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ARAB NEWS

The Voice of a Changing Region

SINCE 1975



CEASEFIRE FILTERS

Israel halts all aid to Gaza

• Residents fear 'famine and chaos' • Red Cross says 'essential' to maintain Gaza truce

AP Cairo

Israel stopped the entry of all goods and supplies into the Gaza Strip on Sunday and warned of "additional consequences" if Hamas doesn't accept a new proposal to extend a fragile ceasefire, while key mediator Egypt accused Israel of using "starvation as a weapon."

UN chief Antonio Guterres called for Israel to end its suspension of humanitarian aid to Gaza "immediately."

"The secretary-general urges all parties to make every effort to prevent a return to hostilities in Gaza. He calls for humanitarian aid to flow back into Gaza immediately and for the release of all hostages," said a statement from the UN posted on X.

The UN humanitarian agency's head condemned Israel's action as being contrary to international law.

"Israel's decision to halt aid into Gaza is alarming. International humanitarian law is clear: We must be allowed access to deliver vital lifesaving aid," OCHA head Thomas Fletcher wrote on X.

Hamas accused Israel of trying to derail the ceasefire agreement hours after its first phase ended.

It called the decision to cut off aid "cheap extortion, a war crime and a blatant attack" on the truce, which took hold in January after over a year of negotiations.



Palestinians gather on Sunday to receive food supplies outside a distribution center at Jabalia refugee camp in northern Gaza Strip. Reuters

Both sides stopped short of saying the ceasefire had ended.

The first phase, which included a surge in humanitarian assistance after months of growing hunger in the territory, expired on Saturday.

The two sides have yet to negotiate the second phase, in which Hamas was to release dozens of remaining hostages in return for an Israeli pullout from Gaza and a lasting ceasefire. Talks should have begun a month ago.

INSIDE

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Egyptian Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty condemned Israel's decision as "a flagrant and clear violation of humanitarian law" and called for the immediate implementation of the second phase.

The International Committee of the Red Cross, which has facilitated the releases of hostages and Palestinian prisoners, said the ceasefire has saved countless lives, and "any unraveling of the forward momentum

created over the last six weeks risks plunging people back into despair."

Israel described the new proposal as a US one.

There was no immediate comment from the US, and it was unclear when US envoy Steve Witkoff, who was expected to visit the region last week, would arrive.

The war has left most of Gaza's population of over 2 million dependent on international aid.

PEACE HOPE

Displaced Kurds seek relief after years of war

AP Baghdad

Iraqi Kurdish villagers, displaced by fighting between Turkish forces and Kurdish militants that has played out for years in northern Iraq, are finally allowing themselves to hope they will soon be able to go home.

Their hopes were raised after the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, on Saturday declared a ceasefire in the 40-year insurgency against the Turkish government, answering a call to disarm from earlier in the week by the group's leader, Abdullah Ocalan, who has been imprisoned in Turkey since 1999.

If implemented, the truce could not only be a turning point in Turkey but could also bring much-needed stability to the volatile region spanning the border between the two countries.

In the border area of Amedi in Iraq's Dohuk province — once a thriving agricultural community — around 200 villages had been emptied of their residents by the fighting, according to a 2020 study by the regional Iraqi Kurdish government.

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Reset in ties expected as Riyadh braces to receive Lebanese president

FAISAL J. ABBAS | EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

A reset in Saudi-Lebanese ties is expected as President Joseph Aoun arrives in Riyadh today, his first international destination since his election on Jan. 9.

This is significant because Saudi-Lebanese relations have been deteriorating since the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in 2005 at the hands of Hezbollah. Although Riyadh never broke off bilateral ties officially, the relationship with Beirut has lacked warmth and eventually worsened, given Hezbollah's provocative statements, its role in exporting captagon and even its provision of military aid and expertise to the Kingdom's enemies.

Aoun — who was elected without

interference from Hezbollah or the Assad regime, given the dramatic changes that saw the former weakened and the latter collapse last December — is expected to reach out to reset the relationship with the Kingdom, where more than 100,000 Lebanese live and work. It is also hoped that a ban on Saudis traveling to Lebanon will be lifted.

In his inaugural address, President Aoun sent several — and long-awaited — reassuring messages. He pledged to fight corruption and restrict the right to bear arms and declare war to the government exclusively. And addressing Gulf countries, Aoun pledged that Lebanon will only export "the best of what it has."

His pledges have been warmly welcomed. In a recent interview, former Saudi intelligence chief Prince Turki



X: @FaisalJAbbas

Al-Faisal expressed optimism over the changes occurring in Lebanon.

Talking to Arab News' "Frankly Speaking" program, he said: "The Kingdom has wholeheartedly supported the actions of the Lebanese parliament in electing the president."

He rightly pointed out that the Lebanese people were tired of having to be the sacrificial lamb, "for either sectarian or other political factions, whether they be Hezbollah or some other Lebanese parties in the course of the development in the future."

Prince Turki also said that what he hears from Saudis is "that they're willing and anxious to be able to go back to Lebanon. Those who have not invested yet, I think, are also thinking of the opportunities there."

The prince's sentiments were corroborated by the Lebanese ambassador to the Kingdom Dr. Fawzi Kabbara. Writing in this newspaper in an exclusive column that will appear tomorrow, Dr. Kabbara states that Aoun's visit to Riyadh is not just an exercise in diplomacy, but "a pivotal moment that could redefine Lebanese-Saudi relations."

Dr. Kabbara points out that Saudi Arabia's support is more significant than ever, serving as a beacon of hope and opportunity for Lebanon's future.

As such, it is highly likely that Saudi-Lebanese ties are set to soar following the president's visit. But Lebanon's road to recovery is going to be a bumpy one; this is why a firm and determined president such as Joseph Aoun deserves full support from Saudi Arabia and the world at large.

Ramadan embodies the principles of compassion, empathy, and generosity, offering an opportunity to reconnect with family and community.

Antonio Guterres
UN secretary-general



Radar

KSA today



Riyadh Embroidery

Resa Perfumer is offering a guided creative workshop that combines photos and embroidery. Join the session on March 6 through experiences.suplift.com.



Dhahran Mihrab workshop

In this workshop conducted by Ithra Center's Energy Exhibit, participants will get to explore the Mihrab, its origin story and the meaning behind its design. Runs until April 30. Check the Ithra app for more details.



Riyadh Cultural festival

Explore Hakawi Al-Ammaria for magical nights with scenic views, stargazing and delightful refreshments in a serene outdoor setting. Visit riyadh.sa for booking.



AlUla Explore sound

Enter "Bayt Al-Hams" ("The Whispering House") by Tarek Atoui for an art experience that explores the relationship between materials and sound. Runs until April 30. For more details, visit experiencealula.com.

TheRegister

THE PICTURES THAT MARK THE DAY



Riyadh Gov. Prince Faisal bin Bandar received Dean of the Diplomatic Corps and Ambassador of Djibouti to the Kingdom Dya-Eddine Bamakhrama, as well as heads of countries accredited to

the Kingdom, in Riyadh on Sunday. Everyone offered their congratulations on behalf of the members of the diplomatic corps accredited to the Kingdom on the holy month of Ramadan, Saudi Press Agency reported.

Meanwhile, Prince Saud bin Abdullah bin Jalawi, governor of Jeddah, received the Consul General of Kenya in Jeddah Aden Mahmoud Mohammed, on Sunday. The two discussed topics of common interest.

Today's Number

1.9m

According to Ministry of Environment, Water, and Agriculture, local date production in the Kingdom exceeded 1.9 million tonnes in 2024, Saudi Press Agency reported on Sunday.

Review

Gymkhana

WAAD HUSSAIN

Gymkhana Riyadh, inspired by its Michelin-starred London counterpart, offers a refined take on classic and contemporary Indian cuisine.

Gymkhana is presenting a specially curated iftar menu priced at SR235 (\$63) per person for the holy month of Ramadan. The meal begins with a selection of Ramadan-inspired mocktails and Saudi gahwa, setting the stage for an indulgent feast.

The starters bring an assortment of textures and flavors, from the crisp pappadam selection served with tomato kalonji chutney and nimbu achari raita to the tangy gol guppas filled with jaljeera, potato, and sprouting moong.



The potli vegetable samosa, paired with chutney, offers a satisfying crunch, while the aloo chaat with tamarind and sev balances sweetness with spice.

For those who enjoy heartier options, the kassoori chicken tikka with moong sprouts and kasundi kachumber add a smoky depth to the spread.

For the main course, diners can choose between dum lamb biryani, Goan prawn curry, or chicken butter masala, each served with dal lasooni and a bread basket. The biryani is fragrant and well-spiced, the prawn curry offers a coastal touch with its coconut-infused sauce, and the butter chicken delivers the comforting, creamy flavors that many expect from a classic North Indian dish.

What's Trending

Today's hot topics explained by Afshan Aziz



STILL ROCKIN' Billy Joel

Billy Joel recently experienced a brief mishap during his concert at Mohegan Sun Arena in Connecticut, US, but quickly regained his footing.

The 75-year-old musician was performing his hit "It's Still Rock and Roll to Me" when he lost his balance after spinning his microphone stand and tossing it toward the audience. In the moment, Joel stumbled and fell to the ground, landing on his side.

However, the crowd's reaction was swift and supportive. As seen in a TikTok video shared by a concertgoer, after a moment lying on his back, Joel rolled over, repositioned himself, and managed to get back on his feet with the audience erupting in applause.

The show continued seamlessly, and Joel's performance remained energetic. The set featured classics like "Piano Man" and "Movin' Out (Anthony's Song)."

The concert at Mohegan Sun was part of Joel's ongoing tour, which will continue throughout 2025.

'NOT A BAD ACTRESS!'

Alexandra Daddario

Alexandra Daddario, who has appeared across television and film, recently addressed the claim that she is a "bad actress."

In an appearance on Elle's "Thirst Trap" drinking game, Daddario defended her acting skills with clear conviction.

"I'm not a bad actress," she said, looking directly into the camera. "I've just done some projects that don't showcase me in the way that I should be showcased. Okay? (Direction) and the writing is everything, and sometimes I'm lit poorly, but I'm not a bad actress. I got an Emmy nomination. How do you think I did that?"

Daddario's portrayal of newlywed journalist Rachel Patton in the first season of HBO's "The White

Lotus" earned her an Emmy nomination in 2022.

Her nuanced performance caught the attention of critics and audiences alike, earning her a well-deserved nod for Outstanding Supporting Actress in a Limited Series or Television Movie.

In addition to discussing her Emmy nomination, Daddario reflected on her experiences working on various projects. She emphasized that her frustrations had more to do with the behind-the-scenes drama than the project's final result, saying: "I have a lot of acting gigs I regret doing. This is a hard one, but I'll be vague ... The movie doesn't have to be good, but you know, fighting is not something that I'm into." Daddario's next project is a role in the film "A Tree Fell in the Woods."



TheRegion

The Middle East Roundup

Arab News Jeddah

- The Ramadan experience at Capital Majlis in Abu Dhabi is an ideal space to gather with family and friends. Guests can enjoy iftar and sahoor meals featuring Emirati, Moroccan, and international cuisines with an array of delicious desserts, all prepared by award-winning chefs. Held

at the Abu Dhabi National Exhibition Centre until March 30. More details on adnec.ae.

- The Heritage Village Festival in Askar, Bahrain, offers a glimpse into traditional Bahraini life, featuring historical architecture, artisanal crafts and local cuisine. Held until March 18, the festival is ideal for

families, tourists and history enthusiasts.

- The Throwback Food Festival 2025 is set against the backdrop of the Old Doha Port until the end of Ramadan. The festival offers a rich cultural experience, immersing guests in art, history, and culinary traditions that bring Qatar's heritage to life.

Prayer Times in Saudi Arabia

March 3	Fajr	Sunrise	Dhuhr	Asr	Maghreb	Isha
Makkah	5:24	06:40	12:33	03:54	06:26	08:26
Madinah	5:24	06:42	12:34	03:55	06:26	08:25
Riyadh	4:56	06:14	12:05	03:26	05:57	07:57
Abha	5:13	06:27	12:22	03:44	06:17	08:17
Dammam	4:42	06:01	11:52	03:12	05:42	07:42

FRANKLY SPEAKING *The* Interview



Arab News Riyadh

Prince Turki Al-Faisal, Saudi Arabia's former intelligence chief and ambassador to the US and UK, has long been vocal about the plight of the Palestinian people and the destruction caused by Israel's military campaigns.

Now, in the wake of the latest war in Gaza, he has called for a fundamental shift in how reconstruction efforts are financed — by forcing Israel to contribute to rebuilding the very infrastructure it has repeatedly destroyed.

