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ARAB NEWS

The Voice of a Changing Region

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MIDDLE EAST CRISIS

Gaza truce in the balance as Israel threatens to resume war

Egypt 'has plan for enclave's future,' Jordan's king says, talks to be held in Saudi Arabia

AFF, Reuters Gaza City

The fragile truce in Gaza was hanging by a thread on Tuesday after Israel and Hamas traded accusations and Benjamin Netanyahu threatened to resume the war that has already devastated the Palestinian enclave.

After Hamas halted the latest release of Israeli hostages due on Saturday, the Israeli prime minister said the war would restart if Hamas did not return its captives. "The ceasefire will end," he said, and the Israeli army would "resume intense fighting until Hamas is decisively defeated."

Donald Trump's latest comments raised tensions further. The dust had not settled on the US president's bombshell plan last week to expel Gaza's residents and redevelop the enclave when Trump then said that displaced Palestinians would have no right to return to the territory.

He followed that up with a ceasefire ultimatum to Hamas. "If all of the hostages aren't returned by Saturday 12 o'clock I would say cancel it, all bets are off, and let hell break out," Trump said.

Trump's threat was backed up by far-right extremist Israeli minister Bezalel Smotrich. "Cut off electricity and water, stop humanitarian aid ... open the gates of hell," he said.

Senior Hamas official Sami Abu Zuhri said: "Trump must remember that there is



President Donald Trump greets Jordan's King Abdullah at the White House on Tuesday. AP

an agreement that must be respected by both parties. The language of threats has no value and further complicates matters."

Trump repeated his Gaza plan during talks at the White House

on Tuesday with King Abdullah of Jordan. "We're going to take it. We're going to hold it, we're going to cherish it. We're going to get it going eventually," he said.

The king has already rejected the Trump plan, but would not be drawn on the issue in the White House. "The point is how to make this work in a way that is good for

We're going to take it. We're going to hold it, we're going to cherish it. We're going to get it going eventually.

Donald Trump
US president

everybody," he said. Egypt was working on proposals for Gaza's future, the king said. "Let's wait until the Egyptians can come and present it to the president. We will be in Saudi Arabia to discuss that."

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• **Opinion: Osama Al-Sharif & Yossi Mekelberg** Pages 9 & 10

MILITIA MENACE

UN man in Yemen dies in Houthi captivity

AFF, Reuters Dubai

An employee of the UN's World Food Programme has died while being held captive by the Houthi militia in Yemen, the agency said on Tuesday.

The man, identified only as Ahmed, was "arbitrarily detained by local authorities since 23 January," it said.

"A devoted humanitarian and father of two, he played a crucial role in our mission to deliver lifesaving food assistance," agency chief Cindy McCain said.

The Houthis have arrested at least 24 staff from the UN and other humanitarian organizations, most of them since June 2024. In January alone, the militia detained eight UN workers, including six in its stronghold in the northern Saada region. On Monday, the UN suspended its activities in Saada.

The Houthis claimed the June arrests included "an American-Israeli spy network" operating under the cover of humanitarian organizations — allegations emphatically rejected by the UN Human Rights Office.

The militia have controlled most populated parts of Yemen, including the capital Sanaa, since seizing power in a coup in 2014 and early 2015.

Yemen has been the focus of one of the world's largest humanitarian operations during a decade of civil war that disrupted food supplies. The World Food Programme provided assistance to 15.3 million people, nearly 50 percent of the population, in 2023.

The Brief

LEBANON CABINET

President Joseph Aoun has told ministers in Lebanon's new government that their 'loyalty must be to the state alone.' **P6**

ENERGY WEEK

Thousands of industry leaders and policymakers gathered in New Delhi for India Energy Week 2025, where they will be discussing energy access. **P8**

INVESTMENT LEAP

Investments totaling \$1.78 billion marked the third day of the LEAP 2025 Tech Conference in Riyadh. **P11**

TECHNOLOGY

World 'needs new policies' on artificial intelligence

Many fear the future because progress is so fast, government conference in Dubai told

Arab News Dubai

World governments must work together to create ethical policies on new technologies such as artificial intelligence so they can serve humankind, a conference in the UAE heard on Tuesday.

"What we are seeing today ... is not enough," World Economic Forum chief Klaus Schwab told those attending the World Governments Summit in Dubai. "We need a coordinated global process to make sure that those technologies are constructive,



Kristalina Georgieva, the International Monetary Fund's managing director, speaks as moderator Richard Quest listens during a session at the World Governments Summit in Dubai. Reuters

"Many people are afraid of the future because the progress is so fast. Not understanding new technologies can create fear. It is our job to educate and allow people to understand this technology, so it is not feared."

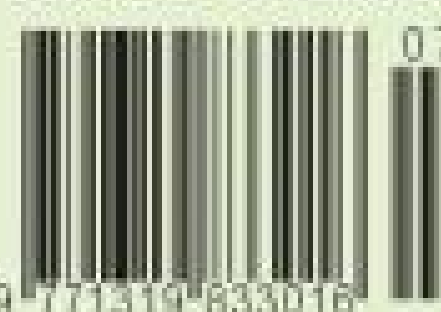
Kristalina Georgieva, managing director of the International Monetary Fund, told the conference that artificial intelligence was "already like a tsunami hitting the labor market in advanced economies."

She said: "Sixty percent of

jobs over the next period of time will either enhance and become more productive, or transformed or eliminated."

Detailed coverage Pages 3 & 4

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Today we take a new step with our partners in the International Olympic Committee in adopting the Esports Olympics roadmap. We look forward to welcoming the world to the home of major sporting events.

Prince Abdulaziz bin Turki Al-Faisal
Saudi sports minister



Radar

KSA today



Jeddah Inspiring Talk

Dr. Khaled Ghattas is delivering a talk, "More Than a Story," that encourages people to reflect on life and learn patience when facing challenges. It takes place on Feb. 13. Tickets are available on jeddah.platinumlist.net.



AJUla Tuneful times

Traditional and modern Arabic music will blend beautifully at Majida El-Roumi's concert on Feb. 14. Visit experienceaju.com for tickets and further information.



Dhahran Heritage toys

Learn about the history of traditional Japanese games and toys and their significance in Japanese culture. Find out more information about the attraction, which runs until Feb. 15, via the Ithra app.



Riyadh Musical night

Enjoy a heartwarming time on Feb. 12 with the most beautiful love songs performed by talented singers Eman Abdelghani and Hager El-Khashab at Vocally Riyadh. Book your seat through riyadh.platinumlist.net.

The Register

THE PICTURES THAT MARK THE DAY



The Islamic Military Counter-Terrorism Coalition and the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism signed a memorandum of understanding in New York to bolster international efforts

against terrorism and promote global security and stability. The coalition was represented by secretary-general Maj. Gen. Mohammed Al-Moghedi, and the UN office by under-secretary-

general Vladimir Voronkov. The MoU aims to unify efforts in addressing terrorist threats in line with the regulations of both parties, the Saudi Press Agency reported on Tuesday.

What's Trending

Today's hot topics explained by Afshan Aziz



BIRTHDAY GAL Rose

BlackPink's Rose celebrated her 28th birthday in style with a private party in Los Angeles, surrounded by close friends on Feb. 10. Although her birthday falls on Feb. 11, the K-pop star chose to mark the occasion a day early. The event quickly gained attention on social media, with several clips capturing Rose joyfully cutting her birthday cake and sharing beautiful moments with her loved ones. The singer looked stunning in a metallic gold mini-dress that shimmered under the lights. With a structured, form-fitting silhouette, the dress accentuated her elegance and effortlessly matched the lively atmosphere of the celebration.

'WE'LL BE READY' Ariana Grande

Ariana Grande has responded to rumors suggesting that she and her "Wicked" co-star Cynthia Erivo will open the 2025 Oscars with a performance from the film. The speculation has been circulating on social media, and while attending the 2025 Critics Choice Awards, Grande was asked to clarify the situation. "I don't know where this has come from," she told Variety, making it clear she was not aware of any such plans. Later, at the Santa Barbara International Film Festival on Sunday, where Grande received the Virtuoso Award, she was asked about the Oscars rumor. Grande responded with a laugh: "What did Cynthia say?" She added: "Yeah, I don't know either. It would be really fun. We will have our thermoses, our pink and green thermoses filled with tea.

"Hers will probably be rose and an English breakfast mixed together or something like that. In case, we'll be ready, but I know nothing." Grande is already preparing for another big event, the 2025 Academy Awards, where she is nominated for best supporting actress for her role as Glinda in "Wicked." During the Santa Barbara festival, Grande teased her upcoming red carpet look for the prestigious event. "I'm very excited about it and I'm really looking forward to wearing it," she told E! News. However, she remained tight-lipped about whether her gown would be inspired by her "Wicked" character. "I can't say anything else. Too soon," she teased. Speaking about the sequel, "Wicked: For Good," which will be released later this year, Grande said that the film would depict Glinda's emotional growth as she faces new challenges. "The movies are so different," she added.

Today's Number

19m

According to the General Entertainment Authority, the number of visitors to Riyadh Season has reached 19 million since its launch in October, Saudi Press Agency reported.

Review

The Flower Cup

NADA HAMEED

Coffee has always been the go-to choice for a quick pick-me-up, but if you want to add an extra touch of joy to a loved one's day, flowers make the perfect pairing.

At The Flower Cup, a cafe in Jeddah's Al-Hamra district, you can send a cup of coffee accompanied by flowers to someone special.

The cafe serves a wide selection of drinks, including classic and specialty coffees, Saudi coffee, iced coffee, mojitos, hot chocolate, matcha, and tea.

Their dessert menu is equally tempting, featuring delights like the marshmallow flower, rose cake, ice cream cookies, and a variety of cheesecakes including basbousa, mango, pistachio and strawberry, and San Sebastian.

I tried the marshmallow flower. It was soft, warm, and irresistibly fluffy, and it melts beautifully as rich Belgian chocolate is poured over it, adding layers of sweetness.

I also tried their V60 brew, which was expertly prepared, offering a well-balanced cup with bright acidity and deep, nuanced flavor notes.

Beyond its romantic flower-themed service, The Flower Cup offers celebration packages ideal for gatherings, birthdays, work meetings, and special occasions.

One standout option is the VIP celebration package for SR300 (\$80), perfect for a romantic date or a birthday surprise.



TheRegion

The Middle East Roundup

Arab News Jeddah

Qatar International Food Festival returns with culinary experiences from top chefs, live entertainment, food competitions and exclusive workshops. This year features a Michelin Guide Zone. Held at the Hotel Park Doha until Feb. 22. More details on visitqatar.com.

On Feb. 13, Amman will be the center of three concerts: Andre Soueïd will perform at the White Hall Airport Road; musician Echonomist at The Box, W Amman Hotel; and Baron and Dorian at the Fairmont Amman, Nasim Rooftop Lounge. Tickets can be purchased through calendar.jo.

"A way of surviving, a way of

life ..." exhibition in Abu Dhabi showcases the film practice of Zineb Sedira spanning the years 2002 to 2022. The exhibition features four significant films from different stages of Sedira's career, reflecting her experiences as a woman with a complex cultural heritage. Runs until March 8. More details at visitabudhabi.ae.

Prayer Times in Saudi Arabia

	Feb. 12	Fajr	Sunrise	Dhuhr	Asr	Maghreb	Isha
Makkah		5:37	6:54	12:35	3:51	6:16	7:46
Madinah		5:39	6:58	12:36	3:49	6:14	7:44
Riyadh		5:11	6:30	12:08	3:21	5:45	7:15
Abha		5:24	6:39	12:25	3:43	6:09	7:39
Dammam		4:59	6:19	11:54	3:06	5:29	6:59

If you open things up, a lot of people will be curious enough to try it. This will help spread the technology much faster.

Robin Li
CEO of Baidu



Spotlight

WORLD
GOVERNMENTS
SUMMIT 2025

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Push to educate and regulate

At annual forum in Dubai, WEF's Klaus Schwab urges states to cooperate on ethical regulatory frameworks

Dalal Awlenat Dubai

While the potential benefits of artificial intelligence are immense, the technology's rapid development has raised concerns about job displacement, the misuse of autonomous weapons, and the erosion of public trust in governments.

At the World Governments Summit in Dubai, global thought leaders emphasized the urgent need for AI regulation and public education to ensure this powerful technology serves humanity rather than destabilizes it.

As AI reshapes how people communicate, work, and live, speakers said the responsibility to regulate and educate falls squarely on governments.

Speaking on the opening day of the World Governments Summit, Klaus Schwab, executive chairman of the World Economic Forum, underscored the need for a comprehensive ethical regulatory framework to guide AI's development.

