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SPOTLIGHT

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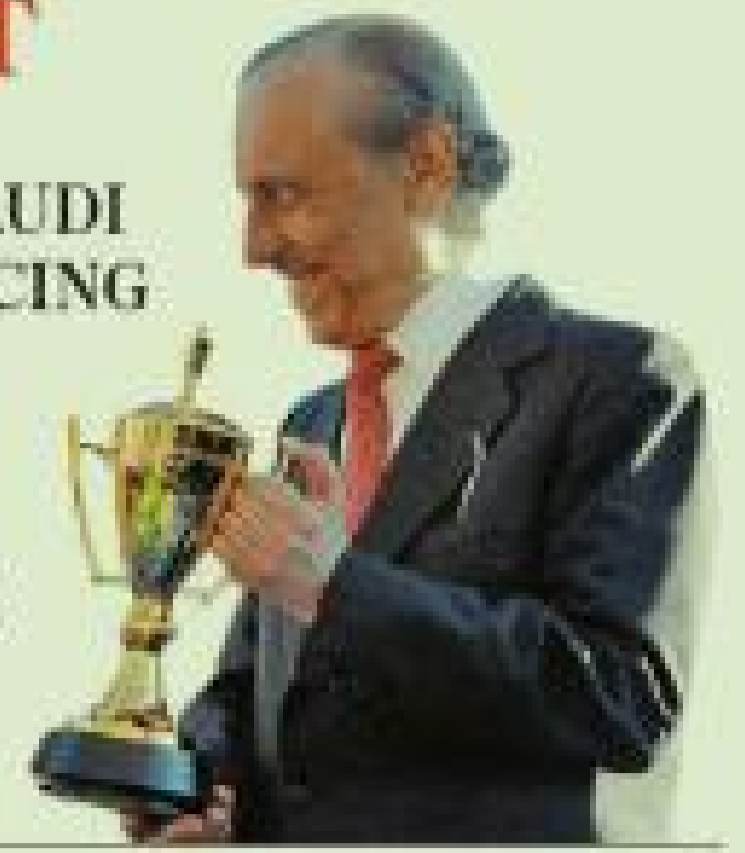
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TRIBUTES
PAID TO SAUDI
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45TH
ANNIVERSARY

Since 1975

ARAB NEWS

The Voice of a Changing Region

THURSDAY, January 14, 2021
Jamad Al-Thani 1, 1442
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BLOW TO REGIME

Israeli jets pound Iran's fighters in east Syria

At least 57 dead in massive airstrikes

Arab News Jeddah

Israeli fighter jets bombarded Iranian-backed militia positions in northeast Syria on Wednesday in a new effort to disrupt supply lines to Tehran's proxy fighters propping up the Assad regime.

At least 57 people died in the heaviest Israeli airstrikes for at least three years. They included 14 regime troops, 16 Iraqi militia fighters and 11 Afghan members of the pro-Iran Fatimid Brigade. "This is the largest death toll from Israeli raids in Syria," said Rami Abdul Rahman of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

Days before the strikes, the Fatimid Brigade transported a consignment of Iranian-manufactured weapons to eastern Syria from Iraq, said the observatory, which is based in the UK.

Wednesday's strikes targeted areas in Deir Ezzor province where Iranian-backed militias and Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps fighters have a heavy presence.

A senior intelligence official in Washington said the airstrikes were carried out with intelligence provided by the US, and hit warehouses in Syria that were being used to store Iranian weapons.

The warehouses were also a staging post in a pipeline for components that support Iran's nuclear program, the official said.

A regional intelligence source said the targets included Syrian security compounds inside Al-Bukamal and Deir Ezzor cities, while in the past raids had struck only the outskirts. The latest raids hit "advanced weaponry and weapons depots ... in a

large combat arena," the source said. Iran's proxy militias led by Lebanon's Hezbollah control large parts of eastern, southern and northwestern Syria, several suburbs of Damascus and the Lebanese-Syrian border.

The latest raids came hours after separate strikes on Tuesday near the Iraqi border killed at least 12 Iranian-backed militia fighters on Tuesday.

Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz said: "We remain vigilant on all our frontiers. We have taken action and will continue to take action against anyone who tries to challenge us, from near or far. We're not sitting and waiting."

Israel has carried out hundreds of

FASTFACT

The attack was carried out with intelligence provided by the US, and hit warehouses that were being used to store Iranian weapons.

air and missile strikes on Syria since civil war broke out in 2011, targeting Iranian and Lebanese Hezbollah forces as well as regime troops.

The Observatory said it recorded 39 Israeli strikes inside Syria in 2020 that hit 135 targets, including military posts, warehouses or vehicles. At least 217 people were killed, mostly Iranian-allied fighters.

In June 2018, strikes in Deir Ezzor killed at least 55 pro-regime fighters, including Iraqis as well as Syrians, according to the monitoring group.

Tzachi Hanegbi, an Israeli government minister, said Israel hit Iranian targets in Syria "whenever our intelligence dictates it and according to our operational capability."

Spot the rally racer ...



Chilean motorcyclist Pablo Quintanilla is overshadowed by the stunning Saudi landscape on Wednesday during Stage 10 of the Dakar Rally between NEOM and AlUla. Chilean rider Jose Ignacio Comejo, who had been leading the motorbike section of the rally, was forced to drop out after a fall. **Bike leader Nacho retires, Peterhansel nears title** Page 15

AFF

PANDEMIC

Lebanon begins 11 days of 24-hour curfews to stem surge in COVID-19 infections

Armed forces to patrol the streets as hospital chief warns of 'major disaster'

Najla Housseini Beirut

Lebanese were warned on Wednesday that they were "heading for disaster" as the country began 11 days of 24-hour curfews aimed at stemming a surge in COVID-19 infections.

There were 45,445 coronavirus cases in the first 12 days of January, compared with 53,559 in the whole of December. The number of daily cases has not dropped below 4,300 since health precautions were widely flouted during the New Year party season.

"A large number of people in Lebanon have caught the coronavirus," said Firas Al-Abyad, director of the Rafic Hariri University



NUMBER

45,445

Cases found in Lebanon in the first 12 days of January.

Hospital. "This requires ... people to be admitted into hospitals which are at their maximum capacity. What scares us is that we have reached the point we did not want to reach.

"The number of people in need of intensive care will double next week, which means that we are heading toward a major disaster."

The Lebanese Armed Forces will enforce the new lockdown, from Thursday until at least Jan. 25. No one will be allowed on the streets except medical staff, diplomats, travelers and employees of some exempt institutions. Grocery stores will be closed and operate delivery only.

Dr. Abdul Rahman Al-Bizri, head of the Health Ministry's crisis committee, told Arab News: "I hope the strict total lockdown will limit the spread of the virus, but I am afraid of going back to how things were and completely opening up the country without any measures after the lockdown is over."

Detailed report Page 6

The Brief

EAST MED ROW

A first round of new exploratory talks between Turkey and Greece will take place this month following Ankara's offer to discuss conflicting territorial claims in the eastern Mediterranean. P7

TAMILS ANGRY

Outrage has mounted in Tamil Nadu, India, after a memorial to Tamils who lost their lives to a civil war was demolished in Sri Lanka. P8

SABALENKA WINS

Aryna Sabalenka heads to next month's Australian Open tennis brimming with confidence after outclassing Veronika Kudermetova in Abu Dhabi. P15

STRONG PUNISHMENT

'Naming and shaming' to deter Saudi sexual predators

Legal experts say new amendment to law will reduce harassment and protect potential victims

Tareq Al-Thaqafi Makkah

A new amendment to the Saudi anti-harassment law enabling the "naming and shaming" of convicted sexual predators will deter potential offenders and protect victims, lawyers told Arab News on Wednesday.

The change to the original 2018 law was approved by the Cabinet on Tuesday, adding the publication of an offender's personal details to the previously applicable punishments of fines and imprisonment.

"A royal decree was issued to



"Naming and shaming would be done only in the most serious cases that affect society."

amend the anti-harassment law allowing the judge handling the case to include a sentence imposed on the harasser to name and shame him at his own financial expense, as a deterrent to him and others like him," legal counsel Dr. Mohammed Mahmoud said.

"Public naming and shaming constitute a strong punishment that deters anyone who may be

tempted to engage in sexual harassment, the essence of which is the objection of the other party," said Mahmoud. "It may also imply exploitation and humiliation."

Lawyer Hisham Al-Faraj said naming and shaming would not be automatic, but would be implemented only in the most serious cases that affected society.

"Naming and shaming will be applied only after the sentence is final," he said. "This is an additional guarantee not to name and shame any person before the crime is proved definitively and finally against him."

The amendment to the law would ensure that harassers were not employed in sensitive jobs and professions that were inappropriate for such offenders he said.

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Together, we must build a safer and more prosperous world for future generations. A world where all of our diversity is embraced and our contributions appreciated.

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



Radar

KSA today



Jeddah

Conference

Students, engineers, scientists, researchers and academics will exchange knowledge and ideas at the International Conference on Science, Engineering and Technology being held at the Holiday Inn, King Fahad Street, Jeddah, from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Thursday.



Online

Tech startup

Learn how to start your own healthcare tech startup with Atechup. Discover tools, software, hardware, platforms, resources, projects, processes, methods and strategies. The webinar will take place on the Atechup website at 1 p.m. on Thursday.



Jeddah

Movie night

"Secret Cinema" is the latest way to enjoy classic films. Organizers send information about the movie, location and what to bring. Live the story of the movie before watching it with other filmgoers. Thursday from 6 p.m. to 10 p.m. via +96 656 321 6993 or TalentReunion@gmail.com.



Jeddah

Health

Discover the latest advances in medicine at the two-day International Conference on Medical and Health Science which starts on Thursday at the Holiday Inn, King Fahad Street, Jeddah, from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.

The Register

THE PICTURES THAT MARK THE DAY



Prince Faisal bin Khalid bin Sultan, governor of the Kingdom's Northern Borders region, on Wednesday inaugurated a number of health projects in the region for the year 2021.

The projects, which will cost a total of SR50 million (\$13.3 million), cover the human resources building at the Arar Central Hospital; the development of the work environment at the Prince Abdul Aziz bin Musaed Dental Center; the development of the Prince Abdullah bin Musaed Cardiac Center, a health center south of Al-Faisaliah; the establishment of health centers in the Rafha governorate; and the development of the work environment in Rafha's Northern Health Center and Diabetes and Endocrinology Center.

Prince Faisal expressed his thanks to the leadership for continuously supporting the health sector since the beginning of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, implementing all necessary preventive measures and ensuring the provision of the best health services for all.

He also praised Minister of Health Dr. Tawfiq Al-Rabiah for his essential role and interest in the development of the health sector across the Kingdom.

During the inauguration ceremony at Rafha Central Hospital, Al-Rabiah commended the government's support of the health sector during the pandemic, which has led to a decrease in the number of recorded cases in the Kingdom, noting that the new projects "will represent a qualitative leap for the health services

provided to advanced cases in the region."

Attendees watched a visual presentation showcasing the region's health projects for the year 2021.

In the presence of Al-Rabiah, Prince Faisal also inaugurated the project aimed at developing the work environment at Rafha's Northern Health Center, which includes expansion of the center and restoration of the main building's work environment.

He also launched the "Know Your Numbers" initiative, which seeks to decrease the rate of chronic diseases by raising awareness regarding the importance of regular medical examinations that monitor blood pressure and body mass index, among other health parameters.

Today's Number

50k

More than 50,000 beneficiaries have received a copy of the executive ruling issued electronically by the Board of Grievances courts through the Moeen electronic platform, since the launch of the service in September 2020. It is one of the services provided by the board for all beneficiaries following the course of their cases electronically, while moving judicial work in the courts online. Beneficiaries can now receive a copy of the judgment and the different parties involved can verify electronically the validity of the judgment received.

Who's Who



Sulaiman Azzabin

Sulaiman Azzabin has been deputy chairman of Saudi Paper Manufacturing Co. since March 2020 and a board member of the company since November 2018.

Before that he was deputy minister of social development at the Ministry of Labor and Social Development, and CEO of Deutsche Gulf Finance Corp. and Al-Rajhi Bank.

He worked at Saudi Basic Industries Corp. (SABIC) between 1995 and 2007 before moving to Al-Rajhi Bank in 2007 where he worked in the risk management unit and international business unit.

In 2009, he was appointed director of comprehensive risk before heading the corporate finance client department. Later, he was named director-general of the bank's international business group.

He was a board member of Al-Rajhi Malaysia and Al-Rajhi Capital, and a member of the National Committee for Prisoners, their Families and Ex-Convicts (Tarahum).

Azzabin said: "I worked in three sectors and came to realize that a robust strategy, dealing with mistakes and collaborating with others to overcome challenges are all important foundations, but they need sufficient information and data as well effective communication and realistic analysis to succeed."

Azzabin received his master's degree in risk management from the University of Southampton in the UK in 2004, and a bachelor's degree in accounting from King Saud University, Riyadh, in 1995.

What's Trending Today's hot topics explained by Nada Jan



AUTOPSY RESULTS

Diego Maradona

The autopsy results of Diego Maradona have raised criminal suspicion surrounding the circumstances of his death.

Following a heart attack, the globally adored Argentine football player died on Nov. 25, at the age of 60, leaving the world of sport in waves of sadness.

The Argentinean media announced that the autopsy results reveal that medical negligence could be behind his death. The results show that he had suffered from heart, liver, and lung issues and there was no trace of substance abuse, alcohol, or any illegal materials.

The media also shared that the police have found documents holding a fake signature of Maradona at the house of Dr. Leopoldo Luque, who was part of his medical team. It is believed he had done that to illegally send copies of Maradona's medical condition to his own clinic.

'ERROR IN JUDGMENT' OVER FACE MASK

Bruce Willis

Bruce Willis, 65, was reportedly asked to leave a store for not wearing a mask.

According to US gossip site PageSix, the actor was asked to leave a Rite Aid in Los Angeles on Monday after refusing to wear a mask.

A source told PageSix that people at Rite Aid became upset after seeing Willis shopping without a mask and had to leave before finishing his shopping.

He was photographed at the pharmacy wearing a bandana around his neck but not covering his mouth and nose.



"It was an error in judgment," Willis, two-time Emmy winner, told People about the incident. "Be safe out there everyone and let's continue to mask up."

People criticized Willis on Twitter for his maskless shopping trip, often with "Die Hard" themed jokes.

"Thank god Bruce Willis has made enough movies whose titles we can now use for silly jokes... Die Hard, Mortal Thoughts, Death Wish..." one tweeted.

"Die Hard: With A Ventilator," wrote Daniel Kibblesmith.

Noel Murray tweeted: "Just like his recent movies, Bruce Willis only appeared in this Rite Aid for about 10 minutes."

TheRegion

The Middle East Roundup

Arab News Dubai

•An Arabic-language stage play will take place at the Dubai Opera on Thursday. The play, titled "Bait Bu Sanad," tells the story of Sanad, a middle-class man and father to one son and three daughters, all of whom are married.

•Market players and industry leaders in advertising and digital

printing are gathered at the Cairo International Exhibition Center in Egypt for "Digi Sign Africa 2021." The event aims to encourage and develop the industry further in Egypt, the Middle East and North Africa. It runs until Friday.

•The Dubai Shopping Festival continues today, with an array of entertainment and promotional activities scattered across the

emirate. There will be retail deals, fireworks, live concerts and shows during the festival, which lasts until Jan. 30.

•Prominent Cirque du Soleil mastermind Franco Dragone's "La Perle" is still showing in Dubai, at the luxurious Al-Habtoor City in the downtown area. The heart-racing aquatic spectacle features 65-world class performers from 23 countries.

Prayer Times in Saudi Arabia

Jan. 14	Fajr	Sunrise	Dhuhr	Aar	Mugreb	Isha
Makkah	5:41	7:00	12:30	3:38	5:59	7:29
Madinah	5:46	7:07	12:31	3:34	5:54	7:24
Riyadh	5:17	6:39	12:03	3:05	5:26	6:56
Abha	5:26	6:44	12:20	3:31	5:54	7:24
Dammam	5:06	6:29	11:49	2:49	5:09	6:39

Nujood Al-Otaibi finds inspiration in the hyperrealist movement, an art form that resembles a high-resolution photograph but captures a deeper emotional narrative.



Spotlight



Nujood Al-Otaibi, below, saw her career blossom when Jeddah's Athr Gallery displayed one of her paintings, a self-reflection influenced by her hearing loss and inspired by the Belgian surrealist Rene Magritte. Supplied

SAUDI ARABIA

No barrier to success

Hearing loss has not stifled the creativity of Saudi painter Nujood Al-Otaibi, now looking forward to her first solo show

Caline Malek Dubai

Nujood Al-Otaibi began losing her hearing around the age of five. In Talf, the area in Saudi Arabia's Makkah region where she was born, her affliction was initially mistaken for a common fever. But as the years passed, her deafness became progressively worse and, by the time she finished higher education, she was almost entirely dependent on hearing aids.

Al-Otaibi ascribes the lack of public awareness about hearing disabilities in the village from where her mother came to its remote location. "Over the years, I learned how to read lips, which I find is the conversation of the soul," Al-Otaibi, who turned 32 last year, told Arab News from her home in Jeddah, the city where she was raised and where she now combines her work as a teaching assistant with her passion for art and design.