Appearing on the Arab News current affairs program "Frankly Speaking," Prince Turki laid out his case for why Israel should bear financial responsibility for the damage it has inflicted on Gaza and the West Bank — rather than the Gulf states footing the bill.

"I have been saying this for some time now, that there should be a fund, a worldwide fund for the reconstruction, not just in Gaza, but also in the West Bank. And Israel should be forced to chip in to that fund," he told "Frankly Speaking" host Katie Jensen.

"We can't have Israel, every time we reconstruct Gaza or the West Bank, coming and demolishing what has been reconstructed. That is unacceptable.

"And I think from now on, it is an issue of finality rather than temporary or procedural actions that are taken to build and then wait for the next round of destruction that comes from Israel. There has to be a finality for this situation by an end to the conflict."

Israel mounted its military operation in Gaza in retaliation for the Oct. 7, 2023, Hamas-led attack on southern Israel, which saw some 1,200 people killed, most of them civilians, and around 250 taken hostage, many of them foreign nationals.

At least 50,000 Palestinians were killed in the ensuing conflict and some 1.9 million displaced from their homes before a ceasefire deal was finally agreed on Jan. 19. Much of the enclave now lies in ruins and humanitarian needs are immense.

Prince Turki said a permanent ceasefire was the only way to guarantee that reconstruction efforts were not repeatedly undone by future Israeli military operations.

"The next phase of the ceasefire, as we have seen, will see a permanent ceasefire come into effect not just in Gaza but all of Palestine," he said.

"That is the only way that we can guarantee that whatever is reconstructed can remain as a viable Palestinian state that can become independent and self-governing with all of the rights of its people."

While much of the world's focus has been on Gaza, Prince Turki warned that Israeli policies in the West Bank, where refugee camps have been raided by troops and settler violence has increased, should not be overlooked.

"The struggle for Palestine has not ended with the ceasefire



PRINCE TURKI AL-FAISAL
FORMER SAUDI INTELLIGENCE CHIEF

Should Israel pay for rebuilding Gaza?

Prince Turki views permanent ceasefire as only way to guarantee reconstruction will not be futile; sounds warning on Israel's actions in the West Bank; says Lebanese people will safeguard country's new direction



(Main and above) Prince Turki spoke on the crisis in Gaza, Ukraine, Lebanon and other hotspots with Katie Jensen, host of "Frankly Speaking." AN photos

in Gaza," he said. "We see the Benjamin Netanyahu government doing similar things to what they did in Gaza in the West Bank, although at a slower

pace than they did in Gaza."

"They're uprooting people in the West Bank, emptying some of the refugee camps there, and forcibly driving residents of

the camps out with no destination. That is unacceptable as well. That is a form of ethnic cleansing. And yet Israel gets away with it, and nobody — especially not the US — condemns it."

Despite the controversy, Prince Turki noted that the international community's response to the war in Gaza had been unprecedented. "I must say that throughout this brutal attack on the Palestinians by the Netanyahu government, the world reaction has been quite good," he said.

"You saw the demonstrations that took place and are still taking place in various places around the world in opposition

to this brutality and in support of the freedom and independence of a Palestinian state. That is a very healthy sign."

Asked whether Hamas could have a role to play in governing postwar Gaza, perhaps as part of the Palestinian Authority, and whether the West would tolerate such an arrangement, Prince Turki said there were those within the Palestinian militant group who rightly prioritize the needs of the Gazan people who could well be included.

"When you say Hamas, there are individuals who are definitely neutral, if you like, and more in terms of not bound by party or by commitment to either Hamas or Fatah or any of the other Palestinian groupings there," he said.

Turning to Lebanon, Prince Turki expressed optimism about the country's new government, headed by President Joseph Aoun and Prime Minister Nawaf Salam. Aoun arrives in Saudi Arabia on Monday on his first official trip abroad since he was elected president on January 9.

The new government was created after more than two years of political paralysis, which had prevented Lebanon's recovery from its devastating financial crisis that began in 2019 and the 15-month conflict between Israel and Hezbollah that began in October 2023.

"The Kingdom has wholeheartedly supported the actions of the Lebanese parliament in electing the president," Prince Turki said. "And now

The brutality of the Israeli treatment of the Palestinians does inspire reactions not just from the Arab world but from the world community.

the president has designated a prime minister and I think they have announced a government that hopefully will take its place as the ruling government of Lebanon."

He added: "I think the Lebanese people are tired of having to be the sacrificial lamb. So, it is the Lebanese people, I think, who will be the safeguards of this new direction."

The Kingdom recently hosted high-level talks between the US and Russia to discuss a potential peace deal in Ukraine and other topics. In doing so, they reinforced Saudi Arabia's position as a key player in global diplomacy.

"They seem to have set a course forward on a mutual return of diplomatic representation and also mutual cooperation, not only politically but also in terms of commercial and other enterprises that can bring benefit to their two peoples," Prince Turki said of Moscow and Washington.

"It's good to see that the potential for nuclear war between America and Russia has decreased incredibly. Is a reassuring sign that we do not face a nuclear holocaust, for which there might have been a reason had this meeting not taken place."

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FRANKLY
SPEAKING

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[arabnews.com/
FranklySpeaking](https://arabnews.com/FranklySpeaking)

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JOOD REGIONS CAMPAIGN

Saudi entities sign housing deal to support vulnerable families

Arab News Riyadh

The National Developmental Housing Foundation, known as Sakan, and the Social Development Bank have partnered to provide 4,000 housing units for eligible families across Saudi Arabia as part of the second phase of the Jood Regions campaign.

The agreement was signed during a ceremony attended by Minister of Municipalities and Housing Majed Al-Hogail, Minister of Human Resources and Social Development Ahmed Al-Rajhi, and Deputy Minister of Interior Nasser Al-Dawood.

This partnership builds on a previous agreement that secured housing for 1,000 families. The initiative directly supports Vision 2030's goal of increasing homeownership rates among citizens, the Saudi Press Agency reported on Sunday.



Minister of Municipalities and Housing Majed Al-Hogail, center, Minister of Human Resources Ahmed Al-Rajhi, left, and Deputy Interior Minister Nasser Al-Dawood attended the event. SPA

Sakan Secretary-General Abdulaziz Al-Karidis and the bank's CEO, Sultan Al-Humaidi, signed the agreement.

Al-Humaidi confirmed that the agreement is part of the bank's efforts to strengthen strategic partnerships that provide sustainable financing solutions.

He noted that cooperation with Sakan through the construction completion program will help

eligible families complete their housing units. The program aims to finance 5,000 beneficiaries nominated by Sakan from social security recipients and similar categories.

Al-Humaidi said: "At the Social Development Bank, we are committed to leveraging our capabilities to support the most vulnerable groups and enable them to access suitable housing.

We believe housing stability is key to enhancing quality of life and achieving Vision 2030 targets of increasing homeownership rates among citizens."

Al-Karidis explained that the agreement is part of efforts to develop sustainable solutions for eligible families and highlighted the bank's crucial role in supporting housing empowerment for beneficiaries.

Meanwhile, the Jood Regions campaign headquarters was inaugurated at Misk City in Riyadh on Saturday under the patronage of Al-Hogail.

Al-Hogail expressed his gratitude to the leadership for their generous support of the campaign, which included an SR150 million (\$40 million) contribution, and for their ongoing interest in supporting developmental housing programs and community initiatives.

Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Crowd management

Makkah enhances services for Ramadan visitors

Government agencies in Makkah have begun implementing plans to provide the best services for visitors and Umrah performers during Ramadan. The General Authority for the Care of the Grand Mosque and Prophet's Mosque has launched its Ramadan season plan with several projects.

The Tahallul from Nusuk service has been trialed at five locations within the Grand Mosque, following strict hygiene standards. For the first time, the authority is offering a mobile hair-cutting service via specially designed carts that move with the crowds.

Additionally, luggage storage services have been enhanced with designated shelves and an electronic tracking system, including six drop-off points at the mosque's main entrances.

The number of electric golf carts has been doubled to 400, distributed across 11 locations inside the Grand Mosque. SPA Makkah

Quality assurance

KSA launches food safety campaign

The Saudi Food and Drug Authority, in collaboration with the Ministry of Municipalities and Housing, has launched a nationwide regulatory campaign to enhance food safety during Ramadan.

The campaign focuses on verifying the quality of commonly consumed foods and ensuring compliance with health regulations. It includes intensified inspections of food warehouses, sales outlets, and distribution centers to check the accuracy of food and nutritional data, assess compliance with transportation and storage requirements, and examine product tracking mechanisms.

Alongside inspections, the campaign features food safety training programs for food establishment employees to enhance compliance with health requirements and ensure the availability of safe, high-quality products. SPA Riyadh



HIGH LIGHT

Al-Qibli Mosque is one of 30 mosques being restored across the Kingdom in the second phase of the project.

The mosque's Najdi architectural style, characterized by clay construction and natural materials, is being preserved and enhanced. SPA

HERITAGE PRESERVATION

Historic mosque undergoes restoration in Saudi capital

Saudi craftsmen revive a centuries-old landmark using traditional techniques in crown prince's nationwide development initiative

Arab News Riyadh

Al-Qibli Mosque, a key component of the Prince Mohammed bin Salman Project for the Development of Historical Mosques, is undergoing restoration in Riyadh's historic Manfuha neighborhood, the Saudi Press Agency reported.

Originally built in 1689 AD and later reconstructed by King Abdulaziz in 1945, the mosque's proximity to the old princely palace made it a significant prayer hall for princes and

senior state officials.

The mosque's Najdi architectural style, characterized by clay construction and natural materials, is being preserved and enhanced. Its area will expand from 642 sq. meters to 804 sq. meters, increasing its capacity to 440 worshippers.

A major challenge is sourcing and preparing the necessary wood, which requires traditional techniques such as straightening, upturning, and pest treatment, the SPA reported.

Craftsmen are meticulously measuring and preparing components onsite, employing traditional decorative techniques

to revive the mosque's original architectural character.

The project also aims to raise awareness about the importance of preserving these historical landmarks, according to the SPA.

Al-Qibli Mosque is one of 30 mosques being restored across the Kingdom in the second phase of the project, led by Saudi companies and engineers specializing in heritage buildings.

This initiative balances historical preservation with modern construction standards, ensuring sustainability while retaining the mosque's

authentic architectural identity.

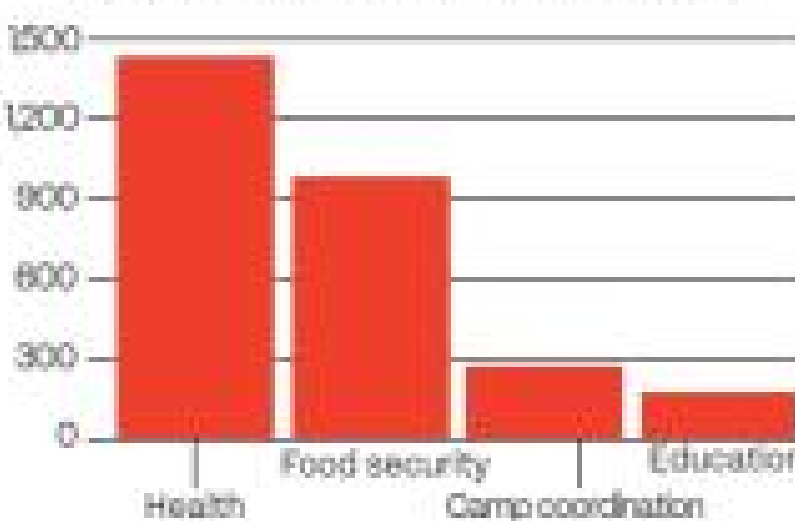
Phase two follows the successful completion of phase one in 2018, which restored 30 mosques in 10 regions across the Kingdom.

The project's strategic objectives include rehabilitating mosques for worship, restoring architectural authenticity, highlighting the Kingdom's cultural heritage, and enhancing the religious and cultural significance of these historical sites.

The project aligns with Vision 2030 by preserving architectural heritage and influencing the design of modern mosques.

The Day's FIGURES

KSRELIEF LARGEST COMPLETED AND ONGOING PROJECTS IN 106 COUNTRIES



Source: ksrelief.org

Cultural program

Umrah guests tour Madinah Qur'an complex

The guests of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques Program for Umrah and Visit toured the King Fahd Complex for the Printing of the Holy Qur'an in Madinah, as part of a cultural program organized by the Ministry of Islamic Affairs.

The group comprised 250 Umrah performers from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Türkiye, Sri Lanka, Nepal, the Maldives, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Georgia, Australia, New Zealand, and Russia.

During the visit, the guests were briefed on the extensive work involved in serving the Holy Qur'an, including printing, publishing, translation and distribution.