"We are living in a transition into a new time that will change everything. How we communicate, how we work and how we live," Schwab said. "Governments have to be an agent of change in lightning speed ... They need to provide the necessary infrastructure to sustain change at this rate."

Schwab urged governments to work together in creating policies that ensure AI remains constructive. "What we are seeing today as international efforts is not enough. We need a coordinated global process to make sure that those technologies are constructive," he said.

One of the key challenges with AI regulation is the pace of innovation. Governments often struggle to keep up with technological advancements, and without clear regulatory guidelines, AI risks being deployed in ways that could harm society.

Schwab warned against treating AI like nuclear technology, but stressed the importance of governance in shaping its ethical use.

"It is an enabling technology; governments have a big responsibility in shaping these regulations and rules," he said. "Government people today have to be governance architects to create a systems approach to define a system-oriented attitude."

Beyond economic concerns, AI's role in modern warfare is becoming increasingly apparent. From autonomous drones to AI-powered cyber warfare, technology is changing the way conflicts are fought.

Also speaking on the summit's opening day, Mohammad Al-Gergawi, chairman of the World Governments Summit



Main: World Governments Summit Chairman and UAE Minister of Cabinet Affairs Mohammad Al-Gergawi, seated left, and World Economic Forum Executive Chairman Klaus Schwab discussed how AI can serve rather than destabilize humanity. Getty Images

and UAE minister of Cabinet affairs, highlighted how AI has already moved beyond the realm of science fiction and into military strategy.

"In 2000, technological warfare and military robots existed only in science fiction. Today wars are fought with drones, autonomous weapons, and AI," he said. "Governments that understand the past deeply are the ones who are able to build a better future."

The ethical dilemmas surrounding AI-powered warfare remain unresolved. The lack of comprehensive international treaties governing autonomous weapons raises fears that AI could be used to make lethal decisions without human oversight.

While the UN has initiated discussions on AI in warfare, agreements have been slow to materialize, leaving a regulatory gap that bad actors could exploit.

At the same time, AI-driven automation is reshaping labor markets, leading to fears of widespread job losses.

Governments are under pressure to reskill workers and create policies that ensure AI augments human labor rather than replaces it. Schwab emphasized that governments must play a proactive role in addressing public fears by investing in education and workforce adaptation.

"Many people are afraid of the future because the progress is so fast. Not understanding new technologies can create fear," he said. "It is our job to educate and allow people to understand this technology so it is not feared."

Trust in government is an essential factor in the successful deployment of AI. However, as AI-driven changes accelerate, public skepticism toward government institutions has grown.

Citing the Edelman Trust Barometer, Al-Gergawi noted that global trust in government stands at just 52 percent.

"Trust is the foundation of a government's success," he said. "We are stepping into an entirely new era in the history of human civilization." Without strong public trust, AI adoption could face resistance, hindering its potential benefits.

The challenge for policymakers is therefore twofold — crafting effective AI regulations that ensure safety and fairness while also fostering public confidence through transparency

FAST FACTS

• The World Governments Summit is a global, nonprofit organization dedicated to shaping the next generation of governance through innovation and technology.

• 30 world leaders, delegations from 140 governments, and representatives from more than 80 global institutions are attending the 2025 Dubai summit.

and accountability. Governments and international organizations have begun to take steps toward AI regulation, but progress has been uneven.

The EU has led the charge with its AI Act, which classifies AI systems based on risk levels and sets strict guidelines for high-risk applications such as biometric surveillance and critical infrastructure.

The US, while lagging in comprehensive AI regulation, has issued executive orders and guidelines on AI safety and transparency.

On Tuesday, US Vice President JD Vance called on European

countries to embrace "the new frontier of AI with optimism and not trepidation" and adopt a lighter touch on tech regulation.

"We want to embark on the AI revolution before us with the spirit of openness and collaboration, but to create that kind of trust we need international regulatory regimes that foster creation," he told the Artificial Intelligence Action Summit in Paris.

"To restrict its development now would not only unfairly benefit incumbents in the space, it would mean paralyzing one of the most promising technologies we have seen in generations."

Last month, Chinese startup DeepSeek sent shockwaves through the tech industry when it released a cutting-edge chatbot allegedly at a fraction of the cost of its American competitors, including OpenAI's ChatGPT.

China has implemented AI governance measures that require algorithms to align with government-mandated social values, although these policies have raised ethical concerns.

Despite these efforts, there is no single global framework governing AI. The UN and the Organization for Economic

Co-operation and Development have called for international cooperation, but geopolitical competition often complicates these efforts.

Schwab emphasized that a fragmented approach to AI regulation is inadequate.

"The future is shaped by us, so let's look with optimism into the future," he said. "Let's look at our future with constructive optimism."

To ensure AI development aligns with human interests, experts say countries should collaborate on common AI governance principles to prevent regulatory gaps and misuse, while also implementing AI education programs to demystify the technology and reduce public anxiety.

Clear rules on the use of AI in military applications agreed at the international level could help prevent unintended escalations, while retraining programs could help workers transition into AI-augmented industries.

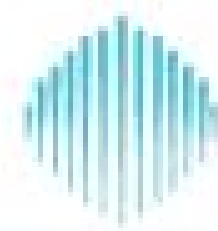
As the discussions at the World Governments Summit made clear, failure to act could result in lost public trust, economic upheaval, and the dangerous proliferation of autonomous weapons.

"I hope this summit will create a better landscape for the future of governments and humanity," said Al-Gergawi.

To achieve that vision, policymakers are urged to move beyond rhetoric and take concrete steps toward responsible AI governance. Indeed, the future of AI is not predetermined — it will be shaped by the decisions made today.

Summit attendees, right, heard how AI technologies like China's DeepSeek, left, and its US counterparts are pushing the limits of existing regulations. AFP/Getty Image





FINANCE AND ECONOMY

World economy 'remarkably resilient despite unprecedented setbacks'

IMF chief Kristalina Georgieva says Gulf countries are performing well, voices concern over Europe's situation

Arab News Dubai

The International Monetary Fund remains committed to helping countries that need support in the MENA region with financing of \$33 billion, IMF's Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva told the World Government Summit on Tuesday.

"Today the IMF is supporting over 50 vulnerable countries, half of them are in sub-Saharan Africa ... more important is we help countries build the foundations to get on a better part," Georgieva told the WGS during a session with Richard Quest, CNN correspondent and anchor.

"By the way, in this region, \$33 billion, IMF is financing for countries that need that support," she said.

When asked by Quest if she was concerned that inflation was going to resurge, the IMF's top official said that there was a need to see how things evolved.

"If we are in a situation where in some parts of the world there is a slowdown that may push central banks to bring interest rates down, that actually may not be inflationary ... there are many things that we don't know, but what we do know is that we have a situation in which the US economy has been performing quite strongly and will likely continue to be strong and that pushes the dollar up," Georgieva explained.



The US had outperformed the rest of the G20 members, the only economy to exceed its pre-pandemic trend, Georgieva told CNN's Richard Quest. AFP

Addressing a packed hall during WGS's first day, the IMF chief added that the US had outperformed the rest of the G20 members, the only economy to exceed its pre-pandemic trend.

"What does that mean? Capital is moving much more forcefully toward the US ... before the pandemic many on the move went to many places, 18 percent went to the United States and today it is over 30 percent. So that is the foundation for a strong dollar, and

a strong dollar all other things are equal for the majority of emerging markets and developing economies is trouble ... so then we have inflationary impact," she said.

The IMF sees a picture of a "remarkably resilient world economy despite a series of unprecedented shocks," Georgieva said, elaborating that "we are projecting growth this year 3.3 percent and next year 3.3 percent." The Gulf countries were doing quite well, she said,

but expressed more concern about "Europe, and some ... (places) are vulnerable emerging markets where they are doing less well."

Another concern highlighted was "how the tremendous transformations that are happening in the world are integrated in countries' policies."

Taking AI as a case in point, Quest asked: "Do you see us having a good handle on the growth of new technologies?"

"So, we look at the front, what is happening with artificial intelligence? It can be a great story, a world that becomes more productive, or it can be a sad story, a world that is more divided ... the haves have more, and the have-nots are completely lost. What we assess is that AI is already like a tsunami hitting the labor market in advanced economies ... 60 percent of jobs over the next period of time will either enhance and become more

IN NUMBERS

3.3%

Projected global growth for 2025

3.3%

Projected global growth for 2026

Source: IMF

productive, or transformed or eliminated," she said.

Georgieva added that there was a need to recognize that "we are in a multipolar world" so cooperation as it used to be "before when we had a world with one country dominating" was going to be different.

"We still have one economy that is the strongest (the US) but we also have many economies, emerging market economies that are moving forward much faster, usually because of the 3 Ds: deregulate, digitize and diversify.

These islands of excellence need to connect more, and we at the IMF are actually promoting more inter-region and cross-region collaboration. I think it is a moment to recognize our host (the UAE) because they are absolutely fantastic in working with everybody," she said.

TELECOMMUNICATION

Connectivity gap poses barrier to economic progress: experts

Arab News Dubai

A massive 5.5 billion people have been connected around the world through such projects as the Edison Alliance, but half as many remain unconnected, Hatem Dowidar, group CEO at e&, told the World Governments Summit on Tuesday.

Dowidar said it was important to ensure this gap was addressed before it led to further economic divide in the future.

He gave the example of two students, one in an advanced economy with access to personalized artificial intelligence programs for education and the ability to collaborate globally with his peers, and another in a less wealthy nation, who had to walk for hours to reach school and had access to only the "very basic training and teaching equipment."

He said: "These two have to compete in the future ... It's really



Satellite technology can boost global connectivity, industry leaders told Dubai summit. WGS photo

unfair. And if we don't do anything today to bridge that divide, it will become a bigger problem in the future." Connectivity has become one of the most important ingredients for progress, Dowidar said, adding: "We need

to all work together, whether it's governments, businesses (or) organizations."

Today with the advancement of AI, this becomes even more critical as "we can really help a lot of the global south with solutions that improve education, healthcare and economic activity."

Dowidar said there were signs of improvements in technology that would help increase

connectivity, such as satellite technology, which was becoming more accessible.

Margherita Della Valle, CEO, Vodafone, said: "For society, connectivity today is essential ... There cannot be any real development without connectivity. She added that her company's most recent evolution has been adding satellite connectivity to their networks.

"Out of the 2.5 billion people who have no access to the internet, there are around 300 million who are nowhere near any form of connectivity, and satellite can get us there," Vodafone's CEO said two weeks ago she made the first mobile space video call in the world using a normal smartphone.

"We are now going to commercially launch the service later this year, and I think it's a great opportunity to bring connectivity to the most remote areas of the planet," she said.

ECONOMY

Gulf ministers tout shift to renewable energy, tech investments

Sara Al-Shurafa,
Dalal Awienat Dubai

Gulf Cooperation Council countries are taking substantial steps to diversify their economies based on a model of the economy of ideas, the World Governments Summit was told on Tuesday.

Saudi Economy Minister Faisal Alibrahim said that collaboration is essential among GCC member states.

"Integration should not be seen as a compromise, but a potential big opportunity," he added.

Bahrain's minister of finance, Salman Al-Khalifa, said that economic diversification has made the GCC resilient and boosted economic development.

GCC Secretary-General Jassem Al-Budaiwi said that the world was looking to the GCC for guidance.

IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said that "trade



GCC's non-oil sectors now make up 50 percent of its economy, said Bahraini minister. WGS photo

among GCC countries grew rapidly; good exports tripled in the last decade to \$70 million."

However, Kuwait's Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah warned that US President Donald Trump's economic decisions would have "repercussions" for the entire world.

On Monday, Trump raised steel and aluminum tariffs to a flat 25 percent. He also vowed "reciprocal" tariffs on nations taxing US goods.

News Saudi Arabia

URBAN LIVING

Riyadh charts path to even better days

Kingdom's capital unveils a comprehensive master plan for infrastructure projects in 2025

Rashid Hassan Riyadh

Saudi Arabia has launched its first comprehensive master plan for all infrastructure projects in Riyadh for 2025 to ease traffic congestion, optimize spending, and align with Vision 2030's sustainable development goals.

Mayor of Riyadh and Chairman of the Infrastructure Projects Center Prince Faisal bin Ayyaf announced the comprehensive plan, which is part of broader efforts led by the capital's Infrastructure Projects Center, established by a Cabinet decision in July 2023.

The plan represents a qualitative shift in the region's development, as it puts an end to random and individual works and moves to a new stage that depends on collective planning and prior coordination.