Living with a disability in the Arab world is a challenge for many reasons, despite increasing recognition by governments of the rights of persons with disabilities. Social stigma is believed to be one reason why only 2 percent of the general Arab population is reported to be living with disability even though the corresponding figure for the world population is 6 percent.

Attitudes are changing, however, in part thanks to the Kingdom's Vision 2030 reform plan to uphold the rights of persons with disability and empower them to participate in shaping the country's economic and social future.

It is also changing thanks to the creative renaissance sweeping the

Kingdom, which has given social issues such as disability a new medium for public expression. For Al-Otaibi, this climate of artistic freedom has allowed her to open up about her own struggles.

"It's really hard in our society. People think you can't do anything and that is shameful," she said, referring to the condition in which persons with disabilities often find themselves in.

Unbowed by these attitudes, Al-Otaibi cites the example of Ludwig van Beethoven, the early 19th-century German composer who, despite suffering from profound deafness in his later years, remains one of the most admired composers in the history of Western music.

"I don't want to suffer. I want to be inspired by someone like Beethoven who had hearing disabilities yet was one of the best artists of all time. This is how I want to inspire people — I want to be the best and this is not going to stop me."

Al-Otaibi's artistic skills and abilities were nurtured early on. "My father is an artist and I remember seeing him painting from a very young age," she said.

"My mother said I was three when I started drawing people and she remembered me drawing my aunt's hair and uncle's belly. No one knew I would become an artist one day, but my father was the only one who encouraged me to continue painting."

She soon found inspiration in the hyperrealist movement, a genre of painting and sculpture which, on the surface, resembles a high-resolution photograph, but on closer inspection captures a deeper emotional narrative.

One of Al-Otaibi's most recent works, "The Heart of the Kingdom,"



One of Al-Otaibi's most recent works, "The Heart of the Kingdom," left, is an oil painting depicting the flag of Saudi Arabia in the shape of a heart and set against a black background. The brushwork is so precise that the green fabric seems almost real. Supplied

INNUMBERS

7.1%

Saudi population with some form of disability.

is an oil painting depicting the flag of Saudi Arabia scrunched into the shape of a heart and set against a black background. The brushwork on the canvas is so precise that the green fabric seems almost real.

At the age of 16, Al-Otaibi completed her first oil painting titled "Peace," which combined the flags of three Middle East countries. Another of her paintings depicted the 9/11 attacks on the US. Both of them proved problematic when

it came to getting them publicly displayed. "It was really sad," she said. "People back then had no idea about the meaning of art. Art was very limited in Saudi Arabia in the past."

These early setbacks were not enough to stifle or crush her creativity, however. After completing school in Jeddah, Al-Otaibi moved to the US, where she spent eight years in Wisconsin studying art and design. It was here she explored her love of hyper-realism and began branching out into other styles of painting.

After a stint interning in the US, she returned to Saudi Arabia to work at the American International School of Jeddah. As her hearing loss became progressively worse, her desire to help others with disabilities grew.

"I wanted to be in a community where I could help children with disabilities like myself, and to help them reach their academic goals," she said. "So, I decided to do art and help children believe in themselves, especially those with disabilities, because it's really hard and people don't shed light on it, especially in the Kingdom."

As a teaching assistant specializing in assisted learning, Al-Otaibi helps her students identify their goals and pursue their dreams. "This is what I struggled with," she said. "This is what's going to keep you moving in life and I feel like it's my purpose."

In Saudi Arabia's increasingly tolerant and inclusive atmosphere, Al-Otaibi has seen her artistic career blossom. She crossed a significant personal milestone when Jeddah's Athr Gallery displayed one of her paintings — a self-reflection influenced by her hearing loss.

"I never expected that one day I would showcase my artwork representing my disability," she said. "I wanted to deliver my idea by representing myself with no face and showing my ear in different objects," she said. "It was inspired by the artist Rene Magritte — I love his style and work and the way he expresses his feelings."

Like the Belgian surrealist's most famous painting, "The Son of Man," in which a hovering green apple largely obscures a man's face, Al-Otaibi's work depicts a strange, geometric dream world.

Near the center of the canvas, a hollow pink headscarf frames a deep blue void in place of a face, surrounded by walls, windows, and ghostly figures with their backs turned. To the right hangs a disembodied diagram of the inner ear. The piece is a deviation from her usual attachment to hyperrealism — but is still laden with the same cutting social commentary, in this instance, perhaps, a critique of the social isolation of living with a disability.

Although Al-Otaibi is now looking forward to her first solo exhibition in Riyadh in 2021, details of which will soon be announced on her Instagram page, she says her greatest joy is seeing her students draw inspiration from her work, which shows that disabilities should not be viewed as a barrier to success.

"They know about my disability and they are curious about my hearing aid and they understand that some people may have such issues and that it's OK," she said.

"I'm really happy that the younger generation will no longer see this as something new or weird."

Twitter: @CalineMalek



News Saudi Arabia

Protecting wildlife



The 'Hadad' program, launched in November 2020 by the Saudi Falcon Club, seeks to return falcons to their original habitats inside and outside the Kingdom, adapt falcons to their natural environments, preserve the hobby of falconry from disappearing, and to protect them from illegal hunting and tampering with their nests.

SPA

COVID-19

Saudi Interior Ministry warns against large social gatherings

Health officials report 175 new coronavirus cases, 156 recoveries, 4 deaths

Aseel Bashraheel Jeddah

The Saudi Ministry of Interior renewed its warning against social gatherings and reminded people of the penalties against gatherings of more than 50 individuals as a precautionary measure against the coronavirus disease (COVID-19).

The ministry uploaded an infographic to Twitter stating: "Gatherings for social purposes such as funerals, parties and the like, for more than 50 people violate preventive measures against COVID-19."

The infographic reconfirmed that the initial penalty for an establishment or person who instigated the violation is a SR40,000 (\$10,600) fine, while anyone in attendance or causing the crowding will pay SR5,000.

If there is a second violation,

the penalty will be doubled to SR80,000. Those who are in attendance or instigating the event will pay up to SR10,000.

For a third violation, the penalty is doubled and they will be referred to the public prosecution.

If the violating institute is in the private sector — and a repeating offender — it will be closed for three months. In a second incident, the establishment will be closed for six months. The ministry urges those who witness any violations to call 911 for those in Makkah and Riyadh, and 999 for other regions.

Meanwhile, the Health Ministry said everyone should create an online account on the Sehhaty app to get the vaccine. It added that family members cannot get appointments for each other.

"An independent account is created for the wife and other beneficiaries in the Sehhaty app, except for children who are under 18, who can be affiliated with the head of

INNUMBERS

364,271

Total cases

356,013

Recoveries

the family," the ministry tweeted.

Meanwhile, a source in the Interior Ministry said citizens were being warned against traveling to a number of countries without obtaining prior permission.

This comes following the statement on Jan. 8 allowing citizens to travel outside the Kingdom starting from March 31.

The list of countries includes Libya, Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, Iran, Turkey, Armenia, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of the

Congo, Afghanistan, Venezuela, Belarus and any other countries in which the pandemic has not yet been controlled or the spread of the mutated strain of the virus has been evident.

The ministry said Saudi citizens who are in these countries or expecting to travel to them should urgently register at an embassy.

It also called on citizens wishing to travel to the permitted countries to exercise caution and stay away from busy areas, and to follow all precautionary measures.

Saudi Arabia has reported four new COVID-19-related deaths. The death toll now stands at 6,304.

A total of 175 new cases were reported, meaning 364,271 people have now contracted the disease. There are 1,954 active cases, 307 of them are in a critical condition.

In addition, 156 new patients had recovered, bringing the total number of recoveries in the Kingdom to 356,013.

INTENSIVE LEARNING

Five-day fashion bootcamp to promote Saudi talent, entrepreneurs

Deema Al-Khudair Jeddah

A virtual bootcamp aimed at promoting entrepreneurial talent in Saudi Arabia's fledgling fashion industry has opened for applicants.

The Kingdom's Fashion Commission launched the second phase of its incubation program as part of an initiative to boost cultural entrepreneurship in the country with the support of the Quality of Life scheme.

One of 11 commissions established by the Ministry of Culture, the Fashion Commission's program will run a series of workshops from Feb. 28 until March 4 addressed by top academic speakers, thought leaders, Saudi business figures, and international institutions involved in the fashion sector.

Virtual bootcamp participants will learn how to develop their business projects, network, build partnerships, assess the market, and benefit from prototypes to cost-effectively bring their ideas to fruition.

The program's first-phase fashion hackathon started on Thursday and will run for three intensive days. Phases three and four will be announced over the coming weeks.

The fashion hackathon will see 150 participants — chosen from 1,500 applications — divided into 33 teams compete to win a five-day trip to the Milan Fashion Week.

Saudi fashion designer and founder of luxury brand Hindamme, Mohammed Khoja, told Arab News that the ministry

HIGHLIGHT

One of 11 commissions established by the Ministry of Culture, the Fashion Commission's program will run a series of workshops from Feb. 28 until March 4 addressed by top academic speakers, thought leaders, Saudi business figures, and international institutions involved in the fashion sector.

backed program would help to give fashion talent access to business partners, intensive practical learning, and mentors.

"Programs such as this are vital in being able to build up the industry and in connecting the dots," he said.

Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Innovation

Saudi Arabia launches ambitious e-gaming program

Saudi Arabia has launched an ambitious new business training program to help promote the Kingdom's e-gaming sector, the Saudi Press Agency reported.

The Game Changers initiative, being led by the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, will offer apprenticeship training to participants, and help them to find jobs in the industry and establish startups.

The program will offer participants an academic and practical qualification, a diploma, an opportunity to create a games studio, a grant of up to SR70,000 (\$18,000) at the incubator stage, or an employment opportunity in one of the leading companies in the field. **SPA Riyadh**

Helping hand

KSrelief delivers aid in Bangladesh, Yemen, Jordan

The King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center (KSrelief) is continuing to implement a project to secure and distribute food baskets to Rohingya refugees and their host communities in Bangladesh.

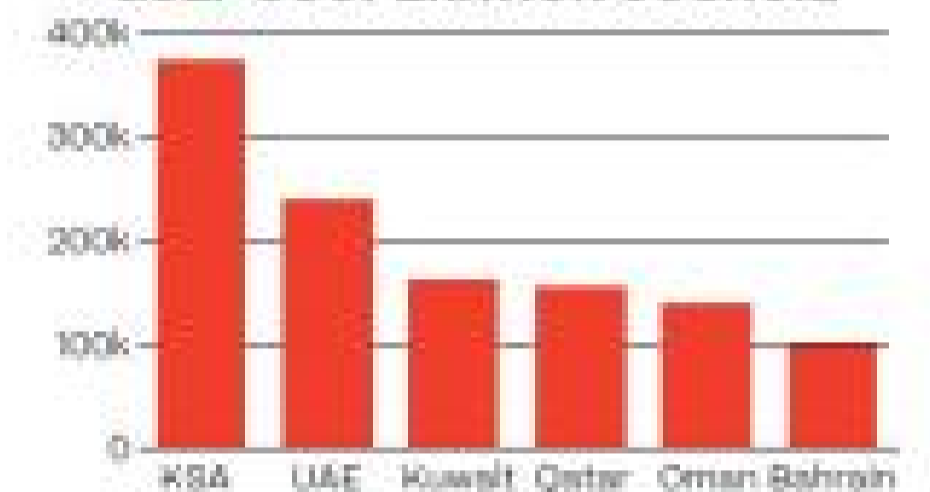
KSrelief distributed more than 43 tons of food baskets in one day, benefiting 9,000 people in the city of Cox's Bazar.

KSrelief also distributed 5,049 cartons of dates in Yemen's Marib, Hodeidah and Taiz governorates, helping thousands of families.

In Jordan, the center continued to distribute winter clothes to needy families of Palestinian and Syrian refugees. **SPA Dhaka**

The Day's FIGURES

CORONAVIRUS CASES IN THE GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL



Source: Worldometers

DiplomaticQuarter

EMBASSY ACTIVITIES



Indian Ambassador Dr. Ausaf Sayeed and Dr. Faisal Al-Sugair, president and CEO of the Saudi Center for International Strategic Partnerships, launch the Riyadh chapter of the Indo-Saudi Medical Forum (ISMF). Supplied

Riyadh

Indian ambassador inaugurates joint medical forum in Riyadh

The Riyadh chapter of the Indo-Saudi Medical Forum (ISMF) was recently inaugurated at the Diplomatic Quarters by Ambassador of India Dr. Ausaf Sayeed. The ISMF will consist of prominent Indian and Saudi doctors, health experts, businessmen associated with the pharmaceutical sector and other stakeholders from the medical field.

The inauguration ceremony was attended by Dr. Faisal Al-Sugair, president and CEO of the Saudi Center for International Strategic Partnerships; Dr. Ahmed Assiri, assistant supervisor of the Clinical Excellence General Directorate at the Ministry of Health; and Dr. Fawaz Al-Hussain, consultant and professor at the College of Medicine at King Saud University, who will also be the first president of the Riyadh chapter of the ISMF.

Executive council members, city coordinators and members of the ISMF joined the inauguration ceremony, both in person and virtually.

The idea for the ISMF was originally conceived by the then Indian consul general in Jeddah and now the ambassador

of India in Riyadh to foster collaboration between the medical fraternities of India and Saudi Arabia.

It strives to create an institutional structure for medical professionals from both countries to forge alliances and encourage cooperation in the fields of healthcare, medicine, pharmaceuticals and related sectors. The launch of the ISMF was rendered even more necessary because of the renewed focus on healthcare, especially after the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. Across the globe, healthcare organizations are now enjoying a new direction and momentum.

The success of the Jeddah chapter has paved the way for the revamping and upscaling of the ISMF to a pan-Saudi organization.

The ISMF will be divided into three regional chapters — Jeddah, Dammam and Riyadh — which will each be led by regional executive councils.

The Jeddah chapter was inaugurated by the Indian ambassador on Dec. 25, 2020, and the Dammam chapter will also be inaugurated in the next few months.

News Saudi Arabia



About 100 men and women took the initiative of reviving the Zubaida Trail, participating in a camel caravan along the historical path that is valued for its role in connecting Iraq and Saudi Arabia. Supplied

ISLAMIC CIVILIZATION

From Kufa to Makkah: Reliving the Zubaida Trail

Stretching from Iraq, it covers 420 km inside KSA, and was once a route for pilgrims and traders

Tareq Al-Thaqafi Makkah

Darb Zubaida, or the Zubaida Trail, is one of the most important humanitarian and social projects of Islamic civilization.

It stretches from Kufa, in Iraq, to Makkah, covering 420 km inside the Kingdom alone, and was once known as a route for pilgrims and traders.

The trail was named after Zubaydah bin Jafar, wife of Caliph Harun Al-Rashid, who contributed to its construction and revival for convoys and passersby.

Ten days ago, more than 100 men and women took the initiative of reviving the Zubaida Trail, participating in a camel caravan along the historical path.

Turki Al-Muhaifer, one of the initiators, said that the project seeks to revive the heritage of the trail by charting it as it would have been in Zubaydah's era.

"The road has an important historical dimension, which tells of a rich culture lived by our ancestors," he told Arab News.

Al-Muhaifer explained that the road is valued for its vital role in connecting Iraq and Saudi Arabia and allowing pilgrims a passageway to Makkah to perform Umrah.

He noted that participants in the initiative started on Jan. 4 and will continue until Jan. 19, after traveling the 420 km.

"We passed through several historical stops and through monuments that are still standing, despite the great passage of time," he said.

Each day, the team wakes up early before the morning prayer. Following prayer, they have breakfast, get ready and then start off on the journey, stopping every 10 km to rest. This continues until they stop for the night to sleep and repeat the process the next morning.

Thirteen nationalities were supposed to be represented in the convoy. Due to the exceptional circumstances created by the pandemic, however, that number was limited.

So far, the group has completed half the distance, traversing a variety of terrains, including



The initiative started on Jan. 4 and will continue until Jan. 19, after traveling the 420 km. Supplied

rocky territory and sand.

"The project provides good lessons for youth and history lovers," Al-Muhaifer said.

Fureih Al-Shamri, another member of the team, said the main goal of the initiative is not so much to explore the Zubaida Trail as it is to shed light on this civilizational achievement, give the deserved historical and civilizational recognition to the place



We are not only camelers or shepherds, as we are portrayed in some Western media, but we are people with a rich and enduring legacy.

and encourage walking.

Al-Shamri said the unique experience was sure to delight lovers of history, archeology, photography and the environment.

"Our goal is to allow them to practice their hobby and protect this historical heritage," he said.

Another of the initiative's goals is to show the world the Islamic civilization's strong identity.

"This trail shows only a small part of the Islamic civilization



and its wonderful legacy," he said. "We are not only camelers or shepherds, as we are portrayed in some Western media, but we are people with a rich

and enduring legacy.

