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KEEP SANCTIONS ON
ASSAD REGIME, SAY
CHRISTIAN LEADERS
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**SAUDI
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PROJECT PUTS
A 'NEW SMILE'
ON CANCER-HIT
CHILDREN
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&FINALLY
BRAZILIAN
IT-GIRL CAMILA
COELHO SHOWS
SUPPORT FOR
KAREN WAZEN
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45TH
ANNIVERSARY

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ARAB NEWS
The Voice of a Changing Region

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**Libyans
mark
10th
year of
uprising**

Libyans wave national flags as they gather in the eastern city of Benghazi on Wednesday to mark the 10th anniversary of the 2011 revolution. The uprising toppled longtime dictator Muammar Qaddafi but threw the country into a decade of violent lawlessness.

AFP



JORDAN INITIATIVE
*Gratitude
and tears
as refugees
vaccinated*

Raed Omari Zaatari, Jordan

For Um Ali, a 73-year-old Syrian refugee in Jordan, being vaccinated against COVID-19 was a moment of overwhelming emotion.

"I really feel more secure now from the corona that has added a lot to our burdens," the mother-of-five said, her eyes filling with tears. "For an old woman of my age, receiving the vaccine was such a great blessing. Thank you, Jordan."

Um Ali was vaccinated against the disease at the sprawling Zaatari refugee camp on Jordan's border with Syria, home to 80,000 displaced Syrians.

As the world's wealthy countries race ahead with vaccinating their populations, Jordan has begun delivering the jab to some of the most vulnerable, those driven from their homes by the turmoil that has shaken parts of the Middle East in the past 10 years.

"Jordan is the first country in the world to include refugees in its nationwide COVID-19 vaccination

Jordan has begun giving the jab to those driven from their homes by the turmoil that has shaken parts of the Middle East in the past 10 years.

drive," Mohammad Hawari, spokesman in Jordan for the UN's refugee agency (UNHCR), told Arab News. "The vaccination center in Zaatari is also the first in the world at a UN-administered refugee camp."

Despite spending another cold winter in the camp, refugees spoke of their relief and gratitude. "I feel really privileged to receive the vaccine in a refugee camp when other people in advanced countries are unable to," said Ibrahim Elhamad, 69, who arrived in Jordan from Syria in 2012.

Hawari said that Syrian refugees in urban centers in Amman, Zarqa, Irbid and Ramtha would also receive COVID-19 vaccines. "In fact, the vaccines will be given to all refugees and asylum seekers of different nationalities living in Jordan."

World's case of 'long COVID' needs urgent attention Page 9

NATION IN TURMOIL

Squabbling MPs threaten \$246m aid package for Lebanon's poor

Draft law to sign World Bank loan agreement held up by arguments over distribution of cash

Najla Housseini Beirut

Hopes of an emergency \$246 million World Bank relief package for Lebanon's poor have been thrown into chaos amid squabbling by members of parliament over how to distribute the funds.

The World Bank cash aid is aimed at setting up a stronger social safety net for 800,000 of Lebanon's most vulnerable citizens as up to half the population faces growing deprivation in an economic and health crisis. The spiraling collapse has led to three-digit inflation and fears that up to 20 percent of Lebanese could be plunged into extreme poverty.

With little hope of an end to the political stalemate and economic experts predicting the central bank will cut subsidies of essential goods, the caretaker government has been desperate to access the loan to stave off social chaos. The deteriorating economic situation was highlighted on Wednesday when the dollar reached 9,000 Lebanese pounds on the black market.

However, hopes that the World Bank emergency cash could be used quickly were dented when a draft law to sign the loan agreement became the subject of a heated parliamentary debate.

Some MPs said the loan details were "ambiguous and the mechanism of distribution unclear."

BACKGROUND

The World Bank cash aid is aimed at setting up a stronger social safety net for 800,000 of Lebanon's most vulnerable citizens.

Others demanded that the package should be linked with a halt to smuggling across the border with Syria.

Hezbollah MP Hassan Fadlallah accused the government of using the economic crisis and people's pressing needs to approve projects without scrutiny. "This affects Lebanon's sovereignty," he said.

MPs also argued over whether the

loan should be donated to needy families at an exchange rate of 6,240 Lebanese pounds to the dollar, or in US dollars. Other MPs expressed fears the loan funds could be exploited for political purposes.

The World Bank has estimated that 1.7 million Lebanese are likely to fall into poverty, with up to 841,000 people facing food shortages.

Michel Abboud, president of Caritas-Lebanon, said that the charity had tens of thousands of struggling families on its lists. "We have been in the social field for 50 years, and we are seeing more poor people joining the lists as a result of the loss of family income due to the exceptional situation in the country," he said.

The original amount offered by the World Bank was \$600 million, but it was reduced amid concerns over potential mismanagement. Ziad Abdel Samad, executive director of the Arab NGO Network for Development, said: "The World Bank refused to hand over any money due to lack of trust and the absence of reform." Eventually, it offered a reduced loan to help people "survive in the face of suffocating crises."

Samad said: "Politicians defending sovereignty is an attempt to further control the management of the program funds. This aid will vanish in the crisis." International groups should be overseeing the loan distribution, he said.

VIRTUAL MEETING

Saudi energy minister in warning to oil speculators

'Don't try to predict the unpredictable,' Prince Abdul Aziz says at industry forum hosted in Riyadh

Frank Kane Dubai

Trying to predict the next move by the OPEC+ oil alliance is futile, Saudi Energy Minister Prince Abdul Aziz bin Salman warned global oil markets on Wednesday.

Speaking to other ministers and energy policymakers at a forum hosted virtually in Riyadh, he said the world had to learn the lessons of last year's oil price fluctuations.

"One of these lessons is the futility of trying to predict what is around the corner, and the best we can do is to increase our preparedness and resilience, realizing that



collective action is the best way to tackle the challenges ahead," Prince Abdul Aziz said.

"And on the subject of predictability, this also applies to those who are

Speaking to other ministers and energy policymakers at a forum hosted virtually in Riyadh, Prince Abdul Aziz bin Salman said the world had to learn the lessons of last year's oil price fluctuations.

trying to predict the next move of OPEC+. To those people I say, don't try to predict the unpredictable."

His comments at a symposium on energy outlooks were seen as

an attempt to head off speculation in oil markets ahead of a key meeting of OPEC+ next month, when the alliance, led by Saudi Arabia and Russia, must decide if it will restore oil supply in the face of uncertain demand.

He advised against any action that might affect the pace of recovery in global markets. "We are in a much better place than we were a year ago, but I must warn, once again, against complacency," he said. "The uncertainty is very high, and we have to be extremely cautious."

"The football match is still be-

ing played, and it is too early to celebrate and declare any victory against the virus. The referee is yet to blow the final whistle."

Detailed report Page 11

The Brief

PALESTINE POLITICS

The Palestinian factions, who agreed in the Cairo dialogue to form a national coalition government after the elections in May, have postponed a discussion on their political program. **P6**

KHAN'S LANKA VISIT

Sri Lanka has canceled Pakistan Premier Imran Khan's address to the parliament amid claims that the visit is ill-timed because of rising virus cases across the country. **P8**

SME BANK HAILED

Saudi Arabia's decision to set up a bank dedicated to small and medium-sized enterprises has been welcomed by industry experts in KSA. **P12**

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Radar



The world is in desperate need of good leadership. Too many leaders fall victim to hatred, bigotry, and petty conflict. Leadership is a gift and responsibility, and must be approached with reverence.

Dr. Mohammed bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa
Secretary-general, Muslim World League

KSA today



Online Marketing

Brad Alexander, a business growth coach and storybrand guide, is presenting a “Flip the Script” workshop for business owners to save time through creative and story-based ways of marketing. The workshop is free of charge and can be found on eventbrite.com. It starts on Thursday at 7 p.m.



Online Art

Families can join Liz Million's free and easy draw-along tutorials. Participants will be drawing everything from moss monsters to wildlife to Romans. The workshop will start on Thursday and runs from 5:30 p.m. to 6:15 p.m. Registration and other information can be found on eventbrite.com



Online Community

Selah Freedom Organization is offering a webinar for parents to learn how to teach their children about the importance of body safety rules, how to save themselves and other children from an abusive person, and how to prevent violence. The webinar is available for free on eventbrite.com and will start on Thursday from 9 p.m. to 10 p.m.



Online Development

Learn how “Visual Practice” can enhance your life, work systems, and other things to create a positive change in the space you are at. Robin Hotz will present participants with the idea of visual practice and teach them how to do it. The workshop will start on Thursday at 8 p.m. Registration is for free through eventbrite.com

The Register

THE PICTURES THAT MARK THE DAY



Saudi Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Adel Al-Jubeir met the ambassadors of Norway and the UK to the Kingdom at the ministry's office in Riyadh on Wednesday.

Al-Jubeir and Norwegian Ambassador Oyvind Stokke reviewed the bilateral relations between the two countries and issues of common interest. In a separate meeting, Al-Jubeir and

UK Ambassador Neil Crompton reviewed relations between the two countries. They also discussed the most prominent regional and international developments of common interest.

What's Trending

Today's hot topics explained by Nada Jan



TRANSFORMATION

Emma Stone

Emma Stone's transformation into the fashionable villain Cruella De Vil is shockingly stunning. The actress looks completely unrecognizable as a punk rock version in the first movie poster “Cruella” shared by Disney on Wednesday morning on Instagram with the caption “Hello, Cruel World. New Trailer Tomorrow.” In the photo, Stone sported Cruella's iconic black-and-white hairstyle while wearing a flawless smoky eyeshadow and some bold dark lipstick. Back in August of 2019, at the D23 Expo convention, Disney shared a movie still of Stone walking three dalmatians. The “La La Land” actor shared at the time “Since you're such huge Disney fans, we wanted to let you know a bit about the story. 1970s set in London, it's punk rock.” Stone's Cruella de Vil follows Glenn Close's portrayal of the Disney villain in 1996's “101 Dalmatians” and the “102 Dalmatians” sequel in 2000. “Cruella” will mainly focus on the backstory of the villain and is set for release on May 28.

MODELING

#YEONJUNatNYFW

Yeonjun of TXT is the first Korean idol of the 4th generation to model at New York Fashion Week. Yeonjun is the eldest member of the five-member group TXT (Tomorrow X Together). His position in the group is the rapper and main dancer. Aside from his singing career, he produces songs and is also an actor. In the past few months, Yeonjun was rarely active on social media, which worried fans, but on Tuesday, it was revealed that he was busy preparing for his official debut at New York Fashion Week, practicing modeling and designing clothes for his own collaboration line, which is expected to be launched in March. On Wednesday, photos and video of Yeonjun modeling and sporting his own designs sent fans crazy. They took to Twitter to compliment him, launching hashtags that trended worldwide, including #YEONJUNatNYFW, #TXT YEONJUN, and others. @kaitae7 tweeted: “He's so hot and perfect at the same time ... 4TH GEN IT BOY YEONJUN.” @4hgenitboy tweeted: “This is such a huge break for yeonjun in an industry very close to his heart and I am happy for him for everything he has achieved. i hope for more opportunities like this for him and txt in the future.” @txtvisuals tweeted: “No but I'm genuinely so proud of Yeonjun. We all know how much he enjoys fashion, even when he's showing us his outfits he gets so excited. So for a clothing brand to see how passionate he is and want him as their model is such a huge achievement for him.” @myjoysxt tweeted: “So proud of Yeonjun for pulling off the look and concept wow hoping that this appearance at New York Fashion Week brings in more opportunities for him and all the members.” @nunuxkoo tweeted: “I'm so proud of him, he's happy and it's all that matters.” @txtdreaming_jj tweeted: “Yeonjun looks so stunning and happy here. I'm so so proud of him.”



Today's Number

1.8m

Saudi Arabia's National Water Co. announced the completion of 225 projects during 2020, which contributed to the delivery of water and sanitation services to more than 1.8 million new beneficiaries in different regions of the Kingdom. The company said that 107 water projects and 107 sanitation services projects were completed, in addition to 11 supporting projects being implemented.

Who's Who



Dr. Bandar Al-Khayyal

Dr. Bandar Al-Khayyal has been the general manager of programs accreditation at the Saudi National Center for Academic Accreditation and Assessment (NCAAA) since January. In 2010, Al-Khayyal gained a bachelor's degree in computer science and two years later a master's degree in industrial management, both from the Eastern Michigan University, in the US city of Ypsilanti. He then went on to obtain a master's degree in industrial engineering from New Mexico State University, in Las Cruces, and in 2013 a Ph.D. in the same subject from Northeastern University in Massachusetts. From 2010 to 2011, he presided over the Saudi student union in Detroit where he partnered with the Saudi Cultural Mission in Washington, DC to help resolve issues on behalf of students. He also worked as a teaching assistant in Northeastern University's department of mechanical and industrial engineering, assisting in the design and construction of courses and tests. For six months from March 2017, Al-Khayyal acted as a consultant at the Tatweer Buildings Co., a business wholly owned by the Saudi Public Investment Fund, before moving to Prince Sultan University as an assistant professor in the department of production and manufacture. He founded the Riyadh-based university's engineering management master's degree program and in 2019 became its director. Al-Khayyal joined the NCAAA last year as a job-sharing consultant and was the center's director of engineering and computer sciences accreditation prior to taking on his new role.

The Region

The Middle East Roundup

Arab News Dubai

•“Abstraction and Calligraphy — Towards a Universal Language” has opened at the Louvre Abu Dhabi. The exhibition explores the calligraphy of Asia and North Africa as an inspiration for Western artists. It will allow visitors to appreciate the works of Henri Matisse, Paul Klee, Joan Miró, Lee Ufan, André Masson and Jackson

Pollock, alongside contemporary works and calligraphies from artists responding to Eastern traditions. The works come from the Centre Pompidou, Guggenheim Abu Dhabi and other institutions.

•IFZA Dubai Polo Gold Cup 2021 started on Feb. 14 in Dubai. The event is an 18-goal handicap competition and is seen as the most significant event of the Dubai Polo

series. The world's best-known polo players will be attending this highly competitive tournament.

•Cinema Akil continues to screen Najwa Najjar's critically acclaimed drama “Between Heaven and Earth.” The movie is about the divorce of a young, middle class couple from Ramallah, Salma and Tamer, and how it leads them to uncover secrets about the past.

Prayer Times in Saudi Arabia

Feb. 18	Fajr	Sunrise	Dhuhr	Aar	Maghreb	Isha
Makkah	5:33	6:49	12:35	3:53	6:21	7:51
Madinah	5:35	6:53	12:36	3:52	6:18	7:48
Riyadh	5:06	6:26	12:08	3:24	5:50	7:20
Abha	5:21	6:35	12:24	3:44	6:13	7:43
Dammam	4:53	6:13	11:54	3:09	5:35	7:05

The cost of rebuilding war-shattered Syria's physical assets is estimated at \$117 billion.



Spotlight

SYRIA

A war of words over sanctions

Prominent Christian figures rebut arguments in letter urging Biden to lift sanctions targeting Assad regime figures

Ephrem Kossaiy New York City

Isolated and paralyzed by the Caesar Act's sanctions, the regime of Syrian President Bashar Assad has been using every ruse in the book to find a way around them. The changing of the guard in Washington, coupled with the appointment of senior White House advisers keen on a thaw with Iran, may be just the break Assad and Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah had been waiting for.

"We as Syrians are afraid of those advisers who have good ties with the Iranians," said Ayman Abdel Nour, a Syrian reformist. "Are they going to sell us out — like they did under (President Barack) Obama — as the icing on the cake of another nuclear accord?"

A widely publicized letter sent to President Joe Biden on Jan. 21 by Michel Abs, secretary-general of the Middle East Council of Churches, and co-signed by Syriac Catholic Patriarch Ignace Joseph III Younan, Melkite Catholic Patriarch Joseph Absi and Syriac Orthodox Patriarch Ignatius Aphrem II, argued that "unilateral coercive measures imposed by the United States make the economic plight of the Syrian people worse."

The signatories include other clerics besides officials and civil personalities with close ties to the Assad regime.

As scholars of modern Middle East history can attest, the regime has a long history of using minorities as a means to burnish its image abroad while keeping its crimes under wraps. When Hafez Assad came to power in 1970, he presented himself from day one as the "minority protector" and the antidote to rising Islamic fundamentalism.

His son Bashar continues to use the Christian minority in his various attempts to get around the sanctions, and as he desperately tries to regain some sort of international recognition. Thus, he sent four patriarchs to Washington in 2013 to meet with President Barack Obama. When the latter watched them repeat the same talking points from small paper notes hidden in their pockets, he was infuriated.

"It was a disaster, that meeting," remembers Abdel Nour, who met with the four patriarchs at their hotel lobby before their meeting with Obama.

"It was very clear the patriarchs were the regime's intelligence messenger. So, when they returned the following year, Obama refused to meet with them."