In a speech during the plan's review ceremony, Prince Faisal said that it will help in addressing clashes between various projects within the region and arranging priorities, by placing all projects within a unified timetable, which will improve the quality of life for the residents in the capital.

Osama Ghanem Alobaidy, adviser and professor of corporate law at the Institute of Public Administration in Riyadh, told Arab News: "The plan announced by the Riyadh mayor is a welcome move to reduce traffic congestions in the city.

"The increase in the city's population, infrastructure projects as well as residential, commercial, investment projects, and megaprojects have also resulted in traffic congestion.

"This master plan will better manage these problems through the creation of a structured and coordinated system that will allow the authorities to better manage the infrastructure projects around the city and will lead to the easing of traffic congestion. It will also lead to the optimizing of spending efficiency and



Riyadh Gov. Prince Faisal bin Bandar unveiled the comprehensive master plan for infrastructure projects in the capital for 2025. Supplied/Emarah Riyadh

ensure sustainability of infrastructure projects."

Prince Faisal hailed the initiative as a transformative milestone for Riyadh.

He noted that the Infrastructure Projects Center anticipates the urban growth of the city with careful planning, which raises the efficiency of projects

and ensures the improvement of services provided to residents and visitors.

The mayor added that infrastructure is vital for any city

and raises its capabilities, with Riyadh set to host major global events such as the AFC Asian Cup in 2027, Winter Asian Olympics in 2029, World Expo in 2030, the

FIFA World Cup in 2034, and the Asian Games in 2034.

Fahad Al-Badah, CEO of the center, described the plan as a model for national cooperation, developed through a comprehensive engineering methodology. The process involved data collection, integration of planning efforts, and collaboration with over 15 government and service entities.

Al-Badah added that more than 837 plans were reviewed and approved, leading to the restructuring of 1,737 project phases and accumulating over 100,000 work hours. The center also conducted over 80 workshops and automated more

HIGHLIGHTS

- The comprehensive master plan represents a qualitative shift in the region's development.
- It puts an end to random and individual works and moves to a new stage that depends on collective planning and prior coordination.
- According to the Infrastructure Projects Center, 837 plans were reviewed and approved, leading to the restructuring of 1,737 project phases.

than 66,000 pre-coordinated permits for 2025.

Riyadh has evolved from an emerging city into a global economic hub over the years, and is a leading investment destination. Its land area has expanded immensely, and its population has surpassed 7 million.

This rapid growth is reflected in the surge in infrastructure work permits, which have tripled from 50,000 in 2017 to over 150,000 in 2024.

"These figures underscore the city's accelerated urban and economic expansion," Al-Badah noted.

He underlined that sustaining this momentum requires adopting global best practices in infrastructure development, aligning with the ambitious goals of Vision 2030.

SPORT FOR ALL

Paralympic ball game helping empower people with disabilities

Arab News Riyadh

The sport of boccia is helping empower people living with severe physical disabilities across the Kingdom, the head of its governing body said.

The precision ball game, which is related to bowls and petanque, was introduced into the Paralympic Games in 1984 and has since rocketed in popularity.

Mohsen Al-Ismael, president of the Saudi Boccia Federation, said his organization was committed to promoting the sport throughout the Kingdom



Boccia, a precision ball game, was introduced into the Paralympic Games in 1984 and has since rocketed in popularity. SPA

FASTFACTS

• Mohsen Al-Ismael, president of the Saudi Boccia Federation, said his organization was committed to promoting the sport throughout the Kingdom and helping nurture talent.

• In 1984, the sport attracted just 19 athletes from five countries. In 2024, there were 116 players from 75 countries.

and helping nurture talent, the Saudi Press Agency reported.

When the game was introduced to the Paralympics it was designed to be played by people with cerebral palsy but now includes athletes with other disabilities affecting motor skills.



In 1984, the sport attracted just 19 athletes from five countries. In 2024, there were

116 players from 75 countries.

Al-Ismael said the sport helped individuals with cerebral palsy, particularly those with nerve issues, by improving balance, stimulating blood circulation, strengthening muscles and supporting motor rehabilitation.

Boccia uses six leather balls per side and can be played by individuals, pairs, or teams of three. The aim is for players to throw their balls as close as they can to a white target ball, or jack.

The game dates back to ancient Greece and Egypt and its name is derived from the Latin word for "boss."

A FRESH START

Loyalty must be to the state alone, Aoun tells Lebanon ministers

Salam's government told to focus on reforms that will 'revive the nation'

Najla Houssari Beirut

Lebanese President Joseph Aoun has told ministers in the country's new government that their "loyalty and allegiance must be to the state alone, not to any other entity."

Speaking after the official group photo in the presidential palace courtyard, Aoun also told the 24 ministers in Prime Minister Nawaf Salam's government that they "are here to serve the people, not the other way around."

"The key issue is not just the formation of the government but proving credibility by initiating anti-corruption efforts and carrying out administrative, judicial, and security appointments," he said.

Aoun urged ministers to focus on urgent issues, primarily the state budget, municipal and local elections, and the Israeli withdrawal on Feb. 18.

During the first government session, Aoun said that ministers should "refrain from

directing any criticism toward friendly and brotherly nations," adding that Lebanon should not be used as a "platform for such criticisms."

Salam's government, the first under Aoun's presidency, does not include direct party members but rather specialists nominated by political parties.

Aoun said "the country is not bankrupt, but the administration is," highlighting the need to revive the nation through reforms that ministers and the government will work to implement.

"Our focus will be on reforming and developing the ministries in light of the significant international support we have received. The opportunities are available to seize this support, provided we carry out the necessary reforms," he said.

In turn, Salam called on the ministers "to ensure a complete separation between public and private work."

He added: "To avoid any confusion, ministers must fully dedicate themselves to their governmental



The five women ministers in Lebanon's new government, from left, Rima Karami, education minister; Haneen Sayed, social affairs minister; Laura Lahoud, tourism minister; Nora Bayrakdarian, sports minister; and Tamara Elzein, environment minister, after their first Cabinet meeting at the Baabda presidential palace, east of Beirut, on Tuesday. AFP

duties and step down from any leadership or board positions in commercial companies or banks."

However, Salam added that "this does not apply to memberships in educational or social

organizations that serve the public good."

Following the meeting, Minister of Information Paul Morcos confirmed that a ministerial committee had been set up to draft a constitutional statement that is expected to be completed within days.

Morcos said that "the prime minister assured the ministers that this is not a time for political bickering, and that there won't be any obstructions."

He said that "many ideas are being discussed, and solutions will ultimately be reached."

A political source said the

FASTFACT

Joe Al-Khoury, the newly appointed industry minister, described the session as 'an excellent start.'

ministerial statement will "emphasize the need to dismantle the Israeli occupation of Lebanese territories and implement Resolution 1701," as outlined in the president's oath speech.

Joe Al-Khoury, the newly appointed industry minister, described the session as "an excellent start."

Tarek Mitri, deputy prime minister, said that the first meeting of the ministerial committee tasked with drafting the ministerial statement "will be held in the afternoon."

Salam received a congratulatory phone call from Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, UAE foreign minister, on the formation of the new government.

While the handover process continues between outgoing and incoming ministers, the government must secure the confidence of parliament after presenting the ministerial statement before it can officially begin its work.

GAZA TORMENTORS

Some Israeli soldiers traveling abroad are targeted for war crimes

AP The Hague

An Israeli army reservist's dream vacation in Brazil ended abruptly last month over an accusation that he committed war crimes in the Gaza Strip.

Yuval Vagdaní woke up on Jan. 4 to a flurry of missed calls from family members and Israel's Foreign Ministry with an urgent warning: A pro-Palestinian legal group had convinced a federal judge in Brazil to open a war crimes investigation for his participation in the demolition of civilian homes in Gaza.

A frightened Vagdaní fled the country on a commercial flight the next day to avoid the grip of a powerful legal concept called "universal jurisdiction," which allows governments to prosecute people for the most serious crimes regardless of where they are allegedly committed.

The case against Vagdaní was brought by the Hind Rajab Foundation, a legal group based in

Belgium named after a young girl who was killed early in the war by Israeli fire as she and her family fled Gaza City.

Aided by geolocation data, the group built its case around Vagdaní's own social media posts. A photograph showed him in uniform in Gaza, where he served in an infantry unit; a video showed a large explosion of buildings in Gaza during which soldiers can be heard cheering.

Judges at the International Criminal Court concluded last year there was enough evidence to issue an arrest warrant for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for crimes against humanity for using "starvation as a method of warfare" and for intentionally targeting civilians.

Since forming last year, Hind Rajab has made dozens of complaints in more than 10 countries to arrest both low-level and high-ranking Israeli soldiers. Its campaign has yet to yield any arrests. But it has



Israeli soldiers transport Palestinian detainees blindfolded with their shirts in Gaza on Dec. 8, 2023. AP

BACKGROUND

In 1999, the UN Security Council asked all UN countries to include universal jurisdiction in their legal codes, and around 160 countries have adopted them in some form.

led Israel to tighten restrictions on social media usage among military personnel.

"It's our responsibility, as far as we are concerned, to bring the cases," Haroon Raza, a co-founder of Hind Rajab, said from his office in Rotterdam in the Netherlands.

It is then up to authorities in each country — or the International Criminal Court — to pursue them, he added.

The director general of Israel's Foreign Ministry, Eden Bar Tal, last month said fewer than a dozen soldiers had been targeted, with no warrants issued.

Universal jurisdiction is not new. The 1949 Geneva Conventions — the post Second World War treaty regulating military conduct — specify that all signatories must prosecute war criminals or hand them over to a country who will.

In 1999, the UN Security Council

asked all UN countries to include universal jurisdiction in their legal codes, and around 160 countries have adopted them in some form.

"Certain crimes like war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity are crimes under international law," said Marieke de Hoon, an international law expert at the University of Amsterdam. "And we've recognized in international law that any state has jurisdiction over those egregious crimes."

In response to Brazil's pursuit of Vagdaní, the Israeli military has prohibited soldiers below a certain rank from being named in news

articles and requires their faces to be obscured. It has also warned soldiers against social media posts related to their military service or travel plans.

The evidence Hind Rajab lawyers presented to the judge in Brazil came mostly from Vagdaní's social media accounts.

The power of universal jurisdiction has limits.

In the Netherlands, where Hind Rajab has filed more than a dozen complaints, either the victim or perpetrator must hold Dutch nationality, or the suspect must be in the country for the entirety of the investigation — factors likely to protect Israeli tourists from prosecution. Eleven complaints against 15 Israeli soldiers have been dismissed, some because the accused was only in the country for a short time, according to Dutch prosecutors. Two complaints involving four soldiers are pending.

In 2016, activists in the UK made unsuccessful attempts to arrest Israeli military and political leaders for their roles in the 2008-09 war in Gaza.

Raza says his group will persist. "It might take 10 years. It might be 20 years. No problem. We are ready to have patience."

There is no statute of limitations on war crimes.

PRESSURE MOUNTS

Pope slams migrant deportations from US, warns 'it will end badly'

In 2016, pontiff said anyone who builds a wall rather than a bridge to keep out migrants was 'not a Christian'

AP Rome

Pope Francis issued a major rebuke on Tuesday to the Trump administration's mass deportation of migrants, warning that the program to forcefully deport people purely because of their illegal status deprives them of their inherent dignity and "will end badly."

Francis took the remarkable step of addressing the US migrant crackdown in a letter to US bishops who have criticized the expulsions as harming the most vulnerable.

History's first Latin American pope has long made caring for migrants a priority of his pontificate, demanding that countries welcome, protect, promote and integrate those fleeing conflicts, poverty and climate disasters. Francis has also said governments are expected to do so to the limits of their capacity.

In the letter, Francis said nations have the right to defend themselves and keep their communities safe from criminals.

"That said, the act of deporting people who in many cases have left their own land for reasons of extreme poverty, insecurity, exploitation, persecution or serious deterioration of the environment, damages the dignity of many men and women, and of entire families, and places them in a state of particular vulnerability and defenselessness," he wrote.



History's first Latin American pope has long made caring for migrants a priority of his pontificate, demanding that countries welcome, protect, promote and integrate those fleeing conflicts, poverty and climate disasters. X

Citing the biblical stories of migration, the people of Israel and the Book of Exodus, Francis affirmed the right of people to seek shelter and safety in other lands and said he was concerned with what is going on in the US.

"I have followed closely the

major crisis that is taking place in the United States with the initiation of a program of mass deportations," Francis wrote.

"The rightly formed conscience cannot fail to make a critical judgment and express its disagreement with any measure that tacitly or explicitly identifies the illegal status of some migrants with criminality."