"We had a civilization before petrol, and the Zubaida Trail is a testament to this. This road passes through stations, each containing

FASTFACT

The trail was named after Zubaydah bin Jafar, wife of Caliph Harun Al-Rashid, who contributed to its construction and revival for convoys and passersby.

wells and ponds. There were small markets, some of which were buried hundreds of years later, while others still exist."

Sarah Al-Modaymagh, a businesswoman participating in the initiative, said this is one of the most important experiences of her life.

She described being part of a motivated group and traveling the Zubaida Trail as an enriching experience, encouraging physical fitness and promoting the study of culture and history.

"This initiative tells the story of a great lady who dedicated her life and effort to humanitarian and cultural work and managed to create a trail from Kufa to Makkah, despite the circumstances and hardships, in order to secure trade and Hajj routes," she said.

She described the Zubaida Trail as a piece of "forgotten heritage" with an untold story and praised the initiative for bringing attention to it.

"It renews hope and sheds light on the story of a woman whose actions and foresightedness will last forever," she said.

TheSpace

Vaccination services make us proud

HODA AL-HELAISSI



know everyone is talking about it, and I'm no different. And it must be said that the reason everyone is going on about it is because everyone is impressed. I'm talking about the way the government, and more specifically the Ministry of Health, is handling COVID-19 vaccination.

Starting with the Sehaty app registration to make an appointment, then going to the center for the vaccine and leaving with a flower — the whole process is fast, professional and hassle-free.

I have not been vaccinated yet, but many members of my family have, as well as many friends, and they all say the same thing: How well-organized everything is, how easy the whole process was and how happy they were that they took it.

They also say how surprised they were that from beginning to end the procedure was so



The whole process is fast, professional and hassle-free.

rapid — they certainly did not expect that appointments would be given within a few days of registration. But what I have heard over and over again is praise for the efficiency of the doctors and the young Saudis who guide, direct and help everyone going in to get vaccinated.

It makes me proud to know that our young people are reliable, conscientious and serious about what they do. It makes me proud to know about these services and that they are freely given to everyone in the Kingdom.

Saudi Arabia acted quickly at the beginning of the pandemic. No doubt, lessons learnt from past experiences were responsible for implementing necessary measures.

MERS, which itself is a coronavirus, was first reported in the Kingdom in September 2012 and spread to over 27 countries, although close to 90 percent of the cases occurred here. It is still endemic but controlled and has taught the country to be in a state of preparedness and readiness in order to curb any possible pandemic.

When COVID-19 reached Saudi Arabia in March 2020, the Kingdom was one of the few countries to impose extreme measures on everything from travel to education, social movement and gatherings, even before 100 cases were reached.

From preventive measures to free testing and vaccinations for all, I think there is much of which to be proud.

Hoda Al-Helaisi has been a member of the Shoura Council since 2013. She is also a member of the Shoura's Foreign Affairs Committee.

DIFFICULT TIMES

Lebanon faces new 11-day lockdown

Armed Forces called in to take part in the measures to limit the spread of the virus

Najla Houssari Beirut

Starting Thursday morning, the Lebanese people will be put to the test again, as a new 11-day lockdown is imposed.

All projections predict a spike in the country's coronavirus disease (COVID-19) cases in the upcoming days, while the hundreds of intensive care hospital beds dedicated to COVID-19 patients are full. Doctors have started to check on patients inside ambulances, and ask those who need oxygen to provide it at their own expense, and stay home.

According to the Lebanese Health Ministry's statistics, there were 618 critical cases and 80,386 active cases as of Wednesday morning, while the number of daily cases recorded has not dropped below 4,300 for days. These infections came a week after social interactions during New Year celebrations.

A state of health emergency, a total lockdown and a curfew have been imposed in the country between Jan. 14-25, a period that can be extended, to face the most dangerous COVID-19 wave Lebanon has witnessed since recording its first case last February.

The Lebanese Armed Forces, along with the state's security apparatus, will ensure the implementation of the curfew across Lebanon, noting that this is the first time the army has been asked to take part in the measures to limit the spread of the virus.

Under the state of emergency, "the security forces and judicial authorities have the right to strictly enforce the laws that punish the hospitals that refuse to treat urgent cases, including coronavirus cases, punish those who do not abide by the prevention measures, and issue tickets for those who violate these measures and contribute to the


FAST FACT

A state of health emergency, a total lockdown and a curfew have been imposed in the country between Jan. 14-25, a period that can be extended.

People shop at a supermarket ahead of a tightened lockdown and a 24-hour curfew to curb the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak in Beirut on Wednesday. Reuters

spread of the virus."

The Supreme Defense Council has prohibited people from going onto the streets, with some exceptions for medical personnel, nursing staff, diplomats, travelers and the employees of a number of institutions that require minimum administration. However, food and grocery stores will only be operating through delivery service.

Lebanon's land and sea borders will be closed from Thursday, while the country's airport will

be operating at its lowest operational capacity. Only transit passengers with tickets showing their crossing date will be allowed to cross into Lebanon through the land borders.

Minister of Health Hamad Hassan announced on Wednesday that he is now quarantined pending the necessary tests after three of his office staff tested positive for COVID-19, joining 18,715 others who have been forced to quarantine over the past 2 days.

This comes at a time when all

eyes are on the government to implement the measures after being criticized for a general state of confusion in previous weeks.

The country has also failed to form a government capable of leading the efforts to save Lebanon from its various crises beyond the coronavirus.

The Health Ministry's statistics show that 45,445 positive COVID-19 cases were recorded in the first 12 days of January, while 53,559 cases were recorded during the whole month of December.

Firas Al-Abyad, director of the Hariri Governmental University Hospital, said that "a large number of people in Lebanon have caught the coronavirus. This requires ... people to be admitted into hospitals, which are at their maximum capacity. What scares us is that we have reached the point that we did not want to reach."

He expected that "the number of people in need (of) intensive care will double next week, which means that we are heading towards a major disaster."

Dr. Abdul Rahman Al-Bizri, head of the Health Ministry's Scientific Committee on Combating the Coronavirus Pandemic, told Arab News: "I hope that the strict total lockdown will limit the spread of the virus. However, I am afraid of going back to how things were and completely opening up the country without any measures after the lockdown is over."

Al-Bizri is the person charged with communicating with Pfizer, on behalf of the Health Ministry, to procure its coronavirus vaccine.

RACE TO WIN

Israel PM 'driving a wedge between Arab Israelis'

Daoud Kuttub Amman

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has been accused of cynically courting the Arab vote to ensure his own political survival.

Claims that the Israeli leader was exploiting the "good nature" of Arabs were made after he made a surprise visit to Nazareth, the largest Arab town in Israel, on Wednesday.

During the visit Netanyahu greeted Nazareth's mayor, Ali Salam, promising him a safe spot in the Likud's list for the Knesset elections due in late March.

The Israeli leader also promised to increase budget spending and strengthen laws to stem criminal violence causing growing concern among Israel's Palestinian citizens.

Police arrested 10 people after Netanyahu's visit sparked protests in the town.

Wadie Abu Nassar, director of the Haifa-based International Center for Consultations, told Arab News that the Israeli leader is a "magician and his latest prize is the Arab community."

He added: "This is the first time in years that Netanyahu needs every vote, including Arabs, because of the challenges he is facing from his



Israeli border police detain a Palestinian protester during a demonstration against a visit by PM Benjamin Netanyahu to the Arab city of Nazareth on Wednesday. AP

HIGHLIGHT

During his visit to Nazareth, Netanyahu greeted the city's mayor, Ali Salam, promising him a safe spot in the Likud's list for the Knesset elections due in late March.

opponents. But he is a magician in politics and can never be counted out of any race."

Head of the Joint List Arab alliance, Ayman Odeh, said that the

Israeli prime minister imagines that the Arab community has a "short memory."

"The only way to ensure the interests of the Arab community are met is through the unified voice of Arab citizens and their Jewish partners who are fighting with honor and dignity for peace, equality, democracy and social justice."

In a tweet, Odeh also accused Netanyahu of attempting to drive a wedge between Arab Israelis.

Referring to clashes between police and protesters, he said: "If this

is what your reconciliation attempts look like, better to stay home."

During the visit Netanyahu referred to his 2015 quote when he allegedly opposed Arabs voting in Israel with the comment that they are "coming in droves to vote."

"People misunderstood what I meant," he said. "I didn't oppose the Arab vote, I only said that they are voting in droves for the Joint List."

Netanyahu also said that Jews and Arabs are "dancing in the streets of Dubai, so why shouldn't they be working together in Israel?"

The Israeli prime minister slammed the Joint List for opposing normalization treaties between Israel and four Arab countries.

Botrus Mansour, a Nazareth-based lawyer, told Arab News that the Israeli prime minister is exploiting the good nature of Arabs.

"He is using the agreements he made with Arab countries, and trying to use the fact that Arabs were disappointed with Benny Gantz and the Zionist left, to offer himself as an effective alternative. The Joint List has been splintered and Netanyahu is using that to make inroads."

VACCINE CAMPAIGN

Jordan begins jab drive as ex-army physician gets first shot

Raed Omari Amman

An 87-year-old former army physician on Wednesday received the first shot in Jordan's coronavirus disease (COVID-19) vaccination program.

Retired Lt. Gen. Dawood Hanania was given his jab at 8 a.m. at a vaccination center in the Jubelheh neighborhood of the capital Amman, signaling the start of a mass immunization effort to curb the spread of the virus that has killed more than 4,000 people in Jordan.

Hanania, a former Royal Medical Services director, told national news agency Petra: "Jordanians are now en route out of the pandemic." He said that after consulting with international research centers and had been "strongly" advised to take the vaccine.

In preparation for the rollout of its vaccination program, Jordan launched an online platform for people to register for jabs.

Brig. Gen. Mazen Farsiah, head of the department responsible for COVID-19-related issues at the National Center for Security and Crisis Management, said 68,000 people would receive the vaccine in the campaign's first phase,

HIGHLIGHTS

• Dawood Hanania urges Jordanians to follow suit to help country bring virus cases under control.

• Around 68,000 people will receive vaccine in campaign's first phase.

adding that 201,144 had already registered for the jab.

Health officials are aiming to inoculate about 2 million of Jordan's 10 million population through the nationwide vaccination drive.

"The campaign is progressing steadily and smoothly," said Health Minister Nathir Obeidat, adding that around 5,000 people every day would receive shots at the country's 29 vaccination centers. Previously the minister said that the elderly, doctors, and nurses would be first in line for the vaccine.

Obeidat recently pointed out that Jordan's Prime Minister Bisher Al-Khasawneh and several other members of the government had received the China-UAE SinoPharm vaccine during its testing phase.

News Middle East

MARITIME DISPUTE

Turkey, Greece set for historic East Med talks

It will be the 61st round of exploratory talks to be held in the past 14 years

Menekke Tokyay Ankara

A first round of new exploratory talks between Turkey and Greece will take place this month following Ankara's offer to discuss conflicting territorial claims in the Eastern Mediterranean.

The talks are set to take place in Istanbul on Jan. 25.

It will be the 61st round of exploratory talks to be held in the past 14 years, but previous meetings mainly focused on issues related to the Aegean Sea.

Athens is expected to focus discussions on maritime zones in the Aegean and East Med in line with the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), while Ankara has not set any pre-conditions for the talks.

Turkey is not a signatory of UNCLOS and does not recognize the government of Cyprus, an EU member.

Rauf Mammadov, resident scholar at the Middle East Institute, told Arab News that any direct dialogue was a positive step toward reconciliation

between the conflicting parties.

"The dialogue is also the sole nonconflict method toward resolving the disagreement in this particular case.

"The gist of the dispute between the two NATO members rests on a competing interpretation of international law. The alternative to talks is regular diplomatic feuds, sometimes accompanied by threats of military escalation," he said.

However, Oxford University Middle East analyst Samuel Ramani said that a short-term diplomatic breakthrough in the Med standoff between Greece and Turkey was "unlikely" to happen.

"Levels of trust on both sides are extremely low and both sides see any diplomatic overture as an image-branding exercise to the international community, rather than a sincere attempt to de-escalate the crisis," he added.

Ramani said it was "unsurprising" that Turkey offered to stage talks with Greece, as Ankara had hinted toward it previously.

"The only path to convergence in the Eastern Mediterranean is for some of the tensions around the Greece-Turkey dispute to ease.

Turkey's recent overtures toward France are a positive step, as are the UAE's recent statements on de-escalating with Turkey," he added.

Turkey rejects the maritime boundary claims of Greece and Cyprus, claiming they violate the sovereign rights of both Turkey and Northern Cyprus.

Experts have also underlined the importance of the announcement's timing.

"Ankara and Athens are taking steps toward a potential compromise as the Southern Gas Corridor (SGC) becomes operational. The project is a rare example of continuing economic cooperation between two neighboring nations," Mammadov said.

He added that a possible resolution to the East Med energy dispute would be successful if driven by mutually beneficial economic interests, similar to the SGC.

Charles Ellinas, a senior fellow at the Atlantic Council, told Arab News that the incoming administration of US President-elect Joe Biden must be of concern to Turkey, especially given that within a short length of time it had become the subject of

sanctions both from the EU and America.

"It is very important that aggressive language and threats should be avoided. The recent warning from (Turkish President Recep Tayyip) Erdogan to the EU that in case it supports Greece, Turkey will return back to offshore surveys and further escalate the dispute, is not

FASTFACT

Athens is expected to focus discussions on maritime zones in the Aegean and East Med in line with the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), while Ankara has not set any pre-conditions for the talks.

constructive," he said.

Ellinas added that without a change in direction, Turkey was likely to face a difficult time with Biden, while a constructive start to discussions with Greece would be seen quite positively by the EU and the US.

On the other hand, both countries are hoping for stronger support from Washington in consolidating

their regional gains and pushing for their "red lines" ahead of the upcoming inauguration of Biden on Jan. 20.

However, Ramani said that while a reduction of the aggression on both sides was possible, the core issues would be harder to resolve.

"Turkey will keep its gas extraction agreement with Libya, which is unacceptable to Greece. The Cyprus dispute is still a point of friction," he added.

Decades-long efforts to establish peace in the divided island are on the verge of collapsing, especially after Ankara began advocating the division of Cyprus into two states in October last year.

The controversies unfolding around maritime rights and hydrocarbon explorations off the island are also adding fuel to the growing tensions in Eastern Mediterranean waters.

Ramani said that the key issue that Turkey-Greece dialogue would resolve, in theory, was the end of Turkish brinkmanship, such as harassment of fishing boats and provocative military drills. "It likely won't solve the core problems," he added.

In December, Turkey withdrew

its Oruc Reis seismic research vessel that was operating in disputed waters of the Eastern Mediterranean, triggering a row with Athens over energy drilling prospects.

The ship will remain within the Turkish continental shelf until June 15 — a move that was seen by some as a goodwill gesture.

The 60th round of talks, the most recent between the two countries, began in Athens in March 2016. The talks continued for years through political consultations, despite having no formal framework.

"Athens' only pre-condition is that the exploratory discussions should address only the delimitation of maritime zones, based on international law, starting from where they stopped in March 2016. Turkey appears to prefer open-ended discussions. Hopefully, they will converge to an agreed agenda," Ellinas said.

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu and Erdogan met EU member-state ambassadors in Ankara on Tuesday, in a move seen by many experts as another attempt to reconcile with the EU and mend ties with Greece. Cavusoglu is also set to travel to Brussels on Jan. 21.



Turkey's research vessel, Oruc Reis, rear, anchored off the coast of Antalya on the Mediterranean. Ankara and Athens are set to revive talks on territorial disputes. AP

RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

HRW slams Tehran for 'relentless repression of dissent'

Charlie Peters London

Human Rights Watch (HRW) has slammed the Iranian regime over numerous rights violations throughout 2020.

In its annual World Report 2021, published on Wednesday, the NGO highlighted the state's ruthless grip over civil society.

Paying particular attention to peaceful activism and anti-regime protests — which have drawn global attention in recent years — HRW accused Tehran of "jailing lawyers, human rights defenders, and those who protested government corruption, mismanagement, and repression."

The report also focused on Iran's handling of its coronavirus outbreak, noting that while some prisoners were offered temporary release as the state struggled to contain the spread of COVID-19, many were excluded from this clemency. Political prisoners were forced to remain behind bars as the virus spread through cells.

"Despite numerous geopolitical, health, and economic crises facing the country, Iranian authorities are treating local civil society as their No. 1 threat and remain unaccountable for their abuses," said Michael Page, deputy Middle East director at HRW.



Anti-government protesters take to the streets in Iran protesting against the country's repression aimed at tightening civil society. AFP/File

HIGHLIGHT

Human Rights Watch accused Tehran of 'jailing lawyers, human rights defenders, and those who protested government corruption, mismanagement, and repression.'

"By suppressing human rights defenders and other activists, the authorities are simply fueling more dissent and frustration."

The report underlined Tehran's

brutal crackdown on peaceful protesters. It said since January 2018, the Iranian authorities have responded to regular protests across the country with extreme violence and the baseless arrests of thousands of peaceful demonstrators.

At the height of the protests in November 2019, when global attention was drawn to Iran, HRW said the regime initiated a "brutal crackdown" by ordering a near-total shutdown of internet services.

HRW quoted figures from Amnesty International, which claimed that the state's response to the protests led to

the deaths of 304 people. Tehran puts the figure at 230.