They learned about the Kingdom's efforts in preserving the Qur'an, along with the rigorous processes of review and verification to ensure the highest standards of accuracy and quality.

At the end of the visit, the complex officials presented the guests with copies of the Holy Qur'an. SPA Riyadh

Sustainable growth

Islamic nations back Riyadh Charter for AI

Fifty-three member states of the Islamic World Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, have approved the Riyadh Charter for Artificial Intelligence in the Islamic World.

The charter was announced during the Global AI Summit, organized by the Saudi Data and Artificial Intelligence Authority in September 2024 in Riyadh.

The charter was approved during the 45th session of the ICESCO Executive Council, held in Tunisia, with all member states in attendance and the Saudi AI authority participating.

The session discussed the Riyadh charter as a comprehensive strategic framework for AI development, aligning with Islamic values, promoting sustainable development, and enhancing international cooperation.

Member states affirmed their commitment to strengthening AI governance and supporting its responsible adoption in the Islamic world. SPA Riyadh



PALM POWER

Dates at dusk: a core delight on every iftar spread

Saudi Arabia's regions boast different varieties, reflecting agricultural diversity, local traditions

Nada Hameed Jeddah

From the humble iftar plate to grand festivals, dates are essential for Saudi cuisine and social traditions.

Their rich flavor, nourishing qualities, and deep-rooted historic significance make them a cherished part of Ramadan and daily life for Saudis and Muslims everywhere.

Served alone or paired with cream, ghee, or coffee, dates are typically the first bite taken after a long day of fasting, following the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad, which said: "When one of you breaks his fast, let him break it with dates, for they are a blessing; and if he cannot find dates, then with water, for it is pure."

Their natural sweetness and rich nutritional content make them the ideal choice to renew energy levels in the body.

Consumer preferences for dates vary across Saudi Arabia's regions, reflecting agricultural diversity and local traditions.

In the central region, there is high demand for sukkari, medjool, and wanana dates, while, in the Western Region, khodari, safri, and barni types are usually preferred.

In the eastern region, Al-Ahsa's renowned khalas and burji dates are widely consumed.

The people of the southern region primarily choose sukkari, khalas, safri, and barni, while the Northern Region of the country tends to favor barni, barhi, and hilwah dates.

Ajwa dates are popular across all regions, as many seek to follow the Sunnah in which the variety was mentioned.

Abdulhady Al-Suqair, a veteran date farmer and investor from AlUla, told Arab News: "Different regions favor specific types of dates based on agricultural factors and nutritional value.



Several well-known date festivals celebrate the fruit's significance in Saudi culture around the Kingdom every year — Buraidah, Unalzah, and AlUla. SPA

fresh well water for irrigation if their primary water source is high in salinity or bitterness. Additionally, they invest in specialized cold storage to maintain freshness, preventing dates from drying out or losing their flavor."

Dates can be eaten fresh but are also an ingredient in various traditional and modern dishes. They are also used in beverages and desserts.

Al-Suqair said: "Dates in Ramadan are looked on as a very special ingredient in the Saudi traditional kitchen, so they are paired with traditional foods such as ghee, butter, wild sesame, millet, and corn.

"(They are) used in baking for date-based pastries and desserts, processed into special items such as date cakes, biscuits, and porridges, and blended into Ramadan beverages, providing a natural energy boost after fasting."

Though dates are associated with Ramadan, they remain a daily staple in Saudi households. They are often served with coffee as a gesture of hospitality, and as an Arabic saying attests: "Dates are the food of the poor and the dessert of the rich."

Gifting dates is also a time-honored Ramadan practice, and Al-Suqair said: "One of the most cherished Ramadan traditions is exchanging gifts, and dates are a popular choice."

NUMBER

700

Some 700 tonnes of Saudi dates will be distributed across 102 countries during Ramadan as part of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques' Gift Program for Providing Dates.



favors a different variety, saying: "Sukkari dates are my family's favorite. They're naturally caramel-like and melt in the mouth.

"We always stock up on them from the Qassim markets before Ramadan begins. I like to enjoy them with tahini and Saudi coffee before the main iftar meal during the holy month of Ramadan."

As Ramadan approaches, the demand for dates surges, leading to higher market availability and increased prices.

Al-Suqair said: "In childhood I worked alongside my father on his farm, developing with him — may he rest in peace — various farming techniques and methods for preserving and

marketing the harvest.

"From him I learned how to care for palm trees, harvest dates, and properly store them for extended periods. I witnessed the evolution of storing barni dates, from using palm-frond containers at the time to metal tins, then plastic buckets, and eventually to processing them in specialized factories for date-based food products.

"Farmers now prioritize quality over quantity, carefully nurturing date palms by ensuring optimal irrigation and organic fertilization. This meticulous care results in premium-sized dates with enhanced taste, as each palm produces a carefully regulated yield."

He added: "Many farmers use

MARITIME CHARM

A tapestry of traditions: Farasan Islanders embrace spirit of holy month

Arab News Riyadh

Steeped in history, the Farasan Islands have long embraced unique Ramadan traditions, welcoming the holy month with a blend of faith and maritime charm.

Farasan women used to prepare their homes by painting walls to highlight intricate engravings and plasterwork, while laying smooth pebbles on courtyards to add a maritime-inspired touch.

Amnah Aqili spoke to the Saudi Press Agency about these preparations, recalling the renewal of wooden bed frames, the polishing of utensils, the preparation of



Farasan women used to prepare their homes by painting walls to highlight intricate engravings. SPA

spices, and the weaving of doun palm frond carpets.

Aqili noted that with the arrival of Ramadan, the air would be filled with the scent of mastic from clay water jugs and

FASTFACTS

• The exchange of Ramadan dishes among neighbors is a cherished tradition in the Farasan community.

• The community continues to honor the spirit of Ramadan through acts of worship, compassion, and the exchange of gifts, strengthening both spiritual and social bonds.

the sweet aroma of coffee from traditional pots.

The exchange of Ramadan dishes among neighbors was another cherished tradition in the community.

Abkar Al-Mashrai'i recalled a time over 70 years ago when the islanders would rely on news from Jazan to begin Ramadan.

Nightly recitations of the Qur'an by the glow of lanterns would echo through the alleys, and the muezzin's melodic call would announce sahoor. Children and young men filled the evenings with traditional games, Al-Mashrai'i added.

The Farasan community continues to honor the spirit of Ramadan through acts of worship, compassion, and the exchange of gifts, strengthening both spiritual and social bonds.

HOPE FOR PEACE

Gaza residents pray for better days as Ramadan begins

Israel-Hamas war has shredded many of the familiar and cherished threads of the holy month

AP Jabaliya

Before the war, the holy month of Ramadan was a festive time of increased worship, social gatherings, and cheer for Fatima Al-Absi.

With her husband, the resident of Jabaliya in Gaza said she used to do Ramadan shopping, visit relatives, and head to the mosque for prayers.

But the Israel-Hamas war has shredded many of the familiar and cherished threads of Ramadan as Al-Absi once knew it: Her husband and a son-in-law have been killed, her home was damaged and burnt, and the mosque she attended during Ramadan was destroyed, she said.

"Everything has changed," she said on Saturday as her family observed the first day of Ramadan.

"There's no husband, no home, no proper food or life."

For Al-Absi and other Gaza residents, Ramadan started this year under a fragile ceasefire agreement that paused more than 15 months of a war that has killed tens of thousands of Palestinians and devastated the Gaza Strip.

Compared to last Ramadan, many found relief in the truce — but there's also worry and fear about what's next and grief over the personal and collective losses, the raw wounds, and the numerous scars left behind.



Distressed relatives on Sunday mourn Palestinians killed in an Israeli strike, at a hospital, in northern Gaza Strip. Reuters

"I've lost a lot," said the 57-year-old grandmother, who's been reduced to eking out an existence amid the wreckage.

"Life is difficult. May God grant us patience and strength," she added.

Israel cut off all aid and other supplies to Gaza on Sunday to pressure Hamas to accept a new proposal to extend the first

Life is difficult. May God grant us patience and strength.

phase of the ceasefire.

Hamas accused Israel of trying to derail the existing ceasefire agreement, but both sides stopped short of declaring the truce over.

"We're scared because there's no stability," Al-Absi said, adding that she was praying for the war to end and cannot bear any more losses.

She spoke before Israel

announced the new proposal and the aid cutoff on Sunday.

Though Ramadan is still far from normal, some in the Gaza Strip said that, in some ways, it feels better than last year's.

"We can't predict what will happen next," Amal Abu Sariyah, in Gaza City, said before the month's start.

"Yes, the country is destroyed and the situation is very bad,

but the feeling that the shelling and the killing ... have stopped, makes you (feel) that this year is better than the last one."

Overshadowed by war and displacement, last Ramadan was "very bad" for the Palestinian people, she said.

The 2024 Ramadan in Gaza began with ceasefire talks then at a standstill, hunger worsening across the strip, and no end in sight to the war.

The war was sparked by the Oct. 7, 2023 attack on Israel.

Israel's military offensive has killed over 48,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza's Health Ministry.

Vast areas of Gaza have been destroyed.

Under the ceasefire, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians flooded back into northern Gaza.

After initial relief and joy at returning to their homes — even if damaged or destroyed — they've been grappling with living amid the wreckage.

As Palestinians in the Gaza Strip prepared for Ramadan, shopping for essential household goods and food, some lamented the harsh living conditions and economic hardships but also said they relied on their faith in God to provide for them.

"I used to help people. ... Today, I can't help myself," said Nasser Shouelkh.

"My situation used to improve, and I did not need anything. ... We ask God to stand by us."

CONFLICT

Egypt rejects attempts to form parallel Sudanese government

AFP Cairo

Egypt has rejected attempts to establish a rival government in Sudan, warning that such moves jeopardized the "unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity" of the war-torn country.

Sudan has been locked in a war between the army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces for nearly two years, plunging the country into what the United Nations describes as one of the worst humanitarian disasters in recent memory.

A week ago, the RSF and its allies signed a charter in Kenya declaring the formation of a "government of peace and unity" in areas under their control.



Newly graduated soldiers attend a ceremony in northern Sudan. AFP

"Egypt expresses its rejection of any attempts that threaten the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of brotherly Sudan, including the pursuit of forming a parallel Sudanese government,"

a statement from Cairo's Foreign Ministry said Sunday.

It added that such actions "complicate the situation in Sudan, hinder ongoing efforts to unify political visions and

exacerbate the humanitarian crisis."

Egypt also called on "all Sudanese forces to prioritize the country's supreme national interest and to engage positively in launching a comprehensive political (peace) process without exclusion or external interference."

Last week, Egyptian Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty voiced the same stance in a press conference alongside his Sudanese counterpart Ali Youssef.

"Sudan's territorial integrity is a red line for Egypt," he said, adding that his country "rejects any calls to establish alternative structures outside the current framework."

TRANSITION

Syrian panel to draft new charter

Reuters Damascus

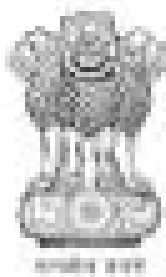
Syria has formed a seven-member committee to draft a constitutional charter for governing its transition to democracy, the presidency said

in a statement on Sunday.

A Turkish Foreign Ministry source separately said Turkish and British officials will discuss Syria's future during a meeting in Ankara on Monday, with security, sanctions, and

economic development on the agenda.

The Turkish source said Turkish Deputy Foreign Minister Nuh Yilmaz and British Junior Foreign Office Minister Hamish Falconer would lead Monday's talks.



CONSULATE GENERAL OF INDIA, JEDDAH

ADVERTISEMENT

NOTICE FOR INVITING TENDER FOR HIRING OF A BUILDING IN MAKKAH ON AN ANNUAL BASIS (EXTENDABLE) FOR SETTING UP INDIAN HAJ PILGRIMS' OFFICE FOR HAJ 1446 H – 2025 G

No. Jed/Haj/118/06/2025

Dated: 03.03.2025

Sealed Tenders/Quotations are invited from the Owners, Mustajirs (legally authorized lessors) or licensed Saudi service provider companies for hiring of a building in Makkah on an annual basis (extendable) for setting up Indian Haj Pilgrims' Office. Preferably, the building should have the following specifications:

- Location: Within a 12 km radius from Haram Sharif
- Tasreeh Capacity: Minimum 600 pilgrims
- Elevators: At least three functional lifts
- Storage: A spacious basement (or designated area) for storing essential Hajj materials
- Meeting Area: Dedicated space on the mezzanine floor or another suitable location
- Parking: Sufficient parking space in front of the building or basement
- Rooms: A minimum of 90-100 rooms

2. The interested and eligible bidders/rightful legal title holders of building in Makkah, including Landlords may submit their proposal as per the procedure detailed in the Tender Document published in the local dailies, uploaded on the Consulate Website and CPP Portal to Vice Consul (Haj), Consulate General of India, Villa No. 34, Behind Saudi National Bank, Tahaliya Street, P.O.Box No. 952, Jeddah-21421 (Telephone No. 6639351) by **10th March, 2025 till (1700 hrs).**

3. Further details in respect of the Tender are available at www.cgijeddah.gov.in & on <https://eprocure.gov.in/eprocure/app>.

