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ARAB NEWS

SINCE 1975

The Voice of a Changing Region

Makkah Gov. Prince Khaled Al-Faisal receives Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi in Jeddah on Thursday. SPA

MAKKAH SUMMITS

Iranian designs, Palestinian crisis top agenda of GCC, Arab summits

Muslim leaders focus on Houthi menace, Syrian conflict, Libya chaos, violent extremism

Mohammed Al-Kinani Jeddah

A Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) meeting and an emergency summit of the Arab League took place late on Thursday in Makkah, expressing concern over the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the destabilizing activities of Iran and its proxy forces in the region.

The 14th ordinary summit of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), which convenes in Makkah on Friday, will have a greater focus on the two key issues.

To be chaired by Saudi Arabia's King Salman, the Islamic Summit is expected to discuss challenges facing the Arab and Muslim worlds, especially the suffering of Syrian civilians due to an ongoing military assault in Idlib province, the conflict in Libya, rising anti-Muslim prejudice in different parts of the world, and violent extremism.

Saudi Foreign Minister Ibrahim Al-Assaf urged Muslim nations to confront with "all means of force and firmness" recent attacks in the Arabian Gulf that have been blamed on Iran.

Addressing the preparatory meeting of OIC foreign ministers, Al-Assaf said: "Tehran's support for Houthi rebels in Yemen is proof of Iranian interference in other nations' affairs, and this is something that ... Islamic countries should reject."

He added that the Islamic world faces extremely dangerous challenges, including interference in countries' internal affairs, rising numbers of refugees and displaced people, and the spread of terrorism, extremism and sectarianism.

The conflict with Israel remains the most important challenge facing the Islamic world, Al-Assaf said.

He added that the Palestinian cause is Saudi Arabia's "first issue," in particular regaining Palestinians' full legitimate rights, including the establishment of an independent state with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Al-Assaf said the Kingdom backs sincere efforts to find a political solution that preserves the unity and institutions of Syria, and ends the presence of sectarian terrorist groups there.

He affirmed the Kingdom's firm support for Libya's sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity, and rejection of foreign interference there.

OIC Secretary-General Yousef Al-Othaimeen said Houthi attacks against Saudi Arabia will be discussed at the Islamic Summit.

He told Saudi TV that all countries share common interests regardless of religion or race. He condemned interference in other countries' internal affairs.

Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi told Arab News that his country is willing to help resolve "longstanding issues" between Muslim countries.

"Pakistan believes that this region is in flux," he said. "Our message is that we have to join hands. We have to understand each other's concerns, and have a collective objective of peace and stability so that our region can develop like other parts of the world."

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HIGHLIGHT

Saudi Foreign Minister Ibrahim Al-Assaf urged Muslim nations to confront with "all means of force and firmness" recent attacks in the Arabian Gulf that have been blamed on Iran.

FAST FACTS

● OIC Secretary-General Yousef Al-Othaimeen said Houthi attacks against Saudi Arabia will be discussed at the Islamic Summit.

● Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi said his country is willing to help resolve 'longstanding issues' between Muslim countries.

REGIME WARNED

US threatens military force if Iran hits its interests

Peter Harrison Dubai

Iran needs to show more interest in talks than threats, a senior policy adviser to the US secretary of state said on Thursday, adding that America "will respond with military force" if its interests are attacked.

Brian Hook, US special representative for Iran, said a number of "military assets" had already been repositioned in response to intelligence that Iran was planning imminent attacks against American interests.

"We have made it clear that we will respond with military force if American interests are attacked by Iran," Hook said at a press briefing.

The US is awaiting the results of investigations into the recent attacks on UAE, Saudi and Norwegian tankers in the Gulf, and a "proper response" will then be discussed, he added. "We have been consistent in our messaging — Iran should show more of an interest in talks than threats, and we have seen on an almost daily basis from the Iranian regime that they will not talk with the United States," Hook said.

"Iran faces a choice. They have to decide whether they want to be a normal country or a revolutionary cause."

He said President Donald Trump is open to negotiations, but the US "maximum pressure campaign" is working "by nearly every measure."

Hook added: "The Iranian regime and its proxies are weaker today than when the (US) president took office over two years ago." Hook cited the public call for support by Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah, and said Iran-backed Shiite militias will have to "find new sources of revenue."

Hook added that the Syrian regime faces a fuel crisis because the US has cut off the 1-3 million barrels per month that Tehran had previously supplied.

Even Iran's military spending has been cut, he said, adding that its military spending peaked during the nuclear deal.

"Since we exited the deal, Iran's military spending for the budget that they released in March was cut by 28 percent," he said.

The Brief

ISRAELI CRISIS

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was confronted with one of the biggest defeats of his political career on Thursday after failing to form a coalition. **P6**

AFGHAN ATTACK

A suicide attack outside Kabul's main military academy killed at least six people on Thursday when cadets were leaving the facility to travel home for the weekend. **P8**

KSA REFORMS

We know that it is important not just to implement the reforms, but also to monitor the difference that they are making, writes Ibrahim Al-Omar, governor of the Saudi Arabian General Investment Authority. **P11**

AL-BALAD IN FOCUS

Middle Eastern art auction to benefit Jeddah's historic district

Arab News Jeddah

The Saudi Ministry of Culture and auction house Christie's on June 26 will hold a special charity auction of contemporary Middle Eastern art to benefit a new heritage museum in Jeddah's historic district and a children's nonprofit organization also in the city.

The event, Art for Al-Balad, is the first of its kind in the Kingdom with over 40 works donated for sale by collectors, artists and gallerists in Saudi Arabia and other Middle East countries. Among those who contributed artworks include the Mansouriah Foundation for Culture and Creativity, Ayyam Gallery, Agial Gallery, Al-Marsa Gallery, Elmarsa Gallery, Hafez Gallery as well as Rochan Gallery, Mazen Souqid, George Alama, Hamza Bounoua, Abdullah K. Al-Turki and Qaswra Hafez.

The Nassif House in Al-Balad served as the royal residence of Saudi Arabia's founder King Abdul Aziz bin Saud in 1925. Saudi Culture Ministry

Proceeds from the sales will support the creation of a dedicated heritage museum that will tell the story of Al-Balad's unique history and the Help Center, a Jeddah-based children's nonprofit organization, which provides tailored support to children with special educational needs.

Al-Balad boasts of 600 buildings dating back to the 19th century — including traditional tower houses with distinctive wooden tops or "roshan" — and is one of five UNESCO World Heritage Sites in the Kingdom.

"A dedicated Al-Balad Museum is an important cause that will play a crucial role in historic Jeddah's preservation and regeneration. It will showcase a part of Saudi Arabia's heritage to a wide audience and ensure that culture is embedded into Saudi citizens' everyday lives for generations to come," said Saudi Minister of Culture Prince Badr bin Abdullah.

"Arts and culture have the power to transform lives, and this is clearly demonstrated by this group of talented artists donating their work to support the Al-Balad Museum and the Help Center."

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Extremism and terrorism remain one of the greatest threats to the region's security and stability, and to the whole world.

Dr. Yousef Al-Othaimeen
OIC secretary-general

Radar

KSA *today*

Jeddah

Almirkaz

Jeddah residents can book iftar or suhoor in the General Entertainment Authority's Ramadan tent until June 3. The tent is set up in Al-Khalidiyah district on King Abdul Aziz Road. Call 00 96650 6683107.

Riyadh

Ramadan tent

A Ramadan festival at Al-Faisaliah Resort in Riyadh offers activities for the whole family, including a tent for iftar, a suhoor tent for relaxing, coffee and bazaar shopping, as well as health advice, and free counseling and medical checkups. From 5 p.m. until 3 a.m. until June 1.

Jeddah

Spring carnival

A festival offering a range of entertaining activities including live audiovisual shows, interactive art exhibitions, rides and carnival-themed games. It will run until July from 4 p.m. to 12 a.m. at Al-Samer, opposite Haramain Road in Jeddah.

Ad Diriyah

Diriyah Nights

A special Ramadan family package which offers live storytelling and outdoor cinema screenings, alongside workshops for children and adults. Traditional Saudi suhoor will also be available. The event runs daily from 9.30 p.m. to 2 a.m. daily until June 3 in the historic Al-Bujairi district.

The Register

THE PICTURES THAT MARK THE DAY

Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan visits the Prophet's Mosque in Madinah on Thursday. SPA

Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan arrived in Saudi Arabia on Thursday to attend the 14th Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) summit in Makkah, where he will meet Muslim world leaders and issue a call for unity in the Islamic world.

The summit will be chaired by King Salman and will begin on Friday under the banner "Makkah Summit: Hand in Hand toward the Future."

Khan was greeted at Prince Mohammed bin Abdul Aziz International Airport by Wahib bin Mohammed Al-Sahli, undersecretary of the Madinah region, and several officials.

The Pakistani leader later visited the Prophet's Mosque.

Khan is due to meet Muslim world leaders on the sidelines of the summit where he will stress the need for solidarity and unity, Pakistan's Foreign Ministry said.

Other Muslim leaders who have arrived in the Kingdom for the summit include Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri, Jordan's King Abdullah, Kuwaiti Emir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, Iraqi President Barham Salih, Chadian President Idriss Deby, Oman's Sultan Qaboos's adviser Sayyid Shihab bin Tariq Al-Said, Prince Moulay Rachid of Morocco, Sudan's transitional military council leader Gen. Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan, Comorian President Azali Assoumani, Algerian Prime Minister Noureddine Badawi, Senegal's President Macky Sall, First Deputy Prime Minister of Uganda Gen. Moses Ali and Suriname Foreign Minister Yldiz Pollack-Beighle.

What's Trending

Today's hot topics explained by ***Aseel Bashraheel***

VIDEOGAME

'Death Stranding'

"Death Stranding" has become arguably the most eagerly anticipated videogame of 2019 since the release of a new trailer on Wednesday alongside the news that it will be released on Nov. 8.

It is the first release — as an independent studio — from Kojima Productions, headed by legendary game developer Hideo Kojima, who parted ways with Konami in late 2015.

Fans of Kojima's work, including the "Metal Gear" franchise which made his name, have been awaiting further news of the game since its first trailer was released at the Electronic Entertainment Expo in 2016.

Based on what the trailers have so far revealed, this is not going to be a straightforward action game, but one that — in typical Kojima style — follows a complex, confusing storyline.

FOOTBALL

Eden Hazard

After scoring twice in Wednesday's Europa League final between Chelsea and Arsenal, Belgian forward Eden Hazard — Chelsea's standout performer for most of the seven years he has been with the club announced he would be leaving in the summer.

"I think it's goodbye," he told BT Sport after the match.

Hazard — one of the world's most exciting attacking talents — has long been rumored to be a target for Spanish giants Real Madrid. Florentino Perez, Real's president, admitted that he has wanted to sign Hazard for years.

"I am very interested in him coming to Real Madrid and I am very hopeful that he will come this year," Perez told Spanish radio station, Onda Cero.

Hazard expressed how desperate he was to win the Europa League trophy, regardless of whether he scored or not. He said: "Would it be the perfect farewell? Yes."

Hazard also posted a heartfelt video, kissing his latest medal and dedicating the win to the club's supporters. "Hi Chelsea fans, this is for you," he said. "Fans in the stadium, fans in London, fans everywhere, I love you."

Today's Number

2k

More than 2,000 students have volunteered in Makkah during the holy month of Ramadan, the Saudi Press Agency reported. The director-general of education in the Makkah region, Mohammed bin Mahdi Al-Harthy, said that 2,289 students and scouts had completed 118,531 volunteer hours in the service of pilgrims. The volunteers helped out with food distribution, transportation, hosting, security and organization. The voluntary work had benefited 688,784 people.

Who's Who

Dr. Abdullah Al-Bussairy

Dr. Abdullah Al-Bussairy has been the Saudi ambassador to the Philippines since March 2015.

On Wednesday, he met with officials of the Civil Aviation Authority of the Philippines (CAAP) to discuss search and rescue operations to find Saudi flying student Abdullah Khalid Al-Sharif.

Al-Sharif and his instructor, Capt. Jose Nelson Yapparcon, went missing on May 17 after their aircraft vanished from radar shortly after takeoff.

Al-Bussairy has a Ph.D. in political science. His career began as a diplomatic attache with the Foreign Ministry in Dammam from 1985 to 1987.

He served as head of consular affairs at the Saudi Embassy in Bangladesh until 1992, before carrying out the same duties at the embassy in Kuwait for less than a year.

He was then appointed third secretary at the Foreign Ministry in Dammam. In 1994 he moved to Khartoum, where he was head of consular affairs at the Saudi Embassy for five years.

In 1999, Al-Bussairy was promoted to second secretary at the Foreign Ministry. He remained in that post until 2001.

That year, he became head of consular affairs at the Saudi Embassy in Jakarta until 2008, when he became ambassador to Bangladesh.

In 2015, he was appointed non-resident ambassador to Nepal, shortly before becoming ambassador to the Philippines.

The Region

The Middle East Roundup

Arab News Dubai

•Organized by the Sharjah Art Foundation, the 14th Sharjah Biennial showcases work from local and international artists at the Heart of Sharjah.

•Dubai's Cinema Akil is hosting a special screening of Egyptian dramedy "Ext. Night," from filmmaker Ahmad Abdalla. The film tells the story of an aspiring young director who is facing an existential crisis. Set in Cairo over the course of a single night, it portrays a different side of the Egyptian capital.

•Calligrapher and artist Fadi Al-Awayid is showcasing his work — a mixture of calligraphy, abstraction, letters and messages — at the Beirut Terraces in Lebanon. The "Life" exhibition, which ends on June 30, mixes modern and classic calligraphy.

•Musical trio Shkoon take to the stage at Odin Mazar in Lebanon. Known for their signature sound — mixing Arabic scales and traditional folk songs with oriental melodies — Shkoon are Ameen, Thorben, and Maher, who met in Hamburg.

Prayer Times in Saudi Arabia

May 31	Fajr	Sunrise	Dhuhr	Asr	Maghreb	Isha
Makkah	4:12	5:38	12:19	3:35	6:59	8:59
Madinah	4:03	5:32	12:20	3:42	7:06	9:06
Riyadh	3:35	5:04	11:51	3:14	6:38	8:38
Abha	4:10	5:33	12:08	3:28	6:42	8:42
Dammam	3:15	4:47	11:38	3:05	6:28	8:28

The Palestinian issue is a paramount Saudi concern.
Ibrahim Al-Assaf
Saudi foreign minister

Spotlight

A man rescues a child while members of the Syrian civil defense, known as the White Helmets, search the area for survivors following a reported airstrike by regime forces and their allies in Idlib province on May 30, 2019. AFP

ORGANIZATION OF ISLAMIC COOPERATION

Unifying the Muslim world's stance on pressing issues

The OIC's 14th ordinary summit convenes in Makkah to tackle a long list of problems amid rising tensions

Mohammed Al-Kinani Jeddah

With the theme "Hand in Hand toward the Future," and an agenda packed with issues affecting the Muslim world, the 14th ordinary summit of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) convenes in the Saudi holy city of Makkah on Friday.

Saudi Arabia's King Salman will chair the Islamic Summit, a gathering of monarchs, heads of state and government that dates back 50 years, and nowadays convenes every three years to deliberate, make decisions and try to resolve crises in Muslim-majority countries.

This year, the summit coincides with two emergency meetings — the Arab League and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) summits — called by King Salman amid escalating tensions between Iran on one side and the US and its Gulf allies on the other.

The summit in Makkah is expected to address a long list of pressing political problems, including the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, rising anti-Muslim prejudice in different parts of the world, and violent extremism.

Coinciding with the final days of Ramadan, the summit is expected to deal with the consequences of the US decision last year to move its embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem; the suffering of Syrian civilians due to an ongoing military assault in Idlib province; and the destabilizing activities of Iran and its proxy forces in the Middle East. Amid rising tensions between the US and Iran, attacks on four commercial vessels near the UAE's Fujairah port earlier this month have raised serious questions about maritime security in the Gulf. Senior US officials have pointed the finger at Tehran.

The incidents, which included attacks on two Saudi oil tankers, drew strong condemnation from governments in the Middle East and worldwide, as well as the Arab League. The acts of sabotage were followed by strikes by explosives-laden drones on Saudi oil installations, which led to a temporary closure of the East-West pipeline.

A TV station run by Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi militia said it had launched drone attacks on Saudi installations. The incidents were described by the OIC as a threat to the security and safety of international maritime traffic.

On Wednesday, addressing the preparatory meeting of OIC foreign ministers in Jeddah, Saudi Foreign Minister Ibrahim Al-Assaf said: "Tehran's support for Houthi rebels in Yemen is proof of Iranian interference in other nations' affairs, and this is something that ... Islamic countries should reject."

