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ARAB NEWS

The Voice of a Changing Region

Since 1975

Saudi Arabia beat Iraq, reach Gulf Cup semifinals

Saudi Arabia's Salem Al-Dawsari in action with Iraq's Ali Atiyah at Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium in Kuwait City on Saturday. The Green Falcons defeated Iraq 3-1 to finish top of Group B in the Arabian Gulf Cup and book their place in the last four of the Kuwait tournament.

Reuters
Report Page 15



CARE Kingdom announces \$500m in new aid to Yemen

Arab News Riyadh
Saudi Arabia has announced a new economic support package for Yemen worth \$500 million to bolster the government's budget, stabilize the Central Bank of Yemen, and foster the development and stability of the Yemeni people.
The latest assistance includes a \$300 million deposit into the Central Bank of Yemen to improve economic and financial conditions, alongside \$200 million to address the Yemeni budget deficit.
The latest funding forms part of a larger \$1.2 billion initiative through the Saudi Development

MIDDLE EAST WAR

Israel detains Gaza hospital chief

• Military calls him ' Hamas operative ' but provides no evidence • 48 killed in 24 hours

AP, AFP Gaza Strip
Israel's army detained the director of one of northern Gaza's last functioning hospitals as strikes elsewhere in the territory killed nine people, including children.
Gaza's Health Ministry said Dr. Hussam Abu Safiya, director of Kamal Adwan Hospital, was arrested along with dozens of

other staff and taken to an interrogation center.
The ministry said Israeli troops stormed the hospital and forced many staff and patients outside and told them to strip in winter weather.
Israel's military confirmed it detained the director and called him a suspected Hamas operative while providing no evidence.
It said it encircled the hospital and special forces entered and found weapons in the area. It said

The WHO said it was 'appalled' by the Israeli raid, adding that 'hospitals have once again become battlegrounds.'
The World Health Organization said: "The systematic dismantling of the health system and a siege for over 80 days on

north Gaza puts the lives of the 75,000 Palestinians remaining in the area at risk."
Gaza authorities said conditions for Kamal Adwan patients who were relocated to the damaged Indonesian Hospital nearby — also raided in the past — were "extremely difficult."
Israel continued attacks across Gaza on Saturday. An overnight strike killed at least nine people in Maghazi, including women and children, according to staff

at Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital and a reporter who saw the bodies. Men cried as the bodies, wrapped in bloodied white plastic, lay on the floor of the morgue.
The Health Ministry said on Saturday that 48 people had been killed in the past 24 hours by Israeli fire.
The war has killed more than 45,400 Palestinians, over half of them women and children.
Related reports Pages 6 & 7

FASTFACT

Saudi grants for petroleum derivatives have played a vital role in operating 80 power plants across Yemen.
and Reconstruction Program for Yemen.
The new support aims to establish economic, financial, and monetary stability in Yemen by strengthening public finances, building government institutional capacity, and enhancing governance and transparency.
The assistance will empower the private sector to drive sustainable economic growth, create job opportunities, and place Yemen's national economy on a more sustainable path for economic and social development.

The Brief

TELEMEDICINE

Telemedicine continues to help bridge treatment gaps in Saudi Arabia for rural areas that have a shortage of services. **P4**

RUSSIA APOLOGY

Russia's president apologized to his Azerbaijani counterpart for what he called a 'tragic incident' following the deadly crash of an Azerbaijani airliner. **P8**

SAUDI PROWESS

Saudi Arabia's prowess in crude oil production could help it emerge as a global leader in the renewable energy sector. **P11**

CREATIVE MINDS

Saudi men weave their stories into every rug

Challenging times during the pandemic led to inspiration, innovation and passion

Rahaf Jumbi Riyadh

In the wake of the pandemic Bassam Al-Khalifi and Saud Al-Rasheed transformed their isolation into creativity, leading to the birth of Ghazlah Studio — a hub for unique, hand-tufted rugs.
The Saudi men's story is not just about artistry but a testament to how challenging times can inspire innovation and passion.
Al-Khalifi's journey began

when he sought to decorate his room. Frustrated by the lack of appealing rugs in the market, he decided to create his own.
"I wanted something different, so I ordered the equipment and dedicated a year to learning how to tuft," he told Arab News. What started as a personal project quickly evolved into a larger vision.
Initially, neither Al-Khalifi, an artist and designer, nor Al-Rasheed, an avid art collector, had any experience in weaving.



Bassam Al-Khalifi and Saud Al-Rasheed transformed their isolation into creativity. Supplied

They faced a steep learning curve but were undeterred.
"We took six months to learn how to conceive designs, source materials, and weave the rugs," Al-Khalifi explained.
They experimented with various techniques, ultimately settling on a "cut and loop" method using 100 percent acrylic yarn. This approach stands in contrast to traditional Arabian carpet-making methods which often utilize wool and time-honored designs.

Al-Khalifi pored over tutorials, consulted with experts, and practiced tirelessly.
Detailed report Page 5

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No. 23 • 16 pages



During our meeting with investors in Jazan, we reviewed the promising opportunities and projects that reflect the region's potential as an investment destination that supports the goals of Saudi Vision 2030.

Majed Al-Hogail
Saudi minister of municipal and rural affairs and housing



Radars

KSA today



Dhahran Under the sky

Join SALT Camp x Ithra at Lush Garden for a transformative journey filled with creativity, workshops, culinary delights, and lasting memories. More details are available on the Ithra app.



Riyadh Perfumes

Explore the Blue Oud and Perfumes Exhibition showcasing over 100 renowned local and international brands in a celebration of captivating fragrances. For more details, visit riyadh.sa.



Al-Ahsa Hiking adventure

Discover the treasures of Mount Qara in Al-Ahsa with a visit to a local pottery factory, followed by hiking, birdwatching, and exploring rock formations and caves.



AIUla Incense road

Embark on a captivating two-hour journey through AIUla Old Town, where you can immerse yourself in scenes from the past and create your own incense blends. The experience can be enjoyed until April 5. Book through experiencealula.com.

TheRegister

THE PICTURES THAT MARK THE DAY



Saudi Chief of General Staff Lt. Gen. Fayyadh Al-Ruwaili recently met Turkish Minister of National Defense Yasar Guler during an official visit to Ankara.

During the meeting, they reviewed relations between the two countries and discussed aspects of cooperation in the defense field, the Defense Ministry wrote on X.

Al-Ruwaili also headed the Saudi-Turkish Joint Military Committee's sixth meeting with his Turkish counterpart Lt. Gen. Metin Gurak.

What's Trending

Today's hot topics explained by Afshan Aziz



REST IN PEACE

Olivia Hussey

X Golden Globe-winning British actress Olivia Hussey, best known for her portrayal of Juliet in Franco Zeffirelli's 1968 film "Romeo and Juliet," has died at the age of 73.

"It is with profound sadness that we announce the passing of Olivia Hussey Easley, who went peacefully at home surrounded by her loved ones," her family wrote in a statement shared on social media. "Olivia was a remarkable person whose warmth, wisdom, and pure kindness touched the lives of all who knew her. Born on April 17th, 1951 in Buenos Aires, Argentina ... Olivia lived a life full of passion, love, and dedication to the arts, spirituality, and kindness towards animals. "As we grieve this immense loss, we also celebrate Olivia's enduring impact on our lives and the industry."

NEW RECORD

Rose and Bruno Mars

X BLACKPINK's Rose and Bruno Mars' hit single "APT" has made history by becoming the fastest K-pop music video to reach 700 million views on YouTube, surpassing PSY's 12-year-old record.

The track, which was released on Oct. 18, achieved this remarkable milestone in just 70 days and 13 hours, setting a new benchmark for K-pop videos.

This impressive feat not only broke PSY's long-standing record but also earned Rose the distinction of having the fastest music video by a female K-pop artist to reach this achievement.

The previous record, set by PSY's iconic 2012 track "Gangnam Style," stood for over a decade, with the video achieving 700 million views in 118 days.

The song also ranks as the fourth fastest music video to hit 700 million

views on YouTube, following behind Adele's "Hello," Nicky Jam and J. Balvin's "X (EQUIS)," and DJ Snake's "Taki Taki," featuring Selena Gomez, Ozuna, and Cardi B.

Additionally, "APT" soared to the eighth position on the Billboard Hot 100, establishing Rose as the highest-charting female K-pop soloist.

The song also marked her achievement of becoming the first female K-pop soloist to top the Global Spotify chart.

Fans on the X platform extended their congratulations to the artists for this remarkable achievement. @NumberOneZara posted: "That's amazing. Huge congratulations to Rose and Bruno Mars for setting this incredible record. Their talent really shines through, and it's great to see K-pop reaching new heights."



Today's Number

28m

According to the Ministry of Interior, the electronic platform Absher issued more than 28 million digital identities as part of its drive toward digital transformation, Saudi Press Agency reported.

Review

Ashbiz

SULafa ALKHUNAIZI

Ashbiz is a great spot for Uzbek cuisine, offering a rich and flavorful array of foods that combines influences from Central Asia and the Middle East.

The menu is small but full of dishes that burst with flavor, including a favorite of mine, chicken bukhari, which originated in the ancient city of Bukhara.

Bukhari, which can be made with beef, lamb or chicken, is served hot and packs a punch with its aromatic spices like cumin, cardamom and cinnamon.

Noodles are a key feature of Uzbek cuisine and the hand-pulled variety created at Ashbiz are key to its lag'mon:



a delicious dish that combines beef or lamb with vegetables in a hearty broth.

Another favorite is the samsa, a tasty bun stuffed with spiced meat and vegetables, which resembles the samosa, but instead of being fried is baked in the oven.

The menu also includes manto — a popular handmade steamed dumpling stuffed with a choice of pumpkin or meat and a unique blend of spices — and shish barak soup which has small dumplings.

Ashbiz is a pocket-friendly option for anyone who enjoys that home-cooked feel to their food.

TheRegion

The Middle East Roundup

Arab News Jeddah

- The Light and Peace Museum at Abu Dhabi's Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque Center offers exhibits connecting the Grand Mosque to other iconic mosques — highlighting shared spiritual and architectural heritage. Runs until Dec. 31. More information is available at visitabudhabi.ae.

- Experience a journey through Bahrain's golden era at the Manama Retro event in Manama Souq until Jan. 7, celebrating the vibrant decades from the 60s to the 90s. The Yateem Centre Rooftop transforms into an open theater, hosting classical performances, concerts, and talks. For details and timings, visit [@manama_retro](https://www.instagram.com/manama_retro) on Instagram.

- Baraha Cinema is back with an upgraded outdoor movie experience in the heart of Barahat Msheireb in Doha. With immersive audio and expanded seating it's billed as "the perfect destination for movie enthusiasts and families to enjoy films under the stars." Runs until Jan. 4. For more details check visitqatar.com.

Prayer Times in Saudi Arabia

Dec. 29	Fajr	Sunrise	Dhuhr	Asr	Maghreb	Isha
Makkah	5:36	6:57	12:23	3:27	5:48	7:18
Madinah	5:41	7:04	12:24	3:23	5:43	7:13
Riyadh	5:13	6:36	11:55	2:54	5:14	6:44
Abha	5:21	6:40	12:12	3:21	5:44	7:14
Dammam	5:02	6:26	11:42	2:37	4:57	6:27

Spotlight²⁰²⁴ IN REVIEW



LIBYA

Of fragmentation and state failure

Entrenched rivalries and foreign meddling made progress elusive, prolonging the suffering of the Libyan people

Robert Edwards London

When the Arab uprisings swept through the Middle East and North Africa in 2011, many in the West hoped the fall of these entrenched regimes would herald a new era of development and good governance. Instead, it marked the beginning of a period of unprecedented suffering for millions.

Since the NATO-backed uprising that ousted Muammar Qaddafi, Libya has become a byword for state failure — divided between rival administrations, plagued by criminality, and used as a proxy battleground by foreign powers keen to exploit its oil and strategic location.

While 2024 offered glimpses of possible reconciliation between the North African nation's competing factions, steps toward national elections, and perhaps even justice for its long-suffering citizens, the country remains deeply unstable as it enters the new year.

In April, Abdoulaye Bathily, the UN special envoy to Libya, resigned, citing the country's entrenched political stalemate. His resignation followed 18 months of attempts to mediate between Libya's divided factions, but a "lack of political will and good faith" thwarted progress.

"The selfish resolve of current leaders to maintain the status quo must stop," Bathily told the Security Council.

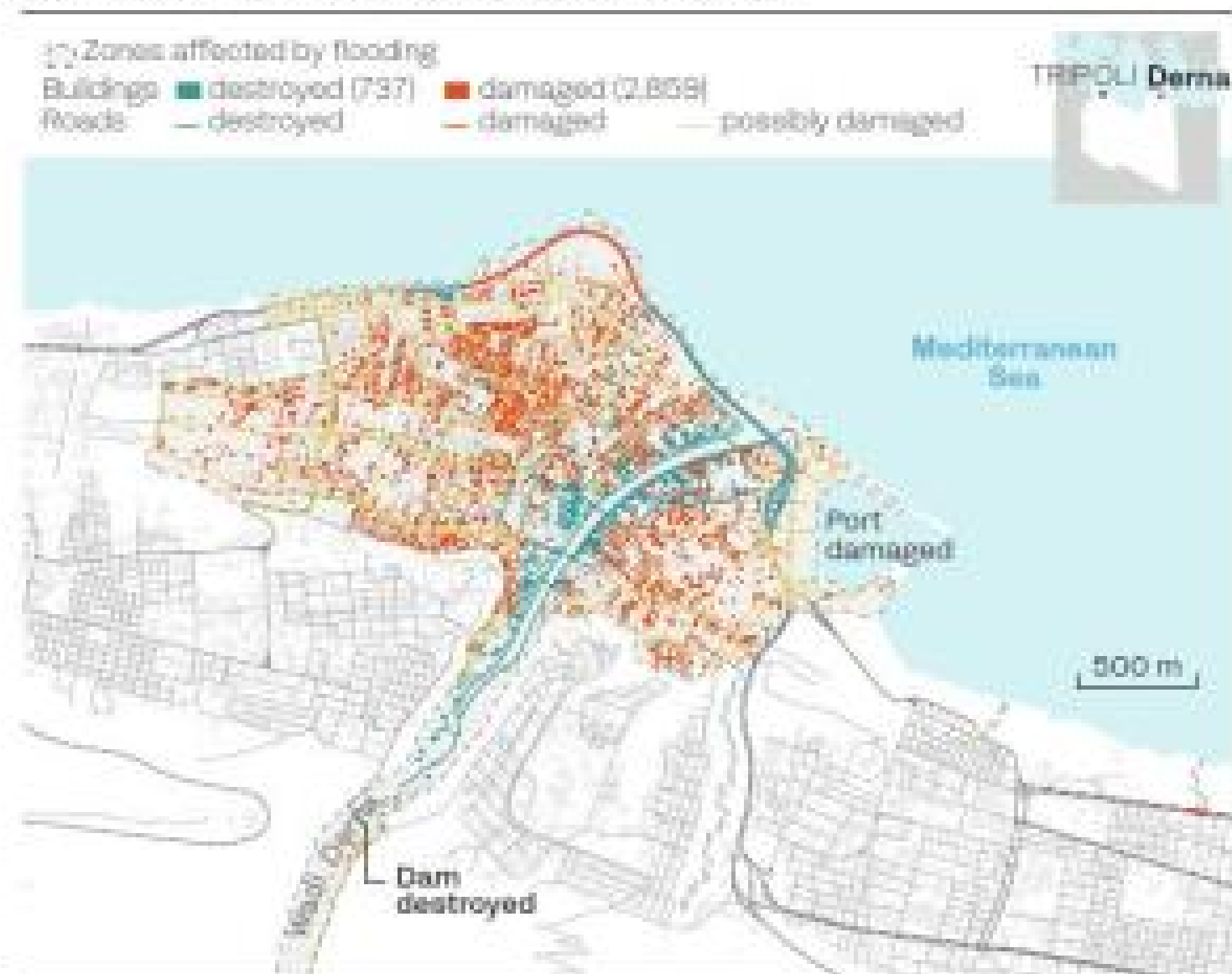
Libya's fragile peace was repeatedly shattered in 2024, with violence escalating across major cities and border regions. In May, clashes in Zawiya between militias loyal to the GNU left one dead and six injured.

