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Shawwal 13, 1442
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ARAB NEWS

The Voice of a Changing Region

SINCE 1975

Our primary focus is on maintaining the ceasefire, getting the assistance to the people who need it.

Palestinian artist Etaf Al-Najli paints Al-Aqsa Mosque's Dome of the Rock on Monday on the wall of a building destroyed by an Israeli airstrike. AFP



PEACE PUSH

US envoy Blinken flies in for new crisis talks as Jerusalem simmers

• Israel rounds up 43 Palestinians in occupied territories • Schoolboy, 17, shot dead near Sheikh Jarrah

Arab News Jeddah

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken arrives in the Middle East early on Tuesday for crisis talks amid simmering tension in occupied East Jerusalem and a fragile truce in Gaza.

Blinken will travel to Jerusalem, Ramallah, Cairo and Amman and meet Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi and King Abdullah of Jordan.

The visit follows an 11-day on-slaught by Israel on the Gaza Strip, in which 248 Palestinians, 66 of

them children, were killed in a barrage of airstrikes and artillery shelling. A ceasefire brokered by Egypt has been in place since last Friday.

"Our primary focus is on maintaining the ceasefire, getting the assistance to the people who need it," the White House said on Monday.

US President Joe Biden said Blinken would "continue our administration's efforts to rebuild ties to, and support for, the Palestinian people and leaders, after years of neglect."

However, the spark for the latest conflict was not in Gaza, but in occupied East Jerusalem. Israeli authorities are threatening to evict 13 Palestinian families, about 300 people, from their homes in the

OPINION

• US media coverage of Israel-Palestine conflict is changing
By Kerry Boyd Anderson
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• United Palestinians have changed the course of history
By Ramzy Baroud
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Sheikh Jarrah area of the city and hand the land over to Jewish settlers. A court has postponed a ruling on the case.

Amid Palestinian protests and rising tension, Israeli security forces fired stun grenades this month at worshippers inside Al-Aqsa Mosque, the third-holiest site in Islam, and there were also clashes between Arab and Jewish Israelis.

Israeli police said they had arrested 1,550 people and charged 150 in the past two weeks over "violent events." Overnight on Sunday they arrested 16 Palestinians in the occupied West Bank and 27 in East Jerusalem.

On Monday, Israeli forces shot dead a 17-year-old Palestinian

schoolboy near Sheikh Jarrah. Israeli authorities said the boy had stabbed two men in their twenties, one of them a soldier. Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi and Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry discussed Palestine on Monday in talks in Amman.

Safadi said it was essential to avoid a recurrence of the Israeli provocation that had sparked the most recent conflict.

"The issue of Sheikh Jarrah must be dealt with on the basis that there is neither right nor legitimacy for any Israeli decision to displace people from their homes, which would be a war crime that the international community cannot tolerate," he said.

SCANDAL

Turkish officials face retrial over killings

Arab News Ankara

Two former senior security officials in Turkey face retrials after an appeals court overturned their acquittals on charges related to 18 extrajudicial killings in the 1990s.

The retrials of Mehmet Agar, a former interior minister and police chief, and Korkut Eken, a former intelligence official, are the latest fallout from explosive revelations by exiled Turkish mafia boss Sedat Peker.

In a series of videos on his YouTube channel, Peker has exposed the close ties among Turkey's deep state, the far-right Grey Wolves group and the Turkish mafia.

Peker has accused Agar and Eken of committing several unlawful acts under the state apparatus, including involvement in an international drug-smuggling scheme and the assassination of investigative journalists Ugur Mumcu and

The latest allegations will also undermine the approval ratings of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's government.

Rutlu Adali.

Sinem Adar, associate at the Center for Applied Turkey Studies at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs, said that the state-mafia-organized crime triangle in Turkey was now out in the open.

"It is a public performance through which parties show each other their power, audacity and sometimes even their panic — a performance that slaps one in the face as the very evidence of political and institutional decay," she said.

The latest allegations will also undermine the approval ratings of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's government.

"This decline is not reversible," Adar said. "No doubt about it. Peker's allegations are, in this sense, another hit to an already losing alliance."

Detailed report Page 7

SECURITY

Saudi defenses thwart Houthi boat-bomb attack in Red Sea

Iranian military technology a growing threat to US allies in Gulf, security analysts tell Arab News

Arab News Riyadh

Saudi naval defenses thwarted an attack in the southern Red Sea on Monday by the Iran-backed Houthi militia using a booby-trapped boat laden with explosives.

The Saudi-led coalition in Yemen said the Houthis continued to threaten shipping lanes and global trade, and were using the Stockholm Agreement as an umbrella to launch hostile attacks from the Red Sea port of Hodeidah. The attack was condemned by the secretary-general of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation Youssef Al-Othaimen, and by the UAE.

The Foreign Ministry said the UAE "considers this attack new evidence of the Houthi militia's endeavor to undermine security and stability in the region."

The Arab Parliament condemned the "hostile attack," and warned that the Houthis continued to threaten maritime shipping lanes and global trade in the Red Sea.

