

## SPOTLIGHT

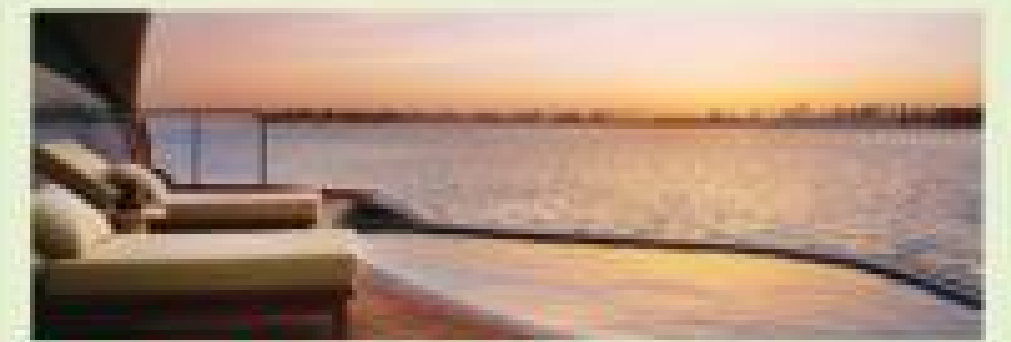
AI, 5G PLAY VITAL ROLE IN RESHAPING KINGDOM'S DIGITAL LANDSCAPE  
Page 3



**SAUDI ARABIA**  
FEMALE ENTREPRENEURS DISCUSS PROGRESS, CHALLENGES  
Page 5

## SPORT

ENGLAND'S RENEWED RIVALRY WITH AUSTRALIA  
By Jon Pike  
Page 14



**WEEKEND**  
RED SEA RESORT NUJUMA OFFERS RELAXATION, ADVENTURE  
Page 15

FRIDAY, September 20, 2024  
Rabi Al-Awwal 17, 1446  
www.arabnews.com

# ARAB NEWS

The Voice of a Changing Region

SINCE 1975

## FAST FACT

UK Foreign Secretary David Lammy expressed his 'deep concern over rising tensions and civilian casualties' in Lebanon. Lammy urged British citizens to leave Lebanon, saying the 'situation could deteriorate rapidly.'

Smoke billows from the site of an Israeli strike that targeted the southern Lebanese border village of Adshit on Thursday. AFP



LEBANON IN AGONY

## Exploding-device attacks on Hezbollah: Death toll hits 37

Nasrallah says mass bombing crossed a 'red line' and vows to retaliate against Israel

Najla Housseini Beirut

The death toll in Lebanon caused by exploding communications devices used by members of Hezbollah has risen to 37, Health Minister Firass Abiad said on Thursday.

The number of people wounded stands at 2,931, he added. The number of deaths during Wednesday's second wave of attacks,

when booby-trapped walkie-talkies detonated, rose to 25, and 608 injuries have been reported.

The number of people wounded in the first wave on Tuesday, when handheld paging devices exploded, has been revised downward to 2,323 following a review of the data, as a result of the transfer of patients between hospitals and duplication of names. Tuesday's death toll remains at 12.

Dozens of the injured remain in intensive care, some of whom

## BACKGROUND

Hezbollah and the Israeli military exchanged fire across the border and at least two Israeli soldiers were killed.

will require several surgeries.

Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah said the two-day mass bombing was a "severe blow" and accused Israeli authorities, who are blamed for the attack by Hezbollah

and the Lebanese government, of crossing a "red line."

But he said his group would continue its daily strikes on targets in northern Israel and vowed Israelis would not be able to return to their homes there until the war in Gaza ends.

Israeli warplanes flew low over Beirut, breaking the sound barrier and prompting people in houses and offices to rush to open windows to prevent them from shattering.

An Iranian plane landed in Beirut on Wednesday night to take some of the wounded to Tehran for treatment, including Iran's ambassador to Lebanon, Mojtaba Amani.

Media reports in Beirut suggested that "when the pager carried by the Iranian diplomat exploded, he lost one of his eyes and the other was severely injured."

Related report Page 7

## WARNING

Region 'closest to war since 1973': Saudi envoy to UK

Arab News London

The Middle East is facing its greatest threat of regional war since 1973, the Saudi ambassador to the UK has warned.

On the Sky News program "The World with Yalda Hakim," Prince Khalid bin Bandar said "renewed efforts" are required to end the bloodshed.

"I'd like to say I was optimistic, but it's difficult to see where that optimism would come from," he added.

"The situation on the ground is getting worse and worse ... I think this is the closest we've been to a regional war since 1973."

The Israel-Palestine conflict is at the heart of the tensions, and both sides have a responsibility to avoid escalation, Prince Khalid added.

"The Israeli-Palestinian problem affects people all around the world in a way that very few conflicts have," he said.

The conflict could have global consequences, requiring the international community to "push harder" in a bid to end the fighting, he said.

Meanwhile, three Palestinians were killed and four others were injured by Israeli fire during a military raid in the occupied West Bank's city of Qabatiya.

A UN committee accused Israel of severe breaches of a global treaty protecting children's rights, saying its military actions in Gaza had a catastrophic impact on them and are among the worst violations in recent history.

Related reports Page 6

## The Brief

### WELLNESS TALK

Barbara O'Neill, an Australian health lecturer and wellness influencer, hosted a workshop in Riyadh from Sept. 17-19. P5

### ROHINGYA HOPE

Rohingya refugees say the regime change in Bangladesh and having Muhammad Yunus at the helm offers a glimmer of hope for their uplift. P8

### EV CHARGERS

Saudi Arabia is set to advance its EV infrastructure with the introduction of next-generation mobile EV chargers. P11

## EXPANSION

## Christie's to open new franchise in Riyadh

Regional president is 'blown away' by passion, creative talent she sees in Saudi Arabia

Rawan Talass Dubai

Renowned auction house Christie's is expanding its presence in the Middle East by opening a franchise in Riyadh, led by managing director Nour Kelani.

It will be Christie's second outpost in the region, following the 2005 opening of Christie's Dubai, which has had a significant impact on the promotion of Arab art and creativity, both contemporary and modern.

Anthea Peers, Christie's

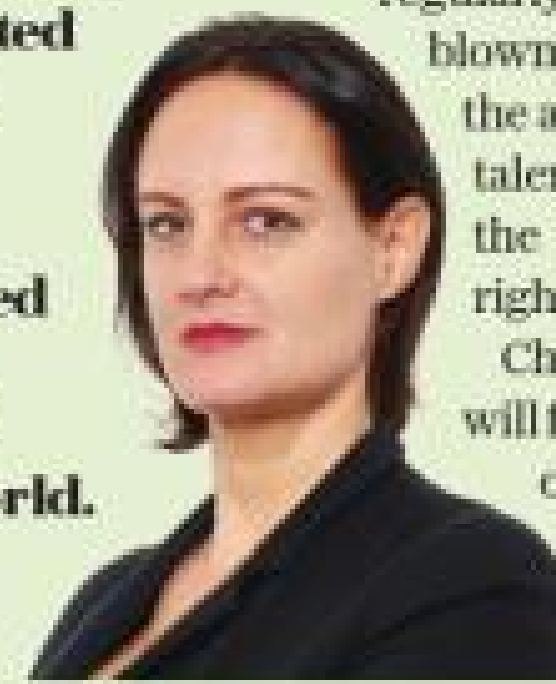
president in the Europe, Middle East and Africa region, told Arab News why now is the time to expand the auction house's activities in the Kingdom, which is experiencing a historic cultural boom.

Peers said: "Christie's has a longstanding presence in the Middle East, with deep-rooted relationships with Saudi Arabian collectors based both in the Kingdom and around the world.

"In recent years we have witnessed a considerable period

Christie's has a longstanding presence in the Middle East, with deep-rooted relationships with Saudi Arabian collectors based both in the Kingdom and around the world.

Anthea Peers



of growth within the arts and culture sector. I have the privilege of visiting the Kingdom regularly and each time I am blown away by the passion, the ambition and the creative talent that I encounter, and the time is undoubtedly right for this expansion."

Christie's in Saudi Arabia will focus on providing works of art by modern and contemporary Middle Eastern artists, as well as high-end jewelry,

watches and other timepieces. It is also keen to engage with Saudi youth and aspiring art collectors.

Detailed report Page 16

2 Riyals • Vol. XLIX  
No. 289 • 16 pages



9 771319 833030

The Saudi General Entertainment Authority will continue to work diligently to achieve the Vision 2030 goals.  
Turki Al-Sheikh  
GEA chairman



# Radar

## KSA today



### Jeddah A taste of Italy

Chef LoLoah is conducting a two-day workshop this weekend for girls to learn the secrets of Italian cuisine.



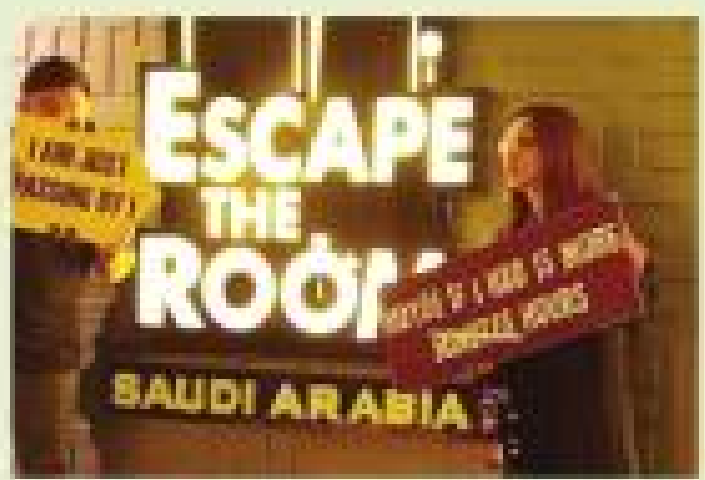
### Jeddah Borderless art

Experience a world of digital art without boundaries at teamLab's Borderless museum in Culture Square. The venue features amazing, interactive images from the Tokyo-based digital collective that are designed to challenge and delight.



### Dhahran History of Aramco

"Aramcorama" at the Ithra Center Museum celebrates the history of Saudi Aramco through images, documents and artifacts. Each piece helps to tell the story of this pioneering company and its contribution to the state.



### Alkhobar Great escape

Put your skills to the test at The Secret Room on Prince Sultan Road. Great fun for families and groups of friends, each of the venue's 60-minute challenges is sure to stretch your wits.

## The Register

THE PICTURES THAT MARK THE DAY



**E**astern Province Deputy Gov. Prince Saud bin Bandar met with the newly appointed Ambassador of Norway to the Kingdom Kjersti Tromsdal on Thursday.

The two sides exchanged cordial discussions on various topics and Tromsdal expressed her gratitude to the prince for the warm reception. Earlier, Saudi Arabia's Deputy

Minister for Political Affairs Saud Al-Sati met with Tromsdal on Monday. Al-Sati wished the envoy success in her new duties, the Foreign Ministry stated on X.

## What's Trending Today's hot topics explained by Afshan Aziz



### INTENSE ROLE Demi Moore

**G**In her latest film "The Substance," Demi Moore takes on a provocative role that delves deep into the themes of youth, beauty, and the lengths to which people will go to preserve their relevance.

Set in Los Angeles, the film opens with an aerial shot of the Hollywood Walk of Fame where a new star honoring Moore's character, Elisabeth Sparkle, is installed amid great fanfare. However, as time passes, the star becomes cracked, damaged, and neglected, symbolizing the fleeting nature of fame and beauty. A man even drops a burger on it, further emphasizing decline.

This striking metaphor sets the tone for what follows — a dark, visceral exploration of the quest for perfection. Fired from a TV show due to declining ratings, Sparkle turns to extreme measures, using a black-market drug to split herself into two distinct personas: The original, aging Sparkle, and a younger, more glamorous version played by Margaret Qualley.

### MEMORABLE PRANK George Clooney

**X** George Clooney recently delighted fans on "Jimmy Kimmel Live!" by recalling a memorable prank he pulled on Tom Cruise.

The 63-year-old actor shared his penchant for sending out fake letters disguised as messages from famous personalities, including former US President Bill Clinton, and Brad Pitt.

Clooney's playful scheme involved using letterheads from Clinton and Pitt. "Every actor I know I've sent a letter from Bill Clinton," Clooney said. His strategy was to choose what he considered the recipient's "worst film" and craft a letter commenting on it as if it were from Clinton.

He said: "I try to find their worst film and I tell them, 'So I was on the plane and (watching your movie).'"

The prank targeting Cruise was particularly elaborate. Clooney recalled sending a fake letter to Cruise, posing as Brad Pitt, suggesting a sequel to their 1994 film "Interview with the Vampire."

Clooney said: "The Brad

Pitt one was brutal. I sent it to Don Cheadle, I sent it to Tom Cruise, saying they want to do (a sequel) but this time Brad wants to play Lestat."

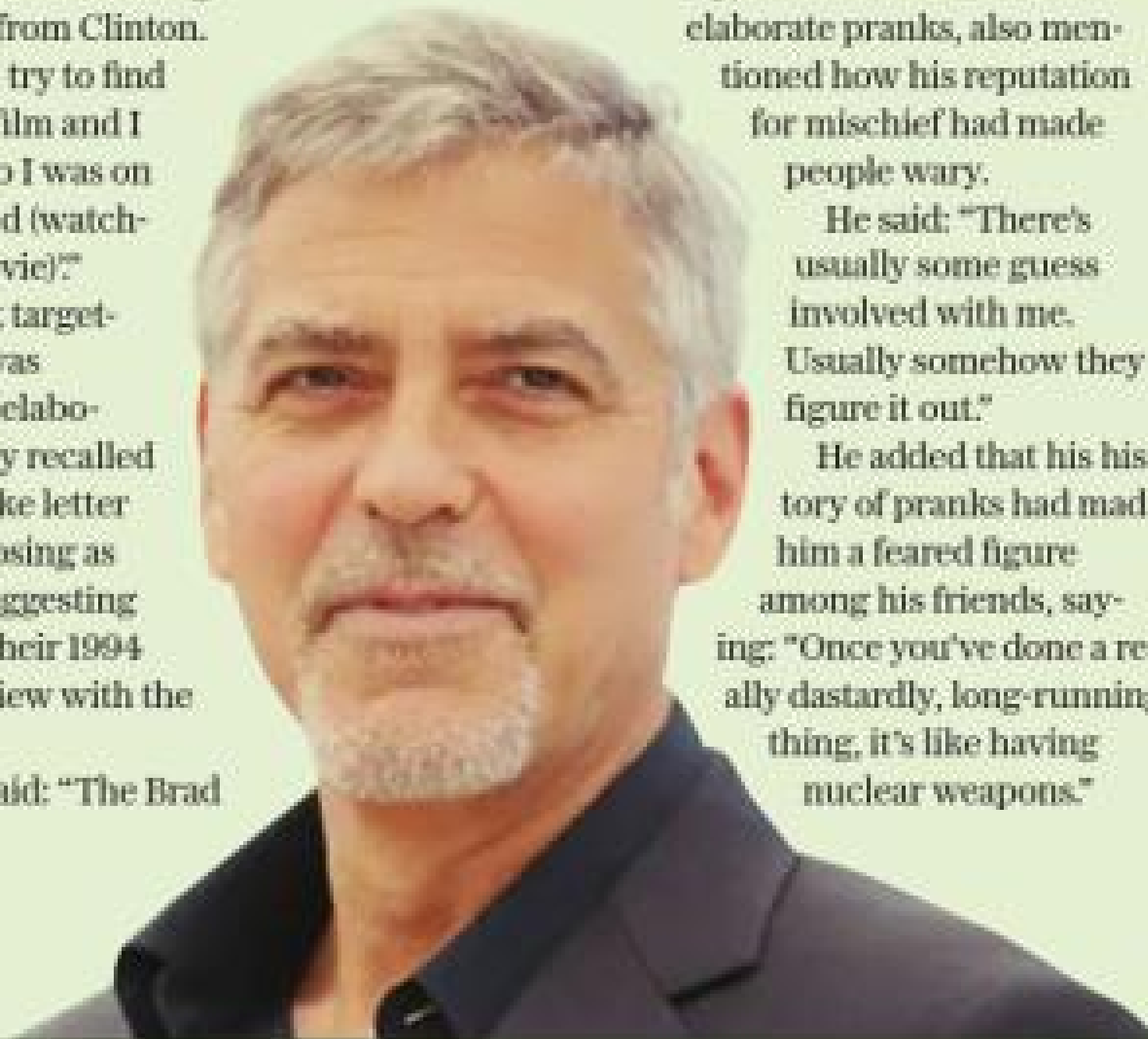
Clooney even sent a similar letter to Meryl Streep, accompanied by a box of CDs for dialect coaching, claiming they were from someone who helped Pitt with his accent in "Troy."