Assad had more tricks up his sleeve, so to speak, as the sanctions' noose continued to tighten. In 2017, after he declared victory in Aleppo, he went on to seek the Vatican's public support.

In order to get it, he gave the Holy See two offers the latter could not refuse: The first was a license to build a Roman Melkite faculty of theology open to seminarians from all over the Middle East.

The second was a visit he personally paid to a Syriac Catholic youth camp. All smiles, he posed for the cameras that showed him buddying up with the Christian youths.

Thus, when Abdel Nour, who is also the editor-in-chief of Al4Syria, Syria's leading independent news outlet, got wind of the Jan. 21 letter, he was alarmed.



Syrian President Bashar Assad (main) meeting Melkite Greek Catholic Patriarch Joseph Absi. Assad, like his father, Hafez, has claimed to be the protector of Syria's minorities, including its Christians (right) as cover for the regime's alleged human rights abuses and war crimes (far right). AFP



Abdel Nour says he picked up the phone and called the signatories. He learned that some had been coerced to sign; others had sought changes to the letter before agreeing to sign, but their names were added anyway without any changes made.

One signatory was laid out on a hospital bed when Abdel Nour called him. The patient had not



It was very clear the patriarchs were the regime's intelligence messenger. So, when they returned the following year, Obama refused to meet with them.

even heard of the letter, he said.

An examination of the background of one of the letter's signatories, SOS Chrétiens d'Orient (SOS-CO), reveals that the French NGO knowingly transferred money and equipment to the pro-regime National Defense Forces (NDF).

The Nov. 2020 report compiled by the UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) also claimed there are close ties between SOS-CO's founders and NDF leaders.

The US Treasury Department defines the NDF as "a pro-Assad, Iranian-affiliated militia." It sanctioned one of its top leaders late last year for his alleged role in the massacre of more than 70 civilians.

What alarmed Abdel Nour most was the sophisticated, efficient language of the letter. It was written by

highly respected Christian dignitaries who wrote a single, simple demand: That sanctions be lifted. This is the kind of letter that gets attention in Washington, D.C. "They worked very hard on it. They started writing in December, two months before Biden took the oath of office," said Abdel Nour.

"And they submitted it to him on January 21, his second day in office, hoping to capitalize on the new momentum. The letter makes it look as though all the suffering of the Syrian people is due to the Caesar Act sanctions against the figures of the regime."

Something needed to be done, said Abdel Nour, who is president of the non-profit Syrian Christians for Peace. Work on a new letter then began.

A response was written and signed by prominent Christian and Muslim figures from six Arab countries.

INNUMBERS

128,000

People believed murdered in Syrian jails by Assad regime.

\$7.6bn

Estimated Iranian line of credit to Assad regime since 2011.

70%

Decline in Syria's per capita budget spending since 2010.

They included members of the Christian Arab Congress; the Jordanian diplomat Marwan Muasher, Lebanese former MPs Fares Souaid and Ahmed Pafat, as well as Iraqi intellectuals and politicians, university rectors and famous writers.

The signatories wrote that, in Assad, the world is dealing with a leader who has been summoned by European courts for his war crimes and crimes against humanity.

They argued that Syrians are suffering, but for reasons that have nothing to do with sanctions: The regime has found ways to steal humanitarian aid, sell the goods on the market and use the profits to finance its military operations against civilians.

They called for aid to be delivered directly to impoverished Syrian citizens living in refugee camps under the supervision of international organizations.

The letter also pushed to put a stop to any increase in humanitarian supplies, contending that it is not the quantity of aid that is the problem, but the way it is distributed. Instead, according to the signatories, it would be more than enough for the US to push for a full implementation of Resolution 2254, which called for a ceasefire and political settlement.

The letter apparently did not go unnoticed at the State Department. Anthony Blinken, who during his five-hour Senate confirmation hearing last month did not once mention Syria, called UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and discussed some of the letter's recommendations.

Abdel Nour, whose podcast *Risala Ila Sourriyyin* (Letter to Syrians) has 1.5 million weekly listeners, said the US still has no strategy for dealing with the Syrian crisis, although the State Department is fashioning one. He believes it will not be separate from the strategy for the Middle East, which includes Iran.

In a list of recommendations that he was asked to share, Abdel Nour urged the State Department team to heed the lessons taught by the Obama-era 2015 nuclear accord: "The deal did not prevent the Iranian regime from expanding and taking control of Arab capitals. It put US allies (the GCC countries) in constant danger. The nuclear agreement should not be reinstated without first addressing the concerns of Arabs who live in the region. Then there is the case of Iran's ballistic missiles which, if developed, will reach European capitals."

Twitter: @EphremKossaiy

With inputs from Oubai Shahbandar in Washington, D.C.



The Kingdom recently received a new batch of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine and resumed its national vaccine rollout program to cover all regions of the country. SPA

POSITIVE SIGN

No new coronavirus patients admitted to Saudi intensive care units in past 24 hours

We need to put in more effort in coming period to see positive outcome: MoH

Saudi Arabia on Wednesday announced that in the past 24 hours there had been no reports of any patients being admitted to hospital intensive care units (ICUs) in the country with illnesses related to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19).

The news was greeted by health officials as a positive sign that the Kingdom's precautionary measures to stop the spread of the virus, along with its treatment methods, were paying dividends. However, another 334 new cases of COVID-19 were recorded on Wednesday, taking to 373,702 the total number of people in the country who had so far contracted the virus. There were currently 2,611 active cases, of which 480 patients were receiving critical care. Of the latest cases, 169 were in the Riyadh region, with the Eastern Province reporting 62, Makkah 42, and the other Saudi regions less than 20 each. The Jazan

and Tabuk regions both reported just two cases. "We need to put in more effort in the coming period to see a positive outcome," a Ministry of Health spokesman said, adding that although infection rates were showing signs of declining, they had not yet reached a stable point. The number of people recovering from COVID-19 had outweighed new cases for the third day in a row, with the latest figure of 349 increasing the total number of recoveries in the Kingdom to 364,646, a recovery rate of 97.57 percent and rising. Four new COVID-19-related fatalities were reported, upping the death toll to 8,445. A further 49,608 polymerase chain reaction (PCR) tests were conducted in the past 24 hours, meaning more than 13.1 million checks had now been carried out in Saudi Arabia. Meanwhile, ministry officials announced that a new vaccine center capable of dealing with 700 people a day would be opening in the Northern Borders region city of Arar. A similar center at Makkah's

FASTFACTS

373,702
Total cases

364,646
Recoveries

6,445
Deaths

Umm Al-Qura University — the first of five planned for the holy city — was now also operational with a daily handling capacity of 4,000, a figure expected to rise over the coming weeks. The Kingdom recently received a new batch of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine and resumed its national vaccine rollout program to cover all regions of the country. So far, 462,812 people have received the jab.

Separately, eight mosques have been temporarily closed in four areas after a number of COVID-19 cases were confirmed among worshippers. The Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Dawah, and Guidance said 87 mosques had been shut for the same reason in the past 10 days, but 70 had since been allowed to reopen after satisfying health and safety rules. The ministry reiterated the need for all worshippers to adhere to social distancing protocols, wear masks, and carry their own prayer rugs. During the latest 24-hour period, the Ministry of Municipal, Rural Affairs and Housing carried out 24,671 field inspections across all 13 Saudi regions and recorded 1,808 breaches of health and safety protocols. Officials closed 786 establishments for violations that included failure to check visitors' temperatures, lax disinfection and cleaning of shopping carts before and after use, and noncompliance with regulations surrounding the wearing of masks.

FIGHTING TERROR

Arab coalition intercepts two Houthi drones targeting Kingdom

Arab coalition forces on Wednesday intercepted and destroyed two drones launched by Yemen's Houthi militia toward Saudi Arabia. Coalition spokesman Brig. Gen. Turki Al-Maliki said a "booby-trapped" drone was launched from Yemeni airspace by the Iran-backed Houthis was intended "to target civilian objects and civilians in a systematic and deliberate manner." Earlier on Wednesday, coalition forces intercepted another drone launched by the Houthis toward

Rhamis Mushayt in the southern region. Al-Maliki said: "Attempts by the Houthi militia to attack civilians constitute war crimes," adding that the joint coalition forces are taking the "necessary operational measures to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure in accordance with international humanitarian law and its customary rules." On Tuesday, the Arab coalition had also intercepted a Houthi drone targeting Abha International Airport. The coalition said

Attempts by the Houthi militia to attack civilians constitute war crimes.
Brig. Gen. Turki Al-Maliki
Spokesman, Arab coalition

Houthi targeting of civilians was planned by Iranian generals in Sanaa, Yemen. On Feb. 10, the coalition said it had controlled a fire in a civilian plane at Abha airport as a result of a Houthi attack. Earlier on that day, Saudi state TV reported that



the coalition had intercepted and destroyed two armed drones launched by the Iran-aligned group toward southern Saudi Arabia. The Saudi-led military alliance intervened in Yemen in 2015 after the Houthis ousted the internationally recognized government from power in the capital, Sanaa. The Houthis hold northern Yemen, from where they have often launched missiles and drones toward Saudi cities. Dr. Yousef Al-Othaimen, secretary-general of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), strongly condemned the attacks.

Briefs

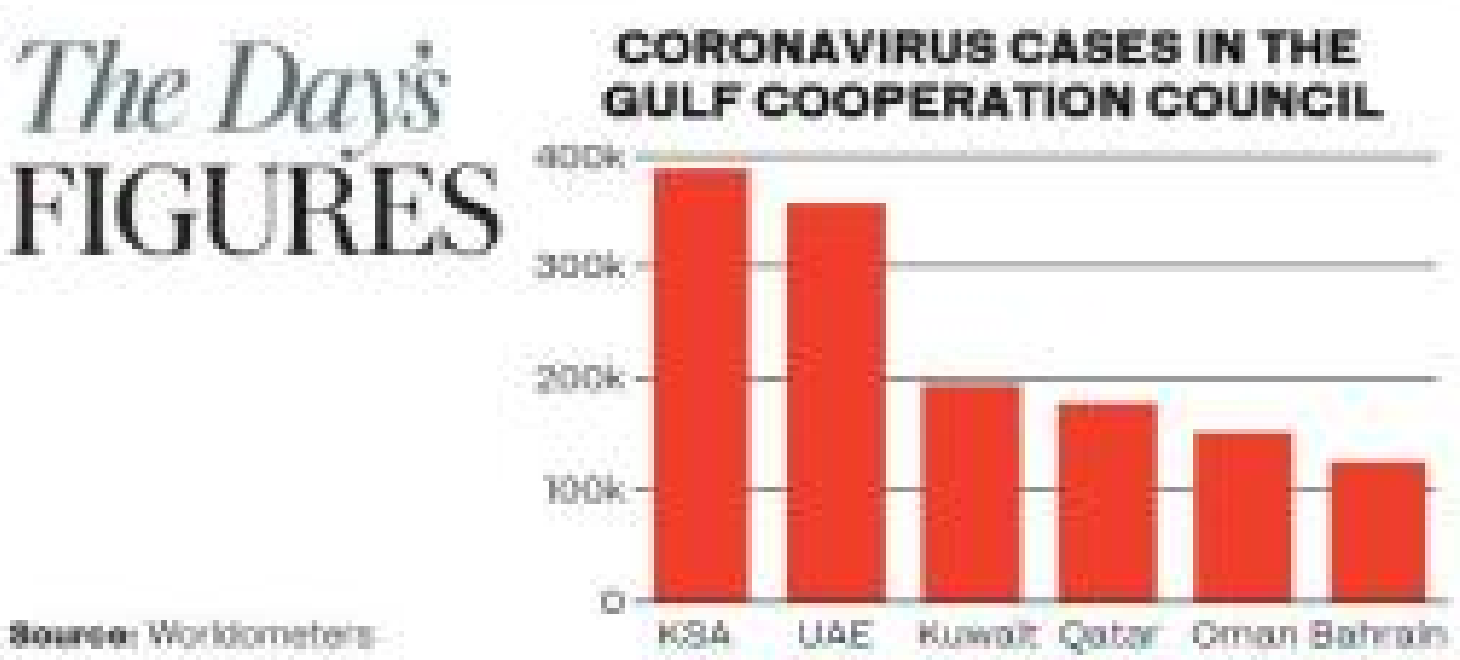
THE BEST OF THE REST

Ramadan gift
Kingdom to send 200 tons of dates to 24 countries

The Kingdom is sending 200 tons of dates to 24 countries. The Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Dawah and Guidance said it had completed preparations to launch King Salman's gifting program of dates. They will be distributed to Muslims from minorities, communities, institutions as well as to Islamic personalities during Ramadan, in coordination with the offices of the religious attaches in the Kingdom's embassies and the ministry's Islamic centers. The minister of Islamic affairs, dawah and guidance, Dr. Abdullah Al-Asheikh, said that the implementation of the project would be in accordance with the precautionary measures taken in those countries to prevent the spread of COVID-19. **SPA Riyadh**

Innovation
Deals signed to promote scientific research, poetry

Makkah Gov. Prince Khalid Al-Faisal witnessed the signing of two cooperation deals between the Islamic Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (ISESCO), King Abdul Aziz University (KAU), and Taif University's academy of Arabic poetry. The first agreement, inked by ISESCO Director General Dr. Salim Al-Malik and KAU Chairman Dr. Abdulrahman Al-Youbi, aims to establish joint programs, projects, and activities in research areas such as communication, culture, science, and education. Al-Malik and Dr. Yousef Asiri, the president of Taif University, penned the second deal which will support poetry in all of its forms, and promote the academy's activities. **SPA Jeddah**



DiplomaticQuarter

EMBASSY ACTIVITIES



Pakistan's Ambassador Raja Ali Ejaz meets the secretary-general of the Gulf Cooperation Council, Dr. Nayef Falah Mubarak Al-Hajraf. Supplied

Riyadh
GCC chief accepts Pakistan invitation

Pakistan's ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Raja Ali Ejaz, called on the secretary-general of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Dr. Nayef Falah Mubarak Al-Hajraf, and extended an invitation to visit Pakistan, which the secretary-general accepted. During the meeting, they discussed ways to enhance cooperation and friendly relations between the GCC and Pakistan in various fields to serve their common interests, as well as the developments in the political and security situations in the region. "Several matters of mutual interest were discussed, including convening of joint ministerial meeting and resumption of free trade agreement (FTA) negotiations," a statement by the ambassador said. The secretary-general affirmed that the GCC attaches high importance to its brotherly relations with Pakistan and is keen to further strengthen the ties, the envoy added. The ambassador extended an invitation to the secretary-general to visit Pakistan at his earliest convenience, and the secretary-general accepted the invitation. The Pakistani ambassador also called on Dr. Abdullah Al-Rabeeah, supervisor general of the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center (KSrelief), and thanked him for the center's humanitarian and aid activities

carried out in Pakistan. During the meeting, Al-Rabeeah briefed the Pakistani ambassador on KSrelief's efforts to help afflicted and needy peoples in the world. The Pakistani ambassador expressed his admiration of KSrelief's achievements and its vital role in humanitarian work. KSrelief has implemented 1,536 projects worth nearly \$5 billion in 59 countries. The initiatives were carried out in cooperation with 144 local, regional and international partners since the inception of the center in May 2015. According to a recent KSrelief report, the countries and territories that benefited the most from the center's projects include Yemen (\$3.47 billion), Palestine (\$363 million), Syria (\$305 million) and Somalia (\$202 million). The center has also concluded a number of agreements with the UNHCR to support refugees from Syria, Yemen as well as the Rohingyas, and has partnered with humanitarian organizations including the World Food Programme, UN Children's Emergency Fund and the International Committee of the Red Cross. KSrelief has a representative office in Pakistan that carries out humanitarian assistance in the fields of food security, education, health, water, sanitation and hygiene and charitable assistance, said the envoy.

News Saudi Arabia

SPREADING SMILES

Saudi doctor provides lift for kids with cancer

Dr. Nabila bin Sulaiman launched New Smile, a project that makes hats for children battling disease

Huda Bashatah Jeddah

Dr. Nabila bin Sulaiman learned how to knit when she was a young child and now her passion for crocheting is helping children across the Arab world.

Bin Sulaiman launched New Smile, a Saudi-based project that provides handmade hats for children suffering from cancer. She leads a group of more than 40 volunteers that designs, manufactures, and delivers hats and beanies to patients who have lost their hair while battling the disease.

"I met with many children in the hospital who suffered hair loss due to chemotherapy," said Bin Sulaiman, a mother of four, who works at the King Faisal Specialist Hospital and Research Center in Jeddah.

"Sometimes they wear normal hats to hide their head and sometimes they wear nothing at all. I see them so embarrassed that they try to hide behind their parents."