News International

RAGING CONFLICT

Ugandan army deploys to town in northeast Congo

AFP Kampala

The Ugandan army confirmed Sunday it has sent troops to another town in northeastern Democratic Republic of Congo to fight local armed groups, amid fears a raging conflict could spiral into a wider war.

"Our troops have entered Mahagi town and we are in control," Uganda's defense and military affairs spokesman Felix Kulayigye said Sunday.

The deployment was requested by the Congolese army following alleged massacres of civilians carried out by a militia known as the Cooperative for the Development of Congo, or Codeco, he said, without providing further details.

Mahagi is in Ituri province, which borders Uganda, where at least 51 people were killed on Feb. 10 by armed men affiliated with Codeco, according to humanitarian and local sources.

Codeco claims it defends the interests of the Lendu community, mainly composed of farmers, against the Hema community, mainly herders.

Uganda already has thousands of troops in other parts of Ituri under an agreement with the

HIGHLIGHTS

- The deployment was requested by the Congolese army following alleged massacres of civilians carried out by a militia known as Codeco.

- Mahagi is in Ituri province, which borders Uganda, where at least 51 people were killed on Feb. 10 by armed men affiliated with Codeco, according to sources.

Congolese government.

Last month, Uganda announced its troops had "taken control" of the provincial capital, Bunia.

Ituri is just north of the provinces of North and South Kivu, which at the end of January fell under the control of the anti-government M23 armed group, which is backed by neighboring Rwanda.

Analysts fear that Uganda and Rwanda's growing presence in eastern Congo could lead to a repeat of the so-called Second Congo War, which lasted from 1998 to 2003, involving many African countries and resulting in millions of deaths from



M23 rebels during the escort of captured FDLR members to Rwanda for repatriation, at the Goma-Gisenyi Grande Barrier border crossing. Reuters

violence, disease and famine.

Meanwhile, Congo's army denied on Sunday that 20 fighters linked to the Rwandan genocide had been captured on its territory, calling a video of their handover to Rwanda "faked."

The statement came after the Rwanda-backed M23 armed group in eastern Congo said on Saturday it had captured fighters from the Democratic Forces

for the Liberation of Rwanda, or FDLR, a militia founded by ethnic Hutus who took part in the genocide of Tutsis in Rwanda in 1994.

Rwanda has long pointed to the alleged presence of the FDLR in eastern Congo to justify its support for the M23.

With Rwanda's backing, the M23 has seized swaths of the Congo's troubled, mineral-rich

east in recent months, including the key provincial capitals of Goma and Bukavu.

The M23 released a video showing its forces handing over 20 alleged FDLR fighters to Rwanda at a border post between the two countries.

"This is a faked incident in poor taste orchestrated with the sole aim of discrediting our army," the Congolese armed forces chiefs of

staff said in a statement.

"This is part of the Rwandan strategy to justify the invasion of parts of the DRC's territory," it added.

"The Rwandan authorities, who specialize in the art of lies and manipulation, took old FDLR detainees, dressed them in new military fatigues, and passed them off as FDLR fighters newly captured in Goma."

ASSISTANCE

Jakarta NGO sends off new group of medics to volunteer at Gaza hospital

It includes nurse, midwife, anesthesiologist and general practitioners

Sheany Yasuko Lai Jakarta

A new group of Indonesian medics is on their way to Gaza to volunteer at the Indonesia Hospital, the Jakarta-based nongovernmental organization that assembled the team said on Sunday, as uncertainties loom over the second phase of the ceasefire.

The Indonesian NGO Medical Emergency Rescue Committee, or MER-C, has been organizing teams of doctors and nurses since last March, as part of emergency deployments led by the World Health Organization.

The latest batch, comprising two general practitioners, a nurse, an anesthesiologist and



The NGO has been organizing teams of doctors since last March. Supplied

a midwife, departed Jakarta on Saturday and is expected to enter Gaza in the next couple of days.

"They will be stationed at the Indonesia Hospital, as the facility has resumed operations," Sarbini Abdul Murad, chairman of MER-C's board of trustees in Jakarta, told Arab News on Sunday.

"Gaza is in need of different kinds of doctors, as the number of victims and the availability of local doctors are disproportionate."

MER-C has so far sent 45 volunteers to Gaza as part of its emergency medical teams, which previously comprised

other specialists, including internists and surgeons.

The Indonesia Hospital — a facility that was funded and opened by MER-C in late 2015 — was one of the first sites hit when Israel began its assault on Gaza in October 2023.

Since the first phase of the ceasefire began on Jan. 19, the hospital has also been gradually resuming essential services, from surgeries to emergency and inpatient services, as it worked to reach at least 50 percent of full capacity by July.

For nurse Ade Andrian, a member of MER-C's latest emergency medical team, the opportunity to volunteer in Gaza was a long time coming, having first registered in 2023, a couple of months after Israel began its latest assault on the enclave.

HIGHLIGHTS

- MER-C has so far sent 45 volunteers to Gaza as part of its emergency medical teams, which previously comprised other specialists.

- The Indonesia Hospital was one of the first sites hit when Israel began its assault on Gaza in October 2023.

- Since the first phase of the ceasefire began on Jan. 19, the hospital has also been gradually resuming essential services.

"Praise be to God that today I have been given the chance to join the EMT to be a part of the humanitarian mission for the people of Gaza," Andrian said.

However, as the first stage of the ceasefire ended without agreement on continuing into a second phase and Israel moved to block entry of all humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip on Sunday, the latest developments are sparking concerns.

"The blocking of humanitarian aid will not only impact the Indonesia Hospital but also all the other hospitals in Gaza and also the residents of the enclave," MER-C's Murad said.

"We hope that Israel will soon continue with the ceasefire deal according to what was agreed. If this is violated, then we fear another massive wave of civilian loss."

VIOLENCE

Militants' ambush kills 11 soldiers in north Niger

AFP Niamey

An attack claimed by Al-Qaeda-linked militants killed 11 soldiers in northern Niger near the Algerian border, local sources and media reported.

According to Air Info news website, an army patrol was

ambushed in the Ekade Malane area on Friday and the JNIM group claimed responsibility.

It said the 11 soldiers were buried on Saturday in the presence of top officers including armed forces chief of staff Gen. Moussa Salaou Barmou.

State radio confirmed the attack

and death toll but said the patrol was ambushed by "bandits."

Niger forces stationed near Algeria face occasional attacks by armed assailants.

These are usually not attributed to militants, who are more active in borderlands straddling Mali and Burkina Faso.

Niger's vast desert north is however a notorious corridor for illicit traffickers and a transit point for thousands of Africans hoping to reach Europe.

The Sahel country is governed by a military junta which seized power in July 2023 vowing to tackle Niger's security issues.

Yet unrest persists: Since the coup at least 2,400 people have been killed in attacks, according to the international conflict monitor ACLED.

Together with junta-led allies Mali and Burkina Faso, Niger is setting up a joint 5,000-strong force to tackle the region's unrest.

INVESTIGATION

Sri Lanka hunts for police chief over deadly raid

Travel ban imposed on Deshabandu Tennakoon to stop him from leaving the country

AFP Colombo

Sri Lankan police were searching for their chief on Sunday after a court order for his arrest was issued over the killing of an officer during a botched raid, an official said.

Inspector-General of Police Deshabandu Tennakoon has been missing since a magistrate in the island's south ordered his arrest on Friday, following allegations that he had ordered the raid on Dec. 31, 2023.

"We went to his home to carry out the arrest warrant but he had gone into hiding, leaving behind his bodyguards," a senior officer said.

He said the court had also imposed a foreign travel ban on

Tennakoon, 53, to stop him from leaving the island.

Tennakoon ordered a unit from Colombo to search a hotel in Weligama, a resort town about 150 kilometers south of the capital, for illegal drugs.

Local police, unaware of the undercover operation, confronted the unit from the capital, sparking a gunbattle in which one officer was killed and another critically wounded. No drugs were found at the hotel.

Tennakoon was controversially named as police chief in November 2023 but his appointment was challenged in the Supreme Court, which suspended him in July pending the completion of a hearing.

He was given the top job despite the highest court finding in a separate case that he had



Deshabandu Tennakoon

tortured a suspect.

The court had ordered Tennakoon to pay half a million rupees (\$1,600) to the victim but the government at the time ignored judicial orders to take disciplinary action against him.

Separately, Sri Lanka's leftist president recently received a boost from Washington, with the International Monetary

Fund greenlighting a roughly \$330 million payout under an existing loan agreement.

The IMF board approved the latest review of an existing four-year loan agreement, noting in a statement that Sri Lanka's program performance "has been strong," and that almost all quantitative targets had been met.

The board's approval gives Sri Lanka "immediate access" to around \$334 million to support its economic policies and reform program, the IMF said, and follows an earlier staff level agreement struck with the Sri Lankan authorities.

"Reforms in Sri Lanka are bearing fruit and the economic recovery has been remarkable," IMF deputy managing director Kenji Okamura said in a statement.



Tourists and devotees visit St Peter's Square in The Vatican. Pope Francis has been in hospital for more than two weeks. AFP

'AFFECTION AND CLOSENESS'

Pope stable in hospital, thanks well-wishers for support

Reuters Vatican City

Pope Francis, in a stable condition as he battles pneumonia in hospital for the 17th day, met two Vatican officials on Sunday and offered thanks to well-wishers for their prayers and support in a written message.

Francis, 88, was admitted to Rome's Gemelli Hospital on Feb. 14 with respiratory problems that degenerated into double pneumonia — a serious infection in both lungs that can inflame and scar them, making

it difficult to breathe.

The Vatican said on Saturday that the pontiff's condition had stabilized, following an "isolated" breathing crisis a day earlier.

"I would like to thank you for the prayers," Francis said in a note released by the Vatican in place of his usual Sunday prayer with devotees, which the pope was not able to lead for the third week running.

"I feel all your affection and closeness," the message said.

Francis also met at the hospital

FASTFACT

Francis, 88, was admitted to Rome's Gemelli Hospital on Feb. 14 with respiratory problems that degenerated into double pneumonia.

on Sunday with Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Vatican's senior official, and Parolin's deputy, said Vatican spokesperson Matteo Bruni, without giving further details about the meeting.

The pope, who is known to

work himself to exhaustion, has continued leading the Vatican during his hospital stay and last met Parolin and the deputy at the Gemelli on Feb. 24.

Earlier on Sunday, the Vatican said in a one-line update that the pope had rested well overnight. A full medical update on his condition is expected on Sunday evening.

A Vatican official said on Sunday that Francis was eating normally, moving about his hospital room, and continuing his treatment.

Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Tragedy

Eight dead in India avalanche

Rescuers recovered the eighth and final body from the site of an avalanche in a remote area of northern India, the army said Sunday, marking the end of a marathon operation in sub-zero temperatures. More than 50 workers were submerged under snow and debris after the avalanche hit a construction camp on Friday near Mana village on the border with Tibet in the Himalayan state of Uttarakhand.

Authorities had revised down the number of workers on site at the time of the avalanche from 55 to 54 after one worker, previously believed to be buried, was found to have safely made his way home before the avalanche hit. **AFP**

Corruption

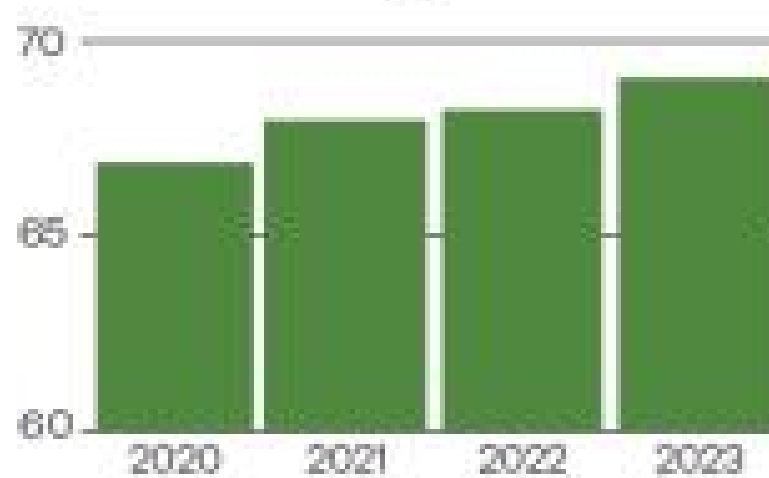
Malaysia's ex-PM declares wealth to agency

Malaysia's former Prime Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob has declared his wealth to authorities as part of an ongoing corruption and money laundering probe, the anti-graft agency said on Sunday, following the seizure of nearly \$40 million in assets allegedly linked to him.

The Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission said its investigation is focused on government publicity expenditure and procurement during the premiership of Ismail Sabri, who served as premier from August 2021 to November 2022. **Reuters**

The Day's FIGURES

S. AFRICA: URBANIZATION (%)



Source: Statista

What We're Reading Today

FOR THE TRAIN OR ON THE PLANE

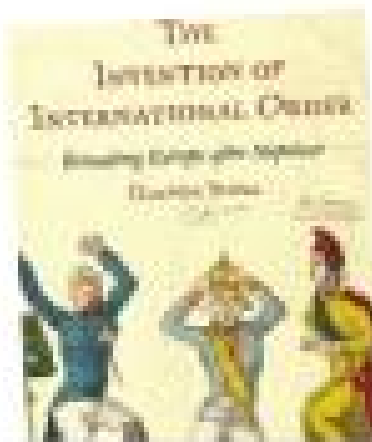
The Invention of International Order

GLENDIA SLUGA

In 1814, after decades of continental conflict, an alliance of European empires captured Paris and exiled Napoleon Bonaparte, defeating French military expansionism and establishing the Concert of Europe.

This new coalition planted the seeds for today's international order, wedding the idea of a

lasting peace to multilateralism, diplomacy, philanthropy, and rights, and making Europe its center.



Milestone

Private US spaceship lands upright on Moon

A US company successfully landed its spacecraft on the Moon on Sunday, marking only the second private mission to achieve the milestone — and the first to do so upright.

Firefly Aerospace's Blue Ghost Mission 1 touched down near Mons Latreille, a volcanic formation in Mare Crisium on the Moon's north-eastern near side.

"Y'all stuck the landing, we're on the Moon," an engineer at mission control in Austin, Texas, called out as the team erupted in cheers. **AFP**

Austerity

Milei says more cuts to public spending

Argentine President Javier Milei told lawmakers Saturday he planned to make more "chainsaw" cuts to public spending, adding that his government's austerity program would "last for years."

The libertarian leader has held a chainsaw at public events as a symbol of his push to restore fiscal discipline in the South American nation where he has been president since December 2023.

Milei's measures, which have plunged Argentina into recession, are blamed for tipping millions more people into poverty in the first half of 2024. **AFP**

YOUR DAILY ARABIC PROVERB

Throughout the years, we nurture great hopes
that we eagerly anticipate, though our lives are brief.

Al-Buhturi

(Abbasid-era poet)

Opinion

A turning point for Gaza and the Palestinian issue

DR. KHALED MANZLAWIY

The imminent emergency Arab League Summit in Cairo, Egypt, comes at a defining moment in the Middle East.

The region is still enveloped in the devastating consequences of a 15-month war in Gaza and a conflict that has spanned decades between Israel and Palestine. Tomorrow's emergency summit of Arab leaders is far more than just a diplomatic event; it is an opportunity for reckoning against arguably one of the worst humanitarian and political disasters of our age.

The stakes for this summit could not be higher. Gaza lies in ruins, with Israeli air attacks and ground assaults taking almost 50,000 lives and injuring more than 110,000, with women and children suffering the most. Whole neighborhoods have vanished, pushing the humanitarian crisis into catastrophic territory.

Several urgent matters will be discussed during the summit and will require immediate action, as follows:

The alleviation of the humanitarian crisis will be the top priority. Arab countries

must ally to feed, clothe, care for and house the suffering population in Gaza. The summit must, therefore, call for the lifting of the blockade by Israel so that they can issue free aid and build homes, schools, hospitals and infrastructure. This will need to be placed within the confines of a comprehensive reconstruction plan with strong financial backing from Arab nations and the international community to give hope and stability back to Gaza.

The summit will also reject the forced displacement of Gazans. One of the most alarming trends of the past few years is the number of proposals to forcibly evict Palestinians from Gaza, either to other countries or into so-called safe zones. Aside from being ethically reprehensible, such suggestions violate international law. And Saudi Arabia has put itself on record: it will not normalize relations with Israel until a Palestinian state is established. The Arab League must categorically reject displacement plans and reaffirm the right of Palestinians to remain in their homeland.

The Arab leaders will also develop a comprehensive scheme to reconstruct



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Gaza, without including any displacement schemes, on the road to stabilizing the whole region. These connections will include Gaza, the West Bank and Jerusalem, since their integration is vital for the establishment of a functional Palestinian state.

The summit will seek the empowerment of the Palestinian people. Employing a unified policy within a singular Palestinian polity is essential to promote the longevity of any peace settlement.

The two-state solution, which most faithfully conforms to the envisioned model of peace as one in which an independent Palestinian state exists alongside Israel, is still the only possible road to peace. The summit must reaffirm this vision and condemn any acts that undermine it, including the expansion of Israeli settlements.

The Arab Peace Initiative of 2002 and other diplomatic endeavors for Palestinian statehood have consistently championed the rights of the Palestinian people. This emergency summit is yet another platform to reiterate to the world that this commitment endures. The Arab world has been united in pursuit of justice, dignity and peace for Palestine.

Arab leaders emphasize this point with the determination that issues facing the Palestinians should take priority over factional politics.

This is not a mere diplomatic meeting. It is an opportunity to send a strong message of hope and unity to the Palestinian people. By committing themselves to the reconstruction of Gaza, rejecting displacement schemes and maintaining the two-state solution, Arab leaders will be confirming their dedication to the Palestinian cause.

The road ahead is undoubtedly challenging, but this summit represents a potential turning point. As former Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat once said: "Peace is our strategic choice." This summit can ensure that this choice becomes a reality, not just an empty slogan. By rebuilding Gaza, rejecting displacement and charting a path toward peace, Arab leaders can honor the sacrifices of the Palestinian people and build a future of hope rather than despair.

The world is watching. Let this emergency summit be remembered as a turning point in the struggle for justice and peace in Palestine.

The Arab League must categorically reject displacement plans and reaffirm the right of Palestinians to remain in their homeland

COURTESY: AMJAD RABUVA/ASHARQ AL-AWSAT



It is easy for a government to succumb to the temptation of a bigger role after a destructive war

Lebanon needs its own Department of Government Efficiency

NADIM SHEHADI

Once upon a time, a little frog tried to compete with an enormous ox. It blew and blew and blew and swelled itself until it burst.

The moral of the story, which is one of Aesop's Fables, is a warning against greed or overindulgence. It suggests that pushing things beyond their limits can have catastrophic consequences. Every government or corporation, bloated by bureaucracy, needs to keep that dramatic image in mind.

The Lebanese government of Prime Minister Nawaf Salam faces enormous challenges, the least obvious of which is balancing its own role and share of the economy versus that of the private sector. Such restraint may be too much to expect, as it is not the way politicians work; their instinct is to expand their function. Much more wisdom and vision are needed to keep the size of government down.

It is easy for a government to succumb to the temptation of a bigger role after a destructive war and when government spending is much-needed. This is what

happened in Europe after the Second World War: politicians got addicted to spending and could not give up the habit. Even while trying, they end up spending and borrowing more. The world's worst-kept secret is that the global debt accumulated over the last 70 years will never be repaid, unless more is borrowed to repay it. It is obvious that the global economy is no longer sustainable with its growing deficits and debts. This was also the story of Lebanon at the end of its 15-year civil war in 1990.

We are there again now, with the Lebanese government about to embark on a major enterprise to rebuild the banking sector, as well as the areas destroyed by the war between Hezbollah and Israel. The resulting growth in public spending will set a trend that, if uncontained, will burst again one day. The difference is that each time this happens the crisis gets bigger.

Lebanon was not designed to have a large government sector. Michel Chiha, a prominent banker, intellectual and political thinker who was the main architect of the Lebanese system in the early years, devised it as a liberal, laissez-faire economy, the



Nadim Shehadi is an economist and political adviser.
X: @Confusezeous

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cornerstone of which was a sound monetary policy. He was wary of state intervention in the economy and of inflation, preferring individual initiative, entrepreneurship and innovation, with an emphasis on human capital and the free movement of capital and goods. It was mainly an economy of services, such as banking, tourism and education, and it saw Beirut become a financial and cultural center that attracted investment and talent from the region.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the cosmopolitan merchant and intellectual elite of the region, fleeing the nationalist revolutions in Egypt, Syria and Iraq, contributed to the prosperity of the capital, but not of the whole country. A backlash came with the presidency of Gen. Fouad Chehab, who advocated a harmonious development policy, with social services and balanced development including the regions and the productive sectors such as industry and agriculture.

The weakness of the state, its institutions and its services contributed both positively and negatively to the policy debate in the country at the time. Chiha and Chehab were seen as both complementary and

contrasting, like the relationship between the city and the mountain, between the services sector and productive activities, with the core of the discussions centering on the role of the state.

The government of Salam operates in the context of major regional and international changes, including the fall of the Assad regime and the aftermath of Israel's wars with Hamas and Hezbollah. Internationally, there is also the unpredictability of the Trump administration and its relations with regional powers, as well its Department of Government Efficiency launching an assault on government bureaucracy.

The Salam government is also the first Cabinet under the presidency of Gen. Joseph Aoun and it operates amid the legacy of such policy debates, political conflict and economic crises in Lebanon. Will it have the wisdom to break the cycle and resist expanding government activity?

Since we are practically rebuilding state institutions from scratch, there is an opportunity to reduce the role of the state and encourage the alternative services that have emerged to replace it.

Business



The alliance provides Arabian Drilling with the necessary framework to establish a presence in global markets.

Ghassan Mirdad
Arabian Drilling CEO

INTERVIEW

Saudi, UAE drilling giants team up to expedite global expansion

Arabian Drilling, Shelf Drilling bid for 3 tenders under new strategic alliance

Nour El-Shaeri Riyadh

Saudi-based Arabian Drilling and the UAE-headquartered Shelf Drilling have entered three global tenders as part of their strategic alliance to expand international operations.

The partnership, formalized through a memorandum of understanding signed in early February, seeks to leverage Arabian Drilling's fleet of rigs alongside Shelf Drilling's extensive expertise to accelerate global expansion and unlock new market opportunities.

Talking to Arab News, Ghassan Mirdad, CEO of Arabian Drilling, emphasized that the partnership aligns with the company's long-term ambitions to expand beyond the Kingdom.

"When we go back in time to when we were listed, part of our strategy was to grow outside of Saudi Arabia; it was clearly the intention to grow in the land market, not the offshore," he said. "However, with the suspension of rigs, we had to accelerate the expansion out of Saudi Arabia."

The alliance provides Arabian Drilling with the necessary framework to establish a presence in global markets without having to build operations from scratch. "And this (alliance) is the license to operate outside of Saudi," Mirdad added.

He further underscored the increasing demand for offshore drilling worldwide. "Today, I can easily name on top of my head four or five countries that are in desired need of offshore jack-ups."

Mirdad noted that while entering these markets independently would require significant investment, partnering with an international player like Shelf Drilling facilitates market access. "With this alliance, automatically we have the license to operate in all of these rigs, we have the local knowledge that Shelf has, and it gives us access to all the tenders," he said.

Greg O'Brien, CEO of Shelf Drilling, confirmed that the alliance has already begun executing its objectives by bidding for project proposals across different regions.

"We have participated in three different opportunities. We have a longer list of target opportunities," O'Brien told Arab News.

He noted that while the alliance is taking an aggressive approach to exploring international prospects, the financial impact of these tenders will likely not be seen until late 2025 or early 2026 due to the time



The partnership seeks to leverage Arabian Drilling's fleet of rigs alongside Shelf Drilling's extensive expertise to accelerate global expansion. File

Southeast Asia holds great opportunities as well, but we see a better opportunity margin in West Africa.

Greg O'Brien
Shelf Drilling CEO



required for rig mobilization and contract execution.

As an international offshore extraction contractor, Shelf Drilling operates in multiple regions and continues to seek expansion opportunities while optimizing costs.

O'Brien highlighted that maintaining operational efficiency is a priority, particularly in a competitive market.

"We have 14 rigs right now, all but one of those are contracted, and that one we expect to have contracted really soon, and we see additional opportunities to deploy

newer, more capable rigs in other markets where we have a footprint like West Africa and Southeast Asia," he said.

The alliance allows Shelf Drilling to expand its capacity without significant capital expenditure on new assets.