Violence escalated in Tripoli in July, where clashes between the Interior Ministry's Special Deterrence Forces, also known as RADA, and Presidential Council units resulted in 13 fatalities, including civilians. August brought another tragedy in Tripoli, with nine killed in militia fighting.

Amid this summer of bloodshed, there was a glimmer of justice. In July, Libya's Derna Criminal Court sentenced 12 officials to up to 27 years in prison for their roles in the catastrophic

DEVASTATION IN LIBYA'S DERNA

In July 2024, 12 officials were sentenced to 27 years in prison for their roles in the Sept. 10, 2023, dam collapse



Sources: Map data: Copernicus EMS; data as of September 13, JRC, CGM, AFP

Sept. 10, 2023, dam collapse.

The disaster, triggered by Storm Daniel, unleashed torrents of water that obliterated entire neighborhoods in the coastal city of Derna, claiming thousands of lives. Rebuilding efforts remain slow, hindered by political infighting.

September brought a breakthrough as Libya's rival legislative bodies agreed to appoint Naji Mohamed Issa

Belqasem as interim central bank governor, ending months of turmoil over financial leadership.

October saw the International Criminal Court unseal arrest warrants for six Libyans implicated in war crimes during the Second Libyan Civil War of 2014-20. The suspects, linked to the Kaniyat militia, face charges including murder, torture and sexual violence.

In November, the GNU's

Interior Minister Emad Al-Trabelsi sparked widespread condemnation from human rights groups when he announced plans to establish a morality police force.

"Al-Trabelsi's sweeping moral measures were never likely to materialize," Jalel Harchaoui, a Libya expert and senior fellow at the Royal United Services Institute, told Arab News. "Enforcing such rules requires broad territorial control, religious credibility, and a clear moral gap to address."

"Much of Libya's population is already conservative, the Interior Ministry lacks religious backing, and no armed actor — Al-Trabelsi included — can truly project power citywide, let alone nationwide."

"Unsurprisingly, nothing substantial has followed the initial announcement, which had drawn so much international attention."

Libya has become one of the busiest and most deadly routes used by migrants and refugees attempting to reach Europe.

Tragedy struck Libya's migrant routes repeatedly in 2024, with multiple fatal incidents highlighting the perils faced by those seeking refuge.

In September, a boat capsized near Tobruk, leaving 22 missing. October brought another disaster, with only one survivor from a vessel carrying 13 passengers. Then in November, 28 people disappeared off Libya's coast when their rubber boat got into difficulty.

The Kremlin's strategic ambitions in Libya are likely to keep growing in the new year as it seeks to offset losses in Syria following the overthrow earlier this month of Assad, a key ally who had permitted Russian use of air and naval bases.

Moscow has deepened ties with General Haftar's Libyan National Army in recent years, using Libya as a launchpad for expanding its influence in North Africa and the Sahel.

As Libya's rival factions vie for power, analysts believe this kind of foreign influence could further complicate efforts to achieve peace and sovereignty.

While Syria embarks on its own delicate transition out of war and dictatorship, Libya stands as a cautionary tale for what can happen when factionalism, greed, and foreign interests are allowed to trump the needs and aspirations of a long-suffering people.



The group, comprising 250 European pilgrims, participated in various cultural and entertainment activities. SPA

SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Minister highlights Kingdom's role in promoting peace

European guests praise Saudi Arabia's hospitality, cultural outreach efforts

Arab News Jeddah

Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Islamic Affairs hosted a cultural event for the second group of Guests of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques' Program for Umrah and Visit, featuring various cultural and entertainment activities.

The group comprised 250 pilgrims from 14 European countries, the Saudi Press Agency reported. They expressed their gratitude to the leadership and the ministry for hosting them, allowing them to perform Umrah rituals and visit historic sites in Madinah and Makkah.

Minister of Islamic Affairs Sheikh Abdullah Al-Asheikh said Saudi Arabia, under the leadership of King Salman and Crown

Prince Mohammed bin Salman, was committed to being a beacon of goodness and moderation.

During a reception for the guests, he said the Kingdom would continue to serve Islam and Muslims, and promote tolerance, coexistence and

HIGHLIGHT

The minister also highlighted the Kingdom's commitment to providing humanitarian aid to those in need around the world, in line with Islam's core values of promoting compassion and support.

understanding worldwide.

Al-Asheikh, who is also the general supervisor of the program, met the guests, conveyed the greetings of the Saudi leadership and along

with members of the program's working committees reviewed the services provided and received a briefing on their work.

The guests commended the Kingdom on its efforts to promote Islam's message of tolerance and foster appreciation for its historical and spiritual legacy. They also praised the new projects and expansions at the holy mosques and sites, which align with Vision 2030.

Al-Khamar Al-Baqari, head of imams in the Netherlands, expressed his gratitude to Saudi Arabia, its government and its people for their hospitality.

Sheikh Ali Al-Zughaibi, the program's executive director, said that since its launch the program had provided the opportunity for 4,500 men and women from around the world to perform Umrah and visit the Prophet's Mosque.

HEALTHCARE

Telemedicine continues to bridge critical care gaps in Saudi Arabia

Rashid Hassan Riyadh

Telemedicine continues to help bridge treatment gaps in Saudi Arabia for rural areas and others that have a shortage of services, according to a leading physician.

Dr. Amara Rahmatullah, a consultant in pulmonary and critical care at King Faisal Specialist Hospital and Research Centre, told Arab News recently that telemedicine has ushered in a new era of critical care.

Rahmatullah said: "Our Tele-ICU initiative has transformed critical

care in Saudi Arabia by bridging the gap between urban and rural healthcare. This WHO-accredited program has reduced unnecessary hospital transfers, improved patient outcomes, and provided timely interventions in remote areas, offering seamless, high-quality care across the Kingdom."

For clinicians in telemedicine, the COVID-19 pandemic blew open the doors of need and access. What had been used before to treat critically ill patients in remote, rural, and hard-to-reach communities was suddenly in

play for most of the population.

Recognizing the need to extend its specialized care beyond hospital walls, the Tele-ICU program was launched in 2010, initially to reduce patient transfers and ensure remote communities had access to critical care expertise, said Rahmatullah.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, it expanded rapidly, becoming a lifeline for managing critically ill patients. Today, the Tele-ICU network provides real-time ICU support across the Kingdom, ensuring high-quality care.

TheSpace

Madinah's investment landscape booms with promising opportunities

TALAT ZAKI HAFIZ



I was honored to participate in the recent Madinah Investment Forum organized by the Madinah Chamber of Commerce in collaboration with the Ministry of Investment.

The event showcased over 200 investment opportunities in the region with a combined value of more than SR57 billion (\$15.2 billion) across sectors like hospitality, logistics, agriculture, renewables and real estate.

Home to the Prophet's Mosque, Madinah is the second holiest site in Islam and the most visited pilgrimage destination after Makkah. Its religious and historical significance makes it a leading investment destination.

Foreign investment in Madinah surged to SR53.7 billion in 2023, from SR23.7 billion

in 2020, according to the report.

Mazen bin Ibrahim Rajab, chairman of the Madinah Chamber of Commerce, said the value of projects executed in Madinah this year was SR210 billion, of which 50 percent

came from the private sector.

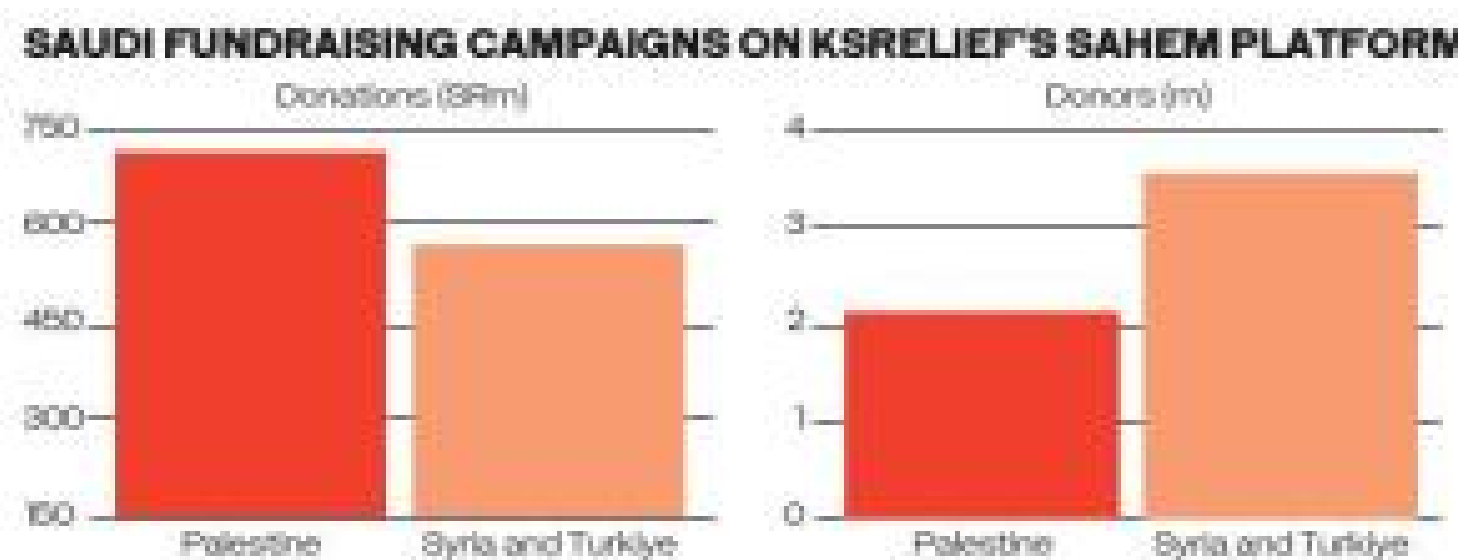
Last year, the region welcomed more than 14 million visitors, who spent SR50 billion. On the 2024 index of the top 100 tourist destinations it ranked first locally, fifth in the Gulf and seventh in the Middle East.

It also ranked fourth locally and seventh in the Arab world on the Smart Cities Index, second in the Kingdom for commuting to work and first globally for the safety of women traveling alone.

The event showcased over 200 investment opportunities in the region with a combined value of more than SR57 billion (\$15.2 billion).

Talat Zaki Hafiz is an economist and financial analyst. X: @TalatHafiz

The Day's FIGURES



Source: sahem.ksrelief.org

Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Cultural heritage Riyadh's souq celebrates Saudi traditions

Souq Al-Awaleen, a part of Riyadh Season, offers a captivating journey through Saudi traditions.

The souq, entry to which is free, blends traditional elements with modern touches, creating a vibrant cultural hub, the Saudi Press Agency reported.

Souq Al-Awaleen features handicrafts, folk art, and live performances reflecting the Kingdom's cultural heritage and providing a platform for local artisans to showcase their work and revive traditional crafts. Visitors can also participate in workshops focused on Sadu weaving and pottery.

Suflat Al-Deira, meanwhile, offers "a taste of authentic Saudi cuisine," the SPA reported, adding that the "atmosphere evokes a bygone era, with activities like cooking demonstrations and cultural performances enriching the experience."

Riyadh Season runs until March 2025, and has already been attended by more than 12 million people, said Turki Al-Sheikh, chairman of the Kingdom's General Entertainment Authority. SPA Riyadh

Humanitarian mission KSrelief aids thousands in crisis zones

Saudi aid agency KSrelief has continued with its humanitarian efforts in Yemen, Afghanistan, Jordan, and Lebanon, benefiting thousands of individuals.

In Yemen's Hajjah, the Al-Jadah Health Center treated 96,184 patients in a week, offering medicines and help with reproductive health, pediatrics and emergency services.

KSrelief also provided 1,829 services to 453 individuals in a month in Marib, including prosthetic fittings, rehabilitation, and physical therapy.

In Aden, KSrelief launched phase two of a project to train 834 educators, benefiting 9,747 individuals across several governorates, including those with disabilities and students with learning difficulties.

KSrelief distributed 276 shelter kits in Afghanistan's Nangarhar, aiding returnees from Pakistan, and flood victims.

In Jordan's Za'atari camp, KSrelief's clinics treated 2,578 Syrian refugees in a week, while, in Lebanon, the agency provided 560 winter clothing vouchers to orphans and individuals with special needs among Syrian refugees. SPA Riyadh

Border control Kingdom arrests 23,194 illegals in one week

Saudi authorities arrested 23,194 people in one week for breaching residency, work and border security regulations.

A total of 13,083 people were arrested for violations of residency laws, while 6,210 were held over illegal border crossing attempts, and a further 3,901 for labor-related issues.

The report showed that among the 1,536 people arrested for trying to enter the Kingdom illegally, 57 percent were Ethiopian, 41 percent Yemeni, and 2 percent were of other nationalities.

A further 57 people were caught trying to cross into neighboring countries, and 23 were held for involvement in transporting violators. The Ministry of Interior said that anyone found to be facilitating illegal entry to the Kingdom could face imprisonment for a maximum of 15 years, a fine of up to SR1 million (\$260,000), as well as confiscation of vehicles and property.