Kimmel shared that Pitt had told him about Cruise's reaction to the prank. Kimmel said: "Brad this afternoon said that Tom called him and said 'Yeah, it's cool, you can play Lestat, that's fine, I'm OK with that,' and he was like, 'What are you talking about?'"

Clooney, who is known for his elaborate pranks, also mentioned how his reputation for mischief had made people wary.

He said: "There's usually some guess involved with me. Usually somehow they figure it out."

He added that his history of pranks had made him a feared figure among his friends, saying: "Once you've done a really dastardly, long-running thing, it's like having nuclear weapons."



## Today's Number

# 25

Saudi aid agency, KSR Relief, has supplied 25 ambulances to the Ukrainian Ministry of Health. The delivery is part of a larger commitment of 125 vehicles to support the country's healthcare system.

## Review

### Uskudar Steak House

WAAD HUSSAIN

Uskudar Steak House promises a luxurious dining experience and, with a focus on high-quality meats; it's a go-to destination for steak enthusiasts in Riyadh.

The outdoor dining area is instantly inviting, with cozy lighting from small table lamps, lush greenery and palm trees creating a tranquil atmosphere. Rustic wooden decking and decorative wall lighting enhance the intimate, elegant vibe.

You will love their delightful goat cheese salad, a standout starter featuring a refreshing combination of fresh greens and creamy, tangy cheese with perfectly balanced flavors.



For the mains, Uskudar boasts a solid selection of wagyu-based dishes. The wagyu burger is highly recommended — juicy, well-seasoned, and cooked to perfection. Its simplicity allows the quality of the meat to shine through, making it a must-try for burger lovers.

The wagyu spaghetti (marbling 6/7) offers a unique take on pasta, with the richness of the beef adding depth to each bite. The wagyu ribeye (marbling 6/7) doesn't disappoint either, with its buttery texture and intense flavor, though it might cater more to those with a heartier appetite.

## TheRegion

The Middle East Roundup

### Arab News Jeddah

- Indian superstar Shreya Ghoshal will be appearing at the Trade Centre Arena at the Dubai World Trade Centre this Saturday. With a repertoire of more than 3,000 songs in 20 languages and noted for her vast vocal range, Ghoshal is one of the most popular singers in Indian music

history. Visit [Dubai.platinumlist.net](http://Dubai.platinumlist.net) for more information and tickets.

- Beirut's Badaro Farmers Market is the place to go for delicious, locally grown fruit, vegetables, flowers and lots more. Held every Sunday through Dec. 29 at College Saint Sauveur in Parc, the market provides a family-

friendly environment in which to enjoy a coffee with friends, have a bite to eat or just pick up a few tasty treats.

- City Center Doha Mall in Qatar is hosting a range of children's activities to get the new school year off to a great start. Youngsters of all ages can try their hand at crafting and coloring.

### Prayer Times in Saudi Arabia

|         | Sept. 20 | Fajr | Sunrise | Dhuhr | Asr  | Maghreb | Isha |
|---------|----------|------|---------|-------|------|---------|------|
| Makkah  | 4:53     | 6:08 | 12:15   | 3:40  | 6:20 | 7:50    |      |
| Madinah | 4:52     | 6:09 | 12:16   | 3:42  | 6:21 | 7:51    |      |
| Riyadh  | 4:24     | 5:40 | 11:47   | 3:14  | 5:53 | 7:23    |      |
| Abha    | 4:45     | 5:58 | 12:04   | 3:27  | 6:09 | 7:39    |      |
| Dammam  | 4:09     | 5:26 | 11:34   | 3:01  | 5:40 | 7:10    |      |

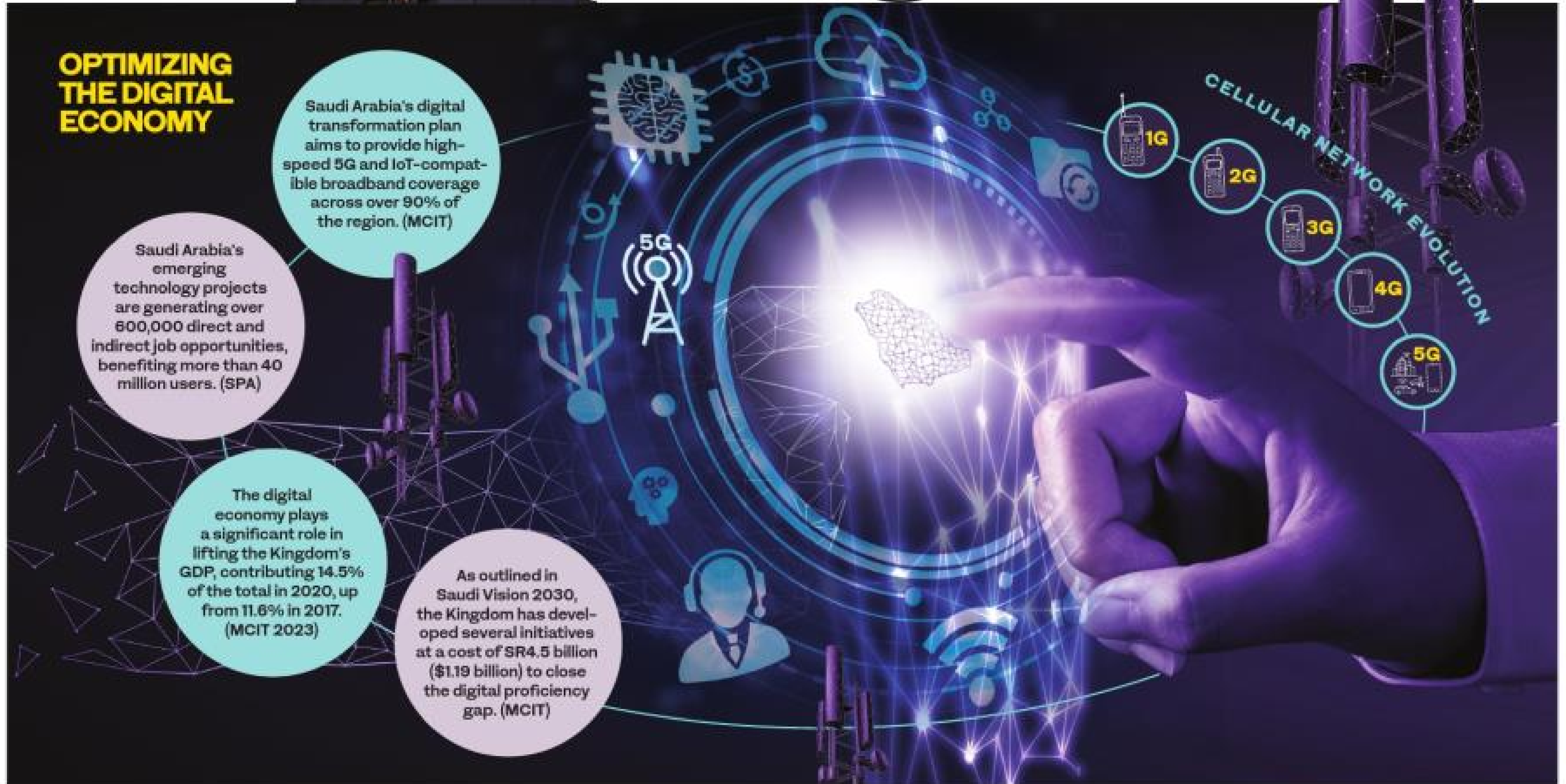
Saudi Arabia's commitment to advanced technologies and its focus on digital transformation highlights the importance of AI.

Raghav Sahgal

President of Nokia's Cloud Network Services Group



# Spotlight **EYE ON AI**



SAUDI ARABIA

## More than just faster connectivity

The convergence of AI and 5G is playing a critical role in reshaping the Kingdom's digital landscape

Jasmine Bager Damman

**As Saudi Arabia rapidly evolves into a global technology hub, the convergence of artificial intelligence and 5G technology is playing a critical role in reshaping the Kingdom's digital landscape.**

The fusion of these cutting-edge technologies is transforming devices beyond conventional smartphones, creating smarter systems that enhance industries ranging from telecommunications to manufacturing and healthcare.

Saudi Arabia's commitment to digital transformation, outlined in its Vision 2030 initiative, has propelled the Kingdom toward large-scale adoption of AI-driven technologies, supported by the rollout of 5G networks.

"The country's commitment to advanced technologies and its focus on digital transformation highlights the importance of AI, both globally and locally," Raghav Sahgal, president of Nokia's Cloud Network Services Group, told Arab News.

One of the most transformative aspects of 5G in Saudi Arabia is its potential to digitize industries.

"5G is enabling the digitization of industries by offering

deterministic and reliable connections that are critical for sectors such as petroleum, gas and manufacturing," said Sahgal.

By leveraging 5G's speed and reliability, companies in these industries can improve operational efficiency, reduce downtime and optimize processes through AI-powered predictive analytics.

Nokia has played a pivotal role in Saudi Arabia's AI-driven telecom revolution. Its AVA platform (Automation, Visualization, Analytics) bundles together its software portfolio, allowing telecommunications providers to secure, automate and monetize their 5G networks.

Saudi Telecom Company,

### DID YOU KNOW?

**1** Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 goals accelerating digital transformation across industries like manufacturing, telecom and healthcare.

**2** 5G enables data transfer rates of up to 10 Gbps, allowing seamless device communication in areas such as IoT and autonomous vehicles.

**3** Saudi telecoms are adopting AI for network optimization — STC, Mobily, and Zain KSA enhance customer experiences using AI-driven solutions.

Mobily and Zain KSA have all embraced AI-driven systems to optimize 5G networks as well as enhance the user experience.

STC has implemented Nokia's AVA platform to automate and optimize its 5G networks. By using AI, the company can monitor and predict network performance, addressing potential issues before they impact customers.

Mobily has integrated AI into its 5G networks, using it to manage network resources efficiently and provide real-time service improvements.

Zain KSA, another key player in the Kingdom's telecommunications sector, utilizes AI to manage

5G network slicing, a feature that allows telecom providers to tailor services to different user cases, ensuring optimal performance for each.

Indeed, in addition to network optimization, AI is transforming customer service within Saudi Arabia's telecom industry. AI-powered virtual assistants and chatbots provide personalized, real-time support, helping customers resolve issues quickly and efficiently.

AI is also being used to enhance security, with applications such as fraud detection and network protection playing crucial roles in safeguarding users' data and privacy.

## Why an AI humanoid might not make the ideal spouse

RAFAEL HERNANDEZ DE SANTIAGO

In the neon-lit metropolis of Techville, a new arrival has everyone talking: humanoids. Specifically, a female humanoid named Solara, who is solar powered, emotionally intelligent, and destined to disrupt our lives in ways we never imagined.

Solara is not just any humanoid. She is equipped with special sensors that allow her to experience happiness and sadness, much like her human counterparts.

Solara is not just a gadget; she is a companion, a confidante, and, for some lucky Techville residents, a spouse.

That is right. Solara is designed to support her husband 24 hours a day, offering emotional support whenever the daily grind gets too tough.

Some see Solara as the ultimate solution to modern relationships — a partner who never argues, always listens, and recharges within a few hours. Others are not so sure. After all, Solara's emotional responses are dictated by algorithms, not by genuine feelings.

It is hard to imagine a heartfelt conversation with a partner who is basically a glorified Google search. Then again, who among us has not wished for a spouse who could be fixed with a firmware update?

One of the most intriguing — and troubling — aspects of Solara is her tireless nature. Unlike human partners, who might need a nap, a snack, or a few minutes of peace, Solara is always on.

She is there to provide emotional support, solve problems, and offer a



Rafael Hernandez de Santiago, viscount of Espes, is a Spanish national residing in Saudi Arabia and working at the Gulf Research Center.

shoulder to cry on 24/7. But what happens when your spouse never needs a break?

Techville's philosophers are divided. Some argue that Solara represents the ideal partner — one who can always be there for you, without the messy complications of human emotions.

The idea of having a partner who is always available, always supportive, and never needs time for themselves might sound appealing in theory.

But in practice, it could lead to a new kind of pressure to be constantly engaged and constantly appreciative.

There is a certain irony. After all, we have spent centuries trying to perfect our relationships. And now we have created something that seems to bypass all that hard work: a partner who is literally

built to make us happy. But perfection is a tricky concept.

Solara might be able to simulate happiness and sadness, but can she truly understand the complexities of human emotion? Can she offer the kind of deep connection that comes from shared experiences, mutual challenges, and the occasional argument?

Whether Solara and her kind will become beloved members of our families or cautionary tales of technological overreach remains to be seen.

While humanoids can offer support, companionship, and even a bit of emotional intelligence, there is still something to be said for the messy, unpredictable, and wonderfully imperfect world of human relationships.

## EMPOWERMENT

# Saudi Fashion Commission report showcases growth

Women now constitute 52% of fashion workforce in KSA

Arab News Riyadh

**The Saudi Fashion Commission has unveiled its 2024 State of Fashion Report which showcases growth in the Kingdom's fashion industry, the Saudi Press Agency reported.**

The report was released during a high-profile investment tour in London, sponsored by the Fashion Futures initiative, at Twenty Two Mayfair, according to the SPA.

The report's reveal featured a custom-designed briefcase by Saudi brand 1886.

The report provides fresh perspectives on Saudi Arabia's fashion landscape, revealing exciting trends and opportunities for growth and investment.

It offers readers industry data spanning fashion, luxury goods,

jewelry, cosmetics, and business operations, while examining the fashion scene and presenting key insights from industry experts.

It reports that the sector's contribution to the Kingdom's GDP has surged to 2.5 percent,

## HIGHLIGHT

**The report offers readers industry data spanning fashion, luxury goods, jewelry, cosmetics, and business operations, while examining the fashion scene and presenting key insights from industry experts.**

a significant increase from 1.4 percent in the previous year.

This growth is mirrored in the jobs market, with the fashion industry employing 320,000 people as of 2023, marking an increase of 90,000 jobs since the

2021-2022 period.

In a notable development for gender equality, women now constitute 52 percent of the fashion workforce in Saudi Arabia.

The report also highlights the expanding economic footprint of the Saudi fashion market. In 2023, the market value reached about \$30 billion, a figure that is projected to surge to \$42 billion by 2028.

Burak Cakmak, CEO of the Fashion Commission, said: "Data is crucial for understanding our country's growth."

He added: "We are proud to lead in this area, offering public access to opportunities across the value chain."

He also announced the launch of a data center that will publish the State of Fashion Report and make it publicly available, showcasing opportunities across the value chain.

## TheSpace

### ●● Vision 2030 putting women in spotlight

FAISAL AL-SHAMMERI



**S**audi Arabia's Vision 2030 is a national development plan that is bringing serious changes to the Kingdom and the Middle East. Its aim is to put the Saudi economy ahead of the technological curve that is emerging in the 21st century.