Bin Sulaiman's previous work at a tertiary hospital specializing in cancer studies and treatment, coupled with a video she saw on social media, inspired her to launch New Smile.

In the video, a group of US women started "The Magic Yarn," a project designed to help cancer patients by making them hats from threads.

Bin Sulaiman's first hat featured threads that looked like real hair and it went to a 3-year-old girl named Rafif, who had lost her hair due to cancer treatment.

"The child's reaction was amazing and shocking to all," she said. "As soon as I put the beanie on her head, she started running around the corridors of the hospital, dancing with happiness and going to the nurses to show off her new beanie."

It was not long before Bin Sulaiman started to recruit other Saudi seamstresses on WhatsApp to join her in the new nonprofit venture.

The hats are handmade using organic cotton threads and high-quality raw materials. Bin Sulaiman says the seamstresses pay careful attention to the people they are trying to help.

"The skin of cancer patients is very sensitive and some patients suffer sores in the scalp," she said. "That is why we use no allergenic threads that can be easily washed. The hats last for a long time and can sustain weather changes."

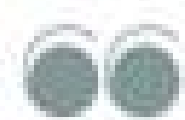
In the first year of its launch, New Smile partnered with several hospitals in Riyadh, including the King Faisal Specialist Hospital and Research Center and the King Khalid University Hospital. The project also distributed beanies and hats to some patients of private hospitals upon the request of their parents, doctors and nurses.

In the second year of the project, Bin Sulaiman discovered beautiful silk threads in Tunisia, that she used to make soft hats that offered the feeling of real hair to children.

"In the third year, the kids' reaction to the simplest things inspired me to add a new collection," she said. "So we began to make dolls with the help of my friend Dina Jamjoom."

The hats and dolls are designed for children starting at 6 months old to teenagers. The group's popularity started to climb within the Kingdom so Bin Sulaiman started to think bigger.

"The project began to expand and



I want this project to reach every child who is suffering from cancer and lost their hair. Our doors are open to everyone, inside and outside of Saudi Arabia.

Dr. Nabila bin Sulaiman

we started distributing our products to a number of Arab countries," she said.

Hats and dolls were sent to the Children's Cancer Hospital in Egypt, the Queen Rania Al-Abdullah Hospital for Children in Jordan, and the Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Center in Oman. Some products also found their way to hospitals in Tunisia and Sudan.

The group faced some difficulties in 2020 due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic as distribution of the hats and dolls was suspended. But production continued and now the group has a stockpile ready to send out.

"Volunteers did not stop for a second making the beanies and dolls," Bin Sulaiman said.

"They are making them with love. I continue to bring them the tools needed to make more, so once the situation returns to normal, we can resume the distribution of our products."

Before the advent of the holy month of Ramadan last year, New Smile distributed Qur'an covers to mothers to lift their spirits. The group also distributed occasion-related dolls such as the Eid lamb in addition to creating favorite cartoon characters for children.

It was also during the pandemic when the Wareef Charitable Foun-

HIGHLIGHTS

• Dr. Nabila bin Sulaiman leads a group of more than 40 volunteers that designs, manufactures, and delivers hats and beanies to patients who have lost their hair while battling the disease.

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dation of the King Faisal Specialist Hospital offered financial support for New Smile.

"The charity has provided us with all the project's needs," Bin Sulaiman said. "During the previous two years there had been no funder or financier, but only personal efforts and cooperation between the members."

The volunteers of the project are from different cities and countries and meet virtually on social media platforms. But the Jeddah volunteers meet for an informal ceremony every year where symbolic gifts are offered to members in recognition of their support.

"My dream is that the project can be based in an official location or a unified known center," Bin Sulaiman said. "That would make it easier for

people who want to get a gift for their children, friends or neighbors to come and get whatever they need with ease."

Bin Sulaiman is hoping the project will continue to expand in the future.

"I want this project to reach every child who is suffering from cancer and lost their hair," she said. "Our doors are open to everyone, inside and outside of Saudi Arabia."

TheSpace



Reforms pave way for human rights leadership

DR. BADER BIN SAUD



Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman recently announced a package of legislative reforms that represent a qualitative leap in aspects of justice and human rights. The reforms included 90 legislative changes in the field of human rights that will work to control the provisions and practices in cases of promotion, personal status and civil transactions, and will take the best judicial practices around the world in a manner that does not conflict with the provisions of Islamic law.

Saudi Arabia is among 36 of 197 countries that have fulfilled its human rights commitments. In the World Bank's 2020 report, the Kingdom ranked as the most advanced and reformed in a list of 190 countries.

The Basic Law of Saudi Rule, in its 26th article, explicitly



Statistics predict that 150 million people globally will suffer from poverty and worsening living conditions this year, but the Kingdom's population is not among them.

affirms the protection of human rights in accordance with the provisions of Islamic law. An article in the implementation system was amended in the last quarter of 2020, and the provision of stopping services was suspended because it violates human rights.

The Kingdom, within the framework of its promotion of standards of integrity, justice and self-criticism, has established an independent national human rights body; one of its achievements is monitoring 164 human rights violations in various regions of the Kingdom, and the identification of cases of children exploitation for the purpose of fame and financial gain.

Saudi Arabia has maintained its respect for human rights amid the COVID-19 pandemic, providing free treatment for coronavirus patients, continuing its services to citizens and residents, including those who breached the employment and residency rules.

Statistics predict that 150 million people globally will suffer from poverty and worsening living conditions this year, but the Kingdom's population is not among them.

Dr. Bader bin Saud is a weekly columnist in both Al-Riyadh and Okaz newspapers.

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

TOUGH TASK AHEAD

Palestinian factions postpone discussion on political program of future coalition

Cairo dialogue didn't discuss portfolios, but 'the size of each party is one of the criteria for forming a govt'

Hazem Balousha, Gaza City

The Palestinian factions, who agreed in the recently concluded Cairo dialogue to form a national coalition government after the legislative elections in May, have postponed a discussion on their political program.

Palestinian sources, who participated in the two-day talks under Egypt's auspices, said that several factions in the drafting committee had "reservations" about the political program of the coalition government not being defined precisely.

On Jan. 15, President Mahmoud Abbas issued a decree calling for elections in three stages, starting in May.

A senior official in a left-wing organization said the factions agreed to postpone talking about the government's political program so it would not be a "hindrance" to the success of the Cairo dialogue.

According to Jibril Rajoub, secretary of Fatah's central committee and head of its delegation at the Cairo talks, the agreement between the factions stipulates that the legislative elections will be held with the formation of a national coalition government that will implement agreed mechanisms to end the internal division.

He said: "The desired government will work on the path of unity of all state institutions and agencies, whether security or civic, and draw up a unified national policy based on justice and equality in all Palestinian governorates (the West Bank and Gaza Strip)."

Hosam Badran, a member of the political bureau of Hamas, confirmed what Rajoub said.

"There is an agreement to form a national unity government in order



An employee of the Palestinian poll commission in the Israeli-occupied West Bank registers a citizen for the upcoming elections on his tablet. Reuters

to move forward toward strengthening the Palestinian home front," Badran told Arab News.

He added: "The Palestinian general position speaks of the necessity and importance of forming a government of national unity, regardless of the election result."

Badran stressed that the Cairo dialogue did not discuss the ministerial portfolios of the government, but "there is no doubt that the size of each party is one of the criteria for forming a government. The idea is not a quota, but a joint

BACKGROUND

The factions are scheduled to return to meet in Cairo next month to discuss the mechanisms of forming the National Council of the PLO and agree on the legal basis for the elections.

action that includes everyone, including independent and honest national figures.

"We want a government that deals with the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza with the same

rights and duties, on the basis of justice and equality, and works to unify the various Palestinian institutions."

He added: "There is a political disagreement between Hamas and Fatah over how to establish a Palestinian state. While Fatah believes that negotiation is the way, Hamas thinks that armed resistance is the best way forward."

Regarding the political program of the upcoming government, Badran said: "It was not talked about because it was premature, but its determinants are clear.

It was mentioned in the final statement of the Cairo dialogue, which talks about the National Accord Document."

The National Accord Document was based on an agreement reached by Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons in 2006, which could not prevent the division in mid-2007.

The Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) was one of the factions in the drafting committee in Cairo. Majda Al-Masry, a member of the DFLP delegation at the Cairo dialogue, said, "We have reservations, but we

did not want it to be an obstacle to an agreement."

"We hoped the agreement to form a coalition government would include an emphasis on its adoption of the decisions of the Palestinian National Council in its 23rd session, especially those related to the relationship with the occupation," Al-Masry told Arab News.

Among the decisions of the National Council during its session held in Ramallah in May 2018 was the task of the executive committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) to suspend recognition of Israel until it recognizes the State of Palestine based on the borders of 1967; revokes the decision to annex East Jerusalem, and halts settlements.

Al-Masry said: "We found that there is already an agreement between the two sides of the division (Fatah and Hamas) on many points, and we will not be an obstacle, and we have pushed the agreement forward, even if we preferred to form a transitional government that will prepare and supervise the elections."

The Palestinian factions are scheduled to return to meet in Cairo next month to discuss the mechanisms of forming the National Council of the PLO and agree on the legal basis for the elections.

Fayez Abu Eita, deputy secretary of the Revolutionary Council of the Fatah movement, told Arab News that the agreement to form a national coalition government is based mainly on the principle of ending the division and moving forward toward a true national partnership.

"There are common grounds and commonalities, and it is important now to establish a new phase in which everyone leaves the path of division for the democratic way to succeed," Abu Eita said.

VETERAN LEADER

Does Abbas intend to run for president after all?

The 85-year-old repeatedly said he won't, but as election approaches there are signs he is planning do so

Daoud Kuttab, Amman

Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas, who signed the decree for this year's elections, has yet to announce whether he intends to run for president.

In the past 10 years, he said on at least three occasions that if and when elections take place he will not stand. But Fatah strongman Jibril Rajoub has repeatedly stated that 85-year-old Abbas is the party's only candidate for president.

Polls conducted as recently as December suggest that Abbas would lose in a head-to-head contest against Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh. Under the current power-sharing understanding between Fatah and Hamas, however, the Islamist movement has agreed not to challenge the Fatah nominee.

While the largely youthful Palestinian population under occupation has not known any leader other than Abu Mazen (Abbas's nom de guerre), he faces a mix of apathy and rejection.

Senior advisers to the president told Arab News that it is "too early" to talk about the presidential race, scheduled for July 31, because all attention now is on making sure the legislative elections take place on May 22 and a new government is formed to represent all of the Palestinian areas occupied in 1967.

Najeeb Qadouni, a member of the Palestinian National Council, told Arab News that the Palestinian leader's achievements cannot be dismissed. Abbas persuaded



SPEEDREAD

Polls conducted as recently as December suggest that Mahmoud Abbas would lose in a head-to-head contest against Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh.

138 nations in the UN general assembly to recognize Palestine as a nonmember observer state, he said, and also stood up to "the most powerful man in the world," US President Donald Trump, in defeating the so-called "deal of the century."

Qadouni highlighted Abbas's boycott of the Trump administration after it moved the US Embassy to Jerusalem and announced its vision for peace that included the annexation of a third of the West Bank. US President Joe Biden and his team have announced that they

plan to reverse many of Trump's decisions that affected Palestinians, including its legalization of Israeli settlement activities. The new US administration also unambiguously stated its support for a two-state solution, and has resumed dialogue with the Palestinians.

While many in Fatah's Central Committee favor Abbas as a consensus leader, it is still unclear whether he will decide to run for the highest office. However his followers have in recent weeks noticed a sharpening of nationalistic rhetoric from him, especially in publicly disclosed statements encouraging Palestinians in the Jordan Valley to resist Israeli policies and attempts at settlement expansion.

"These are the words of a man who is planning to run," a senior Palestinian leader told Arab News. Whether his previous statements

that he would not run were genuine or a bluff, if he does decide to stand he will have a significant problem to deal with: The publicly announced intention of imprisoned Fatah leader Marwan Barghout to run for president from behind the bars of an Israeli cell, where he has been held for almost 20 years.

The most recent poll suggested that if Barghouti runs, he could expect to receive 62 percent of the Palestinian vote. His ally Hatem Abdel Qader, a Fatah leader in Jerusalem, said Barghouti has no plans to run for the legislative council and will only stand for president.

Fatah Central Committee member Hussein Sheikh visited Barghouti in jail on Feb. 11 and reportedly offered him top spot on the Fatah list of candidates, along with the chance to name 10 others on the party's official list, but the offer was rejected.

A possible compromise solution that has been suggested is the creation of the office of vice president and have the Fatah ticket include candidates for both positions. However this would require a change in the law that could only be implemented after the elections for the legislative council take place.

If it happens, Barghouti could be included on the ticket as the candidate either for president or vice president, which could help increase his chances for release, especially considering Abbas's age.

BESIEGED ENCLAVE

After delay, Israel allows jabs into Hamas-run Gaza

AP, Gaza City

The Palestinian Authority (PA) sent the first shipment of coronavirus vaccines to the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip on Wednesday, two days after accusing Israel of preventing it from dispatching the doses amid objections from some Israeli lawmakers.

Palestinian Health Minister Mai Alkaila said in a statement that the PA sent 2,000 doses of the Russian Sputnik V vaccine. The shipment was seen arriving midday at the Kerem Shalom crossing.

An Israeli defense official said that authorities approved the delivery, adding that it's "not in Israel's interest to have a Gaza health crisis." The official spoke on the condition of anonymity in line with regulations.

Gaza is home to more than 2 million Palestinians, many of whom live in close confines. It has been under an Israeli-Egyptian blockade since Hamas seized power in 2007.

Gaza's Health Ministry has reported more than 53,000 cases and at least 538 deaths since the start of the pandemic.

Israeli lawmakers had debated whether to allow the delivery of vaccines into Gaza. Some had argued that the delivery should be linked to progress on the release of two Israeli captives held by Hamas and the remains of two Israeli soldiers killed in a 2014 war with Palestinian militants.

They have also expressed concern that vaccines would



Gaza medics unload the first shipment of Russia's Sputnik V vaccine. AFP

go to Hamas members rather than medics.

Russia's vaccine, which is given in two doses, was initially met with skepticism because it had not undergone the rigorous testing of other vaccines, but a recent study indicates it is safe and effective. Still, the first batch will only allow authorities to vaccinate 1,000 people, and a wider vaccination campaign could take several months.

The Palestinian Authority said the first doses would go to front-line medical workers. But Ashraf Al-Qedra, spokesman for the Gaza Health Ministry, said they would be administered in two phases, first to vulnerable patients and then to medics.

"The amount is very small and not enough to cover all 12,000 medical workers," he said. "We think it's better to first inoculate vulnerable patients, such as organ transplant and dialysis patients."

Rights groups say Israel has an obligation as an occupying power to share its vaccines with the Palestinians.

News Middle East

WITCH-HUNT

Erdogan regime targets jailed activist's cultural organization

Turkey's Trade Ministry files lawsuit demanding dissolution of Kavala's Anadolu Kultur

Arab News Ankara

Turkey is targeting a cultural organization founded by the jailed activist and philanthropist Osman Kavala, who has been behind bars for more than three years without a conviction.

The Trade Ministry filed a lawsuit demanding the dissolution of Anadolu Kultur, an Istanbul-based organization set up by Kavala in 2002 for cross-cultural understanding, claiming that it was originally registered as a commercial enterprise but was operating as a nonprofit organization.

Anadolu Kultur is charged with violating Article 210 of the Turkish Commercial Code regarding corporations and ministry personnel may audit the relevant company accordingly.

US President Joe Biden's administration has urged Turkey to release Kavala without delay and to respect a 2019 ruling from the European Court of Human Rights.

The ministry's action is seen as the "continuation of unlawfulness" against Kavala because it is the first of its kind in Turkey's history.

"Our company has carried out all its operations legally and



Earlier this month, a Turkish court rejected Osman Kavala's request for release on espionage charges. AFP

transparently since its establishment in 2002," Anadolu Kultur said in an official statement. "No crime was detected by Turkey's Financial Crimes Investigation Unit and the ministry's investigations."

Anadolu Kultur has undertaken projects in the arts, democracy, civil society and culture to strengthen Turkey's minority groups and help marginalized

segments of Turkish society, making the organization a target in pro-government circles.

Pro-government newspapers accuse Kavala of using his foundation to evade monitoring by authorities and channeling foreign donations from entities linked to billionaire philanthropist George Soros. Soros' Open Society Foundation ceased its Turkish

operations in late 2018.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has called Kavala "a representative of Soros" - an accusation used to demonize members of civil society in Turkey.

Asena Gunal, general director of Anadolu Kultur, said the lawsuit had been ongoing since last year and explained why the organization had not previously publicized it.

COMMON OBJECTIVE

Philia Forum a 'bridge' between ME and Europe

Angeles Al Athanasopoulos Athens

The Philia Forum is not an alliance against a common threat, but rather a "partnership" that could act as a "bridge" between Europe and the Middle East, Alexandros Papaioannou, spokesman for the Greek Foreign Ministry, told Arab News.