Al-Assaf, who chaired the meeting, said the Kingdom condemned the attacks aimed at threatening the supply of oil, and called for a UN-backed political solution in Syria. He added: "I would like to emphasize that the Palestinian issue is a paramount Saudi concern, in particular the Palestinian people's full legitimate rights, and the establishment of an independent state with East Jerusalem as its capital."

Speaking at the preparatory meeting, OIC Secretary-General Yousef Al-Othaimeen expressed his gratitude to King Salman and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman for Saudi Arabia's hosting of the summit. Al-Othaimeen also praised the Kingdom's support for the OIC, and its generous contributions for Islamic causes.

In a significant development in the lead up to the Islamic Summit, an anti-extremism document was signed by 1,200 figures from the Muslim world during a gathering in Makkah. The four-day event, organized by the Muslim World League (MWL), was attended by dignitaries, scholars, senior officials and leading thinkers, who between them represented 139 countries and 27 Islamic sects.

King Salman was the first leader to sign the declaration, and later received the scholars in Makkah, where he was handed the final document. It says religious and cultural diversity does not justify conflict, and civilized dialogue is the path to overcoming historical differences.

The declaration condemns attacks on places of worship, calling them criminal acts that require a strong legislative and security response. It says the extremist ideas that motivate such attacks need to be challenged.

The document urges non-interference in the affairs of other states, and singles out for criticism dissemination of sectarian ideas.

It recognizes the importance of women's empowerment, rejects their marginalization, and opposes the denial of opportunities for them in various fields.

The document says it is everyone's duty to fight terrorism, injustice, oppression and human rights violations. It also urges greater environmental protection, saying wasting natural resources and causing pollution infringe on the rights of future generations.

Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi told Arab News that his country's message to the Islamic Summit is that Muslims "should join hands, understand their individual concerns, and have a collective objective of peace and stability so that our region can develop like other developed parts of the world."

The OIC is the second-largest inter-governmental institution after the UN, with 57 member states from four continents. It is the voice of 1.5 billion Muslims worldwide. Between 1969 and 2016 there were 13 Islamic summits, with seven held for emergencies in the capitals of Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Kuwait, Egypt, Pakistan and Turkey.

In 1970, the first Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers was held in Jeddah, culminating in the decision to establish a permanent secretariat in the Saudi city.

SECRETARIES GENERAL

The OIC head is elected by the Council of Foreign Ministers for a period of five years, taking into account equitable geographical distribution, rotation and equal opportunity for all member states.

2016-present Yousef bin Ahmad Al-Othaimeen (Saudi Arabia)

2014-2016 Iyad Ameen Madani (Saudi Arabia)

2005-2013 Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu (Turkey)

2001-2004 Abdelouahed Belkeziz (Morocco)

1997-2000 Azeddine Laraki (Morocco)

1989-1996 Hamid Algabid (Niger)

1985-1988 Syed Sharifuddin Pirzada (Pakistan)

1979-1984 Habib Chatty (Tunisia)

1975-1979: Amadou Karim Gaye (Senegal)

1974-1975 Hassan Al-Touhami (Egypt)

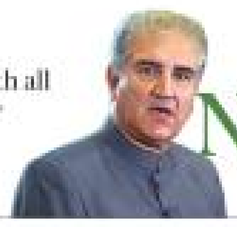
1971-1973 Tunku Abdul Rahman (Malaysia)

Members of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad group march in December 2017 to protest the US decision to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital. AP

TIMELINE OIC SUMMITS

- 2019 - Makkah (Saudi Arabia)
- 2016 - Istanbul (Turkey)
- 2013 - Cairo (Egypt)
- 2008 - Dakar (Senegal)
- 2003 - Putrajaya (Malaysia)
- 2000 - Doha (Qatar)
- 1997 - Tehran (Iran)
- 1994 - Casablanca (Morocco)
- 1991 - Dakar (Senegal)
- 1987 - Kuwait City (Kuwait)
- 1984 - Casablanca (Morocco)
- 1981 - Makkah (Saudi Arabia)
- 1974 - Lahore (Pakistan)
- 1969 - Rabat (Morocco)

We have excellent relations with all Gulf countries, historically and traditionally.
Shah Mehmood Qureshi
Foreign minister of Pakistan



Arab and Islamic states foreign ministers gather for a group photo ahead of the Islamic Summit Conference, which begins in Makkah on Friday. SPA

MAKKAH SUMMIT

'Unite against terror,' OIC forum told

Saudi foreign minister calls for vigilance in face of threats to Islamic world

Mohammed Al-Kinani Jeddah

The preparatory meeting of foreign ministers of member states of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) kicked off in Jeddah on Wednesday under the chairmanship of Foreign Minister Ibrahim Al-Assaf.

The meeting, which coincides with the OIC's 50th anniversary, is in preparation for the 14th ordinary session of the Islamic Summit Conference, which will begin in Makkah on Friday under the banner "Makkah Summit: Hand in Hand Toward the Future."

In his opening address, Al-Assaf said the Islamic world faces extremely dangerous challenges and changes, including interference in the internal affairs of countries, rising numbers of refugees and displaced people, and the spread of terrorism, extremism and sectarianism.

Countries need to take a serious stand and study the issues from all sides, adopting the best possible approach to dealing with them through a unified position and efforts, he said.

Al-Assaf said that the conflict with Israel remains the most important challenge facing the Islamic world.

The Palestinian cause is the "first issue" of Saudi Arabia, he said, in particular the regaining of Palestinian people's full legitimate rights and the establishment of an independent state with East Jerusalem (Al-Quds) as its capital in accordance with international resolutions and the Arab peace initiative backed by the decisions of consecutive Arab and Islamic summits.

"The international community must shoulder its political and moral responsibility to achieve this," he said.

Al-Assaf said that the Kingdom attaches great importance to stability in Yemen and condemns a continuing coup by Iranian-backed Houthi militias against the legitimate authority, which is "a clear example of Iran's continued interference in the internal affairs of countries, which must be rejected by OIC, as it is contrary to its charter and international charters."

He also affirmed the Kingdom's stand with Sudan and support for the transitional military leadership, along with measures taken in the interest of the Sudanese people.

The Kingdom backs sincere efforts to find a political solution that will preserve the unity and institutions of Syria and end the presence of sectarian terrorist groups, based on the Geneva outcomes, statements of the International Syria Support Group and relevant Security Council resolutions, Al-Assaf said.

He also affirmed the Kingdom's firm support for the sovereignty and unity of Libya, its territorial integrity and the rejection of foreign interference, calling on all parties in the country to unite, block and fight terrorist groups.

FAST FACTS

- **The Palestinian cause is the 'first issue' of Saudi Arabia, in particular the regaining of Palestinian people's full legitimate rights and the establishment of an independent state with East Jerusalem (Al-Quds as its capital.**
- **The Kingdom attaches great importance to stability in Yemen and condemns a continuing coup by Iranian-backed Houthi militants against the legitimate authority.**

In his speech, Yousef Al-Othaimeen, secretary-general of the OIC, expressed his gratitude to King Salman and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman for Saudi Arabia hosting the summit and its preparatory meetings.

Al-Othaimeen also praised Saudi Arabia's support for the OIC and its generous contributions in serving Islamic causes.

He extended his thanks to Turkey for its hosting of the 13th summit and the outcome of the forum.

"There is no doubt that the unfortunate developments witnessed by some member states, and the deterioration of the security and humanitarian situation in some member states where there are conflicts urge us to intensify our discussions, and increase our efforts to establish security and peace in our region so as to ensure justice, decent life, development for present and future generations," he said

"These unprecedented current developments in our modern history should in no way distract our attention from our central cause, the Palestinian issue," he said.

Israeli policies and disregard for international legitimacy resolutions call for the OIC to further coordinate efforts to press for a global position toward consolidating peace, and put an end to the Israeli occupation and the suffering of the Palestinian people.

The OIC is closely following the situations in Yemen, Somalia, Libya, Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Mali, Sudan, Algeria, Guinea, Nigeria, Niger, Sierra Leone, Cote d'Ivoire, Djibouti, the Comoros and Central Africa along with others, he said.

"We are following with deep concern the bloody events against the security of the people of Jammu and Kashmir, the developments in the Nagorno-Karabakh region, the conditions of the Rohingya, the Muslim peoples of Turkish Cyprus, Bosnia and Kosovo and the situation of Muslim societies in the rest of the world," he said.

Al-Othaimeen said that extremism and terrorism remain one of the greatest threats to the region's security and stability, and to the whole world.

"Extremism and terrorism are aimed at undermining the cohesion of our societies, disrupting our member states' growth, and depleting their energies and capabilities," he said.

"Considering the dangers of these evil factors, we reaffirm the importance of coordinating our efforts in combating all forms of terrorism, in accordance with a comprehensive strategy that takes into account all the security, economic, cultural, social and intellectual dimensions associated with terrorism and extremism and the ways promoting for them or even leading to them.

"All in all, for our countries to avoid the risks of extremism and terrorism, we have to earnestly join hands to confront these evil acts.

"This can be achieved only in a framework of effective cooperation and solidarity among all Muslim countries, drawing on their noble values, strong civilizational ties and common interests," he said.

He added that the convening of the Islamic summit during the holy month of Ramadan and on this holy land reflect Saudi Arabia's concern for cooperation and coordination with the rest of the Islamic states to achieve these goals and to advance the reality of our Islamic world and put it in a place it deserves.

Pakistan's Foreign Minister, Shah Mehmood Qureshi, told Arab News that his country's message to the summit is that Muslims "should join hands, understand their individual concerns, and have a collective objective of peace and stability so that our region can develop like other developed part of the world.

"By not joining hands, how are we going to achieve what we want to achieve, if we do not sit and resolve our issues through diplomatic means? We should keep on joining hands as that is the only way forward," he said.

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

Pakistani foreign minister: 'Our message is that we have to join hands'

Mohammed Al-Kinani Jeddah

Pakistan's Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs Shah Mehmood Qureshi said on Wednesday that his country is willing to play a role to help resolve some of the region's "long-standing issues" between Muslim countries.

Speaking exclusively to Arab News on the sidelines of the 14th Islamic Summit Conference in Makkah, Qureshi said: "Pakistan believes that this region is in flux. We have some very serious issues in the region. Our message is that we have to join hands; we have to understand each other's concerns and have a collective objective of peace and stability so that our region can develop like other parts of the world.

"The point is that it is a concerted effort," he continued. "How are we going to achieve what we want to achieve if we do not sit and resolve our issues through diplomatic means? We should keep on joining hands, as that is the only way forward."

Pakistan Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi, second left, on the eve of the Islamic Summit Conference in Makkah. SPA

With around 5 million Pakistanis working in the Gulf, the region is of special interest to Islamabad, Qureshi pointed out. "We have excellent relations with all Gulf countries, historically and traditionally," he said. "The Gulf is economically very important for Pakistan. The bulk of our energy requirements are being fulfilled from the Gulf.

"So, for Pakistan, peace within the GCC states is always advocated. And the issues within the Gulf need to be resolved through dialogue. You can agree to disagree, but you can reconnect to resolve," he added.

Asked to comment on Iran's role in the escalating tension in the Gulf, Qureshi said that any country isolating itself from the rest of the Muslim world "because of pursuing a particular policy" was going to suffer negative consequences. However, he added, "Iran is part of the region. It is a country that you have to live with. We share a border with them, so we recognize the challenges. But we have to see how those tensions can be defused and resolved."

Qureshi met with Iran's foreign minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, in Islamabad last Friday to discuss rising tensions between Iran and the US. "My message to him was: Restraint, calm, and resolution of issues through diplomatic channels," he said. "Conflict will not pay. It will only aggravate the situation. People want to see peace and stability in the entire region and we all have to play a responsible role."

It is important, he said, for the Muslim world to improve its international image. "We have to eliminate terrorist elements, and we have to reverse extremism," he said. "Why is the world looking at us in a particular way? And how can we get rid of that image to make the world look at us positively?"

Forums such as the Islamic Summit Conference and Arab League meetings provide vital opportunities to answer such questions, he suggested. "These meeting are very important," he said. "And they will provide ample opportunity for all of us to achieve our goals."

One particular goal on which Pakistan is currently focused is a resolution to "the Kashmir issue."

"The situation (on the Indian side of Kashmir) has changed dramatically," Qureshi said. "Today the world recognizes that Kashmiris — Kashmiris who were engaging with the union in India — are now distant from the center because the reality on the ground has changed." A number of reports, from the UN, the UK and the EU, he said, "are all pointing in one direction."

"People are being alienated, excessive use of force has taken place, human rights are being violated and people are being killed and maimed," he explained. "Pellet guns are being used and horrific stories of killings and gang rapes have surfaced. The situation is explosive, and unless it is addressed, it could lead to new tensions within South Asia between two neighbors, and no one wants that; particularly the Gulf countries because any deterioration will affect the Gulf as well.

"We want to live in peace with India, but the issue of Kashmir has to be addressed," he continued. "It cannot be ignored or overlooked."

News Saudi Arabia

Ramadan in the Kingdom

Ramadan Aman The Ramadan Aman project concluded its activities in Madinah on Thursday. The event, organized in partnership with the Ministry of the Interior, will visit 37 Saudi cities as part of its 2019 program.

"The project in Madinah distributed 21,000 packages containing brochures and iftar meals," the general supervisor of the women's section of Ramadan Aman, Alaa Al-Samman, said.

"The event also launched a campaign aimed at minimizing the number of traffic accidents and excessive speed during the pre-iftar hours by handing out awareness-raising brochures before sunset prayers, with the help of 70 volunteers."

The project's director in Madinah, Daifallah Al-Ansari, said: "The event exceeded all expectations due to the efforts of our young volunteers." ● Saudi Press Agency

JOINT VENTURE

GEMS to acquire Saudi Arabia's biggest private school owner

Sean Cronin London

GEMS Education has agreed to buy the Ma'arif Education Group, the largest private school operator in the Kingdom. The UAE-based group has established a joint venture with Hassana Investment Co., the investment arm of Saudi Arabia's General Organization for Social Insurance (GOSI), to build more than 50 schools across the country.

Ma'arif schools consist of both national and international campuses across and have over 22,000 students enrolled. GEMS did not disclose the value of the deal and was not immediately available for comment.

"The Ma'arif acquisition of 14 schools is an ideal platform from which to grow, and we are incredibly excited about further expansion in the country," said Dino Varkey, CEO of GEMS Education. "Saudi Arabia is one of the most attractive growth markets for GEMS Education, and we are committed to supporting the education sector in the country."

The deal coincides with a major government drive to boost education standards within the Kingdom as part of the country's Vision 2030 blueprint for economic and social reform. Education is seen as a key first step in developing a knowledge-based economy, and adding high-value jobs.

FASTFACT

Ma'arif schools consist of both national and international campuses across and have over 22,000 students enrolled.

"Saudi Arabia spends 8.8 percent of its gross domestic product on education, against a global average of 4.6 percent," Christos Cabolis, chief economist and head of operations at the IMD Business School's World Competitiveness Center, told Arab News earlier this week. "The expectation for the future must be very good."

GEMS is one of the world's biggest private school operators, and has grown rapidly in its home market of the UAE. It educates over 124,000 students across the Middle East and North Africa. However, a regional economic slowdown and the departure of many high-paid expatriates from the Gulf states over the last five years has hit education groups hard, increasing competition for students to fill large new campuses.

School building requires major upfront investment to acquire land, pay contractors and hire teachers, and it often takes years to recoup initial investment.

Saad Al-Fadly, CEO of Hassana Investment Co., said that the joint venture with GEMS would tap into its track record in education with Hassana's strengths as a Saudi institutional investor.

RICH TRADITION

Ramadan tents: A cultural ambience in KSA

Nada Hameed Jeddah

Ramadan tents, usually decorated with lights, have always been popular during the holy month.

The idea is believed to have been inspired by Egyptians' charitable tents, where each neighborhood would provide a huge tent serving free iftar and suhoor meals to those in need.

During the meals, talented men from the neighborhood would play instruments and sing to entertain guests.

The idea spread to other Arab countries, where it has become big business. Tents serve the best traditional dishes in each country, and an open buffet. The charge depends on how fancy the tent is and which hotel is providing it.

Ramadan tents in Saudi Arabia were often confined to hotel rooftops and halls, mostly providing iftar and suhoor but without entertainment. But lately, Ramadan activities in the Kingdom have become more entertaining.

In recent years, restaurants and hotels have begun running Ramadan tents to attract customers in the Kingdom. Photo/Social media

On May 9, 2019, an official Twitter account @MawsemRamadan (Ramadan Season) was launched to keep Saudis abreast of various activities organized by the General Entertainment Authority in the cities of Jeddah, Makkah, Madinah, Riyadh and Dammam.