It is one thing to develop a policy to regulate migration legally; it is another to expel people purely on the basis of

FASTFACTS

● White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said last week that more than 8,000 people had been arrested in immigration enforcement actions since Trump took office on Jan. 20.

● Some have been deported, others are being held in federal prisons while others are being held at the Guantanamo Bay Naval Base in Cuba.

their illegal status, he wrote.

"What is built on the basis of force, and not on the truth about the equal dignity of every human being, begins badly and will end badly," he said.

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said last week that more than 8,000 people had been arrested in immigration enforcement actions since Trump took office Jan. 20. Some have been deported, others are being held in federal prisons while others are being held

at the Guantanamo Bay Naval Base in Cuba.

The US Conference of Catholic Bishops put out an unusually critical statement after Trump's initial executive orders, saying those "focused on the treatment of immigrants and refugees, foreign aid, expansion of the death penalty, and the environment, are deeply troubling and will have negative consequences, many of which will harm the most vulnerable among us."

It was a strong rebuke from the US Catholic hierarchy. Trump won 54 percent of Catholic voters in the 2024 election, a wider margin than the 50 percent in the 2020 election won by President Joe Biden, a Catholic.

The Trump-Francis collision course on migration stems from 2016, when Francis famously said anyone who builds a wall rather than a bridge to keep out migrants was "not a Christian."

He made the comment after celebrating Mass at the US-Mexico border during the US presidential campaign when Trump promised to build a wall along the frontier.

But migration is not the only area of conflict in US-Vatican relations. On Monday, the Vatican's main charity Caritas International warned that millions of people could die as a result of the "ruthless" US decision to "recklessly" stop USAID funding.

Caritas asked governments to urgently call on the US administration to reverse course.

HEALTH SCARE

Ebola cases in Uganda rise to nine, while 265 others are being monitored under quarantine

AP Kampala

Ebola cases in Uganda have risen to nine, while 265 other people were being monitored under quarantine, health authorities said Tuesday.

The nine include the first victim, a male nurse who died the day before the outbreak was declared on Jan. 30. That man remains the only fatality.

Eight patients "are receiving medical care and are in stable condition," a Health Ministry statement said.

Seven of them were admitted to the main public hospital in Kampala, the Ugandan capital, in addition to one being treated in the eastern district of Mbale, the ministry said, adding that "the situation is under control" amid heightened surveillance.

The nurse who died had first sought treatment in Kampala and later traveled to Mbale, where he was admitted to a public hospital.

Health authorities said that the man also sought the services of



A health worker prepares to administer a vial of a vaccine against the Sudan strain of Ebola during a trial at Mulago Hospital in Kampala. AP

HIGHLIGHT

Ebola was discovered in 1976 in two simultaneous outbreaks in South Sudan and Congo, where it occurred in a village near the Ebola River, after which the disease is named.

a traditional healer. His relatives are among those being treated for Ebola.

Kampala has a highly mobile population of about 4 million, and officials are still investigating the source of the outbreak. Tracing contacts is key to stemming the spread of Ebola, which manifests as a viral hemorrhagic fever.

There are no approved vaccines

for the Sudan strain of Ebola that is infecting people in Uganda. But authorities have launched a clinical study to further test the safety and efficacy of a trial vaccine as part of measures to stop the spread of the current outbreak.

The last outbreak of Ebola in Uganda, which began in September 2022, killed at least 55 people by the time it was declared over four months later.

Ebola is spread by contact with bodily fluids of an infected person or contaminated materials. Symptoms include fever, vomiting, diarrhea, muscle pain and at times internal and external bleeding.

Scientists suspect that the first person infected in an Ebola outbreak acquires the virus through contact with an infected animal or eating its raw meat.

Ebola was discovered in 1976 in two simultaneous outbreaks in South Sudan and Congo, where it occurred in a village near the Ebola River, after which the disease is named.

DAESH HORROR

Sweden jails woman for keeping Yazidi slaves

AFP Stockholm

A Swedish court on Tuesday sentenced a 52-year-old woman to 12 years in prison on genocide charges, in the country's first court case over crimes committed by Daesh against the Yazidi minority.

Accused of keeping Yazidi women and children as slaves at her home in Syria in the winter and spring of 2015, Lina Ishaq was convicted of "genocide" and "crimes against humanity," as well as war crimes, the court said in a statement.

The court in Stockholm said her crimes warranted a sentence of 16 years, but taking a previous sentence into account set the sentence to 12.

The woman, who is a Swedish citizen, was in jail having already been sentenced by a Swedish court to six years in prison in 2022 for allowing her 12-year-old son to be recruited as a Daesh child soldier.

The court said Tuesday's case concerned nine injured parties, six of whom were children at the time. All the plaintiffs had been

captured by Daesh in a series of attacks on Yazidi villages that began in August 2014 in Sinjar, Iraq, and their male relatives had been executed.

After about five months of captivity, they arrived at the convicted woman's home in Raqqa.

"The woman kept them imprisoned and treated them as her property by holding them as slaves for a period of, in most cases, five months," the court said.

Their movement was restricted, they were made to perform chores and some had been photographed in preparation to be transferred to others.

"Given the fact that she participated in the onward transfer of the injured parties, she is also responsible for enabling their continued imprisonment and enslavement," the court said.

Around 300 Swedes or Swedish residents, a quarter of them women, joined Daesh in Syria and Iraq, mostly in 2013 and 2014, according to Sweden's intelligence service Sapo.

FLAGSHIP EVENT

Top officials gather in New Delhi for India Energy Week

India's main focus in the energy sector is local production and supply chains, PM Modi says

Sanjay Kumar New Delhi

Thousands of top industry executives, innovators and policymakers gathered in New Delhi on Tuesday for India Energy Week 2025, where they will be discussing energy access and sustainability.

More than 70,000 delegates, officials and visitors are expected to take part in the Indian government's flagship annual energy event, which over the next four days will feature 500 speakers, 700 exhibitors and 10 national pavilions from countries including the US, the UK, Canada, Germany, Italy, Japan and Russia displaying their newest technology.

Held at the Yashobhoomi convention center in New Delhi, India Energy Week 2025 will spotlight energy access, security and new global energy systems,

in line with the South Asian giant's vision of energy transition.

"India's energy ambitions stand on five pillars. We have resources, which we are harnessing. Secondly, we are encouraging our brilliant minds to innovate. Thirdly, we have economic strength, political stability. Fourthly, India has strategic geography, which makes energy trade more attractive and easier. And fifthly, India is committed to global sustainability. This is creating new possibilities in India's energy sector," Prime Minister Narendra Modi said in a virtual address to the event's participants.

"The next two decades are very important for India's development. And in the next five years, we are going to cross many big milestones. Many of our energy goals are aligned with the 2030 deadline. We want to add 500 GW of renewable energy capacity by 2030. Indian Railways has

set a target of net-zero carbon emissions by 2030. Our goal is to produce 5 million metric tonnes of green hydrogen every year by 2030 ... What India has achieved in the last 10 years has given us the confidence that we will definitely achieve these targets."

FASTFACT

Petroleum and Natural Gas Minister Hardeep Singh Puri urged participants to help chart a roadmap to stabilize energy markets and strengthen international cooperation.

India aims to generate 500 GW of electricity from non-fossil fuel sources by 2030, under its nationally determined contributions to the Paris Agreement. Solar energy is the dominant contributor to its renewable energy growth, accounting for 47 percent of

the total installed renewable energy capacity.

The solar power sector has observed a 3,450 percent increase in capacity over the past decade, rising from 2.82 GW in 2014 to 100 GW in January 2025, according to the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy.

The growth is fueled by local solar module production, which in 2014 had a capacity of only 2 GW.

"There is a lot of potential in India for manufacturing various types of hardware including PV modules. We are supporting local manufacturing," Modi said. "India's major focus is on Make in India and local supply chains."

Petroleum and Natural Gas Minister Hardeep Singh Puri, who opened the India Energy Week, urged participants to help chart a roadmap to stabilize energy markets and strengthen international cooperation.



AFP

Approaching summer People walk against a sunset in Porto Alegre downtown, Rio Grande do Sul state, Brazil on Monday. A heat wave with temperatures of up to 40 degrees Celsius is hitting the state of Rio Grande do Sul, which usually has milder temperatures than regions further north.

GENERAL ELECTIONS

Bangladesh plans to hold December polls

Shehab Sumon Dhaka

Bangladesh is preparing to hold elections in December, the first general vote since the ouster of Sheikh Hasina, the former longtime prime minister, Election Commissioner Abul Fazal Mohammad Sanaullah said on Tuesday.

The country's interim government, headed by Nobel prize laureate Prof. Muhammad Yunus, has been implementing a series of reforms and preparing for elections since taking charge in August, after Hasina fled Dhaka

amid student-led protests that called for her resignation.

In November, the transitional authorities appointed a new five-member election commission, which held a meeting with foreign envoys on Tuesday to present its plans for the upcoming polls.

"We have told them that we must make preparations based on the earliest possible date for the election. Our position remains unchanged. We are preparing with December in mind," Sanaullah told journalists after the meeting.

"The national election is

FASTFACT

Chief of Bangladesh's interim administration earlier said reforms must take place before election.

currently the Election Commission's priority."

Yunus previously said that Bangladesh could hold elections by the end of 2025 or in the first half of 2026, provided that electoral reforms take place first.

This includes having the Election Commission prepare a

new voter list, a process expected to take months.

Following 15 years of uninterrupted rule, Hasina and her Awami League party had allegedly politicized key government institutions, including the Election Commission.

In a report submitted to the interim government last week, a special commission on electoral reforms said that Hasina was responsible for rigging the last three national polls in Bangladesh, as it proposed more than 200 recommendations to improve the country's voting system.

Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Aging population
Singapore seniors hoof it to horse therapy

Singapore on Tuesday started an initiative to expand its senior care program using horse therapy as the wealthy city-state grapples with the challenges of a rapidly aging population.

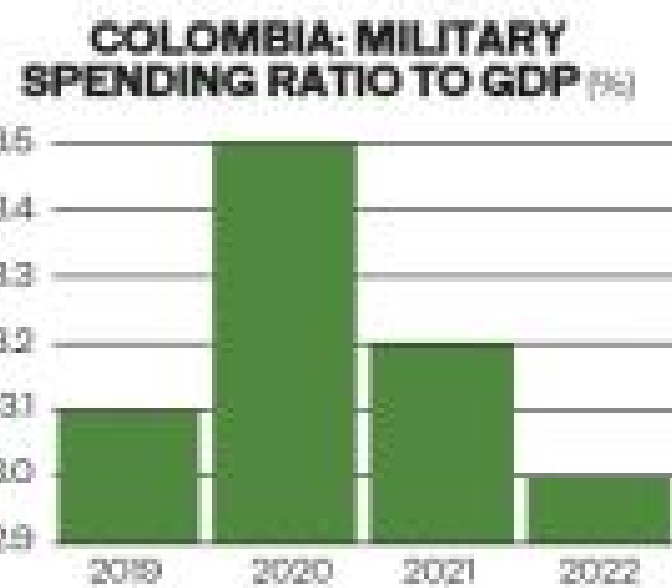
"Haydays with Horses" is a two-year program to tap into the therapeutic power of miniature horses to help seniors improve their physical health, cognitive functions and psychological well-being. The Southeast Asian nation has one of the region's most rapidly aging populations and officials have warned that the "silver tsunami" is a key long-term threat. **AFP**

Power struggle
Philippines kicks off poll campaigning

Campaigning for the Philippines' midterm elections kicked off on Tuesday against a fractured political backdrop, heightened by a high-profile row among warring elites that culminated in last week's impeachment of Vice President Sara Duterte.

The impeachment could see Duterte removed from her post and banned for life from public office and comes amid an escalating feud between her and President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. Their fallout has sent ripples through Philippine politics, turning the midterms into a high-stakes power struggle. **Reuters**

The Day's FIGURES



Source: Statista

What We're Reading

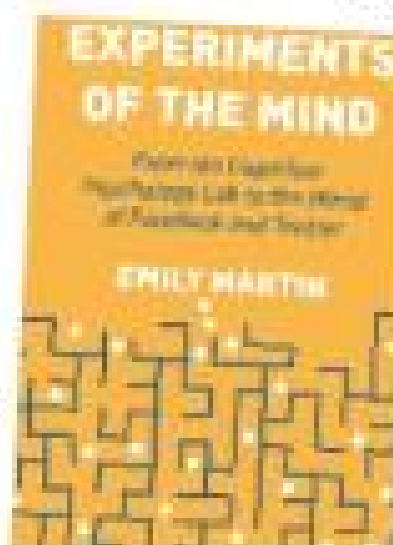
FOR THE TRAIN OR ON THE PLANE

'Experiments of the Mind'

EMILY MARTIN

Experimental cognitive psychology research is a hidden force in our online lives. We engage with it, often unknowingly, whenever we download a health app, complete a Facebook quiz, or rate

our latest purchase. How did experimental psychology come to play an outsized role in these developments? "Experiments of the Mind" considers this question through a look at cognitive psychology laboratories.