At the forum, held last week in Athens, Greek Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias hosted his counterparts from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Cyprus, the UAE and Bahrain. French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian participated by videoconference.

The seven countries issued a joint communique about their common objective to ensure regional peace, stability and prosperity.

Papaioannou dismissed the motion that the Philia Forum would increase regional tensions, saying: "We want to build peace, stability and prosperity, and to have a positive agenda. We want to instill some stability based on some rules, following the UN Charter, avoiding the use of force or the threat of use of force, respecting international law. We aren't trying to create an alliance or a coalition ..."

Turkey was never mentioned at the forum. However, "if Turkey sees the forum as something against her, this is her interpretation and certainly not ours," Papaioannou said.

Advertisement

KAUST brings creators of world's first fully automated kitchen garden to Saudi Arabia

King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST) has welcomed Natufia, a leading startup tech company, to Saudi Arabia. The Estonia-founded company has developed the world's first smart indoor kitchen garden - providing technology to harvest herbs, leafy greens and vegetables at home. KAUST is leading a USD \$3.5 million investment, awarding USD \$2 million to Natufia through their venture capital investment arm - the KAUST Innovation Fund (KIF) - as the startup takes up residency at the KAUST Research and Technology Park (dRTP).

In regions such as Saudi Arabia, difficulty accessing local fresh produce and reducing waste in the food supply chain are increasingly pressing issues. Known as the "Nespresso for plants and herbs," Natufia's indoor garden was developed in response to these growing challenges of sourcing high-quality, nutrient-rich, fresh produce. Natufia's revolutionary hydroponic home kitchen technology gives homeowners year-round control over what they want to grow - regardless of climate or season - ultimately resulting in reduced food waste. The technology also aims to lower environmental impacts by reducing packaging, pollution, food miles and toxins.

"We are delighted to welcome our latest spin-in partner, Natufia, to the Kingdom and support their expansion in the region - and the world," said Kevin Cullen, vice president of KAUST Innovation and Economic Development. "Spinning in talented, entrepreneurial, international startups is a



priority for KAUST as we continue to enhance the growing innovation ecosystem in the Kingdom and establish KAUST as the Deep-Tech Heart of the Saudi Economy."

The move is made possible by KAUST's ability to invest and support diverse startups while offering new expertise and opportunities for further collaboration. Natufia is the latest in top talent that KAUST has attracted from around the world to energize the culture and community of startups in Saudi Arabia. The growing company also has a presence in both the U.S. and Europe. However, residing at KAUST will result in further R&D capabilities for innovation and create job opportunities supported by the University while showcasing Saudi Arabia as an

obvious choice for business in the Middle East.

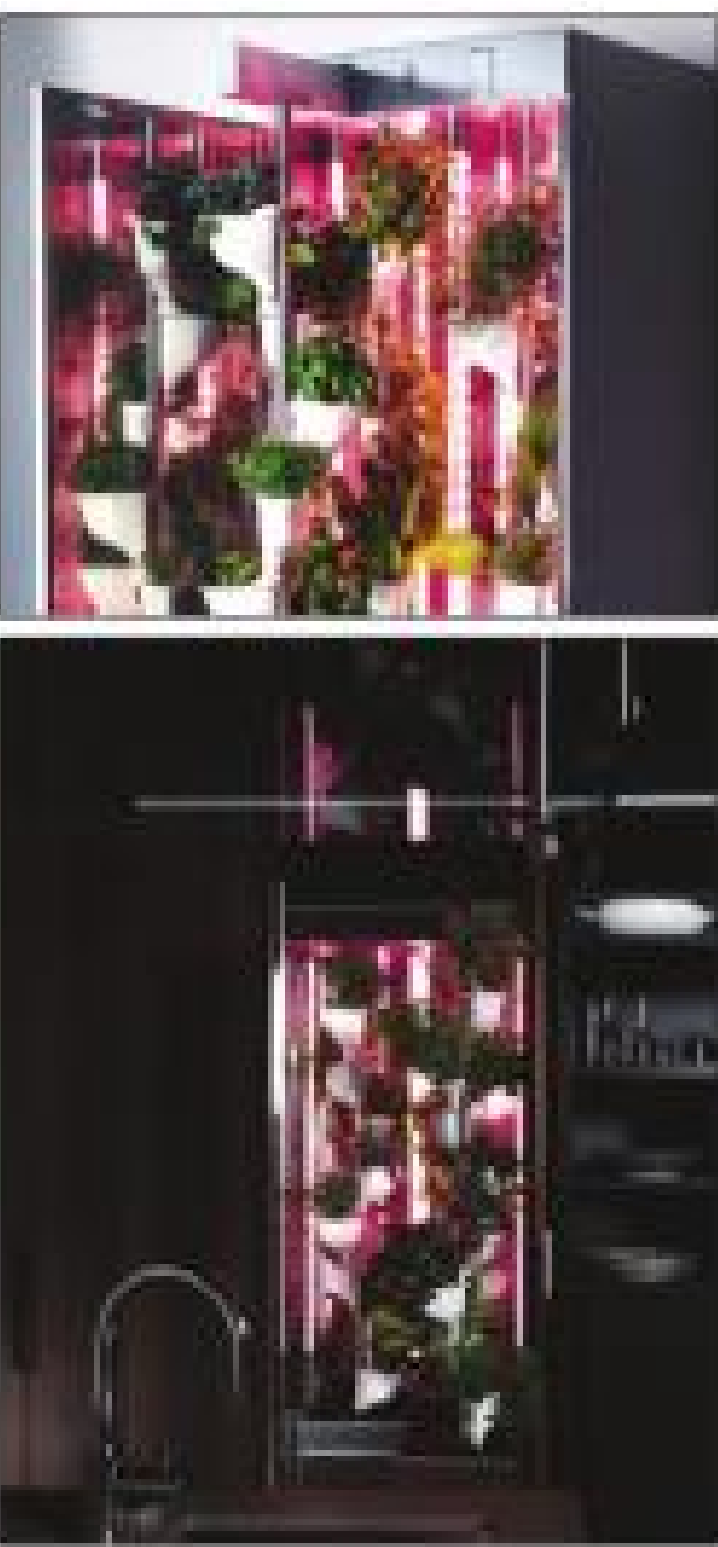
Co-founded in 2014 by Gregory Lu, Natufia goes beyond farm-to-fork, providing herbs and plants from kitchen-to-table. The company is a multi-award winner: Sustainable Design Award (Westedge, Los Angeles 2019), Innovation Award (NKBA, Las Vegas 2020), Innovation Award peoples choice (KBB, Birmingham 2020) and the Green Innovation of the year 2021 (Green Builder Media). Previous investors of the startup include Butterfly Ventures (Finland), Techstars (USA) and the family-office Ginko Investments (UAE), who remain minority shareholders.

The innovative fridge-size appliance is easy to use, and plant growth is fully automated. It

comes as a self-contained cabinet that provides the optimal combination of water, lighting and nutrients to grow plants, providing as much as two harvests per day.

By supporting the new venture, KAUST will help launch the product to the mass market as an "affordable luxury," offering families an immediate holistic, forward-visioning solution to healthy living.

"The current crisis has shown how much we must rely on locally produced food. Thanks to the scientific partnership we are establishing with KAUST and the talents we will hire from the Kingdom, we will accelerate the development of our next models and service the increasing demand of our products," said Gregory Lu, CEO and founder at



Natufia. "KAUST is in the middle of the desert - it is more than natural that this technology is thriving from Saudi Arabia."

KAUST's spinning in of Natufia demonstrates its commitment to promoting and fostering the Kingdom's growing entrepreneurial network while contributing to the goals of Vision 2030. The University continues to invest in novel, deep tech startups that have the potential to immediately offer viable solutions to critical issues facing both the Kingdom and the greater world.

About King Abdullah University of Science and Technology Established in 2009, King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST) is a graduate research university devoted to finding solutions for

some of the world's most pressing scientific and technological challenges in the areas of food, water, energy and the environment. With 19 research areas related to these themes and state-of-the-art labs, KAUST has created a collaborative and interdisciplinary problem-solving environment, which has resulted in over 11,000 published papers to date.

With over 100 different nationalities living, working and studying on campus, KAUST has brought together the best minds and ideas from around the world to advance science and technology through distinctive and collaborative research. KAUST is a catalyst for innovation, economic development and social prosperity in Saudi Arabia and the world. For additional information, visit: www.kaust.edu.sa

About Natufia Labs Natufia Labs is a leading multi-award-winning research lab specializing in hydroponic kitchen appliances. Natufia Kitchen Gardens owns a unique proprietary technology that enables growth of fresh plants and herbs all year-round, offering families and businesses an immediate holistic and sustainable solution to healthy living. Natufia Labs' mission and vision are to minimize environmental impact by reducing food waste, packaging, pollution, food miles and bridging the gaps of food security and traceability awareness.

For additional information, visit <http://www.natufia.com>

Sponsored Content



Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi on Wednesday promised sweeping reforms to help rebuild the country following the coronavirus pandemic.



Filipinos wearing masks for protection against coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pass a mural dedicated to healthcare workers in this Oct. 30, 2020 photo taken in Manila. Reuters

STRATEGIC ALLIANCE

US reiterates commitment to enhance security ties with Philippines

Cites importance of 'open dialogue' to maintain strength of alliance

Elie Aben Manila

Washington will continue to find ways to strengthen and advance security cooperation with the Philippines, its "oldest" ally in the region, the US State Department has told Arab News.

It follows the latest demand by President Rodrigo Duterte for the US to pay more if it wants to maintain the two-decade-old Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) which allows the deployment of American troops in the country.

"We value our alliance with the Philippines, which is the oldest in the Asia-Pacific region," the State Department said.

It was an unprovoked, angry tirade on Friday, during an address to

Philippine troops after inspecting newly acquired air assets, Duterte said that if the US wants the VFA to be continue, it would have to pay, citing US-Chinese relations.

"It's a shared responsibility, but your share of responsibility does not come free. Because after all, when the war breaks out, we all pay," Duterte said. "We are nearest to the garrison there, where there are a lot of arsenals of the Chinese armed forces."

While the State Department's letter did not directly address Duterte's demands, it emphasized that it "will continue to look for ways to further strengthen and advance security cooperation that furthers shared security challenges and respects human rights."

"Open dialogue between allies is essential to maintaining the

HIGHLIGHT

The move follows the latest demand by President Rodrigo Duterte for the US to pay more if it wants to maintain the two-decade-old Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) which allows the deployment of American troops in the country.

strength of an alliance which is vital to both of our countries' security," it said.

Duterte had unilaterally canceled the VFA last year in an angry response to an ally being denied a US visa, but retracted his decision a few months later.

He has faced widespread criticism for his latest remarks on the VFA, which several Filipinos said

was "embarrassing."

Senator Panfilo Lacson and Vice President Leni Robredo, for their part, said that Duterte's statement gave the impression that the Philippines was a "nation of extortionists."

Duterte responded during his public address on Monday, when he said that "foreign relations or foreign policy is vested in the president alone" and that Lacson had "nothing to do with the VFA."

On Tuesday, however, Lacson pointed out that the constitution gives senators a say in the Philippines' international agreements such as the VFA, "especially if they affect the country's long-term national interest and security."

Lacson added that "a diplomatic and civil approach is more effective in upholding the national interest in the long run."

Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Winter storm

Texas deep freeze leaves millions without power

A historic winter storm has killed at least 21 people, left millions of Texans without power and spun killer tornadoes into the US Southeast on Tuesday.

The brutal cold has engulfed vast swaths of the US, shuttering coronavirus (COVID-19) inoculation centers and hindering vaccine supplies. It is not expected to relent until the weekend.

Officials in Texas drew criticism as the state energy grid repeatedly failed, forcing rolling blackouts. Freezing weather stilled giant wind turbines that dot the West Texas landscape, making it impossible for energy companies to meet escalating demand. Reuters

Free speech

33 injured in protests over rapper's jailing

Police in Spain say 14 people were arrested in violent street protests in several cities following the arrest of Spanish rap artist Pablo Hasel, who had barricaded himself at a university with dozens of supporters to avoid prison and defend his fight for free speech.

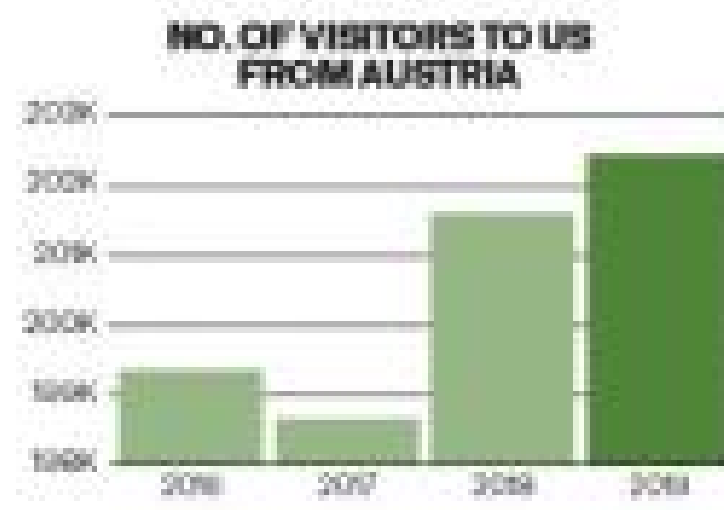
Emergency services said Wednesday that 33 people were treated for injuries in the disturbances.

Smaller demonstrations took place in other Spanish cities.

In the northeastern city of Barcelona, thousands of protesters set trash cans on fire and threw rocks at the police. Several stores and a bank were damaged. AP

The Day's FIGURES

Source: Statista



What We Are Reading Today

FROM AROUND THE WEB & IN PRINT

The Code Breaker

WALTER ISAACSON

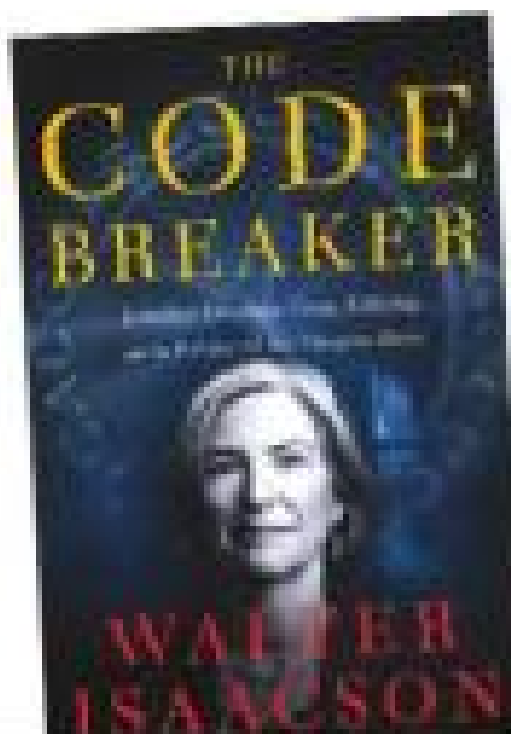
Author Walter Isaacson returns with a gripping account of how Nobel Prize winner Jennifer Doudna and her colleagues launched a revolution that will allow us to cure diseases, fend off viruses, and have healthier babies.

When Jennifer Doudna was in sixth grade, she came home one day to find that her dad had left a paperback titled *The Double Helix* on her bed. She put it aside, thinking it was one of those detective tales she loved. When she read it on a rainy Saturday, she discovered she was right, in a way. Driven by a passion to understand how nature works, she

would help to make what the book's author, James Watson, make the most important biological advance since his co-discovery of the structure of DNA: CRISPR, a tool that can edit DNA, which opened a brave new world of medical miracles and moral questions.

Doudna became a leader in wrestling with these moral issues and, with her collaborator

Emmanuelle Charpentier, won the Nobel Prize in 2020. Her story is a thrilling detective tale that involves the most profound wonders of nature, from the origins of life to the future of our species.



Rescue ordered

Nigeria president slams abduction of schoolboys

Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari on Wednesday condemned the abduction of schoolboys from a school in central Nigeria and ordered a rescue operation, his office said.

"The president has directed the armed forces and police, to ensure immediate and safe return of all the captives," presidential spokesman Garba Shehu said.

The number of students and staff abducted from the school in Kagara, Niger state, was still unknown. Gunmen belonging to criminal gangs were believed to be behind the attack.

Buhari, 76, was elected in 2015 on promises to crush a bloody jihadist insurgency in north-east, but his armed forces have struggled against the militants as well as worsening security across the country. AFP

Rendition

Trial of Hotel Rwanda 'hero' gets underway

Paul Rusesabagina, the polarizing hero of the hit movie "Hotel Rwanda," went on trial Wednesday in a closely watched case in Kigali where he stands accused of serious crimes including terrorism.