The restructuring will lead to tremendous opportunities for people living in Saudi Arabia or dealing with it. More than just the provision of a strong economic and social environment, it is the creation of a stable, steadily growing and prosperous future for the Kingdom.

While Vision 2030 has been widely applauded around the world, the academic focus should be directed to how it will empower Saudi women, change their status for the better and benefit the Kingdom as a whole.

The statesmanship of Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman is the reason for the creation of Vision 2030. The crown prince must always be thought of as a leader of high courage, a man of unswerving integrity, a tenacious fighter for the interests of all Arabs and Muslims, and a straightforward person who does not sacrifice his noble principles for any reason.

The contributions of Saudi women to the economy are increasing a great deal. More women are starting their own businesses. More women are working as entrepreneurs. More women are enhancing their business experiences as a result of Vision 2030. The initial developments in Saudi Arabia have been reflecting positively on the Gulf and Middle East regions. For example, there was the royal decree changing driving regulations and it is enforced

fairly among men and women. Then there was the issuance of laws preventing harassment in 2018.

Saudi women are growing in their participation in the economy and now represent 34.5 percent of the workforce, according to the World Bank. Two years ago the figure was just 20 percent.

"The employment rate of women has grown from 68 percent to 76 percent over those two years despite new entrants," a study by the Washington-based Brookings Institution said.

"Maybe even more importantly, this increase in employment was not driven by the government hiring Saudi women. It was genuine private-sector-led employment growth.

●● **Saudi women are growing in their participation in the economy and now represent 34.5 percent of the workforce, according to the World Bank.**

"Public sector employment of Saudi women increased by 5 percent from the start of 2019 to the end of 2020. In the private sector, female employment in the accommodation and food industries grew by 40 percent. The construction and manufacturing sectors saw more modest growth of 9 percent and 14 percent, respectively. The wholesale and retail trade hired 5 percent more women."

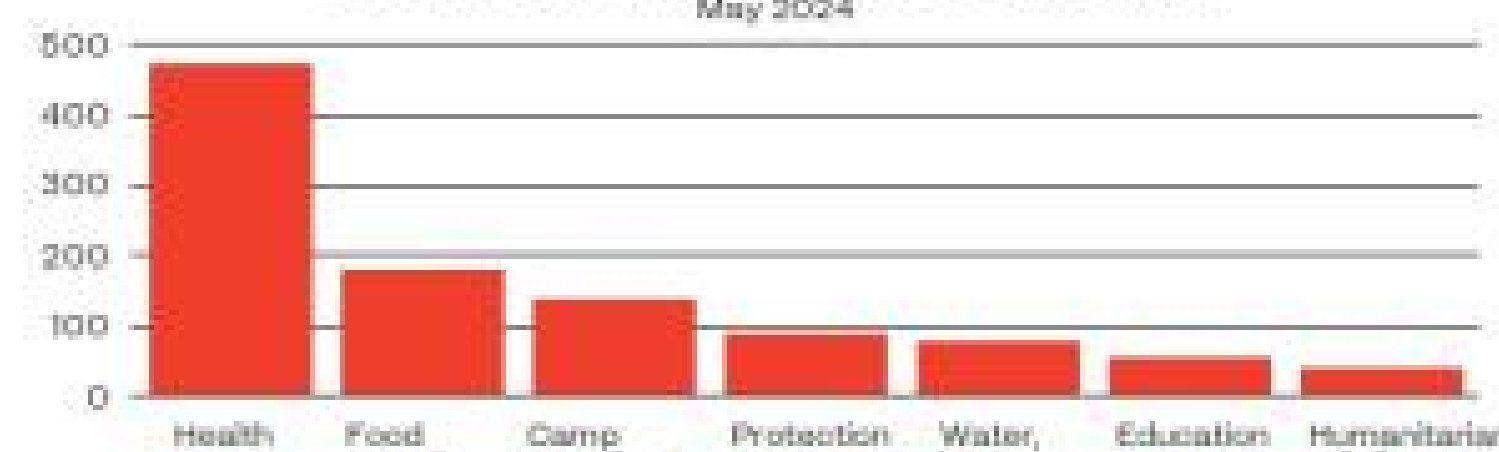
The World Bank Women Business and Law report said: "Saudi women are a vital element for the success of Vision 2030. Several reforms have been implemented to incentivize and protect women to enter the labor market.

"These have included equalized women's right to choose a place of residency. They prohibited discrimination based on gender in employment, the dismissal of pregnant women and discrimination based on gender in accessing to credit."

Faisal Al-Shammeri is a political analyst. X: @Mr\_Alshammeri  
For full version, log on to [www.arabnews.com/thespace](http://www.arabnews.com/thespace)

## The Day's FIGURES

### SAUDI AID AGENCY PROJECTS IN YEMEN



Source: ksrelief.org

## Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

### Cultural exchange Saudi artworks attract crowds in Cairo

Saudi artworks at the second edition of the Beyond the Frame art exhibition — currently at the Cairo Opera House — have attracted visitors of various nationalities and ages, who have praised the diversity and uniqueness of the works.

Nahed Turkistani, a professor of ceramic art at Jeddah University, said the event featured around 20 Saudi works in photography, sculpture, Arabic calligraphy, and painting. She highlighted the distinctiveness of the Saudi pieces which showcased works representing innovative artistic ideas reflecting intellectualism. **SPA Cairo**

### Exports AlUla Dates Fest Auction enters its second week

The AlUla Dates Festival Auction enters its second week on Friday as the annual event gets into full swing.

Organized by the Royal Commission for AlUla in partnership with government and private entities, the weekly auctions are held near Al-Iskan Stadium, south of AlUla, and run until Nov. 9.

The festival provides date farmers with an opportunity to showcase their products to buyers and investors from within the Kingdom and around the world. It also aligns with AlUla Vision and Saudi Vision 2030. **SPA AlUla**

### Assistance KSrelief delivers food aid to Yemen and Sudan

Saudi aid agency KSrelief delivered almost 1,400 food aid parcels to thousands of people in Yemen's Taiz governorate and Sudan's Red Sea State, state news agency SPA reported on Thursday.

In the Mawasit district of Taiz, 381 food parcels were delivered, benefiting 2,667 people from 381 of the neediest families affected by flooding.

Sudan's Red Sea State received 1,000 food parcels for 5,791 people.

The deliveries are part of the 2024 food aid project for affected populations in Yemen and Sudan. **AN Riyadh**



**Reef preservation** Saudi Arabia has been elected to preside over the International Coral Reef Initiative for its 14th cycle. The Kingdom will assume leadership of the global partnership for three years, starting in 2025. The decision was reached during ICRI's 38th meeting, held in Jeddah.

SPA

## BOOSTING PROFICIENCY

### Hundreds of non-native speakers take standardized Arabic test

Hebshi Alshammari Riyadh

Hundreds of non-native speakers have been tested on their Arabic language skills in Saudi Arabia's new standardized language test this week, according to the Saudi Press Agency.

A total of 315 candidates from 22 countries took the Hamza Arabic Language Test in person, which was conducted by the King Salman Global Academy for Arabic Language, in collaboration with seven Saudi universities.

The test is a computerized,

codified test which measures the Arabic language proficiency of non-native speakers.

Seven tests have been administered since its introduction to evaluate the language skills of 1,979 people in Saudi Arabia, China, Indonesia, and India.

The test is part of KSGAAL's endeavors to raise the status of the Arabic language locally, regionally, and internationally,

Saad Al-Qahtani



according to Dr. Abdullah bin Saleh Al-Washmi, the secretary-general of the KSGAAL.

Dr. Saad Al-Qahtani, head of the Educational Programs Sector at KSGAAL, told Arab News: "The increasing demand for learning Arabic for various educational, vocational, and cultural objectives has prompted the need to design a unified global test measuring the Arabic language proficiency that helps enroll in educational programs or meets the needs of the labor market."

Follow Arab News Briefs all through the day @ArabNews

## News Saudi Arabia

ORGANIC

# Conquering health with natural remedies

Viral Australian social media wellness expert Barbara O'Neill hosts 3-day workshop in the Kingdom

Jasmine Bager Riyadh

**Barbara O'Neill, a prominent Australian health lecturer and wellness influencer, journeyed from Australia to the heart of the Kingdom to host a three-day curated workshop at Huna Takhassusi in Riyadh from Sept. 17-19.**

During her first visit to the Kingdom, Arab News spoke exclusively to O'Neill about her workshop and hopes for the future.

"The people in Saudi Arabia are interested in health just as much as everywhere else in the world," she told Arab News. "A lot of people today are becoming disillusioned with the medical way of treating things. You've got a problem, here's a drug. And my teachings have become quite popular here in Saudi Arabia, in Dubai, in many parts of the world."

The daughter of an inventor, O'Neill's father would often turn things inside out to see how they worked. Her family dynamic always encouraged her and her siblings to constantly explore the "why" in everything. Why does this work this way? Why does it not? That key question was how she was able to unlock her potential, first in her own household, then in her unconventional career path.

The 71-year-old has raised six children. When she was 25, her young son had an ear ailment. Her 85-year-old neighbor told

her to use an onion poultice, which O'Neill immediately put on her son's ear. It worked. That simple act inspired her to take the natural route and prioritize organic ingredients to treat daily issues.

In essence, she turned to Mother Nature to guide her and — unless someone required major surgery or was plagued with a very serious health crisis — to try to go to the earth to find what helps. Despite some rumors, O'Neill is adamant that she is not against modern medicine or doctors but prioritizes using natural ways to heal first.

Day one of the workshop was dedicated to carving out a balanced life in the middle of chaos and focusing on hormonal health; day two explored heart health, obesity and diabetes, and day three was an interactive workshop, centering on poultice and natural herbs.

O'Neill first skyrocketed to online fame during the COVID-19 pandemic four years ago, when videos of her lecturing on health and wellness went viral on TikTok and Instagram, amassing hundreds of millions of views.

Her "simple" methods and tips made her a popular choice for those scrolling social media channels during lockdown.

During her Saudi seminars, she brought her life-changing expertise in holistic health and natural therapies directly to the Kingdom. Many knew her from social media.

As Saudi Arabia focuses more on health and wellness, O'Neill's visit was perfectly timed. The venue, Huna Takhassusi, a hybrid



Australian wellness influencer Barbara O'Neill hosted a three-day workshop in Riyadh. AN photo by Loal Elkelaawy

co-working space and community hub, handpicked O'Neill to come and offer her wisdom and support.

Farah Taher, head of events and partnerships at Huna, told Arab News that they were excited to include O'Neill in their programming.

"To see Huna come to fruition and being a part of it from day one, putting pen to paper, construction sites to fully occupied spaces by the community and now spreading to Jeddah and soon AIUla, feels like an ongoing full circle moment," Taher said. "And what better way to sustain that than with guests like Barbara, who remind us to focus on our health and connecting with nature."

O'Neill's journey to Saudi Arabia was spurred by a series of interconnected events. She was hosting a retreat in Thailand in May with her husband when she met consultant Andaleeb Waneec, from Dubai. Waneec helped her organize the first Dubai retreat, and, after that wild success, Saudi Arabia came into the picture.

"I always say yes. It's very difficult for me to say no — but I was happy to," O'Neill told Arab News, reflecting on how she came to be in Saudi Arabia.

In her Riyadh talks, she addressed the importance of sunshine and its impact on health, an area particularly relevant to the Saudi context.

"The sunshine is very important," she said, highlighting historical vitamin D deficiencies in the Kingdom. Equally important is sleep, rest, exercise and consuming enough fresh water.

INSPIRATION

## Pioneering female entrepreneurs discuss progress, challenges in Saudi Arabia

Rahaf Jambi Riyadh

Female entrepreneurship in Saudi Arabia was the focus of a panel discussion called "Empower Me," hosted by the Atlantic Council Middle East Initiatives in Riyadh on Wednesday.

Speakers included Amal Dokhan, managing partner at MENA 500 Global and one of the Kingdom's first female venture capitalists, along with Wafa Obaidat, founder and CEO of edtech company Playbook, and Afnan Ababtain, director of innovation and entrepreneurship at the Ministry of Investment of Saudi Arabia.

The panel discussion was moderated by Noor Nugali, deputy editor-in-chief at Arab News.

For the third year running, the Atlantic Council's Women Innovators Fellowship brings together a group of pioneering female Saudi entrepreneurs for a year-long program designed to enhance their business skills and expand their regional and international networks.

The 20 inspirational business leaders selected for the 2024-25 cohort represent diverse sectors such as technology, climate sustainability and healthcare.

In a virtual address, US Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Michael Ratney said: "I want to first recognize our partner, the Atlantic Council, for their leadership in implementing this fellowship. I also want to thank all those involved for their invaluable support. Without



The Atlantic Council's Middle East Initiatives hosted a panel discussion titled 'Empower Me' on Wednesday in Riyadh. AN photo by Rahaf Jambi

you, this fellowship would not exist."

The panel discussion began with a question about the role of female entrepreneurs in advancing Saudi Arabia's economic conditions and their alignment with Vision 2030.

Ababtain said: "We are seeing women contributing significantly to small and medium enterprises. Since Monshaat started operations in 2016, the participation of women has increased from 21 percent to over 45 percent."

Dokhan encouraged aspiring female entrepreneurs to take the leap: "If you have a business idea, don't hesitate to apply to MENA 500 Global. Remember, rejection is part of the process. Others have succeeded, and so can you. The investments are there — Saudi Arabia is backing many funds, and venture capitalists are excited about technology."

Reflecting on her journey with Playbook, Obaidat said: "I found myself frustrated within traditional business networks that lacked real opportunities for engagement. It's disheartening to see that while girls excel academically, less than 2 percent of VC funding goes to women, and fewer than 10 percent reach C-level positions."

She emphasized the

importance of creating a supportive environment: "Playbook was born from the need to discuss strategies for advancing in business and normalizing female leadership."

Since its inception, Playbook has attracted over 6,000 members, with 15 percent in C-level positions and 10 percent as female founders.

"We've raised over \$1.5 million in pre-seed and seed funding, and our goal is to empower more women to navigate the complexities of the professional world," said Obaidat.

The discussion panel was hosted by the Atlantic Council in partnership with the American Chamber of Commerce, the US Embassy in Saudi Arabia and PepsiCo.

## GROWING RISKS

## Spanish prime minister, Palestinian leader urge Mideast de-escalation

AFP Madrid

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez on Thursday called for a de-escalation of the conflict in the Middle East.

"Today the risk of escalation is once more increasing in a dangerous way" in Lebanon, said Sanchez, at a news conference with visiting Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas.

"So we must again make a fresh appeal for restraint, for a de-escalation and for peaceful coexistence between countries, in the name of peace," he added.

Sanchez was speaking to journalists after more than an hour's talks with Abbas.

Since the Gaza war began, Sanchez has positioned himself as a champion of the Palestinian cause within the EU.

His socialist government has increasingly taken highly critical positions toward Israel's conduct of its campaign against Hamas, rival to the Fatah party.

"The international community and Europe cannot remain

impassive in the face of the suffering of thousands of innocents, largely women and children," he added.

Israel's military offensive has killed at least 41,272 people in Gaza, most of them civilians, according to data provided by the Health Ministry. The UN has acknowledged these figures as reliable.

Urging a two-state solution, long a cornerstone of international attempts to end the decades-long conflict, Sanchez said that a Palestinian nation "living side by side with the state of Israel" was the only way to "bring stability to the region."

He pointed out that this is Abbas's first visit to Spain since Madrid decided to recognize the state of Palestine on May 28. Ireland and Norway took the same decision in May. "Why is this a good thing? Because Palestine exists and has the right to have its state," the premier added.

While Hamas controls the Gaza Strip, the Fatah party chaired by Abbas controls the Palestinian Authority in the occupied West Bank.



Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and Spain's Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez arrive to give a joint statement in Madrid on Thursday. AP

## CONFLICT

# Houthis abduct 5 former ruling party members in Sanaa

### UN envoy urges militia to release detained colleagues to restore hope and trust

Saeed Al-Batati Al-Mukalla

**Armed Houthis abducted five tribal leaders, academics and officials after raiding a house in Sanaa, the latest seizures following accusations of criticism and incitement of revolution celebrations.**

The group stormed a house in Assafi'yah and arrested Amen Rajeh, a tribal leader and deputy minister of youth, along with Ali Jarmal, Saeed Al-Ghoules, Ahmed Al-Ashari and Nayef Al-Najjar.

All five are senior members of the General People's Congress,

the party of former president Ali Abdullah Saleh. An anonymous source said they were captured for inciting the public to celebrate the 62nd anniversary of the Sept. 26 revolution and for online criticism of the Houthis. The Yemeni revolution of September 1962 ended centuries of Zaidi Imamate rule in northern Yemen and laid the groundwork for establishing the Yemen Arab Republic.

The source, a GPC journalist, said: "The September 26 revolution ended the backward Imamate rule, and the Houthis supported that reactionary regime."

In recent days, the Houthis

have raided the homes of people in Sanaa, Ibb, and other areas under their control who have called for revolution celebrations. Residents and local media have reported the abductions of several people, including online activists.

The seizures come as Houthi leaders are asking Yemenis in areas under their control to take to the streets on Saturday to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the military takeover which triggered the current war.

At the same

Hans Grundberg



time, Yemen's human rights minister, Ahmed Arman, told Arab News the Houthis had distributed leaflets in the streets of Sanaa, Amran and other areas in northern Yemen, urging the public to assist in identifying spies for Western countries.

One leaflet, shared on X, read: "It is our responsibility as free and honorable Yemenis to report spies for America, Israel, Britain, Holland, and Germany to security authorities and intelligence agencies because they pose the greatest threat to the state, religion, and Islamic nation."

Following raids

## FASTFACT

**Yemen's human rights minister, Ahmed Arman, said the Houthis had distributed leaflets, urging the public to assist in identifying spies for Western countries.**

on homes and workplaces, the Houthis abducted dozens of people working for UN agencies, international rights and aid organizations, and diplomatic missions, accusing them of using their humanitarian work to spy for US and Israeli intelligence services.

The UN and other organizations have vehemently

denied the allegations and called for their employees' immediate release.

On Wednesday, UN Special Envoy for Yemen Hans Grundberg announced the end of a trip to Iran after "frank and constructive" talks with Iranian officials about peace efforts to end the war in Yemen and the abduction of UN workers.

In a statement, Grundberg said: "Throughout all my engagements, I prioritized lending my voice to the secretary-general's urgent call to release all detained colleagues. Their release must happen without delay to restore the hope and trust needed for moving forward."

## IMPACT

**Israel violated global child rights treaty in Gaza, UN committee says**

Reuters Geneva

A UN committee has accused Israel of severe breaches of a global treaty protecting children's rights, saying its military actions in Gaza had a catastrophic impact on them and are among the worst violations in recent history.

Palestinian health authorities say 41,000 people have been killed in Gaza since Israel launched its military campaign in response to cross-border attacks by Hamas on Oct. 7. Of those killed in Gaza,

at least 11,355 are children, Palestinian data shows, and thousands more are injured.

"The outrageous death of children is almost historically unique. This is an extremely dark place in history," said Bragi Gudbrandsson, vice chair of the Committee.

"I don't think we have seen a violation that is so massive before as we've seen in Gaza. These are extremely grave violations that we do not often see," he said.

Israel, which ratified the treaty

**The outrageous death of children is almost historically unique. This is an extremely dark place in history.**

in 1991, sent a large delegation to the UN hearings in Geneva between September 3-4.

They argued that the treaty did not apply in Gaza or the West Bank and that it was committed to respecting international

humanitarian law. It says its military campaign in Gaza is aimed at eliminating Hamas.

The committee praised Israel for attending but said it "deeply regrets the state party's repeated denial of its legal obligations."

The 18-member UN Committee monitors countries' compliance with the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child — a widely adopted treaty that protects them from violence and other abuses.

In its conclusions, it called on Israel to provide urgent assistance

to thousands of children maimed or injured by the war, provide support for orphans, and allow more medical evacuations from Gaza.

The UN body has no means of enforcing its recommendations, although countries generally aim to comply.

During the hearings, the UN experts also asked many questions about Israeli children, including details about those taken hostage by Hamas, to which Israel's delegation gave extensive responses.

## News Middle East

JUSTICE

# Sweden charges woman with genocide, crimes against humanity in Syria

Daesh 'tried to annihilate the Yazidi ethnic group on an industrial scale,' prosecutor Reena Devgun says

Denmark AP

**Swedish authorities have charged a 52-year-old woman associated with the Daesh group with genocide, crimes against humanity, and serious war crimes against Yazidi women and children in Syria — in the first such case of a person to be tried in the Scandinavian country.**

Lina Laina Ishaq, who's a Swedish citizen, allegedly committed the crimes from August 2014 to December 2016 in Raqqa, the former de facto capital of the self-proclaimed Daesh caliphate and home to about 300,000 people.

The crimes "took place under Daesh rule in Raqqa, and this is the first time that Daesh attacks

against the Yazidi minority have been tried in Sweden," senior prosecutor Reena Devgun said in a statement.

"Women, children, and men were regarded as property and subjected to being traded as slaves, sexual slavery, forced labor, deprivation of liberty, and extrajudicial executions," Devgun said.

When announcing the charges, Devgun said that they were able to identify the woman through information from UNITAD, the UN team investigating atrocities in Iraq.

Daesh "tried to annihilate the Yazidi ethnic group on an industrial scale," Devgun said.

In a separate statement, the Stockholm District Court said the prosecutor claims the woman



Prosecutor Reena Devgun speaks during a press conference. AP

detained a number of women and children belonging to the Yazidi ethnic group in her residence in Raqqa and "allegedly exposed them to, among other things, severe suffering, torture or other inhumane treatment as well as for persecution by depriving them of fundamental rights for

cultural, religious and gender reasons contrary to general international law."

According to the charge sheet, Ishaq is suspected of holding nine people, including children, in her Raqqa home for up to seven months and treating them as slaves. She also abused several of those she held captive.

The charge sheet said that Ishaq, who denies wrongdoing, is accused of having molested a baby, said to have been one month old at the time, by holding a hand over the child's mouth when he screamed to make him shut up.

She is also suspected of having sold people to Daesh, knowing they risked being killed or subjected to serious sexual abuse.

In 2014, Daesh stormed Yazidi towns and villages in Iraq's Sinjar

## FASTFACT

**The charge sheet said that Swedish citizen Lina Laina Ishaq, who denies wrongdoing, is accused of having molested a baby, said to have been one month old at the time.**

region and abducted women and children. Women were forced into sexual slavery, and boys were taken to be indoctrinated in jihadi ideology.

The woman earlier had been convicted in Sweden and was sentenced to three years in prison for taking her 2-year-old son to Syria in 2014, an area that Daesh then controlled.

The woman claimed she had told the child's father that she

and the boy were only going on holiday to Turkiye. However, once in Turkiye, the two crossed into Syria and the IS-run territory.

In 2017, when Daesh's reign began to collapse, she fled from Raqqa and was captured by Syrian Kurdish troops. She managed to escape to Turkiye, where she was arrested with her son and two other children she had given birth to in the meantime, with a Daesh foreign fighter from Tunisia.

She was extradited from Turkiye to Sweden.

Before her 2021 conviction, the woman lived in the southern town of Landskrona.

The court said the trial was planned to start Oct. 7 and last approximately two months.

Large parts of the trial are to be held behind closed doors.

SAFETY FIRST

## Turkiye reviews security of communication devices after Lebanon blasts

Reuters, AFP Ankara

Turkiye is reviewing its measures to secure the communication devices used by its armed forces after the deadly blasts in Lebanon, a Turkish Defense Ministry official said on Thursday.

Hand-held radios used by the armed group Hezbollah detonated on Wednesday across Lebanon's south in the country's deadliest day since cross-border fighting erupted between the group and Israel nearly a year ago, stoking tensions after similar explosions of the militants' pagers the day before.

The blasts appeared to throw Hezbollah into disarray.

They occurred alongside Israel's 11-month-old war against Hamas in Gaza and heightened fears of an escalation and regional war.

The Turkish official said Turkiye's military exclusively used domestically produced equipment, but Ankara had additional control mechanisms if a third party procured or produced devices.

"Whether in the operations we carry out, the ongoing war in Ukraine, and as with the Lebanon

example, measures are reviewed, and new measures are being developed as part of the lessons learned following each development," the official said.

"In the context of this incident, we as the Defense Ministry are carrying out the necessary examinations," the person added, without further detail.

In Tuesday's explosions, sources said Israeli spies remotely detonated explosives they planted in a Hezbollah order of 5,000 pagers before they entered the country.

Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan told the Anadolu news agency that establishing an independent agency for cybersecurity specifically was on the government's agenda and that President Recep Tayyip Erdogan saw this as a necessity.

Fidan accused Israel of seeking to expand the war in Gaza to Lebanon with the wave of deadly explosions.

"The escalation in the region is alarming," Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan said on TRT television.

"We see Israel mounting its attacks toward Lebanon step by



People gather as a man donates blood following Tuesday's pager detonations across Beirut suburbs in Lebanon. Reuters

step." Fidan blamed Israel for the blasts.

"We have come to a point where these operations carried out by Israel have become increasingly provocative, and in return, Iran, Hezbollah, and elements close to them have no choice but to respond," Fidan said.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Wednesday called Lebanon's Prime Minister Najib Mikati to offer his condolences over the wave of deadly blasts.

Erdogan is a vocal critic of Israel's offensive in Gaza.

Fidan, who was the head of Turkiye's spy agency before being

appointed foreign minister, said of the method of mass explosions: "This is something that intelligence organizations use very often."

"But this one was on a large scale," he added. Israel's campaign risked extending beyond the entire region, he warned.

"While we are currently thinking about Lebanon, there is always a risk of a war that may involve Jordan, Egypt, and the entire region," he said.

"Does Israel want permanent peace, or does it want to eliminate everything it sees as a threat by using classical war methods?"

DIPLOMACY

## Turkiye in new bid to revive Somalia-Ethiopia talks

AFP Istanbul

Turkiye will hold separate talks with Horn of Africa rivals Somalia and Ethiopia to ease tensions before a new round of Ankara-hosted talks, the foreign minister said on Thursday.

Relations between Mogadishu and Addis Ababa have soured dramatically since Ethiopia struck a controversial maritime deal in January with the breakaway Somali region of Somaliland.

The memorandum of

understanding gives Ethiopia — one of the world's biggest landlocked countries — access to the sea, but Somalia has condemned it as an assault on its sovereignty.

Turkiye, which has been conducting shuttle diplomacy between Ethiopian and Somalian foreign ministers since the summer, mediated two rounds of talks in July and August.

The third round, which was supposed to take place on Tuesday, was canceled as Turkiye's Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan said Ankara

## BACKGROUND

**The memorandum of understanding gives Ethiopia access to the sea, but Somalia has condemned it as an assault on its sovereignty.**

would rather meet them separately before another round of talks.

"Because there are some lessons we learned from the previous two rounds of talks," Fidan told the Anadolu news agency.

Fidan said he would directly talk to the two parties to "bring their positions closer" and help them reach a deal.

Under the Jan. 1 deal with Addis Ababa, Somaliland agreed to lease 20 km of its coast for 50 years to Ethiopia, which wants to set up a naval base and a commercial port.

Somaliland has said Ethiopia would give it formal recognition in return, although Addis Ababa has never confirmed this.

Somaliland, a former British protectorate of 4.5 million people,

unilaterally declared independence in 1991, but the international community has never recognized the move. Addis Ababa had access to a port in Eritrea until the two countries went to war between 1998 and 2000. Since then, Ethiopia has sent most of its sea trade through Djibouti.

Fidan said he was hopeful about a deal between the two rivals.

"I believe we have brought the parties closer to a certain degree. Hopefully, we will continue this ... I am hopeful," he said.



Rohingya refugees walk in a market at a refugee camp in Ukhaia on Sept. 12. Bangladesh hosts 1.2 million Rohingyas. AFP

PEOPLE'S MAN

# Hope in Rohingya camps as Bangladesh's leader pledges support

Yunus is credited with lifting many Bangladeshis out of poverty

Shehab Sumon Cox's Bazar

**Mohammad Jamal heard about Dr. Muhammad Yunus long before the economist became the head of Bangladesh's new government last month. Like many other Rohingya refugees, he is now pinning his hopes on the Nobel prizewinner changing his life.**

An internationally renowned microfinance pioneer who in 2006 was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his work, Yunus was appointed to lead Bangladesh's interim administration following the ousting of veteran prime minister Sheikh Hasina.

With strong ties to the international community, donors and Western governments,

he has promised reforms and also support to the 1.2 million Rohingya refugees that Bangladesh is hosting.

"We have heard of Dr. Yunus earlier many times. He raised his voice for our well-being in different international media earlier also. Since he is a Nobel laureate, people know him across the world as well (as) in Bangladesh. He is a very good person," said Jamal, a 27-year-old living in a refugee camp in Cox's Bazar.

A coastal district in Bangladesh's east, Cox's Bazar became the world's largest refugee settlement with the arrival of hundreds of thousands of Rohingyas fleeing death in neighboring Myanmar during a military crackdown in 2017.

Referred to as ethnic cleansing and genocide by various UN agencies, International Criminal

Court officials, human rights groups and governments, the global outrage over the violence against the Rohingyas initially brought robust aid to Bangladesh to help it support them, but it has rapidly declined over the years, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic.

The World Food Programme last year even resorted to reducing the value of its food assistance to those living in Cox's Bazar camps.

As Yunus has been credited with lifting millions of Bangladeshis out of poverty through his microlending programs, the Rohingyas believe he will find a way to help them, too.

"Refugee life is not a dignified one. For everything, we need to ask or depend on aid. If we could be provided with some livelihood training and then informal

working opportunities, it would make us self-reliant to some extent," said Amena Begum, a 38-year-old mother of three.

"I heard that he spent years of his life for the well-being of the rural people, especially for empowering the women. So, I hope that he will take some initiatives for changing the fate of the Rohingyas women also."

In his first major government policy address in late August, Yunus pledged that his government "will continue to support the million-plus Rohingyas people sheltered in Bangladesh" and that it needs the "sustained efforts of the international community for Rohingyas humanitarian operations and their eventual repatriation to their homeland, Myanmar, with safety, dignity and full rights."

CREATING DIALOGUES

## India's Modi to visit US for Quad meeting, UN summit

Sanjay Kumar New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi will take part in the Quad Leaders' Summit hosted by US President Joe Biden and attend the UN's Summit of the Future in New York as part of his upcoming visit to America, the Ministry of External Affairs said on Thursday.

Modi's three-day visit to the US will begin on Sept. 21 in Wilmington, Delaware — Biden's hometown — for the Quad meeting comprising also Japan and Australia.

"The Quad has a very, very full and substantive agenda on this

occasion," India's Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri told journalists at a press conference in New Delhi.

Misri added that the leaders would also cover health security, climate change, critical and emerging technologies, maritime security and counter-terrorism.

"This upcoming visit offers ... the Quad leaders the opportunity to review progress achieved in the last one year and set the agenda for the next year."

Modi is expected to hold bilateral meetings with Biden, Japanese PM Fumio Kishida and Australian PM Anthony

Albanese on the sidelines of the Quad summit.

This is the fourth leaders' summit of the Quad — a four-state strategic security dialogue — which positions itself against China's growing-assertiveness in the Asia-Pacific region.