Somber mood
Sweden honors victims of a mass shooting

Government offices, schools and workplaces fell silent in Sweden at midday on Tuesday in remembrance of the victims of a mass shooting at an adult education center last week when a gunman killed 10 people before turning his weapon on himself.

Swedes, grown reluctantly accustomed to gangland bombings and shootings, were still stunned by the Feb. 4 attack, in which Rickard Andersson, a 35-year-old unemployed loner, opened fire on students and teachers at the Campus Risbergsska school in the city of Orebro. **Reuters**

Major operation
Sicily police arrest 150 in Mafia blitz

Italian police arrested almost 150 people Tuesday in a major operation against the Sicilian Mafia in Palermo, areas of which remain in the grip of powerful Cosa Nostra clans. Warrants were issued against a total of 183 people, 36 of whom were already in custody, for crimes including mafia-type criminal association, attempted murder, extortion, drug trafficking and illegal gambling, police said.

More than 1,200 officers were involved in dawn raids, in what media reports said was the biggest operation against the Cosa Nostra since 1984. **AFP**

YOUR DAILY ARABIC PROVERB
*The bullet that costs us the price of a piece bread
and a dose of medicine kills us, not our enemy.*
Amal Dunqul
(20th-century Egyptian modernist poet and Arabist writer)

Opinion

Power, wealth and governance in the modern world

DR. TURKI FAISAL AL-RASHEED

In contemporary society, the phrase "follow the money" serves as an illuminating principle for unraveling the intricate connections among various societal issues, particularly those intertwined with governance. This concept emphasizes the critical need to investigate the motivations that fuel decisions made at the highest echelons of power. By analyzing the actions and policies of influential leaders through the lens of financial interests and control, one can uncover a profoundly tangled web that links power, wealth and governance.

The recent political discourse surrounding US President Donald Trump and members of his administration has prompted substantial debate over their approach to leadership. Critics argue that Trump's methods reflect a troubling trend that diminishes the lines between nationalism and detrimental practices. Rather than upholding the foundational values of conservatism, some view these actions as a form of vandalism — an indiscriminate assault on long-standing institutions, alliances and cultural norms.

As Trump amplified his influence and unpredictability, he built alliances with

some of America's wealthiest individuals; his administration includes 14 billionaires, reflecting his strategy of consolidating power through ties to the financial elite. This intricate dance between political power and wealth raises concerns about the integrity of governance, as the intertwining of financial ambition with political decision-making enhances the risk of the interests of a privileged few being prioritized at the expense of democratic values.

While it may seem that Trump's actions primarily serve his personal interests and those of his close allies, the consequences for American society are profound. For example, the ongoing trade war, rather than uplifting working-class Americans, often appears to further elevate Trump's financial stakes, presenting an ironic contrast to the mounting struggles faced by many citizens attempting to meet their basic needs.

As the challenges facing the global landscape intensify, the urgency of the need to reassess how wealth is distributed has never been clearer. The historical predilection for wealth accumulation benefiting a select few cannot sustain itself indefinitely.



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Acknowledging this reality necessitates a collective awakening and robust political resolve. Society must prioritize human needs by creating an environment that is not merely prosperous, but also equitable and just. By adopting this principle, we can enhance living standards for all and collaboratively address the multifaceted challenges that lie ahead, forging a path toward a brighter and more sustainable future.

As we navigate this complex landscape of power, wealth and governance, a commitment to sustainable development emerges as a pivotal pathway for progress in the Arab world. It entails not just economic rebuilding but also ensuring that the moral underpinnings of governance emphasize justice and equity. The reckless strategies of the past have continually failed to yield desired outcomes, emphasizing the need for a paradigm shift in how the US engages with the Middle East.

History serves as a reminder that continual reliance on the failed methods of military intervention and support for oppressive regimes will only breed more instability and suffering. Instead, fostering an environment where all individuals can realize their

potential, particularly through the recognition of Palestinian rights, may hold the key to long-term peace and prosperity.

As residents of a global society, it falls upon us to champion justice, equity and accountability, ensuring these principles remain at the forefront of our collective consciousness. Ultimately, navigating the nexus of power, wealth and governance requires a diligent critique of current systems, advocacy for ethical leadership and a fundamental commitment to uplifting human dignity across all societies.

In conclusion, the complex interplay of power, wealth and governance underscores myriad challenges existing within contemporary society. By thoughtfully navigating these issues, insisting upon accountability and prioritizing the well-being of all individuals, we can work toward a more equitable future, not just for the US but for the world at large.

A renewed focus on sustainable development, coupled with a concerted effort to resolve the Palestinian issue, emerges as both a moral obligation and a practical necessity in building a future grounded in cooperation and mutual respect.

As Trump amplified his influence and unpredictability, he built alliances with some of America's wealthiest individuals

COURTESY: AMALAD RASHEED/ASHARQ AL-AWSAT



World leaders expressed revulsion at the notion of uprooting the Palestinians and taking over their ancestral lands

Netanyahu's arrogance pushing region to the precipice

OSAMA AL-SHARIF

Saudi Arabia has hit back at Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's arrogant suggestion that the Kingdom should host a Palestinian state, while rejecting the premise that Palestinians must be displaced from their native land. The Kingdom's Foreign Ministry said that it rejected "such statements that aim to divert attention from the continuous crimes committed by the Israeli occupation against the Palestinian brothers in Gaza, including the ethnic cleansing they are subjected to."

Netanyahu's tongue-in-cheek statement was not only reckless and in poor taste, but it also backfired, as Arab capitals rallied to condemn his position and defend the Saudi position. At the same time, world leaders expressed revulsion at the notion of uprooting the Palestinians and taking over their ancestral lands.

Netanyahu's haughty attitude was boosted by US President Donald Trump's shocking announcement last week, at a White House press conference with the Israeli premier, that the US would "take over" and "own" Gaza

while displacing its residents so that it can turn it into the "Riviera of the Middle East."

Netanyahu and his extremist coalition partners were quick to praise Trump's plan, even as US officials scurried to tone down his statement by claiming that it was based on humanitarian grounds. Others said that Gazans would eventually be allowed to return. But Trump's confusing and shocking Gaza plan presented a beleaguered Netanyahu with an opportunity to wriggle out of commitments to the ceasefire deal reached last month with Hamas.

And when Netanyahu suggested that Saudi Arabia should host a Palestinian state, Riyadh was equally resolute in denouncing the Israeli premier. Even in Israel itself, Netanyahu has been attacked for provoking America's closest Arab ally, one that Trump hopes to bring into the Abraham Accords. By trying to be clever, Netanyahu has sealed the fate of any rapprochement with Saudi Arabia — at least for as long as he is in power.

But despite his diplomatic flop, the Israeli premier is looking for ways to use Trump's



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surprise position on Gaza to derail the second phase of the ceasefire deal with Hamas and restart military operations.

He seems to be getting his way, as things have begun deteriorating quickly on the state of the truce. On Monday, Hamas issued a statement saying that Israel had been violating the ceasefire deal and that, in response, the movement had decided to indefinitely postpone the further release of Israeli captives.

Trump's irrational Gaza statements, as well as Netanyahu's arrogance, could now lead to the collapse of the ceasefire and the return to a horrific bombardment of Gaza. Netanyahu's faux pas on Saudi Arabia and his support for the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians will complicate Trump's bid to revive the Abraham Accords. They should instead create much-needed momentum for a united global front to oppose Israel's annexation of Palestinian lands.

Meanwhile, there has been a muted reaction to Israel's month-long campaign to destroy Palestinian refugee camps in the West Bank. According to the UN, at least

40,000 Palestinians have been displaced from Jenin and other refugee camps in the West Bank. Dozens have been killed, the latest being two women, one of them a pregnant 23-year-old. Israel has also demolished tens of homes and destroyed vital infrastructure in at least two camps.

This, along with the financial strangulation of the PA, is aimed at encouraging what ultrareligious Jewish leader Itamar Ben-Gvir has called the "voluntary migration" of Palestinians. Trump is yet to divulge what he thinks Israel should do in the West Bank.

These are dangerous times not only for the Palestinians but for the entire region. Israeli extremists are now in control of Israel, which has gone rogue.

An Arab summit in Cairo this month will discuss the dangerous spiral of events in the region that have been encouraged by Trump and led by Netanyahu and his fellow zealots. The message should be a resounding one, echoing around the world and heard particularly in Washington and Tel Aviv.

We will become a global hub for gaming and eSports by 2030.
Prince Faisal bin Bandar bin Sultan
 Saudi Esports Federation chairman



Business LEAP

SPECIAL COVERAGE

EMPOWERING INNOVATORS

\$1.78bn in deals signed to advance AI, digital talent in Kingdom

Wave of investments underscores Kingdom's growing prominence in tech sector

Miguel Hachitty Riyadh

Investments totaling \$1.78 billion marked the third day of the LEAP 2025 Tech Conference in Riyadh, aimed at accelerating artificial intelligence and digital talent development.

Industry leaders, investors, and policymakers have launched several initiatives to drive digital transformation in Saudi Arabia, aligning with Vision 2030 to position the Kingdom at the forefront of the digital age.

Among these, Equinix, a global leader in digital infrastructure, announced a \$1 billion investment in data centers nationwide, starting with a 100-megawatt facility to serve hyperscale and retail customers in the region.

"Equinix has been at the center of technological advancements for 26 years. Our global interconnection hubs allow data to move seamlessly worldwide, and now, we are expanding further into Saudi Arabia," said Judith Gardner, vice president of growth and emerging markets at Equinix.

Saudi Arabia's Communications, Space, and Technology Commission has launched Cohort 3 of its innovative regulatory sandbox program, aimed at empowering innovators and startups to test new technologies.

Abdulaziz Al-Batli, general manager of technology enablement at CST, emphasized the commission's approach, which balances ample space for innovation with necessary regulatory oversight.

To further solidify Saudi Arabia's position as a regional technology and innovation hub, DAMAC's EDGNEX



Dutch designer Anouk Wipprecht brought a futuristic vision to LEAP 2025 with her collection of robotic dresses. AN photo by Nadlin Hassan

unveiled plans to expand its investments in data centers for cloud computing and AI across the Kingdom.

The company aims to develop a 500-megawatt capacity by 2030, aligning with the country's broader digital transformation goals.

This initiative complements the wave of investments announced at LEAP 2025, reinforcing Saudi Arabia's commitment to enhancing its digital infrastructure and fostering an AI-driven economy.

Several investment funds pledged a total of \$695 million to support startups specializing in AI, gaming, and innovative tech solutions. These investments

bring the Kingdom's total venture capital commitments announced at LEAP to nearly \$700 million, with close to \$100 million dedicated to startup investments.

Talent development

WhiteHelmet introduced ASIF, the first AI-powered construction agent designed to revolutionize the building industry by optimizing speed and efficiency.

Additionally, Microsoft announced the establishment of the Kingdom's first Data Center Academy in partnership with the National IT Academy.

"This initiative aligns with Microsoft's mission to provide cutting-edge digital skills and training, ensuring Saudi Arabia's

HIGHLIGHTS

• **Equinix, a global leader in digital infrastructure, announced a \$1 billion investment in data centers nationwide, starting with a 100-megawatt facility to serve hyperscale and retail customers in the region.**

• **Saudi Arabia's Communications, Space, and Technology Commission has launched Cohort 3 of its innovative regulatory sandbox program, aimed at empowering innovators and startups to test new technologies.**

workforce is ready for the AI-driven future," said Zainab Al-Amein, vice president of national digital transformation at Microsoft.

Similarly, Huawei, in collaboration with the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, unveiled plans for a Future Skills Center to enhance AI expertise in the region.

Accenture and Atomcamp also launched the first AI Academy in Saudi Arabia, aiming to train 20,000 Saudi professionals by 2030.

CST Gov. Mohammed Al-Tamimi, highlighted key themes shaping LEAP 2025, including AI, cloud computing,

quantum technologies, and the intersection of space and the digital economy.

"We are witnessing the second phase of our space track, with over 20 events dedicated to discussions on space competition and the connection between space and the digital economy," said Al-Tamimi.