"This alliance with Arabian Drilling gives us access to a few additional rigs that we believe we can deploy in the contract opportunities and markets that we know well without having to buy other assets," O'Brien stated. For Arabian Drilling, the alliance is a critical step in its broader international growth strategy.

The company, which operates 36 rigs, has three currently

suspended. O'Brien explained that these three rigs share similarities with those used by Shelf Drilling, making their international deployment more seamless.

By leveraging Shelf Drilling's established presence in key markets, Arabian Drilling can re-enter the global scene more efficiently.

Opportunities and plans

Several international markets present promising opportunities for new contracts, with West Africa emerging as a key target region.

"India, Southeast Asia, West Africa are markets we know extremely well. West

Africa is a place that has a decent number of new projects that are incremental to existing activity in that region, and it's not quite as competitive," O'Brien said.

"Southeast Asia holds great opportunities as well, but we see a better opportunity margin in West Africa," he added.

Mirdad acknowledged that the alliance's initial three rigs would not be sufficient to meet the growing demand for offshore drilling services.

"When we looked at the opportunities, we, as Arabian Drilling, looked at each other and realized we don't have enough rigs," he said.

He indicated that the company is actively considering further expansion. "The three rigs are not enough. So, I'm very upbeat to giving the market some good news in the short term," Mirdad said.

When asked about plans for additional rig deployment, he explained that the alliance is a long-term strategic move rather than a short-term fix.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The alliance is taking an aggressive approach to exploring international prospects.
- The financial impact of these tenders will be seen until late 2025 or early 2026.

When asked about the financial impact of the alliance, Mirdad stated that Arabian Drilling's strong balance sheet allows it to focus on growth rather than relying solely on financial maneuvers to expand.

"Our relations with the banks are really good, so access to cash is not a problem for growth, but this is a great avenue for us and Shelf to grow and not to miss out on any international opportunities," he said.

O'Brien highlighted that the alliance aligns with global trends in the shallow-water drilling market, particularly as demand for offshore rigs remains strong.

"There are about 425 jack-ups around the world; the Middle East is the biggest market, and Saudi Arabia is the largest market for offshore shallow water drilling, but there is stable demand in other parts of the world," he said.

Mirdad further explained that new jack-up rigs are rarely built, leading to a gradual phasing out of older rigs and creating a supply gap in the offshore drilling market.

"That means that you'll have demand but not enough rigs available," he added.

GROWTH

Corporate lending pushes Saudi bank loans past \$800bn for the first time

Real estate activities continued to command the largest share of corporate loans: SAMA data

Dayan Abou Tine Riyadh

Saudi bank loans surpassed the SR3 trillion (\$801.6 billion) mark for the first time in January, registering a 14.66 percent year-on-year increase.

According to figures from the Saudi Central Bank, also known as SAMA, this growth marks the fastest expansion since October 2022 and is primarily driven by a surge in business financing.

Corporate loans grew 18.5 percent over the past year, outpacing the 10.5 percent rise in retail lending. As a result, corporate credit now accounts for 54.09 percent of total bank lending, up from 52.34 percent in 2024.

Among business sectors, real estate activities continued to command the largest share of corporate loans, making up 21.13 percent of total business lending in January. Loans to this sector surged 30.57 percent year on year to SR343.6 billion.

The strong demand for real estate financing aligns with the sector's growing role in the Saudi economy.

According to the General Authority for Statistics, real gross domestic product from real estate activities reached SR176.18 billion in the first nine months of 2024, accounting for around 7 percent of gross value added.

This marks an increase from SR172 billion in the same period last year, highlighting the sector's expanding contribution to economic output.

The wholesale and retail trade sector followed, with credit facilities totaling SR204 billion, or 12.54 percent of total corporate loans. Meanwhile, manufacturing accounted for 11.7 percent, with loans rising to SR190.2 billion.

While professional, scientific, and technical activities hold a smaller share of total corporate lending at 0.52 percent, they recorded the highest annual growth rate, soaring 34.2 percent to SR8.38 billion.

Similarly, education loans saw a 33.17 percent increase to SR8.43 billion, while financing for financial and insurance activities grew 32.06 percent to SR137.62 billion.

Real estate boom

The real estate boom has been a key driver of credit expansion, fueled by population growth, rapid urbanization, government-backed initiatives such as the Sakani housing program, and large-scale developments like NEOM, ROSHN, and Diriyah Gate.

The surge in demand for housing and commercial properties has led to increased borrowing by developers and investors looking to capitalize on the sector's momentum.



Initiatives such as NEOM, Diriyah Gate, and Qiddiya have also contributed to rising property values.

The real estate boom has been a key driver of credit expansion, fueled by population growth, rapid urbanization and government-backed initiatives. Reuters/File



Wholesale and retail trade have benefited from rising consumer spending, an expanding middle class, and the rapid growth of e-commerce. Shutterstock

Meanwhile, wholesale and retail trade have benefited from rising consumer spending, an expanding middle class, and the rapid growth of e-commerce, which has driven investment in logistics, supply chains, and retail infrastructure.

Government efforts to boost domestic manufacturing and reduce import dependency have also strengthened lending to the industrial sector, particularly in pharmaceuticals, automotive production, and food processing. Incentives and subsidies have further supported local production.

The professional, scientific, and technical services sector has seen robust credit growth as businesses and government projects accelerate digital transformation and infrastructure

development, increasing demand for engineering, consultancy, and IT services.

Similarly, the education sector has experienced significant lending expansion, driven by private sector investment in schools, universities, and vocational training centers as part of the Kingdom's push to develop human capital and align workforce skills with evolving job market demands.

Financial and insurance activities have also emerged as a key growth area, with lending surging due to the expansion of fintech startups, digital banking, and capital market activity.

The rise of investment funds, initial public offerings, and sukuk issuances has created new financing opportunities, reflecting Saudi Arabia's ambition to position itself as a regional financial hub.

Affordability challenges

The Kingdom's commercial real estate market is grappling with affordability challenges as strong demand and rapid economic expansion push prices higher.

The rise in business activity, foreign investment, and large-scale infrastructure projects has intensified competition for prime commercial spaces, particularly in major urban centers like Riyadh and Jeddah.

As Saudi Arabia continues

to position itself as a global business hub, companies are facing mounting pressure to secure office and retail spaces at rising costs.

Recent data from the GASTAT showed that commercial real estate prices rose 5 percent year-on-year in the fourth quarter of 2024, driven primarily by a 5.2 percent increase in commercial land plot prices and a 5.1 percent rise in building costs.

The Real Estate Price Index, a key measure of property price movements, recorded an overall 3.6 percent annual increase in the fourth quarter.

While residential real estate had the largest impact on the index due to its higher weighting, commercial real estate prices saw sharper increases in specific subcategories, highlighting the growing cost burden on businesses.

Several factors are driving this sustained rise in commercial real estate prices. The Kingdom's Vision 2030 initiatives, focusing on economic diversification and attracting multinational corporations, have significantly boosted demand for office spaces and commercial land.

Saudi Arabia's Regional Headquarters Program, designed to encourage global firms to establish regional offices in the country, has further fueled demand in key business districts, particularly in Riyadh,

FAST FACTS

● Corporate loans grew 18.5 percent over the past year, outpacing the 10.5 percent rise in retail lending.

● Corporate credit now accounts for 54.09 percent of total bank lending, up from 52.34 percent in 2024.

● Loans to the real estate sector surged 30.57 percent year on year to SR343.6 billion.

● Real GDP from real estate activities reached SR176.18 billion in the first nine months of 2024.

where commercial real estate prices jumped 10.2 percent.

Initiatives such as NEOM, Diriyah Gate, and Qiddiya have also contributed to rising property values as businesses seek to position themselves near these emerging economic zones.

At the same time, the supply of prime commercial properties remains relatively constrained, adding further pressure on prices.

While the influx of international businesses has strengthened market dynamics, it has also made affordability a growing concern, particularly for small and medium enterprises.

Despite these challenges, Saudi Arabia remains one of the region's most attractive commercial real estate markets, supported by strong economic growth, government incentives, and an expanding business ecosystem.

However, ensuring that commercial spaces remain accessible to a broad range of businesses may require policy adjustments, such as increasing the supply of office spaces, revising zoning regulations, or offering incentives to support SMEs.

As demand for commercial real estate rises, balancing growth with affordability will be crucial in sustaining the Kingdom's economic momentum.

Business News



This significant growth highlights the country's success in solidifying its position as a key global investment hub. AFP

INVESTMENTS

FDI in Oman jumps 17.6% over 5 years

Gulf country attracts \$69.3bn by third quarter of 2024

Miguel Hadchity Riyadh

Oman's foreign direct investment inflows rose by over 17.6 percent over the past five years, reaching 26.6 billion Omani rials (\$69.3 billion) by the third quarter of 2024.

As reported by the Oman News Agency, this significant growth highlights the country's success in solidifying its position as a key global investment hub. The rise has been fueled by strategic initiatives, a conducive capital environment, and advanced infrastructure.

This increase in Oman's FDI aligns with a global rise of 11 percent in FDI flows in 2024, which reached \$1.4 trillion. However, developing Asia saw a 7 percent decline in its FDI inflows, according to the UN Conference on Trade and Development.

According to the National

Center for Statistics and Information, the UK led the way with investments totaling 13.6 billion rials, followed by the US with 5.2 billion rials. The UAE contributed 836.5 million rials, while Kuwait invested 833.5 million rials. China invested 817.8 million rials, and Switzerland added 551.9 million rials.

Qatar's investments in Oman reached 488.3 million rials by the end of the third quarter, with Bahrain contributing 375.7 million rials. Investments from the Netherlands and India amounted to 359.1 million rials and 286.1 million rials, respectively.

Oman's Minister of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion Qais bin Mohammed Al-Yousef highlighted that high-level directives aimed at improving the capital climate have played a key role in building a promising economic future.

Ibtisam Ahmed Said Al-Farooji,

undersecretary at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion, stated that Oman's investment sector is actively reviewing and evaluating its investment policies, laws, and incentives.

Al-Farooji highlighted that the

NUMBER

11%

This increase in Oman's FDI aligns with a global rise of 11 percent in FDI flows in 2024, which reached \$1.4 trillion.

manufacturing sector attracted 2.13 billion rials in FDI, followed by financial intermediation with 1.36 billion rials, and real estate activities with 969.1 million rials.

The ministry has organized investment opportunities

through the "Invest in Oman" platform, showcasing 20 opportunities in sectors such as tourism, real estate development, aviation, logistics, and manufacturing.

In 2024, the ministry promoted Oman on the international stage at 21 events, welcomed delegations from 23 countries, hosted eight local promotional forums, and targeted six G20 countries and four markets in collaboration with the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Nasser bin Khalifa Al-Kindi, CEO of Invest in Oman, explained that the "Invest in Oman" lounge brings together government institutions under one roof, streamlining the investor journey.

The lounge is designed to attract high-capital investors to strategic sectors and serves as a digital gateway to promote Oman's investment environment and present new opportunities.

GOING DIGITAL

Abu Dhabi Customs hits 72% pre-arrival clearance

Nirmal Narayanan Riyadh

Abu Dhabi Customs recorded a 72 percent pre-arrival clearance rate in 2024, marking a significant increase as the emirate accelerates digital

transformation and streamlines trade operations.

The figure represents a sharp rise from 47 percent in 2023, reflecting a 53 percent annual growth rate, according to the UAE's state news agency WAM.

The surge underscores efforts to enhance digital customs processes, integrate advanced technologies, and optimize clearance systems.

Pre-arrival clearance for outbound shipments accounted for 85 percent of total exit declarations in 2024, up from 67 percent a year earlier, while inbound shipments made up 60 percent of entry declarations, compared with 31 percent in 2023. Abu Dhabi Customs has

also automated the issuance of entry and exit customs certificates to expedite processing.

Pre-arrival customs clearance, available through smart platforms like the Abu Dhabi Government Services Platform, or TAMM, and the Advanced Trade and Logistics Platform, or ATLTP, enables importers, exporters, and their representatives to complete customs procedures before goods reach customs centers. This process includes submitting declarations, paying duties, meeting regulatory requirements, if applicable, and finalizing procedures in advance, streamlining operations and improving efficiency.

Freight clearance and shipping companies have benefited from electronic integration with regulatory entities and service-level agreements with key stakeholders, reducing transaction times.

In August, Abu Dhabi Customs reported that the average time for customs clearance transactions in the first half of 2024 was 13.86 minutes, down from 15.47 minutes in the same period of 2023.

In December, the General Administration of Abu Dhabi Customs launched its 2024-2028 Strategic Plan, focused on facilitating secure and legitimate trade through advanced innovations and digital technologies.

BizBriefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Expansion

China's February manufacturing activity grows

China's manufacturing activity returned to expansion in February, an official factory survey showed, indicating that stimulus measures are helping shore up a patchy recovery.