The report also criticized the regime for its indiscriminate use of the death penalty. HRW said as of Sept. 21, 2020, the authorities had executed two people convicted of murder during the protests, including Navid Afkari, a 27-year-old champion wrestler, "without investigating serious allegations of torture he said he experienced in detention."

Ali Safavi, an official with the foreign affairs committee of the Paris-based National Council of Resistance of Iran, told Arab News: "The ruling theocracy's draconian repressive measures, including the stepped-up executions, arrests and torture of dissidents, must be viewed in the context of the regime's increasingly precarious state in the face of tremendous public rage."

He added that the brutal crackdown on dissidents could lead to an "eruption of another nationwide uprising, far greater in scope and intensity than the one which engulfed nearly 200 cities nationwide in November 2019."

Safavi said the conclusions of the HRW report are hardly a surprise when "the economy is near collapse, Iran's national currency has been in freefall, government corruption is rampant, and factional feuding at the top has reached new heights."

FACE OFF

Ankara launches fresh probe into controversial new WhatsApp privacy rules

Arab News Ankara

Turkey has stepped up its ongoing row with mobile messaging service WhatsApp over controversial privacy rules.

The country's Personal Data Protection Authority on Tuesday followed in the footsteps of the Turkish Competition Authority by launching an investigation into the Facebook-owned platform over its new data-sharing practices.

WhatsApp has asked all its users to agree to sharing more personal data or be kicked off the site.

The Competition Authority on Monday opened a probe into WhatsApp and Facebook while suspending the app's new data collection rules in Turkey. Meanwhile, rival WhatsApp messaging apps such as Telegram, Signal, and BiP have seen a surge in users joining up.

The Turkish watchdog is expected to reevaluate the situation on Feb. 8 — the deadline set by WhatsApp for users to accept the new terms of service.

The latest saga comes in the wake of a recent clampdown by Turkey on social media platforms operating in the country. Legislation introduced in July has applied strict oversight of foreign social media companies with those

having more than 1 million daily users forced to set up offices in Turkey or face gradual fines and reductions in internet bandwidth.

Cyber rights' activists claim the law, which obliges social media firms to host Turkey-based users' data in the country, could allow the government to tighten its grip on online content with tools such as access blocking or content removal.

In November and December,

SPEEDREAD

The reason behind the Turkish probe into WhatsApp was 'probably due to Facebook not appointing a representative in Turkey as the government had requested.'

Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok faced fines totaling \$4 million each for refusing to comply with the legislation.

Erkan Saka, communications professor at Istanbul Bilgi University, told Arab News the reason behind the Turkish probe into WhatsApp was probably due to Facebook not appointing a representative in Turkey as the government had requested.



General view of a war memorial in the University of Jaffna, before it was demolished. The monument was built in memory of Tamil civilians killed in an ethnic war. AFP

DIPLOMATIC TIES ISSUE

Indian outrage over Tamil war memorial demolition

Demolition took place two days after Indian FM's visit to Colombo

Sanjay Kumar New Delhi

Outrage has mounted in the south Indian state of Tamil Nadu after a memorial to Tamils who lost their lives in a civil war was demolished in northern Sri Lanka last week.

The monument at the University of Jaffna was built in 2019 in memory of Tamils who perished in the 26-year conflict between Sri Lanka's government forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) from 1983-2009, which claimed an estimated 100,000 lives.

Tamils, who are of the same ethnic group as residents of Tamil Nadu, constitute 12 percent of Sri Lanka's population. Their situation in Sri Lanka plays a major role in New Delhi-Colombo relations.

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami condemned the monument demolition as causing "great pain to the Tamils of the

world," while regional parties held a protest on Monday in the state's capital Chennai, in front of the Sri Lankan deputy commissioner's office. On the same day, the Sri Lankan government promised to rebuild the monument.

"You cannot undo the damage already done. Colombo had to retract after international pressure," Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (MDMK) leader Mallai Sathya told Arab News.

"We feel the demolition is an attack on the memory of the Tamils who lost so many of their dear and near ones in the war against the Sri Lankan government," he said.

The Sri Lankan government, under Gotabaya Rajapaksa, which derives its political support from the majority Sinhala community, had earlier referred to the memorial as "glorification of the separatist LTTE."

Tamil politicians in India see the monument demolition as jeopardizing the integration of the Tamil community into Sri Lankan society.

HIGHLIGHT

After protests in India, Sri Lankan government promises to rebuild the monument.

"If the Sri Lankan government was really keen on the integration of the Tamils in mainstream society, they should not have allowed the demolition of the war memorial," Saravanan Annadurai, spokesman for the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam party, told Arab News after Monday's protest.

"A fragile peace is prevailing in Sri Lanka and this kind of majoritarian act shakes the confidence of the local Tamils in the government in Colombo," he said, adding that the "plight of Tamils in Sri Lanka is a sensitive issue" for Tamil Nadu.

The memorial destruction is seen as polarizing in Colombo as well.

"This was a polarizing action, and it will make the Tamil people all the more upset with the govern-

ment," said Colombo-based Jehan Perera, the head of the National Peace Council of Sri Lanka. As the demolition incident took place two days after Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanya Jaishankar's visit to Colombo, Perera told Arab News it was a "slap in the face" to India.

During his visit, the Indian minister urged Sri Lankan authorities to transfer some power to Tamils in Sri Lanka's Tamil-dominated regions.

As Tamil Nadu will hold a regional election in April, India's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has been trying to show it "cares" for Tamils, Perera said.

"The BJP wanted to impress upon the people in Tamil Nadu that they care. After this incident, India now has to show they are serious about the Tamil people in Sri Lanka."

However, Chennai-based political analyst N. Sathya Moorthy says that by restoring the war memorial, the Colombo government is trying to convey the message that it was not behind its destruction.

CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS

Outcry after Dhaka court bars women marriage registrars

Shehab Sumon Dhaka

Bangladeshi women are calling for a high court ruling barring them from becoming Muslim marriage registrars to be overturned, saying the verdict breaches their constitutional rights.

The Dhaka High Court, citing "certain physical conditions," last week rejected a petition by Ayesha Siddiqua, from Dinajpur in northern Bangladesh, who was refused employment as a Muslim marriage registrar on the grounds that she is a woman.

The court, referring to menstruation, said that women in the Muslim-majority country "cannot enter a mosque during a certain time of the month," and this "physical disqualification" means they cannot conduct religious tasks such as registering marriage.

Women politicians, lawyers and activists reacted angrily to the verdict.

"It rejects the concept of equal

rights for women. I protest against the decision," ruling Awami League MP Meher Afroz Chumky told Arab News on Tuesday.

Chumky, the party's women's affairs secretary, and a former minister for women's and children's affairs, called the court decision "humiliating."

"Women are allowed to offer prayers in the mosque in Saudi Arabia, but in Bangladesh we rarely see this. I think it's time to change the people's mindset," she said.

Salma Ali, president of the Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association, said that "physical issues" should not be the basis for refusing women employment as marriage registrars.

"It's very sad. The reasons mentioned in the verdict don't justify barring women from acting as Muslim marriage registrars. If necessary, the court could seek opinions from Islamic scholars to find a reasonable way out," she said.

Fawzia Karim Firoze, who is

FASTFACTS

• 'Humiliating' verdict sparks political backlash amid calls for change.

• Outcry after Dhaka court bans women marriage registrars.

overseeing Siddiqua's appeal to the Supreme Court, said that Bangladeshi women work in all sectors of society and should not be barred from job of marriage registrar.

"Our women even serve in the armed forces. So, they can't be barred from joining as marriage registrars," she told Arab News.

"Women have been performing as Muslim marriage registrars for many years in the UAE and Egypt also. The marriage registrar performs the registration of the marriage only and the person has nothing to do with religion. In Muslim marriage, the religious

parts are taken care of by any imam."

Mufti Mizanur Rahman, khatib of the national mosque, Baitul Mukarram, said that if other Muslim countries allow women to perform as Muslim marriage registrars, there is a chance that Bangladesh will review the decision "in the light of Islamic guidelines."

"The Holy Qur'an didn't say anything regarding women working as marriage registrars," he said.

Activists say that the ban ignores the country's constitution.

"In our religion there is no guideline barring women from performing as Muslim marriage registrars. This type of decision is contrary to our constitutional rights," human rights defender Khushi Kabir said.

"It seems like a gender-biased decision, and there is scope to review it after more consultation. I hope the Supreme Court will consider it in a pragmatic way," she said.

Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Pandemic in US

Coronavirus deaths hit new high of 4,300

Coronavirus deaths in the US hit another one-day high at over 4,300 with the country's attention focused largely on the fallout from the deadly uprising at the Capitol.

The nation's overall death toll from COVID-19 has eclipsed 380,000, according to Johns Hopkins University, and is closing in fast on the number of Americans killed in World War II, or about 407,000. Confirmed infections have topped 22.8 million.

With the country simultaneously facing a political crisis and on edge over threats of more violence from far-right extremists, the US recorded 4,327 deaths on Tuesday by Johns Hopkins' count.

Arizona and California have been among the hardest-hit states.

AP

Defiant

Kremlin critic vows return to Russia Sunday

Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny said on Wednesday he plans to return to the country this weekend from Germany, where he has been recovering from a poisoning attack, despite facing a threat of jail.

The 44-year-old Kremlin critic said he had booked a flight that will arrive in Moscow on Sunday.

"It was not my choice to come to Germany ... I ended up here because they tried to kill me," the anti-graft campaigner said in a video posted on his Instagram account.

Navalny said that he is "almost healthy" after the poisoning and can continue recovering at home, in Russia. Allies said Navalny will arrive on a Pobeda Airlines flight landing at Moscow's Vnukovo airport on Sunday at 7:20 pm local time (0620 GMT). AFP

The Day's FIGURES

Source: Statista



What We Are Reading Today

FROM AROUND THE WEB & IN PRINT

Hobbesian Moral and Political Theory

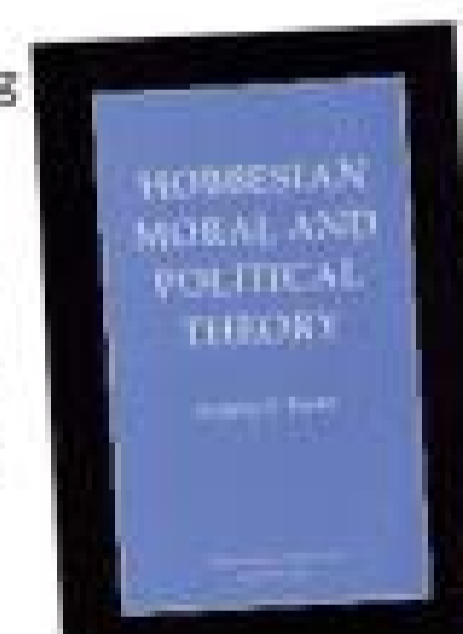
GREGORY S. KAVKA

In recent years serious attempts have been made to systematize and develop the moral and political themes of great philosophers of the past. Kant, Locke, Marx, and the classical utilitarians all have their current defenders and are taken seriously as expositors of sound moral and political views. It is the aim of this book to introduce Hobbes into this select group by presenting a plausible moral and political theory inspired by Leviathan. Using the techniques of analytic philosophy and elementary

game theory, the author develops a Hobbesian argument that justifies the liberal State and reconciles the rights and interests of rational individuals with their obligations.

Hobbes's case against anarchy, based on his notorious claim that life outside the political State

would be a "war of all against all," is analyzed in detail, while his endorsement of the absolutist State is traced to certain false hypotheses about political sociology.



Spain politics

Parliament rejects ex-king credit card probe

Spain's parliament rejected Wednesday opening a probe into whether former king Juan Carlos I used credit cards linked to accounts not registered in his name.

Far-left party Podemos, part of the government coalition with Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez's Socialists, had together with other smaller regional parties called for the enquiry into a possible money-laundering offense.

Anti-corruption prosecutors are looking into the origin of funds deposited in several Spanish bank accounts held by a Mexican businessman and an official in the Spanish Air Force, and whether the money in them had been used by the former monarch. AFP

Book deal

Duchess of York to publish debut historical romance

Sarah, the Duchess of York, has landed a book deal for her debut novel, a historical romance fictionalizing the life and loves of her great-great-great aunt.

In a promotional video posted Wednesday on her Twitter account, the former Sarah Ferguson said the novel, titled "Her Heart for a Compass," is set in the Victorian era and is "about daring to follow your heart against the odds." The duchess wore a Victorian-style outfit in the video and described her heroine as strong, rebellious and courageous. Publisher Mills & Boon, a romance imprint of British publisher Harlequin UK, said the story is based on Sarah's ancestor, Lady Margaret Montagu Douglas Scott, who fled an arranged marriage and "the confines of polite society." AP

YOUR DAILY ARABIC PROVERB
Do not argue with he who knows more than you; if you do, he will neither add to your knowledge nor will he be adversely affected by what you say.

Maimun bin Mahrān
(Medieval Imam, scientist and educator)

Opinion

Future of Turkish-US ties an early dilemma for Biden

ZAID M. BELBAGI



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The very public, and at times altogether baffling, Turkish support of Donald Trump's re-election campaign left many in the dark as to why Ankara would side so committedly with such a pro-Israel American president. The answer, quite simply, was the alternative. With President-elect Joe Biden now waiting in the wings, Turkey's precious strategic goals are undoubtedly being recalculated.

Given that Biden has promised to reconfigure America's relationships with the world, there is a real opportunity for both sides to consider a reset in bilateral ties, away from the short-term calculations of the election. With a Turkey that is increasingly at odds with NATO and European powers, how the US manages this relationship is of immense strategic importance.

A perfect storm of factors has made Turkey a concern of the US government for the last decade. It is a valuable ally as a long-standing member of NATO and given its situation between Europe and Asia, which makes it an important buffer not only to the chaos of the Near East but also to Russian expansionism. In Syria, where the US has lost important ground to Russia, Turkey provided not only a conduit for American efforts in the region but also a powerful reminder that the US' recalibration

for military adventurism had given way to the enthusiasm of regional powers. However, where Turkey once provided a vital pillar in the security of the transatlantic community, as illustrated by its work in Afghanistan, the war on terror and in promoting economic interdependence with Europe, its increasingly independent policies have seen Washington lose ground.

The dysfunctionality of the bilateral ties between the two overtly allied powers has only grown in recent years. Interestingly, the new year has not only concerned Ankara from the perspective of the change in administration, but also the sanctions enforced under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act, which had been delayed by Trump. With Turkey's Defense Industry Directorate, its chief Ismail Demir and three other employees feeling the pressure over their country's acquisition of the Russian S-400 missile system, it is not surprising that Ankara is now feeling somewhat marooned.

These circumstances do, however, provide an opportune moment for a realignment of the relationship. As much as the Biden administration may hope that sanctions drive Turkey closer to its orbit, it will be well aware that any further pressure may drive Ankara toward Moscow, or worse still to expand its more independent diplomatic initiatives

in the Mediterranean and farther afield. Where President Recep Tayyip Erdogan benefited from a personal relationship with his American counterpart to avoid the more commonplace repercussions for US allies that challenge its strategic imperatives, the new administration has made clear that it will only engage with Turkey through traditional diplomatic channels — and not rely on the kind of ad hoc communication that marked the relationship between Trump and Erdogan.

Though the transactional nature of the Trump administration that endeared it to foreign governments may have been deplored by Biden, there are certain concessions that both sides will need to make in order for relations to improve. Aside from the S-400 issue, US support for the Syrian Democratic Forces does not sit well with Turkey, while the Biden administration's expected reluctance to extradite Fethullah Gulen (the alleged mastermind of Turkey's July 2016 failed coup) will harm the prospects of changing things. Ankara has long been at odds with the US over its Syria policy, with America's support of the People's Protection Units — the Syrian affiliate of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, which is designated as a terrorist organization by Ankara, the US and the EU — long considered a betrayal of the alliance between the two.

Despite these obvious hurdles, there are signs that relations could improve. Turkish presidential spokesperson Ibrahim Kalin has said that Biden's team wants to turn a new page in its relations with Turkey, but how and when this comes about remains to be seen. The haphazardness of the Trump administration provided a strategic vacuum, in which Turkey was able to act, to some extent, without concern for US consternation. Whether through defense purchases, explorations for natural gas in disputed waters in the eastern Mediterranean or their pursuit of their own agenda in Libya, Turkey's leaders may have gotten too used to their new-found independence to see the strategic imperative of warming to Washington.

With the ruling Justice and Development Party having had to ally itself with nationalists to stay in power, any moves deemed to reduce Turkey's international standing will be hard to enact. In any case, seasoned Obama-era hands like Antony Blinken, Jake Sullivan, Lloyd Austin, Wendy Sherman, Victoria Nuland, Amanda Sloat and Brett McGurk, who will no doubt formulate Biden's foreign policy, know both Turkey and its diplomats very well. Like the president-elect, they realize that the US has lost too many friends in the last four years — a trend that must be reversed.