Gaming industry

The gaming industry also saw significant investments, with HGM announcing a \$300 million commitment to bring top gaming titles to Riyadh. The Kingdom's first major military shooter game is set to launch in October, developed by a team with experience in franchises like Call of Duty.

AI ADOPTION

Orange Business to offer subscription-based Smart City services

Reina Takla,
 Reem Walid Riyadh

Digital system integrator Orange Business is set to roll out "Smart City-as-a-Service" in Saudi Arabia, aiming to drive significant financial and time savings, a senior company official said.

Speaking to Arab News on the sidelines of LEAP 2025 in Riyadh, Mohammed Al-Jeraisy, managing director of Saudi Arabia and Africa, said the service will develop Smart City applications for cloud deployment, capitalizing on the sector's rapid growth.

The Saudi Smart Cities market is projected to expand considerably, with revenue expected to hit \$560 million by 2025, according to data firm Statista. Globally, the US is projected to generate the highest revenue in the segment at \$27.06 billion in the same year.

"This is something that is known — it's a challenge. When you implement a Smart City solution, deployment is costly and time-consuming. These projects typically take years to develop and build. What a Smart City-as-a-Service solution does today is help customers adopt



Mohammed Al-Jeraisy, managing director of Orange Business, Saudi Arabia and Africa. AN photo by Abdulrahman bin Shalhoub

the solution quickly, saving both time and costs," Al-Jeraisy said.

He added that the new model could cut costs by 40 to 60 percent and reduce adoption time by up to 80 percent.

Al-Jeraisy also highlighted the flexibility of the subscription-based model, which allows customers to choose specific Smart City services as needed.

"When it comes to Smart City services, there are many — plenty of them. You can think of major services like a city's command and control center, which is essential. You also need solutions for the environment and applications

for traffic management. Today, you can start using these services immediately and access them through the platform," Al-Jeraisy said.

The model enables customers to opt in and out of services as required. "You can subscribe to the service today, use it for as long as you need, and stop whenever you decide. You can then go for another service. I think that's one of the key benefits we offer to customers," he added.

Despite the name, Smart City-as-a-Service is not limited to cities, Al-Jeraisy said. "It can be used for

campuses, stadiums, events, and even universities because what truly matters are the applications and use cases we build on the platform," Al-Jeraisy said.

Saudi Arabia is emerging as a leader in Smart City and AI adoption, he noted, adding that the global adoption rate for Smart City-as-a-Service currently stands at 33 percent and is expected to rise as more customers recognize its benefits.

Orange Business has been involved in large-scale Smart City projects in Saudi Arabia and the Middle East for more than a decade.



The 2024 event saw strong private sector participation, with agreements signed across industries, including construction and financial services. File

SHAPING THE FUTURE

PIF forum to drive private sector growth with new partnerships, investments

Event to catalyze strategic alliances and expand economic opportunities in key industries

Reem Waid Riyadh

Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund is set to unveil new private sector partnerships and investment initiatives at its annual Private Sector Forum, scheduled for Feb. 12-13 in Riyadh.

The event, which will bring together more than 90 PIF-backed companies, seeks to strengthen supply chains, boost local manufacturing, and accelerate economic diversification under Vision 2030.

Now in its third year, the forum will spotlight business opportunities with the sovereign wealth fund and its portfolio companies, identify potential prospects for investors and suppliers, and expand avenues for collaboration. It will also serve as a bridge between PIF, its portfolio companies, and the private sector, reinforcing localization efforts.

The event aligns with Saudi Arabia's push to boost private sector participation in its economic diversification efforts, with the wealth fund playing a key role in this transformation.

Established in 1971, the fund manages assets estimated at \$930 billion and is central to Saudi Arabia's strategy to reduce reliance on oil, with investments spanning technology, tourism, and infrastructure both locally and globally.

The forum provides a platform for engagement, emphasizing partnership opportunities between PIF, its portfolio companies, and the local private sector.

It also offers networking opportunities and direct access to supplier registration with portfolio firms. Additionally, participants can learn about PIF programs designed to support the private sector.

Workshops and insights

The event will feature specialized workshops led by experts from PIF and its portfolio companies, providing insights into investments and supply chain opportunities. These sessions will highlight expected demand for key products and services, equipping businesses with the knowledge to make informed decisions.

The event is expected to draw over 12,000 visitors, including more than 1,000 C-level executives from the public and private sectors. It will feature over 120 speakers, 15 panel discussions, and 25 workshops.

Some of the key speakers include Saudi Minister of Municipalities Majed Al-Hogail, Minister of Transport and Logistics Saleh Al-Jasser, Investment Minister Khalid Al-Falih and Minister of Economy and Planning Faisal Al-Ibrahim.

Ceer CEO James DeLuca, Riyadh Air CEO Tony Douglas

and Ma'aden CEO Robert Wilt are also scheduled to speak at the event. Other notable participants include Jerry Todd, head of the national development division at PIF; Ranjith Powell, head of ports and transport infrastructure at PIF; and Abdullah Al-Hussaini, head of strategy and engagement at PIF.

Attendees can engage with more than 100 portfolio company booths, 10 government entity booths, and participate in 10 business matching sessions.

Additionally, over 100 memorandums of understanding are expected to be signed, with 80 ministers and government officials in attendance. The forum will also include five side events and special corners.

Panel discussions will bring together thought leaders from government entities, PIF, and its portfolio companies, discussing the private sector's vital role in Saudi Arabia's development, successful collaborations with the wealth fund, and opportunities in emerging sectors and mega-projects.

The forum will also feature key announcements from PIF, reinforcing its commitment to private sector collaboration to drive economic growth.

The event will feature four main tracks, covering investment and collaboration opportunities, as well as manufacturing and localization through panels and matchmaking sessions

FASTFACTS

- Established in 1971, the fund manages assets estimated at \$930 billion and is central to Saudi Arabia's strategy to reduce reliance on oil, with investments spanning technology, tourism, and infrastructure both locally and globally.
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connecting private sector representatives with PIF portfolio companies. It will also include workshops on financing tools and capital market opportunities, along with sessions highlighting key programs and initiatives available to private sector firms.

Day 1 highlights

The forum will open with a keynote ceremony, followed by panels on government support for the private sector, supply chain localization, and biotech growth. Presentations will spotlight industry leaders such as ALAT, Ceer, Ma'aden, NUPCO, and Cruise Saudi.

Key sessions include the MUSAHAMA Awards and a fireside chat on Riyadh Air's vision for aviation. Workshops at the PSF Pavilion - Lab 1 will cover localization, finance, and infrastructure, while Palmgrove - Lab 2 will host panels on Saudi Arabia's automotive, transport, and logistics sectors.

Day 2 highlights

The second day will feature panels on real estate market enablers, covering strategy, regulation, licensing, deal structures, funding, and partnerships. Presentations will highlight key projects, including Jeddah Central Development, NEOM, New Murabba, ROSHN, and King Abdullah Economic City.

Fireside chats will explore Red Sea Global's luxury tourism

push, Diriyah Co's historical significance, and Rua Al Madinah's vision for enhancing visitor experiences.

Workshops at PSF Pavilion - Lab 1 will focus on contractor programs, AI's role in Saudi Arabia, and the innovation ecosystem. Palmgrove - Lab 2 will cover manufacturing acceleration, sports investment, and Saudi investment opportunities. The MUSAHAMA Design Competition Awards will also take place.

PIF's Private Sector Forum is emerging as one of the most significant business events in Saudi Arabia, not only as a networking platform but also as a driver of tangible economic outcomes.

The 2024 event saw strong private sector participation, with agreements signed across industries, including construction and financial services. The forum attracted over 9,000 attendees and showcased more than 10 investment and supply opportunities.

This year's forum is expected to build on that momentum, with a strong emphasis on investment facilitation and supply chain resilience.

The forum will conclude with a series of closing remarks from PIF executives, summarizing key takeaways, new business agreements, and upcoming initiatives aimed at further integrating the private sector into Saudi Arabia's economic growth plans.

Business News

COST OF LIVING

Egypt's inflation eases slightly in January: data

Analysts expect inflationary pressures to persist in the near term

Dayan Abou Tine Riyadh

Egypt's headline consumer price index recorded 243.5 points in January, reflecting an annual inflation rate of 23.2 percent, down slightly from 23.4 percent in December, according to official data.

Figures from the nation's Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics show that Egypt's inflation slowdown was primarily driven by a 2.6 percent decline in vegetable prices from December to January, alongside a 0.3 percent decrease in fish and seafood prices.

Meanwhile, costs remained stable across key sectors such as education, health services, and telecommunications.

However, according to the report, some essential commodities saw notable price hikes. Bread and cereal prices rose 1.3 percent, while meat and poultry prices surged 5 percent. Dairy, cheese, and eggs recorded a modest increase of 0.3 percent, and oils and fats edged up by 0.7 percent.



Despite a slight moderation in annual inflation, elevated food and transport costs remain a key challenge for Egyptian households, Reuters/File

The sharpest price spike was in fruits, which jumped by 9.8 percent. These price increases were key contributors to the 1.6 percent monthly inflation in January,

compared to a flat reading in December. Other sectors also experienced price increases. Personal care products rose by 1.5 percent, hospital services by 1.4 percent and furnishings and household appliances by 0.6 percent, as well as electricity, gas, and fuel by 0.1 percent, and hotel services by 3.3 percent.

Compared to January, several

categories recorded substantial annual increases, the report showed. Food and beverages rose by 20.2 percent, tobacco and alcoholic drinks by 29.5 percent, housing, utilities, and fuel by 18.7 percent, healthcare services by 40.5 percent, and transport by 33.6 percent, while education costs remained unchanged.

BizBriefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Jobs

Unemployment rate in France drops to 7.3%

The unemployment rate in France dropped to 7.3 percent in the fourth quarter of 2024, down from 7.4 percent in the previous quarter, and below market expectations of 7.5 percent, according to official data.

The number of unemployed individuals decreased by 63,000, reaching a total of 2.3 million. Among different age groups, the unemployment rate for those aged 15 to 24 fell by 0.8 percentage points to 19 percent, while it decreased by 0.1 percentage points to 6.5 percent for those aged 25 to 49.

AN

Economy

Norway GDP unexpectedly contracts in Q4

Norway's mainland economy unexpectedly contracted in the final quarter of 2024, coming in below analysts' forecasts and the central bank's projection, on weaker investment by households and companies, Statistics Norway data showed on Tuesday.

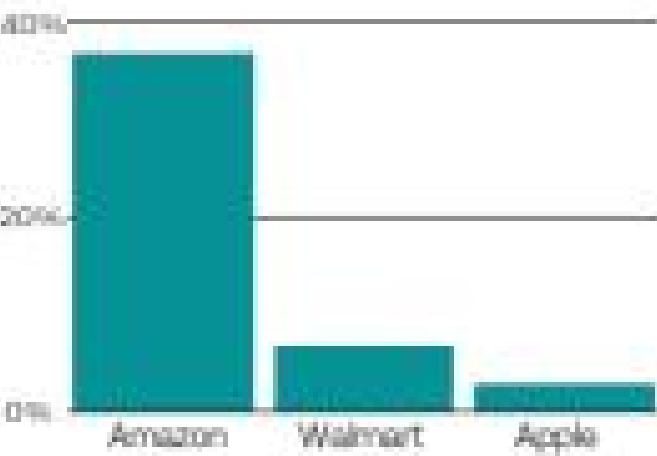
The October-December period saw a decline in mainland gross domestic product of 0.4 percent compared with the July-September period, while economists polled by Reuters had expected growth of 0.2 percent. Overall growth in the mainland economy for 2024 stood at 0.6 percent from the previous year. **Reuters**

Chart of THE DAY

Amazon claimed the top spot among online retailers in the US in 2023, capturing 37.6 percent of the market.

Source: Statista

MARKET SHARE OF E-COMMERCE FIRMS IN US (2023)



What We're Reading

FOR THE TRAIN OR ON THE PLANE

Change The Box

JOHN SPENCER-TAYLOR

This book reveals powerful strategies to transform bold ideas into thriving businesses, says a review published on goodreads.com. John Spencer-Taylor shares practical advice on

balancing creativity with commercial viability. Readers will learn to navigate the stages of innovation. It contains insights on maintaining company culture during rapid growth and overcoming challenges.



Data

Russia's budget deficit jumps 14-fold

Russia's fiscal deficit jumped 14-fold in January due to a 73.6 percent increase in spending at the start of the year, reaching 1.7 trillion rubles (\$17.73 billion) or 0.8 percent of national output.