The official Purchasing Managers' Index was 50.2 in February, a three-month high, compared to 49.1 in January and above the 50-mark separating growth from contraction.

China's \$18 trillion economy hit the government's growth target of "around 5 percent" in 2024 though in an uneven manner, with exports and industrial output far outpacing retail sales. **Reuters**

Trade

S. Korea exports edge up against expectations

South Korea's exports barely grew in February, missing market expectations, with demand in key markets hurt amid a global trade war triggered by US tariffs.

Outbound shipments stood at \$52.60 billion, up 1 percent from a year earlier, data showed.

The return to growth, after falling in January for the first time in 16 months with a decline of 10.2 percent, was due to the timing difference in the Lunar New Year holidays. On a working day-adjusted basis, exports fell 5.9 percent in February. **Reuters**

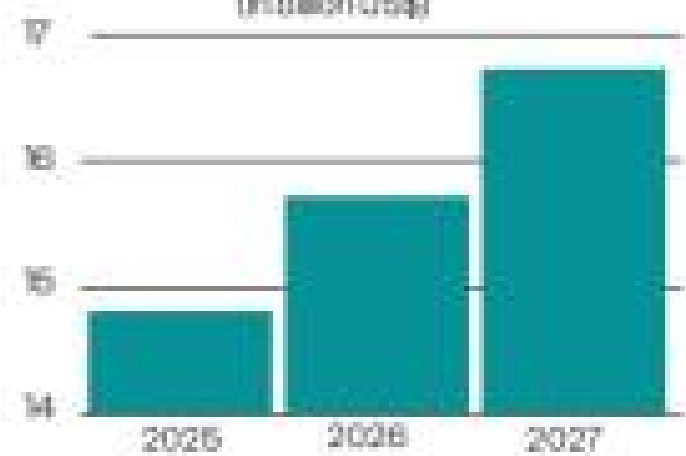
Chart of THE DAY

The global revenue in the "Natural Cosmetics" segment of the beauty and personal care market is forecast to continuously increase between 2025 and 2027.

Source: Statista

REVENUE OF NATURAL COSMETICS MARKET

(in billion USD)



What We're Reading

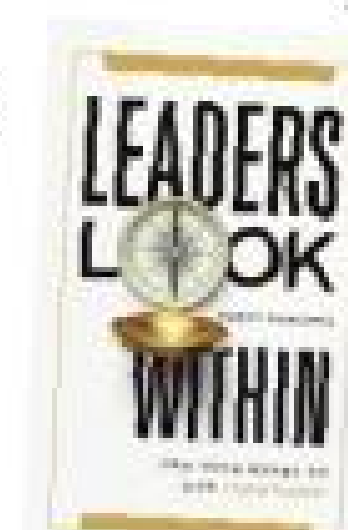
FOR THE TRAIN OR ON THE PLANE

Leaders Look Within

BRENT POHLMAN

In "Leaders Look Within," Brent Pohlman shows you how to achieve the business role you dream of by focusing on how to be a good leader, says a review published on goodreads.com. His inspirational

guide includes management habits and practical lessons you can apply to change your work and personal life. This book will convince you that the only way to lead is by having the courage to do so from the heart.



Rating

S&P downgrades France's economic outlook

Ratings agency S&P maintained France's "AA-" credit score but revised down its economic outlook following pressure on the public finances and political strife over the country's budget.

That downgrade from stable to negative opens the door to a future demotion of France's sovereign debt rating from its current high-quality status.

S&P warned that the "weak political consensus for tackling France's large underlying budget deficits" was reflected in its revised outlook.

S&P also revised its growth forecast for 2025 down to 0.8 percent from 1 percent. **AFP**

Metal

Russia's Rusal set to launch scandium plant

Russian aluminum producer Rusal said it is setting up a 1.5 tonne-a-year production facility for the rare-earth metal scandium, with the capacity to increase to 19 metric tonnes a year. Investment in the project will amount to 500 million rubles (\$573 million), Rusal said in a statement. Production will start this year at its Bogoslovsky Aluminium Plant, located near the Urals Mountains.

Scandium is used as an alloying agent with aluminum, providing alloys with such qualities as 10-15 percent weight reduction, higher strength and resistance to thermal shock. **Reuters**

Riyadh Air is more than just an airline; it is a gateway to new opportunities for travelers from the Kingdom and beyond.

Adam Boukadida
Riyadh Air, chief financial officer



Corporate

PRESS RELEASES FROM THE WORLD OF BUSINESS AND COMMERCE

LOCAL FOCUS

SAMI was Platinum Sponsor of the First Aerospace Connect Forum

SAMI, the national defense and security champion, a PIF company, successfully concluded its participation as the Platinum Sponsor of the first Aerospace Connect Forum, held in Jeddah from Feb. 24-25.

Under the patronage of Bandar bin Ibrahim Al-Khorayef, minister of industry and mineral resources, organized by the Industrial Center and co-hosted by the General Authority of Civil Aviation, the forum was successful in driving innovation, promoting the localization of aerospace technologies in alignment with Vision 2030 and creating an ideal platform for international collaboration and investment.

The forum was inaugurated by Abdulaziz bin Abdullah Al-Dualej, president of the General Authority of Civil Aviation, and Khalil bin Ibrahim bin Salamah, deputy minister of industry and mineral resources for industrial affairs, who also visited the SAMI pavilion.

As a Platinum Sponsor, SAMI's presence at the forum was particularly significant, showcasing its key division, SAMI Aerospace, through its subsidiaries, SAMI Alsalam Aerospace Industries, SAMI Figeac, SAMI Aerospace



The forum was inaugurated by Abdulaziz bin Abdullah Al-Dualej, president of the General Authority of Civil Aviation, and Khalil bin Ibrahim bin Salamah, deputy minister of industry and mineral resources for industrial affairs.

Mechanics and SAMI AEC.

SAMI Figeac presented its latest innovations in aerospace components, including metal parts used in aircraft parts, floor beams,

wing ribs, and Tailcone panels.

Additionally, the F-15SA pylons, designed for mounting external equipment such as fuel tanks beneath aircraft wings, were showcased. These pylons are manufactured at SAMI Alsalam Aerospace Industries' facilities.

Experts from across SAMI's divisions participated in a panel discussion titled "Trends,

Challenges and Best Practices for Ensuring Aircraft Reliability and Safety," where they discussed the company's continuous efforts to enhance local aerospace manufacturing capabilities and identified opportunities for growth within the sector.

At the close of the first day, Salamah alongside SAMI CEO Thamer AlMuhid and the accompanying delegation, toured the

SAMI Aerospace Mechanics and SAMI Figeac Aero Manufacturing facilities.

The visit provided an opportunity to assess progress, review advanced manufacturing technologies, and explore the Kingdom's growing industrial capabilities in aerospace, reinforcing the commitment to localizing 50 percent of Saudi Arabia's military spending by 2030.

GUESTS AND EMPLOYEES

Riyadh Air, IBM to build AI-driven enterprise to elevate experience

IBM announced a new agreement with Riyadh Air, which will integrate watsonx, IBM's portfolio of AI products, and IBM Consulting AI solutions to establish an enterprise-wide AI capability to elevate Riyadh Air guest and employee experiences.

As Riyadh Air prepares for its inaugural flights in late 2025, the new Saudi Arabian airline sets another key building block of its journey in redefining air travel as the world's first digital native carrier.

The announcement took place at the third edition of The FII PRIORITY Miami 2025 Summit, where senior executives from both IBM and Riyadh Air, including Adam Boukadida, Riyadh Air chief financial officer, and Mohamad Ali, SVP and head of IBM Consulting, reaffirmed their commitment to driving innovation in the aviation sector.

Building a world-class airline requires more than just aircraft and infrastructure; it demands an intelligent digital foundation

that anticipates passenger needs, streamlines operations, and empowers employees. Riyadh Air is embracing this challenge by making AI the driving force behind its transformation.

"Riyadh Air is more than just an airline; it is a gateway to new opportunities for travelers from the Kingdom and beyond," said Boukadida. "As we move closer to our first flight later in 2025, our vision is to deliver a seamless, world-class travel experience by expanding our reach, pioneering innovations, and redefining industry standards. By deepening our collaboration with IBM, we are harnessing the power of AI, from intelligent customer interactions to optimized flight operations, to set a new benchmark for the future of aviation."

This agreement aims to strengthen Riyadh Air's position as a truly digital-native airline, building on IBM's AI-driven products and solutions together with IBM Consulting as its lead systems integrator.

TRANSFORMING MOTORSPORT

Jaguar TCS Racing showcases cutting-edge technology

Tata Consultancy Services, a global leader in IT services, consulting, and business solutions, highlighted the pivotal role of advanced technology in Jaguar TCS Racing's participation at the 2025 Jeddah E-Prix, rounds three and four in season II of the ABB FIA Formula E World Championship. The event demonstrated how digital engineering, data analytics, simulation, and electric vehicle technology are transforming motorsport and accelerating the future of mobility.

The Jeddah E-Prix provided a crucial testing ground for innovations with significant potential for race-to-road technology transfer, leading to smarter, cleaner, and more efficient mobility solutions.

President & Regional Head, Middle East, Africa, and Mediterranean TCS Sumanta Roy said: "Our collaboration with Jaguar TCS Racing continues to redefine performance standards in electric motorsport, while aligning with industry efforts to foster clean energy, technological innovation,



and sustainable mobility solutions."

TCS' digital twin technology played a crucial role in optimizing setup and energy efficiency of the Jaguar I-TYPE 7.

Jaguar TCS Racing leveraged TCS' Virtual Vehicle Validation Model (V3M), a mathematical model which instructs the digital twin of the Jaguar I-TYPE 7 on how to navigate a track based on various inputs. The V3M enables Jaguar TCS Racing run continuous simulations in the virtual world and rapidly and robustly validate changes

to developmental software in digital twin models. This saves engineers critical time, allowing for continuous adaptation and performance gains, even up to the last moment, which is crucial for maximizing race performance on urban circuits like Jeddah.

Data-driven insights discovered through simulation can inform energy management strategies, optimal vehicle set ups and future car development. Data from the Jaguar TCS Racing simulator helps the team replicate race weekend conditions and identify strategic tweaks.

Corporate Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Sharing expertise

Dubai authorities to regulate use of drone use

The Dubai Civil Aviation Authority and the Islamic Affairs and Charitable Activities Department have signed a memorandum of understanding to strengthen their efforts with the aim of regulating drone operations to ensure the safety of Dubai's airspace.

This MoU supports the emirate's goal of fostering greater cooperation to enhance services by sharing expertise for the common good.

The MoU was signed by Mohammed Abdulla Lengawi, director general of the DCAA, and Ahmed Darwish Al Muhairi, director general of the IACAD, in the presence of senior officials from both entities.

Show appreciation

Mark Mother's Day with gifts from Dyson

As Mother's Day approaches, it's the perfect opportunity to show appreciation for the mother figure in your life with Dyson's range of innovative gifts designed to suit every woman's needs.

Nothing says "I appreciate you" quite like the gift of effortless styling without heat damage. The Dyson Airwrap in the special-edition Red Velvet and Gold colorway combines velvet textures and ceramic finishes, creating a signature richness and saturation that's as delicious as it sounds. This globally awarded multi-styler and dryer features Bluetooth technology resulting in effortless styling and healthy-looking hair with every use.

Stay alert

Kaspersky warns of scams ahead of the Oscars

As excitement builds for the upcoming Academy Awards ceremony, Kaspersky experts warn that cybercriminals are seizing the opportunity to exploit eager movie fans with fraudulent streaming scams. Disguised as free streaming offers for Oscar-nominated movies, these scams are designed to lure users into clicking links that redirect them to scam pages capable of stealing personal and financial data, potentially leading to significant financial losses. The scam operates with a simple bait: Attackers promise free access to critically acclaimed movies nominated for this year's Academy Awards.

Spinner Varun Chakravarthy returned figures of 5-42 as India beat Kiwis by 44 runs in ICC Champions Trophy in Dubai.



Sport News

DRAMATIC WIN

Welbeck sinks Newcastle as Brighton reach FA Cup quarters

The Seagulls have never lifted the Challenge Cup and last reached the final in 1983

AFP Newcastle

Danny Welbeck sent Brighton into the FA Cup quarterfinals as his extra-time strike clinched a dramatic 2-1 win against Newcastle in a stormy clash scarred by red cards for both teams.

Alexander Isak's penalty put Newcastle ahead in the fifth-round tie at St. James' Park.

Former Newcastle winger Yankuba Minteh equalized before the break, setting the stage for an explosive second half.

Newcastle forward Anthony Gordon was sent off for violent conduct in the 83rd minute after shoving Brighton's Jan Paul van Hecke in the head.