Al-Mirkaz

The new Al-Mirkaz tent in Jeddah, with its luxurious style, combines the modern day with the traditional Ramadan atmosphere in the Hijaz region.

It was built this year, attracting different segments of Saudi society and accommodating more than 600 people. The tent offers guests exquisite Saudi, Mediterranean, Asian and Middle Eastern cuisine. The minimum charge is SR370 ($98.66) for iftar, SR400 for suhoor and SR220 for the shisha lounge.

Saudi entrepreneurs showcase their projects at the tent's side booths. It has been attended by a number of Gulf social media influencers, and Tunisian singer Saber Rebai.

Qamra

Qamra in Jeddah is more of a Ramadan night than a tent, supporting local brands and gathering many Saudi entrepreneurs and their projects under one roof.

In its third edition, its theme this year is urban designs, and it hosts more than 100 booths for elite Saudi fashion and abaya designers.

Qamra also includes cafes and restaurants, and has been attended by Gulf social media influencers.

"Qamra vibes are the best. I'm really proud to have such activities in the town. It helps promote local talents," said Zahra Al-Shibani, representing Saudi fashion and accessories brand Mishkat.

The price of entry ranges from SR100 to SR400.

Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Best facilities

KSA welcomes all Muslim pilgrims: Hajj minister

Saudi Arabia welcomes any Muslim pilgrims from all over the world without discrimination, said Hajj and Umrah Minister Dr. Mohammed Salih Bentin.

The Kingdom is ready to provide facilities and services to enable pilgrims to perform their rituals with ease and tranquillity, he added.

On Tuesday, King Salman inaugurated the Guests of God Service Program, which features more than 130 initiatives.

The program aims to offer the finest services at all levels, and manage Saudi archaeological and cultural sites to enrich pilgrims' experience.

Bentin praised the cooperation of the various bodies concerned with Hajj and pilgrims' affairs, and their keenness to facilitate their access to the Two Holy Mosques and their movement between the holy sites. **SPA Makkah**

Fighting terror

Expo shows evidence of Iranian military backing for Houthis

An exhibition held on Thursday on the premises of Jeddah's King Abdul Aziz International Airport showcased missiles, unarmed aerial vehicles (UAVs), boats and other equipment used by the Iran-backed Houthi militia in Yemen to target Saudi Arabia, the Saudi Press Agency reported.

The Facts in Minutes exhibition showcased the remains of Iranian missiles and drones that targeted Saudi Arabia, including a Qiam ballistic missile fired at Riyadh on March 25, 2018, and a Qiam ballistic missile fired at Makkah in 2016.

The exhibition was organized by the Saudi defense and foreign ministries, as well as the Yemen Development and Reconstruction Center. It was attended by leaders of 56 countries and about 390 media personnel. **SPA Jeddah**

The Day's FIGURES

Source: SPA

Where We Are Going Today

FROM AROUND THE WEB & IN PRINT

Leaves and Vines

AMEERA ABID

The army of restaurants promoting healthy food in Jeddah has a new addition with Leaves and Vines offering a range of options for health-conscious people looking for a fulfilling meal.

The eatery, located in Jeddah's Al-Khalidiyah district, serves salads, juices, smoothie bowls and coffee, and includes gluten-free options on its menu.

Ginger and lemon shots are a favorite with health-conscious diners, while vegan options such as a lentil bolognese, soups and hummus are also popular.

Leaves and Vines also caters for diners with a sweet tooth, serving up desserts including white chocolate mousse and cheesecake.

Cooperation

Kingdom confirms support for UN development system

Ahmed Al-Faryan, counselor of the permanent representative of Saudi Arabia to the UN, has confirmed Saudi Arabia's full support for the reform of the UN development system and the Kingdom's commitment to the full implementation of the related General Assembly Resolution No. 72/279, noting its aspiration to pursue a transparent and inclusive process of consultation with UN member states.

Al-Faryan was speaking at a meeting of the Group of 77 and China at the UN headquarters in New York on Thursday.

Al-Faryan said: "The Kingdom appreciates the efforts exerted to achieve gender parity in the resident coordinator system, as it welcomed the nomination of the first female resident coordinator in January this year. **SPA New York**

Serve pilgrims

Grand Mosque authorities step up security measures

Security and safety measures are being stepped up around the Grand Mosque in Makkah as the end of Ramadan nears, the Saudi Press Agency reported.

The director of crowd management at the Grand Mosque, Nizar Alaa' Eddine, said authorities were ready to cope with the huge numbers expected to visit the holy site in the coming days and that these efforts were being done in cooperation with security services and other government bodies.

"We are monitoring crowded sites, developing adequate solutions and studies and preparing daily reports about the capacity of the Grand Mosque to ensure a safe and comfortable environment for pilgrims and visitors to help them perform their pilgrimage with ease and peace," he said. **SPA Makkah**

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Jordan's King Abdullah insisted during Kushner's visit on Wednesday on the need to intensify efforts to achieve a lasting peace based on the two-state solution.

REGIME'S REPRESSION CONTINUES

Syrian boy survives regime bombing that killed his mother, siblings

AP Beirut, New York

Syrian regime warplanes dropped bombs on a residential building in the last opposition's stronghold on Thursday, pancaking it and killing at least five people, including a mother and her two children, rescue workers and activists said.

Video shot by the Syrian Civil Defense showed volunteers working to pull bodies and survivors from under the collapsed building in Maaret Al-Numan, a town in southern Idlib that was hit in the airstrike.

The volunteers from the group also known as White Helmets pulled away at cement blocks to reach the lifeless body of a young boy.

His father, standing behind the camera, wept, repeating his son's name, Abboudi, as rescuers mulled how to lift the heavy structure. A large bulldozer stood nearby.

Amid the frenzy, a younger boy emerged from a gap in the rubble with swollen red eyes, dusty hair and body, his shirt barely hanging on his body. Rescuers cheered. It was Abboudi's younger brother.

The mother and another sibling, a girl, were also killed in the bombing. Activist-operated Baladi News agency also reported that five people were killed.

Syria's regime escalated its offensive on the opposition stronghold in northwestern Syria, home to 3 million people. Bombs and shells rained on the crowded enclave, sending tens of thousands of civilians fleeing to safer areas in the north.

The UN has warned its humanitarian operations in the region are at risk. The US envoy for Syria says top US and Russian diplomats have discussed the step-by-step implementation of a 2012 roadmap to UN-supervised elections in the war-torn country that could allow a Syrian government "to move back into the international community."

Ambassador James Jeffrey's comments indicate a new US-Russian engagement on efforts to end the eight-year Syrian war.

But Jeffrey cautioned that "this is just a potential way forward" because there have been no steps such as a cease-fire in the last opposition-held stronghold in Idlib or the convening of a committee to draft a new constitution for Syria.

SPEEDREAD

The Syrian regime escalated its offensive on the opposition stronghold in northwestern Syria. Bombs and shells rained on the crowded enclave, sending tens of thousands of civilians fleeing to safer areas in the north.

FALL OF A TITAN

Israel heads to new election after Netanyahu stumbles

Fresh poll to elect new government to be held on Sept. 7

AFP Jerusalem

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was confronted with one of the biggest defeats of his political career on Thursday after failing to form a coalition and opting instead to hold an unprecedented second election.

Israel will now head to the polls again on Sept. 17, just over five months after an April election that saw Netanyahu and his right-wing and religious allies win a majority.

But as Wednesday's midnight deadline to form a coalition approached, Netanyahu was unable to convince ex-Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman to abandon a key demand and join the government.

That led Netanyahu to instead move forward with his plan B and hold a Parliament vote on new elections, which was approved just after the deadline in the early hours of Thursday.

The vote followed raucous moments in Parliament that saw opposition members chant "shame!"

It prevented Netanyahu's nightmare scenario of Israeli President Reuven Rivlin naming someone else to try to form a government, but also sent the country into what is likely to be another divisive and costly election campaign.

Netanyahu's inability to form a coalition showed his long tenure atop Israeli politics may be weakening as rivals eye his downfall in the not-so-distant future over corruption allegations, some analysts said.

"Netanyahu is a very strong person and personality. He is not someone who gives in so easily, but definitely it could signal a possible beginning of the end," said Hebrew University political scientist Abraham Diskin.

"He is going to fight. But definitely he is not as strong as he was in the past."

In a matter of weeks, Netanyahu has shifted from victory celebrations to tense, behind-the-scenes efforts to ensure his long tenure in power continues.

The stakes could not be much higher for the 69-year-old premier.

Netanyahu is facing possible indictment for bribery, fraud and breach of trust in the months ahead and is reportedly seeking legislation in the new Parliament that would result in him being granted immunity.

He is also on track to become Israel's longest-serving premier in July, surpassing founding father David Ben-Gurion — and he is no doubt aware of the weighty milestone.

Lieberman's nationalist Yisrael Beitenu party's five seats were just enough to torment Netanyahu.

Lieberman wants legislation he supports aimed at having ultra-Orthodox Jews perform mandatory military service, like other Jewish Israelis, to be approved without changes.

The issue is highly sensitive in Israel and the legislation is opposed by ultra-Orthodox parties, who control 16 seats in Parliament and are a key part of Netanyahu's alliance.

Netanyahu sought to place full blame on Lieberman after the Parliament vote, alleging he "had no intention to reach agreements and just wanted to bring down the government."

FASTFACT

Netanyahu's inability to form a coalition showed his long tenure atop Israeli politics may be weakening as rivals eye his downfall in the not-so-distant future over corruption allegations.

Dark age Syrians run for cover during an airstrike by pro-regime forces on the market town of Kfar Ruma in Syria's southwestern Idlib province, on Thursday. Regime forces and their Russian allies have over the past three months escalated bombardment of Syria's last major opposition bastion in the province of Idlib and adjacent areas. AFP

ANALYSIS

ME peace plan hopes dim amid Israeli political crisis

AP, AFP Jerusalem

President Donald Trump's son-in-law and senior adviser Jared Kushner met with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Thursday to push the Trump administration's long-awaited plan for Mideast peace, just as Israel was thrust into the political tumult of an unprecedented second election in the same year.

Kushner and US special envoy Jason Greenblatt stopped in Israel as part of a Middle East tour to rally support for the administration's upcoming economic conference in Bahrain, which the White House bills as the first portion of its peace plan.

The US is hoping to draw Arab states to participate in the workshop, which envisions large-scale infrastructure work and investment in the Palestinian territories.

In brief joint remarks, Kushner touted American-Israeli cooperation, saying, "it's never been stronger and we're very excited about all the potential that lies ahead for Israel ... and for the whole region." But public attention was dominated by Israel's political crisis.

Netanyahu attempted to play down concerns that the Israeli Parliament's dramatic dissolution would further postpone the US peace plan rollout. "You know, we had a little event last night," he said. "That's not going to stop us."

At the White House, President Trump weighed in expressing dismay at the prime minister's failure to form a governing coalition. Calling Netanyahu a "great guy," Trump said he feels "very badly" that the country has to face another election because there is "enough turmoil" in the region.

Israel's reopened election season presents another stumbling block for Trump's Mideast peace process, which the Palestinians, citing the administration's pro-Israel bias, have rejected out of hand.

The Trump administration had hinged the plan's unveiling on Netanyahu's victory in elections last month. Now, it seems the proposal will have to wait for the outcome of another tumultuous election cycle, after which Trump's own race for re-election will be kicking into gear.

Traveling this week to Jordan and Morocco, Kushner and Greenblatt strove to drum up support for the economic conference in Bahrain, scheduled for June 25-26. Neither state has announced plans for participation.

After more than two years of work, Kushner's team still has not unveiled its political vision. But glimpses of the plan hint it will focus heavily on so-called economic peace while sidelining or ignoring the longstanding Palestinian goal of independence. The two-state solution continues to enjoy the broad support of the international community.

Meeting with the US presidential advisers, Jordan's King Abdullah stood by his country's commitment to the two-state solution, exposing a rift with the administration and raising doubts about how Trump's team will win over skeptical Arab states.

The king insisted on the "need to intensify efforts to achieve a comprehensive and lasting peace based on the two-state solution, that would guarantee the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with east Jerusalem as its capital."

Dennis Ross, the veteran Middle East negotiator, says the plan's outlook has dimmed, considering the "many unknowns" that may indefinitely defer its rollout.

Specifically, if Netanyahu pivots even farther to the right on the campaign trial, appealing to voters by promising to annex West Bank settlements again, "the political climate will only get more difficult ... it will make it harder for Arab leaders to accept anything."

But, he said, Trump has attached particular importance to this peace agreement, and is eager for an accomplishment.

If the administration manages to ditch the stigmatized tagline of "economic peace," and sells the Bahrain workshop as a step toward "economic stabilization" with the help of Gulf states, the constant deferral of the plan's thornier political portion, such as the status of contested Jerusalem and the fate of Palestinian refugees, could work in its favor.

"It might be difficult for the Palestinians to reject reconstruction and development projects given the financial crises destabilizing the West Bank and Gaza right now," said Ross.

Still, the Palestinians say they will not attend the Bahrain meeting, rejecting the parameters of the conference and the role of the US as mediator.

King Abdullah, right, discusses peace plan with US President Donald Trump's son-in-law and senior adviser Jared Kushner in Amman on Wednesday. AFP

HIGHLIGHTS

- **The Trump administration had hinged the peace plan's unveiling on Netanyahu's victory in elections last month.**
- **It seems the proposal will have to wait for the outcome of another tumultuous election cycle, after which Trump's own race for re-election will be kicking into gear.**

The first president whose hair I cut was Sadat. I traveled with him to Italy, America, France and Germany.
Mahmoud Labib Egyptian barber

Egypt's former President Anwar Sadat gets a haircut from Mahmoud Labib. Photo/Supplied

Anyone who sits in the chair of my barbershop is a client ... The same applies whether they're a young boy or the president of Egypt.
Mahmoud Labib Egyptian barber

HAIRDRESSER AT THE HELM

Mahmoud Labib — 'the barber of presidents'

The barber visits Hosni Mubarak in hospital every two or three weeks to cut his hair

Sherif El-Touny Cairo

Mahmoud Labib, "the barber of presidents," received this title under former Egyptian presidents Anwar Sadat and Hosni Mubarak.

"Once, I shaved Sadat's son in my shop, and afterward his father asked him for my name," Labib told Arab News. "The presidency called me to be the barber of Sadat and then Mubarak."

Over the decades, Labib has counted famous politicians, artists, writers, actors and businesspeople as customers.

"Anyone who sits in the chair of my barbershop is a client. Our duty is to do what they ask professionally. The same applies whether they're a young boy or the president of Egypt, whom we'd visit to do the job," he said.

"The first president whose hair I cut was Sadat. I traveled with him to Italy, America, France and Germany," he added.

"Tel Aviv is the only trip on which I didn't go with Sadat, and the last time I cut his hair was the day he was assassinated," Labib said.

"I started my relationship with Mubarak when he was vice president, and his sons Alaa and Jamal came to me for a haircut," he added.

"My relationship with everyone is good, and I visit Mubarak in hospital every two or three weeks to cut his hair," he said. "My relationship with (renowned Egyptian singer) Abdel Halim Hafez continued until his death (in 1977)," Labib added.

"I love the customer more than the money," he said, adding that he has not met current President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi.

SPEEDREAD

The Egyptian presidency called Mahmoud Labib to be the barber of President Anwar Sadat and then President Hosni Mubarak.

TRAVEL BAN

Turkey frees US scientist but tensions remain

AFP Washington

Turkey on Wednesday released a NASA scientist with dual US-Turkish citizenship whose nearly three-year detention had soured relations, but the NATO allies remained divided over issues including Ankara's purchase of a Russian missile system.

Serkan Golge, a naturalized US citizen working for the US space agency in Houston, was arrested in July 2016 on a visit back to Turkey in the aftermath of a failed coup against President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Turkish authorities charged Golge with ties to self-exiled cleric Fethullah Gulen, whom Erdogan accused of orchestrating the mutiny. Golge was sentenced in 2018 to seven-and-a-half years in prison despite US State Department protests that there was no credible evidence.

His wife, Kubra Golge, expressed joy at his release but said that he remained banned from traveling outside Turkey.

"We are happy but he still rejects the charges against him," she told AFP by email. "Hope we can come back soon to the US."

State Department spokeswoman Morgan Ortagus said that the US would press for Golge to be able to return to the US "as soon as possible."

"We want to commend them for doing the right thing today by releasing him," Ortagus told reporters. "We think it's welcome news."

Ortagus said that the US was still seeking the release of detained local employees of US diplomatic missions in Turkey.