Rusesabagina, whose actions during Rwanda's 1994 genocide inspired the Hollywood blockbuster, had been living abroad for years before appearing in Kigali under arrest in mysterious circumstances in October.

His family and lawyers say he was abducted overseas and brought back to Rwanda illegally.

The former hotelier has been charged with 13 offenses including terrorism, financing and founding militant groups, murder, arson and conspiracy to involve children in armed groups. AFP

GSA (Passenger & Cargo) Appointment in KSA

Applications are invited for the appointment of General Sales Agent (Passenger & Cargo) of Biman Bangladesh Airlines Ltd. in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Interested agencies are requested to send their applications by E-mail to rfpgsaksa.2021@bdbiman.com latest by 1400 GMT on 11 march 2021 duly filling out the prescribed questionnaire available on the websites of Biman Bangladesh Airlines Ltd (www.biman-airlines.com/about/tenderand www.biman.gov.bd/site/view/tenders) along with supporting documents. If any documents are in languages other than English, notarized/certified copies of English translation must be sent. Hard copies are to be sent to the following address:

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TIGHT SCHEDULE

Sri Lanka cancels Pakistan PM's parliamentary address

Mohammed Rasooldeen Colombo

Sri Lanka has canceled Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan's planned address to the parliament next week due to his "tight schedule" amid claims that the visit is ill-timed because of rising coronavirus cases across the country.

Khan is due to arrive in the capital Colombo on Feb. 23 for talks with key government officials and party leaders. He was expected to address the legislature the following day.

However, Shan Wijetunge, the parliament's head of communications, told Arab News on Wednesday that the address has been canceled because of the visiting premier's demanding schedule.

During his two-day visit, Khan will meet with Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa and Foreign Minister Dinesh Gunawardena, as well as attending an investors' forum on Feb. 24.

Khan would have been the third Pakistani head of state to address the Sri Lankan parliament, after former President Gen. Mohammed Ayub Khan (1963) and Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (1975).

Former Indian leader Jawaharlal Nehru also addressed the parliament in 1962, followed by British PM Margaret Thatcher in 1985. More recently, Indian leader Narendra Modi addressed the legislature in 2015.

YOUR DAILY ARABIC PROVERB

Not often do we notice that language is the mirror
of thought and the reflection of being aware.

Dr. Sawwan Al-Abtah
(Lubnanese journalist and academic)

Opinion

World's case of 'long COVID' needs urgent attention

ALISTAIR BURT



Alistair Burt is a former UK Member of Parliament who has twice held ministerial positions in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office — as Parliamentary Under Secretary of State from 2010 to 2013 and as Minister of State for the Middle East from 2017 to 2019.
Twitter: @AlistairBurtUK

As awareness of the extent of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) crisis began to register last year, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres made a plea for a "global cease-fire." In March 2020, he responded to the widespread concerns of development agencies that victims already caught up in the myriad of conflicts worldwide were about to be subjected to this new threat to their well-being.

This alarm was well meant — there looked to be no reason why the epidemic emerging elsewhere should not affect those already subject to the meanest physical deprivations in war-torn areas, where medical facilities were also often deliberately targeted. And if the world was to meet a potentially existential viral challenge unseen for perhaps a century, it would be better placed to do so by working together in a manner exemplified by achieving a cessation of man-made hostilities.

In the event, we have seen fewer COVID-19 cases than were first feared in such places; but sadly also very few combatants taking the opportunity to use the pandemic to climb down from locked-in situations. The hot conflicts in Libya, Yemen and Syria and cold stand-offs, such as Iran and the US

and Israel and Palestine, all continue.

But COVID-19 has many facets, and many threats. It has not only created its own horror for those who have suffered its effects, but has also shone a severe and uncomfortable spotlight on other aspects of the world's grinding unfairness, poverty and inequality — all ultimately causes of friction and conflict.

The first fear was the obvious medical emergencies of illness and death, prompting the global search for protective clothing, ventilators, treatments and, of course, vaccines. We then got our first clear sight that, beyond the rhetoric of "we are all in this together" and that "no one is safe until all are safe," the cold reality of life is the inevitable need of nation states to protect their own citizens. Some balanced this expenditure on their own people by also supplying others — they will be remembered.

As the year progressed and we moved closer to the vaccine solution, efforts were made to build a global supply and distribution network. Covax came into being for this purpose, but it can offer nowhere near the sort of coverage in less-developed nations that is expected in richer states. Today's map of vaccine shots per 100 people hardly needs to be posted — you already know what it looks

like. Perhaps 100 states have had no vaccinations at all. The Economist Intelligence Unit predicts much of the developed world will be vaccinated by the end of 2021 or mid-2022, but it will be perhaps a full year later for the rest. None of this is a surprise. The vaccine is being manufactured as quickly as it can be but, when the world is unprepared, it is rarely a surprise who comes off worse.

The worry that this inequity of supply and delivery might be a cause for friction is real and we have already seen "vaccine nationalism." An unmet need for vaccines in countries, even if significant numbers of deaths have not yet occurred there, is a breeding ground for variants and mutations of the virus, meaning the pandemic becomes never-ending.

But that is just the medical aspect. The world's COVID-19 recovery poses new threats. What of the risks of instability and potential conflict from the economic pressures to come?

The world's economic repair bill — vast beyond current comprehension — will not be met equitably either and will become a source of new potential conflict. The geographical correlation between the vaccinated and the unvaccinated is reminiscent of so many other maps, not least demographic ones. The world's most volatile areas have young

populations, mostly spared COVID-19 so far, but they will be growing up looking for jobs just at the same time as the economies of the developed world will also be suffering increased joblessness, meaning they will be unable or unwilling to boost their development budgets to help in conventional ways. Young people with no jobs, but grievances about others experiencing very different COVID-19 outcomes because of where they live, will be exploited. Also not every offer of state economic assistance that comes along in the wake of this will come without unannounced strings attached.

As we reach its first anniversary, Guterres should renew his plea. This time it should not be just for a global cease-fire, but also a demand for concerted international economic action to ensure that vulnerable states are not left behind. The public and private sectors need to come together: A combination of the G7, which the UK leads this year, and the private sector, fueled by the trillions of dollars individuals and corporations have made while economies plunged.

Medics are dealing with what is called "long COVID." International leaders would also do well to spot this phenomenon in their sphere of expertise.

The pandemic has shone a spotlight on the world's grinding unfairness, poverty and inequality

COURTESY: ARABIC NEWS/ASHRAF AL-JABIR



Just like the US, the EU needs to deal with its near neighbor on various levels

Why international community cannot ignore Russia

CORNELIA MEYER



Cornelia Meyer is a Ph.D.-level economist with 30 years of experience in investment banking and industry. She is chairperson and CEO of business consultancy Meyer Resources.
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The imprisonment of Russian opposition politician Alexei Navalny on his return from having been treated for Novichok poisoning in Berlin brought the fissures between Russia and the West to the fore — as did the police's subsequent heavy-handed response to pro-Navalny demonstrators. The EU and Germany were quick to condemn the actions and the US followed suit.

Both the US and the EU maintain the sanctions they imposed on Russia following its annexation of Crimea and incursion into Ukrainian territory in 2014. That conflict prompted the then-G8 group of countries to kick Russia out, ending Moscow's 14-year membership of the exclusive club.

The EU sees itself not just as a union of nations, but also as a union of values, standing up for democracy and human rights. This has also traditionally been the US' position. Former American President Donald Trump was different, however, as he clearly admired Russian President Vladimir Putin and his hold on power. Trump focused less on maintaining multilateral agreements and more on curbing China's seemingly ever-growing economic and political influence.

New US President Joe Biden is different: He has taken a dim view of Russia's attempts to meddle in US elections and its cyberattacks. The US and EU once again speak the same language vis-a-vis Russia on Navalny. So far so good but, when it comes to geopolitics, things are never that easy. Despite their grievances,

Russia is important to Western nations on many levels and issues.

The Biden administration agreed to extend the New START (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty), which limits America and Russia to a maximum of 1,550 nuclear warheads, in the nick of time, as it was due to expire on Feb. 5. This was important because, the smaller the global nuclear arsenal is, the safer the world is.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov even said that Moscow might consider returning to the Open Skies Treaty, which allows signatory countries to monitor and verify each other's military forces and weaponry from the air (Trump unilaterally withdrew from the treaty in 2019).

While keeping up sanctions and maybe even tightening them is on the cards for Washington, US foreign policy still needs to deal with Russian influence in the Middle East (Syria, Libya, Iran, Turkey, etc.), where it has steadily been growing, as well as in Eastern Europe, the Balkans and elsewhere.

The strong rhetoric of the EU's High Representative Josep Borrell during a visit to Moscow last week enraged Lavrov, leading him to warn that Russia was ready to break off its ties with the EU if the bloc contemplated further sanctions. A few days later, while talking to Finnish Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto, Lavrov sounded more emollient, explaining the EU as a bloc was not the same as individual countries, with which he was happy to maintain cordial relations.

Just like the US, the EU also needs to deal with its near neighbor Russia on various

levels. There are the obviously contentious points of election meddling and cyberattacks. There are also commercial interests, like the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline, which is divisive in Europe and faces opposition from several EU member countries — particularly those in Central Europe, which fear for their geopolitical influence as the two Nord Stream projects circumvent them. The Baltic states also fear that the projects will run afoul of their security strategies.

Nord Stream has former German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder on its board and has reasonably strong support on the right and the left of the political spectrum in Germany, but not from the Greens. Its supporters argue that energy security is a matter of national security, which supersedes the opinions of even strong allies. Given that the 1,222 km-long pipeline is only 150 km from completion, we can reasonably expect a compromise among the Western allies.

The EU is also keen to revive the nuclear deal between the P5+1 nations and Iran, its hitherto most successful foreign policy objective. As a permanent member of the UN Security Council, Russia is a very important piece in that jigsaw. Its strength in Syria and Libya also matters when it comes to dealing with the constant stream of refugees into Europe.

Russia has played its geopolitical cards well over the last few years, gaining influence in the Middle East and also working with the OPEC member states, forming the OPEC+ alliance, which was pivotal in restoring normality in the oil markets after the historic demand

destruction last April, when the coronavirus outbreak went global.

Russia is also on a charm offensive with the help of its highly effective Sputnik V vaccine, which it uses as a foreign policy tool aimed at creating goodwill. While the EU is still bickering over the distribution of vaccines, its near neighbors in the Balkans have been wooed by Russia and China with their respective vaccines. On the global scale, Moscow and Beijing seem to be the great hope for the middle-income countries in Africa, Latin America and Asia to receive vaccines, as the rich nations have grabbed every vial they can get their hands on of the Pfizers and Modernas of this world.

German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas has warned that antagonizing Russia too much would push it into greater alliance with China. Developments in the Middle East and Central Asia, as well as "vaccine diplomacy," seem to prove his point. One should not forget that the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), whose aim is to promote cooperation in the spheres of the economy, defense, research, technology and culture, counts Russia and China among its founding members. Iran, Belarus and Afghanistan are observer states, while Pakistan and India are full members. The SCO has real geopolitical clout in Eurasia, which will only grow in the future.

In other words, while being tough on Russia when it comes to its meddling in other countries' affairs and especially how Moscow treats its opposition may be justified, ostracizing the world's largest nation by landmass may backfire.

Opinion

What next for children of Daesh?

DR. AZEEM ISRAHIM

The attempt by Daesh to create a so-called Islamic state in Syria and Iraq attracted volunteers from many nations. The children of these volunteers, many of whom were born in Syria, now pose a unique dilemma for those nations.

It is estimated that about 70,000 women and children are detained in the refugee camps in Northern Syria. Of that number, at least 12,000 are foreign nationals. Two-thirds of the children held there are under the age of 12, with the majority under five years old, according to a UN report.

These youngsters are, first and foremost, a vulnerable group in need of urgent assistance in a volatile and war-torn region. The urgency of resolving the question of how to manage their cases cannot be overstated, given the instability in the region and the ongoing threat posed by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19). If not dealt with, the challenge these children present runs a serious risk of developing from an easily solved welfare issue into a possible security and counterterrorism issue.

It is in the short and long-term interests of all nations to take action over the children left behind in areas once held by the now-vanquished Daesh. Moreover, it is ethically and legally a certain and necessary course of action.

To begin with, diplomatic and financial resources need to be invested in the development of infrastructure to provide for the needs of those remaining in the camps until a long-term solution has been decided. Such small investments should be seen as the first step toward avoiding the expenditure of greater resources — on measures such as possible military action, expensive

repatriations and incarceration — in the future. Secondly, the creation of a UN body to investigate the actions of Daesh supporters would benefit their children. It would serve to share

information about suspects and work closely with child protection services in their countries of origin to determine the best outcome for the youngsters.

Thirdly, the children of Daesh supporters must receive secular education, as per international law, to ensure they have a viable future.

Finally, juvenile rehabilitation facilities that are already operating in northeastern Syria need resources and expertise from donor states and international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). These facilities offer a way to immediately reduce the risks to European children while efforts to find longer-term solutions, such as repatriation, continue.

Several NGOs are already carrying out safeguarding and rehabilitation efforts in neighboring countries, including Iraq and Turkey. International support would vastly increase the capacities of such facilities.

Dr. Azeem Ibrahim is a director at the Center for Global Policy and author of "The Rohingyas Inside Myanmar's Genocide" (Hurst, 2017).
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This is the executive summary of Dr. Azeem Ibrahim's research paper for Arab News Research & Studies Unit. To read and download the full report, please scan the above QR code.



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World closer to holding firms accountable wherever they operate

RANVIR S. NAYAR

Swiss citizens last November voted in a referendum that proposed making Switzerland's multinational companies responsible for their actions overseas. The Responsible Business Initiative could have marked the beginning of greater control over the behavior of multinationals, not just in their home countries but also overseas.

Though a thin majority of people voted in favor, the proposal was defeated since it did not meet the second condition — a majority of cantons needed to have backed the move, but only a third did. If it had passed, this would have been a huge win for activists, notably those in developing nations that have been fighting the double standards applied by large firms, which project themselves as green warriors and responsible companies at home but play havoc with the environment and communities overseas, especially in poor countries.

Swiss mining giant Glencore is a perfect example. Headquartered in Baar in the pristine valleys of Switzerland, there is nothing polluting about the company's headquarters or its presence in the country. But, halfway across the world in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Glencore is regularly accused of widespread water pollution and labor abuses. Unfortunately, there are no laws in Switzerland obliging Glencore and other such companies to audit their human rights or environmental practices or hold them accountable for misconduct abroad.

This is just one example of how companies behave, or rather misbehave, in developing nations, flouting weak environmental and workers' rights laws in those countries. A report by Harvard Business Review on 1,800 multinationals found that, in countries with tight ecological regulation, these companies had about 29 percent lower emissions in their home countries and any tightening of regulation at home prompted them to export carbon emissions and other pollution overseas, leading to 43 percent higher emissions abroad.

It is in this context that the ruling of the UK Supreme Court last week, when it held petroleum giant Royal Dutch Shell responsible for the actions of its subsidiary in Nigeria, needs to be welcomed. The case involved a group of fishermen and farmers who were fighting Shell's Nigerian subsidiary over repeated oil spills in the Niger Delta.

Five judges sitting at the UK's top court held that Shell had a duty of care to the Nigerian petitioners over the actions of its subsidiary, and hence was liable for compensation. The order could open a Pandora's box of claims against



Ranvir S. Nayar is managing editor of Media India Group.

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hundreds of large multinationals whose subsidiaries have been operating, often with impunity, across the developing world.

This is not the only such ruling to emerge from the UK courts. In 2015, more than 1,800 villagers from Zambia filed a claim against Vedanta Resources, another mining giant, for water pollution caused by its subsidiary's copper-mining operations. Two years ago, the court crucially ruled that the case could be heard in the English courts. And, just last month, Vedanta agreed an out-of-court settlement in the case, marking a landmark win for the people who had previously been the silent and powerless victims of global giants.

The rulings in the UK were also significant wins for millions of people around the world who have suffered due to the hypocritical attitudes of companies, especially the behemoth multinationals, which resolutely refuse to apply their best practices equally around the world.

Fortunately, the Swiss and British are not the only examples of citizens or the judiciaries of rich nations forcing their big businesses to be equally accountable for their activities whether at home or in the Third World. Governments are now beginning to legislate to ensure that their multinational companies follow the same human rights and environmental norms wherever they do business.

One of the strongest pressures on companies for good behavior all over the world is set to come later this year, as the European Commission is due to finalize a draft law that will make supply chain due diligence mandatory for companies, including on their human rights and environmental performance.

While these moves are welcome, much greater and concerted pressure needs to come from new US President Joe Biden, as no American firms are currently feeling the heat over their pollution and violations of human and workers' rights overseas. After all, US companies are by far the largest polluters.