Suspected violations can be reported on the toll-free number 911 in the Makkah and Riyadh regions, and 999 or 996 in other regions of the Kingdom. SPA Riyadh

News Saudi Arabia

CREATIVE SPARK

Saudi men weave a kaleidoscope of dreams

Bassam Al-Khalifi, Saud Al-Rasheed master the art of tufting rugs

Rahaf Jambli Riyadh

In the wake of the pandemic Bassam Al-Khalifi and Saud Al-Rasheed transformed their isolation into creativity, leading to the birth of Ghazlah Studio — a hub for unique, hand-tufted rugs.

The Saudi men's story is not just about artistry but a testament to how challenging times can inspire innovation and passion.

Al-Khalifi's journey began when he sought to decorate his room. Frustrated by the lack of appealing rugs in the market, he decided to create his own.

"I wanted something different, so I ordered the equipment and dedicated a year to learning how to tuft," he told Arab News. What started as a personal project quickly evolved into a larger vision.

Initially, neither Al-Khalifi, an artist and designer, nor Al-Rasheed, an avid art collector, had any experience in weaving. They faced a steep learning curve but were undeterred.

"We took six months to learn how to conceive designs, source materials, and weave the rugs," Al-Khalifi explained.

They experimented with various techniques, ultimately settling on a "cut and loop" method using 100 percent acrylic yarn. This approach stands in contrast to traditional Arabian carpet-making methods which

often utilize wool and time-honored designs.

Their learning process was filled with challenges, but their determination pushed them forward.

Al-Khalifi pored over tutorials, consulted with experts, and practiced tirelessly. Al-Rasheed, with his keen eye for aesthetics, contributed by curating color palettes and design concepts.

What started as a hobby soon blossomed into a commercial venture. With their rugs gaining traction, Al-Khalifi and Al-Rasheed launched Ghazlah, featuring a debut collection titled "Color as a Scene."

The collection evokes a range of emotions, reflecting the complex sentiments many experienced during the pandemic. "I wanted to splash all these emotions on the piece itself," Al-Khalifi said. The vibrant tapestries of feelings capture the essence of joy, nostalgia, and hope.

The vibrance of their work makes a statement piece in any room. Each piece is unique, with some featuring Saudi themes that enhance their significance and appeal. The artists also draw inspiration from their heritage, incorporating traditional motifs and modern designs, creating



HIGH LIGHTS

• The journey of Ghazlah Studio began when Bassam Al-Khalifi, frustrated by the lack of appealing rugs in the market, decided to create his own.

• Their debut collection titled 'Color as a Scene' evokes a range of emotions, reflecting the complex sentiments many experienced during the pandemic.

Saudi duo Bassam Al-Khalifi and Saud Al-Rasheed's story is not just about artistry but a testament to how challenging times can inspire innovation and passion. Supplied

a fusion that resonates with a broad audience.

In Ghazlah's Riyadh workshop, the atmosphere is filled with creativity and energy. The walls are lined with neatly organized shelves filled with spools of yarn in every imaginable color. There are some of Al-Khalifi's paintings and rugs still in progress, showcasing their journey.

Al-Rasheed gestured around the space, saying: "This place is full of rugs that we made but decided not to sell. Why? Because we love them. I'm trying to push Al-Khalifi to sell them, but he won't."

Ghazlah Studio has made a notable impact in Riyadh,



showcasing creations in three galleries. Their work has garnered attention not just locally but also from international platforms, leading to collaborations with major brands

such as Vogue and Sephora.

These partnerships have elevated their profile and allowed them to reach a wider audience with which they can share their artistry and craftsmanship.

The duo's success can also be attributed to their innovative marketing strategies.

They leverage social media to share their creative process, engage with customers, and build a community around their brand.

By showcasing behind-the-scenes footage, they invite their audience into their world, allowing them to witness the transformation of raw materials into stunning art pieces.

As they continue to grow, Al-Khalifi and Al-Rasheed are committed to exploring new design possibilities, as well as looking into creating home decor items. They plan to expand their collections, experimenting with different textures, materials, and techniques.

From a simple idea born during quarantine to a noteworthy business, Ghazlah Studio continues to make waves in the art scene, proving that even in isolation, inspiration can thrive.

As they weave their stories into every rug, Al-Khalifi and Al-Rasheed invite us all to find beauty and meaning in our own creative pursuits.

HERITAGE ART

Sculpture art, animals take center stage at Riyadh camel festival

Arab News Riyadh

The works of a renowned local sculptor are among the creative highlights of this year's King Abdulaziz Camel Festival, which celebrates not only ships of the desert but arts and crafts from around the Kingdom.

Abdulrahman Al-Zahem is best known for his depictions of camels and traditional tools. Each of his pieces serves as a symbol of the Kingdom's heritage and connection to the land, the Saudi Press Agency reported.

As well as creating his own

works, Al-Zahem spends much of his time helping to nurture the next generation of artists, including his own daughter.

Besides providing a global hub for all things camel, the festival in Al-Sayahid, northeast of Riyadh, is an important platform for the arts, offering an opportunity for artists to showcase their work to a global audience.

The combination of arts and animals also makes the event an appealing option for visitors and supports

FASTFACT

The combination of arts and animals makes the King Abdulaziz Camel Festival an appealing option for visitors and supports the economic and cultural growth of the Kingdom.

The Qassim municipality pavilion at the



Saudi craftsman Abdulrahman Al-Zahem is best known for his depictions of camels and traditional tools. SPA

Ministry of Interior's Security Oasis exhibition, held alongside the King Abdulaziz Camel Festival, also impressed visitors with a stunning display of wooden sculptures.

The intricate works show the region's cultural heritage and the exceptional craftsmanship of local artisans, the Saudi Press Agency reported on Tuesday.

Characterized by exquisite detail, the sculptures demonstrate the remarkable skill of Qassim's craftsmen in transforming wood into captivating art that blends authenticity and creativity.

News Middle East

ANGUISH

Gaza amputees get new limbs, but can't shake off war trauma

Survivors are haunted by memories of war and their terror of losing loved ones

AFP Abu Dhabi

Layan Al Nasr, 14, thought she would never walk again after both of her legs were amputated following an Israeli bombing in Gaza one year ago.

Now, she stands proudly on artificial limbs fitted in the UAE. But fear for her family, still living under the attacks, gnaws away.

"When I was told about prosthetics when I arrived, I didn't even know they existed," she jokes, taking a few steps supported by crutches.

She is able to smile as she describes her operations, rehabilitation and her newfound hope. But emotion eventually catches up with her.

"What scares me today is losing my brothers, my sisters and my father," she confides, bursting into tears.

Nasr is one of more than 2,000 wounded or seriously ill Palestinians flown with their closest relatives to the UAE during the Israel-Hamas war.

Plucked from shattered Gaza, much of it in ruins, they are lucky to escape a conflict that has left more than 45,000 people dead in the Palestinian territory.

The survivors brought to the UAE are haunted by their memories of war and their terror of losing loved ones, despite their new existence in calm, quiet Abu Dhabi.

"I don't care what happens to me, the important thing is that nothing happens to them," insists Nasr.

The complex housing them in the UAE capital has a school, mosque, grocery store and a hairdresser, as well as a care center offering physiotherapy,



An amputee from the Gaza Strip receives rehabilitation care at a hospital in Abu Dhabi. AFP

speech therapy and counseling.

"Thanks to the prosthetics and the care provided, patients have regained their autonomy," says physiotherapist Mustafa Ahmed Naji Awad.

But the hardest thing to treat is the psychological impact, he admits.

Faten Abu Khoussa, who came with her 10-year-old daughter Qamar, can testify to this.

The little girl was caught in an air raid in Gaza when she went out to buy a packet of crisps, losing a leg from her injuries.

Qamar's spirits have gradually improved over time, but "it remains very difficult for her. She loved nothing more than playing on her scooter," says her mother.

"She feels alone without her brothers and sisters" who have fled to Egypt, Abu Khoussa adds.

The single mother, now separated from the other children she has been raising

FASTFACT

The Emirati authorities say the afflicted Palestinians and their family members will be asked to return home when conditions allow.

since her husband's death, is desperately trying to reunite her family in the UAE.

Until then she feels her life is "suspended," leaving her unable to plan for the future.

The Emirati authorities say the

afflicted Palestinians and their family members will be asked to return home when conditions allow.

Ahmad Mazen, 15, who came with his mother to have a lower-leg prosthesis fitted, was looking forward to being reunited with his father and brother.

But shortly after his arrival, he learned that they had been killed in a bombing raid.

His only consolation is football, his passion, and the "indescribable feeling" of finally being able to kick a ball again, he says.

CALL FOR JUSTICE

Damascus rally demands news of missing Syrians

AFP Damascus

A silent crowd gathered in the Syrian capital Damascus to press the new authorities about the fate of relatives who went missing under Bashar Assad and to demand justice for their loved ones.

The fate of tens of thousands of people who disappeared under Assad — who was ousted on Dec. 8 by a coalition of rebels — is a key question after more than 13 years of devastating civil war that saw upwards of half a million people killed.

Dozens of somber protesters holding pictures of the disappeared assembled in central Damascus's Hijaz Square, a journalist said.

"It is time for tyrants to be held accountable," read a black banner unfurled from the balcony of the elegant Ottoman-era train station.

Other placards read: "Revealing the fate of the missing is a right," and "I don't want an unmarked grave for my son, I want the truth."

Such a demonstration would have been unthinkable under Assad's rule, but it is now possible under the new authorities dominated by the radical group Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, which led the offensive that overthrew him.

"Unfortunately for many years

BACKGROUND

Dozens of somber protesters holding pictures of the disappeared assembled in central Damascus's Hijaz Square.

we were united in the grief of absence and uncertainty, waiting for our loved ones, one amnesty after another," said Wafa Mustafa in a speech in the midst of the protesters.

Her father Ali was arrested in 2013.

"We all saw the scenes of prisoners being freed. It was a source of joy, but it was also very difficult because we did not see our own loved ones among them," she said.

"We are here to say we will not accept anything less than the whole truth, to know what happened to our relatives, who tortured them, and if they were buried, where they are," she added.

Amani Al-Hallaq, 28, was seeking news about where to find the remains of her cousin, who was kidnapped in 2012 when he was a student dentist.

"I was once one of those who was afraid. This is the first time I am protesting," the 28-year-old Amani said.

Her cousin was abducted as he came out of the university, said the young woman in a headscarf.

"They pulled out his nails. He died instantly," she said.

"We want to know where the disappeared are, their bodies, so we can identify them."

DEFIANT MILITIA

Israel intercepts missile from Yemen, day after Sanaa hit with strikes

AFP Sanaa

The Israeli military said it intercepted a missile launched from Yemen early on Saturday, a day after the Houthi-held capital Sanaa was hit by fresh airstrikes.

Sirens sounded in areas of Jerusalem and the Dead Sea as "a missile launched from Yemen was intercepted ... prior to crossing into Israeli territory," the Israeli military said.

The day before, a fresh airstrike hit Sanaa, which Houthi rebels blamed on "US-British aggression" though it remains unclear who was behind it.

There was no comment from Israel, the US or Britain.

"I heard the blast. My house shook," one Sanaa resident said.

The Houthis control large parts of Yemen after seizing Sanaa and ousting the government in 2014.

Since the eruption of war in Gaza in October last year, the Houthis — claiming solidarity with Palestinians — have fired a series of missiles and drones at Israel.

They have stepped up their



Protesters in Sanaa raise their weapons as they rally to show support to Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. Reuters

attacks since November's ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon.

Israel has also struck Yemen, including targeting Sanaa's international airport on Thursday in an attack that came as the head of the World Health Organization was about to board a plane.

The Houthis have also attacked commercial shipping in the Red

Sea, prompting reprisal strikes by the US and sometimes Britain.

Earlier on Friday, before the strike on Sanaa, tens of thousands of people gathered to protest and express solidarity with Palestinians.

"The equation has changed and has become: (targeting) airport for airport, port for port, and infrastructure for infrastructure," Houthi supporter

Mohammed Al-Gobisi said. "We will not get tired or bored of supporting our brothers in Gaza."

Israel's strike on the Sanaa international airport on Thursday shattered windows and left the top of the control tower a bombed-out shell.

A witness said that the raids also targeted the adjacent Al-Dailami air base, which shares the airport's runway.

"The attack resulted in four dead until now and around 20 wounded from staff, airport and passengers," Houthi Deputy Transport Minister Yahya Al-Sayani said.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres denounced the escalation in hostilities, and said bombing transportation infrastructure threatened humanitarian operations in Yemen, where 80 percent of the population depends on aid.

The UN has called Yemen "the largest humanitarian crisis in the world," with 24.1 million people in need of humanitarian aid and protection.

News Middle East

INVESTIGATION

Assad's relatives arrested as they tried to flee Lebanon

AP Beirut

The wife and daughter of one of deposed Syrian President Bashar Assad's cousins were arrested at the Beirut airport, where they attempted to fly out with allegedly forged passports, Lebanese judicial and security officials said. Assad's uncle departed the day before.

Rasha Khazem, the wife of Duraid Assad — the son of former Syrian Vice President Rifaat Assad, the uncle of Bashar Assad — and their daughter, Shams, were smuggled illegally into Lebanon and were trying to fly to

Egypt when they were arrested, according to five Lebanese officials familiar with the case. They were being detained by Lebanese General Security. Rifaat had flown out the day before on his real passport and was not stopped, the officials said.

Swiss federal prosecutors in March indicted Rifaat on charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity for allegedly ordering murder and torture more than four decades ago.

Rifaat Assad, the brother of Bashar Assad's father Hafez Assad, Syria's former ruler, led the



More than 20 military officers and others affiliated with Assad's forces were arrested earlier in Lebanon. AFP/File

artillery unit that shelled the city of Hama and killed thousands, earning him the nickname the "Butcher of Hama."

Earlier this year, Rifaat Assad was indicted in Switzerland for war crimes and crimes against humanity in connection with Hama.

Tens of thousands of Syrians are believed to have entered Lebanon illegally on the night of Assad's fall earlier this month, when insurgent forces entered Damascus.

The Lebanese security and judicial officials said that more than 20 members of the former

Syrian Army's notorious 4th Division, military intelligence officers and others affiliated with Assad's security forces were arrested earlier in Lebanon. Some of them were arrested when they attempted to sell their weapons.

Lebanon's public prosecution office also received an Interpol notice requesting the arrest of Jamil Al-Hassan, the former director of Syrian intelligence under Assad. Lebanon's caretaker Prime Minister Najib Mikati earlier said that Lebanon would cooperate with the Interpol request to arrest Al-Hassan.