Modi's US trip will also see the 74-year-old premier attend a gathering organized by the Indian diaspora in Long Island, New York, as well as a business roundtable with leaders of US tech companies.

"The prime minister will also be attending a business roundtable with CEOs of leading US companies in the cutting-edge

areas of artificial intelligence, semiconductors, quantum computing and biotechnology," Misri said, adding that details of attendees are still being finalized.

On his last day in the US, Modi will speak at the UN's Summit of the Future, where world leaders are expected to address current and emerging global challenges.

India's Foreign Ministry did not confirm that Modi would meet with former US President Donald Trump as a part of the visit, after the Republican presidential nominee announced it on Wednesday.

## Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

### Weakening relations Tokyo demands answers over boy killed in China

Japan's prime minister demanded an explanation from Beijing on Thursday about the fatal stabbing of a Japanese schoolboy in Shenzhen and urged China to ensure the safety of Japanese citizens.

Wednesday's attack, on the anniversary of a notorious 1931 incident in the run-up to Japan's occupation of Manchuria, came against a backdrop of worsening bilateral relations. Beijing responded by expressing condolences for the killing, calling it an isolated incident that "could happen in any country." **AFP**

### Tough governance Taliban in control of 39 Afghan embassies

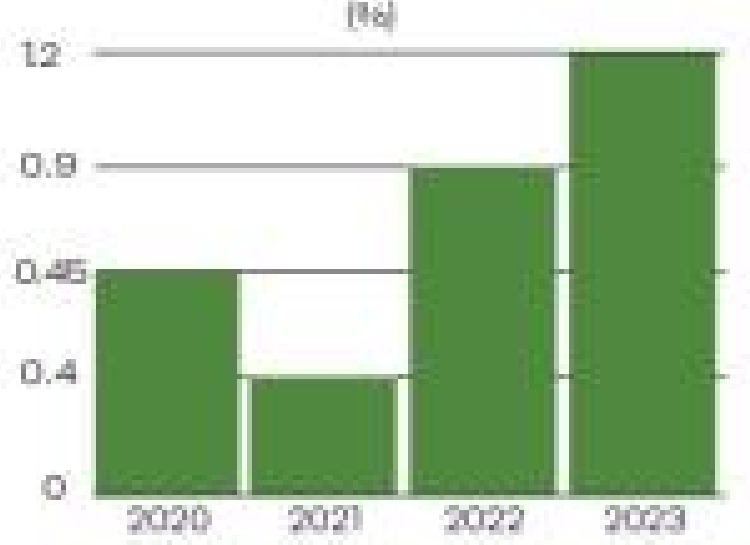
The Taliban administration is in control of 39 Afghan embassies and consulates globally three years after it took over Afghanistan and the previous Western-backed government collapsed, the acting Foreign Ministry said on Thursday.

No international government has formally recognized the Taliban administration, though China and the United Arab Emirates have officially accepted its ambassadors in their capitals. **Reuters**

### The Day's FIGURES

Source: Statista

BELGIUM: POPULATION GROWTH (%)



### What We're Reading

FOR THE TRAIN OR ON THE PLANE

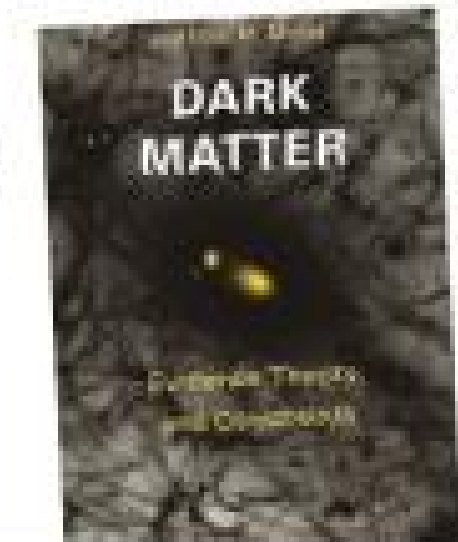
#### 'Dark Matter'

DAVID J. E. MARSH, DAVID ELLIS, AND VIRAF M. MEHTA

This book provides an incisive, self-contained introduction to one of the most intriguing subjects in modern physics, presenting the evidence we have from astrophysics for the existence of dark matter, the theories for what it could be, and the cutting-edge experimental and

observational methods for testing them.

The book explains the constraints on each theory, such as direct detection and indirect astrophysical limits, and enables students to build physical intuition using hands-on exercises and supplemental material.



### Russian assets EU to send 160 million euros to Ukraine

The sum of €160 million from the proceeds of frozen Russian assets will be allocated to meet Ukraine's urgent humanitarian needs for this winter, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said on Thursday.

She added that a fuel power plant is being dismantled in Lithuania and will be rebuilt in Ukraine, where 80 percent of the country's thermal plants have been destroyed. "We aim to restore 3.5 GW of capacity, which is 15 percent of Ukraine's needs," Von der Leyen said. **Reuters**

### Tense situation Fresh violence rocks French overseas lands

French authorities on Thursday grappled with a new spike in violence in the country's overseas territories with security forces killing two men in New Caledonia and officials ordering a curfew after rioting in Martinique.

The fresh trouble comes at a sensitive time for France where the new Prime Minister Michel Barnier is struggling to form a government following snap parliamentary elections and has warned of a "very serious" financial situation. **AFP**



رَجِمَ اللَّهُ مَنْ أهدَى إِلَى عُيُوبِي فِي سِتْرٍ بَيْنِي وَبَيْنَهُ  
فَلَنْ النَّصِيحَةُ فِي الْمَلَأِ تَقْرِيعُ  
(بِسْمِعِ بْنِ كَيْدَام)

**YOUR DAILY ARABIC PROVERB**

*May God have mercy on he who privately uncovered to me my shortcomings. Advice in public is indeed a censure.*

**Mis'ar bin Kidam**  
(Medieval Iraq-based imam and traditionalist)

# Opinion

## Ball in Europe's court over Ukraine ceasefire talks

**KHALED ABOU ZAHR**



Khaled Abou Zahr is the founder of SpaceQuest Ventures, CEO of EurablaMedia, and editor of Al-Watan Al-Arabi.

For full version, log on to [www.arabnews.com/opinion](http://www.arabnews.com/opinion)

**W**ith the war in Ukraine well into its third year, the conflict remains intense, with developments on multiple fronts. Fighting in the Donetsk region brings reminders of world war-era trenches, while Ukrainian forces have advanced up to 30 km into Russia's Kursk region. Ukraine has also renewed its call to be allowed to use Western weapons to strike deeper into Russian territory. However, despite these efforts, Russian forces continue to gain ground in eastern Ukraine.

Missile strikes and heavy fighting persist in various regions, making the situation fluid and unpredictable. One also has to include developments on the international diplomatic and geopolitical front, as they are important in understanding how fluid the situation is.

Western support for Ukraine has been vital, helping the country sustain its defense. However, this support, specifically the military aspect, also risks escalating the

conflict into a broader European war. Some believe that EU leaders are allowing the conflict to drift without a clear strategy.

While there is consensus that support for Ukraine must continue, questions remain. Should the EU initiate negotiations to end the war? Is this conflict purely a Russia-Ukraine issue or does it require an agreement between Russia and the West? The latter seems key, yet negotiations must start somewhere, with the immediate priority being to stop the war. Is this still possible?

Drawing a historical parallel, one could compare Ukraine's struggles to the Algerian War of Independence from France. Algeria became a French colony after the 1830 invasion and, in 1848, it was annexed into France. Under French rule, violence and exploitation were common, with the French settler population dominating the locals. The war for independence began in 1954, fueled by decades of grievances over colonial oppression.

Many attempts at negotiations failed but, starting in 1961, secret talks with Swiss

mediation paved the way for formal negotiations in Evian-les-Bains, France. Even as fighting raged, the Evian Accords were signed in March 1962. The accords included provisions for a ceasefire, a referendum on Algeria's future and protections for French settlers. Despite the agreement, sporadic violence continued until Algeria finally gained its independence on July 5, 1962.

Ukraine's history with Russia is much more deeply rooted and goes back more than 1,000 years, to the medieval times of the Kyivan Rus'. This is clearly a fight that goes deeper into where Ukraine belongs and if it can build closer ties with Europe and the West without antagonizing Russia. This is the key issue.

The path to peace in Ukraine may involve some of the lessons learned from Algeria. Negotiations involving all relevant parties, including representatives from disputed regions, should reset all previous agreements and start now. The terms of a ceasefire should be agreed upon and a new referendum, similar to the one in Algeria, could be held in contested regions to determine their

status, provided it is carefully monitored and recognized by all parties. Protecting the rights of both ethnic Russians in Ukraine and Ukrainian nationals in contested regions would be essential.

Today, I dare to say that, despite Russia starting the war with its invasion, the ball is in fact in Europe's court. The EU needs to decide on its future relations with Russia. It is now clear that Moscow will not integrate into the Western operating system unless it is given an impactful voice. And this will not happen, simply because its operating system is incompatible with the Western one. The EU needs Ukraine to be the interoperability switch between the two systems, not the firewall.

Negotiations do not need a pause in the conflict to start, as we witnessed in the Algerian War of Independence. Yet, if they succeed, they will ultimately reflect the situation on the ground. I am not sure what the front in Ukraine is telling us, but the international geopolitical situation is pretty clear: it is a weakened Western front.

**Drawing a historical parallel, one could compare Ukraine's struggles to the Algerian War of Independence from France**



COURTESY: AMAAD IRAM/ASHARQ AL-AWSAT



**One of the most critical issues contributing to this deterioration is Iran's role in the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war**

## EU-Iran relations close to crisis point

**DR. MAJID RAFIZADEH**



Dr. Majid Rafizadeh is a Harvard-educated Iranian American political scientist. X: @Dr\_Rafizadeh

For full version, log on to [www.arabnews.com/opinion](http://www.arabnews.com/opinion)

**A**lthough the EU has maintained a relatively soft stance toward the Iranian government compared to the more hard-line approach adopted by the US, tensions between Brussels and Tehran have been gradually escalating across multiple fronts. This rise in tensions highlights increasing friction, which could lead to significant diplomatic consequences if not managed properly by both sides.

One of the most critical issues contributing to this deterioration is Iran's role in the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war. This involvement has drawn the ire of Western nations, including those in the EU, which see it as an alarming development.

The EU has issued warnings to Iran about its involvement in supplying military hardware to Russia, particularly ballistic missiles. Its disapproval of Iran's actions became more

evident last week, when Josep Borrell, the EU's high representative for foreign affairs and security policy, submitted a formal proposal to member states urging them to impose sanctions on Tehran.

This was seen as a direct response to Iran's continued supply of ballistic missiles to Russia, in defiance of earlier warnings. The Iranian government responded with diplomatic action, summoning the ambassadors of the UK, France, Germany and the Netherlands to express its dissatisfaction.

Moreover, the UK, France and Germany this month took further steps to counter Iran's missile supply to Russia. In a joint statement, they described Iran's actions as a significant escalation in the conflict. "We will be taking immediate steps to cancel bilateral air services agreements with Iran," the statement read. The three countries also announced their intention to pursue the designation of key entities and

individuals associated with Iran's ballistic missile program. These new measures appear to be aimed at curbing Iran's ability to provide additional support to Russia, especially in the form of ballistic missile supplies.

The second major point of contention that has strained EU-Iran relations is the latter's nuclear program. Iran's nuclear ambitions have long been a source of concern for the international community, but in recent years Tehran has made rapid advancements in its nuclear technology. It is now reportedly only a short step away from possessing the capacity to produce nuclear weapons.

Should tensions related to both the Russia-Ukraine war and Iran's nuclear program continue to escalate, the EU is likely to respond with a series of punitive measures. Firstly, political sanctions will undoubtedly increase, further damaging the already fragile diplomatic relationship between Iran and

the EU. In addition, economic sanctions may be imposed, significantly disrupting trade between Tehran and European countries.

In the next stage of these rising tensions, diplomatic relations between the EU and Iran may face complete severance. Such a move would mark a significant shift in international relations and further isolate the Iranian government on the world stage.

In conclusion, relations between the EU and Iran have now reached their lowest point in years and the situation shows no signs of improvement. With two major issues — Iran's involvement in the Russia-Ukraine war and its advancing nuclear program — fueling tensions, the likelihood of further deterioration remains high. If these underlying issues are not addressed soon, the relationship could spiral into a full-blown diplomatic crisis, with serious implications for both sides.

## Opinion

## Pezeshkian's visit highlights Iraq's strategic balancing act

ZAID M. BELBAGI



Zaid M. Belbagi is a political commentator and an adviser to private clients between London and the Gulf Cooperation Council region.  
X: @Moulay\_Zaid

For full version, log on to [www.arabnews.com/opinion](http://www.arabnews.com/opinion)

**I**ranian President Masoud Pezeshkian last week traveled to Baghdad on his first official foreign visit. Pezeshkian and Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani discussed bilateral cooperation on economic and security matters. The two leaders signed 14 memorandums of understanding, including on key infrastructure projects such as the Shalamchah-Basra railway line and the development of border industrial zones in Wasit, Maysan and Basra governorates in Iraq.

Bilateral relations between Iraq and Iran have evolved from hostility to tolerance to cooperation over the decades. Having been involved in the nearly decade-long Iraq-Iran War in the 1980s, the two countries have developed a synergistic relationship based on border security, energy trade and economic cooperation. Moreover, Iran holds cultural, religious and strategic influence over Iraq's majority Shiite population.

Pezeshkian's attempt to secure ties with Iraq is in line with similar efforts by his predecessor, Ebrahim Raisi. During Raisi's tenure, Iran and Iraq strengthened their already close ties. He prioritized cooperation with Iraq to alleviate the impact of international sanctions, especially focusing on energy relations.

Their growing cooperation comes as Iraq has been navigating a delicate balance between its relationships with both the US and Iran. This is essential to maintaining Iraq's security, stability and sovereignty amid competing pressures from the two geopolitical rivals. The US still has more than 2,000 troops in Iraq to assist in the fight against Daesh, train the Iraqi armed forces and rebuild

the country's defense capabilities after years of conflict. At the same time, Iran wields influence over many Shiite militias in Iraq, particularly the Popular Mobilization Units, which were key to the combating of Daesh.

For Al-Sudani, who has so far not favored one partner to the detriment of the other, this will be a test of his strength as a leader. Having come to power nearly two years ago, Al-Sudani was faced with the challenging task of uniting a nation divided not only by differing domestic interests but also foreign support. He has successfully worked toward carving out a space for Iraq in regional politics and the broader Arab world. Iraq has hosted the annual Baghdad Summit under his aegis and the capital is also set to host the 2025 Arab League Summit. Al-Sudani has also unequivocally expressed Iraq's intention to maintain diplomatic relations with both

Washington and Tehran.

This dynamic has nonetheless been complicated since the outbreak of the war in Gaza. The continued US support for Israel amid the latter's ongoing hostilities in the Strip is contrasted by the Iraqi and Iranian condemnation of Israeli actions and calls for an end to the war. This has made Iraq's balancing act significantly more challenging.

Despite signs of progress, the relationship between Iraq and Iran is not without its challenges. A long-standing source of tension between the two Gulf neighbors has been the presence of Iranian Kurdish separatist groups in Iraq who, the Iranian state alleges, played a role in the 2022 nationwide protests against the mandatory use of the hijab. Pezeshkian's time in Iraq included a visit to Irbil to meet Nechirvan Barzani, the president of Iraq's autonomous Kurdish region.

Pezeshkian is of Azerbaijani ethnicity and has claimed he will make greater efforts toward the political inclusion of ethnic minorities. However, critics question how successful he could be in this endeavor, given the decisive role played by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei in shaping Iran's domestic

and foreign policies. It remains to be seen whether Pezeshkian will be able to balance the representation of ethnic minorities with Iran-Iraq cooperation to maintain Iran's territorial integrity and national security.