It may also be the right time for multilateral bodies like the UN to develop a global good practices charter for companies to follow. Anyone not adhering to these basic values should not just be shamed, but also heavily penalized as a deterrent to other CEOs who might be looking to make a quick buck by polluting a Third World nation.

Such a charter would encourage companies not to choose profit over responsibility, ensuring the same conditions for environmental preservation and community relations with the weakest communities in the poorest countries as with the strongest communities in the richest nations.

US' Human Rights Council move just a political game

RAY HANANIA

When he was president, Donald Trump withdrew US support for the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC), accusing it of being biased against Israel. Then-ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley called the council "an organization that is not worthy of its name." Of course, everyone knew what was going on. Trump was wearing his love for Israel on his political sleeve, rather than tempering his rhetoric or hiding American bias toward Israel as other administrations had done.

The truth is that the issue of human rights is a political football used by politicians to beat up and pressure those nations they want to dominate, while undermining the concept when it involves their allies.

Last week, Trump's successor Joe Biden announced that he had directed the State Department to "re-engage immediately and robustly" with the UNHRC. The move is being cheered by people willing to close their eyes to policies that hypocritically excuse some human rights violations, only addressing those committed by countries that contradict US foreign policy.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced that the administration was re-engaging with the UNHRC because the US is "centered on democracy, human rights and equality." But he quickly added a caveat that undermines the true principle of human rights and ensures Israel will be exempt from scrutiny, saying: "We recognize that the Human Rights Council is a flawed body, in need of reform to its agenda, membership and focus, including its disproportionate focus on Israel."

Blinken added: "When it works well, the Human Rights Council shines a spotlight on countries with the worst human rights records



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and can serve as an important forum for those fighting injustice and tyranny." The key phrase here is "the worst human rights records," which means that any country not perceived to be "the worst" — such as Israel — will get a pass. This is despite Palestinians being oppressed every day in a system of discrimination based on religion and race.

Biden's support of Palestinian rights is yet to be fully determined. But his nominee to be UN ambassador, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, made it clear during her Senate confirmation hearing that she will fight the pro-Palestinian activists who criticize the theft of Palestinian land and resources by Israel's racist settler movement.

Additionally, Biden, like Trump, has been critical of the International Criminal Court's (ICC) decision that it can investigate potential Israeli war crimes in the Occupied Territories. The irony is that the ICC was founded in 2002 to bring to justice those responsible for the world's "worst" war crimes. There is that subjective word again, "worst." It is a relative term that means not all war crimes will be prosecuted. Trump used that to protect Israel, and so will Biden.

When the ICC last year announced it would investigate American soldiers for potentially engaging in war crimes in Afghanistan, Trump denounced the court and sanctioned senior officials.

For me, it is all a political game: How you speak about issues rather than how you change them. Trump was pro-Arab as long as it did not include the Palestinians or jeopardize his loyalty to Israel. Biden is also pro-Arab, but he too will not jeopardize America's relationship with Israel. Just because he has not yet called Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu does not mean that he won't support Israel's settlement expansion.

ARAB NEWS
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There will be no peak oil on the immediate horizon, which means that 1.7 trillion barrels of proven oil reserves will not be stranded.

Mohammed Barkindo
OPEC secretary-general



Business

INTERNATIONAL ENERGY FORUM

Speculators warned against guessing OPEC+ next move

'Too early' to declare victory over virus, says Saudi energy minister

Frank Kane Dubai

Saudi Energy Minister Prince Abdul Aziz bin Salman has warned global oil markets against the "futility" of trying to second-guess the OPEC+ oil alliance's next crucial move.

Speaking to other ministers and energy policymakers at a forum held virtually from Riyadh, he said that the world had to learn the lessons of last year's dramatic gyrations in oil prices.

"One of these lessons is the futility of trying to predict what is around the corner, and the best we can do is to increase our preparedness and resilience, realizing that collective action is the best way to tackle the challenges ahead.

"And on the subject of predictability, this also applies to those who are trying to predict the next move of OPEC+. To those people I say, don't try to predict the unpredictable," the prince said.

He characterized the OPEC+ stance as one of "constructive ambiguity."

His comments, delivered at the opening session of the International Energy Forum symposium on energy outlooks, were seen as an attempt to head off speculation in the oil markets ahead of a key meeting of OPEC+ next month, when the alliance, led by Saudi



Saudi Energy Minister Prince Abdul Aziz bin Salman speaks at the International Energy Forum on Wednesday.

Oil rose on Wednesday, buoyed by frigid Texas temperatures that curtailed production in the largest US producing state, Shutterstock

HIGHLIGHTS

● Prince Abdul Aziz bin Salman advised against any action that might affect the pace of recovery in global markets.

● India's petroleum minister cautioned against allowing crude prices to rise too fast.

Arabia and Russia, must decide if it will add back oil supply in the face of uncertain global demand.

He advised against any action that might affect the pace of recovery in global markets. "We are in a much better place than we were a year ago, but I must warn, once again, against complacency. The uncertainty is very high, and we have to be extremely cautious.

"The football match is still being played, and it is too early to celebrate and declare any victory against the virus. The referee is yet to blow the final whistle," he said.

On the same panel, Dharmendra Pradhan, petroleum minister of India, said that there was a big improvement from the pandemic recession of last year, and predicted double-digit economic growth in 2021.

But he warned against allowing crude prices to rise too fast. "The rising oil price of recent weeks is hurting the global economic recovery," he said, highlighting India's progress toward greater use of renewable fuels compared with hydrocarbons.

"India is committed to renewables and energy efficiency, while maintaining the use of oil and gas



and expanding refining capacity," Pradhan said.

Fatih Birol, executive director of the International Energy Agency, told the forum that oil demand would recover with global economic improvement, and that he saw no prospect of a "peak" in oil demand unless there is a significant change in consumer

preferences, but noted that government calls for "net zero" policies on emissions would mean a reduction in fossil fuel use.

Mohammed Barkindo, secretary-general of OPEC, said that there remains "tremendous uncertainty" in demand and that OPEC was aligned on the need for a cautious, but optimistic,

approach on supply.

He added: "There will be no peak oil on the immediate horizon, which means that 1.7 trillion barrels of proven oil reserves will not be stranded."

Barkindo urged more investment to ensure adequate supply of oil in the event of rapidly increasing economic recovery.

ENERGY SECTOR

Investments worth \$12.6tr needed in oil sector by 2045

Cornelia Meyer Bern

The first session of Wednesday's International Energy Forum symposium compared the energy outlooks of the International Energy Agency (IEA) and OPEC, delineating their assumptions of primary energy demand and supply over the next 24 years.

There were commonalities in terms of oil and gas still being an important part of primary energy demand, but where the two presentations differed was the magnitude of change and how fast the energy transition would impact all aspects of life across the globe.

Dr. Ayed Al-Qahtani, OPEC's head of research, saw oil demand recovering over the next few years from the historic 10 percent drop last April. Demand would grow the fastest in countries such as India and China, whose gross domestic products were expected to grow by 7.5 percent and 7.4 percent, resulting in a global growth in oil demand of 5.8 million barrels per day (bpd) in 2021.

He was pleased with the OPEC+

production cuts resulting in a decline of the five-year average to 138 million bpd, compared to 267 million bpd around the middle of last year.

Al-Qahtani reiterated that all forms of energy would be needed over the next 25 years, with the share of renewables growing by 6 percent a year and the demand for

All forms of energy will be needed over the next 25 years, with the share of renewables growing by 6 percent a year.

Dr. Ayed Al-Qahtani
OPEC's head of research

natural gas growing by 21 million barrels of oil equivalent by 2045.

The starkest number mentioned by OPEC was the need for \$12.6 trillion worth of investment into the oil sector required between 2019 and 2045, equating to an annual investment demand of \$380 million per year.

The IEA was a lot more aggressive in terms of the scope

and pace of energy transition between now and 2045. Its three scenarios pointed to a world of pre-pandemic recovery, a delayed recovery scenario and a sustainable development scenario and, in all of them, the absolute demand for coal and oil would decline and the share of renewables would grow commensurately.

The IEA's director of the office for energy markets and security, Keisuke Sadamori, said the demand for electricity would grow by 4,000 TW over the next 10 years to keep up with the electrification needs posed by energy transition.

He added that energy transition would require contributions from governments in terms of policies and investments, citizens in terms of behavior, as well as requiring a step change from finance in terms of boosting clean energy.

BP's chief economist Spencer Dale said his scenarios all had the share of fossil fuels in the energy mix declining and the share of renewable sources of energy dramatically increasing.

CHALLENGES

US energy leader highlights renewables limitations

Frank Kane Dubai

Power blackouts in Texas and other parts of the US in the face of a record winter freeze showed the limitations of some renewable energy systems in extreme climate conditions, according to the head of one of the country's leading energy companies.

Vicki Hollub, CEO of Occidental Petroleum, told policymakers at the virtual International Energy Forum in Riyadh that the outages were the result of winter conditions "unprecedented" for a century.

"Parts of the grid were just not prepared for it, they had not been weathered in properly. Texas has tried to be progressive regarding renewables, but this has shown that it is not just about putting renewable energy sources in place but being able to operate them when we do," she said.

Earlier in the forum, Saudi Energy Minister Prince Abdul Aziz bin Salman offered sympathy and support to states, including Texas, that have suffered several days of



Vicki Hollub, CEO of Occidental Petroleum.

FASTFACT

40%

The extreme weather knocked out 40 percent of the Texas grid capacity.

subzero temperatures.

"Our hearts and minds are with you, and as always Saudi Arabia does stand ready to extend any support we can send or render to our friends and family members," he said.

The extreme weather has knocked out 40 percent of the Texas grid capacity, Hollub said.

The US shale industry needs greater scale to match growth with the cost of infrastructure and new drilling operations, she said.

Occidental, the dominant operator in the US Permian shale fields, was focused on paying down the debt from its big acquisition of Anadarko Petroleum in 2019. "No matter how high the oil price goes we have got to keep sustainable capital. The way we'll create wealth for shareholders is to cut costs," she said.

Hollub said that the new breakeven "floor" in shale production was around the \$40 a barrel level, and that any new developments above that price were "not feasible."

SHARIAH-COMPLIANT

Saudi Arabia closes \$840m riyal-denominated sukuk program

Global Islamic finance assets are forecast to reach \$3.69 trillion by 2024, says a report

Deema Al-Khudair Jeddah

The Saudi National Debt Management Center (NDMC) said on Wednesday that it has closed the February 2021 issuance under the government's riyal-denominated sukuk program.

The issuance size was fixed at SR3.16 billion (\$840 million), the Ministry of Finance said in a statement.

Sukuk issuances were divided into two tranches, with the first of SR1.930 billion set to mature in 2028. The second tranche of SR1.230 billion is scheduled to mature in 2033.

The NDMC was established in 2015 to secure the Kingdom's financing needs through the best terms and cost in the short, medium and long terms.

The latest announcement highlights the Kingdom's growing leadership within the Islamic finance sector, which is set to continue in 2021, an expert told Arab News in January.

"The region, and specifically Saudi Arabia, is leading the Islamic finance market globally," Fitch Ratings' global head of Islamic Finance, Bashar Al-Natooq, said.

"The Kingdom has previously carried out the largest-ever sukuk offering internationally — we expect this trend to continue," he said.

Sukuk are Shariah-compliant financial certificates through which investors gain partial ownership on an issuer's assets until maturity.

They are a safer alternative to conventional bonds because they are backed up by actual underlying assets. As such, they can be part of a vibrant investment portfolio, yielding attractive returns.

Due to some common



Moody's anticipates a shift to more Shariah-compliant finance over the next 12-18 months as corporates and households increasingly use Islamic products. Reuters/File

FASTFACT

In September, the credit ratings agency Moody's said Islamic financing in Saudi Arabia will account for 80 percent of the Kingdom's loans in the next 12-18 months, compared with 70 percent in 2013.

characteristics with bonds and market preference, sukuk are classified as fixed income and sold in debt capital markets.

In September, the credit ratings agency Moody's said Islamic financing in Saudi Arabia will account for 80 percent of the Kingdom's loans in the next 12-18 months, compared with 70

percent in 2013.

Moody's anticipates a shift to more Shariah-compliant finance over the next 12-18 months as corporates and households increasingly use Islamic products.

"A comprehensive set of Islamic finance regulations has spurred Saudi banks to issue sukuk, Islamic products are now listed on

the main market, and an Islamic mortgage refinancing business has been established," said Ashraf Madani, VP-senior analyst at Moody's.

Global Islamic finance assets are forecast to reach \$3.69 trillion by 2024, according to a report released in December by the Jeddah-based Islamic Development Bank.

The bank said that global Islamic finance assets increased in value by 14 percent year-on-year to \$2.88 trillion in 2019, the highest recorded growth for the industry since the global financial crisis.

According to the report, the top five developed countries in Islamic finance are Malaysia, Indonesia, Bahrain, UAE and Saudi Arabia.

OPERATIONS

US aviation giant reinforces foothold in KSA

Shane McGinley Dubai

Saudi Arabia's focus on localizing its defense requirements will not impact Boeing's operations in the country as the US aviation giant has had a long relationship with the Kingdom and employs thousands of Saudi nationals.

Company executives also remain confident amid Monday's announcement that Saudi Arabia will stop signing contracts with foreign companies that do not have a significant presence in the country.

"We have had a 75-year relationship with the Kingdom," Torbjorn Sjogren, Boeing's international government and defense vice president, said ahead of the International Defense Exhibition and Conference (IDEX) taking place in Abu Dhabi next week.

"As things stand today, we have more than 2,200 people employed through the various Boeing entities, including the joint ventures in which we are still a partner."

Boeing's relationship with the Kingdom began on Feb. 14, 1945, when then-US President Franklin



Boeing says it is 'absolutely committed to Saudi Arabia's 2030 Vision.' Supplied

now stands at SR228.8 billion (\$61 billion), with 32 percent of that coming from outside the US. Over the next five years, BDS is pursuing \$170 billion across 41 countries in international defense and services opportunities.

Last month, Walid Abdulmajid Abukhaled, the CEO of Saudi Arabian Military Industries (SAMI), the company charged with expanding the Kingdom's indigenous defense industry, said he has set a goal to see 60 percent or more of the Kingdom's defense requirements from local companies by 2030.

Sjogren said he did not see this as a threat to Boeing's operations in the Kingdom: "We stand ready to discuss any new requirements, obviously, as they arise."

Despite the challenges presented by the global coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, Boeing said demand for its government service business remains stable. It expects the sector to be worth \$14 trillion over the next decade, with the Middle East representing \$195 billion of the market as more than half of that will be dedicated to defense and security services.

Defense, Space & Security (BDS) to Boeing Commercial Airplanes and Boeing Global Services programs.

"Boeing Saudi Arabia is a Saudi company with Saudi leadership, and the majority of our employees in that company are Saudis," Sjogren said.

"We are absolutely committed to Saudi Arabia's 2030 Vision and we continue to work, as we speak, with our stakeholders in the Kingdom to execute on that vision. That is based on the work that we have done over the past decades."

BDS said its production backlog

BANKING

New SME bank to help fill Kingdom's financing gaps

Deema Al-Khudair Jeddah

Saudi Arabia's decision to set up a bank dedicated to small and medium-sized enterprises has been welcomed by industry experts in the Kingdom.

The new lender will be called the Bank of Small and Medium Enterprises and was approved by the Saudi Cabinet on Tuesday, the Saudi Press Agency reported.

"The SMEs Bank brings together all financing solutions under one umbrella to enable the small and medium enterprises sector to access appropriate financing and achieve stability and growth," the Ministry of Commerce tweeted.

Mohammed Al-Tuwaijri, deputy chairman of the National Development Fund, said the new bank would contribute to the local economy by filling funding gaps, Argaam reported.

Wassim Basrawi, who is CEO at Saudi Aramco's entrepreneurial arm Wacel, said the news confirmed the Kingdom's ongoing support for the SME ecosystem and recognizing how critical these businesses were to growing and diversifying the economy.

"This is a welcome addition to the Kingdom's entrepreneurial ecosystem and we're confident this new initiative will accelerate SME growth, which has been our focus for almost a decade," he told Arab News. "Wacel remains committed to supporting new ideas, solutions and products that fill critical gaps in the Kingdom's economy."

According to a new industry

HIGHLIGHTS

● The new lender will be called the Bank of Small and Medium Enterprises.

● The Saudi Cabinet approved it on Tuesday.

survey, Saudi Arabia reported a 35 percent year-on-year increase in the number of investment deals in the technology start-up sector in 2020.

A study by data research platform Magnitt found that, last year, the Kingdom accounted for 18 percent of the 496 investment deals across the Middle East and North Africa.