Brighton were also reduced to 10 men late in the second half when Tariq Lamptey was dismissed for a second booking.

Fabian Hurzeler's side emerged victorious thanks to Welbeck's strike in the closing stages of extra time.

Brighton have never lifted the FA Cup and last reached the final in 1983 when they lost in a replay against Manchester United. The Seagulls have won five successive matches since their 7-0 thrashing at Nottingham Forest.

They are through to the quarterfinals for the second time in three seasons after winning at St. James' Park for the second time this season.

It was a bitter blow for Newcastle, who haven't won a domestic trophy since landing the 1955 FA Cup, while their last major trophy was the 1969 Inter-Cities Fairs Cup.

Unless Newcastle appeal against Gordon's three-match ban, they will be without one of their key players for the League Cup final against Premier League leaders Liverpool at Wembley on March 16.

Newcastle made a vibrant start as Harvey Barnes lofted a pin-point cross to the far post, where Isak blazed over from



Brighton's Danny Welbeck scores their second goal against Newcastle United during their FA Cup match in Newcastle on Sunday. Reuters

close-range after his initial effort was blocked by Adam Webster.

Isak tested Brighton keeper Bart Verbruggen with a long-range drive before Newcastle took the lead in the 22nd minute.

Minteh conceded a penalty with his rash challenge on Tino Livramento. Isak confidently lashed the spot kick into the top corner.

It was Isak's 22nd goal in all competitions this season and the Sweden striker had the ball in the net again with a ferocious blast, only for an offside flag to curtail his celebrations.

Newcastle looked in complete command when Anthony Gordon cut inside for a curler that

HIGHLIGHTS

• Newcastle forward Anthony Gordon was sent off for violent conduct in the 83rd minute after shoving Brighton's Jan Paul van Hecke in the head.

• Brighton were also reduced to 10 men late in the second half when Tariq Lamptey was dismissed for a second booking.

• Fabian Hurzeler's side emerged victorious thanks to Welbeck's strike in the closing stages of extra-time.

Verbruggen saved at full stretch.

But Brighton snatched an equalizer against the run of play in the 44th minute.

Joao Pedro's superb pass picked out Minteh inside the area and the Gambian's shot took a deflection as it flashed past Newcastle keeper Martin Dubravka.

It was a sweet moment for Minteh, who joined Brighton from Newcastle last year in a £30 million (\$37 million) deal.

Gordon saw red with seven minutes left in normal time, the England star lashing out at Van Hecke as they challenged for the ball after play was stopped for offside against Isak.

Lamptey followed Gordon down the tunnel in stoppage-time after the Brighton defender's rash foul on Jacob Murphy.

Fabian Schar thought he had volleyed Newcastle's winner in stoppage-time, but the defender was ruled offside after a VAR check.

Brighton came on strong in extra time. Dubravka made a fine stop to keep out Diego Gomez's rocket from the edge of the area.

Newcastle had wilted and Welbeck won it for the Seagulls in the 114th minute, racing onto Solly March's defense-splitting pass and clipping his shot over Dubravka.

Sport Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Golf

Dylan Naidoo wins SA Open playoff

Johannesburg-born Dylan Naidoo won his first European Tour event on Sunday with a birdie at the first hole of a South African Open playoff against Englishman Laurie Canter.

While the final round at Durban Country Club was abandoned due to rain, play was possible on the 18th hole, setting up a title showdown between the joint overnight leaders.

Both drove to the edge of the green on the short par four. Naidoo then produced a superb chip to set up a birdie putt, which he holed. **AFP**

Boxing

Davis and Roach fight to majority draw

Gervonta Davis was being booed, the record crowd that came to cheer the popular champion not approving of his excuse.

"Tank" had gone to a knee during the middle of a round and then got brief assistance from his corner — basically taken a timeout — because grease after getting his hair done this week had gotten into his eye, he explained.

Lamont Roach wasn't buying it, either. **AP**



Tennis

Tomas Machac secures his first career title

Eighth-seeded Tomas Machac defeated Alejandro Davidovich Fokina 7-6 (6), 6-2 to win the Mexican Open for his first ATP title.

The 24-year-old Machac became the third Czech to win an ATP 500 tournament since the category started in 2009, joining Jiri Lehecka (2024 Adelaide, 2025 Brisbane) and Kiri Vesely (2015 Auckland, 2020 Pune).

The win propels Machac into the top 20 in the men's rankings for the first time. He is the first Czech player to do so since Tomas Berdych in June 2018. Machac lost his previous final at Geneva to Casper Ruud last year. **AP**

Follow Arab News Briefs all through the day @ArabNews

CRICKET

India set up ICC Champions Trophy clash with Australia

AFP Dubai

Spinner Varun Chakravarthy returned figures of 5-42 as India beat New Zealand by 44 runs on Sunday to set up a semifinal clash with Australia in the Champions Trophy.

India won all three of their group matches to top Group A and will play the first semifinal of the 50-over tournament in Dubai on Tuesday.

New Zealand will take on Group B winners South Africa in Lahore on Wednesday.

India are playing all their matches at the Dubai



India won all three of their group matches to top Group A in the contest. AP

International Stadium after they refused to tour hosts Pakistan due to security reasons.

Australia and South Africa had to travel to Dubai from Pakistan despite not knowing if they would be playing there, as India were told ahead of the tournament they would play the first semifinal if they qualified no matter where they finished in the group.

South Africa will now have to fly back to Pakistan ahead of their meeting with New Zealand.

Shreyas Iyer's 79 and a late 45 by Hardik Pandya steered India to 249-9 after being invited to bat first.

New Zealand pace bowler Matt Henry stood out with figures of 5-42 from his eight overs.

Chakravarthy took his first ODI five-wicket haul in just his second match as India bowled out New Zealand for 205 in 45.3 overs despite a vallant 81 by Kane Williamson.

Williamson survived two dropped catches on 17 and 68 in his 120-ball knock before he finally fell, stumped off Axar Patel.

New Zealand lost Rachin Ravindra early as Patel took a superb catch to dismiss the opener for six.

The late One Direction alum Liam Payne was honored with a heartfelt tribute at the Brit Awards. 'He achieved so much in the short time that he was on this Earth and was not only a supremely gifted musician, but an incredibly kind soul,' said host Jack Whitehall.



Finally

TheSix

Coffee tips

Elevate your coffee experience at home this Ramadan with tips from Kim Thompson, co-owner of Dubai's RAW Coffee Company.



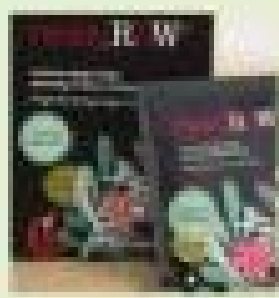
Flavored coffee

Cardamom, cinnamon, or saffron can add depth and warmth to your brew. Simply sprinkle your chosen spice into your coffee grounds before brewing.



Cold brews

Rocket Fuel is a great blend known for its bold flavors and refreshing taste. Unlike traditional hot brewing methods, cold brew is steeped over time, resulting in a low-acid, full-bodied coffee.



Instant brewing

ReadyRAW is a simple pour-over pouch that allows you to brew fresh coffee with just hot water.



Simplified brewing

Special tools are designed to optimize water flow and extraction, giving you a balanced and full-flavored cup with minimal effort. HOOPS is an excellent option.



Freshly ground coffee

For those who love the ritual of grinding fresh coffee beans, the Life X grinder, designed by Italian brand Ceado, is a game-changer.



Sustainable sipping

Ramadan is a time of mindfulness — opting for ethically sourced beans supports responsible farming practices and ensures fair wages for producers.



British pop star Jade Thirlwall, who has Yemeni and Egyptian heritage on her mother's side, was named Best Pop Act at the BRIT Awards 2025. Getty Images

CLOSE UP

Jade Thirlwall wins first solo BRIT Award

Arab News Dubai

English pop star Jade Thirlwall, who has Egyptian and Yemeni ancestry on her mother's side, was named Best Pop Act at the BRIT Awards 2025.

The last member of girl group Little Mix to launch a solo career, Thirlwall was born to an English father and has Egyptian and Yemeni ancestry on her mother's side.

Accepting her award at London's O2 Arena on Saturday night, the singer got emotional, saying, "Oh my God, what?! This is my first solo BRIT Award. Oh my God! I can't cry because I've got to sing later but I did do a little piece of paper in case I won. I know it's cringe!"



Thirlwall — who wore a baby blue Regency-esque gown designed by Glenn Martens for Diesel — ended her acceptance speech with a shoutout to her former Little Mix bandmates. "And finally, of course, my Little Mix sisters. I love you so much. I wouldn't have this award without them and they changed my life. I'm so grateful."

Thirlwall took to the stage at London's O2 Arena to perform her debut top 10 single, 'Angel Of My Dreams.' Getty Images

She later took to the stage to perform her debut top 10 single, "Angel Of My Dreams."

Of her Arab heritage, Thirlwall had said in a previous interview with BBC. "My granddad was a Muslim from Yemen. He settled in South Shields and married my granny, who was Egyptian — but I never met her because she died when my mam was four."

In 2022, the singer did a Q&A session on her Instagram Stories, where she further talked about her Arab heritage. "I love cooking Yemeni food, discovering Yemeni artists and creatives, and I will be continuing to learn Arabic on tour," she said.

In a more recent interview with Bang Showbiz, the 32-year-old singer talked about cancel culture and her support for Palestine.

She said: "Cancel culture is thriving now. When you're in the public eye, it's quite scary. I've always been quite vocal, and I'm not always going to get it right. But you can't be a pop artist right now without speaking out about certain things."

"I have been warned there could be consequences for speaking out about things like Palestine, but these are basic human rights."

RAMADAN

Harrods collaborates with Saudi calligrapher

Arab News Dubai

London's luxury department store Harrods has collaborated with Saudi calligrapher Mawadah Muhtasib for its Ramadan and Eid campaign.

This is the third year in a row that Harrods has collaborated with an Arab calligrapher.

Muhtasib is known for her Arabic calligraphy, using Muthana (mirror writing) and reverse script. Her work modernizes traditional calligraphy while keeping its original essence.

For this collaboration, Muhtasib created two bespoke artwork pieces that blend Islamic floral motifs with her distinctive style.

The first, featuring the message "Ramadan Kareem," is set against a deep-blue backdrop, reflecting the spiritual ambience of Ramadan.

The second design, adorned with "Eid Mubarak," embraces



Mawadah Muhtasib

a vibrant pink palette, symbolizing the joy and festivity of Eid celebrations.

"I am thrilled to collaborate with Harrods to mark Ramadan and Eid this year," Muhtasib said in a released statement. "Arabic calligraphy holds a profound power beyond artistic beauty — it is a true reflection of heritage, culture and design that transcends all generations."

"For this collection, it was important for me to capture the harmony between the elegance of Arabic script and the beauty of nature. The floral illustrations of the design showcase the versatility of Arabic calligraphy, affirming its place in the world of luxury and design," she said.

Muhtasib's creations will be showcased throughout Harrods' Ramadan and Eid campaign, including their in-store displays, digital greetings, social content and in the iconic Knightsbridge food halls.

INTERVIEW

Lina Ghotmeh to redesign British Museum's Western Range Galleries

Rebecca Anne Proctor Dubai

Lebanese-helmed architecture firm Lina Ghotmeh — Architecture will redesign the British Museum's Western Range galleries.

The Paris-based firm, founded by Beirut-born Ghotmeh, will transform the museum's historic galleries that house some of the world's greatest antiquities. The competition for the project ran for nine months and attracted more than 60 teams.

Ghotmeh's vision for the

redesign for the galleries resonated with the judges due to its archeological approach to the architectural design in what the museum is calling "one of the biggest cultural renovations undertaken anywhere in the world."

In 2023, she designed the Serpentine Pavilion London, making her the second female architect to do so after Zaha Hadid. She has also been commissioned to design a contemporary art museum in AlUla, Saudi Arabia's ancient



Renderings of the proposed design by LG - A. Supplied

desert region in the north-western part of the country, among other international projects.

Winning the project gave her "a feeling of sharing, of collective joy, an expression of deep humanity that arises from the connections and emotions these moments evoke," Ghotmeh told Arab News. While prestigious, the redesign will be challenging. The Western Galleries, which comprise a third of the museum's overall gallery space, total 15,650 square meters. The complex

area includes the original 1850s buildings that were designed by Robert Smirke and later additions that need to be renovated to meet present building standards.

"Each project, for me, is a historical, material, and creative journey — like 'archeology of the future,'" the architect said.

"I am thrilled to design with a deep understanding of this museum — its history, the possibilities of what a 21st-century museum could be, the collection, its provenance, and the stories it should tell."