BACKGROUND

Serkan Golge, a naturalized US citizen working for the US space agency in Houston, was arrested in July 2016 on a visit back to Turkey in the aftermath of a failed coup against President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

RAGING FIRE

Crop fires, a weapon of war, ruin Iraqi, Syrian harvests

AP Irbil/Iraq

It was looking to be a good year for farmers across parts of Syria and Iraq. The wettest in generations, it brought rich, golden fields of wheat and barley, giving farmers in this war-torn region reason to rejoice.

But good news is short-lived in this part of the world, where residents of the two countries struggle to cope with seemingly never-ending violence and turmoil amid Syria's civil war and attacks by remnants of Daesh. Now, even in areas where conflict has subsided, fires have been raging in farmers' fields, depriving them of valuable crops.

The blazes have been blamed alternately on defeated Daesh militants seeking to avenge their losses, or on Syrian regime forces battling to rout other armed groups. Thousands of acres of wheat and barley fields in both Syria and Iraq have been scorched by the fires during the harvest season, which runs until mid-June.

"The life that we live here is already bitter," said Hussain Attiya, a farmer from Topzawa Kakayi in northern Iraq. "If the situation continues like this, I would say that no one will stay here. I plant 500 to 600 acres every year. Next year, I won't be able to do that because I can't stay here and guard the land day and night."

Daesh militants have a history of implementing a "scorched earth policy" in areas from which they retreat or where they are defeated. It is "a means of inflicting a collective punishment on those left behind," said Emma Beals, an independent Syria researcher.

Daesh militants claimed responsibility for burning crops in their weekly newsletter, Al-Nabaa, saying they targeted farms belonging to senior officials in six Iraqi provinces and in Kurdish-administered eastern Syria, highlighting the persistent threat from the group even after its territorial defeat.

Daesh said it burned the farms of "the apostates in Iraq and the Levant" and called for more.

"It seems that it will be a hot summer that will burn the pockets of the apostates as well as their hearts as they burned the Muslims and their homes in the past years," the article said.

Hundreds of acres of wheat fields around Kirkuk in northern Iraq were set on fire. Several wheat fields in the Daquq district in southern Kirkuk burned for three days straight last week.

Syrian White Helmet civil defense workers trying to extinguish a fire in a field of crops, in Kfar Ain, the northwestern province of Idlib, Syria, on Tuesday. AP

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Even in areas where conflict has subsided, fires have been raging in farmers' fields, depriving them of valuable crops.**
- **The blazes have been blamed alternately on defeated Daesh militants seeking to avenge their losses, or on Syrian regime forces battling to rout other armed groups.**

Farmers in the village of Ali Saray, within Daquq's borders, struggled to put out the blazes. The militants had laid land mines in the field, so when help arrived in the village of Topzawa Kakayi, the explosives went off and seriously wounded two people, according to the local agriculture department and farmers.

In eastern Syria's Raqqa province, farmers battled raging fires with pieces of cloth, sacks and water trucks. Piles of hay burned and black smoke billowed above the fields.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said more than 74,000 acres of farmland in Hassakeh, Raqqa and all the way to Aleppo province to the west, were burned.

Activist Omar Abou Layla said local Kurdish-led forces failed to respond to the fires in the province of Deir Ezzor, where Daesh was uprooted from its last territory in March, deepening the crisis.

Other residents accuse the Syrian regime, which used to earn millions from the wheat trade in eastern Syria, of sparking the fires to undermine the Kurdish-led administration, which now operates independently of the central government.

Kurdish authorities acknowledge they have few capabilities to deal with the arson.

In Raqqa, where most of the residents rely on agriculture, farmers were preparing for a good harvest. Ahmed Al-Hashloum heads Inmaa, Arabic for Development, a local civil group that supports agriculture. He said rainfall levels were more than 200 percent higher than last year, causing many to return to farming.

But what promised to be a good year turned into a "black one," said Al-Hashloum, who said western Raqqa was worst hit by the fires. All it takes is a cigarette butt to set haystacks on fire, he pointed out.

"It doesn't need a bomb or fuel," he said.

Estimates based on local farmers suggest that nearly 25,000 acres in Raqqa province were set on fire, valued at $9 million, he said.

In western Syria, a regime military offensive against the country's last opposition stronghold has also left thousands of acres of farms in ashes, in what activists and experts say is a calculated move to deny the locals livelihood and force them to leave the enclave, home to 3 million people.

Beals, the Syria expert, said the regime used similar tactics when it besieged Daraya and eastern Ghouta, other opposition areas outside of the Syrian capital, Damascus, eventually forcing the fighters to surrender as early as 2015 and 2016. Throughout the conflict, various warring parties have used food crops as a way of controlling the population.

Beals said crop burning in opposition-held Idlib province in northern Syria is likely the latest chapter in this playbook and "will impact food security and the ability to eke out a small living for some." She added that the scale of crop burning is much larger in Idlib than other areas.

Opposition leader Guaido's office said it had ratified a road map for ending Nicolas Maduro's presidency in Venezuela.

News International

LANDSLIDE VICTORY

Indian premier sworn in for historic second term

Bollywood stars join heads of state as Modi takes oath at gala ceremony

Sanjay Kumar New Delhi

After a historic election win, Narendra Modi was sworn in as prime minister of India for a second time at a gala ceremony on Thursday attended by more than 8,000 national and international dignitaries.

The 68-year-old Modi became the first prime minister in 50 years to return to power with a full majority following his landslide election victory.

Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) claimed 303 seats out of 543 in the Lower House, and with his alliance partner he commands the support of 350 parliamentarians.

The glittering ceremony took place against the backdrop of a 120-year-old, British-era presidential palace that was lavishly decorated for the occasion.

India's President Ram Nath Kovind greets Premier Narendra Modi at the Presidential Palace in New Delhi on Thursday. Reuters

More than 50 ministers also took the oath of office alongside Modi.

The Cabinet remains largely the same as the previous term. However, the inclusion of Amit Shah, president of the BJP, as the Cabinet number two is a major surprise.

Shah, a close confidant of Modi, is known for his organizational abilities and is credited for expanding BJP's presence around India. He was a minister in the western state of Gujarat during Modi's 12-year period as chief minister.

The inclusion of former foreign secretary S. Jaishankar — widely tipped to be the next foreign minister — also caused surprise.

Heads of state from South and Southeast Asia were among guests at the ceremony. Several top industrialists and Bollywood stars also attended the function.

In 2014, Modi invited heads of state from the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation, along with Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, to the inaugural ceremony.

FASTFACT

Premier Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party claimed 303 seats out of 543 in the Lower House, and with his alliance partner he commands the support of 350 parliamentarians.

CADETS ATTACKED

Blast at Kabul military academy kills six

Sayed Salahuddin Kabul

A suicide attack outside Kabul's main military academy killed at least six people on Thursday.

The suicide bomber struck as cadets were leaving the facility to travel home for the weekend.

Witnesses said the attacker was seen driving a vehicle laden with explosives.

The blast shattered windows in houses several block away.

"The explosion was very powerful," Aref Shah, 34, a nearby resident, told Arab News by phone.

Police who cordoned off the site said that as well the six fatalities, at least six other people were wounded.

One police source put the toll at 15, but it was not immediately clear how many of the victims were cadets.

Afghan security forces guard the site of Thursday's suicide bombing in Kabul. AP

The sprawling academy lies close to a residential area on a hill in the western part of Kabul.

Both Taliban and Daesh affiliates have struck outside the academy in recent years. In one incident militants stormed the compound after climbing through one of its walls. A US general was also killed by a Taliban infiltrator inside the compound.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for Thursday's explosion, which comes amid escalating attacks by the Taliban around the country in recent months, including Ramadan.

Some reports said that at least 20 government troops were killed in two different strikes by militants in the past 24 hours.

Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Danube tragedy

Seven tourists dead in Budapest boat disaster

Hungarian rescue officials said there was little chance of finding survivors after a boat carrying South Korean tourists sank on the Danube in Budapest, killing at least seven people and leaving 21 people missing.

The boat collided with a much larger luxury passenger boat during a rainstorm near the Parliament building, capsized and sank with some 30 tourists on board. Police said the smaller boat turned on its side and sank within seconds after the collision underneath a bridge.

They said a criminal investigation was under way against "an unknown perpetrator" to determine the cause of the accident. **Reuters**

Venezuela chaos

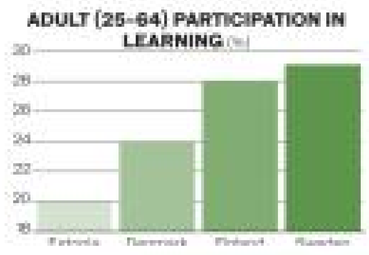
Guaido says Norway talks to continue

Venezuelan opposition leader Juan Guaido said talks hosted by Norway between his delegation and that of President Nicolas Maduro would continue despite Wednesday's discussions ending "without agreement."

"We thank the Norwegian government for its desire to contribute to a solution to the chaos our country is suffering. We're prepared to continue alongside them," Guaido said in a statement.

Maduro also expressed support for dialogue, saying that: "I believe in dialogue. Our path is dialogue, respect for the constitution, peace, democracy." **AFP**

The Day's FIGURES



Source: Spectator Index

What We Are Reading Today

FROM AROUND THE WEB & IN PRINT

The Making of Justice

JOHN PAUL STEVENS

The Making of a Justice: Reflections on My First 94 Years is a comprehensive memoir of Justice John Paul Stevens.

He offers an intimate and illuminating account of his service on the US Supreme Court.

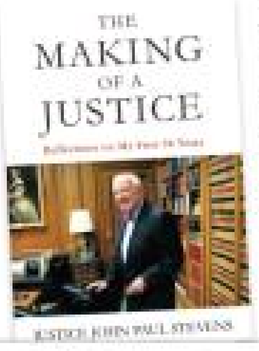
It is a must read for those trying to better understand the US and the constitution, according to critics.

Justice Stevens witnessed so much American history as he sat on the top court for 34 years as one of America's most beloved jurists.

Justice Stevens was appointed to the court by former President Gerald Ford and resigned during Barack Obama's first term in office.

Ford wrote in 2005 that he was prepared to let "history's judgment" of his presidency rest exclusively on his decision in 1975 to nominate Stevens. Barack Obama scrawled his endorsement on a birthday note to Stevens in 2014 — "We miss you on the Court!"

"The cross-party embrace of Stevens by these two presidents shows the distance to the right the Republican Party has traveled from Ford to President Donald Trump far more than Stevens's own shift in the opposite direction," critic Emily Bazelon said in a review for The New York Times.



California hospital

World's tiniest surviving baby born in US

A California hospital on Wednesday disclosed the birth of the world's smallest baby ever to survive, weighing a mere 245 grams — the same as a large apple — when she was born.

The girl, nicknamed Saybie by hospital staff, was born 23 weeks and three days into her mother's pregnancy at Sharp Mary Birch Hospital for Women and Newborns in San Diego.

The father was told by doctors that he would have about an hour with his daughter before she passed away.

"But that hour turned into two hours which turned into a day, which turned into a week," the mother said in a video released by the hospital. **AFP**

'Health problems'

Assange misses brief court hearing

WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange missed a court session on Thursday, apparently due to health problems. He had been expected to appear from prison via video link at a brief extradition hearing at Westminster Magistrates' Court.

Lawyer Gareth Peirce told the court Assange was "not very well." Assange, 47, is in Belmarsh Prison serving a 50-week sentence for jumping bail in Britain while fighting extradition to the US. Sweden also seeks him for questioning about an alleged rape.

Judge Emma Arbuthnot said a more substantive extradition hearing set for June 12 may be moved to a court next to Belmarsh Prison for convenience. **AP**

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

I, Younus Talha (given name) Mohammed (surname), lost my passport. Nationality: Indian. Passport no. S3369309 issued on 16/07/2018 from Hyderabad, India. Whoever finds it, please call 0500963533 or submit it at Indian Consulate, Jeddah, KSA.

***

I, Shazad Khan (given name) and Nil (surname), holding passport no. H7742235, issued in Doha on 21/01/2010, hereby announce the change of my name as Shaizad Khan and Nil (surname) for all future purposes.

***

MATRIMONIAL

SMP family from Lahore, living in Saudi Arabia, invites alliance for their daughter, 30 years, 5' 5". Masters from UK University, fair complexion, iqama holder. Employed with attractive 5-digit package. Foreign-qualified groom preferred. Parents of a well-settled, highly educated, smart, tall, attractive groom from KSA may send profile by email to 1953mas@gmail.com.

SHIPMENT ARRIVES

Philippines announces June 5 as public holiday on Eid Al-Fitr

Ellie Aben Manila

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte has declared June 5 a public holiday in observance of Eid Al-Fitr.

Although the Philippines is a largely Catholic country, a proclamation signed by Duterte stated: "The entire Filipino nation should have the full opportunity to join their Muslim brothers and sisters in peace and harmony in the observance and celebration of Eid Al-Fitr."

It said the aim of the decision is "to bring the religious and cultural significance of Eid Al-Fitr to the fore of national consciousness."

Meanwhile, the National Commission on Muslim Filipinos (NCMF) said a shipment of donated dates from Saudi Arabia had arrived at its central office.

A meeting was held to determine the method of distribution, and NCMF Secretary Saidamen Pangarungan gave instructions on how to divide the 1,250 boxes of dates among various regions and provinces.

Each box contains 10 packs of dates.

A ceremonial handover of the 60 metric tons of pressed dates, as a gift to the government and people, was held at the Saudi Embassy in Makati City last Monday.

The Saudi ambassador to the Philippines, Dr. Abdullah Al-Bussairy, handed over the dates to NCMF representatives and the Department of Foreign Affairs.

Representatives from the Saudi Finance Ministry and the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center (KSRelief) witnessed the handover.

الرِّفقُ يبلغُ ما لا يبلغ الخرقُ وقلَّ
في الناسِ مَن تَصفو له خلقُ
أبو العتاهية

YOUR DAILY ARABIC PROVERB

Kindness is stronger than any breach of relationship; very few people have perfect demeanor.

Abu Al-Atahya
(A leading medieval poet)

Opinion

Euroskeptics and nationalists to have a louder voice within EU

DR. THEODORE KARASIK

The EU's parliamentary election results illustrate the strength of far-right populist parties and where liberal, pro-EU parties now lie within Europe's sociopolitical space. The European Parliament represents more than 500 million people in 28 countries and the EU voting results suggest a complicated future for the continent, especially thanks to the Euroskeptics who seek alternative pathways for their respective countries.

Although pro-European parties will still hold a majority in the new European Parliament, there is no doubt a big shift is occurring. To be sure, high voter turnout — for the first time in 20 years — for this particular EU election signals a reflection of European sentiments regarding a number of hot button issues, such as an increasingly divided Europe that is being pulled in a number of different directions. How Europe looks at North Africa is going to continue to be a hot issue. The results suggest that Europeans who seek a liberal outcome are going to have to form new coalitions against the upsurge in populism. EU authority on issues such as immigration and Islamophobia are shifting.

Populist, Euroskeptic parties across Europe saw gains, which is what pro-EU forces had feared. But the various nationalist parties' differences over issues like migration and attitudes toward Russia could cloud prospects for a united right. In France, Marine Le Pen beat French President Emmanuel Macron's coalition. Le Pen said the result "confirms the new nationalist-globalist division." In Italy, the League, led by Deputy Prime Minister Matteo Salvini, defeated other challengers and, in the UK, amid its Brexit mess, Nigel Farage and his new Brexit Party won big.

Importantly, UK voters weren't initially even supposed to participate in this election, as the country was due to leave the EU by the end of March. But, thanks to the Brexit crisis, Farage moved forward, decimating Prime Minister Theresa May's Conservative Party. Farage noted that: "Never before in British politics has a new party, launched just six weeks ago, topped the polls in a national election. There's a huge message here, a massive message here."

In Hungary, the nationalist Fidesz party of Prime Minister Viktor Orban took over 50 percent of the vote and, in Austria, conservative Chancellor Sebastian Kurz's Austrian People's Party won too. Poland's Euroskeptic Law and Justice Party won 45 percent of the national vote.

Thus, France, Italy, the UK and others showed that Europeans are shifting to positions that a few years ago may have seemed highly unlikely. The trend line is illustrative of the impact of how far-right parties are sharing the goals of an EU without authority as in the past and the ability for individual European states to reject core, liberal European values by adopting an anti-immigration stance, closing borders, and rejecting the relocation of asylum seekers across the continent. The idea is to close Europe to outside influences that, from their perspective, are destroying European culture.

Dr. Theodore Karasik is a non-resident senior fellow at the Lexington Institute and a national security expert, specializing in Europe, Eurasia and the Middle East. He worked for the RAND Corporation and publishes widely in the US and international media.
Twitter: @tkarasik

Nevertheless, Germany's results, where the Greens triumphed, and those of other Northern European countries, such as Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Ireland and the Netherlands, showed that environmental issues appear to trump more pressing issues regarding immigration. These results appear to mask more serious issues that the European right will be pushing in the aftermath of the European elections.