CEASEFIRE VIOLATION

Israel destroys Hezbollah tunnel

Israeli forces have been infiltrating border areas in Lebanon since Oct. 1

Najla Houssari Beirut

The Israeli military announced its "success in dismantling an underground tunnel in southern Lebanon, measuring 100 meters in length, leading to a hideout belonging to the Radwan Forces of Hezbollah."

Israeli forces, which have been infiltrating the border area in southern Lebanon since Oct. 1 continue to operate in the country despite the ceasefire agreement, with Saturday marking the beginning of the second month of the specified withdrawal deadline.

While the Israeli military justified its hostile activities in southern Lebanon as "removing threats in line with the ceasefire understandings between Israel and Lebanon," it said that "the 300th Brigade, in cooperation with the 146th Division and engineering forces, successfully dismantled the mentioned tunnel."

It added that "the specialized Yahalom Unit, dealing with explosives, secured and inspected the tunnel for threats. During the operations, large quantities of weapons were discovered inside the tunnel, including rifles, machine guns, anti-tank missiles, as well as advanced surveillance systems. All the equipment was confiscated and destroyed, including the tunnel itself."

The statement mentioned "the discovery of a stockpile of anti-tank missiles and heavy



Israeli forces, which have been infiltrating the border area in southern Lebanon since Oct. 1, continue to operate in the country. Reuters/File

machine-gun positions directed toward Israeli sites near the tunnel." It also noted that "the tunnel's path led to a Hezbollah command center containing rocket launch platforms previously used against Israel during the war, as well as large quantities of explosives."

While the Israeli military continues to encroach upon the border area and prevents

residents from accessing the area until further notice in an attempt to establish a buffer zone, anonymous statements circulated on social media calling for "popular resistance." Activists supportive of Hezbollah criticized the Lebanese Army and state for not responding to the Israeli incursions into towns and villages and demanded that Hezbollah "arm and train us so we can resist

the Israeli occupier and liberate our land with our own hands."

A statement signed by a group calling itself Youth of the Border Villages declared: "We find ourselves compelled to defend our villages and properties with whatever weapons are available, and we will not accept the continuation of this barbaric, systematic, and brutal aggression by the enemy. We will be forced to

launch a southern popular resistance to confront this assault."

Another statement signed by a group called Youth of Beirut's Southern Suburb called on "the Islamic Resistance in Lebanon, represented by Hezbollah, to fight in defense of the land, the people, and honor."

The statement referred to the Israeli violations that occurred after the ceasefire agreement

was announced and stated that "given what has happened, after consulting with the Lebanese state and receiving no response, and consulting UNIFIL without receiving any answer, we hereby legally, morally, and ethically authorize Hezbollah and demand it to arm and train us so we can resist the Israeli occupier and liberate our land with our own hands."

However, despite these anonymous calls, the caretaker government, in which Hezbollah is a key partner, continues to affirm its commitment to the "ceasefire agreement and its insistence on implementing Resolution 1701 as

HIGHLIGHT

Activists supportive of Hezbollah criticized the Lebanese Army and state for not responding to the Israeli incursions into towns and villages.

a means to stop hostilities against Lebanon."

Meanwhile, Hezbollah continues to hold funerals for members killed in southern Lebanon.

During the funeral of one in the city of Hermel on Saturday, Hezbollah MP Ihab Hamadeh condemned "the repeated Israeli violations of the ceasefire agreement." He held "the Lebanese government and the committee overseeing the implementation of the ceasefire accountable," asserting that "resistance remains the most effective option to confront the Israeli enemy."

'SETTLEMENT'

Turkiye's pro-Kurd party meets jailed PKK leader

AFP Istanbul

A delegation from Turkiye's main pro-Kurdish DEM party on Saturday visited jailed PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan, who is serving life on a prison island off Istanbul, party officials said. The visit was the party's first in almost 10 years.

DEM's predecessor, the HDP party, last met Ocalan in April 2015.

On Friday, the government approved DEM's request to visit Ocalan, who founded the Kurdistan Workers' Party nearly half a century ago and has languished in solitary confinement since 1999.

The PKK is regarded as a "terror" organization by Turkiye and most of its Western allies, including the US and EU.

The DEM party delegation was made up of two lawmakers

HIGHLIGHT

The PKK is regarded as a 'terror' organization by Turkiye and most of its Western allies, including the US and EU.

— Sirri Sureyya Onder and Pervin Buldan.

DEM's co-chair Tuncer Bakirhan hoped the talks with Ocalan will "open a new era" for

a democratic settlement to the Kurdish problem.

"While I speak here, our delegation is meeting with Abdullah Ocalan at Imrali island. We believe it's important," he told reporters in the Uludere district near the Iraqi border.

"Imrali's door must be unlocked," Bakirhan said. "I hope that the discussions there will enable the Kurdish

issue to be resolved through democratic means and on a democratic basis."

Saturday's rare visit became possible after President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's ally Devlet Bahceli invited Ocalan to come to parliament to renounce "terror," and to disband the militant group.

Erdogan backed the unprecedented appeal as a "historic window of opportunity."



An Afghan Taliban security personnel keeps watch from a helicopter two days after airstrikes by Pakistan on Thursday. AFP

REGIONAL TENSION

Afghan Taliban hit several locations in Pakistan in ‘retaliation’ for attacks

Pakistani air raids on southeastern Afghanistan killed at least 46 people

Modaser Islami Kabul

Afghan Taliban forces targeted several locations in Pakistan on Saturday, Afghanistan's Defense Ministry said, days after the Pakistani military launched deadly air raids on its territory in the latest flare-up of tensions.

The Pakistani Air Force bombed Afghanistan's southeastern Paktika province on Tuesday, claiming it was targeting alleged hideouts of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan — the Pakistani Taliban — a militant group separate from the Afghan Taliban.

The raids killed at least 46 people, most of whom were children and women, the Afghan Ministry of National Defense said after the attack.

Announcing Saturday's strikes, the ministry said in a statement that "several points

beyond the assumptive lines ... were targeted in retaliation."

While the statement did not mention Pakistan, the "assumptive lines" is a reference to the Afghan-Pakistani border, part of the Durand Line — a colonial-era boundary dividing the regions and communities between Afghanistan and what is now Pakistan. The boundary has never been officially recognized by any Afghan government.

Citing ministry sources, local media reported that 19 Pakistani soldiers were killed in the clashes. There was no official comment from Pakistan, but a security source confirmed that the confrontation with Afghan forces took place.

Since the Taliban took control of Afghanistan in 2021, Pakistan has repeatedly accused them of allowing TTP militants to use Afghan territory for cross-border attacks — a claim the Taliban have denied.

The latest escalation of

hostilities comes as TTP fighters last week claimed responsibility for killing 16 Pakistani soldiers in the border region of South Waziristan. The area targeted by Pakistani strikes days later was the nearby Barmal district on the Afghan side of the border.

"Pakistan claims that by targeting alleged TTP hideouts and training venues in Barmal district in southeast of Afghanistan, it ensures security inside the country. This means that by challenging the security of its neighbors, Pakistan is trying to strengthen its own security," Abdul Saboor Mubariz, board member of the Center for Strategic and Regional Studies in Kabul, told Arab News.

The Pakistani attack took place on the same day that Islamabad's special representative for Afghanistan, Mohammed Sadiq, was in Kabul for talks to strengthen bilateral ties.

"A major problem that exists in Pakistan's politics is that the civil

government is not aligned with the military ... The civil government is backing negotiations, while the army is after a military solution," Mubariz said.

"TTP has been a major barrier in relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan ... the Taliban, however, have continuously shown willingness for talks."

Abdul Sayed, a Sweden-based analyst and expert on the politics and security of the Afghanistan-Pakistan region, interpreted Pakistan's attack just hours after the Islamabad envoy's visit as a "strategic message from Pakistan's military establishment, signaling that failure to meet their demands through dialogue may result in the application of force."

The subsequent responses from Taliban officials and Saturday's retaliation by Taliban forces "appear to underscore their resolve not to yield to such pressure," Sayed told Arab News.

Ilham Aliyev "for the fact that the tragic incident occurred in Russian airspace."

On Friday, a US official and an Azerbaijani minister made separate statements blaming the crash on an external weapon.

Friday's assessments by Rashan Nabiye and White House national security spokesman John Kirby echoed those made by outside aviation experts who blamed the crash on Russian air defense systems responding to a Ukrainian attack.

Neither Kirby or the Azerbaijani minister directly addressed the statements blaming air defenses.

FASTFACT

The Kremlin said air defense systems were firing near Grozny due to a Ukrainian drone strike as the plane attempted to land, but stopped short of saying one of these hit the plane.

defense systems were firing near Grozny due to a Ukrainian drone strike as the plane attempted to land, but stopped short of saying one of these hit the plane.

According to a Kremlin readout of the call, Putin apologized to Azerbaijani President

'TRAGIC INCIDENT'

Putin apologizes to Azerbaijani leader for plane crash

AP Baku

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Saturday apologized to his Azerbaijani counterpart for what he called a "tragic incident" following the crash of an Azerbaijani airliner in Kazakhstan that killed 38 people.

The plane was flying on Wednesday from Azerbaijan's capital of Baku to Grozny, the regional capital of the Russian republic of Chechnya, when it turned toward Kazakhstan and crashed while making an attempt to land. There were 29 survivors.

In an official statement Saturday, the Kremlin said air

Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Military honors

State funeral for India's ex-PM Manmohan Singh

India on Saturday accorded former premier Manmohan Singh, one of the architects of the country's economic liberalization in the early 1990s, a state funeral with full military honors, complete with a gun salute. Singh, who held office from 2004 to 2014, died at the age of 92 on Thursday, after which seven days of state mourning were declared. The honors were led by President Draupadi Murmu with Prime Minister Narendra Modi in attendance, along with the country's top civilian and military officials. **AFP**

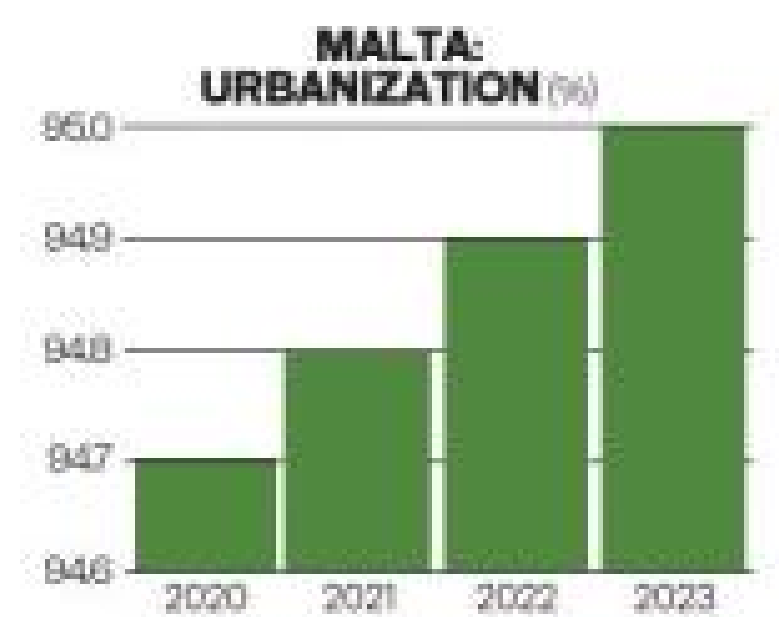
Under probe

Finland moves suspected tanker closer to port

Finnish authorities said on Saturday they are moving an impounded tanker closer to port after boarding the vessel carrying Russian oil earlier this week on suspicion it had damaged an undersea power line and four telecoms cables. Baltic Sea nations have been on high alert after a string of outages of power cables, telecom links and gas pipelines since Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, and NATO said on Friday it would boost its presence in the region. Finnish police believe the Eagle S may have caused the damage to undersea cables by dragging its anchor along the seabed. **Reuters**

The Day's FIGURES

Source: Statista



What We're Reading Today

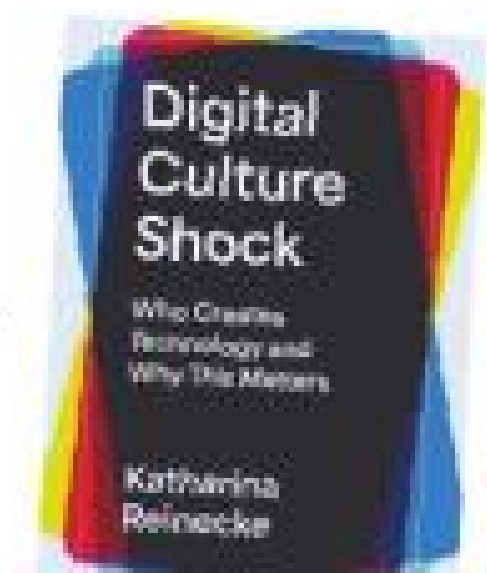
FOR THE TRAIN OR ON THE PLANE

'Digital Cultural Shock'

KATHERINA REINECKE

Robots that encroach on your personal space, baffling emojis, a chatbot that gives you an answer that seems terribly rude—does any of this sound familiar? An encounter with new technology can teach us to embrace the unfamiliar, but a mismatch between design and user can create

misunderstanding and loss of trust, and can even become a tool of digital imperialism. In "Digital Culture Shock," computer scientist Katharina Reinecke travels through countries and cultures around the world to show the many fascinating ways that technology design and use can differ.



Risky sport

Skier killed in Swiss avalanche

An avalanche has killed a 27-year-old cross-country skier in southwestern Switzerland, police said Saturday. The avalanche occurred at around 1:30 p.m. (12:30 GMT) on Friday as two skiers made their way along the Cheilon glacier near Arolla, the Wallis regional police said. "Suddenly, the snow mass gave way under the skis of one of them. He was carried by the avalanche to the bottom of the slope," a statement said. "They resuscitated him before transporting the unfortunate man to Sion hospital where he succumbed to his injuries." **AFP**

Low visibility

Thick fog disrupts UK flights

Travelers flying to or from the UK faced further disruptions Saturday as thick fog and low visibility restricted air traffic on one of the year's busiest weekends. Gatwick Airport in London warned that some flights may be delayed throughout Saturday and apologized for the inconvenience. Flights were delayed by up to three hours late Friday because of poor weather conditions, and at least 40 flights from the airport, mostly short haul to Europe, were delayed Saturday morning. Conditions are expected to improve Sunday, the Met Office said. **AP**

YOUR DAILY ARABIC PROVERB
Expect nothing from a brother or a friend; have you ever seen your shadow walk with you in darkness?
Mohammed Rabah
(Contemporary Syrian poet)

Opinion 2024

TOMORROW
Vera Songwe and Guido Schmidt-Traub on how rich countries must do more than just talk about the climate.