The dysfunctionality of the bilateral ties between the two overtly allied powers has only grown in recent years



No other presidential candidate has directly addressed the concerns of Arab Americans in the way Biden did

President-elect must deliver on Arab 'partnership' vow

RAY HANANIA



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Joe Biden will be sworn in as the 46th president of the US next week, with the backing of Arab, Muslim and Palestinian American voters. The key question remains, however, was the vote for Biden merely a protest against the outgoing administration, which was vilified by many Arabs and Muslims, or was it because of a firm belief that he will actually bring change for the Arab world generally and Palestinians in particular?

I think it is clear that Biden has opened the door a little wider than his predecessors, having last year issued what Arab Americans called a "historic" six-page "Plan for Partnership" with the community. No other presidential candidate has directly addressed the concerns of Arab Americans in the way Biden did with this document.

But what does it really mean? Well, Biden has moved quickly to name several Arab Americans to key positions in his administration. These appointees have, however, refrained from speaking publicly to Arab Americans about what is expected of them. And they are already under attack from the pro-Israel movement, which has accused them of harboring views that are "anti-Israel" — a sacred institution in American politics that few are allowed to question.

Biden's "partnership" document speaks to some important issues, like supporting a freer form of immigration. While Trump restricted immigration, using what was described as a "Muslim ban" to stop arrivals from six predominantly Muslim nations, the president-elect has called that "morally wrong" and promised to end the ban. He has also vowed to reinforce protections for so-called "Dreamers," the children of illegal immigrants to America who continue to fight for citizenship.

Biden also promised in his plan to fight "discriminatory policies that single out Arab Americans and cast entire communities under suspicion." What policies are these? Will he call out the anti-Arab racism, such as the distortion of the truth about the 1948 Palestinian Nakba, which has been denounced by pro-Israel members of Congress, including many Democrats?

There was heightened discrimination against Arabs and Muslims in America after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, but most of that has subsided. However, nothing has ever been done to make up for the failure of Congress to recognize the dozens of Americans who were beaten or killed in the weeks after 9/11 because they were or looked like they might be "Middle Eastern."

Biden says he will review the Department of Homeland Security's no-fly list and the watch list, which targets individuals suspected of involvement in terrorism, as well as ending the racial profiling of suspects based on their appearance.

And he has said he will support the inclusion of a "Middle East and North Africa" category on future US Census forms, which would boost the identification of America's Arabs. There are 22 racial and ethnic groups currently listed in the Census, which is conducted every decade. These statistics are used to help distribute billions of dollars in grants and funding to the ethnic and racial groups that are listed.

Biden's partnership document, if you read it carefully, is actually filled with a lot of positive words about protecting the civil rights of everyone, not just Arabs. The most important part is the least descriptive, which is titled "Championing democracy and human rights globally." Does that mean censoring Israel when it discriminates against its non-Jewish citizens? Will Biden stand up for the rights of Palestinians who live under occupation? Will he return the vernacular of the Middle East conflict to reality by calling things what they are: An "occupation," not "disputed territories?"

Will Biden speak out against the laws adopted by more than 30 American states that call for punishments and contract restrictions against anyone who supports the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement? The issue of boycotting Israel because of the exploitation of stolen Palestinian lands by the illegal and racist settler movement has been a big topic in the US and the world, but it is not addressed in Biden's document.

I hope the president-elect will stand up for all the things he says he is going to stand up for. Many presidents before him have uttered — and then failed to keep — the same promises.

I have to ask Arab Americans, what are we really expecting? Will Biden have the courage to stand up to Israel's racist policies and achieve a two-state solution, in which Palestinians have their own sovereign state with Jerusalem as its capital? Or will he simply move all of us Arabs, Muslims and Palestinians back to where we were under his predecessors — leaders who literally did nothing of substance to defend the rights of the Palestinian people or champion democracy in the Arab world?

If we argue that is too much to expect from any American president, I have to then ask: What is the point of it all?

Opinion

The paradox of Brexit

CHANDRAHAS CHOUDHURY

In the end, Brexit happened with a whimper, almost as a sideshow. On Jan. 1, after months of haggling and while preoccupied with the coronavirus disease

crisis, the UK began its new (one is tempted to say socially distanced) relationship with the EU.

Everything came down to the wire, with a trade deal between two of the world's largest economies finally brokered on Christmas Eve. It was then rushed through the British Parliament between Christmas and the new year by Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who had staked his entire political reputation on "getting Brexit done."

Despite the last-minute drama, there was a sense of anti-climax and weary resignation about it all. The new deal, only welcomed because it was better than a no-deal exit, put a "mission accomplished" stamp on the tortuous political and legislative journey.

On balance, it is probably a good thing that Brexit is done and dusted. Even during its 47 years of membership, the UK, despite benefiting enormously from tariff-free access to the world's largest single market, was the most conflicted major country in the EU. Neither of the UK's two major political parties could bring themselves to commit consistently and unambiguously to the European project (they often each had internal wars over the question of Europe).

And so the secession of the UK from the EU is probably the best outcome for all sides. No relationship, whether personal or political, can be secure when one side is always changing its mind, and then changing it again.

Here in the UK, despite some hand-wringing by liberal



commentators and by young people with an internationalist outlook, the majority of the population seems to have accepted Brexit in quite a sanguine fashion. Neither the

short-term disruptions to trade nor the projections of a long-term cost to the economy of something like 6 percent of gross domestic product seem to have shaken the reflexive Euroskepticism of a preponderance of the British public, or shaken their conviction — as much a matter of heart as head — that they are better off going it alone.

Evidence-based arguments about the folly of leaving the world's largest single market cut no ice for many on this island, which, having once dragooned a large part of the globe into an empire and now at the end of nearly a century of retreat, seeks to cut ties with any union larger than that in its own name.

Hence the paradox of Brexit. The EU, the partner that has less to lose, seems more disconsolate about the divorce, while the one that has more, the UK, seems jubilant about its enhanced power to legislate and trade without interference from Brussels. But both sides stand to lose in the medium to long-term.

For now, history speaks loudest in the voice of those 17 million or so denizens of the UK for whom Brexit represents a long-awaited "Independence Day" and a chance to sing "(Self) Rule Britannia" with pride and joy in the great history of their world-shaking island.

Chandradas Choudhury is a novelist and writer based in New Delhi. His work also appears in *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Washington Post*.
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The Line fulfills humankind's need to change

DR. THEODORE KARASIK

Saudi Arabia's newly unveiled The Line project has been three years in the making, from design and concept to announcement. It will serve multiple purposes, but the most important is in terms of its role in the Kingdom's future hopes and vision.

The Line, construction of which is to begin by March, will rewrite the concept of the city. The coronavirus disease's (COVID-19) impact on global societies is bringing to the fore new ideas about how to use space in a healthier way. Usually, cities are laid out concentrically or in grids, but The Line goes from point A on NEOM's Red Sea coast to point B in the interior.

The project was announced this week by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who said The Line will benefit from \$500 billion in support from the Saudi Public Investment Fund, which owns NEOM, and local and global investors over the next 10 years. He said that the project is expected to add \$48 billion to the Kingdom's gross domestic product and will create 380,000 jobs.

NEOM, in northwest Saudi Arabia, is a 26,500 square km high-tech development with several zones, including industrial and logistics areas, planned for completion in 2025. The Line itself is billed as a project that will accelerate human progress by reconceptualizing the use of space in a city, augmented by the use of technologies such as biometrics. The Line will serve as a model for other similar concepts around the world once it bears actionable results.

Linear cities are not a new idea, but now that COVID-19 is ravaging the planet and will continue to challenge countries for several years to come, the time for such projects is now. The ideas surrounding The Line are experimental, but the concept of its use of space provides a unique way of examining urban layout in conjunction with modern technology.

This is the first time in two centuries that a major urban development has been designed around people, not roads. The idea is that all essential daily services, such as schools, medical clinics and leisure facilities, as well as green spaces, will be within a five-minute walk for everybody. Urban living will become



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more about time, health and business thanks to this linear design.

As previously announced by the Saudi government, NEOM is to be home and workplace to more than a million residents from around the world. It will include towns and cities, ports and enterprise zones, research centers, sports and entertainment venues, and tourist destinations. As a hub for innovation, entrepreneurs, business leaders and companies will come to research, incubate and commercialize new technologies and enterprises in groundbreaking ways. The inland water access, which will go all the way to the end of The Line, illustrates the efficiency of its use of space from sea to desert in a spoke-like nature. This futuristic concept will help restructure the use of space in a high-tech, climate-sensitive manner.

The idea of NEOM and The Line functioning within an ethos and embracing a culture of exploration, risk-taking and diversity is related to the ideas of free trade zone regulations. The Line, alongside NEOM itself, is about progressive laws that are compatible with international norms and are conducive to economic growth in the post-COVID-19 era. The status of The Line in terms of regulatory law will help to create new opportunities for entrepreneurship.

NEOM is to become a hub of renewable energy generation, as well as a development ground for smart technologies that will facilitate the transition to a low-carbon energy system. Last year, NEOM announced plans for the world's largest green hydrogen plant: A \$5 billion venture that is expected to produce 650 tons of the fuel per day by 2025, making the Kingdom a world leader in the field.

Overall, The Line is unique. The idea of a linear city will help humankind as it adjusts to co-existence with the COVID-19 pathogen, while also coping with the need to address climate change and the very way that we live our lives. It is time for a change, as demonstrated by how the COVID-19 pandemic hotwired the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). The Line is a byproduct of the requirements of the 4IR and its global impact.

No time to spare for the Paris climate promise

MARY ROBINSON

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has turned the world upside down. But it has also shown us that, when there is a political consensus for action, human ingenuity and innovation can be deployed at the scale and speed needed to meet global challenges.

With unprecedented speed, we have developed, tested and begun to deploy multiple effective vaccines for COVID-19. Now we must bring the same resolve to bear on fighting the other great existential threat to humanity: Climate change.

However, even at the most recent Climate Ambition Summit on Dec. 12, many leaders' commitments fell far short of what is needed to meet this collective challenge. To be sure, the EU, the UK and even some of the smaller countries that are most vulnerable to climate change have significantly strengthened their 2030 emissions reduction targets. But the US, Japan, China and other major greenhouse gas emitters still need to follow suit. Given the crisis we face, there are no more excuses for delay or prevarication.

Just over five years ago, after long and painstaking negotiations, the world came together to conclude the Paris climate agreement. This was one of the greatest triumphs of multilateral diplomacy in recent years, but it must not be taken for granted. Without an even greater commitment to action, the legacy of Paris risks being squandered altogether.

The events of the intervening half-decade have created a geopolitical landscape that would be unrecognizable to those who gathered in Paris. Back then, words like "coronavirus" or "Brexit" would have elicited little more than a puzzled shrug. But we cannot allow these developments to obscure the continuing and increasingly acute need for climate action, especially climate finance. More than a decade ago, the world's richest countries pledged to mobilize \$100 billion per year by 2020 to assist poorer countries with climate adaptation and mitigation efforts. That deadline has now passed and these countries



Mary Robinson, a former president of Ireland and UN high commissioner for human rights, is Chair of The Elders, ©Project Syndicate

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have yet to fulfill their promise.

Still, there is hope. I am delighted that US President-elect Joe Biden has reaffirmed his commitment to rejoining the Paris agreement immediately upon taking office. American leadership is sorely needed after four wasted years of unnecessary destruction. But other rich countries must not use the renewed focus on the US as an alibi for backpedaling on their own commitments.

Moreover, all countries must this year give clear proof that they are reviewing and seeking to heighten the ambitions of their nationally determined contributions — the voluntary instrument through which signatories will uphold their commitments under the Paris agreement.

Solidarity and justice lie at the heart of both the Paris accord and the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, which were also agreed in 2015. These principles, and the responsibilities they entail, are more important than ever as we chart a sustainable recovery from the shock of COVID-19.

The blunt truth is that we have wasted too much time in the five years since Paris. The policies we need to cut emissions have been fitful, inconsistent and uncoordinated. But the climate crisis, like COVID-19, observes no borders and is indifferent to national sovereignty.

While attention has properly been focused on the virus, the world has also witnessed ever more extreme weather phenomena, from wildfires in Australia and the US to the costliest storm on record in the Bay of Bengal, which forced 2 million people to evacuate their homes. We have all become acutely and intimately aware of the fragility of human existence and the extent to which, across borders and generations, our fates are interconnected.

As we move from Paris to 2030, global leaders, businesses and citizens alike should expect to be judged by the actions that are (or are not) taken today. Neither our descendants nor the planet will tolerate more selfish short-termism.



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ARAB NEWS

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The availability of economic opportunities in our region is an ideal opportunity for American companies to invest and expand their business.

Zayed bin Rashid Al-Zayani
Bahraini minister of industry,
commerce and tourism



Business

GREEN ENERGY

NEOM to put Saudi Arabia on top of global hydrogen production

Venture with Air Products, ACWA to provide sustainable solution for global transport sector

Asharq Dubai

Mohammad A. Abunayyan, the chairman of ACWA Power, has said that a new hydrogen project partnership with NEOM and Air Products will lead to Saudi Arabia being at the forefront of green energy production and exports.

In an interview with Asharq News, Abunayyan said "NEOM city enjoys a strategic location for renewable energy, especially with wind and solar energy, which will enable the joint venture to convert renewable energy into green hydrogen with new technology for the first time."

FASTFACTS

- The project will produce 650 tons per day of carbon-free hydrogen and 1.2 million tons of green ammonia per year, reducing carbon dioxide emissions by the equivalent of 3 million tons per year.

- It will be equally owned by NEOM, ACWA and Air Products.

He added that the new technology "will be utilized in the supply chains of the NEOM project, and will be the beginning of the Kingdom's green energy leadership in the world."

The chairman noted that the project is now in its early stages, with completion expected by 2025.



An artistic rendition of the futuristic NEOM city, which aims to catapult Saudi Arabia at the forefront of green energy production and exports.

"This project does not only benefit NEOM but the whole world, as its green energy products will be exported everywhere."

In July 2020, Air Products, in conjunction with ACWA Power and NEOM, announced the signing of an agreement for a \$6 billion world-scale green hydrogen-based

ammonia production facility powered by renewable energy. The planning and design phases are currently underway to start construction in the industrial zone.

This joint venture is the first step for the NEOM region to become a key player in the global hydrogen market. The business is



This project does not only benefit NEOM but the whole world.

Mohammad A. Abunayyan
ACWA Power chairman

expected to build an environmentally friendly hydrogen production facility to provide sustainable solutions for the global transport sector and to meet the challenges of climate change.

The project, which will be equally owned by the three partners, will export hydrogen

to the world market for use as a biofuel that feeds transportation systems.

It will produce 650 tons per day of carbon-free hydrogen and 1.2 million tons of green ammonia per year, reducing carbon dioxide emissions by the equivalent of 3 million tons per year.

SAVINGS

Dubai bank launches scheme to encourage savings

Shane McGinley Dubai

Dubai's largest bank has launched a marketing campaign offering customers the chance to win Bentley cars or Breitling Aviator watches in a bid to encourage them to boost their savings.

The initiative by Emirates NBD follows a recent report showing the negative impact that the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has had on many bank balances.

Bank customers are being given the opportunity to win three luxury Bentley Bentayga SUVs and 75 Breitling Aviator 8 Chronographs as part of a marketing drive that will run until the end of May.

Existing customers with an average balance of at least AED100,000 (\$27,229) will get the chance to enter a draw to win a Bentley every time they increase their balance by AED50,000 in a current or savings account or AED100,000 in an online savings account or fixed deposit account during the length of the campaign.

Alternatively, new or existing customers with a balance of AED25,000 and who boost their coffers by AED5,000 could bag a Breitling Aviator 8 Chronograph.

"We are committed to making available exciting opportunities for our customers while also encouraging them to adopt good financial habits especially during

these times of uncertainty," said Suvo Sarkar, Emirates NBD's senior executive vice president and group head of retail banking and wealth management.

The promotion comes in the wake of a survey last month, which revealed that more than half of UAE residents said the financial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic had negatively impacted their savings.

The research by wealth

Perceived barriers to saving including expenses, loans, and a poor knowledge about savings instruments are drawbacks.

Mohammed Qasim Al-Ali
National Bonds CEO

management company Quilter found that just 13 percent of respondents had increased their savings in 2020. More than a quarter (27 percent) said they had lost income so were unable to save, while 25 percent had saved less than in the previous year.

Brendan Dolan, global distribution director of Quilter International, said:

"This research highlights how badly the pandemic has impacted people's savings habits. Millions of people have experienced a fall in income and the economy suffered a huge economic shock when the UAE went into lockdown.

"It is, therefore, no surprise that more than half of people had to readjust their saving habits to cope in these unusual and difficult circumstances."

Government investment company National Bonds has carried out its savings index since 2011. Its most recent results in 2019 showed that even before the COVID-19 pandemic some UAE residents were already struggling to save as much as they had hoped. Its research found that just 23 percent of expats who moved to the UAE for savings purposes were positive about putting aside what they had budgeted for, while 68 percent of total respondents said they believed that it was becoming harder to save money each month.

"Perceived barriers to saving including expenses, loans, and a poor knowledge about savings instruments are drawbacks," Mohammed Qasim Al-Ali, the CEO of National Bonds, said in May 2019.