Business News



The total value of the Public Investment Fund's 13F holdings was \$12.77 billion as of Dec. 31, up from \$7.05 billion on Sept. 30, an increase of 81 percent. Reuters

INVESTMENT

PIF acquires \$3.3bn stake in US video game makers

Uber maintains largest share in the fund's investment portfolio on the US market

Arab News Riyadh

Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund (PIF) acquired more than \$3 billion worth of stock in three US video game makers during the fourth quarter (Q4) of 2020, according to a regulatory filing.

Information submitted to the US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) revealed that the Saudi sovereign wealth fund investments included Activision Blizzard Inc., Electronic Arts Inc., and Take-Two Interactive Software Inc., said Al Sharq Business.

The PIF acquired 15 million Activision shares with a market

value of almost \$1.39 billion, representing 3.5 percent of the company's total shares. The fund's other purchases included 7.42 million Electronic Arts shares, and 3.97 million Take-Two shares worth around \$1 billion and \$825.5 million, representing 2.6 percent and 3.5 percent of the companies' total issued shares, respectively.

According to combined data on investments in the e-gaming sector, the three shares were valued at approximately \$3.3 billion at the end of December. MultiPlan Corp. was the PIF's fourth new investment in Q4, with it acquiring a 7.7 percent stake in the company's shares valued at \$409.5 million for 51.3 million shares.

The total value of the PIF's 13F

FASTFACTS

15m

The PIF acquired 15 million Activision shares with a market value of almost \$1.39 billion.

\$1bn

The fund's other purchases included 7.42 million Electronic Arts shares, and 3.97 million Take-Two shares worth around \$1 billion and \$825.5 million.

(a list of managed equity assets reported to the SEC) holdings was \$12.77 billion as of Dec. 31, up from \$7.05 billion on Sept. 30, an increase of 81 percent.

According to the PIF, Uber Technologies Inc. had maintained the largest share in the fund's investment portfolio on the US stock market with the fund's ownership stabilizing at 72.8 million shares valued at \$3.71 billion, representing 29 percent of its total investment value in the US market.

The PIF kept its stake in the Utilities Sector Fund with an investment value of \$2.07 billion while its equity ownership of Carnival Corp. had stabilized at 50.8 million shares, valued at \$1.1 billion, by the end of Q4.

BizBriefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Antitrust

Italy fines Facebook over data protection

Italy's antitrust regulator announced on Wednesday a new fine of €7 million (\$8.45 million) against Facebook for misleading conduct on data protection.

According to the authority, known as AGCM, the US social media giant fails to properly inform users about how it collects and uses their data for commercial purposes.

AGCM had already fined Facebook €5 million in 2018, charging it with unfair trading practices, and ordered it to take corrective action.

Wednesday's fine came because the company ignored orders to alter its practices as requested.

Even if Facebook no longer advertises itself as free, "immediate and clear information on the collection and use of user data for commercial purposes is still not provided," it said.

AFP

Support

Google to invest \$75m in virus-hit firms

Google is teaming up with the European Investment Fund (EIF) and two other organizations in Latin America and Asia to provide \$75 million in funding to small and medium-sized companies suffering from the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

Google said on Wednesday that it would invest in two EIF funds, giving \$15 million in loan capital to 1,000 European small businesses.

The EIF is part of the European Investment Bank group, the lending arm of the EU.

In Latin America, Google will work with the Inter-American Development Bank to allocate \$8 million to small companies.

It has also set up a \$26 million loan fund to help businesses in Africa, the Middle East and Indonesia.

Reuters

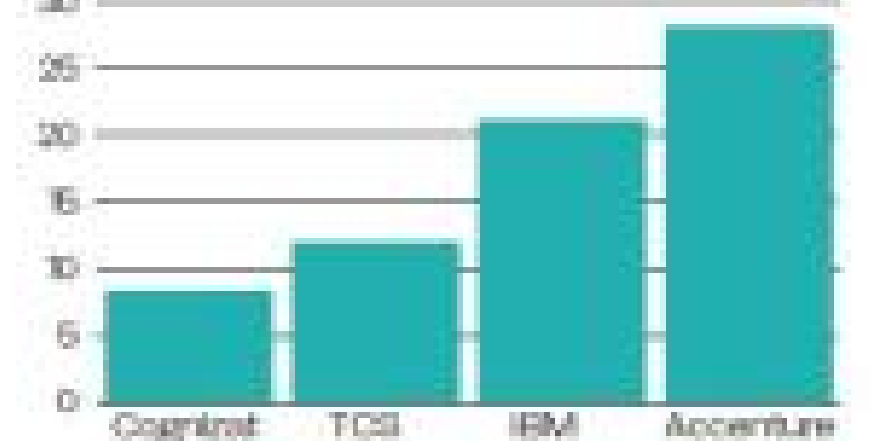
Chart of THE DAY

Accenture, which has a brand value of about \$25.3 billion, was the world's most valuable IT services provider in 2020.

Source: Statista

BRAND VALUE OF IT FIRMS

2020 (in billion \$)



What We're Reading

FOR THE TRAIN OR ON THE PLANE

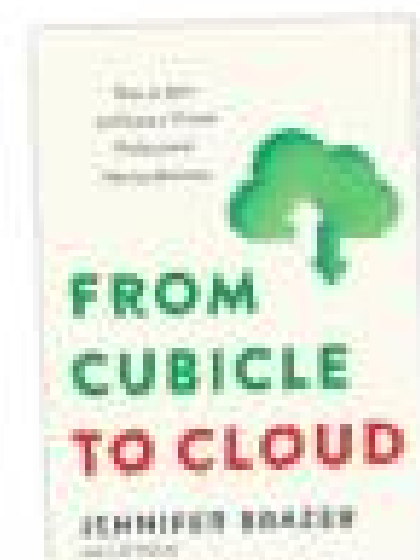
From Cubicle To Cloud

JENNIFER BRAZER

It is challenging to start and scale a business. Choosing the cloud as your platform for delivery and headquarters presents a whole new set of obstacles. This guide will allow you to leverage the cloud to streamline your processes, according to a review published on goodreads.com.

When Jennifer Brazer founded her company, Complete Controller, she disrupted and reinvented client accounting services (CAS), creating an

entirely new cloud-based business model. This book provides entrepreneurs indispensable tools that will set up a cloud-based professional service.



RETURN TO NORMALITY

Johnson charting path to reopen UK economy

Reuters London

Prime Minister Boris Johnson is plotting a staged exit from lockdown that would see the UK's battered economy returning to work over the next five months after leaping ahead of most of the world on vaccinating its people.

After moving faster than all other Western countries to vaccinate its population, the UK's \$3 trillion economy is aiming to be among the first major Western economies to return to some semblance of normality — though still far behind the furnaces of global growth in China.

Johnson, who will set out the path out of lockdown on Feb. 22, said the staged exit plan would be cautious but irreversible, although schools are likely to return on March 8 along with a mass-testing program to monitor the outbreak.

The Daily Mail newspaper reported that while office workers



will be told to continue working from home for some time, parts of the economy such as holiday lets and larger hotels will reopen in April.

Outdoor leisure such as theme parks and zoos as well as golf, open-air gyms and tennis could

also resume in April, though restaurants would have to wait until May.

"Leisure businesses may not return to 'broadly normal' until July under a roadmap out of lockdown," the Mail reported, though it said the final decision

had yet to be made by Johnson.

"Office staff are expected to be told to keep working from home when the prime minister unveils his roadmap," the Mail said. "The 'work from home if you can' message will continue for the foreseeable future."

HIGH LIGHT

British PM will set out the path out of lockdown on Feb. 22.

Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson visits a vaccination center at Cwmbran Stadium in South Wales on Wednesday. Reuters

Alternative

Ford's Europe car lineup to be all-electric by 2030

Ford Motor Co. on Wednesday said its car lineup in Europe will be all-electric by 2030 as the US automaker races to get ahead of CO2 emissions targets and looming bans in some countries on fossil fuel vehicles.

The carmaker said it will invest \$1 billion over the next 30 months to convert its vehicle assembly plant in Cologne, Germany, to become the US automaker's first electric vehicle facility in Europe.

Ford said its first European-built, all-electric passenger vehicle will be produced at the facility from 2023 and is considering building a second model there.

Ford currently dominates the US and European markets for gasoline-powered commercial vehicles with shares of 40 percent and almost 15 percent, respectively.

Reuters

Aviation

Ryanair loses state aid lawsuit in EU court

Irish low-cost airline Ryanair on Wednesday lost its attempt in an EU court to block massive public bailouts of rival companies such as Air France and SAS, a statement said.

"This aid scheme is appropriate to remedy the economic damage caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and does not constitute discrimination," the EU's lower General Court, based in Luxembourg, said in a statement, in reference to the French case. Ryanair has pursued a legal campaign to stop bailout deals for the bloc's legacy airlines, arguing the state aid gives them an unfair advantage.

The Irish flyer lost two cases on Wednesday: One involving a tax delay for Air France and other French airlines, and another that offers loan guarantees for Sweden's airlines.

AFP

Loai Alarayedh has been appointed as Investcorp's head of Gulf institutions relationships.



Corporate

PRESS RELEASES

FROM THE WORLD OF BUSINESS AND COMMERCE

FOOD MANUFACTURING

Sunbulah sets the standard for global honey production

Sunbulah Group, a Saudi Arabian manufacturer of food products, is setting the standard for the production of honey varieties from the finest international sources, ensuring that honey is authentically sourced and tested for adulteration. During a recent media roundtable, the group's honey business unit demonstrated the methodology for sourcing and processing authentic, all-natural honey free from adulteration.

During the meeting, Karim Moussa, general manager of the honey business unit at Sunbulah Group, explained that the group has worked for more than 30 years to establish global best practices in honey production and provide a variety of natural honey from the finest sources. He said the focus is on sourcing honey in its purest form just as it was produced in nature. The company distributes honey products in more than 50 markets around the world.

Moussa highlighted that Sunbulah Group's honey business unit is currently producing two brands. The premium brand, Al-Shifa honey, is SASO-certified and is carefully collected from flowers that grow in tropical forests in South America, Australia and Northern Europe. The value brand, Sary honey, is collected from the best apiaries in the world that also meet SASO quality requirements, while offering a more modest price point for consumers.

Samer Kurdi, chairman of the board of directors at Sunbulah Group, said: "Honey consumption in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia during 2020 was approximately 320 grams per person, more than double the average consumption of honey worldwide. However, honey is one of the most adulterated products in the world — local studies in the Saudi market show that the Kingdom is no exception



Sunbulah Group's honey business unit demonstrated the methodology for sourcing and processing authentic, all-natural honey during a recent media roundtable.

FASTFACT

Sunbulah Group is currently producing two honey brands — the premium brand, Al-Shifa honey, and the value brand, Sary honey.

and struggles with adulterated honey regularly as evidenced by reports that tested various honey samples sourced from the Saudi honey market."

"Sunbulah Group's honey business unit works tirelessly to ensure the quality of our products by conducting a series of tests in the best laboratories of the world. We are proud that our honey

business unit represents one of the largest honey companies in the world. I urge consumers and honey connoisseurs alike in the Saudi community to strive to always ensure that the honey they consume is SASO-certified and always 100 percent authentic," he added.

Sunbulah Group's honey business unit is focused on preparing

honey varieties for final consumption, ensuring that its suppliers and processing preserves nutrients and health benefits made in nature, which are presented to the consumer without any additives.

The group, which has been in operation for 40 years, specializes in the manufacturing of multiple food categories.

GLOBAL RECOGNITION

SAP's Hoda Mansour ranked in Forbes' list of 50 'power businesswomen' in Mideast

Hoda Mansour, managing director, SAP Egypt and New Frontiers (Libya, Sudan, Yemen, Palestine and Levant), is among the prestigious Forbes Middle East's "Top 50 Power Businesswomen in the Middle East 2021," ranking an impressive 26th, up from 75th in 2020.

"Being among the top Middle East's 'power businesswomen' is a testament to SAP Egypt and New Frontiers team for focusing on customer success, and endorses the abilities of women leaders in the technology sector," said Mansour. "SAP will continue to focus on supporting the digital transformation, economic growth, and young talent development in Egypt and New Frontiers countries."

Meanwhile, underlining the strong success of SAP Egypt's leadership, SAP Egypt has been awarded the certification of Great Place to Work for 2021-2022, following the completion of the Trust Index employee survey and Culture Audit workplace cultural analysis.

"SAP Egypt being named

SAP will continue to focus on supporting the digital transformation, economic growth, and young talent development in Egypt and New Frontiers countries.

Hoda Mansour
Managing Director,
SAP Egypt and New Frontiers

a Great Place to Work is a milestone in SAP's commitment to developing young talent in Egypt's technology sector, training the workforce of the future, and ensuring diversity and inclusion in the workplace," added Mansour.

Great Place to Work Institute is an expert organization and considered an authority in constructing high performance and high trust culture companies in more than 60 countries with its 30+ years of experience.

Recognizing Egypt as an industry leader in growth and innovation, SAP Egypt has also been named as the "Market Unit for the Year" for SAP Middle East South.



Hoda Mansour

KNOWLEDGE SHARING

Almosafer Academy to train PNU students in travel & tourism skills

Almosafer, an omni-channel travel brand in Saudi Arabia, part of Seera Group, has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Community College at Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University (PNU) based in Riyadh.

Through this collaboration, Almosafer Academy, the brand's in-house training program dedicated to shaping the new generation of travel consultants, will offer the Community College Travel and Tourism Management program students a series of training workshops throughout each semester to arm them with the necessary skills and industry knowledge needed to succeed in the tourism sector. At the end of each semester, graduates will be offered a chance to take part in a three-month internship program at Almosafer. The company will also work with the university on several community service activities, organizing a series of events and seminars focusing on tourism, as well as developing the current curriculum to reflect the scale and importance of the travel and tourism industry.

The MoU was signed on Feb. 15 by Dr. Samira Al-Ghamdi, dean of the Community College at PNU, and Fahad Al-Oballan, vice president of retail at Almosafer.



The MoU was signed by Dr. Samira Al-Ghamdi, dean of the Community College at PNU, and Fahad Al-Oballan, vice president of retail at Almosafer.

Al-Oballan said: "An important element of our partnership with the university is the sharing of our knowledge and expertise in travel and tourism with the students, which in turn will foster innovation and improve our understanding of the current and future challenges in the Kingdom's tourism sector."

"Tourism in Saudi Arabia is a fundamental pillar of the national economy and plays a key role in the Vision 2030 reform plan. As one of the key players in the local market, we have an obligation to support our government's vision and direction to grow and develop this sector."

Al-Ghamdi said: "With this partner-

ship, our students will benefit greatly from a practice-based approach, training workshops and study tours. It will also leave a positive and long-term impact on our female students, equipping them with the knowledge and skills needed to contribute to the goals and initiatives of the academy and Saudi Vision 2030."

The training workshops will commence at the onset of the university's second semester, with Almosafer Academy trainers sharing experiences and skills with students, with a focus on travel marketing tools such as the Amadeus travel technology and customer relationship management (CRM) skills.

Corporate Briefs

THE BEST OF THE BEST

Loan Agreement

ADEX inks \$6m deal with Jenaan to finance Egypt project

Abu Dhabi Exports Office (ADEX), the export-financing arm of Abu Dhabi Fund for Development (ADFD), has signed a 22 million dirhams (\$6 million) loan agreement with the Egypt-based Emirati firm Jenaan Pipes and Irrigation Systems SAE. The funds will enable the company to import raw material from Borouge, a petrochemicals company, to manufacture and supply irrigation systems to one of the world's largest refineries situated in Egypt.

Additionally, the amount will help Jenaan to produce irrigation systems that will contribute to building the world's biggest sugar refinery in the country. The projects will not just lead to growth and expansion of the two Emirati companies, but they will also bolster Egypt's food security.

The polyethylene extrusion plant provides Jenaan with a new strategic manufacturing foothold in Egypt to expand across the MENA region, while greatly reducing shipping and logistics costs. The irrigation system will support a new beet farm and the refinery that will produce 900,000 tons of sugar annually, reducing Egypt's reliance on sugar imports by 80 percent.

Electric Vehicle

McLaren unveils new hybrid supercar — the Artura

McLaren Automotive, the British creator of luxury, high-performance supercars, has revealed the McLaren Artura, marking the beginning of both a new chapter for the supercar company and a new era in supercar technology and performance.

Underpinned by the McLaren philosophy of super-lightweight engineering, the Artura is a distillation of every attribute inherent in a McLaren, combined with faster throttle response, lower emissions and ability to run in pure EV mode, thanks to its groundbreaking electrified powertrain.

Brett Soso, managing director — Europe, Middle East and Africa, McLaren Automotive Ltd., said: "We are proud and honored to showcase the all-new McLaren Artura in Bahrain and on the day of its global debut. This revolutionary high-performance hybrid supercar marks a beginning of a new era for both McLaren Automotive and the wider supercar segment."