ILLUSTRATION FOR ARAB NEWS: THE SPORTING PRESS

Trump's key foreign policy tests

As ever, a new year comes with new challenges and opportunities. For US foreign policy, the new Trump administration, which will take office on Jan. 20, will shape the country's approach to the world. As with all presidents, Donald Trump will have significant power to determine foreign policy but will also have to determine how to respond to events that are unexpected or outside of US control.

When Trump once again becomes president, he and his senior advisers will face two major wars — in Ukraine and Gaza — that have bedeviled the outgoing administration. Trump has repeatedly said that he could very quickly end the war between Russia and Ukraine and now he will have an opportunity to attempt to do so. Trump and some of his top advisers have expressed skepticism about or opposition to America's provision of weapons and aid to Ukraine. It is very likely that Ukraine will face a major reduction in US assistance once Trump returns to the White House.

Trump recently appointed Keith Kellogg as his special envoy to address the war. Kellogg has proposed using the threat of cutting off future aid as leverage to force Ukraine to negotiate, while offering incentives such as putting off NATO membership for Ukraine and alleviating sanctions to persuade Moscow to negotiate. Regardless of the policy specifics, Ukraine will find itself in a weaker position vis-a-vis Russia, which indeed might lead to negotiations to end the war, but probably on terms that are more disappointing to Kyiv than to Moscow.

A related challenge will be managing relations with European allies. Trump's lack of commitment to NATO, as he expressed during his first term in office, will pose a challenge for the organization, which gained strength from new members during Biden's

term but also faces multiple threats from internal tensions and Russia. Advocates for greater European cooperation on security and autonomy from the US on defense matters are hoping that their efforts will gain momentum during the second Trump presidency.

The war in Gaza is likely to still be ongoing when Trump is inaugurated. The Trump administration's approach will feature enthusiastic support for Israel. Trump's picks for foreign policy advisers are all extremely pro-Israel. For example, his nominee for secretary of state, Marco Rubio, recently wrote that "Israelis rightfully living in their historic homeland are not the impediment to peace; the Palestinians are."

Trump's choice for ambassador to Israel, Mike Huckabee, has said that "there is no such thing as the West Bank — it's Judea and Samaria," and that "there is no such thing as an (Israeli) occupation." Other senior foreign policy officials chosen by Trump express similar sentiments. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will have even greater US support under Trump and will face no serious pressure from the new administration to change his approach toward Gaza or the West Bank.

The Trump administration will face the continuing risk that the war in Gaza helps to drive other regional conflicts. Even if the ceasefire between Hezbollah and Israel holds through Trump's inauguration, the risk of renewed fighting is high. The outgoing administration has also struggled to respond to evolving risks posed by the Houthis in Yemen and Trump will inherit that challenge.

The new administration's pro-Israel lens will be applied to the challenge of dealing with Iran, including less pressure on Israel to restrain its potential actions. Many of Trump's top foreign policy advisers take a hawkish approach toward Iran; however, Trump does not seek another protracted war in the



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Middle East that might involve US troops. His desire to avoid direct involvement in a war that could be costly in terms of American lives and funds might constrain some of his advisers' more hawkish tendencies.

One of the few areas of bipartisan agreement in Washington is that China poses the greatest long-term threat to the US. Over the years, Trump has spoken both negatively and positively about China and Chinese President Xi Jinping, but his advisers are mostly hawkish toward Beijing. Furthermore, the US defense establishment sees China as its "pacing threat" and the top potential challenger to American power and interests. Trump's administration is very likely to view China as a key competitor and threat and to seek to shift resources away from the Middle East toward East Asia — though the same was true for the last several presidents, with limited success.

It will be important to watch how the Trump administration shapes the details of its approach toward China. Trump has promised very high tariffs against Beijing, but he has both official and unofficial advisers who oppose that. Some of his advisers want to back Taiwan, but Trump appears less likely to be willing to risk significant military losses to protect the island. He may prefer to engage in economic rather than military conflict with Beijing. China will loom large in US foreign policy, but the details on how the Trump administration will manage the challenge are not yet fully clear.

Increasing US-China competition, combined with uncertainty regarding Washington's future policy, creates a challenge for US allies in the Pacific, including South Korea and Japan. South Korea has particular reason to worry about the depth of US commitment to its alliance, given statements from Trump that suggest he wants a more transactional relationship. Recent media reports suggest that Trump would like

to renew talks with North Korea. Security in East Asia will depend significantly on how Trump approaches China and North Korea, as well as how Beijing and Pyongyang respond.

The Biden administration placed significant emphasis on cooperation to address global concerns, such as climate change, but Trump and many of his advisers express disdain for international institutions. For example, his nominee for ambassador to the UN, Elise Stefanik, is very critical of the institution. Trump has called climate change "a hoax" and will likely withdraw from the Paris Agreement, as he did during his first term.

As the Trump administration determines how to respond to new challenges that might arise in 2025, it will do so on a unilateral basis or by working with specific countries, rather than through multilateral institutions.

Elsewhere, Trump's strong opposition to illegal immigration will define Washington's relations with Central and South America. Trump's "America First" approach opposes sending US taxpayers' dollars abroad without clear, concrete returns, so US aid to developing countries is likely to drop, especially where previous aid was based on concepts of soft power and promoting American values. Relations with India will likely see continuity, as Trump and Prime Minister Narendra Modi get along well and Trump's advisers do not see India as a major concern.

The world is more prepared for a second Trump term than it was for the first, which came as something of a surprise to many global actors. However, Trump's second presidency will be different from his first in many ways, as already evidenced by his selection of advisers based more on their strong alignment with him and less on their experience within the political or national security establishments. Washington's approach to foreign policy challenges in 2025 will diverge significantly from its approach in 2024 — and possibly from Trump's first term.

Opinion

The path to peace and stability in the Arab world

DR. TURKI FAISAL AL-RASHEED

The Arab world stands at a crossroads, its strategic significance having drawn the attention of global powers for over a century. This focus has often entangled the region in a complex web of international conspiracies and alliances, stifling its progress and development. The historical backdrop of the two world wars illustrates this struggle, as dominant Western powers viewed the Arab world not merely as a battleground but also as a stage for competing interests. This dynamic underscores the delicate balance between local aspirations and external interventions.

The challenges of achieving stability were starkly highlighted during a 2007 lecture by Gen. Wesley Clark, former supreme allied commander of NATO, who disclosed plans by the Bush administration to invade seven Middle Eastern nations. Clark's revelations suggested that the motivations behind such strategies often stemmed from special interests rather than genuine concerns for regional stability. This raises significant ethical

questions regarding the interventions by the US in foreign governments.

Critics of immediate actions against Israel argue that such measures might undermine the legitimacy of peace negotiations and hinder the potential for a two-state solution. However, it is essential to recognize the necessity of fostering inclusive dialogue, incorporating diverse voices from both sides to promote mutual

understanding and cooperation. The UN designates Israel as an occupier state in Palestinian territories, with annexations since the 1967 Six-Day War constituting violations of international law. Therefore, to advance development and stability in the region, adherence to international law and a commitment to

resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with justice and peace are imperative.

The Arab world has endured prolonged periods of turmoil, exacerbated by the missteps of some leaders. Many citizens struggle with basic human needs, with hunger emerging as a national security issue amid global conflicts. When individuals face food scarcity, the ramifications extend beyond mere survival, threatening stability



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and peace within nations. Despite these challenges, a newfound confidence and enthusiasm are emerging in the region. In Syria, efforts to heal from past wounds are underway, while the Palestinian struggle continues to reflect nearly a century of pain and resilience. This resilience offers hope that Palestinians may ultimately break free from the grip of occupation.

Israel's reliance on military power and intimidation not only suppresses the Palestinian population but also poses threats to neighboring countries such as Lebanon and Syria. History teaches us that oppression cannot extinguish the quest for justice; the moral arc of history bends toward justice. The complexities of ensuring stability were further illuminated by Clark's revelations, which raise critical questions about the ethics of US interventions.

Reflecting on America's historical mistakes, it becomes increasingly vital to cultivate a new understanding of what stability truly entails. The era of equating quiet or complacency with stability must come to an end.

By nurturing the aspirations of citizens

and fostering constructive dialogue, we can pave the way for a meaningful resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. A commitment to promoting democratic governance and human rights will ultimately lead to greater stability and reduce the violence that has long plagued the region.

We must acknowledge the longing for accountability among Arab populations, as their quest for justice resonates

deeply with their experiences. Only through fostering inclusive political reforms can we redefine the future of US-Middle East relations, creating an environment that encourages genuine stability and open dialogue.

The unfolding narratives of hope amid despair in the Arab world remind us that from the remnants of conflict and chaos, virtuous aspirations can emerge. As leaders in the region prioritize peace over perpetual conflict driven by corporate and special interests, there lies an opportunity to reshape the geopolitics positively. By investing in the dignity and aspirations of the Arab people, the US and its allies can facilitate progress toward a more just and peaceful future.

Year of turmoil poses risks to global growth

MOHAMED A. EL-ERIAN

It is something of a tradition every December to take stock of the year that is ending and consider what might lie ahead. This is true on a personal level: In my family, we tend to do this around the dinner table. But it is also true more broadly, with the time of year inviting an examination of the intersection of economics, national politics, and global geopolitics.

You would be forgiven if, as a starting point, you expected these three areas to be in alignment. After all, they are deeply interconnected, which suggests self-reinforcing dynamics. But 2024 brought some unusual dispersion in this relationship that actually widened, rather than narrowed, over the course of the year.

Begin with geopolitics. In 2024, Russia secured a greater advantage in the Ukraine war than the consensus forecasts of a year ago anticipated. Similarly, the human suffering and physical destruction resulting from the Israel-Hamas conflict in Gaza exceeded most observers' already grim expectations, and spread to other countries, such as Lebanon. The apparent impunity of the strong, together with the absence of effective means of preventing dire humanitarian crises, has deepened the sense for many that the global order is fundamentally imbalanced, and lacks any enforceable guardrails.

As for domestic politics, upheaval has been the order of the day in many countries. Governments have collapsed in both France and Germany — Europe's largest economies — leaving the EU without political leadership. And following Donald Trump's victory in last month's presidential election, the US is preparing for a political transition that is likely to bring a significant increase in the influence of a new "counter-elite."

Meanwhile, an "axis of convenience," comprising China, Iran, North Korea, and Russia, is seeking to challenge the Western-dominated international order. Other recent developments — from the now-impeached South Korean president's abrupt declaration of martial law, a move that was quickly reversed, to the collapse of Bashar Assad's regime in Syria — have reinforced the impression that we are living at a time of exceptional geopolitical and political volatility.

The past year also brought some worrisome macroeconomic developments. Europe's malaise has deepened, as countries grapple with low growth and large budget deficits. Meanwhile, China has failed to respond credibly to the clear and present danger of "Japanification," with unfavorable demographics, a debt overhang, and a prolonged property market downturn undermining growth, economic



Mohamed A. El-Erian, President of Queens' College at the University of Cambridge, is a professor at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania and the author of "The Only Game in Town: Central Banks, Instability, and Avoiding the Next Collapse" (Random House, 2016) and a co-author (with Gordon Brown, Michael Spence, and Reid Liddow) of "Permacrisis: A Plan to Fix a Fractured World" (Simon & Schuster, 2023).

efficiency, and consumer confidence.

And yet, stock markets have remained relatively stable and delivered high returns, including almost 60 record-high closes for the S&P index. The US economy's exceptional performance is a major reason. Far from weakening, as most economists expected, the US pulled even further ahead. Given the amount of foreign capital the US is attracting, and the scale of its investment in the future drivers of productivity, competitiveness, and growth, it is likely to continue outperforming other major economies in 2025.

One consequence of this success is that the US Federal Reserve did not deliver the soothing 1.75-2-percentage-point interest rate cuts that markets were pricing in a year ago. This trend, too, is set to continue. At December's policy meeting, the Fed signaled fewer cuts in 2025, and a higher terminal (long-run) rate.

But political and geopolitical upheaval — and the limited prospects for significant improvements — does pose a risk to the endurance of US economic exceptionalism. Even if the US continues outperforming its peers, as expected, the range of possible outcomes, in terms of both growth and inflation, has widened. In fact, global economic and policy outcomes as a whole are now subject to a larger

possibility set, both because the downside risks have grown and because upside innovations, such as in artificial intelligence, life sciences, food security, health-care, and defense, could transform sectors and accelerate productivity gains.

Absent a major policy reset, my baseline scenario for the US includes a somewhat lower immediate growth rate, even as the economy outperforms its peers, and sticky inflation. This will present the Fed with a choice: Accept above-target inflation or attempt to bring it down and risk tipping the economy into recession.

Globally, economic fragmentation will continue, pushing some countries to diversify their reserves further away from the US dollar and explore alternatives to Western payment systems. Yields on US 10-year government bonds, a global benchmark, will edge higher, trading mostly in the 4.75-5 percent range. As for financial markets, they might find it more challenging to maintain their status as the "good house" in a challenging geo-economic neighborhood.

This is how things appear now. But, beyond recognizing the wider dispersion of possible economic outcomes in 2025, it will be crucial regularly to test which-ever baseline one embraces against actual developments.



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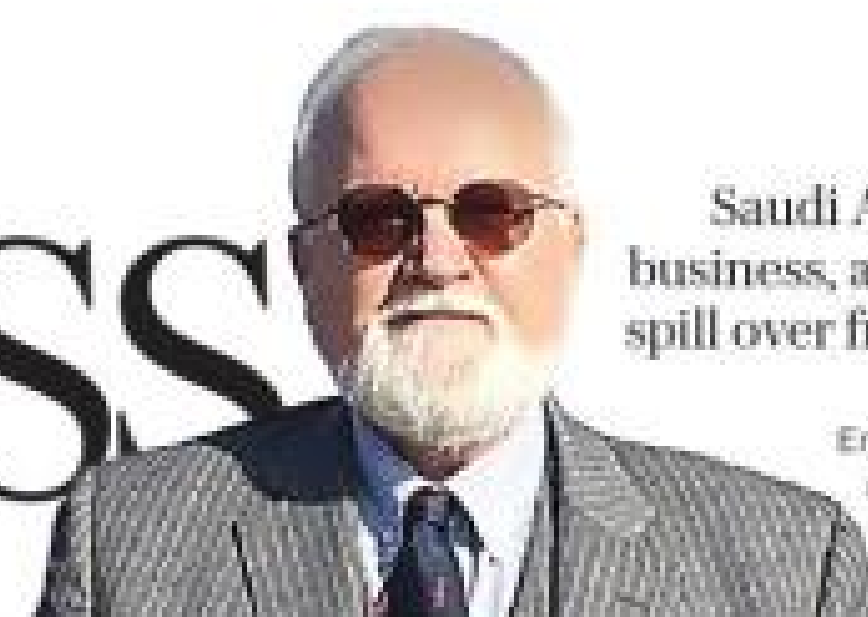
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Business



Saudi Arabia has many technical, business, and engineering skills that can spill over from oil and gas to renewables.