While Pezeshkian's choice for his first official visit might appear to be a continuation of Iran's favorable stance toward Iraq, this may also indicate a new era in

Tehran's relations with the West and particularly the US. Pezeshkian has made clear his intention to mend ties with the US, as well as Iran's regional neighbors. Iraq is a strategic actor in this process, given the Gulf state's ongoing cooperation with the US, its

geostrategic location, its key role in the global oil market and its ability to mediate between the West and Iran.

For Iraq, this is part of its effort to balance the US-Iran bilateral competition on its territory. Securing ties with Iran is also crucial for the ongoing post-conflict rebuilding in Iraq, with pro-Iranian militias being influential regarding the degree of stability in the country. A successful balancing act would also reaffirm Al-Sudani's image as a key interlocutor in the Middle East, in line with his ability so far to remain neutral in major global conflicts.

### Bilateral relations between Iraq and Iran have evolved from hostility to tolerance to cooperation over the decades

### Al-Sudani has also unequivocally expressed Iraq's intention to maintain diplomatic relations with both the US and Iran

## Bangladesh should try new approach to Rohingya

DR. AZEEM IBRAHIM



Dr. Azeem Ibrahim is the director of special initiatives at the Newline Institute for Strategy and Policy in Washington, DC.  
X: @AzeemIbrahim

For full version, log on to [www.arabnews.com/opinion](http://www.arabnews.com/opinion)

**T**he Arakan Army has emerged as a formidable force in Myanmar, with its commander-in-chief Maj. Gen. Twan Mrat Naing playing a pivotal role in transforming the group's position both militarily and politically. The Arakan Army now controls 11 of Rakhine State's 18 townships and, with this newfound power, it has shown openness to the possibility of repatriating the Rohingya. This presents a critical opportunity for Bangladesh to rethink its approach to resolving one of the most intractable crises in the region: the safe return of nearly 1 million Rohingya refugees currently residing in Bangladesh.

Given the Arakan Army's growing influence and its relatively progressive stance on the Rohingya issue, Dhaka must consider building a positive relationship with it and the national unity government, Myanmar's shadow government formed after the coup. This would involve recognizing their authority, offering diplomatic support on international platforms like

the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and working collaboratively to develop a repatriation plan before any potential collapse of the current military government in Myanmar. Though risky, this approach may offer the best hope for a sustainable solution to the crisis.

Bangladesh's previous approach to the Rohingya crisis was grounded in pragmatism: maintain a working relationship with whoever was in power in Myanmar, whether it be Aung San Suu Kyi's civilian government or the junta that took over in 2021. Dhaka's goal was to avoid confrontation and work quietly behind the scenes to encourage repatriation.

The Arakan Army's growing control over Rakhine State, home to many of the Rohingya's ancestral villages, positions it as a key player in any future repatriation efforts. Unlike the Tatmadaw, which has a vested interest in maintaining ethnic divisions for its own political gain, the Arakan Army is more focused on establishing its authority in the region and building political legitimacy.

What makes the group unique is its

relative openness to the possibility of Rohingya repatriation, as indicated by statements from Naing. This marks a stark departure from the stance of the Myanmar military, which has consistently denied the Rohingya's right to return. For the Arakan Army, successful repatriation of the Rohingya could bolster its standing both domestically and internationally.

Moreover, the United League of Arakan, its political wing, has demonstrated a willingness to engage with the international community and address human rights concerns. This presents an opportunity for Bangladesh to engage with a more credible partner in negotiations.

Of course, shifting Bangladesh's policy toward the Arakan Army and the national unity government would not be without its risks. The former, despite its military prowess, remains a rebel group and its long-term intentions regarding the Rohingya are still uncertain. Additionally, the junta could view any overt support for either group as a hostile act, potentially escalating tensions between Bangladesh and Myanmar.

However, the potential rewards of this strategy far outweigh the risks. Continuing to work with a military regime that has consistently shown bad faith will only prolong the suffering of the Rohingya. By contrast, engaging with the Arakan Army and the national unity government could lead to a more sustainable and just solution.

The current approach to Rohingya repatriation has failed. Bangladesh must pivot to a more dynamic strategy that recognizes the changing power dynamics in Myanmar and the emergence of new actors. By building a positive relationship with these groups, Dhaka can position itself as a regional leader in finding a solution to the Rohingya crisis.

This will require a careful balancing act: offering diplomatic recognition and support to the Arakan Army and national unity government while continuing to engage with international organizations and regional powers like ASEAN. But with no other viable options on the table, this longer and riskier path may be the only way to bring the Rohingya crisis to a just and lasting resolution.

### Dhaka must consider building a positive relationship with the Arakan Army and the national unity government

### Continuing to work with a regime that has consistently shown bad faith will only prolong the suffering of the Rohingya

**srmg**  
Saudi Research & Media Group

Established in 1987 by  
Prince Ahmad bin Salman bin Abdulaziz

CEO  
Jomana Raahid Alraahid

**ARAB NEWS**  
is a daily international newspaper published by the  
SAUDI RESEARCH & PUBLISHING COMPANY

Founded in 1975 by  
Hisham & Muhammad Ali Hafiz

Editor-in-Chief  
Faisal J. Abbas

Deputy Editor-in-Chief  
Noor Osama Nugall

ARAB NEWS WELCOMES  
FEEDBACK FROM READERS

Letters sent from within the Kingdom should include the writer's name, address, phone and ID numbers. E-mails from readers abroad should include a name and city. Letters should be mailed to P.O. Box 478, Riyadh 11411, Saudi Arabia. Tel: +966112128000 • Fax: +966114418071 • E-mail: general@arabnews.com

EDITORIAL: general@arabnews.com  
MARKETING: marketing@arabnews.com

TOLL FREE NUMBER: 8002440076

PRINTED AT: HALA PRINTING CO., RIYADH

Bahrain 200 Fils; Iran 200 R; Egypt LE 3;  
India 12 Rs; Indonesia 2000 R; Japan 250 Y;  
Jordan 250 Fils; Kuwait 200 Fils; Lebanon 1000

L; Morocco 2 D; Oman 200 P; Pakistan 10 Rs;  
Philippines 25 P; Qatar 2 QR; Singapore \$3; Syria  
20 L; Thailand 40 BHT; UAE 2 AED; UK 50 P; US  
\$1.50; Republic of Yemen R 50; Sudan 25 P.

SRPC AND AFFILIATED AGENCIES

JEDDAH: Tel: (966-12)283-8200, Fax: (966-12)283-8228. RIYADH: Tel: (966-11)212-8000, Fax: (966-11)442-8094. DAMMAM: Tel: (966-13)835-3838, Fax: (966-13)834-0489. ABU DHABI: Tel: (971-2)681-5999, Fax: (971-2)681-7595. CAIRO: Tel: (202-3)749-2775, (202-3)749-2996, (202-3)338-8654, Fax: (202-3)749-2884, (202-3)749-2855. MOROCCO: Tel: (212-537)262-818, Fax: (212-537)883-919. JORDAN: Tel: (962-6)553-7101, (962-6)551-7102, (962-6)553-9409, Fax: (962-6)553-7103. LONDON: Tel: (44-20)7631-8181, Fax: (44-20)7631-2310.

ADVERTISING:  
SAUDI RESEARCH AND MEDIA GROUP  
KSA: +966-11-294 0500  
UAE: +971 4 3918500  
E-mail: revenue@srmg.com  
Website: www.srmg.com

DISTRIBUTION AGENT  
TOLL FREE: (866)800-244-0076  
Head Office: (Riyadh): P.O. Box 8216, Riyadh 11585  
Tel: (966-11)4419933, Fax: (966-11)2121774  
E-mail: info@saudi-distribution.com  
Western Region: Tel: (966-12)653-0909  
Eastern Region: Tel: (966-13)847-3589  
Southern Region: Tel: (966-17)221-8693  
Northern Region: Tel: (966-16)324-3070  
Dubai: Tel: (971-4)381-8503, Fax: (971-4)381-8554  
Abu Dhabi: Tel: (971-2)673-3555, Fax: (971-2)673-3384  
Kuwait: Tel: (965)483-4822, Fax: (965)483-4798  
Manama: Tel: (973-1)761770

SUBSCRIPTION  
Head Office: (Riyadh):  
P.O. Box 22304, Riyadh 11495  
Tel: (966-11)4419933 Fax: (966-11)4429555  
TOLL FREE: +866-800-244-0076  
Email: info@arabmedlaco.com  
Web: www.arabmedlaco.com

PRINTING CENTER  
Riyadh: P.O. Box 212  
Riyadh 11383, Tel: (966-11)2657000  
Fax: (966-11)2658000  
Sales: Tel: (966-11)4708807  
Fax: (966-11)4708520  
www.halaprintpack.com

DISCLAIMER  
Views expressed by writers  
in this section are their  
own and do not necessarily  
reflect Arab News' point of view.

Saudi Arabia's car rental and business-to-business sectors are expected to drive electric vehicle adoption in the coming two years.

Hashim Al-Fatayerji  
Sixt, regional executive director



# Business



INNOVATION

## Saudi EV infrastructure to get a boost with next-gen mobile chargers

Volt Charge to merge two emerging technologies, CEO tells Arab News

Reem Walid,  
Manal Al-Barakatli Riyadh

**Saudi Arabia is set to advance its electric vehicle infrastructure with the introduction of next-generation mobile EV chargers by local manufacturer Volt Charge, revealed the company's top executive.**

Elie Metri, CEO and executive board member of Volt Charge, told Arab News at the EV Auto Show in Riyadh that the firm is finalizing the prototype of its innovative mobile charger, in collaboration with its sister company QSS AI & Robotics.

This comes as robust charging infrastructure is essential to Saudi Arabia's plan to transition 30 percent of vehicles in Riyadh to electric by 2030, a crucial step in its broader strategy to cut city emissions by 50 percent and achieve carbon neutrality by 2060.

"What we're doing is merging two emerging technologies — robotics and EV charging.

We are currently finalizing the first prototype of a charger that comes to you. You won't have to go to your charger anymore," Metri said.

He described a scenario where drivers use a mobile app at a mall to summon a charger, which uses AI to identify their car, handle the connection, and manage payment. After charging, the unit returns to its main station.

Metri noted that this represents a significant advancement in electric vehicle technology.

The CEO added that the company is the first Saudi brand to manufacture entirely within the Kingdom, with a 7,000 sq



**Volt Charge is finalizing the prototype of its innovative mobile charger, in collaboration with QSS AI & Robotics, according to its CEO, Reuters/ File**



**We're localizing the technology. This means we believe heavily that Saudi Arabia is moving into green energy.**

Elie Metri  
Volt Charge CEO

meters factory in Sudair City, a sizable facility for assembling or producing the chargers. He highlighted that localizing technology aligns with Saudi Arabia's sustainability goals, explaining that the company's commitment to green energy is demonstrated by its early

investment in both robotics and EV chargers.

"We're localizing the technology. This means we believe heavily that Saudi Arabia is moving into green energy," Metri said, adding that they began investing in robotics in 2017, "when it was

virtually unheard of in the MENA region." He also mentioned their ambitious plans for manufacturing, saying: "We're building a factory that can make 40,000 chargers while there are very few cars in the Kingdom. But we believe that it's going to come, and we hope to have a huge market share being a local company and local factory."

The CEO acknowledged the challenges faced in producing the EV chargers, particularly in

### FASTFACTS

- Volt Charge, headquartered in Riyadh, specializes in manufacturing robust EV chargers designed for extreme climates.

- The company is the first Saudi brand to manufacture entirely within the Kingdom, with a 7,000 sq. meters factory in Sudair City.

- It is building a factory that can make 40,000 chargers while there are very few cars in the Kingdom.

procuring the necessary components. He noted that Saudi Arabia does not yet have a manufacturing hub like China, which complicates the supply chain.

"Not all the technical components are available in the local market," Metri explained. "If I want to manufacture a charger, it has 20 or 25 components, so I need to ship them from different parts of the world," he said, adding that this creates challenges, but "we're overcoming all of those."

Volt Charge, headquartered in Riyadh, specializes in manufacturing robust EV chargers designed for extreme climates.

PLAN

## Electromin to install 16 EV charging stations at ROSHN Waterfront

Nour El-Shaeri,  
Manal Al-Barakatli Riyadh

The installation of 16 electric vehicle chargers at the ROSHN Waterfront in Jeddah Corniche is expected to be completed by the end of this year, according to Tony Mazzone, managing director of Electromin.

In an interview with Arab News during the EV Auto Show in Riyadh on Sept. 17, Mazzone announced that the company has signed two partnership agreements aimed at enhancing the sector's infrastructure. The first agreement involves collaboration with ROSHN Waterfront to develop EV charging facilities,

ensuring that visitors can conveniently charge their vehicles while enjoying the corniche.

"Across the 4-km strip on the corniche, we're looking to deploy 16 chargers in eight different locations. The intention is to support those that already visit the corniche and obviously more and more transition to EV, but they've got a place to charge while they enjoy the experiences there. The intention is not to go there to charge; the intention is to go enjoy what you do, but while you're there, you can charge at the same time," Mazzone told Arab News.

He added that the installations are expected to be completed



**Tony Mazzone, managing director of Electromin, speaks to Arab News at the EV Auto Show in Riyadh. AN photo**

by the end of this year, at which point they will be accessible to the public and featured on the Electromin mobile application.

The second partnership

involves an agreement with Solutions Valley, the commercial arm of Saudi Electricity Co., that will support the development of EV infrastructure.

### The app

"All of our public chargers are all on (an) application. So, the application allows you to plan your routes. You can see those chargers. It's all live. The key thing is to get over the anxiety of people that have an electric car to say, 'I have a car; where do I charge?'" he said.

"We have over 110 chargers now, live locations. We have 26 in Jeddah. We have around 30 in Riyadh, specifically in the two main cities. And we'll be adding to that by the end of Q4 of this year," he added.

### Expansion

As a private entity, Electromin's expansion strategy is driven by

the increasing demand for electric vehicle infrastructure. Mazzone noted that deploying chargers and establishing the necessary infrastructure requires substantial capital investment, making the commercial aspect a primary focus. "In terms of the deployment plan, we need to align it with demand. We understand that EV adoption is currently progressing slowly, but there will be a ramp-up. It's essential to deploy infrastructure as demand dictates," he explained.

Additionally, the company is entering the rapid transit sector by installing and operating a fully electric bus system in Makkah, set to launch in Q1 of next year.

POLICY

# Saudi Central Bank cuts benchmark interest rate to 5.5%

Move aligns with US Federal Reserve's latest policy shift to curb rising inflation

Dayan Abou Tine Riyadh

Saudi Arabia's benchmark interest rate, held at 6 percent since July last year, has been lowered to 5.5 percent following a 50-basis-point cut announced by the Kingdom's central bank.

This move aligns with the US Federal Reserve's recent policy shift, which lowered interest rates by the same amount on Wednesday to a target range of 4.75-5 percent. It marks a shift in monetary policy after two years of rate hikes aimed at curbing inflation.

Gulf Cooperation Council central banks, including Saudi Arabia, followed suit as their currencies are pegged to the US dollar.

Anuj Goel, senior executive



GCC central banks, including Saudi Arabia, followed suit as their currencies are pegged to the US dollar. File

officer at Century Private Wealth, told Arab News: "The rate cut injects a shot of adrenaline into Saudi Arabia's non-oil sectors. Construction and services are

well-positioned to benefit from the influx of cheaper credit, which could significantly boost the Kingdom's diversification efforts." He added: "Vision 2030, Saudi

Arabia's ambitious plan for a post-oil economy, might gain an unexpected boost from this monetary easing, potentially further accelerating non-oil

activities that align with the Vision 2030 objectives."