"This is primarily due to the accelerated financing of expenditures within the first quarter and will not affect the quarterly trajectory or the achievement of the target parameters of the structural balance for 2025 as a whole," the Finance Ministry said. The deficit figure stood at 124 billion rubles in January 2024.

Reuters

Trade war

Trump signs orders for steel, aluminum tariffs

US President Donald Trump signed executive orders to impose 25 percent tariffs on steel and aluminum imports from March 12, ramping up a long-promised trade war despite warnings from Europe and China. The EU swiftly vowed to retaliate with "proportionate countermeasures."

In an executive order released Monday, Trump said: "All imports of aluminum articles and derivative aluminum articles from Argentina, Australia, Canada, Mexico, EU countries, and the UK shall be subject to the additional ad valorem tariff." He issued a separate order for steel. **AFP**



The Kuwaiti Danish Dairy Company (KDD) Launches Landmark Event "Fixing Food for Health & Planet" at WEF Annual Meeting at Davos 2025

Davos, Switzerland on January 22nd, 2025 – The Kuwaiti Danish Dairy Company (KDD) hosted a groundbreaking event at the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting in Davos, bringing together global leaders, visionaries, and changemakers to address the urgent need to transform food systems for the benefit of health, sustainability, and resilience.

"Fixing Food for Health & Planet" was held at the SDG Tent in Davos on January 22, 2025. With the spotlight on actionable solutions, this transformative dialogue emphasized the critical role of metabolic health as the cornerstone of sustainable nutrition.

The event featured a stellar lineup of thought leaders, including:

- Dr. Robert H. Lustig
- Dr. Gunhild Stordalen
- Ms. Ndidi Okonkwo Nwuneli

The discussion explored innovative strategies to bridge the gap between food, health, and the planet while emphasizing the importance of trust, transparency, and stakeholder collaboration in achieving measurable progress. At the heart of the event was the Metabolic Matrix, KDD's pioneering framework that integrates 39 evidence-based criteria across three core pillars: Support the Brain, Protect the Liver, and Feed the Gut.

The event's resounding success underscored the power of collective action in reimagining the future of food, health, and the planet. KDD is committed to advancing this vital agenda, bringing together diverse stakeholders to forge



innovative pathways to healthier communities and a sustainable planet.

Visit the KDD Metabolic Matrix website to learn more about how the Company is shaping the future of healthy food systems: metabolicmatrix.info.

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Cisco is proud to partner with the Kingdom to accelerate its Vision 2030.

Chuck Robbins
Cisco Chair and CEO



Corporate

PRESS RELEASES FROM THE WORLD OF BUSINESS AND COMMERCE

PROMOTING INNOVATION

Cisco advances AI to support Saudi Arabia's digitization goals

At LEAP 2025, Cisco, a global leader in networking and security, unveiled a series of strategic initiatives to advance AI in partnership with the Kingdom. By introducing advanced cloud data centers, AI talent development, and phased plans for local manufacturing, Cisco is deepening its commitment and strengthening its partnership with Saudi Arabia. These initiatives are designed to enhance Cisco's regional presence and support the Kingdom's ambitious digitization goals under Vision 2030, accelerating its evolution into a technology-driven economy.

"Our partnership with Cisco highlights the Kingdom's commitment to accelerating its digital economy through innovation. These initiatives will enhance Saudi Arabia's competitiveness both regionally and internationally by promoting innovation and the adoption of AI and cloud computing technologies," said Vice Minister at the Saudi Ministry of Communications and IT Haytham Alohali.

"Cisco is proud to partner with the Kingdom to accelerate its Vision 2030," said Cisco Chair and CEO Chuck Robbins. "Through our investments and innovation, we are protecting organizations, preparing the Saudi workforce for the AI era, and contributing to the local economy and manufacturing ecosystem. Together, we will pave the way for a more connected and secure future."

"By aligning with key initiatives of Vision 2030, Cisco is committed to being a catalyst for digital transformation across



By introducing advanced cloud data centers, AI talent development, and phased plans for local manufacturing, Cisco is deepening its commitment to Saudi Arabia.

various sectors in the Kingdom. As these projects advance, they will help strengthen digital infrastructure and drive economic growth to positively shape Saudi Arabia's future," said Salman Faqeeh, managing director, Cisco Saudi Arabia.

Delivering on its commitment, Cisco announced that its data centers for cloud security

HIGHLIGHT

Cisco's initiatives are designed to enhance Cisco's regional presence and support the Kingdom's ambitious digitization goals under Vision 2030.

services as well as the Webex Collaboration Platform are now operational.

The security data center underpins Cisco's cloud-based security services including its new secure service edge solution, Cisco Secure Access and Umbrella DNS. The center helps customers protect their users, infrastructure, and

investments against threat actors and empowers them with flexible security services and data protection for devices, remote users, and distributed locations.

The collaboration data centers bring extensive services from the Webex suite such as meetings and calling closer to customers in the Kingdom and region.

Corporate Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Smartphone Honor debuts Magic7 RSR Porsche Design

At LEAP 2025, Honor unveiled its latest collaboration with Porsche Design — the Porsche Design Honor Magic7 RSR. This new device combines cutting-edge AI technology with the sophisticated elegance of Porsche sports car design, setting a new standard in the premium smartphone market.

Under the theme "LEAP into Honor AI World," the company also shared its plans for expansion, focusing on enhancing the local consumer experience and bringing advanced technology and premium service to Saudi customers.

Innovation Zain Multi Cloud launched in Kingdom

In a bold move to accelerate digital transformation across Saudi Arabia's public sector and drive cloud adoption, Zain KSA introduced Zain Multi Cloud at LEAP 2025. As the first cloud provider in the Kingdom to deliver comprehensive cloud infrastructure management through a unified platform, Zain KSA launched this innovative service in collaboration with Dell.

Zain Multi Cloud empowers organizations with seamless, centralized cloud management, integrating public, private, and hybrid environments into a single, unified system.

ENTERPRISE SUPPORT

Kyndryl reimagines digital transformation at LEAP 2025

Kyndryl, the world's largest IT infrastructure services provider, is participating in LEAP 2025, taking place from Feb. 9 to 12 at the Riyadh Exhibition and Convention Center, Malham.

Visitors to Kyndryl's booth (G80 — Hall 3) have the opportunity to engage with technical experts and consultants, who are showcasing services and offerings designed to drive customer success, including Kyndryl Bridge. This AI-powered open integration platform helps enterprises unify on-premise and cloud environments for enhanced observability, orchestration, and efficiency. It also accelerates AI adoption and ensures regulatory compliance. Supporting more than 1,200 customers, Kyndryl Bridge delivers over 3 million insights monthly, driving nearly \$2 billion in annual savings.

Kyndryl is also sharing insights from its 2024 IT Readiness Report, which highlights the gap between IT infrastructure perception and preparedness for future risks for customers in the Middle East, including Saudi Arabia. Regional findings show that 92 percent of business leaders are confident in their IT, but only 43 percent believe it is prepared for future challenges.

Additionally, Kyndryl is presenting its joint offerings with Google Cloud in data, analytics, and AI. Since 2021, Kyndryl and Google Cloud have partnered to help global businesses transform through advanced AI capabilities and trusted infrastructure. In 2024, they expanded their partnership to develop responsible generative AI solutions and accelerate adoption among customers.

Dell Technologies has opened its first merge and fulfillment center in Saudi Arabia. Located in Dammam, the hub is engineered to handle up to 600,000 units per year, across all Dell's product lines as customer demand grows.

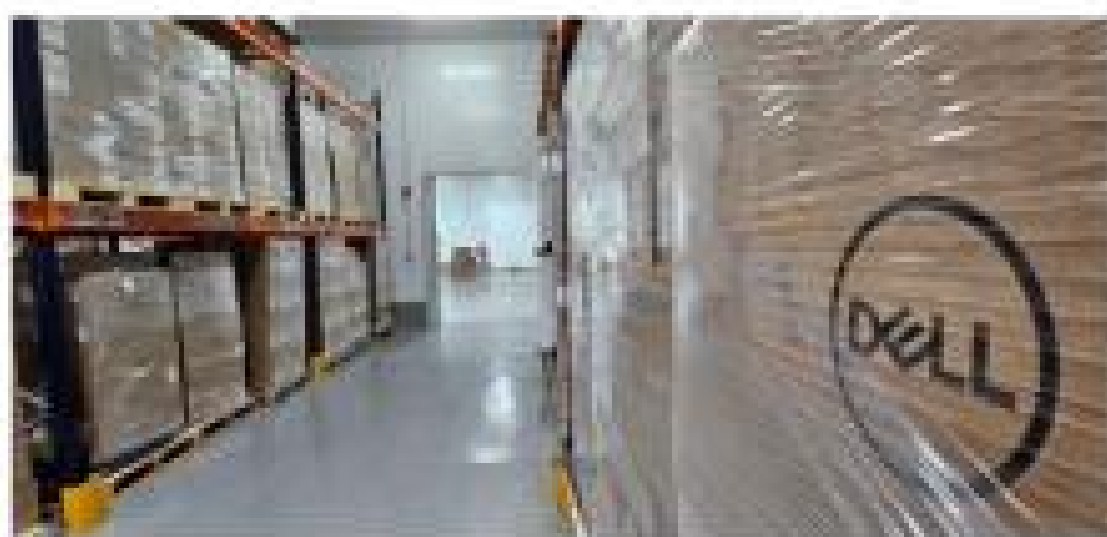
The Dammam center also features a second touch manufacturing facility for product customization of Dell's servers to ensure they meet specific customer needs. This makes the servers ready-to-use, reduces time-to-market, and enhances customer satisfaction.

Dell has also relocated its Flat Panel Monitor Hub to the Dammam facility to serve local customers, offering shipment deliveries within two days to reduce lead times and enhance operational excellence.

The opening of the new center represents a pivotal step in advancing the Kingdom's ICT

STRATEGIC INVESTMENT

Dell opens merge and fulfillment hub in Dammam



Located in Dammam, the center is engineered to handle up to 600,000 units per year.

ecosystem. The Saudi facility is Dell's fifth in the EMEA region and reinforces the company's commitment to Saudi Vision 2030 in driving economic diversification through technological innovation.

The strategic investment builds on Dell's regional headquarters license to operate in Saudi Arabia and will support the Kingdom in creating new jobs across logistics, manufacturing and technical fields, training local talent and nurturing a culture of innovation.

Haytham Alohali, vice minister of communications and information technology, said: "Dell's decision to establish its merge and fulfillment center in Saudi Arabia highlights the Kingdom's emergence as a regional hub for logistics and innovation. This facility will help create jobs and strengthen our local manufacturing and supply chain capabilities aligned with Vision 2030. Together, Saudi Arabia and Dell are building a dynamic and resilient digital economy."

AI App Aster Healthcare rolls out digital platform in KSA

Aster DM Healthcare, an integrated healthcare provider in the GCC, launched its flagship digital health platform "myAster" at LEAP 2025. This launch aligns with Aster's ambitious plans to expand its footprint in the Kingdom and transform the healthcare experience for the people of the country.

With a proven track record as the UAE's No.1 well-being and healthcare app and more than 2 million downloads, myAster is set to redefine digital healthcare in Saudi Arabia. The app offers an all-encompassing suite of services, including online pharmacy, prescription home delivery, appointment management, video consultation, and home care services.

Real Madrid's Italian coach Carlo Ancelotti during a press conference at the Etihad Stadium in Manchester on Monday ahead of their UEFA Champions League match against Manchester City.

INTERNATIONAL EVENT

Esports Olympics to debut in Saudi Arabia later in 2027

AP Lausanne

The first Olympic Esports Games will be hosted in Riyadh in 2027, two years later than expected when a 12-year deal with Saudi Arabia was signed last year.

The International Olympic Committee said Tuesday its founding partner for the event will be the Kingdom's Esports World Cup Foundation.

The first annual Esports World Cup was held last July and August in Riyadh with tens of millions of dollars in prize money paid for games including Call of Duty, Fortnite and Street Fighter.



Prince Abdulaziz bin Turki Al-Faisal

It is unclear which, if any, shooter games the IOC will allow on the Esports Olympics program, which it has repeatedly said must align with Olympic values.

A six-person panel, co-chaired by veteran IOC member Ser Miang Ng and Saudi Sports Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Turki Al-Faisal, will work on deciding the games program, the IOC said.

Details of the inaugural Esports Olympics were confirmed two days after Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman hosted a visiting Olympic delegation in Riyadh, including its president

FAST FACT

The first annual Esports World Cup was held last July and August in Riyadh with tens of millions of dollars in prize money paid for games including Call of Duty, Fortnite and Street Fighter.