Paul Sullivan
Energy and environment expert
at Johns Hopkins University



Through its national policies for enabling human capital development and Saudization requirements, Saudi Arabia is positioning itself to successfully transition its workforce.

Peter Brishimov

Bolstering renewable energy capacity is critical for Saudi Arabia as it aims to generate 130 gigawatts of clean energy by 2030 and achieve net-zero emissions by 2060. SPA

TRANSITION

Saudi Arabia's oil legacy fuels shift to renewable energy hub

Kingdom set to derive 50 percent of its power generation from renewables by 2030

Nirmal Narayanan Riyadh

Saudi Arabia's established prowess in crude oil production could help the Kingdom emerge as a global leader in the renewable energy sector, experts suggest.

Paul Sullivan, an energy and environment expert at Johns Hopkins University, emphasized that Saudi Arabia possesses the technical and engineering skills necessary to become a central hub for renewable energy.

Speaking with Arab News, he explained that the Kingdom's vast experience in energy production could be leveraged to accelerate its transition toward cleaner energy sources.

Bolstering renewable energy capacity is critical for Saudi Arabia as it aims to generate 130 gigawatts of clean energy by 2030 and achieve net-zero emissions by 2060.

At the center of this ambitious plan is NEOM, a flagship project through which Saudi Arabia intends to become a leading manufacturer and exporter of green hydrogen. NEOM, in partnership with ACWA Power and Air Products, aims to export up to 600 tonnes of hydrogen per day by 2026.

"Saudi Arabia has many technical, business, and engineering skills that can spill over from oil and gas to renewables. One obvious one is drilling. Advanced drilling techniques can be used to

develop geothermal energy in many places in the Kingdom," said Sullivan.

He further noted: "Saudi Arabia has massive potential for geothermal energy. Skills in developing pipelines, refineries, ports, pumping stations, and more could also be transferred to geothermal."

Sullivan also pointed out that expertise in electrical engineering and the construction industry, honed through Saudi Arabia's legacy oil business, can be used to build new energy systems, including wind, solar, geothermal, and nuclear power.

"Saudi Arabia has a lot of financial clout from its oil business that could be redirected, but properly, to green energy and other environmental industries such as advanced desalination," he added.

Technical and commercial expertise

Peter Brishimov, a partner in Energy and Process Industries at Kearney Middle East and Africa, echoed similar sentiments, emphasizing that Saudi Arabia's experience in crude oil production provides a solid foundation for future renewable energy projects.

"In terms of technology, it is leveraging its track record in effectively deploying large-scale capital projects. On the commercialization front, given that the market for renewable energy is not yet as global as the one for oil, the Kingdom is building the

bridge to make renewable energy commercially viable in both the short term and long term," Brishimov explained.

He noted that Saudi Arabia is also focused on expanding its interconnection infrastructure and advancing green hydrogen production, which would enable the Kingdom to meet its own renewable energy needs while positioning itself as a global player.

Sullivan suggested that Saudi Arabia could quickly transform its traditional energy infrastructure into facilities capable of producing green energy.

"All over the world, traditional energy systems are being transformed into green energy hubs. The knowledge is out there. Saudi Arabia can build on that with its excellent energy research institutes, universities, and think tanks. KAPSARC comes to mind," he said.

In August, a collaboration between KAUST, NEOM's Education, Research, and Innovation Foundation, and ENOWA was announced to accelerate the development of Saudi Arabia's hydrogen economy. As part of the agreement, ERIF will sponsor three strategic projects focused on hydrogen research, working in partnership with KAUST researchers to advance the development of hydrogen as a renewable energy source.

Human capital development

Sullivan also emphasized the importance of retraining the Kingdom's workforce to support

the green energy transition.

"The traditional energy workforce will need retraining for the skills that are not transferable. Some people may not move that easily to newer ways of doing things, and some may be left behind. Younger people should be educated in the new opportunities. The training and education systems for traditional energy can be developed alongside the same for the new systems," he said.

Brishimov highlighted that human capital development is crucial for the energy transition, often overshadowed by factors

FASTFACT

Expertise in electrical engineering and the construction industry, honed through Saudi Arabia's legacy oil business, can be used to build new energy systems, including wind, solar, geothermal, and nuclear power.

such as natural resources and capital availability. "Based on its track record in building an oil industry, the Kingdom is in a strong position to do the same in the renewable energy domain. Through its national policies for enabling human capital development and Saudization requirements, Saudi Arabia is positioning itself to successfully transition its workforce," he added.

Potential challenges

Discussing potential obstacles, Sullivan pointed out that some

critical minerals and metals required for green energy production, particularly in electric vehicles, will need to be imported. However, he noted that Saudi Arabia is making strides in developing its mining sector, which could mitigate this issue in the future.

"The fact that it is so inexpensive to get the oil out of the ground can hamper the development of green energy. Legacy systems that are cash cows can slow down the development of new industries," Sullivan said.

However, he also noted that, as seen in China's transition, the development of green energy does not necessarily hinder the growth of new energy sectors.

"The development of green energy as the Chinese used coal to develop their green energy. So, it is not necessarily the case that being successful in legacy energy will slow down the growth of new energy," he explained.

Saudi Arabia has set a bold target of deriving 50 percent of its power generation from renewables by 2030. According to Brishimov, this goal presents significant challenges, especially in terms of the speed of infrastructure deployment. "In excess of 100 GW of renewable capacity will need to be deployed by 2030," he said.

He further noted that Saudi Arabia is addressing this challenge by using a combination of renewable energy auctions and direct deployment by the Public Investment Fund to ensure rapid progress.

Additionally, the Kingdom is pursuing ambitious localization targets within the renewable energy sector. "These targets must be achieved in parallel, without hindering the speed of deployment or the commercial attractiveness of renewable energy projects," Brishimov explained.

Balancing old and new energy systems

Energy experts have long emphasized the importance of a gradual transition to renewables, rather than a sudden shift away from traditional energy sources. Haitham Al-Ghais, secretary-general of OPEC, stated in July that oil will continue to play a crucial role in future energy pathways, particularly as petroleum products remain essential for various industries, including electricity generation.

"Oil will continue to play a pivotal role in future energy pathways," Al-Ghais said. He added that OPEC member countries, including Saudi Arabia, are developing clear national electrification plans that align with efforts to reduce emissions.

Sullivan shared a similar perspective, arguing that the future energy landscape should incorporate both traditional and renewable energy systems to ensure energy security. "For energy and economic security, resilience, and reliability, both new and old systems need to be developed. Oil will be needed for a long time to come," he said.

INVESTMENTS

Edtech is revolutionizing education through innovation

Kingdom's edtech market size projected to exhibit a growth rate of 13.3 percent during 2024-2032

Reem Waid Riyadh

Edtech, short for educational technology, refers to the use of technology—hardware, software, and digital resources—to enhance teaching, learning, and educational outcomes.

It encompasses a wide range of tools and techniques to improve the educational experience, including online learning platforms, educational apps, digital textbooks, virtual reality simulations, gamified learning experiences, and more.

Edtech is utilized in schools, universities, corporate training settings, and lifelong learning environments to make education more engaging, accessible, and effective.

When it comes to Saudi Arabia specifically, investing in edtech aligns with the Kingdom's Vision of establishing a knowledge-based economy.

The edtech market size in Saudi Arabia is projected to exhibit a growth rate of 13.3 percent during 2024-2032, according to global management consulting firm Inmarc.

This comes as the market is being propelled by a surge in demand for tailored education to meet individual student needs, a heightened emphasis on digital literacy and tech competencies, and a growing recognition of the value of adaptable and convenient learning options.

Saudi efforts

There is no doubt that the Saudi Ministry of Education isn't just talking about the future—they're building it, step by step, with initiatives designed to transform their classrooms into cutting-edge hubs of AI and digital mastery.

"Take their 'Future Intelligence Program,' for example, which aims to empower 30,000 students with skills in AI, machine learning, and smart technologies. Imagine a generation of Saudi youth who can program self-driving cars before they even graduate high school," Ian Khan, a technology futurist and author who writes on the subject of AI, told Arab News.

"This is more than just an upgrade in skills—this is about shaping a workforce ready to dominate the tech economy. Layer on top of that the SAMAI initiative, where 1 million Saudis will gain expertise in AI and digital tools, and it becomes clear that Saudi Arabia isn't just keeping up with global tech trends—they're aiming to lead them," Khan added.

He went on to note that this bold vision is intricately aligned with Saudi Vision 2030, which strives to create a knowledge-driven economy.

"This AI-driven, personalized



Edtech is utilized in schools, universities, corporate training settings, and lifelong learning environments to make education more engaging. SPA

learning experience is where the future of education meets the individual's unique strengths and needs, gearing up the country for its next leap forward," Khan concluded in that regard.

Initiatives

There is no doubt that the Kingdom is actively integrating AI into its education system to create a future-ready workforce.

"Programs such as the Future Intelligence Programmer aim to train thousands of students in AI, equipping them with the skills to innovate in a rapidly digital world. AI is being used to personalize learning experiences, automate administrative tasks for educators, and enable more tailored educational pathways," Samer Bohsali, Middle East head of government & public sector practice, Bain & Co., told Arab News.

"These efforts are part of a broader vision to transform the Kingdom's education system, setting new standards for digital literacy and student engagement," Bohsali said.

On behalf of PwC Middle East, Partner at Education and Skills Ayham Fayyoumi told Arab News that the Kingdom is adopting a cautious yet forward-thinking approach to AI in education, with initiatives focusing on several key areas.

"One notable example is the implementation of adaptive learning systems, which use AI to analyze individual student performance and tailor educational content accordingly. These systems can identify students'

strengths and weaknesses, offering personalized learning experiences that enhance educational outcomes," Fayyoumi said.

"Additionally, AI-powered virtual assistants are being introduced to support both teachers and students in managing routine tasks, such as administrative work or grading, allowing educators to dedicate more time to core instructional activities. These AI tools are designed to streamline workflows, enhance productivity, and improve engagement

This AI-driven, personalized learning experience is where the future of education meets the individual's unique strengths and needs.

Ian Khan
Technology futurist
and author



in the classroom," he added.

Global partnerships

Global EdTech partnerships are crucial for the Kingdom for several reasons including access to innovation, enhanced learning opportunities, cross-cultural exchange, among several others.

"When Saudi Arabia decided to revolutionize its educational landscape, they didn't go it alone — they teamed up with global powerhouses like Google, Microsoft, and Coursera. This collaboration isn't just window dressing. It's a deliberate strategy to equip students and educators with the latest tools in AI, cloud computing, and data science," Khan said.

"Google Cloud's Elevate Program, for example, has trained over 25,000 Saudi women in cloud technologies. This is more than just a skillset boost—this is building a tech-savvy workforce that can compete on a global stage," he added.

The technology futurist continued to highlight that these partnerships give Saudi educators access to AI-powered platforms that personalize learning and streamline assessments, ultimately creating more engaging and efficient classrooms.

"The future of education isn't just digital—it's adaptable, global, and responsive. And Saudi Arabia, through these forward-thinking

collaborations, is leading the charge toward a tech-dominant educational future," Khan said.

Saudi Arabia's collaboration with global tech leaders also empowers the nation to adopt advanced educational tools that inspire innovation in the classroom.

From Bain & Co.'s side, Bohsali explained that these partnerships provide access to AI-driven platforms that foster personalized learning and critical thinking.

"This digital transformation is not just about adopting technology but also about reshaping how education is delivered, making learning more engaging and aligned with the future needs of the global economy," he said.

Saudi Arabia's educational technology firms are using AI and technological advancements to revolutionize conventional educational approaches and enhance student achievements.

Taking cues from effective programs in the UK and elsewhere, Saudi Arabia is directing significant resources into AI-infused tools across various sectors, particularly education.

Consequently, this initiative is fostering expansion in the education sector and sparking creativity within private enterprises, which is positively impacting more than 6 million students in the nation.

In that regard, PwC partner Fayyoumi said: "Several EdTech companies are at the forefront of this revolution,

incorporating advanced AI technologies into their products and services to enhance learning experiences."

"These companies are providing products utilizing AI to offer personalized learning pathways, adaptive assessments, and real-time feedback to better meet the unique needs of individual students. Such tools not only improve engagement but also boost academic performance by catering to diverse learning styles," he added.

Saudi Vision 2030

"Saudi Vision 2030 isn't just about a shift in economic strategy — it's a transformation in mindset. At the heart of this vision is the move from a resource-based economy to one driven by knowledge, innovation, and technology," Khan said.

"By embedding AI and digital learning in classrooms, programs like SAMAI and the Future Intelligence Program are crafting a new generation of thinkers, doers, and creators. The ripple effects will be profound. Think about it—students will be more engaged because their learning is tailored to their strengths," he added.

The technology futurist emphasized that the education system will be more efficient, and graduates will emerge prepared for high-demand sectors like AI, cybersecurity, and digital industries.

He underlined that this is the essence of future readiness—where a nation's educational foundation aligns perfectly with the demands of tomorrow's economy.

On Bain & Co.'s behalf, Bohsali said: "By embedding AI and advanced technologies into the curriculum, the Kingdom is fostering a generation of learners who are not only technologically adept but also equipped to lead in innovation."

"The expected outcomes are profound—enhanced digital literacy, improved educational outcomes, and the positioning of Saudi Arabia as a global leader in the knowledge economy," Bohsali added.

Education is a key pillar, for both youth and above in achieving the goals of Vision 2030. This comes as the median age of Saudis is 22 years, and 63 percent of the Saudi population is below the age of 30.

Furthermore, PwC's 2024 Hopes & Fears survey shows that nearly three-quarters of people surveyed in Saudi foresee the growing importance of digital skills in their roles over the coming five years.

"Incorporating digital tools within the education ecosystem can help boost the overall student learning experience and prepare them for their future work environments," Fayyoumi said.

Business News



Saudi Arabia is positioning itself as a regional hub for innovation, creating fertile ground for startups and attracting significant investments. SPA

STARTUP WRAP

KSA startups eye AI, enterprise software, and SMEs

Ecosystem gains momentum on government-backed initiatives, investor interest

Nour El-Shaerl Riyadh

Saudi Arabia's startup ecosystem is gaining momentum, propelled by government-backed initiatives and an influx of investor interest. While the fintech sector remains a primary focus, emerging opportunities in artificial intelligence, enterprise systems, and small-to-medium enterprise investments are drawing attention.