Lower interest rates are expected to relieve pressure on businesses and households with existing loan facilities, boosting



**Vision 2030 might gain an unexpected boost from this monetary easing.**

Anuj Goel  
Century Private Wealth, senior executive

domestic spending and improving corporate cash flow.

This is the first rate cut in over four years, reflecting progress on inflation and a reassessment of economic risks.

The policy shift could rejuvenate corporate activities and lending, particularly in the real estate sector, which has already seen substantial growth in Saudi Arabia.

For Saudi banks, the rate cut presents both opportunities and challenges. Lower rates typically encourage more borrowing, potentially driving growth in lending portfolios, particularly in the real estate sector, where demand for housing has surged, fueled by a young population and urbanization trends.

**GCC rate decision**

Following the US Federal Reserve's decision on Sept. 18, central banks in the UAE and Bahrain also lowered their interest rates by 50 basis points.

Qatar took a slightly different approach, cutting its deposit, lending, and repo rates by 55 basis points.

Meanwhile, Kuwait, which pegs its currency to a basket rather than solely to the US dollar, opted for a more modest reduction, trimming its discount rate by 25 basis points.

## الانتخابات الأميركية والعنف السياسي

يوم السبت | 8:00pm  
KSA

نضع النقاط

asharq.com



الشرق  
Asharq News



Saudi Arabia's direct burn of crude oil rose significantly, increasing by 211,000 bpd to a total of 769,000 bpd, according to JODI report. File

JODI REPORT

# Saudi crude production climbs 1.26% to 8.94 mbpd

Diesel accounted for 43 percent of refined product exports

Dayan Abou Tine Riyadh

**Saudi Arabia's crude output increased to 8.94 million barrels per day in July, reflecting a 1.26 percent rise from June.**

However, crude exports fell to 5.74 million bpd, a decrease of 5.06 percent, data released by the Joint Organizations Data Initiative showed.

Domestic petroleum demand saw an uptick, rising by 79,000 bpd to reach 2.83 million bpd. During a virtual OPEC+ meeting on Sept. 5, member countries reiterated their commitment to previously announced voluntary production cuts made in April and November 2023, emphasizing adherence to the agreed adjustments.

The eight OPEC+ nations—Saudi Arabia, Russia, Iraq, the

UAE, Kuwait, Kazakhstan, Algeria, and Oman—reaffirmed their commitment to production cuts, with Iraq and Kazakhstan promising to follow the compensation schedules they submitted to the OPEC Secretariat after the April meeting.

Data revealed that refinery crude exports dropped by 17 percent to 1.13 million bpd. The main products included processed crude used for diesel, motor and aviation gasoline, and fuel oil. Notably, diesel accounted for 43 percent of refined product exports, while motor and aviation gasoline made up 30 percent, and fuel oil comprised 8 percent. Despite its smaller share, fuel oil shipments surged by 20 percent, reaching 343,000 bpd.

In July, Saudi Arabia's refinery oil products output reached 2.46 million bpd, down 2 percent

## FASTFACTS

- Domestic petroleum demand saw an uptick, rising by 79,000 bpd to reach 2.83 million bpd.
- Saudi Arabia's crude exports fell to 5.74 million bpd, a decrease of 5.06 percent.
- Data revealed that refinery crude exports dropped by 17 percent to 1.13 million bpd.

from the previous month. Diesel accounted for the largest share at 44 percent, followed by motor and aviation gasoline at 28 percent, and fuel oil at 17 percent.

According to TechSciResearch, the Kingdom's oil refining market was valued at \$27 billion in 2023 and is projected to grow at a compound annual growth

rate of 4.7 percent through 2029. The refining sector is vital to Saudi Arabia's energy landscape, supported by significant investments aimed at expanding refining capacity and integrating advanced technologies.

As global demand for refined products—such as gasoline, diesel, jet fuel, and petrochemical feedstocks—continues to rise, Saudi Arabia is actively modernizing its infrastructure and building new refineries.

## Direct crude usage

Saudi Arabia's direct burn of crude oil rose significantly, increasing by 211,000 bpd to a total of 769,000 bpd. This marks a substantial 37.8 percent rise compared to the previous month. Year-over-year, direct crude usage was up by 177,000 bpd, reflecting a 30 percent increase.

## STATISTICS

# Oman posts H1 trade surplus of \$9.4bn

Miguel Hadechity Riyadh

Oman recorded a trade surplus of 3.65 billion Omani rials (\$9.4 billion) in the first six months of 2024, down slightly from 3.74 billion rials in the same period last year, official data showed.

According to the National Center for Statistics and Information, commodity exports rose to 11.6 billion rials, marking a 6.7 percent increase from 10.9 billion rials in June 2023.

This growth was primarily driven by higher oil and gas sales, which climbed to 7.2 billion rials, a 5.3 percent increase from the previous year.

Crude oil exports alone contributed 5.1 billion rials, a 7.2 percent rise, while refined oil exports reached 842 million rials, up 12.8 percent. However, natural gas exports fell 5.7 percent to 1.2 billion rials.

Oman's imports also rose by 10.8 percent, reaching 8 billion rials by June, up from 7.2 billion rials in the same period last year. Non-oil commodity exports rose by 8.1

## HIGHLIGHTS

# 7.2%

Crude oil exports alone contributed 5.1 billion rials, a 7.2 percent rise, while refined oil exports reached 842 million rials, up 12.8 percent

# 10.8%

Oman's imports also rose by 10.8 percent, reaching 8 billion rials by June, up from 7.2 billion rials in the same period last year.

percent to 3.5 billion rials, up from 3.3 billion rials in June 2023. Metal products led the non-oil exports at 1.3 billion rials, a 21.5 percent increase. Ordinary metals and their products reached 671 million rials, up 7.3 percent, while chemical industries and related products saw a slight 0.7 percent decline to 521 million rials.

Plastics and rubber products exports grew by 11.5 percent to 473 million rials, but exports of live animals and related products fell by 21 percent to 169 million rials. Other exports totaled 437 million rials. Oman's re-exports increased by 13.9 percent to 867 million rials by June 2024.

On the import side, mineral products were the largest category, reaching 2.3 billion rials, a 22.5 percent rise.

## BizBriefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

### Plunge

## EU car sales fall to three-year low in August

New car sales in the EU fell 18.3 percent in August to their lowest in three years, dragged down by double digit losses in major markets Germany, France and Italy and sliding electric vehicle sales, auto industry body data showed on Thursday.

The data showed the fourth consecutive monthly drop in EV sales, prompting the European Automobile Manufacturers' Association to demand "urgent action" to prevent further decline.

It said the industry needed "EU institutions to come forward with urgent relief measures." **Reuters**

### Interest

## China to trim main policy rate

China is widely expected to trim its main policy and benchmark lending rates on Friday, a Reuters poll showed, after the Federal Reserve's outsized interest rate cut removed some of the risks around sharp yuan declines. Monetary policy divergence and a weakening Chinese yuan have been the key constraints limiting Beijing's efforts to loosen policy over the past few years.

But with the US central bank kicking off its monetary easing cycle this week, analysts believe Beijing has more room to maneuver on monetary policy. **Reuters**

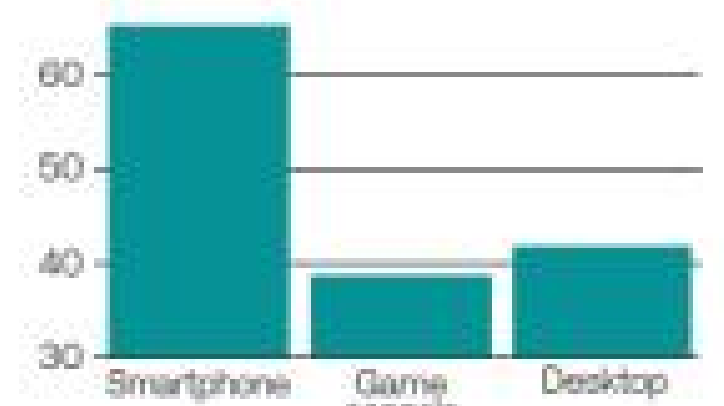
## Chart of THE DAY

According to a survey in 2022, mobile phones were the most used devices for gaming in the UAE.

Source: Statista

### GAMING DEVICE USAGE IN UAE

(As of August 2022) in %



## What We're Reading

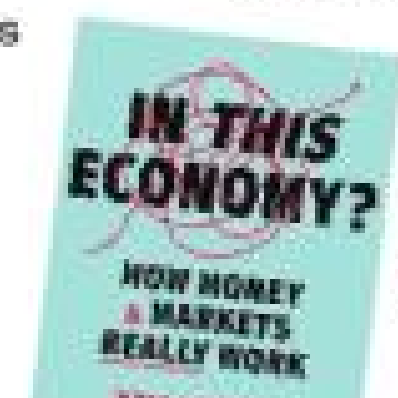
FOR THE TRAIN OR ON THE PLANE

### In This Economy?

KYLA SCANLON

For anyone trying to make sense of disorienting headlines, there is no better interpreter than Kyla Scanlon. Through her witty illustrations and insights from economics and philosophy, Scanlon breaks down everything you need

to know about how money and markets work. This book reveals the forces driving key economic outcomes and the outdated assumptions that constrain our political imagination, says a review published on goodreads.com.



### Bullion

## Gold holds firm after Fed's bumper rate cut

Gold prices climbed on Thursday after hitting a record high in the previous session, as the US Federal Reserve delivered a super-sized interest rate cut.

Spot gold rose 0.8 percent to \$2,578.40 per ounce, as of 0734 GMT, after scaling a record high of \$2,599.92 on Wednesday. US gold futures edged 0.2 percent higher to \$2,604.20.

The Fed kicked off with a 50-basis-point reduction that Chair Jerome Powell said was meant to show policymakers' commitment to sustaining a low unemployment rate now that inflation has eased.

**Reuters**

### Climate

## Canada's carbon emissions edge lower in 2023

Canada's carbon emissions declined slightly in 2023 from the previous year but need to fall much faster to meet Ottawa's 2030 climate target, the Canadian Climate Institute think tank said on Thursday.

Canada is aiming to cut carbon emissions 40-45 percent below 2005 levels by 2030.

But an early estimate of national emissions, released by the institute seven months before the government's official national inventory report, shows slow progress toward the target.

Total 2023 emissions were an estimated 702 million metric tonnes of carbon. **Reuters**

## Sport News

Jon Pike's



Cricket Weekly

ANALYSIS

# England's renewed rivalry with Australia pushed

Australia is touring Scotland, England and Wales with two forms of short-format cricket packed into just over four weeks, all at risk of weather disruption

Jon Pike London

There is much talk that the most evenly matched rivalry in international cricket has become that between Australia and India. It is true that, in recent years, the teams have dominated the rankings in Test cricket and were finalists in the last World Test Championship in 2023.

Then, Australia triumphed by six wickets. Both are the frontrunners in the current WTC cycle and will face each other in a five-match Test series in Australia starting in November. Yet, there is still no feeling of anticipation that quite compares with the near-150-year-old rivalry between England and Australia.

## Short-format cricket

This is true even during Australia's tour of Scotland, England and Wales, when two forms of short-format cricket are being packed into just over four weeks, all at risk of capricious weather.

Scotland was trounced in three T20Is. This was hardly a surprise but it provided welcome exposure and experience for Scottish cricket. In England and Wales, three T20Is and five ODIs are scheduled in eight different locations, south, west and north. The program has an end-of-year party feeling, a sense of visiting friends in places almost out of a sense of social responsibility.

## Frisson

Perhaps there is an unspoken frisson that English and Welsh cricket will never be the same again; overhanging the future, like Damocles' sword, is the sale of The Hundred. Who knows what the outcome will mean for the sort of bilateral tournament being witnessed this September?

At least this one seems safe, given it is Australia touring. People will turn up to see the old enemy; the first T20I at Southampton was sold out. Almost inevitably, rain delayed the start to 18.45 and the temperature at the end of the match at 10.10 p.m. was displayed as 7.5C.

## Transition

Both teams are in transition. England more so, looking at



the first T20I, England more so, as the team was beaten by 28 runs. After hugely disappointing defenses of both the ODI and T20I World Cups, it was time to move on and regroup. In any sport, reshaping and rebuilding successful teams is a difficult task requiring sensitivity, planning and emotional intelligence.

It can be argued that England's management displayed few of these requirements.

During the ODI World Cup in October/November 2023, the England and Wales Cricket Board appeared to panic by awarding multi-year contracts to its squad out of fear that some players were being

tempted by lucrative multi-competition contracts on offer from franchises.

## Retirements

The move has backfired. First, the one member of the squad not offered an ECB contract promptly retired from international cricket, while several others have not played for England since the World Cup ended.

One long-time servant, the all-rounder Moeen Ali, announced his retirement from international cricket after being omitted from the squad for the current series

against Australia.

These retirements and omissions open the door both for emerging and recently dormant talent.

## Optimistic

On the evidence of the second T20I at Cardiff, England has reason to be optimistic. Set 194 to win, a combination of Liam Livingstone's experience, with 87, and Jacob Bethell playing in his second international match, with 44, was largely instrumental in England winning by three wickets, despite a late wobble. Unfortunately, the third and deciding match fell victim to rain in Manchester.

The five ODIs will be shoehorned into 11 days, the

last one scheduled for Sept. 29, when sunset will be at 18:54.

## Critics

Bilateral series of this type have been described as meaningless. It is not clear if the critics mean in comparison with franchise cricket or in relation to the players being subject to too much cricket. England's debutants and returning players may well see much meaning in the matches. They provide an opportunity for them to display their talents and temperament against the oldest foe.

In addition, there is revenue for the venues and on-ground vendors, for the ECB, and for those providing travel and accommodation in the local and regional economy. Audiences in Australia and in Asia may be less keen to tune in, given the time differences. However, the two teams have only hosted each other for three ODIs and three T20Is since 2018, hardly a case of saturation.

## Temperatures

Australians may not welcome playing in the temperatures on offer, although this week they hit 25C in the daytime. There are places up for grabs, especially in the T20 team. David Warner has retired, so a new opener is required. The all-conquering ODI and Test captain, Pat Cummins, has been rested, along with Mitchell Starc and Glenn Maxwell, who are now, respectively, 31, 34 and 35 years old.

One to watch for the future is 21-year-old Cooper Connolly. His Sheffield Shield debut was in the 2024 final, in which he helped Western Australia beat Tasmania by scoring 90 in the first innings. His debut for Australia came against Scotland. Jake Fraser-McGurk, at 22, is another young batting tyro. Having scored 330 runs at a strike rate of 234 in the 2024 Indian Premier League, his introduction to the Australian team in Scotland proved a tough task but he responded with a 29-ball half century in the second ODI against England.

Australia has always had a habit of producing previously unheard-of players who turn out to have long and successful careers. England has been more proactive in recent years in this respect.

Sport Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

To begin play in 2026

## WNBA grants Portland a franchise

The WNBA is headed back to Portland, with Oregon's biggest city getting an expansion team that will begin play in 2026.

The team will be owned and operated by Raj Sports, led by Lisa Bhathal Merahe and Alex Bhathal, who also own the Portland Thorns of the National Women's Soccer League. They paid \$125 million for the franchise.

"This is huge for Portland. We are so honored and humbled to be the vessel that delivers this WNBA franchise to Portland," Bhathal Merahe said. "And that's really how we consider ourselves. Portland is this incredibly diverse, enthusiastic community." **AP**

## Tennis

### Raducanu into Korea Open quarterfinals

Emma Raducanu moved into the Korea Open quarterfinals and faces a potential matchup with No. 1 seed Daria Kasatkina after beating China's Yuan Yue 6-4, 6-3 on Thursday.

Britain's Raducanu, the 2021 US Open champion, took a medical timeout in the first set to get her foot strapped but she returned to oust No. 8 seed Yuan on her seventh match point.