Thomas Bach, who leaves office in June.

The 12-year deal was confirmed last July on the eve of the Paris Olympics as the latest prime sporting asset for the Kingdom to own or host. FIFA confirmed Saudi Arabia as host of the 2034 World Cup in men's soccer in December.

IOC members were told in Paris the vision for the Esports Olympics was to hold it every two years starting in 2025, with "physical, simulated and electronic games" included.

Qualifying competitions for national teams are set to start this year.

CYCLING

'A Dream Come True': Elisa Longo Borghini and UAE Team ADQ make history at the women's tour

Third edition of UAE Tour Women, the Middle East's first and only Women's WorldTour race, signals rapid growth of women's professional cycling

Dawn Barnable Abu Dhabi

"A dream come true." Those were the words of an elated Melissa Moncada, head of team at UAE Team ADQ, after her squad made history on Sunday by securing the overall win at their home race.

The UAE Tour Women, part of the Women's WorldTour — the highest tier of women's cycling — has been a key target for the team since the race's first edition in 2023.

Along with team classification, Italian star Elisa Longo Borghini claimed the prestigious general classification red jersey for UAE Team ADQ, with teammate Silvia Persico securing second in the GC. Katrijn Swinkels placed fifth overall, while Lara Gillespie claimed the black jersey in the Intermediate Sprints Classification — a remarkable achievement on her Women's WorldTour debut after being called up from the UAE squad's development team. Teammates Elynor Backstedt and sprinter Sofie van Rooijen, who bounced back from a crash on stage one, provided crucial support throughout the four days of racing.

Longo Borghini's decisive attack on Jebel Hafeet on Stage 3 proved to be the turning point. With Persico setting a relentless pace, Longo Borghini launched a perfectly timed attack 3 km from the finish line, securing a dominant victory and virtually sealing the overall title. Following Longo Borghini was Persico in second place. The team's overall triumph was sealed on the final Stage 4 on Sunday, despite Lorena Wiebes



Elisa Longo Borghini of Italy led UAE Team ADQ to a historic win at the third edition of the UAE Tour Women. Getty Image

of SD Worx-Protime dominating the sprint finishes, winning three of the four stages.

A pivotal moment

Speaking to Arab News at the end of the tour about the crucial moment in the race, Moncada praised the entire team's effort, particularly the dynamic between Longo Borghini and Persico on Stage 3.

"Persico really is an athlete that can defend and fight for the victory of the leader," said Moncada. "Even though she brought Elisa to the amazing position that she was in, she fought to the end and arrived

in second position. It's like they almost crossed the line together, so it was amazing."

For Persico, who has known Longo Borghini for years but had never raced alongside her until now, the partnership felt instinctive.

"It really seemed that we were always racing together. We just understand each other really well," said Persico.

"I just started to work at the bottom of the climb and I was just pacing a bit hard. I wanted to drop as many girls as possible. And then when Elisa attacked, in my mind I was 'okay, job finished, I can rest.' But then

I saw that I was feeling pretty good — a bit tired, yes, of course. And I said, 'okay, I'll try to do my best for the achievement, so maybe second place.' And yeah, I didn't give up and, in the end, I finished second."

Reflections on a team victory

At the team presentations at the Fatima bint Mubarak Ladies Sports Academy on Sunday morning, ahead of the final day of racing, Longo Borghini — who won the race's inaugural edition in 2023 and counts the 2024 Giro d'Italia Women and Tour of Flanders among her many

victories — reflected on her Stage 3 win.

"The race was very spectacular," she said, acknowledging the crucial role her team played. "Everyone was really committed to trying to win the stage and take the overall, and then you saw how the team was racing — it was pretty incredible."

Following the conclusion of the race, with UAE Team ADQ securing first and second in the GC, the sprinter classification, and the team classification, Longo Borghini emphasized the unity that led to their dominant performance.

"It feels quite amazing," she said. "From the very beginning of the season, the team pointed out that they wanted us to perform well here in the UAE. And of course, we came here for GC, but in the end, we are walking away with first and second on GC, the sprinter classification, and the team classification. And the one I'm the most proud of is the team classification because it shows how strong we were throughout these four days. And it's really been a team victory."

Longo Borghini, in the first year of a three-year contract with UAE Team ADQ, has firmly established herself as a cornerstone of the team's ambitions and according to both management and riders, the team is unified and riding as one.

"You can see the unity there. It's not forced," said Cherie Pridham, UAE Team ADQ's head of sport. "It's been actually one of my best weeks on a cycling team. To do that with these girls has been amazing. To have a leader like Elisa Longo Borghini with us, she just raises the bar and raises everybody's expectations — and ours as well, the staff — it's incredible."

Sport Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

No regret

Ancelotti says Madrid not wrong to boycott Ballon

Carlo Ancelotti defended Real Madrid's decision to boycott last year's Ballon d'Or awards ahead of his team's Champions League playoff against Manchester City.

Madrid did not attend October's gala ceremony after Vinicius Junior was beaten to soccer's most prestigious individual prize by City midfielder Rodri.

"I don't think it was the wrong decision," Ancelotti said on Monday. "We didn't want to participate because we thought that Vinicius was the winner of the Ballon d'Or." AP

Against Jazz

Luka Doncic makes his Lakers debut

Luka Doncic was the last starter introduced by the Los Angeles Lakers, an honor normally reserved for LeBron James. When Doncic jogged into the spotlight on a darkened court through a cordon of his new teammates, his new fans stood and roared while wearing thousands of gold T-shirts with his name and number.

"I was a little nervous before," Doncic said. "I (don't remember) the last time I was nervous before the game. But once I stepped on the court again, it was fun. Just being out there, it felt amazing." AP



Fresh mandate

Trabelsi named Tunisia coach for 2nd time

Sami Trabelsi has been appointed as Tunisia's coach, his second spell with the Carthage Eagles.

Trabelsi, a former Tunisia defender who featured at the 1998 World Cup, previously coached the national team from 2011-13. He quit after the country failed to progress past the Africa Cup of Nations group stage.

The Tunisian federation announced Trabelsi's appointment late Monday. AP

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Following their Super Bowl halftime performance, Kendrick Lamar and SZA have announced new dates for their 'Grand National' tour. The pair will visit 13 stadiums across Europe and the UK this summer, after the tour crosses North America in the spring.



& Finally

TheSix

Cultural events

Here are six vibrant cultural events celebrating art, film, music and literature to attend in the Middle East this year.



Downtown Design

The Middle East's leading fair for contemporary design is making its debut in Saudi Arabia. The event will be held in Riyadh's Jax district from May 20-23.



Sharjah Biennial

The 16th iteration of the contemporary art exhibition, which started on Feb. 6, runs until June 15.



Muscat International Book Fair

Taking place in Oman, this book fair is a major event for publishers, authors and readers in the region. It will take place from April 23-May 3.



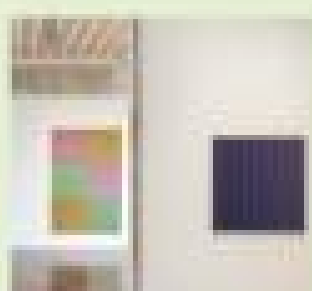
Al-Bustan International Festival

Lebanon's classical music festival showcases world-class orchestras, soloists and chamber music ensembles. It starts on Feb. 26 and runs to March 23.



The Fez Festival of World Sacred Music

This celebrated music festival draws international and local acts from a range of genres. This year it will take place from May 22-31.



Art Dubai

Taking place from April 18-20, Art Dubai showcases contemporary, modern and digital artworks from galleries worldwide.

CLOSE UP

Cartier exhibition brings regional celebrities to Dubai

Arab News Dubai

French luxury label Cartier this week hosted its "A Journey of Wonders" high jewelry exhibition in Dubai, drawing a star-studded lineup of regional celebrities.

Among the attendees were Egyptian Montenegrin actress Tara Emad, Tunisian actor Dhafer L'Abidine, TV presenter Raya Abirached and entrepreneur and host Anas Bukhash. Each guest showcased Cartier's signature pieces.

Emad wore pieces from the Trinity Collection, featuring a mix of pink, yellow and white gold. Her ensemble included Trinity earrings with black lacquer and diamonds, a matching Trinity necklace and bracelet, and a Trinity ring incorporating the same materials.

The actress, who recently debuted a new short haircut on Instagram to her 3 million followers, paired her jewelry with a tailored black pantsuit by Lebanese designer Elie Saab. The ensemble featured a structured blazer with sharp lapels and intricate gold stitching along the edges and pockets.

Abirached wore a black Magda Butrym midi-length dress featuring a strapless, structured bodice and an asymmetrical draped detail at the waist. She accessorized with Cartier's Grain de Café collection, known for its intricate detailing. Her jewelry included Grain de Café earrings, a necklace and a ring, all crafted in yellow and white gold and set with diamonds. She completed the look with black open-toe heels adorned with floral embellishments.

Meanwhile, L'Abidine,



Egyptian Montenegrin actress Tara Emad and Emirati host Anas Bukhash attended the event in Dubai. Supplied

who sported a black suit, chose a refined selection of classic Cartier designs, wearing a Santos de Cartier watch in steel paired with a Love bracelet in white gold.

Bukhash, on the other hand, opted for a mix of the brand's signature pieces, including a Santos Dumont watch in yellow gold, a Juste un Clou bracelet in white gold, and a Love ring in white gold. These stars, who also serve as ambassadors for the brand, have previously collaborated with Cartier and attended its events.

In 2023, Emad, L'Abidine and Bukhash walked in the brand's runway show in Dubai.

That same year, in April, Emad starred in a Cartier campaign alongside L'Abidine, Tunisian-Egyptian actress Hend Sabri and Egyptian actor Ahmed Malek.



Eddie Murphy

HIT SHOW

Stars line up for 'SNL' 50th anniversary show

Arab News Dubai

An all-star lineup of former "Saturday Night Live" cast members will return for the series' 50th anniversary special on Feb. 16.

Adam Sandler, Chevy Chase, Eddie Murphy, Kristen Wiig and Will Ferrell will take part in the show.

They will be joined by Amy Poehler, Andy Samberg, Chris Rock, Fred Armisen, Garrett Morris, Jane Curtin, Jason Sudeikis, Jimmy Fallon, Kate McKinnon, Kenan Thompson, Laraine Newman, Maya Rudolph, Molly Shannon, Pete Davidson, Seth Meyers, Tina Fey, Tracy Morgan, Will Forte and more.

HALFTIME SHOW

Super Bowl halftime protester won't face charges

AP New Orleans

The cast member who displayed the Palestinian flag with the word "GAZA" in protest during Kendrick Lamar's Super Bowl halftime show will not face charges, New Orleans police said Monday.

The banner combined the black stripes of the flags honored by the Sudanese and Palestinian peoples and also had the word SUDAN on it. The cast member, one of dozens of dancers clad in identical black sweats, held it high while standing on the roof of the car that was a centerpiece of the hip-hop artist's performance, and then jumped off the stage and ran across the field before being tackled by several men in suits.

REVIEW

Hulu's 'Muslim Matchmaker' has heart, but not enough spark

Shaletha Khan Toronto

"Muslim Matchmaker" premieres on Hulu this week. The series is directed and produced by Smriti Mundhra (of Netflix's "Indian Matchmaking" fame).

But this time around it's not Sima Aunty and her outrageous comments, but rather two older sister types - Hoda Abraham and Yasmin Elhady - who are helping eight Muslim Americans find love.

The premise of their

matchmaking business is the "Rules of Three: Three dates, three months, and three hundred questions." In an era of dating apps and superficial swipes, the duo urges couples to approach their search for love with intention. They emphasize the importance of giving the relationship time and space to grow while asking the right questions.

The eight-episode show provides a fresh perspective on Muslim Americans as they navigate both their Muslim and



Hoda Abraham and Yasmin Elhady are trying to find love for the show's participants. Supplied

cultural identities in the West. It offers captivating discussions on topics like cultural expectations when dating an older woman, the appropriate timeline to "date," and finding a partner with an equal "halal-to-haram ratio." These discussions are sure to resonate with many, and perhaps, offer a glimpse into a Muslim world that's rarely seen in mainstream Western media.

The show comes with good intentions. For one, it acknowledges dating app fatigue. It offers

a refreshing take with matchmakers who approach singles' choices without judgment or sacrilegious remarks about "wanting too much" (looking at you, Sima Aunty).

But that's also probably the biggest failing of the show. Dating shows thrive on drama - and there's none here.

Tension doesn't surface until episode four. A Bengali American woman is older than the man she's dating, and cultural norms deem this unacceptable.