Significantly, the "Bannon effect" is in play. Former Donald Trump adviser Steve Bannon hailed the European Parliament election results and said the idea of further EU integration was "dead" because of the gains by far-right nationalist parties. Bannon's efforts to build European populist parties is an ongoing project that seeks to develop a Europe that sends would-be immigrants home and allows the building of walls of separation between peoples. Bannon is set on killing the EU in terms of integration.

Bannon is seeking to form a "supergroup" in the European Parliament that will ultimately affect EU activities and shift priorities toward his global "vision" regarding concepts such as "sovereignty" and the boundaries of such ideas in practice. Bannon's importance in Europe's immediate future cannot be underestimated with regard to his drive and ability to create with Europeans a philosophical shift in how immigration should work and who America's real enemies are. Bannon's hatred of China is another driver he brings to the European table. Despite criticism of his meddling from Europe's left-of-center officials, Bannon is providing the ideological foundations for where Europe will go next. That an American is so influential in specific European circles is testimony to the rise of new ideas surrounding nationalism and immigration policy.

Russia, of course, is looking upon Europe through a new lens. European disunity is the best news for the Kremlin's policy toward its western flank. Moscow's ability to influence the outcome of key debates in Europe that meet Euroskeptic goals is an important development that will now take on a new level of assertion. Russia's business strategies in Europe will also take on a new meaning in terms of energy politics and how the EU will act in Russia's neighborhood. Kazakhstan comes to mind, as do the Caucasus and the Baltics.

Overall, the European Parliament election results illustrate that Euroskeptics and right-leaning patriotic parties and groups will have a much louder voice as time passes.

Bannon is seeking to form a 'supergroup' in the European Parliament that will ultimately affect EU activities

COURTESY: ANJAD RASMI/ASHARQ AL-AWSAT

Iran has resisted holding diplomatic talks with the US so far but, if the economic pressure continues, Tehran will most likely change its mind

Talks with Iran's discredited negotiators would prove fruitless

DR. MAJID RAFIZADEH

Some policy analysts and governments are calling on the US to pursue the negotiations path with the Iranian regime, while President Donald Trump has offered to open talks with the regime's leaders on several occasions.

In remarks to reporters at the White House, Trump this month sent a message to the Iranian leaders, saying: "What I'd like to see with Iran, I'd like to see them call me... What they should be doing is calling me up, sitting down; we can make a deal, a fair deal... We're not looking to hurt Iran. I want them to be strong and great and have a great economy. But they should call and, if they do, we're open to talk to them." The White House has also passed to Swiss officials in Tehran a phone number to give to the Iranian government in case it wanted to call the president directly.

Iran has resisted holding diplomatic talks with the US so far but, if the economic pressure continues, Tehran will most likely change its mind. If that should occur, the critical question is: Who should the US or international community negotiate with?

Washington should refrain from negotiating with the same Iranian team as the previous US administration. This primarily includes President Hassan Rouhani and Foreign Minister Mohammed Javad Zarif. This is due to the fact that negotiations with the Iranian president would most likely be fruitless, unproductive and useless for several reasons.

First of all, Rouhani is seen as a lame duck and unpopular president in Iran. When he first ran for president in 2013, he made several promises in an effort to rally people behind him. One of the promises was to improve people's living standards by having four rounds of UN sanctions against Iran lifted. Diplomatic initiatives were subsequently conducted between the Islamic Republic and the UN Security Council's five permanent members (China, France, Russia, the UK, and the US), plus Germany. Rouhani and his technocrat team succeeded in removing sanctions against Tehran through the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, also known as the Iran nuclear deal, in July 2015.

Tehran rejoined the global financial system, gained legitimacy, increased oil exports, and billions of dollars of extra revenues flowed into the regime's treasury. Nevertheless, this extra income did not trickle down to the ordinary Iranians. The main beneficiaries were the Office of the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and its affiliates, including the Quds Force and the paramilitary Basij group. The regime also funneled the money into arming and empowering militia groups in the region in order to expand its influence and achieve its hegemonic ambitions.

Dr. Majid Rafizadeh is a Harvard-educated Iranian-American political scientist. He is a leading expert on Iran and US foreign policy, a businessman, and president of the International American Council.
Twitter: @Dr_Rafizadeh

The Iranian people have lost faith in Rouhani, particularly in the last year, as the economy has substantially deteriorated. In fact, the poor living standards of an overwhelming majority of the Iranian population and the widespread protests that have occurred among many sectors of society (including teachers, truck drivers and the unemployed) forced the so-called moderate Rouhani to admit that the country is facing its worst economic challenge in four decades.

According to Iran's presidential website, Rouhani in January spoke at a ceremony at the shrine of the founder of the Islamic Republic, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, stating that: "Today the country is facing the biggest pressure and economic sanctions in the past 40 years."

Zahra, an Iranian human rights activist, said: "The government tells us that it is the fault of the US, Israel and Iran's enemies that the economy has gotten worse, but people are pointing a finger at Rouhani for his policies, mismanagement and silence in the face of the hard-liners."

In addition, after scoring a victory through the nuclear deal, Rouhani and his team enabled and empowered the IRGC and the hard-liners to ratchet up their military adventurism in the region. Conflicts in the region escalated and Tehran increased its meddling in the internal affairs of several countries, including Yemen, Bahrain, Lebanon, Syria and Iraq.

Furthermore, it is not only the ordinary people who view Rouhani and his team as discredited, but also those who have the final say in Iran's domestic and foreign policies. Last week, Khamenei chastised Rouhani and Zarif. According to the Supreme Leader's official website, he pointed out: "To some extent, I did not believe in the way that the nuclear deal was implemented. Many times I reminded both the president and the foreign minister."

Khamenei has also previously criticized Rouhani's administration over the country's economic crisis and for failing to address the people's demands. "If all necessary measures regarding the resistance economy had been implemented, we would have witnessed a tangible difference in the country's economic conditions and in people's lives," he said in 2017.

In a nutshell, any potential negotiations with Iran's President Rouhani and Foreign Minister Zarif would prove to be fruitless because Rouhani's administration is discredited in Iran, in the region, and on the global stage.

Opinion

Why good gender data is vital

PRINCESS LAMIA BINT MAJED

Data is crucial to realizing many of the global and regional gender equality targets and visions expressed by policy makers, governments and organizations. In the Middle East specifically, we have suffered setbacks in collecting data and our ability to use it to reveal the unique experiences of women and girls in the region and the barriers to gender equality. We need this data in order to prove what works to improve the lives of women and girls and, more importantly, measure how we as a region are performing on our gender equality targets.

The main issue we face regarding gender data is that there is not enough of it, and the little that is available does not accurately reflect the reality of many people. For us in the Middle East, we are facing bigger issues. Despite the recent milestones and changes in the region, there is a significant gap between the progress we are experiencing and the region's continued low position in international rankings due to the lack of regional research.

In Saudi Arabia, women's participation in the development of the Kingdom is a key aspect of Vision 2030. Female participation and empowerment in society is also a key pillar of our work at Alwaleed Philanthropies. With this in mind, we wanted to work with partners on analyzing and tackling the issue as well as celebrating the gender equality developments we have seen in the Kingdom recently.

For nearly four decades, Prince Alwaleed bin Talal, founder of Alwaleed Philanthropies, has been one of the most prominent advocates of women's issues and empowerment in the region and the world. This support reflects a very important fact, reminding us that men play a pivotal role in our women's journey by helping us to make the desired cultural change and achieve greater success. Only through cooperation between women and men can we achieve the ambitious goals of Vision 2030.

The "Participation of Saudi Women in Development" study has been established in partnership with the National Observatory for Women (NOW) at King Saud University and the General Statistics Authority, with support from UN Women in the Middle East, in order to cultivate and analyze data on women in Saudi Arabia. This is the first nationwide gender study ever conducted in Saudi Arabia.

The study assesses women's participation and development across 56 variables under five pillars: Economic, health, education, legislation, and social. It provides a value between 0 and 1, with a score closer to 1 indicating a smaller gender gap. The findings provide an overall score of .62 and show narrow gender gaps in health (.98) and education (.92). Lower numbers in social engagement (.65), economic participation (.42) and legislation and regulation (.13) highlight the need for stronger measures to empower women in these areas.

In addition to supporting the study in Saudi Arabia in future years, Alwaleed Philanthropies is aiming to establish partnerships that will bring this unique methodology to more Gulf countries in future years, helping speed up the pace of progress for women across the region.

Princess Lamia bint Majed is secretary-general and a member of the board of trustees of Alwaleed Philanthropies.

For full version, log on to **www.arabnews.com/opinion**

Middle East allies can help Modi deliver 'good times'

AFSHIN MOLAVI

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi faces a range of problems in his second term, but he clearly does not have a popularity problem. By the sheer force of his personality, he managed another electoral landslide for his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in India's recent elections. Modi has proven highly adept at getting elected and re-elected. The next step is to prove that he is highly adept at achieving inclusive, job-creating growth for India — something that eluded him in his first term.

Back when Modi won his first election in 2014, he promised "ache din" — good times — ahead. Markets reacted positively to the business-friendly former chief minister of Gujarat and the macro growth numbers looked good: Consistent annual growth above 7 percent. However, job growth has been far slower than economic growth, and the challenge remains daunting as India must create 10 million new jobs every year. The bumper sticker summary of Modi's first five years would be "growth good, jobs scarce."

Interestingly, Modi made the Middle East region, particularly outreach to Saudi Arabia and the UAE, a key priority of his foreign policy in his first term. Despite all of the commentary about the BJP's uneasy relations with India's 200 million-strong Muslim community, this has not stopped the prime minister from engaging in an energetic foreign policy aimed at key Muslim states.

If India is to achieve the economic heights that Modi has declared, the country will need massive amounts of investment. In fact, Finance Minister Arun Jaitley estimated that India will need $1.5 trillion in infrastructure investment over the next decade to reach the 8 percent growth needed to create adequate jobs for India's youthful population.

Generally speaking, when you are an emerging market country and you need large-scale infrastructure investment, there is one address to call: Beijing. However, India's suspicion of Belt and Road projects and China's wide-ranging $62 billion investment program in Pakistan mean that will be mostly off-limits. Japan has already filled the gap with major infrastructure projects in India, and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states might be next.

Indeed, the UAE has already been an active investor in India. DP World, the Dubai-based ports operator, already runs five ports in India and has pledged up to $3 billion in investments. The Abu Dhabi Investment Authority, the sovereign wealth fund of the UAE, was the first major anchor investor in India's National Investment and Infrastructure Fund, with Saudi Arabia likely to follow suit.

During the February 2019 visit of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to India, he announced a potential $100 billion in investments. Time will tell what the numbers truly amount to, but even such ambitious goals reflect the growing commercial dynamism between India and Saudi Arabia.

Meanwhile, Saudi Aramco has joined hands with the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company and several Indian oil companies to invest up to $44 billion to build a refinery in the western Indian state of Maharashtra.

Despite Modi's promises of a high-tech future for India, it is worth remembering that agriculture still provides about half of the country's employment. The next robust phase of India-GCC cooperation could be in the food security area, as the Gulf nations seek to ensure their food security and India hopes to boost its agribusinesses. On a recent visit to the UAE, I heard a significant amount of talk about this growing nexus between New Delhi and Abu Dhabi.

Lastly, another area of growth and cooperation can be India's aviation sector. According to the International Air Transport Association, aviation supports 7.5 million jobs in India and accounts for about 1.5 percent of the economy. India's domestic aviation sector has seen double-digit monthly growth for the past five years and is on track to become the third-largest aviation market in the world by 2024.

Carriers and airports from the GCC region play a vital role in India's international air connectivity. Nearly one-third of all international flights that leave India land in the UAE, and nearly a third that land in India hail from the UAE. Clearly, the UAE has emerged as India's major air hub to the world. While Emirates airline gets much of the attention, Indian carriers transport more passengers to Dubai than UAE carriers.

As India moves from roughly 60 million international passengers flying today to 85 million by 2020, GCC air hubs will play a key role.

Modi's promise of labor-intensive manufacturing jobs as part of the "Make in India" campaign have not materialized. To find that elusive "ache din," Modi may need to find other sources of job growth, from infrastructure to agriculture to aviation — and key Middle East allies will play a more prominent role than expected.

Afshin Molavi is a senior fellow at the Foreign Policy Institute of the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies and is the editor and founder of the New Silk Road Monitor.
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Wild accusations of fascism a betrayal of genuine victims

ELLEN R. WALD

Next Thursday marks the 75th anniversary of the Allied invasion of Normandy during the Second World War. The D-Day attacks involved more than 150,000 soldiers, sailors and airmen from eight countries, who left the security of Britain to engage the most formidable enemy on the beaches and fields of northern France. Thankfully, their daring mission was a success and it marked the beginning of the end for the fascist forces in Europe.

Today, too many demagogues and radical partisans falsely accuse their political opponents of being fascists. Among a segment of politically angry citizens and politicians in Europe and the US, "fascist" has become a common slur with little basis in fact.

There is not one country in Western Europe or North America today that has a government even resembling fascism. Yet that does not stop political agitators from screaming that word at their ideological opponents. During the US presidential election of 2016, opponents began comparing candidate Donald Trump to Benito Mussolini, the fascist dictator of Italy before and during the Second World War. And, in July of 2018, the political website the Daily Beast published a column with the preposterous headline, "It is happening here, Trump is already early-stage Mussolini."

In the last three years, a radical and violent political organization has arisen in the US calling itself Antifa. The name is supposed to stand for "anti-fascist," but the tactics of this fringe group betray that it actually uses the methods of fascism. Antifa is not part of the government and thus it cannot meet the definition of fascist. However, it does try to forcibly suppress the opposition with violence. That is a key component of fascism.

A former US secretary of state has also accused Trump of being a fascist. In fact, Madeleine Albright wrote a book about it, called "Fascism: A Warning." It reads: "Why, this far into the twenty-first century, are we once again talking about fascism? One reason, frankly, is Donald Trump. If we think of fascism as a wound from the past that had almost healed, Trump in the White House was like ripping off the bandage and picking at the scab." Either Albright was ignorant of the meaning of fascism, was too deluded to see that the Trump administration does not fit the definition, or was so hatefully partisan that she was willing to fabricate.

Even Europe, whose population should probably know better, is suffering from the phenomenon of the "fascist" slur. A columnist for the Independent, a British news site, recently raised the question of whether outgoing Prime Minister Theresa May was displaying fascistic tendencies. James Moore wrote: "I don't use the term 'fascistic' lightly, because it is uttered too often — and usually incorrectly... But May's speech was at least testing the borders of it." May will step down next week because the people have lost confidence in her. Fascist dictators do not step down just because the people express discontent.

When angry partisans in free countries accuse their opponents of fascism, they are betraying the memories of those who suffered under true fascism and those who fought to defeat it. When they make such wild accusations against people in power and survive with no consequences, they are actually demonstrating that those in power are not fascist at all.

Ellen R. Wald, Ph.D. is a historian and author of "Saudi, Inc." She is the president of Transversal Consulting and also teaches Middle East history and policy at Jacksonville University.
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ARAB NEWS

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President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's grip on power has already been tested by a recession, and if US-Turkish tensions worsen the country's economy could face further strain.

Business

S-400 missiles displayed in central Moscow. Ankara and Washington have squabbled for months over the Turkish plan to buy S-400s , which the US said is incompatible with the Western alliance's defense network. AFP

ENERGY

Turkey rattled by sanctions threat

Country's decision to buy Russian missile defense system has left its already soft currency and economy vulnerable

Reuters Istanbul

Turkey is on the cusp of facing US sanctions over its decision to buy a Russian S-400 missile defense system, leaving its already soft currency and economy vulnerable.

If no solution is found in the coming weeks and US-Turkish tensions continue to worsen, tit-for-tat sanctions could hit trade between the allies and prolong a recession in Turkey that has already tested President Tayyip Erdogan's grip on power.

Turkey also risks being rapidly cut out of the production and use of American F-35 fighter jets, which could mark a step toward a re-evaluation of its 67-year membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

"It's very complex to resolve because both US and Turkish officials see this as a reflection of a larger geo-political balancing," said Galip Dalay, visiting scholar at the University of Oxford's politics and international relations department.

Ankara and Washington have squabbled for months over the Turkish plan to buy the S-400s, which the US said is incompatible with the Western alliance's defense network and poses a threat to the F-35s that Turkey also plans to buy.

Turkey says defending its territory poses no threat to allies, and stresses it has met all NATO obligations.