TRADE TIES

Bahrain, US sign deal to establish commercial zone

Asharq Dubai

The Bahraini Ministry of Industry, Commerce, and Tourism and the US Department of Commerce on Tuesday signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to promote bilateral business by establishing an American trade zone in Bahrain.

The new zone is aimed at boosting economic, commercial, and industrial cooperation between the two countries, the Bahrain News Agency (BNA) reported.

Under the terms of the MoU, the US and Bahrain will promote the zone as a regional hub for trade, manufacturing, logistics, and distribution among American companies in Bahrain, the GCC, and beyond.

The inking of the MoU will further reinforce the partnership between the two nations, which have a long history of solid economic and security cooperation.

The volume of merchandise traded between the US and Bahrain reached \$2.45 billion in 2019, with an additional \$1.5 billion in services, according to 2020 statistics.

Bahraini Minister of Industry, Commerce, and Tourism Zayed bin Rashid Al-Zayani, said: "The availability of economic opportunities in our region is an ideal opportunity for American companies to



The volume of merchandise traded between the US and Bahrain reached \$2.45 billion in 2019, with an additional \$1.5 billion in services. Reuters/File

HIGHLIGHT

The US and Bahrain will promote the zone as a regional hub for trade, manufacturing, logistics, and distribution among American companies in Bahrain, the GCC, and beyond.

invest and expand their business by establishing the US trade zone in Bahrain."

He noted that the deal would usher in wider horizons for strengthening joint trade relations,

in accordance with the advantages of a free trade agreement between the two countries.

US Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross highlighted the importance of Bahrain as a strategic and commercial partner of the US and said that the platform would maintain stability and ensure the progress of American trade in the Gulf region.

"The signing of this MoU comes to reinforce this common commitment and the close relationship between the two countries," he added.

Business Saudi Arabia

ECONOMY

Saudi Arabia sees 55 percent surge in tech startup funding

Kingdom defies COVID-19 slowdown, as volume of deals also increased by 35 percent

Arab News Riyadh

Saudi Arabia recorded a 35 percent year-on-year increase in the number of investment deals in the technology startup sector last year, according to a new industry report.

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

Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Egypt were the largest markets, accounting for 68 percent of total deals. However, while the Kingdom saw the number of investment deals increase by over a third, the UAE and Egypt saw their volume decrease by 17 percent and 10 percent, respectively.

When it comes to the monetary value of the deals, the UAE and Egypt still dominated overall, but Saudi Arabia recorded a surge of 55 percent year-on-year to \$152 million. By comparison the value of deals in the UAE rose 5 percent and Egyptian funding increased 31 percent.

Nabeel Koshak, CEO at Saudi Venture Capital Co., said: "Saudi Arabia is witnessing an increase in the quality and quantity in the deal flow of startups. I am thrilled by the distinguished entrepreneurs who are creating fast growth and scalable startups. Despite the slowdown of COVID-19, Saudi Arabia saw a record increase in venture capital funding (55 percent) in 2020 compared with 2019."

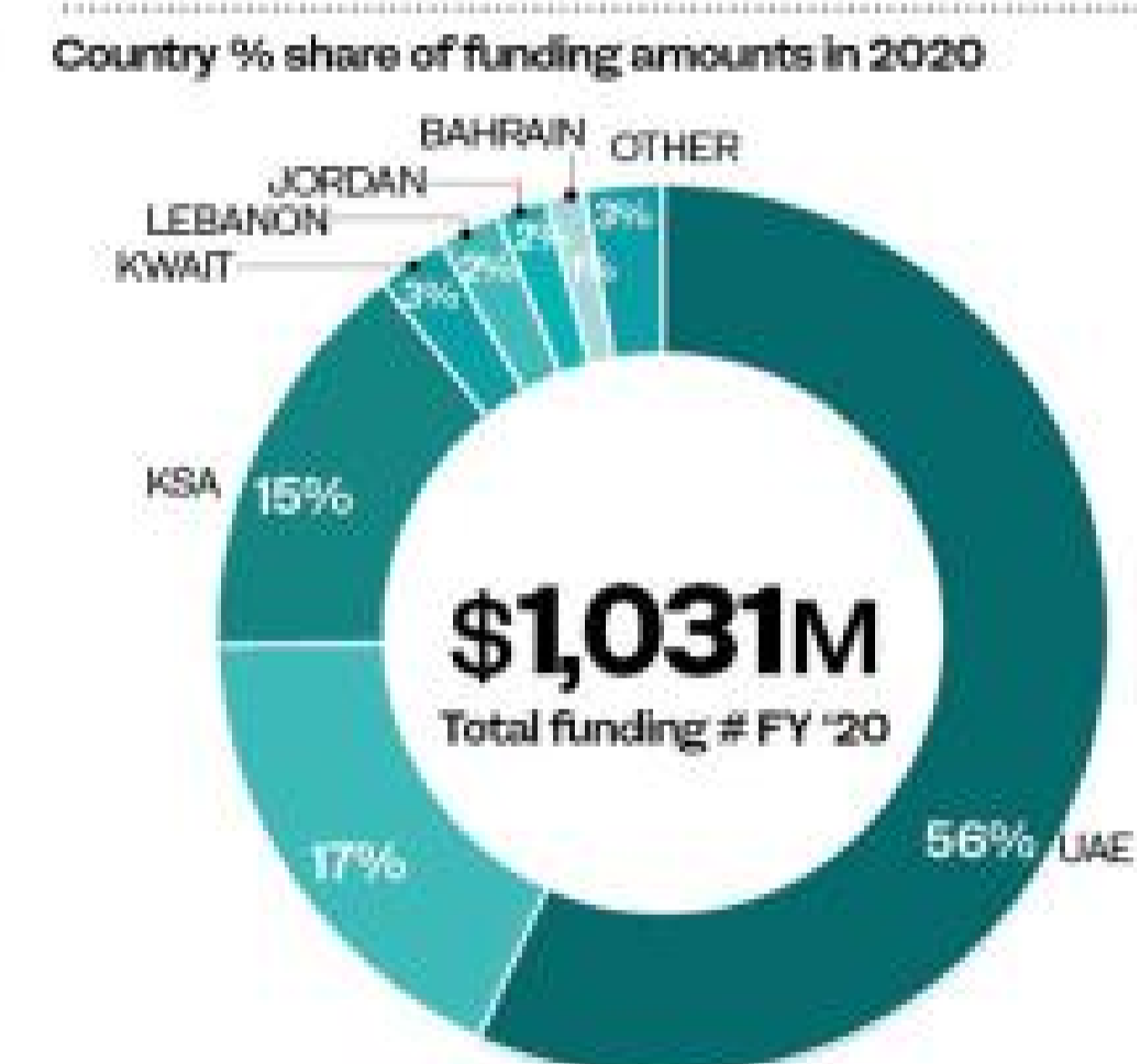
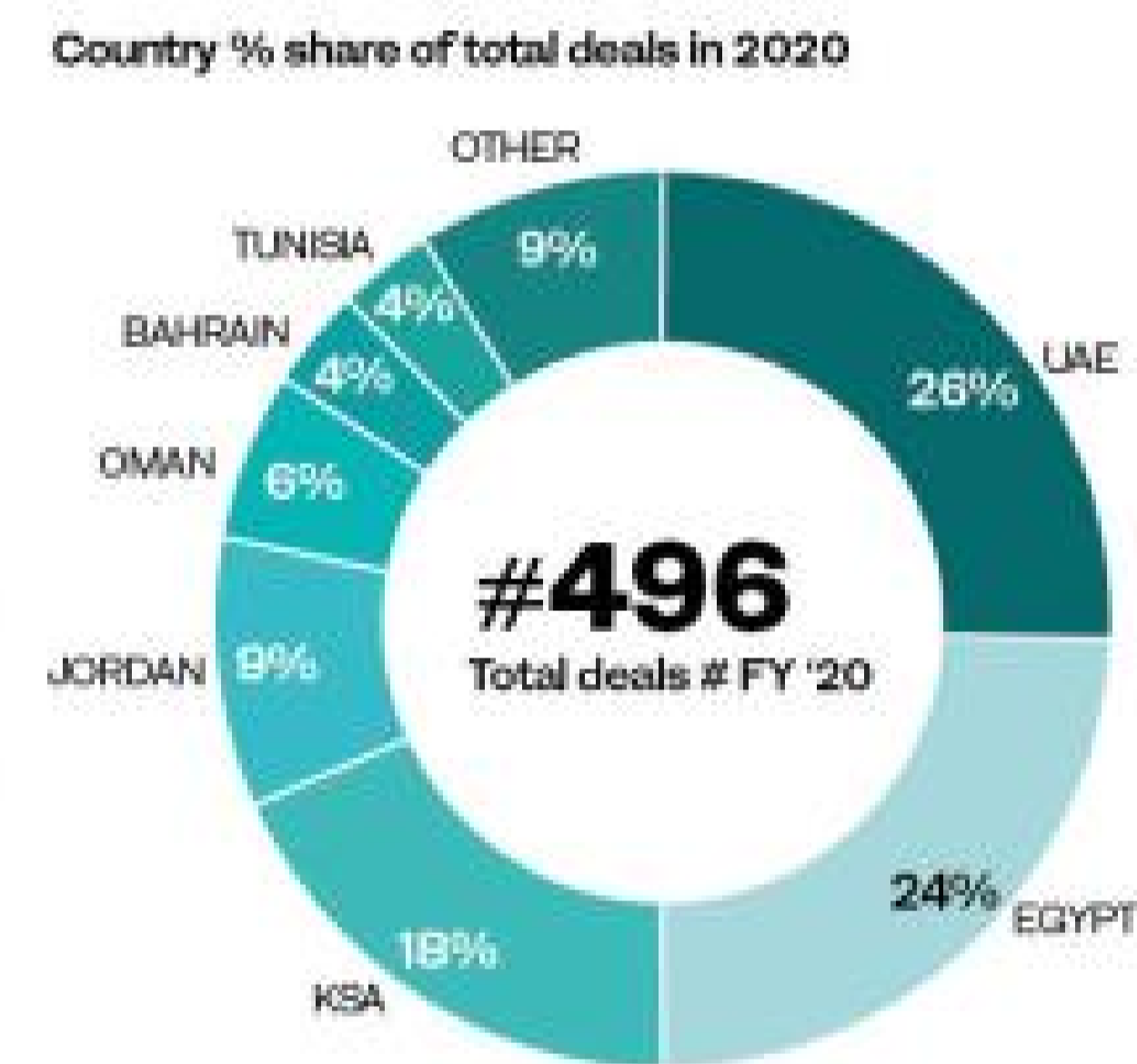
Overall, across the MENA region, 2020 saw a record of just over \$1 billion invested in startups, an increase of 13 percent year-on-year. This is despite the volume of deals decreasing by 13 percent over the same period.

The impact of the pandemic can be clearly seen in the data. In the first half of the 2020, \$725 million in funding was raised, an increase of 29 percent compared with \$563 million in the first six months of 2019. In the second half of the year, \$306 million was raised, a decrease of 35 percent compared with the last six months of 2019.

Philip Baboshy, CEO and founder at Magnitt, said: "Exactly one year ago when we published Magnitt's 2019 annual venture report, I predicted that



Magnitt has forecast that Saudi Arabia will overtake Egypt by total number of investments and become second only to the UAE in the rankings. Shutterstock



Source: MAGNITT

Country deal comparison FY 19 vs FY 20

Rank	Rank Change	Country	Absolute YoY change	% Deal Share change
1	+0	UAE	-17%	-1%
2	+0	EGYPT	-10%	+7%
3	+0	KSA	+35%	+6%
4	▲ 1	JORAN	+18%	+2%
5	▲ 3	OMAN	+23%	+2%
6	▲ 1	BAHRAIN	-33%	-1%
7	▼ 1	TUNISIA	-47%	-2%

Country funding comparison FY 19 vs FY 20

Rank	Rank Change	Country	Absolute YoY change	% Deal Share change
1	=0	UAE	+6%	-4%
2	=0	EGYPT	+31%	+2%
3	=0	KSA	+55%	+4%
4	▲ 2	KUWAIT	-14%	-1%
5	▼ 1	LEBANON	-34%	-2%
6	▼ 1	JORDAN	-38%	-2%
7	▼ 1	BAHRAIN	+200%	+7%

ARAB NEWS

VISION 2030

Saudi Aramco investment arm trebles loans to SMEs

Arab News Dubai

Waed, the entrepreneurship arm of Saudi Aramco, trebled the amount of money loaned to startups in the Kingdom last year as part of its bid to support Saudi entrepreneurs and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

The Dhahran-based initiative gave out 12 loans to SMEs, up from four in 2019, with the value surging to SR31 million (\$8.27 million), up from SR10 million in 2019.

In terms of venture capital funding, Waed deployed SR43 million to SMEs, up 34 percent year-on-year.

Established in 2011, Waed has deployed more than SR375 million to Saudi SMEs as part of Aramco's contribution to the Vision 2030 goal of diversifying the Kingdom's economy away from hydrocarbons.

"I am grateful for the confidence and support we receive from Aramco and the Kingdom, which enables Waed to fulfil its unique pioneering role as an advocate for innovative new businesses that localize technologies and services

HIGHLIGHTS

● Waed deployed SR43 million to SMEs, up 34 percent year-on-year.

● Established in 2011, Waed has deployed more than SR375 million to Saudi SMEs.

which are needed in Saudi Arabia and can help improve quality of life," said Wassim Basrawi, Waed's managing director. "In a very challenging year, I am proud of the Waed family, which includes my team and our resilient entrepreneurs, for rising to the challenges and keeping us on track to deliver an even greater impact in 2021."

Following the onset of COVID-19, Waed adopted a virtual training model for its entrepreneurs, attracting 60 new mentors to its online training platform.

In December, Waed signed a memorandum of understanding to collaborate with OQAL, the largest network of angel investors in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, with the goal of creating a new pipeline of potential deals.

Looking to 2021, Waed's latest initiative is its new Venture Builder, which is described as a breeding ground for promising Saudi startups, providing entrepreneurs and SMEs with back-office services.

INVESTMENT

Florida's BurgerFi set to expand into Saudi Arabia

Arab News Riyadh

US-based gourmet restaurant chain BurgerFi International is set to expand into Saudi Arabia with the signing of a new agreement with Food Supplies Co. to open six restaurants in the Kingdom.

The first Saudi BurgerFi outlet is due to open in Burj Alfardan in Alkhobar City in the fourth quarter of 2021, with five further outlets expected to follow shortly afterward.

The Palm Beach brand, which was established in 2011, currently has two outlets in Kuwait.

"While our main focus is to grow from our dominant position as the market leader in Florida in

the 'Better Burger' category and expand domestically, we anticipate we will also pursue strategic opportunities both in other parts of the US and countries beyond our borders," Julio Ramirez, CEO of BurgerFi, said in a press statement.

"We currently operate in the Middle East and believe that we have selected the strongest partners to develop the brand in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia."

Food Supplies CEO Thamer Al-Hathal said that his company was attracted to the BurgerFi brand because of its unique approach to food production and preparation.

"They use beef that is free of



BurgerFi has 125 outlets around the world and plans to open 25 more in 2021.

FASTFACTS

● The first Saudi BurgerFi outlet is due to open in Burj Alfardan in Alkhobar City in the fourth quarter of 2021, with five further outlets expected to follow shortly afterward.

● The restaurant chain became a public company in December 2020 and is now traded on the Nasdaq stock exchange.

hormones, steroids and antibiotics. We have such a huge demand for this type of concept in Saudi Arabia and we know that BurgerFi will fill that void," he said.

"BurgerFi is an extremely fast-growing concept, and we are excited to get ahead of the game and be part of this revolutionary restaurant and grow it in the Middle East. We see this as a long-term partnership," Al-Hathal added.

BurgerFi has 125 outlets around the world and plans to open 25 more in 2021.

The restaurant chain became a public company in December 2020 and is now traded on the Nasdaq stock exchange.

Business News



The World Bank has cut its 2021 global growth forecast to 4 percent and said the rise in output could be as little as 1.6 percent if there were vaccine delays. AP

OUTLOOK

Industry chiefs optimistic about economy in 2021

Call for global solidarity to mitigate effects of pandemic

Reuters London

Vaccines and fresh economic stimulus promised by US President-elect Joe Biden will give the global economy a chance to put the coronavirus pandemic behind it in 2021, policymakers and industry leaders told the Reuters Next conference.

Their optimism came despite a resurgence in COVID-19 cases that has prompted the World Bank to downgrade its growth forecast for this year and warn that delays in vaccination programs could pinch recovery even further.

The head of German engineering giant Siemens AG said China is currently driving the world economy but was optimistic about recovery in the US, where Biden has promised a faster rollout of vaccines and more economic stimulus.

"In the US, they are holding all

the cards and if they put the money to work in a wise way, there is going to be a very, very, strong second half of 2021 and especially 2022," Siemens Chief Executive Joe Kaeser said.

Europe and the US both now need to "get their act together and put the billions and trillions of dollars and euros which have been promised to work," he told the digital forum.

The World Bank last week cut its 2021 global growth forecast to 4 percent from 4.2 percent and said the rise in output could be as little as 1.6 percent if there were vaccine delays.