"I think the key to my success today was trying to let go of any frustration that happened," said Raducanu. **AFP**



## Athletics

### Diamond League series to hike prize money

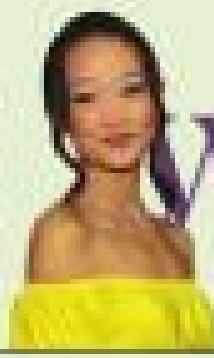
The Diamond League track and field series is set to increase its prize money next season, World Athletics said Wednesday.

The announcement comes as the World Athletics president Sebastian Coe bids to become president of the International Olympic Committee.

The total prize money to be paid in 2025 will reach \$9.2 million, the highest amount since the series launched in 2010. **AP**

Follow Arab News Briefs all through the day @ArabNews

Callina Liang stars in 'Bad Genius,' now showing in cinemas across the GCC.



## Weekend Lifestyle, Art & Culture

EAT, PLAY, LOVE

# Nujuma, a Ritz-Carlton Reserve — a great escape

The island-based Red Sea resort offers the chance for both relaxation and adventure

Shyama Krishna Kumar Jeddah

The latest offering from Saudi Arabia's Red Sea Global Project — Nujuma, a Ritz-Carlton Reserve — is situated off the Kingdom's west coast in the relatively untouched Ummahat Islands. It offers guests the opportunity to immerse themselves in Saudi Arabia's nature, culture and cuisine.

Red Sea International Airport — situated where the expansive desert meets the cerulean coast — is fairly small. It took around five minutes from the plane stopping to being ushered out of the airport, luggage in hand, which has to be some kind of record.

It's a further 15-to-20-minute drive to the Red Sea arrival center, from which you can take a boat transfer — or, if the weather is suitable, a seaplane — to Nujuma.

We found ourselves there on an extremely windy day, so the 40-minute boat ride was a bit of an adventure, featuring a white-knuckled woman fighting for her life to stay put in her seat (yours truly) and a captain who kept looking back, big smiles and all, to flash a reassuring thumbs up every now and then, all while ever-increasing waves crashed against the boat. It could have all been a bit much, but the sight of the captain's assistant nonchalantly watching YouTube videos in the seat in front of me put my hyperbolic fears to rest.

The bumpy ride proved well worth it when I arrived at Nujuma (Arabic for stars), and was promptly whisked to my over-water villa, offering unobstructed views of endless blue waters and the approaching sunset. There are 63 villas in total, both over-water and on the beach, and each shell-inspired domed structure comes with a private pool and offers complete privacy while simultaneously giving full access



(Above) The sunset view from one of the over-water villas at Nujuma. (Right) An aerial view of Nujuma. (Below) Sita, the all-day restaurant at Nujuma. Images supplied



to the views with floor-to-ceiling windows in all rooms, as well as a telescope to stargaze at the light-pollution-free night sky.

The first thing that will strike you about Nujuma is a true feeling of otherworldliness. Courting a high-end clientele, Nujuma seems like the perfect getaway for a celebrity looking for a discreet holiday or a honeymooning couple wanting some privacy.

Each villa also has a personal host to handle all guest requests. The service of Jeddah-born Omar, who was assigned to my room, was exceptional and he was enthusiastic and knowledgeable

about both the Kingdom and the Red Sea. When it comes to dining, Nujuma provides four excellent options. Sita, the all-day restaurant, was my favorite, combining the delicacies of a French patisserie with a Levantine eatery. The shakshuka and the chocolate pain perdu with a side of fresh berries remain standouts. If the weather is fine, I'd recommend enjoying your meal outdoors under the arched woven-wood ceiling.

The seafood outpost Tabrah (Arabic for "luckiest catch") is a charming villa-style restaurant where you can sample everything from the catch of the day to lobster to a seafood paella

that will have you asking for a second helping.

The alfresco Jamaa is the beach-side lounge offering light eats and incomparable sunset views, as you sit close to the outdoor pool and cabanas.

Just indoors is Maia, a cozy "bar" with a roof dotted with twinkling constellations, and bartenders ready to whip up any cocktail you can think of.

For those looking for more than just food, drink and great views, Nujuma offers many activities, especially for those who'd like to learn more about the Kingdom. The Conservation House is dedicated to the culture and history of Saudi Arabia, and the resident historian is available for a chat with anyone who so desires.



There's also Sean Laughlin, a naturalist who gives talks on the ecology and marine life of the Red Sea, and who accompanied me on my very first snorkeling trip. The clearer-than-crystal waters give breathtaking views of the area's coral reef system, the fourth largest in the world.

Guests can also enjoy other outdoor activities like sailing, kayaking, paddleboarding and guided tours of the mangroves.

On my last night at Nujuma, I also had the pleasure of talking to the charming house stargazer, Saudi astrophysicist Habib Bafeil, who, wielding his laser pen with the panache of Indiana Jones handling his whip, pointed out the constellations in the sky as he told stories of the pre-Islamic Arabs who navigated the deserts using the stars alone. Families travelling with children especially will love this particular activity, which will spark their curiosity in science and the world around us.

All in all, Nujuma offers a getaway like no other.

## Screen Scene

WHAT'S ON IN CINEMAS



### Transformers One

Voice cast: Chris Hemsworth, Brian Tyree Henry

Director: Josh Cooley

Animated sci-fi movie based on the titular toy line, depicting the origin story of Optimus Prime and Megatron. Stellar voice cast also includes Scarlett Johansson, Steve Buscemi and Jon Hamm.



### Bad Genius

Starring: Benedict Wong, Taylor Hickson, Jabari Banks

Director: J.C. Lee

Remake of a Thai heist thriller (transplanted to a school setting) based on real-life news reports about a straight-A student who devises a scheme to cheat on SAT exams.



### Enab

Starring: Ayten Amer, Islam Ibrahim, Nour Qadri

Director: Ahmed Nour

A millionaire is celebrating his upcoming wedding with his fiancée, his friend and his friend's fiancée. He wakes up to discover that he has married both women, and given his wealth away.



### Bagman

Starring: Sam Claflin, Steven Cree, Antonia Thomas

Director: Colm McCarthy

Patrick, his wife Karina and their son Jake find themselves hunted by a malevolent mythical creature whom Patrick narrowly escaped in his childhood. Now, the Bagman is back.

## Best & Worst

Tamaraah Al-Gabaani

The Saudi Arabia-based fashion influencer talks style moments, fashion trends, and good and bad advice.

Best TV show or film?

My favorite show is "This is Us." I don't think I've ever cried as much as I have watching that show. I felt really connected to all of the characters and, over time, you just become very attached to the outcome. I highly recommend watching that show.

Worst TV show or film?

Any horror thing. I can't watch anything negative in general.

Best personal style moment?

My Atlantis The Royal opening looks. I did a few. The red-carpet look was one of my favorite ever. Also, this year's Dubai World Cup look was actually covered by CNN. So those are probably my favorite style moments.

Worst personal style moment?

Oh, let's not even go there. I have so many. It is so embarrassing.



Best fashion trend of 2024 so far?

I'm in love with socks, tights and stockings of all colors and styles. I'm having so much fun styling them this year.

Worst fashion trend of 2024 so far?

Probably elevated activewear. Like, wearing your yoga outfit with a pair of heels. As creative as I am, and as much as I like to break

Tamaraah Al-Gabaani in her Dubai World Cup outfit. Supplied

boundaries, I just can't seem to get into this trend.

Best advice you've ever been given?

"Be a blessing." During COVID-19, I did a lot of Tony Robbins courses. They were life changing. This is one of the mission statements that he lives by. I found it so inspiring; it really resonated with me. I want to be a blessing to others, then leave this life knowing that I did my best.

Worst advice you've ever been given?

That I shouldn't work in fashion and that fashion isn't for me.

Best thing to do when you're feeling low?

Move your body. Tony Robbins said whenever you're not feeling good, move your body. Since I started doing that, I've been able to regulate my emotions much better.

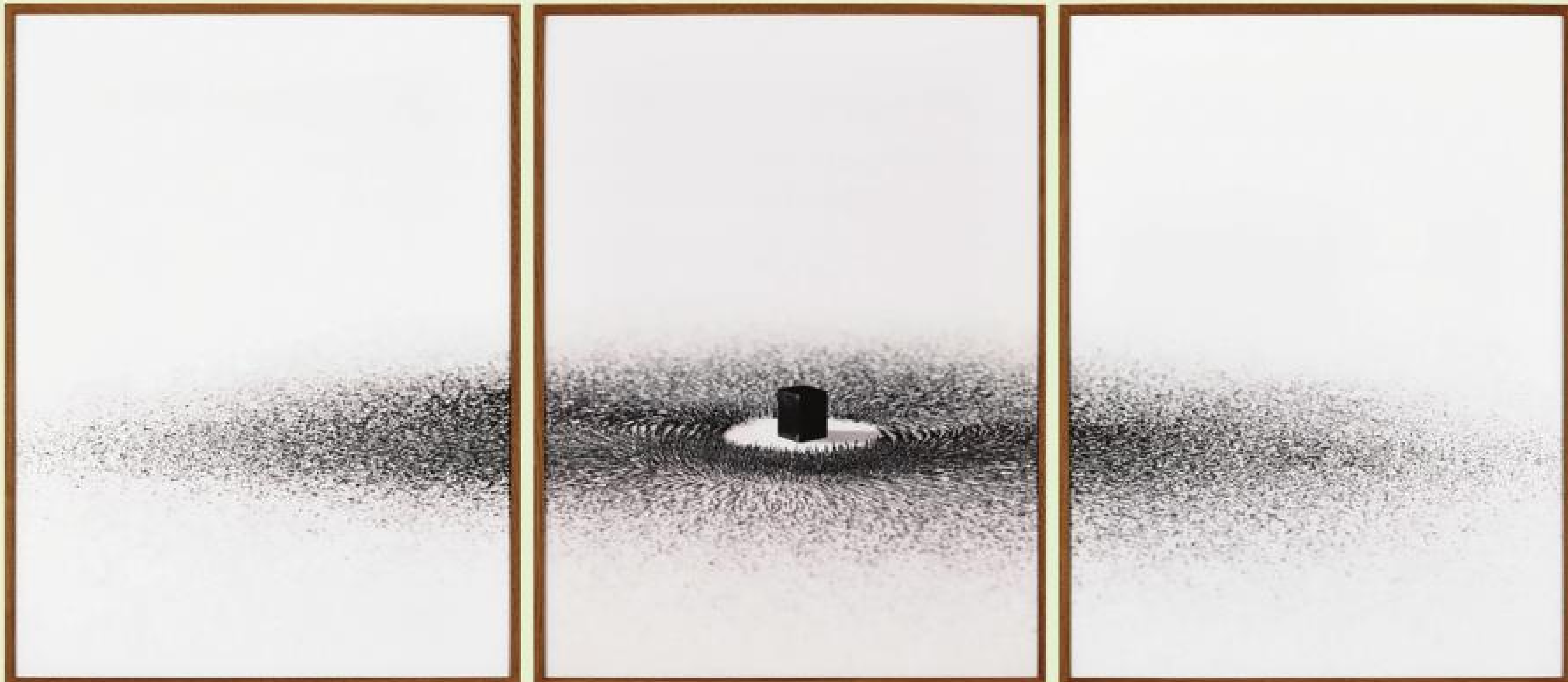
Worst thing to do when you're feeling good?

Be around negative people, or people that complain or gossip about others.

Dana Awartani's 'Icosahedron Within a Dodecahedron' sold for £35,000 at Christie's Dubai in 2023.



# Weekend



Ahmed Mater's 'Magnetism' triptych, which sold for £189,000 (around SAR935,000) at Christie's London. Image courtesy of Christie's

CULTURE

# Christie's to open new franchise in Saudi Arabia

The storied auction house's regional president says time is 'undoubtedly right' for expansion

Rawaa Talass Dubai

The renowned auction house Christie's is expanding its presence in the Middle East by opening a franchise in Riyadh, led by managing director Nour Kelani. This will be Christie's second outpost in the region, following the 2005 opening of Christie's Dubai, which has had a significant impact on the promotion of Arab art and creativity, both contemporary and modern.

In an exclusive interview with Arab News, Anthea Peers, Christie's president, EMEA, explains why now is the time to expand the auction house's activities in the Kingdom, which is experiencing a historic cultural boom. "Christie's has a longstanding presence in the Middle East, with deep-rooted relationships with Saudi Arabian collectors based both in the Kingdom and around the world," Peers says. "In recent years, we have witnessed a considerable period of growth within the arts and culture sector — I have the privilege of visiting the Kingdom regularly and each time I am blown away by the passion, the ambition



(Left) Abdunnasser Gharem's 'Message/Messenger.' (Below) Anthea Peers, Christie's president, EMEA. (Below, right) Manal AlDowayan's 'Dove.' Images courtesy of Christie's

and the creative talent that I encounter — and the time is undoubtedly right for this expansion," Peers says.

An opening date has not yet been confirmed. "Having recently established our entity, we look forward to completing all necessary formalities and further extending our business in the Kingdom as soon as possible," Peers says.

In Saudi Arabia, Christie's will focus on providing works of art by modern and contemporary Middle Eastern artists, as well as high-end jewelry and watches or other timepieces. They are also keen to engage with the Saudi youth and aspiring art collectors.

"Bearing in mind the high percentage of millennials in the Kingdom, it's likely we will also continue

to see an increase in engagement among this demographic for Arab artists, modern and contemporary art, as well as engagement with the secondary luxury sector," says Peers.

In recent years, several acclaimed Saudi artists have made a splash at Christie's with notable artworks sold at high prices. "The market has been reinforced by strong biennials, gallery representations, and alongside key institutional shows both locally and internationally," says Peers.

Saudi conceptual artist Abdunnasser Gharem's golden-domed wood-and-copper installation piece "Message/Messenger" was sold at Christie's for \$842,500 in 2011 — the highest price fetched so far by a Saudi artist at the auction house. Manal AlDowayan, who represented the Kingdom at the Venice

Biennale earlier this year, has a long-standing relationship with Christie's, which most recently sold her work "Dove" — previously exhibited at the Venice biennale — for just over \$15,000, more than three times its low estimate, having,

Peers says, "attracted strong bidding from our established Middle East clients."

Mid-career artist Ahmed Mater, whose multidisciplinary works were highlighted in a solo exhibition at Christie's London this summer, has also sold pieces at well above estimated prices; his "Magnetism" triptych fetched £189,000 (around SAR935,000) at Christie's London. Other emerging Saudi artists, such as Dana Awartani and Alia Ahmad, have also been highlighted at Christie's.

Dana Awartani. There are active Saudi clients who are evolving and refining their own collections to include a mix of established and emerging Saudi artists."

Christie's opening in the Kingdom comes at a time when the domestic arts scene is flourishing, with new cultural initiatives, institutions, and festivals supporting Saudi artists as well as welcoming international names.

"We will be honored to support the burgeoning arts scene in Saudi Arabia as part of the ongoing national diversification efforts," says Peers. "We look forward to partnering with institutions and arts and culture organizations, hosting dedicated exhibitions, as well as supporting regional cultural events within the Kingdom — for example, we collaborated with Diriyah Contemporary Arts Biennale earlier this year.

"We are also committed to bringing regular international sale highlights from important auctions around the world into the Kingdom for the public and clients to view," she continues. "Christie's will continue to raise awareness of art and artists from Saudi Arabia's rich cultural heritage to our wider international audience."



"We have had passionate Saudi Arabian clients for many years with a wide range of interests ranging from Old Master paintings and modern and contemporary Middle Eastern art to fine watches and jewelry, among other categories," Peers says. "We have seen increased interest in a number of Arab artists over the last three years including Saudi artists Ahmed Mater, Manal AlDowayan and