As part of its Vision 2030 initiative to reduce its dependence on oil, Saudi Arabia is positioning itself as a regional hub for innovation, creating fertile ground for startups and attracting significant venture capital flows.

Why fintech?

Tushar Singhvi, deputy CEO of Crescent Enterprises and head of its investment platform, CE-Ventures, discussed the enduring potential of the fintech sector in an interview with Arab News. He pointed to the Kingdom's robust national strategy, which aims to establish 525 fintech companies by 2030, as a key driver behind sustained growth.

"Saudi Arabia's fintech sector is set for sustained growth, driven by a clear national strategy to have 525 fintech companies by 2030," Singhvi said.

In 2023, Saudi Arabia captured 58 percent of all fintech venture capital in the Middle East and North Africa. Singhvi also highlighted pivotal moves like the acquisition of Tweek by Tabby and the launch of Samsang Pay, both of which support Saudi Arabia's goal of becoming a cashless society.

"These efforts position Saudi Arabia as a leader in fintech innovation, making the sector highly attractive to investors," Singhvi stated.

He added that this fintech momentum is aligned with the broader push for economic diversification. Vision 2030, Saudi Arabia's ambitious roadmap for its post-oil economy, is channeling investments into long-term growth sectors like fintech, logistics, and healthcare.

"Investors are focusing on sectors with long-term growth potential, like financial services, healthcare, and renewable energy," Singhvi said, emphasizing a rising interest in ESG-aligned investments that prioritize sustainability and social impact.

The fintech sector's growth is further accelerated by the relative underdevelopment of traditional financial services in the region, according to Khaled Talhouni, managing partner at Nuwa Capital. He noted that the services available to both consumers and businesses from traditional financial institutions remain limited compared to the maturity of the overall economy.



Saudi Arabia's fintech sector is set for sustained growth, driven by a clear national strategy to have 525 fintech companies by 2030.

Tushar Singhvi
Deputy CEO of
Crescent
Enterprises



"The availability and depth of services to both consumers and firms from traditional financial institutions like banks remains woefully under-developed relative to the maturity of the overall economy," Talhouni explained.

This gap presents significant opportunities for fintech startups. However, Talhouni anticipates market consolidation, with smaller companies potentially being acquired by larger players. "I do suspect some consolidation in the space with smaller players folding into larger ones," he said.

The rise of AI

AI is another area where Saudi Arabia is positioning itself for major growth. Singhvi pointed to the partnership between the Saudi Data and Artificial Intelligence Authority and NVIDIA to build one of the largest high-performance computing data centers in MENA.

"Saudi Arabia is rapidly aligning with global AI trends, aiming to be a top 15 AI leader by 2030," Singhvi explained. Along with such investments, there is a concerted effort to build a skilled workforce, ensuring that the Kingdom can adopt AI and enterprise technologies to fuel its digital transformation.

Talhouni, however, sees the real opportunity for startups in integrating AI into day-to-day business operations rather than in large-scale AI infrastructure.

"Rather than investing in AI infrastructure/LLMs (large language models) etc., startups will incorporate AI into their normal course of business naturally across the region," he said. "AI will become

embedded in the offerings of all startups," but he does not expect many companies in the region to invest deeply in large-scale AI or deeptech, except for specific use cases.

Talhouni emphasized that AI will likely serve as an enabling technology, integrated into existing business models, rather than being the primary focus for most startups.

Shifting focus

Singhvi anticipates a shift in investor attention toward enterprise systems as Saudi companies scale up and strive for global competitiveness. He highlighted that enterprise software will play a pivotal role in the Kingdom's broader digital transformation efforts.

"We are seeing more and more SaaS (Software as a Service) companies emerge from the region and the Kingdom," Talhouni observed. However, scaling such businesses can be challenging, given the relatively small number of large companies in the region. "SaaS/Enterprise requires a large number of firms and a relatively large economy to flourish," he said. Despite these hurdles, Talhouni noted that niche opportunities exist for creating regional champions in the sector.

Why not oil and gas?

While the oil and gas sector has traditionally been the cornerstone of Saudi Arabia's economy, it poses significant challenges for startups. Singhvi explained that the sector's complex regulations and high capital requirements create barriers to entry for smaller companies. Established industry giants dominate research and development, making it tough for new players to break into the space.

BizBriefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Year-end adjustment

US stocks tumble at end of holiday week

Wall Street stocks stumbled Friday as major companies saw their shares fall toward the end of a holiday week. The Dow Jones Industrial Average lost 0.8 percent to 42,992.21, while the broad-based S&P 500 slid 1.1 percent to 5,970.84. The Nasdaq Composite Index plunged 1.5 percent to 19,722.03.

Major companies in particular saw their shares fall, with Microsoft slipping 1.7 percent. Amazon lost 1.4 percent, while Nvidia dropped 2.0 percent.

Peter Cardillo of Spartan Capital said the slump was a "year-end adjustment" due to a rise in US Treasury bond yields. **AFP**

Balancing act

Italy lawmakers approve 2025 budget

Italy's parliament on Saturday approved the 2025 budget, aiming to both appease EU demands to lower the eurozone nation's deficit and honor Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's pledge to cut taxes.

Over half of the package, worth some 30 billion euros (\$31 billion), is devoted to cuts to tax and social security contributions for low- and middle-income earners.

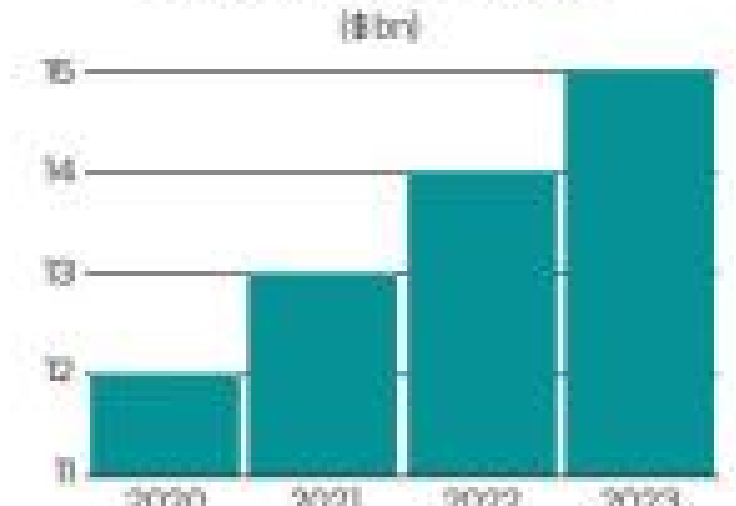
Rome is having to perform a fine fiscal balancing act, after Brussels took Italy to task earlier this year over its debt worth nearly 3 trillion euros. **AFP**

Chart of THE DAY

Ecolab currently operates in over 170 countries globally.

Source: Statista

ECOLAB'S REVENUE (\$bn)



What We're Reading

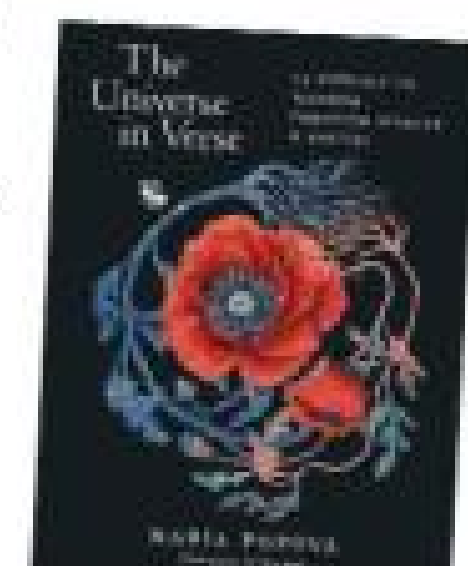
FOR THE TRAIN OR ON THE PLANE

The Universe in Verse

MARIA POPOVA

Maria Popova's "The Universe in Verse" is a collection of 15 short essays on subjects ranging from the mystery of dark matter and the infinity of pi to the resilience of trees and the intelligence of

octopuses. These stories are interwoven with very real and human lives of scientists and poets inspired by the same questions and the beauty they reveal.



Joint venture

Blue Origin gets license for rocket launch

The Federal Aviation Administration said on Friday that it has issued a commercial space launch license for Blue Origin's — Jeff Bezos' rocket company — New Glenn launch.

Blue Origin entered into a highly competitive area it has long sought to join, as the US Department of Defense picked the company, along with Elon Musk's SpaceX and Boeing-Lockheed joint venture United Launch Alliance, to compete for national security space missions.

The Pentagon had made initial selections under a \$5.6 billion program in June. **AFP**

Bourse

China's CATL to seek Hong Kong listing

Chinese battery manufacturer CATL said it plans to seek a listing in Hong Kong, a Shenzhen Stock Exchange filing showed.

CATL plans to issue offshore H-shares and apply for a listing on the main board of the Hong Kong Stock Exchange, it said in the filing.

CATL's board has approved the plan, but the proposal is pending approval from regulators, including the China Securities Regulatory Commission, the company said.

The move is aimed at "further promoting the company's global strategic layout" and improving its competitiveness, it said. **Reuters**

By cultivating the next generation of leaders, New Murabba aspires to build a brighter tomorrow for our nation.

Mamdouh Al-Quraishi
Chief Corporate Services Officer at New Murabba



PRESS RELEASES

FROM THE WORLD OF BUSINESS AND COMMERCE

Corporate



The opening ceremony was attended by Singaporean Ambassador Premjith Sadasivan and Tonya Tan, founder of World Future Enterprises, alongside other dignitaries.

CULINARY DELIGHT

LuLu showcases best of Singapore's gastronomy

The Saudi-Singapore Gastronomy 2024 event at LuLu Hypermarket showcased the best of Singapore's gastronomic delights, bringing 10 premier Singaporean food brands to the hypermarket's stores across Riyadh, Jeddah and Dammam.

Held in association with the Singapore Food Manufacturing Association, the event — which ran from Dec. 14-24 — supports the expansion of Singapore's renowned culinary brands into the Kingdom.

It is the first-ever cross-border event to introduce Singapore's finest culinary products to the Saudi market, transforming LuLu stores into culinary hubs, showcasing the country's finest ingredients and flavors.

The opening ceremony was attended by chief guest Premjith Sadasivan, ambassador of Singapore to Saudi Arabia, and Tonya Tan, founder and business development director of World Future Enterprises, alongside other dignitaries from various fields.

Upon arrival, Sadasivan was welcomed by LuLu's senior management with a purple carpet ceremony, bouquets, and a traditional orchid garland. A state-of-the-art robot announced the launch of new products, adding an innovative and tech-savvy dimension to the event.

Sadasivan said the Saudi-Singapore Gastronomy 2024 event marks a significant milestone in enhancing economic and cultural

HIGHLIGHT

Saudi-Singapore Gastronomy 2024 featured a wide range of Singaporean food products, from sauces, spices, and noodles to ready-to-eat meals, offering a blend of authenticity and premium quality.

relations between Singapore and Saudi Arabia. "This event presents exciting business opportunities for the growth of Singaporean products in the Middle Eastern market. By providing Saudi consumers with access to premium Singaporean food brands, LuLu Hypermarket and

World Future Enterprises are paving the way for greater collaboration between the two nations," he added.

Saudi-Singapore Gastronomy 2024 featured a wide range of Singaporean food products, from sauces, spices, and noodles to ready-to-eat meals, offering a blend of authenticity and premium quality. The Singaporean brands debuting in the Kingdom include: Boozt Isotonic Sports Drink, Jungle Kitchen Productions Pte. Ltd, Chili Brand, Double Elephant Brand, Fred and Chloe, Ideal Food, Quay Wholefoods, MindofFoods, Oatbedient, RÔA Daily, and Flavors of Asia/ Simple Chef.

Key highlights of the event

included tasting tables and interactive live cooking stations manned by celebrity chefs preparing Singaporean dishes.

Shehim Mohammed, director of LuLu Saudi Hypermarkets, said Saudi-Singapore Gastronomy 2024 reflects LuLu's commitment to offering the best of Singaporean flavors to the sophisticated Saudi palate "With our global network of sourcing offices and state-of-the-art warehousing and logistics support, LuLu Hypermarket is in a unique position to bring the finest food trends from Singapore to Saudi Arabia," Mohammed said. He said the event presented an exciting opportunity to explore Singapore's rich culinary offerings bursting with flavor and quality.

ADVANCED HEALTHCARE

Aster Sanad hosts symposium with Saudi Society of Hematology

Aster Sanad Hospital, a unit of the integrated healthcare provider Aster DM Healthcare, recently concluded its Venous Thrombosis and Hemostasis Symposium 2024 at the Braira Hotel Qurtuba in Riyadh. The event, held in collaboration with the Saudi Society of Hematology, drew more than 200 healthcare professionals, including hematologists, clinicians, and researchers from across the Kingdom and beyond. They gathered to explore the latest advancements in the management of venous thrombosis and hemostasis.

Officially recognized by the Saudi Commission for Health Specialists, the symposium offered attendees valuable continuing medical education credit hours. The two-day event

featured a distinguished lineup of 20+ experts from across Saudi Arabia, who presented a wide range of critical topics related to venous thrombosis, bleeding disorders, and blood coagulation.

Mohamed Alshamari, CEO of Aster Hospitals and Clinics Saudi Arabia, said: "Continuous learning and collaboration in healthcare are essential for driving better patient outcomes. We are proud to have brought together such a distinguished group of professionals to discuss the most pressing challenges and recent innovations in the field of hematology.

"This symposium not only provided an opportunity for education but also fostered collaboration among experts, setting the stage for ongoing advancements in patient care."

TALENT DEVELOPMENT

New Murabba launches training program for young Saudis

New Murabba — a PIF Company — has announced the launch of its inaugural Graduates Program, a strategic initiative designed to cultivate and empower the next generation of Saudi leaders. The program welcomed its first cohort, marking a significant milestone in New Murabba's commitment to developing exceptional talent and contributing to the Kingdom's Vision 2030 goals.

Through a rigorous selection process, New Murabba has identified exceptional graduates who embody the program's values. This immersive program will equip these individuals with critical skills in construction, engineering, project management, artificial intelligence, and other key areas, ensuring they are prepared to contribute to building the world's "largest and



New Murabba has identified exceptional graduates who embody the program's values.

most transformative downtown."

"Aligned with Saudi Vision 2030, New Murabba is dedicated to investing in the nation's future by providing unparalleled opportunities for its youth," the company said in a statement. "This program exemplifies the company's commitment to education, training, and workforce localization. Participants will embark on a transformative journey that seamlessly

integrates structured on-the-job training with targeted learning courses."