Both sides are entrenched even while they have repeated a desire to avoid so-called CAATSA sanctions, which by US law would be triggered when the Russian anti-aircraft weapon arrives on Turkish soil, possibly as soon as July.

An agreement to delay shipment of the S-400s could still open the door to US President Donald Trump convincing Erdogan to turn his back on what the Turkish leader has repeatedly called a "done deal" with Russia.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Lira, economy vulnerable to worsening US ties.
- Tit-for-tat sanctions may damage trade.
- Dispute could prolong Turkey's recession.

The pair agreed on Wednesday to meet on the sidelines of a G-20 conference on June 28-29.

Yet Ankara's ties with Moscow have been strengthening, and Turkey's defense minister said last week Turkish military personnel were in Russia for S-400 training.

In response, the US is considering halting the training of Turkish pilots on F-35 stealth fighters in Arizona.

More broadly in the Middle East, the US is ramping up pressure on Turkey and other nations to isolate Iran including blocking all Iranian oil exports.

"If the US sanctions are bad, Turkey could reconsider its decision to comply with US sanctions on Iran," said Dalay.

Washington wants Ankara to buy its alternative Patriot surface-to-air missile batteries and has made an offer that expires on June 4, according to a person familiar with the matter.

If Ankara accepts delivery of the S-400s as planned, the US Congress has moved to block delivery of F-35s to Turkey and remove it from the list of nations working together to build them.

The delivery would also force Trump to select five of 12 possible sanctions under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act, or CAATSA, which targets purchases of military equipment from NATO foe Russia.

> **If the US sanctions are bad, Turkey could reconsider its decision to comply with US sanctions on Iran.**

The sanctions range from banning visas and denying access to the US-based Export-Import Bank, to the harsher options of blocking any transactions with the US financial system and denying export licenses.

Trump may initially choose milder options targeting individual Turks rather than the government, a decision that could buy time for more diplomacy even while it may prompt Congress to separately impose tougher sanctions.

"There is a US reticence to completely block the military-industrial relationship with Turkey," said Sinan Ulgen, a former Turkish diplomat and a visiting scholar at Carnegie Europe in Brussels.

Yet US sanctions of any sort would likely hammer the Turkish lira, which has shed 14 percent of its value against the dollar this year in part due to fraying US ties.

Last year, a separate set of US sanctions and tariffs over a jailed US pastor helped set off a currency crisis that knocked 30 percent off the lira, tipped Turkey into recession and rattled emerging markets around the world.

Ratings agency Moody's said this month that Turkey's political risk is "high" and warned that the S-400s could trigger not only US but also NATO sanctions.

How Saudi Arabia is measuring the progress of its reforms

IBRAHIM AL-OMAR

As Saudi Arabia undertakes its ambitious program of economic reforms, we know that it is important not just to implement the reforms, but also to monitor the difference that they are making. We approach this in a number of ways, from high-level key performance indicators to sending "mystery shoppers" to test how well reforms are working in practice. One of the key measures we look to is how Saudi Arabia is ranked in independent reports looking at how global competitive economies are and how easy it is to do business. The reports are important because they tell us how international experts see things and what impact they believe our reforms are having.

I am very pleased to say that we are making considerable progress in this area.

For example, the World Competitiveness Report, which is published by IMD, one of the world's leading business schools, is the latest example of independent analysis reflecting the progress that Saudi Arabia is making. The report ranked Saudi Arabia as the world's 26th most competitive economy and the 7th most competitive G20 nation. This is positive in itself, but even more important was the fact that we were the country with the largest improvement — rising 13 places in the rankings from last year. The report noted that Saudi Arabia "registered the highest global ranking for investment in education and fared well in public and business finance."

Importantly, this is not an isolated report, but part of a wider trend. The World Bank ranked Saudi Arabia as the 4th largest reformer within the G20 and noted it had improved in four separate pillars in its latest Doing Business report.

Likewise, the World Economic Forum ranked Saudi Arabia among the top 40 economies worldwide in its Global Competitiveness Report, including being ranked in the top five for "quality of road network," "shareholder governance," "future orientation of government" and joint first globally for "macroeconomic stability," "debt dynamics" and "inflation."

Ibrahim Al-Omar is the governor of the Saudi Arabian General Investment Authority (SAGIA).

There are many reasons that our performance in these rankings has improved, but I'd like to highlight three particularly important initiatives here.

Firstly, reforms to business licensing. The National Licensing and Reform Program, which was established by Tayseer, a cross-government entity that helps to drive economic reform, has delivered real results.

The number of licensing requirements in Saudi Arabia has been reduced by more than half and more than 60 percent of over 5,500 licenses selected for reform have been eliminated entirely or amended. Secondly, we have opened the economy to foreign investors. In the past year or so, we have enabled 100 percent foreign ownership across large parts of the economy — including sectors such as courier services, education, health care and life sciences. To give you a sense of the impact of this on investors, 70 percent of the new international investment licenses issued in Q1 2019 were for entities with 100 percent foreign ownership.

Thirdly, we have introduced entrepreneur licenses. We launched the Entrepreneur License in late 2017, allowing international entrepreneurs to launch a fully foreign-owned start-up in Saudi Arabia. We have issued more than 100 licenses already and the momentum is increasing as people learn more about the opportunity — we issued more than 45 in the first three months of this year alone.

These reforms — and a range of others — are beginning to have an impact not only on our rankings, but also on investment. The number of new foreign business licenses issued by SAGIA in Q1 2019 was 70 percent higher than the same period last year and the level of FDI in 2018 was 127 percent higher than in 2017.

We are not complacent — the scale of our ambitions means that we see this as a first step, not a goal in itself.

We are continuing to implement further reforms and open new opportunities to domestic and international investors — and I look forward to hearing more from businesses across the world about how we can help them to invest and grow in Saudi Arabia.

AGRICULTURE

From lab-grown shrimp to sky farms, Singapore eyes food future

Race for space as city's urban farmers and agri-tech firms answer government challenge to 'grow more with less'

Reuters Singapore

Singapore, the tiny Southeast Asian city-state, is an unlikely place for a farming revolution.

With tiered fish farms, vegetable plots atop office buildings and lab-grown shrimp, the island aims to beef up its own food production and rely less on imports to feed its 5.6 million people.

Singapore produces about 10 percent of its food, but as climate change and population growth threatens global food supplies, it aims to raise that to 30 percent by 2030 under a plan known as "30-by-30."

The challenge is space.

With only 1 percent of Singapore's 724 sq km (280 sq miles) land area devoted to agriculture and production costs higher than the rest of Southeast Asia, the pressure is on new urban farmers to answer the government's call to "grow more with less."

"Whenever I talk about food security in Singapore, I tell folks don't think land — think space. Because you can go upwards and sideways," said Paul Teng, a professor specializing in agriculture at Nanyang Technological University.

Sustenir Agriculture is one of more than 30 vertical farms in Singapore, which has seen a doubling in so-called sky farms in three years.

The hydroponic farm grows non-native varieties like kale, cherry tomatoes and strawberries indoors under artificial lights and sells the produce to local supermarkets and online grocers.

Sustenir raised S$22 million ($16 million) from backers including Singapore state investor Temasek and Australia's Grok Ventures this year, which will be used for an expansion in Singapore and opening in Hong Kong.

Growing concern: Kale grown in Sustenir Agriculture's indoor farm is packed for delivery in Singapore. Reuters

Temasek is also providing funds to Apollo Aquaculture Group which is building a S$70 million highly-automated, eight-story fish farm. Apollo says the new farm will deliver more than a 20-fold increase in its annual output of 110 tons of fish.

"It is too unpredictable to do things now in the traditional way," said Apollo CEO Eric Ng, citing problems with algae blooms in recent years that have wiped out farmers' fish stocks.

> **When I talk about food security, I say, don't think land — think space. Because you can go upwards and sideways.**

Singapore has not given a total price tag for '30-by-30', first unveiled in March, but it has various funding schemes.

Aside from Temasek, the government has put aside more than S$144 million for research and development into food, and S$63 million for agriculture firms to use technology to boost productivity. It also plans to build an 18-hectare (44 acre) agri-food site for indoor plant factories and insect farms by mid-2021.

Not everyone is convinced by the focus on high-tech.

Egg farmer William Ho, 53, says the government is putting too much stock in new agri-tech firms with no track record.

"Many of them have failed. That's why I'm always asking the government why don't you invest in us old-timers. We are more practical," he said.

A major hurdle for urban farmers, said Teng, are the expensive inputs like technology that puts their products out of reach for many consumers.

One Singapore firm still in its infancy but hoping to reach a mass market is Shiok Meats, which aims to be the world's first to sell shrimp grown from cells in a lab.

The process, which is harmless to animals, involves cells grown in a nutrient solution in tanks. After four to six weeks, the fluid is siphoned off and leaves behind raw shrimp mince.

Shiok is backed by Henry Soesanto, CEO of Philippines' Monde Nissin, which owns British meat substitute firm Quorn.

FAST FACT

1%

Only 1 percent of Singapore's 724 sq km (280 sq miles) land area is devoted to agriculture.

Shiok co-founder Sandhya Sriram hopes to tap into the enthusiasm for alternative protein that propelled the market value of US-based Beyond Meat to more than $5 billion after its debut this month.

After raising $4.6 million in seed funding this year, Sriram said Shiok Meats plans to sell its product in one or two premium restaurants by late 2020, and by 2030 hopes to produce enough shrimp meat to feed Singapore.

"It ('30-by-30') is achievable, but it depends which part of the food industry they want to take a leap of faith on," she said.

TRADE

How China helps Huawei with millions in handouts

AFP Beijing

A replica of the Palace of Versailles, medieval turrets and spires rise across Huawei's new campus in southern China, a monument to the telecom giant's growing fortune — and the benefits of state aid.

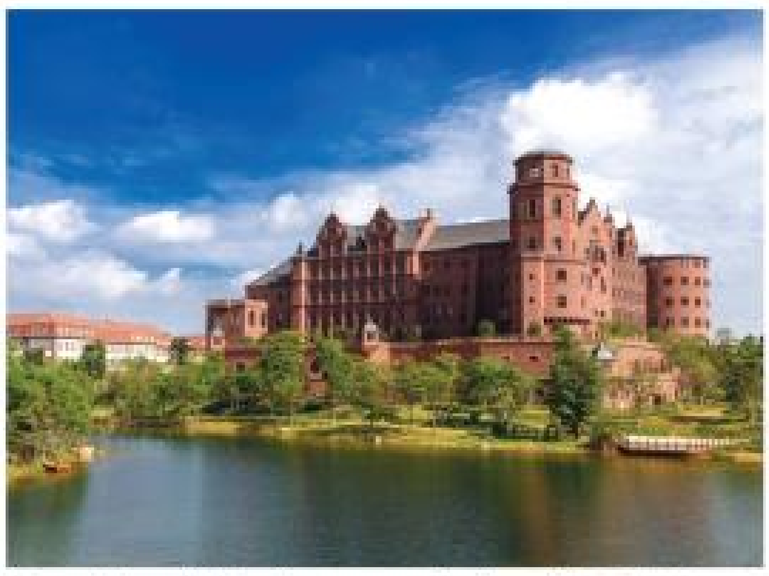
The fairytale-like facilities rest on land that was sold by the local government at cut-rate prices to woo and bolster a strategic, high-tech company like Huawei.

It is the kind of government largesse that has fanned US frustrations at China's industrial policies — subsidies are a sticking point in protracted trade talks between the world's top two economies.

Huawei has become a major flashpoint in the trade war, with President Donald Trump taking steps to block the company's dealings with US companies, threatening its global ambitions.

With the dispute shining a spotlight on China's technological shortcomings, the subsidies are a window into the kind of measures Beijing may step up as trade negotiations founder.

Huawei's annual reports and public records show that it has received hundreds of millions of dollars in grants, heavily subsidised land to build facilities and apartments for loyal employees, bonuses to top engineers, and massive state loans to international customers to fund purchases of Huawei products.



Monument to wealth: Huawei's new campus in southern China. Supplied

"Below market price land sales, massive targeted R&D grants, and export financing on terms that are more favorable than what Huawei could get from the private sector collectively appear to provide significant subsidies that other countries could challenge at the WTO if they are harming domestic companies," said Claire Reade, a former assistant US trade representative.

Huawei founder Ren Zhengfei had denied that the company received subsidies in a BBC interview in February, but a Huawei spokeswoman later said Ren meant the firm did not receive any special government aid.

"Like other companies, Huawei receives research subsidies from governments in several jurisdictions," the spokeswoman told AFP.

Over the past 10 years, Huawei has received 11 billion yuan ($1.6 billion) in grants, according to its annual reports.

More than half was given by China as "unconditional government grants" because of the firm's "contributions to the development of new high-technology" in China, according to Huawei's 2009 annual report.

Even some of Huawei's top engineers receive bonuses through government programs: More than 100 of them received hundreds of thousands of dollars from the city of Shenzhen last year.

Heavily subsidised land is often used by local governments in China to bring in companies.

Huawei's European-inspired campus was zoned for research by the Dongguan city government, and because of Huawei's status as a top Chinese company, it received the 127 hectares of land at about one-tenth the cost of nearby residential land.

The city also sold bargain-rate lakeside land to the firm to build upwards of 20,000 employee apartments around its campus in a series of engineered auctions producing a single bidder: a Huawei subsidiary.

From 2015 to 2018, the subsidiary picked up 46 ha for about one-sixth the going rate, suggesting Huawei saved as much as ($2.4 billion) on the purchases.

Asked about the subsidised land, a company spokeswoman said that Huawei contributed to Dongguan's economic development and pays taxes.

At the Huawei Lakeside Garden complex, Huawei employees who stick around for three years and meet other metrics will be able to buy their apartments at about one-third of the price their neighbors pay.

FAST FACT

Huawei's top engineers receive bonuses through government programs, with more than 100 receiving hundreds of thousands of dollars from the city of Shenzhen last year.

Outside China, the country's state policy banks have provided financing to boost Huawei's sales to the developing world — at times leaving the state on the hook when risky loans go bad.

Huawei inked a $10 billion credit line with the China Development Bank (CDB) in 2004 to provide low-cost financing to customers buying its telecom gear. It was tripled to $30 billion in 2009.

China's demand for infrastructure, including communications and Internet gear, is not as high as it used to be, said CDB President Zheng Zhijie, so "what can we do with the excess production capacity? We can only send it abroad."

"We may give you loans to buy Chinese equipment or materials, but there must be a Chinese element," Zheng said.

Brazilian telecom firm Telemar Norte Leste obtained a $500 million CDB loan in 2009 with a two-year grace period on principal payments at a well-below-market interest rate to buy Huawei gear. This type of loan is known as export credit and primarily regulated under an OECD arrangement incorporated into the WTO.

But China has refused to sign on or abide by its rules, said Kristen Hopewell, an expert at the University of Edinburgh, adding the credit line for Huawei could be in violation of those rules.

Since 2015 China has provided more funding each year to support its exports than the OECD's 36 member-nations combined, according to US Export-Import Bank data.

Business News

$8.3bn

Gazprom reported a 44 percent jump in first-quarter net income to $8.3 billion on higher gas sales and prices, despite a drop in exporting volumes.

A currency trader at the foreign exchange dealing room in Seoul, South Korea. Two big crashes this year separately pummelled the yen and the Swiss franc. AP

MARKETS

IFX flash crashes put regulators on alert

Sudden price moves are now a regular occurrence in world currency markets

Reuters London/New York

The increasing frequency of flash crashes in the $5.1 trillion-a-day foreign exchange market has regulators scrambling for answers.

Sudden, violent and often quickly reversed price moves are now a regular occurrence in world currency markets — often during the so-called "witching hour," a period of thin trading between 5-6 p.m. in New York when currency dealers there have powered off and colleagues in Tokyo have yet to sign on.

Two big crashes this year separately pummelled the yen and the Swiss franc and, given the importance of currency pricing for trade, investment flows and the global economy, policymakers are concerned a major fracturing could threaten financial stability.

"The question is, is this a new normal, or is it a canary in the coalmine sort of thing?" said Fabio Natalucci, deputy director of the Monetary and Capital Markets Department at the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

"We have seen the frequency of these events increase so this may be pointing to a major liquidity stress event coming at some point in the future."

Natalucci said liquidity strains — market lingo for an insufficient number of buy and sell orders — were evident days ahead of a big crash and the IMF was creating a monitoring tool that might be able to predict when the next one was coming.

Reflecting official disquiet, flash crashes have been a regular topic of discussion this year at the Federal Reserve Bank of New York's FX market liaison committee, a forum for central bankers and market players.

Bankers and policymakers agree that an industry-wide switch to machine-trading in FX markets is behind the frequency and severity of the price moves, meaning that further crashes are likely.