European Central Bank President Christine Lagarde nevertheless stuck to the ECB's existing forecasts for the eurozone, provided lockdown measures are lifted by the end of March and vaccines adequately distributed.

She cited as positives the fact that, after elections in the state of Georgia, Biden could count on US Senate support for his economic

HIGHLIGHTS

● Europe and the US urged to work together to lift global economy.

● Policymakers call on the developed countries to help poor nations.

program and that Britain and the EU had managed to avert a no-deal Brexit on Dec. 31.

"Some of the uncertainties we had on the horizon that made us look at the future with a dark cloud over our heads, some of that has been cleared," Lagarde told the conference.

"From that perspective we start on a more positive basis than what some would like to look at," she added, vowing that the ECB had the capacity to add emergency stimulus if needed.

The ECB sees growth of 3.9 percent this year across the 19 countries that use the euro

currency, more optimistic than many private sector economists.

China loans

Asked about the risk that developing nations could be left behind in the economic recovery as their people struggle to pay for COVID-19 vaccines, Lagarde said it would "backfire" on the rich world if they did not show solidarity.

"It is in the self-interest of developed countries to make sure that low-income, developing, fragile states have access to vaccination as it is needed," the ECB chief said.

World Bank Chief Economist Carmen Reinhart said increasing debt distress in many of those countries meant that China, now the world's largest official creditor, would need to start restructuring the debt it is owed.

"What I think China will need to do to confront this is what previous other creditors in the past had done, which is you have to restructure," Reinhart told a panel on economic inequality.

ENERGY

Economic recovery will bring oil demand back to 2019 levels, says IEA official

Reuters London

Oil prices were broadly steady on Wednesday as rising global coronavirus disease (COVID-19) cases took the shine off an earlier rally spurred by a bigger-than-expected drop in US crude inventories.

Oil producers face an unprecedented challenge to balance supply and demand as factors including the pace and response to COVID-19 vaccines cloud the outlook, an official with International Energy Agency (IEA) said.

"Producers are grappling with huge uncertainty about where this goes from here," said Tim Gould, head of energy supply outlooks and investment.

"That's not just in terms of economic recovery but indicators



Crude stocks in the US dropped by 5.8 million barrels last week to around 484.5 million barrels. Reuters/File

we wouldn't necessarily normally be looking at: (Such as the) levels of trust in different countries about vaccines."

Crude stocks in the US dropped by 5.8 million barrels last week to around 484.5 million barrels, data from the American Petroleum

Institute showed late on Tuesday.

That was far more than analysts' expectations in a Reuters poll for a fall of 2.3 million barrels.

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and allies such as Russia agreed this month to cut crude production

through March in a bid to match abundant supply with demand which has sagged amid surging virus cases while vaccination programs get underway.

While the pandemic has prompted some energy majors and watchdogs to predict that a peak in the world's demand for oil has been brought nearer or may have already come and gone in 2019, Gould said the IEA disagreed.

"As things stand, with the pace of change we see on the structural side is not enough in our view to deliver a peak anytime soon."

"Growth in the economy, recovery in the economy will sooner or later bring oil demand back to 2019 levels. The 2020s in our view are the last decade in which you are likely to see increasing oil demand," he added.

BizBriefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Pharmaceutical

UAE to boost number of generic drugs factories

The UAE is keen on expanding the number of factories producing generic drugs in the country, said UAE health official Dr. Amin Hussein Al-Amiri.

The assistant undersecretary of the UAE's Ministry of Health and Prevention's Public Health Policy and Licenses was quoted as saying, "the provision of generic drugs enables patients to receive appropriate and affordable treatment, owing to the lower costs of these medicines."

The list of generic medicines and drugs available in the UAE currently totals 6,176 and the number of factories in the medical and pharmaceutical manufacturing sector has reached 16.

According to IMARC, an Indian research firm, the GCC generic drug market was valued at \$3.94 billion in 2020 and Saudi Arabia was the largest in the region.

AN Dubai

Housing

Off-plan villas in Red Sea project for sale soon

The Red Sea Development Co. (TRSDC) is expected to launch the sale of off-plan villas in the Red Sea megaproject as of next year, said Ahmad Darwish, chief of staff at TRSDC in an interview.

"Phase 1 will not offer lots of villas for sale, as the company is still in the process of building facade designs and providing the project services," Darwish said, expecting stronger demand by 2030.

TRSDC is one of the major attractions of the Vision 2030 strategy to diversify Saudi Arabia away from oil dependency.

The Red Sea project is expected to eventually inject SR22 billion (\$5.8 billion) into the Saudi economy and lead to the creation of 70,000 jobs directly and indirectly in the Kingdom's workforce.

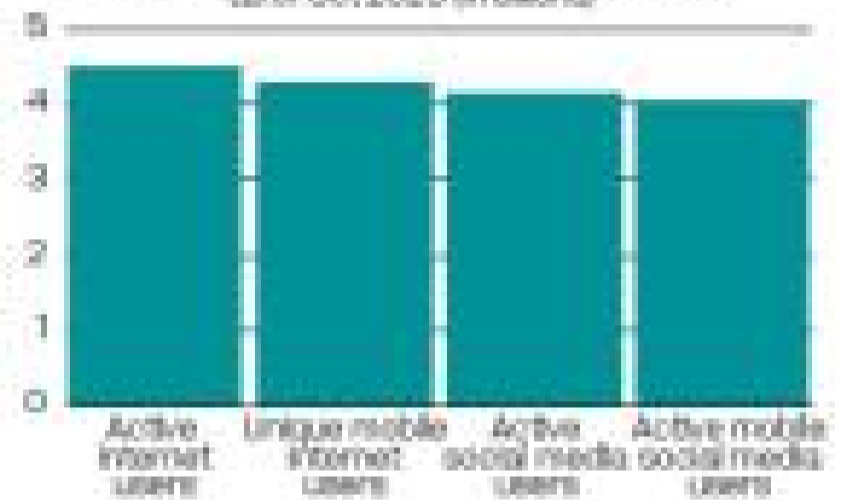
Argaam

Chart of THE DAY

Almost 4.66 billion people were active internet users as of October 2020, encompassing 59 percent of the global population.

Source: Statista

GLOBAL DIGITAL POPULATION as of Oct 2020 (in billion)



What We're Reading

FOR THE TRAIN OR ON THE PLANE

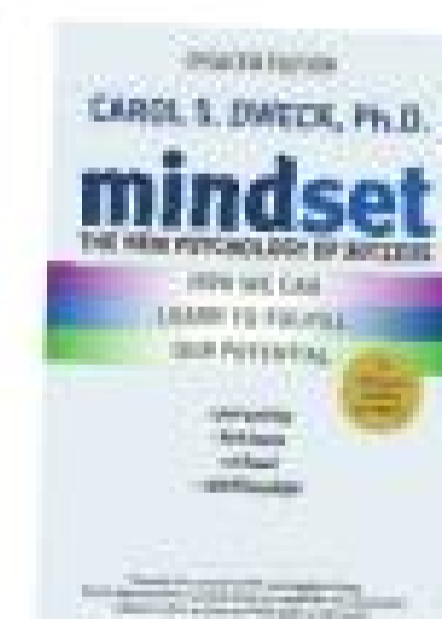
Mindset

CAROL S. DWECK

After decades of research, world-renowned Stanford University psychologist Carol S. Dweck, Ph.D., discovered a simple but groundbreaking idea: The power of mindset. In this brilliant book, she shows how success in school, work, sports, the arts, and almost

every area of human endeavor can be dramatically influenced by how we think about our talents and abilities, according

to a review published on goodreads.com. Dweck introduces a phenomenon she calls false growth mindset and guides people toward adopting a deeper, truer growth mindset.



Transport

Minister OKs Saudization of ride-hailing apps

Saudi Transport Minister Saleh Al-Jasser, who is also chairman of the Public Transport Authority (PTA), approved 100 percent localization of the ride-hailing activity in the Kingdom.

He approved limiting work to nationals with respect to public and private vehicles or through facilities, according to SPA.

The percentage of non-Saudis working in this field fell to 4 percent only of the total workforce, the minister noted.

Moreover, an agreement was signed with the Social Development Bank on funding the purchase of private vehicles.

The ministry also signed an agreement with the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development and the Human Resources Fund to provide subsidies for Saudis, at 40 percent of their income, or SR2,400 (\$640) maximum, for those providing rides in rush hours. **Argaam**

Recovery

China auto sales head for rebound

China's vehicle sales fell for a third consecutive year in 2020, but year-on-year sales rose for a ninth straight month in December as the country continued to lead the global automobile industry's recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

China's auto sales fell 1.9 percent to 25.3 million vehicles last year from 2019.

Sales in the world's biggest auto market rose 6.4 percent in December from a year earlier to reach 2.83 million vehicles. But the pace of growth slowed sharply from a 12.6 percent year-on-year rise in November.

China's automobile industry was hard hit by the pandemic in early last year but started to bounce back in the second quarter of 2020.

Automakers reported sales growth in China last year.

Reuters

Cinépolis is proud to be contributing to the Kingdom's Vision 2030 by providing moviegoers with unrivaled experiences.

Alejandro Aguilera
CEO of Cinépolis Gulf



Corporate

PRESS RELEASES FROM THE WORLD OF BUSINESS AND COMMERCE

RECREATION

Cinépolis to invest \$300m in local cinema expansion

Global movie theater chain Cinépolis Cinemas recently opened two new cinemas in the Kingdom, in Jeddah's Al-Jamea Plaza and Dammam's Lulu Mall. The Mexican movie exhibitor, the first in Latin America and the third largest globally, has announced an investment of \$300 million in Saudi Arabia over the next five years, to expand in the country in partnership with Al-Hokair Group and regional partner Al-Tayer Group.

The expansion of Cinépolis into the Saudi market will help boost the economy through the creation of jobs and recreational spend, and is in line with the objectives of the Kingdom's Vision 2030, which aims at diversifying the economy by leveraging non-oil sectors and promoting culture and entertainment.

Alejandro Aguilera, CEO of Cinépolis Gulf, said the launch of Cinépolis Cinemas in Saudi Arabia reflects the new entertainment strategy of the Kingdom. He said the company plans to launch 200 new screens by 2023, in addition to recruiting more Saudi nationals in the entertainment sector.

"Cinépolis is proud to be contributing to the Kingdom's Vision 2030 by providing moviegoers with unrivaled experiences as Saudi Arabia increases its culture and entertainment offerings. Cinépolis looks forward to offering fun, innovative and stellar services to its customers as well as to enrich the entertainment options throughout the Kingdom," he added.

The opening of both cinemas coincides with the launch of Cinépo-



Cinépolis Cinemas' colorful junior auditorium is an ideal destination for a family movie night, with a range of seating options and play facilities for children.

lis' new website and mobile application, Cinépolis Gulf, available for both Android and iOS users. The user-friendly platforms enable guests to not only book the latest movies in advance but also to purchase their movie snacks online, facilitating a contactless experience

with a reduced waiting time.

Cinépolis Cinemas offers guests reclining leather seats with full optimal viewing angles between the rows. The engrossing view of the screen is complemented with immersive audiovisual technologies to create a unique movie experience.

In addition, the colorful junior auditorium is an ideal destination for a family movie night, with a range of seating options and play facilities for children, including bean-bag seating, a large slide, a ball pit, and a private party room.

Guests can enjoy a range of pre-

mium and delicious movie treats from a carefully curated menu.

Apart from the all-time classics like popcorn, nachos, and hotdogs, Cinépolis Cinemas also offers a selection of gourmet items, such as dynamite shrimp, edamame, chicken tikka paninis, and sweet crépes.

Corporate Briefs

THE BEST OF THE BEST

Retail Therapy

Giordano opens mega flagship store in Jeddah

Giordano's newest flagship store, their largest in the Kingdom, has opened in Jeddah's Corniche Commercial Center.

Spread across 3,600 square feet (334 square meters), the outlet has a cutting-edge design with a fresh look, aiming to redefine simplicity while embracing a more classic concept. There is ample space for product displays and customer interaction, in addition to room for larger, more comfortable fitting rooms. Energy-efficient LED lights enhance the customer experience while minimizing the store's carbon footprint.

"Our customers have been the main focus in the design of our new 'CIM' (customers in mind) stores. Giordano embodies simplicity in design and quality in substance, and we have endeavored to improve our customers' shopping experience, enabling them to mix and match items and avail of excellent quality apparel at great value," said Ahmedullah Abdul Hadi, chief operating officer, Giordano Saudi Arabia.

Digital Training

PwC's Academy wins CertNexus' ATP award

PwC's Academy Middle East was named the "Most Innovative Authorized Training Partner" (ATP) by globally recognized professional body CertNexus at the annual Authorized Training Partner Meeting and Award Ceremony held virtually from Rochester, New York.

PwC's Academy, the talent and skills development business of PwC, launched the GCC region's first qualification for artificial intelligence (AI) certified by CertNexus in 2020. Aiming to bridge a widening skills gap, the qualification for Certified Artificial Intelligence Practitioner (CAIP), equips local talent with the knowledge and skills for practical application of AI in the workplace. Amanda Line, partner, PwC's Academy, said: "Digital training is an integral element of our training portfolio, and has been for a number of years. This reflects the alignment of PwC's Academy with many initiatives introduced by the governments across the GCC, including the UAE Strategy for Artificial Intelligence centered on making the UAE the first in the field of AI across diverse sectors driving the economy, and Saudi Arabia's National Strategy for Data and Artificial Intelligence aiming to train 20,000 AI experts."

Wireless Technology

Belkin launches new Soundform, Boost Charge products

Belkin, the connected things division within Belkin International, has unveiled two new products across its Soundform audio portfolio and Boost Charge mobile power collection, adding new device location features utilizing Apple's Find My network, and expanding its lineup of MagSafe compatible products. In addition, Linksys, the connected home division within Belkin International, is introducing the next generation of its award-winning motion sensing technology in Linksys Aware.

The Soundform Freedom True Wireless Earbuds offer an enhanced listening experience with custom-built drivers, 8-hour nonstop play time, environmental noise cancellation, and Qi wireless charging with an additional 20 hours of charge.

INNOVATION FOR IMPACT

MITEF Saudi Arabia announces semifinalists

The MITEF Saudi Arabia, a program of the global network of MIT Enterprise Forum, in collaboration with Bab Rizq Jameel, recently announced the semifinalists in the competition's three tracks: Startups, Ideas, and Social Enterprises. The competition will be holding its closing ceremony virtually on March 6 under the patronage of Abdullah A. Al-Swaha, minister of communications and information technology.

The Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (MCIT) will be represented by Deputy Minister of Communications and Information Technology for Future Jobs and Digital Entrepreneurship Dr. Ahmed Al-theneyan.

The semifinalists were selected by a jury composed of 100 business and academic experts from all over the world, who evaluated more than 500 projects against the competition criteria, which are cre-



To qualify for the competition, applicants must present an innovative project that is scalable and capable of making a positive impact on the community.

ativity, potential to expand and the positive impact on the community.

The second round of judging will be held on Feb. 20 to announce the names of the finalists (27 teams). The third round will be held on March 3, after the virtual briefing sessions and the business accelerator from Jan. 9 to Feb. 13. A Startup Investment Forum will be held on March 4, 5 and 6.

Bayan Alghamdi, head of entre-

preneurship programs and MITEF Saudi at Community Jameel, said: "This year, the MITEF Saudi Arabia competition saw remarkable progress in terms of the quality of entries in various categories and fields, including e-commerce, education technologies, consumer services, productivity applications, in addition to digital technologies and healthcare.

"The competition is organized

NUMBER

100

business and academic experts from all over the world evaluated more than 500 projects to select the semifinalists of the 5th MITEF Saudi Startup Competition.

in line with the Kingdom's Vision 2030 to support small and medium enterprises. The total number of applicants since the launch of the competition in 2015 has reached more than 8,500 participants from all over Saudi Arabia, thanks to the support of all governmental and private companies. Despite the hard times we have gone through this year due to the global pandemic, entrepreneurs were able to

overcome this challenge with a lot of creativity and innovation that contributed to curbing this pandemic, and we wish all the best for participants and good luck to the semifinalists."

To qualify for the competition, applicants must present an innovative project that is scalable and capable of making a positive impact on the community.

The Saudi startups that qualified for the semifinals of the 5th MITEF Saudi Startup Competition are: Jirah, Nugttah, Grintafy, Future Platform, Winch, Meeza, Hudhud AI, LOGEXA, Linkers IoT, Tafeyette Inc., Spider Connect, Shgard, BashQash, PhysioHome, and Hesba.

Semifinalists in the Ideas track included 15 teams: Genomez, Hydrojeen, Sawty, Estidama, Hakawati Game, Carissimi, Msaha, Themar, Qawam, SARsat, Aquash, Mthmr, White Helmet, Harreef, and Vending Machine Layer.

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

KFUPM Business School partners with IMA to launch CMA program

IMA (Institute of Management Accountants) and the KFUPM Business School (KBS) in Dhahran have signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU), which will see the introduction of the CMA (Certified Management Accountant) program to university students. The partnership is in line with KBS and IMA's global efforts to further academic, educational, and professional initiatives, which will help young students kickstart

their finance and accounting careers by bridging the skills gap during a vital stage of their professional life.