Mamdouh Al-Quraishi, chief corporate services officer, said: "By cultivating the next generation of leaders, New Murabba aspires to build a brighter tomorrow for our nation. We are confident these graduates will shape the future of our community and drive innovation on a global scale."

Corporate Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Aviation Innovation Gulf Air hosts flight safety conference

Gulf Air hosted the second Gulf Flight Safety Association Conference for 2024, at the Mövenpick Hotel, Bahrain. The two-day conference opened with a welcome address by Chief Operating Officer of Gulf Air Captain Qasim Ismaeel, who underscored the airline's dedication to cultivating a robust aviation safety culture throughout the Gulf region and beyond.

The first day of the conference focused on topics including aircraft damage and weather risks, dangerous goods incidents and ground-handling. The second day included reports from various safety groups, and presentations from Airbus, UAE Presidential Flight and Symbiotics.

Financial Services MultiBank Group recognized at Traders Fair

MultiBank Group, the world's largest financial derivatives institution headquartered in Dubai, has been recognized for its industry contributions at Traders Fair Hong Kong 2024. The company was honored with three prestigious awards: Best Forex Partners Program Global 2024, Best Forex Broker in the Philippines, and Forex Broker of the Year.

Traders Fair Hong Kong is a leading financial event in Asia, bringing together thousands of traders, investors, and industry professionals from around the world.

Annual Event Sustainability Forum names GIB as partner

Sustainability Forum Middle East has announced Gulf International Bank as a forum partner for its upcoming third edition, set to take place on Jan. 28-29, 2025, in Bahrain.

GIB's involvement as a forum partner underscores the bank's dedication to advancing sustainability throughout the region. It is a leading supporter of the GCC economies as they transition toward their net-zero goals. GIB, which launched a comprehensive sustainability strategy in 2021, has created internal sustainability metrics to measure performance, and developed its own Sustainability and Transition Financing Framework to assess sustainable financing activities.



Georges-Kevin N'Koudou promises Damac supporters that he will do everything he can to take the club up the Saudi Pro League table.

ON COURSE FOR THE TITLE

Saudi Arabia defeat Iraq to advance in Gulf Cup

The Green Falcons take on hosts Kuwait in the semifinals on Tuesday

John Duerden Kuwait City

Saudi Arabia defeated Iraq 3-1 on Saturday to finish top of Group B in the Arabian Gulf Cup and book their place in the last four of the Kuwait tournament.

Needing just a point to progress, two late goals from substitute Abdullah Al-Hamdan, following an earlier strike from his Al-Hilal colleague Salem Al-Dawsari, produced victory and meant that the Green Falcons stayed on course for a first regional title since 2004.

Both teams had chances in the first half, but 10 minutes into the second, Herve Renard's men — who lost the opening game against Bahrain — got the breakthrough they had been looking for. Ibrahim Bayesh was judged by VAR to have handled in the area to give Saudi Arabia a penalty.

Al-Dawsari had missed his last two spot kicks for the national team, but the 2022 Asian player of the year showed few signs of nerves as he stroked the ball home to give his team a vital lead.

However, after 64 minutes Iraq were level. Mohanad Ali turned Ali Al-Bulaihi inside the area to shoot home inside the near post to give the holders real hope.

There were plenty of nerves



The team restored their lead with nine minutes remaining with a strike. KSA will face Kuwait on Tuesday. @SaudiNT

FASTFACTS

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among the Kingdom's fans but the team restored their lead with nine minutes remaining following a delightful strike. Sultan Al-Ghannam pulled the ball back from the right side of the area for Al-Hamdan to take a touch and curl the ball into the top corner of the Iraqi net.

Five minutes later and it was all over. Al-Dawsari skipped clear of challenges in the Iraqi half to feed Al-Hamdan on the left corner of the area and the forward rolled the ball into the opposite side of the net with a precise low shot.

SAUDI FOOTBALL

Damac's star Georges-Kevin N'Koudou has Ronaldo and Mitrovic in his sights

Mark Lomas London

Few players will want the winter break in the Saudi Pro League to be over more than Georges-Kevin N'Koudou. Despite his team Damac sitting in 10th place in the Saudi Pro League table, N'Koudou has netted eight goals in 13 games so far; only Cristiano Ronaldo, Karim Benzema and Aleksandar Mitrovic have scored more in the league this season.

The Cameroon international primarily operates as a winger but since moving to Damac in the summer of 2023, N'Koudou has become a dangerous finisher. Before arriving in Saudi Arabia, he had only scored more than five goals in a season once in his career. At Damac,



Despite Damac sitting in 10th place in SPL table, Georges-Kevin N'Koudou has netted eight goals so far. @DAMAC_CLUB

FASTFACTS

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• Before arriving in Saudi Arabia, he had only scored more than five goals in a season once in his career. At Damac, he has done it twice in a row.

he has done it twice in a row.

N'Koudou hit the ground running in impressive fashion after his move from Turkish side Besiktas, bagging 14 goals

in his first 16 games, including a sensational match-winning brace against then-reigning Saudi champions Al-Ittihad last December. The Damac No. 10 credits his prolific form to the influence of his coach, ex-AC Milan defender Cosmin Contra.

"The coach has given me so much responsibility and freedom on the field," N'Koudou told Arab News. "He knows I have experience, so he has just let me play my game and be happy on the pitch and off the pitch."

"I have had many great coaches in my career so far but before being a coach, (Contra) is a great man. He's honest and if he has something to say he will say it to you straight."

Sport Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Doping scandals

Nick Kyrgios says tennis integrity 'awful'

Nick Kyrgios lashed out Saturday at what he believes is the lenient treatment of world tennis No. 1 Italian Jannik Sinner for a failed drug test and said integrity in the sport was "awful."

Sinner twice tested positive for the banned steroid clostebol in March.

However, the International Tennis Integrity Agency accepted his argument that the steroid entered his system due to contamination from his physiotherapist and opted not to suspend him. **AFP**

Premier League

Guardiola won't quit troubled Manchester City

Pep Guardiola insists he will not walk out on troubled Manchester City as he strives to stop the champions' stunning decline.

Guardiola only recently signed a two-year contract extension but City's dismal form has raised questions about his future at the Etihad Stadium.

A nightmare run of nine defeats in 13 games, with just one win in that woeful spell, triggered suggestions the City boss could decide to quit if he cannot find an answer to his team's problems. **AFP**



T20 cricket

Duffy shines as New Zealand beat Sri Lanka

A late bowling fightback sparked by Jacob Duffy produced a remarkable eight-run victory for New Zealand against Sri Lanka at Mount Maunganui on Saturday.

Sri Lanka, with openers Pathum Nissanka and Kusal Mendis in sparkling form, were cruising toward the 173-run target when they reached 95 without loss at the halfway stage.

But in the 14th over, with Sri Lanka 121-0, Duffy changed the game with three wickets in four balls, all caught behind by Mitchell Hay, beginning with the dismissal of Mendis for 46 off 36 deliveries. **AFP**

GOLF

Niemann confirms place at International Series India

Ali Khaled Gurugram, India

In-form LIV Golf superstar Joaquin Niemann, The International Series Rankings champion for the 2024 season, is the latest big name to be confirmed for International Series India, the \$2m tournament taking place at DLF Golf and Country

Club in Gurugram next month. The Chilean, who captains the Torque GC team in the LIV Golf League, will join defending US Open champion Bryson DeChambeau and local hero Anirban Lahiri for the tournament, which will take place from Jan. 30 to Feb. 2.

Niemann was runner-up in the

LIV Golf League individual standings in an impressive 2024 season, winning two of the first three tournaments in Mayakoba and Jeddah, and clinching two T2 and two T3 places as he narrowly lost out to two-time major champion Jon Rahm. The 26-year-old, a two-time PGA Tour winner, finished the campaign on

a high by winning the Asian Tour's season-ending \$5m PIF Saudi International powered by SoftBank Investment Advisers earlier this month in Riyadh in a thrilling play-off where he held his nerve to edge out 2022 Open champion Cam Smith and promising American Caleb Surratt.

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Canadian filmmaker Denis Villeneuve revealed in an interview with the Los Angeles Times this week that he enforces a 'no-cell-phone, no-social-media policy' on 'Dune' sets to ensure 'focus and creativity' among cast and crew.



& Finally

TheSix

Trailblazing stars

As 2024 ends, we celebrate Arab celebrities who shone globally and reached historic milestones.



Elie Saab

Lebanese designer Elie Saab hosted "The 1001 Seasons of Elie Saab" in Riyadh.



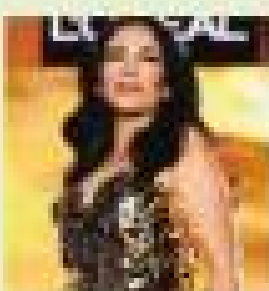
Kaouthar Ben Hania

The Tunisian filmmaker made history in January as the first Arab woman to earn a second Oscar nomination, with her film "Four Daughters" shortlisted for Best Documentary Feature Film.



Elyanna

The Chilean Palestinian singer performed alongside Coldplay at UK's Glastonbury Festival in June and made her debut on Saturday Night Live in October.



Mona Zaki

The Egyptian actress was among the celebrities who walked the seventh edition of L'Oréal Paris' star-studded "Le Défilé Walk Your Worth" event during Paris Fashion Week in September.



Aseel Omran

In Paris, Mona Zaki was joined by Saudi Arabia actress and presenter Aseel Omran who wore a form-fitting velvet black dress with a contrasting white detail at the bust.



Logina Salah

The model and content creator made history by becoming the first Egyptian contestant to secure a top-30 place at Mexico City's Miss Universe pageant in November.



Model and reality TV star Georgina Rodriguez attended the event alongside her longtime partner Cristiano Ronaldo. Getty Images

CLOSE UP

Georgina Rodriguez steals the spotlight at Dubai event

Arab News Dubai

Argentine model Georgina Rodriguez made a head-turning appearance this week at the Globe Soccer Dubai Awards 2024, held as part of the Dubai International Sports Conference 2024.

She attended the event alongside her longtime partner, Cristiano Ronaldo, who was honored with two awards: Best Middle East Player 2024 and All-Time Top Goal Scorer.

Rodriguez turned heads in a fitted black dress featuring a sweetheart neckline and lace-detailed sleeves. She completed her look with black pointed-toe heels and carried a matching black purse.

The couple was joined by Ronaldo's eldest son, Cristiano Jr., making it a family affair at one of the year's most celebrated sports events.



The couple spent their festive holiday in Lapland, Finland, with their children. Instagram

Upon accepting the award, Ronaldo, who plays for Saudi Arabia's Al-Nassr FC, expressed his gratitude on stage, saying: "For me, it is a big pleasure to win this trophy. It is very different than the other ones. It is a pleasure to be in this gala. (There are) a lot of champions here, young generations and old generations."

He continued: "I have to say thank you to my own family, my kids. They are all here in Dubai. My oldest son is there. My wife is here. She's my lovely support all the time to carry on to play."

In one month I'm gonna be 40 years old but I'm not finished yet. I will continue because I want to win titles, I want to be a champion."

After the event, Ronaldo shared pictures with his 646 million Instagram followers, captioning the post: "A great way to end the year. Thank you to my teammates, staff, to everyone who has supported me along the way, and especially to my family. There is still more to come."

The couple were later spotted at Nobu Dubai in Atlantis the Palm, where there was also Brazilian football player Neymar and former Italian footballer Alessandro Del Piero.

Rodriguez and Ronaldo traveled to Dubai following their family vacation in Lapland, Finland, where they celebrated the festive season.

The couple shared glimpses of their activities on Instagram, including an in-house dinner with their children, sledding adventures, ice baths and more, giving fans a peek into their holiday moments.

SEQUEL

'The Batman 2' delayed to 2027

Arab News Dubai

The release of US filmmaker Matt Reeves' "The Batman" sequel has been pushed back to Oct.1, 2027, Warner Bros. announced this week.

The DC Studios film was originally set to debut in Imax on Oct.2, 2026, and is expected to go into production in the third quarter of 2025.

"The only reason for the delay is there isn't a full script," DC Studios co-chief James Gunn wrote on Threads this week. "Matt is committed to making the best film he possibly can, and no one can accurately guess exactly how long a script will take to write. Once there is a finished script, there is around two years for pre-production, shooting and post-production on big films."

"The Batman" premiered in 2022 as the movie industry began recovering from COVID-related closures. The film earned over \$770 million worldwide.

An as-yet-untitled movie directed by Mexican filmmaker Alejandro González Iñárritu and starring Tom Cruise will now take the Oct.2, 2026, release date — the only major studio release currently scheduled for that weekend.

The cast of Iñárritu's movie also includes Sandra Hüller, John Goodman, Michael Stuhlbarg, Jesse Plemons, Sophie Wilde and Riz Ahmed. It reportedly follows the world's most powerful man as he races to prove he is humanity's savior before the disaster he caused leads to total destruction.

The film will be Iñárritu's first English-language movie since "The Revenant," starring Leonardo DiCaprio, nearly a decade ago.



Matt Reeves

INTERVIEW

Mytheresa CEO on personalization, culture, Saudi Arabia's luxury boom

Hanadi Merchant Habib Dubai

As Saudi Arabia cements its position as a global center for luxury, the Kingdom's burgeoning fashion market is capturing the attention of high-end retailers worldwide.

Mytheresa, one of the leading luxury e-commerce platforms, is at the forefront of this shift, catering to a growing and increasingly discerning Saudi clientele.

Michael Kliger, CEO of Mytheresa, revealed how the brand is evolving alongside the Kingdom's

dynamic landscape, with a focus on personalization and cultural connection.

"We're witnessing incredible changes in the Saudi market," Kliger said. "More Saudis are staying in the region, with some even moving back permanently, which has created a significant increase in local demand for luxury fashion."

"Events like weddings and receptions have always been important here, but now, with cinemas and fine dining experiences becoming more common,



Michael Kliger

there are even more occasions for people to dress up."

While Mytheresa does not yet have a physical presence in Saudi Arabia, its strategy focuses on

creating meaningful connections with local clients.

"We host a variety of events to engage directly with our Saudi customers," Kliger said. "Recently, we had a dinner at Hia Hub in Riyadh with the designers of Oscar de la Renta, and in Jeddah, one of our clients hosted 100 of her friends for us at a hotel. These gatherings, along with style suites where customers can try curated collections, allow us to bring the Mytheresa experience to them in a personal and exclusive way."

Additionally, the e-tailer frequently collaborates with local creatives to create authentic connections with their customers. Kliger said that understanding the timing of local events and traditions, such as Ramadan and other festive gatherings, is essential. He highlighted the importance of working with local influencers and ambassadors to ensure the brand's messaging feels genuine and accessible, making it easier for Saudi customers to engage with Mytheresa.