"Our pessimistic view is that this technology is going to become an increasing part of the FX market and we need to step up our monitoring," a G10 central bank official said, declining to be named.

Regulators aren't pressing the panic button yet. Natalucci said there was no evidence that flash crashes so far had raised funding costs for firms or households and it made sense to study the problem before "rushing into enacting any regulatory responses."

The question is, is this a new normal, or is it a canary in the coalmine sort of thing?

Mini-crashes already occur roughly every two weeks in the FX market according to a study by Pragma, a company which creates computer trading models. In these incidences, a currency's price will shift dramatically followed by a swift reversal, along with a sudden and significant widening of the spread between prices quoted to buy and sell it. The spread usually narrows after a few minutes.

Computer models known as algorithms, or algos, have largely replaced humans in currency trading, helping banks to cut costs and boost the speed at which deals are done.

DECODER

Computer models known as algorithms, or algos, have largely replaced humans in currency trading, helping banks to cut costs and boost the speed at which deals are done.

The models are designed to execute trades smoothly by breaking down orders into small pieces and searching for platforms where liquidity is plentiful.

But problems arise when market conditions change, for instance, when trading volumes suddenly collapse or volatility spikes as has been the case during Britain's protracted attempt to extricate itself from the EU. At such times, algos are often programmed to shut down.

Two senior central banking officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, said such "kill switches" drained liquidity.

And, because fragmented forex markets depend on algos for a constant stream of price quotes — by one estimate there are 70-odd trading platforms — a widespread shutdown causes volumes to nosedive, making the price moves more dramatic.

The first of this year's notable crashes came on Jan. 3 when the yen spiked suddenly against the dollar after Tokyo markets closed. It jumped 8 percent within the space of seven minutes against the Australian dollar and 10 percent to the Turkish lira.

The second was on Feb. 11 when the Swiss franc gyrated frantically, with an unexplained and brief jump against the euro and dollar.

A Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA) report noted that several flash episodes have been recorded during the witching hour. It was also during this illiquid period on Oct. 7, 2016 that sterling collapsed 9 percent in early Asian trading, falling to around $1.14 from $1.26 within minutes.

The RBA's analysis of all these flash crashes concluded algorithmic trading strategies likely acted as "amplifiers."

Human traders would be able to spot an opportunity from the market turmoil — buying a currency in free fall — which would help to defuse it. But these days there are far less of them around.

Up to 70 percent of all FX orders on platform EBS, one of two top venues for currency trading, now originate from algorithms. In 2004, all trading was undertaken by humans.

With banks under constant pressure to cut costs and post-financial-crisis rules making it ever more expensive to trade, there is no sign of firms hiring extra staff or deploying existing employees onto a graveyard shift.

Instead, some try to avoid trading when they know volumes will be light such as major holidays.

Machines, meanwhile, are expected to become even more dominant.

Pragma has just launched an algorithm to trade non-deliverable forwards, derivatives used to hedge exposure to illiquid currencies, especially in emerging markets, according to Curtis Pfeiffer, chief business officer at the firm.

Trading in illiquid, emerging market currencies was previously the mainstay of voice traders.

"FX trading in banks is a tough business because spot trading is so commoditized and revenues are squeezed," said John Marley, a senior currency consultant at Smart Currency Business.

Fabio Natalucci, deputy director of the Monetary and Capital Markets Department at the International Monetary Fund, said the IMF was creating a monitoring tool for markets. IMF

BizBriefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Entertainment

Broadway has record season as revenues double

Broadway shows in New York had a record-breaking 2018-2019 season, the theater district said on Wednesday, both in attendance and revenues, which have doubled in the past 10 years.

Some 14.7 million people spent $1.82 billion on tickets to see 38 different shows, with revenue up 7.8 percent from the year before. Earnings have nearly doubled in the past decade and more than tripled in the past 20 years.

A statement from The Broadway League notes that the comparison between 2018-2019 and 2017-2018 gets even better when correcting for the fact the 2017-2018 season was 53 weeks instead of 52 — attendance would have been up 9.5 percent and revenues up 10.3 percent.

Despite lacking hits as big as 2015-2016's "Hamilton," or "2017-2018's "The Band's Visit," shows such as "Tootsie" and "The Prom" have done well. **AFP**

Transport

FirstGroup sell-off to unleash Greyhound

Britain's FirstGroup plans to sell US coach service Greyhound and spin-off its First Bus operations in an attempt to head off shareholder pressure, lifting its share price by 13 percent on Thursday.

FirstGroup has blamed competition from low-cost airlines for the poor performance of Greyhound, which it has owned since 2007.

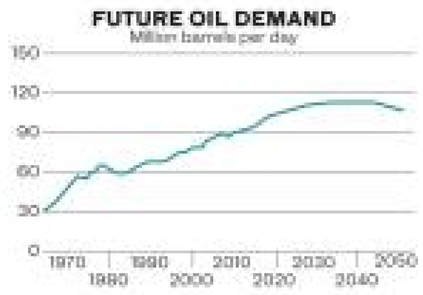
Greyhound had launched a review of Greyhound, the only operator of scheduled intercity coaches in North America which carries around 17 million passengers a year, while withdrawing from Western Canada and selling a facility in Chicago.

"Greyhound has limited synergies with our other, predominantly contract-based, North American businesses and we believe that value for shareholders can best be delivered by seeking new owners," FirstGroup said in a statement. **Reuters**

Chart of THE DAY

Despite the advance of renewables, oil is likely to remain important in the global energy mix to at least midway through this century.

Source: BP



What We're Driving

BIG WHEELS FOR BIG DEALS

Ferrari SF90 Stradale

Ferrari says its first plug-in hybrid can also lay claim to being its most powerful production model ever. With a 3.9 liter V8 engine it gets from zero to 60 miles an hour in just over two seconds and has a top speed of 211 miles per hour. But don't plan a day trip on full electric mode — that will only get you 15 miles and you won't be able to go faster than 84 miles an hour.

Economy

Bank of England's Ramsden warns on growth

Growth is likely to be slower than the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee forecast earlier this month as productivity lags and investment risks being weaker than forecast, Deputy Governor Dave Ramsden said on Thursday.

"Relative to the best collective judgment expressed in the MPC's central forecast I am ... a little more pessimistic on GDP growth than my colleagues on the MPC," he said.

Ramsden said his outlook for inflation and the right level of interest rates was similar to that of his colleagues, as weak productivity growth was likely to push upward on inflation, canceling out the drag on inflation from slower GDP growth.

At the start of this month, BoE Governor Mark Carney said investors were underestimating how much interest rates could rise. **Reuters**

Energy

Russia's Gazprom profits surge on higher gas sales

Gazprom reported a 44 percent jump in first-quarter net income to 536 billion roubles ($8.3 billion) on higher gas sales and prices, the Russian gas producer reported on Thursday, despite a drop in exporting volumes.

Revenue in the January-March quarter rose to 2.29 trillion roubles from 2.14 trillion a year earlier.

Gazprom is a lynchpin of Russia's commodity-reliant economy with its sales accounting for more than 5 percent of the country's $1.6 trillion annual GDP. Russian gas exports have been increasingly politicized after Moscow annexed Crimea peninsula from Ukraine in 2014. A wider standoff between Russia and the West has also contributed to Moscow's global energy expansion.

Gazprom's sales to Europe account for around two thirds of its total gas sales. **Reuters**

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The UEFA Champions League trophy is displayed at Puerta del Sol square in Madrid on Thursday ahead of the final match between Liverpool and Tottenham Hotspur on Saturday.

England's Ben Stokes plays a shot off the bowling of South Africa's Imran Tahir. AP

CRICKET

Stokes stars as England win opener

The all-rounder top-scores with 89 in the hosts' 311 for eight

AFP London

Ben Stokes starred in all departments as England began their quest to win the World Cup with a 104-run thrashing of South Africa in the tournament opener at the Oval on Thursday.

The all-rounder top-scored with 89 in England's 311 for eight, held a brilliant catch in the outfield and took two for 12, including the last wicket, as England won with 61 balls left.

Jofra Archer did the early damage with the ball, the fast bowler taking three for 27 in seven overs.

Barbados-born Archer, who only qualified for England in March, made his presence felt even before he had taken a wicket with a bouncer that beat Hashim Amla for pace and crashed into the grille of the helmet, with the veteran opener retiring hurt on five.

Archer then reduced the Proteas to 44 for two.

Aiden Markram edged to Joe Root at slip and South Africa captain Faf du Plessis fell for just five when he top-edged a hook to long leg.

But Quinton de Kock kept the Proteas in the hunt, although the opener was lucky when on 25 he played ball from leg-spinner Adil Rashid onto his stumps only for the bails to stay put.

The dashing left-hander went on to complete a 58-ball 50 but holed out off fast bowler Liam Plunkett for 68.

FASTFACT

England's Jofra Archer did the early damage with the ball, the fast bowler taking three for 27 in seven overs.

Rassie van der Dussen then make exactly 50 without pressing on when he miscued Archer to mid-on.

His exit saw Amla return with South Africa struggling at 167 for six in the 32nd over.

The game was all but up for South Africa when a back-pedalling and diving Stokes held a brilliant one-handed catch in the deep to dismiss Andile Phehlukwayo.

Amla's brave effort to rescue the innings ended on 13 when he was caught behind off Plunkett's slower-ball bouncer and Stokes finished the match when Imran Tahir edged him to Root.

Stokes was one of four England batsmen who got to 50 on a tricky surface, with captain Eoin Morgan (57), Jason Roy (54) and Root (51) all out soon after reaching the landmark.

England lost a wicket second ball before Roy and Root shared a stand of 106 that was equalled by Morgan and Stokes.

Du Plessi opted to field despite being without injured spearhead Dale Steyn and took the unorthodox decision to give leg-spinner Tahir the first over.

The 40-year-old, the oldest player in the tournament, struck second ball when Jonny Bairstow was caught behind by De Kock for a golden duck.

Roy and Root repaired the damage but were dismissed when well set as England lost two wickets for four runs in four balls to be 111 for three.

Morgan, whose aggressive approach has been symbolic of England's rise to the top of the one-day international rankings after their woeful first-round exit at the 2015 World Cup, struck the match's first two sixes off successive balls from Lungi Ngidi before he too was caught in the deep.

Left-hander Stokes saw his 79-ball knock end in the penultimate over when caught at third man following a reverse hit off paceman Ngidi (three for 66).

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Alisson Becker could be piece Liverpool missed in last year's final

AP Madrid

The key to Liverpool's Champions League success this year may just be in the hands of Alisson Becker.

Liverpool paid a record $85 million fee for a goalkeeper to sign Alisson from Roma at the end of last season after predecessor Loris Karius made several costly mistakes in last year's final.

The Brazilian has so far proven his worth going into Saturday's final against Tottenham at the Wanda Metropolitano Stadium.

"I can't wait," Alisson said. "Once we finished the Premier League, there were 20 days to prepare the final. I'm looking forward to playing this big game. It's maybe the biggest game in my life."

Last year, Liverpool faced Real Madrid in the final in Kiev but fell short of winning their sixth European Cup title, losing 3-1. Besides an injury to forward Mohamed Salah which took Liverpool's main attacking threat out of the game in the first half, it was Karius who made the mistakes that cost the team.

Karius first had an embarrassing giveaway that led to Karim Benzema's opening goal, and he then failed to hold on to a long-range shot from Gareth Bale that sealed the Spanish club's victory.

Liverpool's Alisson Becker during training. Reuters

The 26-year-old Alisson, a starter for Brazil's national team since 2016, fixed Liverpool's goalkeeping problems in his first season with the English club, swatting away the uncertainty that surrounded Karius' performances.

Alisson finished the Premier League season with 21 clean sheets, earning the Golden Glove award in his first attempt. No other goalkeeper had kept as many clean sheets in the English league since Manchester United's Edwin van der Sar in the 2008-09 season.

But it was in the Champions League that Alisson really made the difference for Liverpool, producing a stoppage-time save against Napoli in the final group game to avoid early elimination.

FRENCH OPEN

Osaka hangs tough; Serena, Djokovic triumph

AP Paris

Naomi Osaka is grinding her way through the French Open the hard way.

To cling onto her quest for a third consecutive Grand Slam title, the top-ranked Osaka again had to rally from first-set woes to beat former No. 1 Victoria Azarenka 4-6, 7-5, 6-3 Thursday in the second round.

Serena Williams and Novak Djokovic also advanced, with far easier straight-set wins.

Osaka considered herself unfortunate to be drawn against Azarenka and the powerful, accurate tennis produced by the 29-year-old Belarusian playing in her 12th French Open showed why.

Although now ranked No. 43 and without a major title since winning the Australian Open in 2012 and 2013, Azarenka took a 4-0 lead on Court Suzanne Lenglen and kept Osaka under constant pressure.

"I got rolled," Osaka said. "She kind of killed me in the first set."

Broken by a backhand volley at the net from Azarenka in the fifth game of the second set, the US Open and Australian Open champion from Japan seemed to be in deep trouble. But, as she did against first-round opponent Anna Karolina Schmiedlova, Osaka again proved her resilience.

"I didn't stop trying at all," Osaka said. "Every point was kind of, like, pedal to the metal."

The eighth game of the second set was pivotal. After saving two break points, Azarenka doubled-faulted. Osaka leveled at 4-4 and the momentum started to shift. It was the seventh break point Azarenka had faced in the set, and the first she had failed to save.

But Azarenka still saved three set points before Osaka finally leveled the match with a backhand cross-court winner.

Sport Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

NCAA

Stanford beat Texas to win men's golf title

Stanford took control on the back nine of the opening two matches Wednesday and beat Texas to win the NCAA championship for the ninth time.

Henry Shrimp rallied from an early 2-down deficit against Spencer Soosman, and Isaiah Salinda won four of five holes to start the back nine with a victory over Cole Hammer. Brandon Wu led from the second hole over Pierceson Coody, giving the Cardinal the final point it needed in a 3-2 victory at Blessings Golf Club.

Stanford last won the NCAA title in 2007, two years before the format switched to match play. AFP

Controversy

Wie blasts 'racist' comments from golf coach Haney

Michelle Wie lashed out at comments from veteran golf coach Hank Haney on Wednesday, accusing the instructor of making "racist and sexist" comments about South Korean players at this week's US Women's Open.

Haney, best known for his stint as Tiger Woods' former coach, triggered uproar with a series of disparaging remarks about women's golf on his SiriusXM radio show. In a conversation with co-host Steve Johnson about who might win the US Women's Open which tees in Charleston, South Carolina on Thursday, Haney commented: "I'm gonna predict a Korean." "I couldn't name you like six players on the LPGA tour," the 63-year-old added. "Nah, maybe I could — well, I'd go with Lee. If I didn't have to name a first name, I'd get a bunch of them right." AFP

NHL

Gunnarsson sinks Boston as Blues tie series

Carl Gunnarsson smashed home an overtime winner as the St. Louis Blues roared back into Stanley Cup final contention on Wednesday with a series-levelling 3-2 defeat over the Boston Bruins.

Gunnarsson's stunning long-range effort flew past Bruins goalie Tuukka Rask after 3min 51sec of overtime to silence the home crowd at Boston's TD Garden and tie the best-of-seven series at 1-1. Gunnarsson had only narrowly been denied a winning goal at the end of the third period when his shot struck a post with the game tied. "It feels great taking this home and we go to work again," Gunnarsson said. AFP

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Weekend Lifestyle, Art & Culture

Zhang Ziyi stars in 'Godzilla: King of the Monsters,' now showing in GCC cinemas.

EAT, PLAY, LOVE

Going global: Yangon's tricky transformation

The former capital of Myanmar still sparkles with former glories, even as global chains move in

Martin Wigham Tokyo

During the final years of its five-decade rule, Myanmar's military junta moved the nation's capital some 400 kilometers north, from the historical hub of Yangon to the newly established Naypyidaw — a purpose-built location in the mold of Brasilia, Canberra, Islamabad and Washington.

This deliberate separation of business and power — of the people and those who rule them — might have suited outgoing strongman head of state Than Shwe, but seems equally apt for Myanmar's contemporary leaders.

Amid the daily bustle of Yangon, you'll find little concern for — or likely reporting of — the ongoing Rohingya conflict, 700 kilometers north in Rakhine State, nor of its international condemnation: A hard-hitting headline in the western media won't stop traffic on Yangon's dusty Anawrahta Road.

Like its inhabitants, Yangon is a city going places too fast to think too hard about its destination. To call it a "city in flux" feels stoutly underbaked. The clash of past and present, of tradition and trade, is a familiar travelers' trope, but there are few fresher transformations than the one hitting Myanmar.