The MoU, signed by Hanadi Khalife, senior director Middle East and India operations at IMA, and Dr. Hesham Merdad, dean of KBS, and overseen by Dr. Najj Al-Shammasi, chairman of the Department of Accounting and Finance at KBS, will facilitate an ongoing exchange of knowledge and expertise between

the two institutions whilst enriching programs at the Department of Accounting and Finance.

"The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a thriving economic state with a well-developed financial sector and KFUPM is a frontline university in the region

Hanadi Khalife, senior director Middle East and India operations at IMA.



that is well known for its academic discipline and prowess," said Khalife. "We are very proud of this association and strongly believe that our collaborative efforts will unlock and enhance career opportunities for KFUPM graduates. The CMA designation is a globally acknowledged and respected credential for finance and accounting professionals, and

we are looking forward to its introduction in the Kingdom."

"At KFUPM Business School, we are focused on working with global domain experts to enhance the learning and employability opportunities for our students," said Dr. Merdad. "We are pleased to partner with IMA, one of the largest and most respected associations focused exclusively on advancing the management accounting profession."

Sport News

SAD DAY

Tributes pour in after death of Saudi horse racing owner Prince Khalid

Daniel Fountain London

The world of horse racing has paid tribute to Saudi owner Prince Khalid bin Abdullah Al-Saud, who died on Tuesday aged 83.

As owner of the hugely accomplished Juddmonte Farms breeding operation, he became one of the most prolific owner-breeders the sport has ever known – able to count legendary horses such as Frankel, Enable and Dancing Brave among his litany of successes.

His passing was announced "with great sadness" by his Newmarket-based operation, with CEO Douglas Erskine Crum

saying: "The whole of Juddmonte feels a huge sense of loss. Prince Khalid will always be remembered as a quiet, dignified, benevolent family man whose horses spoke for him. He leaves a legacy that will stand the test of time."

Crum added: "His contribution to the development of the thoroughbred will have long-lasting effects."

While not the first owner from the Middle East, Prince Khalid quickly became the region's first significant winner and one of its best-known when early in his career he landed his first Classic victory in the 1980 running of the 2000 Guineas on Known Fact.



Prince Khalid bin Abdullah Al-Saud

From that point, with more than 100 Group 1 winners and dozens more Classics wins under his belt, Prince Khalid and Juddmonte became arguably one of Saudi Arabia's biggest sporting success stories.

His famous green-white-pink silks becoming synonymous with some of the most historic moments in horse racing.

In the ensuing years, his operation expanded to Ireland and Kentucky in the US, and continued to produce winning thoroughbreds for the next three decades – a consistent success described by Simon Mockridge, his UK stud director, as "probably one of the jewels of Saudi Arabian history."

Arab News spoke to Mockridge when visiting Juddmonte's Suffolk headquarters Banstead Manor last year, and he was full of praise for the prince's efforts.

"I think globally, if you look at

the impact he has had in the 40 years he has been in operation, he has managed to win every English Classic and every French Classic," Mockridge said.

"And to top it all off, he has had in excess of 500 stakes (the most prestigious and valuable races contested by the best horses) winners. So you have to look at him and say that for a medium-sized breeding operation, he has certainly taken the racing and breeding operations to a very high level."

If Prince Khalid's own attention to detail was a cornerstone of his success, it was matched by his connection with, and his loyalty to, the trainers he paired with.

DAKAR RALLY

Bike leader Nacho retires, Peterhansel nears title

The veteran Mini driver enjoys a 17-minute cushion over Qatari Nasser Al-Attiyah

AFP AULIA

The Dakar Rally motorbike leader Jose Ignacio Cornejo was forced to retire after a fall on Wednesday with Friday's finish line agonizingly close as Stephane Peterhansel appeared to have all but wrapped up the car title.

The veteran Mini driver enjoys a 17-minute cushion over Qatari Nasser Al-Attiyah and a record-extending 14th Dakar crown now looks his to lose.

"Being in the lead is the best position, but it's also where you've got the most to lose," said the 55-year-old Frenchman who was first crowned champion in 1991 before luckless Cornejo was even born.

The 26-year-old Honda rider, nicknamed "Nacho," fell 252km into the 10th stage in Saudi Arabia and although he remounted and completed the stage he agreed with the rally's medical department to retire for fear of having suffered concussion.

The Dakar was living up to its fearsome reputation for the second time in 24 hours as the Chilean

rider was airlifted to hospital where he joined Toby Price, the Australian two-time champion who requires collarbone surgery after suffering a dreadful fall on Tuesday's ninth stage.

Dazed after landing on his head Price received immediate assistance from defending champion Ricky Brabec, who won Wednesday's stage to sit just 50 seconds adrift of his Honda teammate, Argentine Kevin Benavides, ahead of Thursday's penultimate and decisive 11th stage.

Price posted a photo of himself from his hospital bed giving a

thumbs up on Twitter alongside an update on his medical condition.

"Finally broken my 30th bone! I don't remember much but I've got a pretty sore collarbone, shoulder and hand and will need surgery for that..."

He expressed disappointment at not riding into Jeddah, and thanked Brabec and British rider Sam Sunderland for coming to his rescue.

"Thank you @Sundersam and @rickyB357 for stopping to help me, I was off with the fairies that day but I heard you took good care of me!"

Thursday's 11th stage features a 464-kilometer timed special, the

longest of the rally, from Aulua to Yanbu.

Peterhansel is approaching the stage with plenty of caution as to what the rest of the Dakar may have in store for him.

He came in third on Wednesday, finishing in runner-up Al-Attiyah's wing mirrors with the day's honors going to Saudi driver Yazeed Al-Rahji.

"Being in the lead is the best position, but it's also where you've got the most to lose," said Mini driver Peterhansel.

"The pressure never goes away, from the moment you wake up until you go to bed.

EUROPEAN TOUR EVENT

Saudi International 2021 invites regional talent to take part in prestigious golf event

Arab News Jeddah

Golf Saudi announced the professional and amateur invitations on Wednesday for the Saudi International, powered by Softbank Investment Advisers, to take place Feb. 4-7 at Royal Greens Golf & Country Club in King Abdullah Economic City.

Invitees will get the chance to compete alongside a world-class field including world No. 1 and 2020 Masters champion Dustin Johnson, 2020 US Open champion Bryson DeChambeau as well as leading Europeans Tommy Fleetwood, Sergio Garcia, Shane Lowry, Tyrrell Hatton, Ian Poulter, Justin Rose, Henrik Stenson, Lee Westwood and defending champion Graeme McDowell.

Saudi Arabia's Othman Almulki made history in 2019 when he became the first golfer from the Kingdom to turn professional and compete internationally and is receiving his third invitation from Golf Saudi to compete in one of the European Tour's leading events. Saud Al-Sharif will be the second Saudi player in the field, securing his invite as the leading amateur golfer in Saudi Arabia, having impressed on the 2020 MENA Tour, where he shot the lowest round of the day on the fourth event of the 2020 season. He also finished second in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Championship in Oman at the start of the year.

Al-Sharif said: "We are very fortunate to have such a high-profile event in our country, and



Saud Al-Sharif during a practice round with Shane Lowry ahead of the Saudi International 2020 golf tournament. Files/Getty Images

I feel very honored to be representing Saudi Arabia in a field of such high-quality global golfers. This will be my third time playing, and each year I gain such invaluable insight into what it takes to be a top golfer. I hope that all the work I have been putting into my game since last year pays off and

I can make everyone proud by becoming the first player from the Kingdom to make the cut."

One of golf's most talked-about rising stars, America's Akshay Bhatia, who turns 19 at the end of January, will also be in the lineup alongside his hero, Phil Mickelson. Formerly the US's top-ranked

junior, Bhatia turned professional after becoming the first high-school student to compete on the US Walker Cup team in 2019 and is already well-known for his impressive ball-striking and 125-mile-an-hour swing speed.

England's Harry Hall, who also made his professional debut

following the 2019 Walker Cup, has just completed his first year as a professional, having concentrated largely on the PGA Korn Ferry Tour, where he impressed with three top-10 finishes. As he looks to gain his full status on the European Tour, this will offer a wonderful opportunity.

Sport Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST



Tennis

Sabalenka makes it 3 in a row with Abu Dhabi win

Aryna Sabalenka heads to next month's Australian Open brimming with confidence after she captured a third consecutive title by outclassing Veronika Kudermetova 6-2, 6-2 in the Abu Dhabi final on Wednesday to extend her winning streak to 15 straight matches.

The 22-year-old from Belarus is the in-form player at the moment on the WTA Tour and will be looking to translate her success from the smaller events into the majors, where she has yet to make it past the fourth round.

Sabalenka added a ninth singles trophy to her collection and will rise to a career-high No. 7 in the world when the new rankings are released next week. **AFP**

Olympics

Team GB 'hugely confident' about Tokyo Games

Team GB Chef de Mission Mark England said on Wednesday he was confident the Tokyo Olympics would go ahead this year even if they would be different due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We are hugely confident of the Games going ahead in the summer," he told Reuters after announcing the selection of four shooting competitors.

"We certainly wouldn't be announcing athletes if that wasn't the case."

The Olympics, delayed from last year due to the new coronavirus, are scheduled for July 23 to Aug. 8 but Japan has expanded a state of emergency in the Tokyo area with cases of COVID-19 rising steadily. **Reuters**

Premier League

Clubs warned by EPL chief over COVID protocols

Premier League clubs must set an example in adhering to coronavirus protocols or risk sanctions, the league's chief executive has warned.

The EPL sent out new directives last week including demands that players tone down celebrations such as hugging after goals are scored and avoid handshakes and swapping shirts.

EPL chief executive Richard Masters followed that up with a letter to clubs on Tuesday, writing: "We are fortunate to be able to continue to play and bring our competition to fans at home and around the world.

"This brings justified additional scrutiny and the Premier League must take the lead in setting the right example to follow." **AFP**

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The latest James Bond film 'No Time to Die,' starring Daniel Craig, is set to be postponed from its April 2021 release date to sometime in November, according to reports.



& Finally

TheSix

Beard care

Dubai-based e-commerce store glamazle.com just launched a men's grooming section in response to surging demand during the pandemic. If you're worried about going to the barber, here are a few products, some of which are available on the site, to help you care for your beard at home.



Wash it

Mancave UAE's beard and shave soap will help you rinse away debris while leaving behind the natural oils of your beard and skin.



Shape it

If you are looking to line up your beard, you can use a beard shaping tool to help you get that fresh-from-the-barbershop look. You can find a handy one on Mancave UAE's website or glamazle.com.



Soften it

If your beard is a little dry, you can use Saudi brand Diggn't's softener to condition your hair during or after the shower.



Moisturize it

A balm not only tames and protects your beard, but also hydrates the skin under the hair. Diggn't offers scented balms that will hydrate and thicken your beard.



Make it shine

Beard oil protects your hair from tangling and gives it extra shine. Dubai-based The Beard Gear Co. offer scented oil in cedar and lavender.



Brush it

You can either use The Beard Gear Co's beard brush or a comb to finish off your routine.

CLOSE UP

Arab influencers grace stylish Alexander McQueen soiree

Arab News Dubai

British brand Alexander McQueen hosted a grand soiree adjacent to Dubai's Burj Khalifa to toast the launch of its Spring 2021 collection.

Dubai fashion influencers and It-girls were invited to take in the brand's new collection while listening to tunes by DJ and influencer Parvane Barrett, who was spinning behind the decks.

The UAE announced a record high in COVID-19 cases on Tuesday, with 3,243 new coronavirus cases and six deaths. However, certain events are permitted with safety measures in place.

Also at the event was Iraqi It-girl Rania Fawaz, who showed up wearing a beige knit dress and black leather purse by Alexander McQueen.

UAE blogger Nadya Hassan was also in attendance, wearing a head-to-toe outfit from the British fashion label in the form of a black minidress, pointed-toe pumps and a leather, monochromatic bag.

Hassan took to her Instagram Stories to document the evening, sharing a glimpse of the brand's new collection of leather handbags, clutches and jewelry as well as a spectacular Alexander McQueen projection that lit up the world's tallest building.

She was joined at the event by Dubai-based Iraqi style blogger Deema Al-Asadi and Saudi influencer Hala Abdallah.

Al-Asadi wore an all-black look, which consisted of a voluminous



corset worn over a T-shirt and tailored trousers. She completed the look with black boots and a gold-trimmed bag. For her part, Abdullah looked elegant in a long, off-the-shoulder black gown.

Creative director Sarah Burton unveiled Alexander McQueen's Spring 2021 ready-to-wear collection via a fashion film entitled "First Light" directed and shot

FASTFACT

Creative director Sarah Burton unveiled Alexander McQueen's Spring 2021 ready-to-wear collection via a fashion film entitled "First Light" directed and shot by English filmmaker Jonathan Glazer in East London.

by English filmmaker Jonathan Glazer in East London.

The film featured male and female models walking along the banks of the Thames on a winter's morning wearing pieces from the new offering.

In her collection notes, Burton expressed a desire for purity.

"Shape, silhouette and volume, the beauty of the bare bones of clothing stripped back to its essence — a world charged with emotion and human connection."

The designer drew fabric from the deadstock pile to create gowns with corset tops, long, full ballerina skirts, a biker jacket with cocoon-shaped tulle sleeves and a ball skirt.

Rania Fawaz, center, pictured at a previous event, graced the soiree. File/Getty Images

Deema Al-Asadi, left, and Parvane Barrett, top right, also attended. Instagram

STREAMING GIANT

Dwayne Johnson, DiCaprio lead Netflix's 2021 movies

Reuters Los Angeles

Netflix Inc said on Tuesday it will release more than 70 movies this year across comedy, drama, family and other genres, a lineup that underscores the streaming service's growing prominence in the film business.

The Netflix slate includes crime thriller "Red Notice" starring Ryan Reynolds, Gal Gadot and Dwayne Johnson, one of six action movies, and zombie heist film "Army of the Dead" from director Zack Snyder. The dozen comedies include "Don't Look Up" with an all-star cast of Leonardo DiCaprio, Jennifer Lawrence, Timothée Chalamet, Tyler Perry, Meryl Streep and others.

All but four of the films will be available to Netflix customers in the more than 190 countries it serves. Ten of the movies are in languages other than English.



Dwayne Johnson

'WANDA VISION'

Marvel superheroes back in black-and-white sitcom

AFP Los Angeles

When the Marvel superhero movies reached their box office-shattering climax in 2019, nobody could have predicted the saga's next installment would be a kitsch, black-and-white TV sitcom called "WandaVision."

Making its debut on Jan. 15 on Disney+, "WandaVision" stars witch Wanda Maximoff (Elizabeth Olsen), and other-worldly android Vision (Paul Bettany), two B-list superheroes who struck up an unlikely but fan-favorite romance across several recent Marvel films.

"WandaVision" finds them — without explanation — living happily married in the idyllic 1950s town of Westview, which is seemingly lifted straight from an episode of "Bewitched" or "I Love Lucy."

REVIEW

Netflix's French crime caper 'Lupin' is thrilling to the core

Gautaman Bhaskaran Chennai

Stylish, sleek and thrilling, Netflix's new show, French series "Lupin," is a spinoff from a cult character created by writer Maurice Leblanc in 1905. Often seen as the French answer to Sherlock Holmes, Arsene Lupin was a master-thief-turned detective.

In the film, Omar Sy ("The Intouchables") plays Assane Diop, who replicates the methods of Lupin, often called the "Gentleman Burglar," having read and re-read a book on Lupin, becoming a master of disguise and sleight of hand.

The five-episode series is set in modern Paris, and opens with a shot of the illuminated pyramid at the

Louvre. Inside the museum, we first see the painting of Mona Lisa before the camera pans to a gorgeous diamond necklace, which was presented by French Emperor Louis XVI to Queen Marie Antoinette in the fictionalized series. Missing for 25 years before it is finally traced and brought to the museum to be auctioned, Diop steals it in a brilliantly executed heist.

Directed by Louis Leterrier and Marcella Said, "Lupin" recounts how Diop and his father emigrate from Senegal to make Paris their home. Working as a chauffeur for a wealthy but avaricious Parisian family, it transpires that his father is accused of stealing the necklace from their



'Lupin' is now streaming on Netflix. Supplied

palatial mansion years before. Diop is shattered when he learns that his father has killed himself in prison, and decides to take the necklace in revenge, finely balancing his underground life with a seemingly happy existence with his ex-partner

(Ludvine Sagnier) and young son (Eaton Simon). Brilliantly executed flashbacks are woven throughout the series to help viewers make sense of Diop's motivations.

"Lupin" is not just a crime caper, but also explores deeper issues

of racial prejudice. Endearingly, father-son relationships are also explored, with Diop's relationship with his father and his own son used as a vehicle to push the riveting story forward.

Richly crafted, "Lupin" demands your undivided attention with its adrenaline-pumping action sequences and a gripping storyline. Sy is brilliant in the lead role, and races into the character with extraordinary conviction. What tends to bog down the pace of the series is the police investigation, some of which could have been dispensed with.

Netflix is yet to announce the date for season two, but anticipation is bound to grow.