Leadership

Investcorp appoints head of Gulf institutions

Investcorp, a global provider and manager of alternative investment products, has announced that Loai Alarayedh will lead its institutional Gulf business as head of Gulf institutions relationships.

Alarayedh joined Investcorp in 2010 and has held various senior roles within the firm across both the institutional and private wealth coverage spectrum. In his new position, he will oversee the capital raising initiative for the firm's alternative investment products across the GCC's institutional market.

Timothy Mattar, global head of distribution at Investcorp, said: "This is an exciting time for Investcorp as we continue progressing our growth and diversification strategy with focus on goal-oriented and talented individuals who we believe will be instrumental in contributing to our growth strategy."



CRICKET

Howzat: Kingdom pads up for record cricket contest

369 teams, 106 pitches, 11 cities in largest-ever tournament

Mohammed Al-Kinani Jeddah

More than 6,800 cricketers are competing in Saudi Arabia's largest-ever cricket tournament, with matches in 11 cities as part of a national championship.

Players from 369 teams representing 15 local cricket associations are taking part in the 11-week National Cricket Championship 2021, which was launched on Jan. 29 and is due to end in April.

Matches in the T20-format competition will take place every Friday on 106 pitches around 11 cities — Riyadh, Dammam, Jubail, Jeddah, Madinah, Yanbu, Tabuk, Abha, Jazan, Qassim and Najran.

The record-breaking competition has been organized by the Saudi Sports for All Federation (SFA) and the Saudi Arabian Cricket Federation (SACF).

Softball cricket tournaments will also be organized with two stages, the first between February and April, and the second between October and November 2022.

Eleven Saudi cities — Riyadh, Dammam, Jubail, Jeddah, Tabuk, Makkah, Yanbu and Jazan, Farasan Island, Taif and Hail — will host

the events, with more than 5,000 players competing.

The events are expected to be popular with a wide range of residents in the Kingdom, especially those from countries where the game is popular, such as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

Prince Khaled bin Alwaleed bin Talal, SFA president, told Arab News: "People see the Asian community's fantastic passion for cricket; the players are deeply devoted to the sport. This is what we want to see of all nationalities in the Kingdom during this activation."

"Our ideal scenario is that anyone who is curious about cricket will be welcomed into the fold, and these advanced players will impart their experience and love of the game, spreading it further than ever."

Chairman of the SACF, Prince Saud bin Mishal, said: "Since Vision 2030 was introduced, Saudi Arabia has made great strides toward achieving a prosperous future for all residents of the country. Organizing such programs for expats, especially those from countries where cricket is so popular, is a major goal of Sport for All within the nation's Quality of Life Program."



Matches in the T20-format competition will take place every Friday on 106 pitches around 11 cities. Supplied

FAST FACT

More than 22,000 people are expected to take part in initiatives and competitions, supported by the Ministry of Sports and the Saudi Arabian Olympic Committee, and organized under the Ministry of Health's guidelines, aiming to combat coronavirus (COVID-19).

The SACF recently called players to join training camps in Jeddah, Yanbu, Madinah, Tabuk, Riyadh, Dammam, Al-Leith, Al-Wajh and Al-Qunfudah.

The camps include softball training activities, and will continue until December. A community cricket program also will be held in Jeddah, Riyadh, Dammam and Yanbu from February to April 2022.

More than 22,000 people are expected to take part in initiatives and competitions, supported by the Ministry of Sports and the Saudi Arabian Olympic Committee, and organized under the Ministry of Health's guidelines, aiming to combat coronavirus (COVID-19).

Nadeem Nadwi, the Jeddah-based Indian entrepreneur and SACF general manager, said: "Cricket has been played in Saudi Arabia by the expatriate community of the subcontinent since the 1960s. However, organized cricket started in 1976 with the formation of three major cricket associations in Jeddah, Riyadh and Dammam."

"In 2003, the Saudi Cricket Center was established under the patronage of Princess Ghada bint Hamoud bin Abdul Aziz to promote and develop the game at grassroots level and pave the way for a Saudi

presence in international cricket."

Nadwi said that Saudi Arabia is now ranked 28th out of 105 countries in the International Cricket Council (ICC) T20 ranking.

"The response from Saudi youth has been overwhelming, and with cricket now included in the Asian Games, it's only a matter of time before the game makes its mark among Saudis," he said.

The Kingdom joined the Asian Cricket Council in 2003 and became an associate member of the ICC.

A national cricket team was formed in the same year.

In 2020, the SACF was established. About 6,800 players from 15 regional cricket associations are registered with SACF.

Abbas Saad Al-Nadwi, a Saudi certified level 2 coach since 2016, told Arab News that there is a basic misconception about cricket in the Kingdom.

"Saudis see only Pakistani and Indian expats playing cricket and think the game belongs to the India-Pakistan subcontinent," he said.

Al-Nadwi, 34, said that his relatives, particularly his late father, first encouraged him to take up the sport.

fifth seed said. "The emotions at the end were indescribable, they were something else." The defeat will sting for Nadal, who was drawing closer to a 21st major title and sole ownership of the all-time men's record he currently shares with the injury-sidelined Federer.

Tsitsipas's reward is a meeting on Friday with Medvedev, his third Grand Slam semi, with top-ranked Novak Djokovic or Russian qualifier Aslan Karatsev waiting in Sunday's final.

The classic encounter played out in front of 15,000 empty seats at Rod Laver Arena, with fake crowd noises added to the TV broadcast, on the last day of a snap, state-wide coronavirus lockdown.

Up to 7,477 fans — about half capacity — will be allowed at the center court from Thursday after Victoria's state government eased the restrictions.

However, fans will not be able to see Barty, the world No. 1 whose dreams of ending Australia's 43-year wait for a domestic winner were dashed by the unlikely figure of Karolina Muchova.

In hot conditions, Barty raced through the first set but Muchova dominated after a medical timeout for dizziness, winning 1-6, 6-3, 6-2 to reach her first Grand Slam semifinal as the Australian crumbled.

Stefanos Tsitsipas hits a return against Rafael Nadal in Melbourne on Wednesday. AFP

TENNIS

Tsitsipas upsets Nadal at Australian Open

AFP Melbourne

Stefanos Tsitsipas ended Rafael Nadal's Grand Slam record bid in five gripping sets on Wednesday as home hopes were dashed when top-ranked Ashleigh Barty was knocked out in the Australian Open quarter-finals.

Greece's Tsitsipas looked down and out after losing the first two sets but after edging the third he was a different player, taking the upper hand over a subdued Nadal to win 3-6, 2-6, 7-6 (7/4), 6-4, 7-5.

Tsitsipas, 22, stunned Roger Federer in the 2019 last 16 before being halted by Nadal in the semis, but he turned the tables to set up a last-four meeting with Russia's Daniil Medvedev. Underlining the scale of the upset, it was only the second time Nadal has lost a Grand Slam five-setter from two sets to love after his defeat to Fabio Fognini at the 2015 US Open.

"I don't know what happened after the third set — I fly like a little bird, everything was working for me," the



HORSE RACING

Charlie Fellowes primes Prince of Arran for turf glory

Ali Khaled Dubai

The esteem in which British trainer Charlie Fellowes holds Prince of Arran is clear in every word he utters about his popular eight-year-old horse.

"My fella, he's old, he's clever, he looks after himself," said Fellowes. "The reason he's probably as good as he has ever been, aged eight, is because he has always looked after himself. And it's also why he finished second and third so many times, because he only ever does as much as he has to."

The champion racehorse is back

in Riyadh for the second running of the Saudi Cup, competing in the \$2.5 million Red Sea Turf Handicap over 3000m on Saturday, Feb. 20.

Fellowes looks to have given Prince of Arran every chance of what would be a popular victory for the representative of Team British Racing, an initiative led by Great British Racing International to promote Britain's trainers on the world stage.

"We've trained him a little bit differently for the race this year," the owner of Charlie Fellowes

Racing told Arab News from his home in the UK. "I found that as he got older, it probably takes more work to get him fit and I felt about a



Prince of Arran in Riyadh ahead of the Saudi Cup. Supplied

month ago that he is possibly not as fast as I hoped he was going to be. So, I decided to take him to the races in England, and to run him at Kempton about a week ago."

Last year, Prince of Arran finished third behind Call the Wind and Mekong in the \$2.5 million Longines Turf Handicap. This year, his trainer is making sure he peaks at just the right time.

"I felt that was going to be more beneficial to him than galloping three more times in Newmarket," said

Fellowes. "Just to get him out of the yard, get his blood up and actually run a proper race somewhere. He ran a really, really good race. (The tempo) was very steady, and that was the best case scenario for me. I didn't want him to go there and have a really hard race. I wanted him to have a race but to come back with the tank still with petrol left in it. So we can then prepare him for the race at the weekend perfectly."

The plan seemed to have worked perfectly, and Prince of Arran headed to Riyadh with a third place finish behind him.

Sport Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Premier League

Bale 'toward end of career,' admits agent

Gareth Bale is not playing regularly at Tottenham because he is coming toward the end of his medal-strewn career, his agent Jonathan Barnett said on Wednesday.

When the Wales international rejoined Spurs on loan from Real Madrid in September, the emotional homecoming was hailed as a perfect fit for the player and the club where he rose to global stardom.

Jose Mourinho's team have been involved in 22 Premier League matches following Bale's return to the north London club but the 31-year-old has started just two of those.

Mourinho last week questioned Bale's Instagram post which suggested he was in good health despite being unavailable to feature in his side's FA Cup defeat at Everton. **AFP**



Cricket

South Africa's du Plessis retires from test cricket

Former South Africa captain Faf du Plessis retired from test cricket on Wednesday after being denied the chance of a home farewell by Australia's decision to cancel next month's tour.

Du Plessis, who played 69 tests, said in a statement on his Instagram account that it was time to "walk into a new chapter." He will concentrate on Twenty20s, the 36-year-old batsman said, with World Cups in that format this year and next.

Du Plessis' decision was accelerated by a lack of test matches in the immediate future for South Africa, mainly due to coronavirus. **AP**

Alpine skiing

Norway win world team parallel gold

Norway claimed their first medal of the world ski championships when they beat Sweden in an all-Scandinavian final in the mixed-sex team parallel event on Wednesday.

The quartet of Thea Louise Stjernesund, Sebastian Foss-Solevaag, Kristina Riis-Johannessen and Fabian Wilkens Solheim beat the Swedes 3-1.

Only Sara Hector won for Sweden, who also included Estelle Alphand, Kristofer Jakobsen and Matthias Roenngren.

Norway beat Japan, the United States and favorites Switzerland in their march to the final, while the Swedish foursome had seen off Slovenia, Austria and Germany. **AFP**

Reality TV star Kourtney Kardashian has made her rumored relationship with US musician Travis Barker Instagram official by sharing a picture of the couple holding hands, much to her fans' delight.



& Finally

TheSix

Styling tips

Neeshay Nouman, founder of UAE-based interior design company The Niche Corner, shares her expert tips for creating your dream home.



Invest in mirrors

"Mirrors on different walls add so much depth to your room and automatically elevate any living space."



Buy plants

"Faux or real plants are really important for any living space because they add this freshness that has the ability to instantly perk up the space. A burst of greenery can brighten your mood instantly."



Lighting is key

"Great lighting doesn't have to be expensive. It could be something as simple as earthy, fresh-scented candles on the coffee table or changing a light-bulb in the living room."



Don't forget rugs

"If you don't have a rug, get one. Nowadays, you've got so many options. A lot of times, rugs can complete the living space."



Shop pre-loved

"For those looking to save a few bucks, getting pre-loved furniture is quite trendy right now. You can always have it painted or sanded. You can give it a completely new look at a fraction of the price."



Experiment with color

"Don't be afraid to incorporate different colors into your living space. A pop of teal goes a long way and it can be used to spruce up any space."

Brazilian 'it-girl' Camila Coelho shows support for Karen Wazen

Arab News Dubai

Camila Coelho seems to be a huge fan of Lebanese multi-hyphenate Karen Wazen. Shortly after she was spotted in Los Angeles wearing a pair of sunglasses from the influencer's eponymous accessories line By Karen Wazen, the Brazilian blogger took to Instagram to show some support for her friend.

"Yay, I couldn't wait to get my pieces from Karen's collection, my habibi I miss you," said the blogger-turned-entrepreneur in a video she shared on Instagram Stories of herself unwrapping a package sent from Wazen. In the package were two slinky dresses from the Lebanese blogger's collaboration with Emirati ready-to-wear label Madiyah Al-Sharqi.

"The pieces look so good and so cool, I cannot wait to wear it. You will see me wearing it very soon," Coelho said.

The 32-year-old was gifted a sleeveless, blue tie-dye dress and a brown and white spaghetti strap dress that certainly looks

FASTFACT

The 32-year-old was gifted a sleeveless, blue tie-dye dress and a brown and white spaghetti strap dress that certainly looks like something Coelho would wear out in her hometown of Los Angeles, or at fashion weeks in Milan and Paris.

like something Coelho would wear out in her hometown of Los Angeles, or at fashion weeks in Milan and Paris.

Wazen partnered with the Emirati ready-to-wear label to design a Spring 2021 capsule collection boasting 28 pieces that dropped in stores in January.

The nearly 30-piece collection



Left: With 8.8 million Instagram followers, Camila Coelho is no stranger to the limelight. File/Getty Images

Above: Lebanese blogger Karen Wazen gifted Coelho pieces from her latest collection. Instagram

features a lineup of separates — like bandeau tops, oversized jackets and high-waisted pants — alongside a variety of dresses. The color palette features soft earthy tones while the fabrics incorporated into the ultra-feminine collection include cotton and linen.

Of course, it's not Wazen's first foray into fashion design. Indeed, the mother of three is the founder of eyewear line By Karen Wazen and launched her debut collection of shades in December 2018.

Her designs have been sported by British singer Dua Lipa and reality television star Kourtney Kardashian, along with a number of regional influencers.

Less than a year after the official launch of her brand, her designs were picked up by major e-tailer Farfetch, which became the first online platform to offer her eponymous eyewear collection.

Meanwhile, with 8.8 million followers on Instagram and a combined following of 4.7 million subscribers on her two YouTube channels, Coelho is one of the most well-known social media influencers on the scene right now.



which means there is only 29 percent for every other race and culture. Out of this, less than 1 percent are Middle Eastern characters."

It was figures such as these that prompted the mother-of-two to launch Storically in a bid to create personalized books for children to preserve personal history and amplify diversity.

The website, launched in December, creates two different types of books.

"First, is a conventional personalized book where

we write a story, and parents can go onto our website and select an avatar that matches their child's character then add in their name, age, and any other details that are required by the story. So, the book that you get has your child as the star or the hero of the narrative," she added.

The second feature allows platform users to share stories from their lives, personal history, or cultures. "It could be a story that your grandmother used to tell you or a family tradition that you want to preserve, and we create books out of



Rose Leslie and Kit Harington.

NEWBORN NEWS

Rose Leslie, Kit Harington welcome first baby

Arab News Dubai

Former "Game of Thrones" stars Rose Leslie and Kit Harington have welcomed their first child together.

Leslie recently gave birth to a baby boy and she confirmed the news by stepping out with her new bundle of joy in London this week with her husband.

The pair are yet to announce the newborn's name.

The 34-year-old Scottish actress announced her pregnancy in September with a photoshoot by the UK's *Marie Claire* magazine that captured the star's baby bump on the cover.

The new parents first connected in 2012, but they had an on-and-off relationship.

Leslie starred alongside Harington in "Game of Thrones" from 2012 to 2014. They tied the knot in 2018.

ABLA FAHITA

Trailer drops for Egyptian puppet's Netflix series

Arab News Dubai

The trailer for satirical Egyptian puppet Abla Fahita's first Netflix series, "Drama Queen," was just released on social media — and fans are already gearing up to laugh along with the famous figure.

In the trailer, which was released on Fahita's Instagram account, the puppet was seen choosing a star to tell the story of her life. Among the actors were two "La Casa De Papel" stars and Saudi singer and actress Aseel Omran.

By the end of the 2-minute clip, the puppet decided to be play herself in "Drama Queen."

The six-episode series, set to be released this year, will see Fahita starring in an action-packed comedy adventure alongside her children Caro and Boudi.

those," Anwar said.

The inspiration for Storically came from the Indian city of Bhopal that between 1820 and 1920 was ruled by "four amazing women" who are her ancestors.

"So, my daughter loves books and princesses. But for her, princesses are Elsa (from Disney's 'Frozen') and all the other Disney princesses. This sort of worried me. I feel like my identity is getting lost because she doesn't know about the princesses in her own family. These amazing powerful rulers from her own history and heritage.

"They look obviously nothing like Elsa, but there are so many stories from their lives which I want her to connect with," Anwar said.