A visit to Yangon offers a ringside seat to globalization in action: Glitzy new shopping malls, apartment blocks and fast-food chains have sprouted up like wildfire, making an uneasy truce with crumbling colonial buildings and local markets.

A counterpoint to these extremes is found in the city's characteristic religious monuments; centuries-old Buddhist icons scattered amid modern streets, and implicitly recalling a richer time — spiritually and materially — balancing conspicuous fortune with karmic harmony.

The entire city radiates from the looming Sule Pagoda, a golden 50-meter-tall stupa proudly sat in the heart of a central roundabout adjacent to Yangon City Hall. Believed to date back some 2,600 years, it remains the focal point of local life, attracting worshippers at all hours of the day, and was notably the scene of 2007's Saffron Revolution, which preceded the reforms to come.

Yangon, the former capital of Myanmar, has expanded rapidly since political reforms began in 2011, and few cities so completely encapsulate the cliche of past and present colliding. Shutterstock

More impressive is the Shwedagon Pagoda, Myanmar's holiest site — and most iconic sight — a 99-meter tall monument which dominates the city's skyline from atop Singuttara Hill.

Up close, it dazzles. The stupa's entire surface is covered with gold plates, crusted with 7,000 diamonds, rubies, topaz and sapphires, and topped with a 76-carat stone.

Visit at the cooler sunset hours to see the surrounding irregular complex of shrines overrun by families, workers and school kids making their daily devotional visit.

More recent history is unearthed at The Secretariat, a regal, 16-acre administrative center commissioned by the British shortly after the colonization of the country then known as Burma in 1885. Built in the proud, Victorian-style of the day — yet dazzling in sunbaked red and yellow brick — The Secretariat would endure as a central government hub long after the imperialists left, and is famously where then-Premier Aung San was assassinated, along with six cabinet ministers, on 19 July 1947, now celebrated as Burmese Martyrs' Day.

The Yangon home in which his Nobel Peace Prize-winning daughter Aung San Suu Kyi — Myanmar's first and incumbent State Counselor — spent 15 years under house arrest remains off limits to the public, patrolled by a single guard. But a big budget renovation of The Secretariat is set to be completed later this year, reimagined as a cultural complex featuring a museum honoring Aung San aside shops, offices, cafes and restaurants.

Visiting The Secretariat as part of a pre-arranged tour, our journey ends at a particularly pleasing, two-story block with a prime street-side vantage — once the ministers' stables, but now elegantly fitted out ready for a new commercial client. The large curved windows, thick wooden columns and exposed brickwork would be perfect for an art gallery, I remark — before my guide corrects me with the tenant all set to move in: KFC.

Screen ScenE

WHAT'S ON AT THE CINEMA

Godzilla: King of the Monsters

Starring: Millie Bobby Brown, Zhang Ziyi, Charles Dance, Ice Cube
Director: Michael Dougherty

The second movie about the iconic giant lizard to hit screens this month sees Godzilla do battle with crypto-zoological agency Monarch and a host of other monsters, including his nemesis, King Ghidorah. All of which leaves kind of a mess behind for humanity to deal with.

The Curse of La Llorana

Starring: Marisol Ramirez, Linda Cardellini
Director: Michael Chaves

Horror set in 1970s Los Angeles. A widowed social worker, Anna, and her kids are haunted by La Llorona — a ghost based on a Mexican legend — who wants to take the kids as her own. Their only hope is a disillusioned priest.

Devi 2

Starring: Prabhu Deva, Tamannaah, Nandita Swetha, Koval Sarala
Director: Vijay

Tamil horror-comedy that's a sequel to the 2016 hit "Devi." At the end of the first film, audiences learned that Ruby (Tamannaah) was no longer possessed. Good news for her, but it seems that Krishna (Deva) is now possessed by not one, but two ghosts.

Red Joan

Starring: Judi Dench, Stephen Campbell Moore, Sophie Cookson
Director: Trevor Nunn

British spy drama based on a novel that was inspired by the life of Melita Norwood, a physicist who supplied the Soviets with UK nuclear secrets for decades, becoming the longest-serving Soviet spy in Britain.

Ma

Starring: Octavia Spencer, Tate Taylor
Director: Tate Taylor

A lonely woman befriends a group of teenagers and allows them to use her basement as a party venue. There are rules: No cursing, one kid has to stay sober, and they must never go upstairs. Oh, and they have to call her Ma. We predict they go upstairs.

MOVIE REVIEW

'For Sama' — a vital and moving account of the fall of Aleppo

William Mullally Dubai

At the heart of "For Sama" — the documentary about the fall of Aleppo by filmmakers Waad Al-Khataeb and Edward Watts that just won the Golden Eye Documentary Prize at Cannes — is a scene that brought me to tears. Doctors perform an emergency cesarean section on a young woman who has sustained injuries from an airstrike. When the baby's lifeless body is pulled from his mother, the doctors spend what seems like an eternity trying to save him — pumping, slapping, even shaking.

In Alfonso Cuaron's 2018 Oscar winner "Roma," a similar scene plays out in fiction — the main character's child is stillborn, and a long, excruciating attempt at resuscitation is unsuccessful. Watching "For Sama," with a real life hanging in the balance, it's hard to have hope for a better outcome. But just as you are about to force yourself to look away, to resent this film for making you watch this, a miracle happens — the baby's eyes open, and he cries. The mother and child are fine now, Al-Khataeb, also the film's narrator, assures us.

(Left) Syrian filmmaker Waad Al-Khataeb. AFP (Above) Her daughter Sama in 'For Sama,' which won the Golden Eye Documentary Prize at Cannes. Supplied

This newborn fighting to survive is right at home in Aleppo. Years after protests against the government began, years after extremists and airstrikes destroyed the massive city, many refused to flee. In Al-Khataeb's view, abandoning their home would mean submitting to the will of a regime they aimed to resist.

Al-Khataeb and her husband are united as activists, even if it's unclear what their views are, except for the rejection of extremism and dictatorship. It's unclear, too, when bombs are dropping, whether anyone should be expected to think past that. Over the five years the film traces, it shows many of the men, women and especially children who were lost to bombs, soldiers and sieges, until finally, with the city in ruins, her family were forced to flee themselves.

Sama, for whom the film is named, is Al-Khataeb's daughter, born during Aleppo's slow crumble. The film is narrated directly to her — sometimes an apology, sometimes a time capsule, other times a direct justification for why they stayed so long in harm's way. Al-Khataeb, who kept her camera rolling for thousands of hours, believes her daughter needs to see not only the atrocities committed, but also the spirit of her home and its people, who clung to their city, and to their lives, until nearly the last man. The world needs to see that, too.

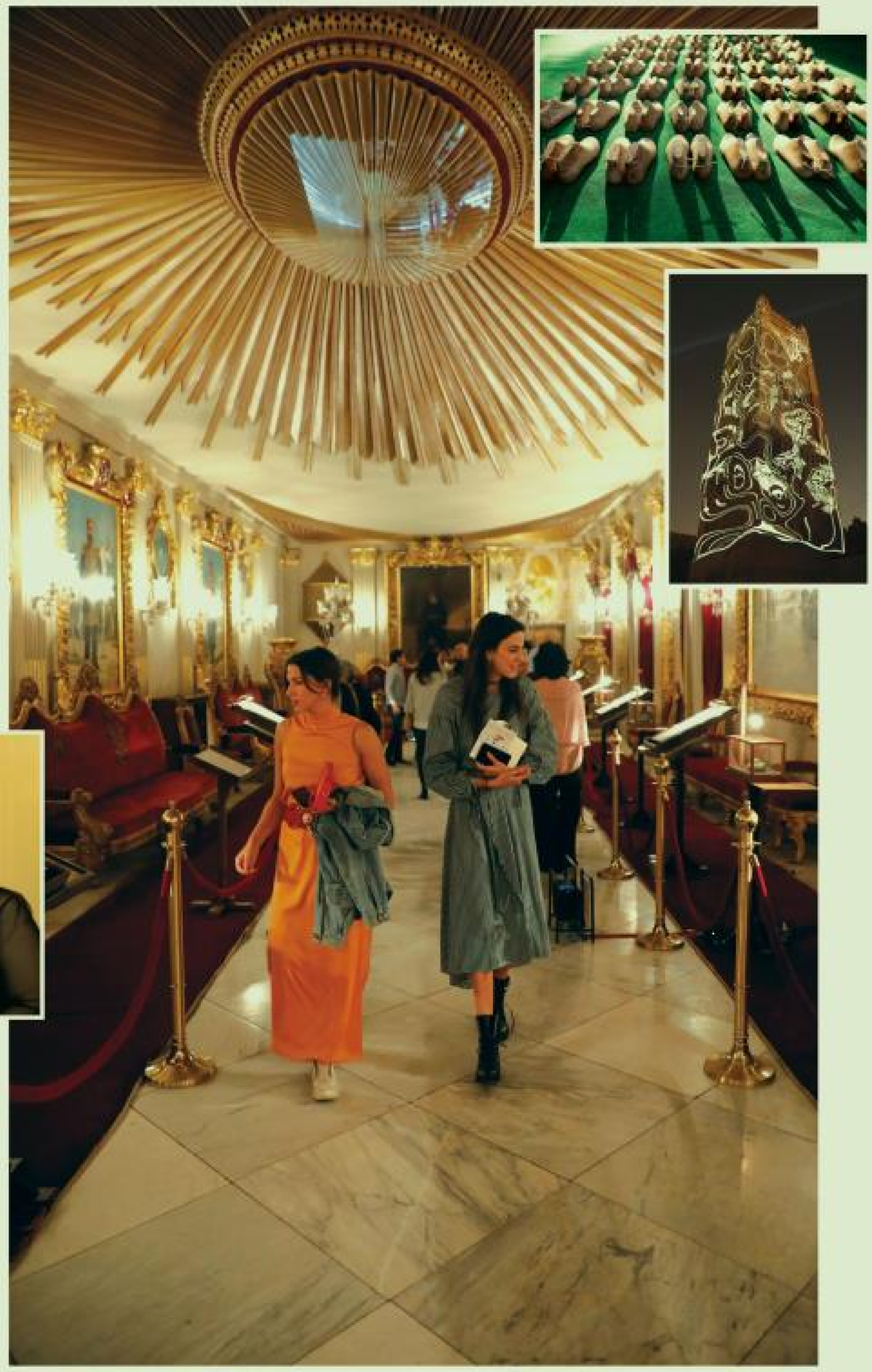
"There is a certain energy (to these historic settings) that you can't explain, but you feel it."
Nadine Abdel Ghaffar
Founder, Art d'Egypte

Weekend

ART

Art d'Egypte combines past and present of Egypt's art scene

The art consultancy presents contemporary work in historical settings



(Above, from left) The Art d'Egypte team: Malak Shenouda, Nadine Abdel Ghaffar and Hana El-Beblawy. (Top right) Huda Lutfi's "Waiting for Admission." (Far right) Islam Shabana's "Unfreeze Time." (Others) Guests at Art d'Egypte exhibitions, including Leah Boutros Ghali (below).
Images supplied

Denise Murray London

The Valley of the Kings in Luxor; Tutankhamun's tomb; the Pyramids; and the Great Sphinx of Giza. These iconic wonders of ancient Egypt continue to enthrall the world today — but some might say their overwhelming beauty puts everything else in the shadows. How can contemporary artists in Egypt compete with these 7,000-year-old treasures that draw visitors from all corners of the globe?

That's a question Nadine Abdel Ghaffar, founder of art consultancy Art d'Egypte, has spent a lot of time contemplating, and she has come up with a highly imaginative answer. She has rewritten the rules for presenting contemporary art works — bringing the pieces into the heart of historic sites, creating a dialogue between past and present.

The first attempt to realize this blend of old and new was a spectacular success. It's safe to say "Eternal Light — A Night of Art at the Egyptian Museum" was a groundbreaking initiative. In fact, it was such a departure from its usual mode of operation that the museum agreed to host the exhibition for one night only before it was moved to another venue.

It was clear, however, that it was a formula that had great appeal, and the following year saw the magnificent early 20th Century Manial Palace of Prince Mohamed Al Tewfik host the "Nothing Vanishes, Everything Transforms" exhibition for one month, with workshops and talks by art experts weaved into the program.

Art d'Egypte does a lot of work to support young artists and aims also to catalogue Egypt's modern and contemporary art. As a private organization, it reaches out to investors and its public-private partnership model produces some impressive initiatives. For example, when the team went into the Egyptian Museum for their first exhibition in 2017, they noted that the lighting for the exhibits needed upgrading. They spoke to their Philips Lighting contact in Cairo, who in turn contacted global headquarters in Amsterdam, with the result that the company installed specialist 'preservation lighting' in the museum and the Manial Palace.

"We guarantee companies branding opportunities and in return they are more willing to donate in kind," said Abdel Ghaffar.

This year, excitement is building for the third presentation to be held on Cairo's Muiz Street - the longest inhabited street in Egypt, with a vibrant history dating back to 969.

Arab News spoke to Abdel Ghaffar when she visited London to host a talk with representatives from the V&A and Dalloul Art Foundation, held at Christie's auction house, about Egypt's creative journey in relation to its ancient, modern and contemporary art.

She noted: "Everybody has this romantic image of the ancient layer of Egypt, but they don't know the other layers, which are also very rich."

She described the experience of looking at contemporary art within a great, historical setting. "You are immersed in an experience which you can't get anywhere else — you fall under the spell of the place. I feel that when you go to these places, you live a thousand lives. You feel the souls of those thousands and thousands of people who were there before. There is a certain energy that you can't explain, but you feel it."

Everybody has this romantic image of the ancient layer of Egypt, but they don't know the other layers, which are also very rich.

Abdel Ghaffar's team consists of just three people — which, considering the scale of the projects they undertake, is pretty amazing. We spoke to Malak Shenouda, who was recruited by Abdel Ghaffar straight after graduating from the American University in Cairo (AUC).

She admits that the whole experience has been both exhilarating and a very steep learning curve.

"I graduated last May and went straight from college to a very high level. It has been an incredible learning experience — from trying to find funding, talking to artists, finalizing paperwork with the Egyptian Ministry of Antiquities, dealing with the logistics of installing the art pieces, doing research, writing catalogues and curatorial statements to drawing up guest lists and invitations.

"I've learned a lot very fast. I now know what it means when people say 'Life is your best teacher.' I was doing my graduation project in parallel with the first exhibition. Nadine has been very patient and given myself and my colleague, Hana El-Beblawy — also a recent AUC arts graduate — a lot of responsibility," she said.

Shenouda described some of the artworks that particularly inspired her at last year's exhibition, "Nothing Vanishes, Everything Transforms."

She particularly admired a work called "Waiting for Admission" by Huda Lutfi, formed of 60 wooden molds of women's shoes lined up in neat rows.

"It speaks about those women who are always waiting for admission, whether it's for job opportunities or for approval in society, or whatever," she said. "This is a powerful statement."

Another work she admired was by the multidisciplinary artist and digital media designer, Islam Shabana. His "Unfreeze Time," a 3D digital mapping piece, brought to life the clock tower in the palace, raising questions about its original purpose, which — due to a lack of historical references — is shrouded in mystery. As the artist explained: "The piece will digitally unfreeze time, opening possibilities of dialectical narratives to answer old questions or ask more important ones about the present."

"This was a site-specific work which could not be exhibited anywhere else," said Shenouda.

She also described the impact of seeing a huge suspended sculpture made of cardboard called "The Provisionary that Lasts," by Ahmed Badry.

"I think seeing two gigantic depictions of common objects (a coat hanger and light bulb) that you see daily, and the juxtaposition of this contemporary piece in the historical surrounds of the palace, was very striking," she said.

All the team's efforts are now focused on the upcoming Muiz Street exhibition in October, which will be held under the auspices of the Egyptian Ministry of Antiquities.

With many visitors looking forward to travelling to Cairo for the two-week exhibition, Abdel Ghaffar was asked about security — especially in the context of the recent attack on a tourist coach near the new Egyptian Museum in Giza.

She pointed out that such attacks have occurred in many cities across the world — including London, Manchester, Madrid, Paris and Nice.

"What has happened in Egypt is no different to what has happened anywhere else in the world. Egypt remains one of the safest countries," she said. "We have high security measures, and I am not worried."

The exhibition's location fits perfectly with Art D'Egypte's aims, she explained: "On this one street you have several layers of history: Fatimid, Ayyubid, Mamluk and Ottoman — right up to our present day, with people living in the historical houses. It's living history. It's not something preserved but a continuously evolving environment. You have workshops and people who live in the old houses. It's beautiful because it's like a mosaic. One of the mosques has a church door with Pharaonic granite and Greek Roman columns.

"In Egypt," she added, "we always say that Egyptian heritage is for all mankind, not just for Egyptians."