It called on the international community and the UN Security Council to take "a firm stand to deter these terrorist practices," and said Iran played a fundamental role in supplying the Houthis with weapons and missiles.

Security analysts have told Arab

INSIDE

• Can Iranian drone tech force a shift in balance of power?
Spotlight, Page 3

• Red Sea security requires international cooperation
By Dr. Abdel Aziz Aluwaisheg
Page 9

News that Iranian military technology, particularly drones, was a growing threat to the US and its allies in the Gulf, including Saudi Arabia.

The Houthis have frequently used "loitering munitions," also known as suicide drones, against Saudi Arabia's civilian and military infrastructure, which appear to feature components based heavily on an Iranian design.

"The Iranian drone program has innovated with sophisticated, indigenously produced drones, which it supplies to regional allies," said Dr. James Rogers, of the Center for War Studies at the University of Southern Denmark.

"This broad diffusion of Iranian drone technologies makes it almost impossible to tell who conducted a lethal drone strike in the region, and thus who should be held accountable. This is only going to get more difficult."

The Brief

LEBANON IMPASSE

Lebanese political parties have reacted strongly to a Beirut demonstration on Sunday by the Syrian Social Nationalist Party amid a deadly political stalemate. **P6**

JABS FOR YEMENIS

Hundreds of Yemenis thronged to health facilities across government-controlled areas to receive COVID-19 vaccines on Monday as the country resumed its campaign to inoculate thousands of vulnerable people. **P6**

KSA REFORMS

Saudi Arabia is seeking to raise about \$55 billion over the next four years through its privatization program. **P11**

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No. 170 • 16 pages



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The Organization of Islamic Cooperation
denounces the Houthi terrorist strikes
targeting shipping routes.
Dr. Yousef Al-Othaimen
OIC secretary-general



Radar

KSA today



Online Workshop

Join Dana Talal's workshop to expand your skills in making nicely scented and beautifully shaped bars of soap. The workshop will be held on Wednesday from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. For registration and more information visit experiences.suplift.com.



Jeddah Macaron

If macaron is one of your favorite desserts, then this workshop, offered by Upgrade, will benefit you. The "Macaron Workshop," presented by Reham Al-Husseiny, will introduce the perfect way to make macarons. Registration is via upgrade-sa.com.



Online Silent Nature

Join Jumanah Bukhary's workshop to learn the tips and tools of drawing silent nature, which means drawing any inanimate object or drawing still creatures like plants. The workshop will be held on Wednesday from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. For registration visit experiences.suplift.com.



Al-Thumama Paragliding

Have an adventurous ride through the clouds with Capt. Saad, and enjoy the scenery and beautiful view as you paraglide over the extended Al-Thumama amazing dunes. More information can be found on the Hala Yalla app.

The Register

THE PICTURES THAT MARK THE DAY



HRC President Dr. Awwad Al-Awwad received UK Minister of State for the Middle East and North Africa James Cleverly in Riyadh on Monday. SPA

Dr. Awwad Al-Awwad, president of the Human Rights Commission (HRC), held a meeting with the UK Minister of State for the Middle East and North Africa James Cleverly at his office in Riyadh on Monday.

During the meeting, the rights chief highlighted the Kingdom's efforts for the protection of human rights.

He briefed the visiting dignitary about several initiatives the Kingdom had taken under King Salman and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to ensure human rights and reform the sector along modern lines.

They also discussed aspects of cooperation in the field of human rights.

Later, the rights chief held a meeting

with the Netherlands Ambassador Janet Alberda.

They discussed ways to enhance ties between the two countries especially in the field of human rights.

Al-Awwad praised the depth of ties between the two countries. He also highlighted the importance of official contacts aimed to exchange views on different issues. Saudi Arabia is witnessing a qualitative leap in the field of human rights. The Kingdom's Vision 2030 program is at the forefront of these reforms intended to focus on humans.

The rights chief said the Vision 2030 plan emphasizes the protection of human rights and the Saudi authorities are making continuous efforts to ensure the rights of all in the Kingdom.

Recently, the HRC in partnership with Alwaleed Philanthropies launched a series of training programs and seminars.

The programs aim to boost the capabilities of workers in the field of human rights and charity work.

Al-Awwad said that the HRC is ready to cooperate with all local, regional, and international establishments working in the field of human rights.

He said that the commission is aiming to integrate human rights methodology into the sector, strengthen interaction with human rights mechanisms and build capabilities for specialist workers.

Among over 60 recent decisions made to improve the situation of human rights in the Kingdom, 22 were related to women.

What's Trending

Today's hot topics explained by Nada Jan



BURGLARY Arundel Castle

Treasure worth £1 million (\$1.41 million) has been stolen in a raid on Arundel Castle in West Sussex, England, including the golden rosary carried by Mary Queen of Scots to her execution in 1587 and the coronation cups she gifted to the Earl Marshal.

Friday's robbery happened days after the castle reopened to the public. The stolen items were described by a castle spokesperson as being of "priceless historical importance" and "irreplaceable."

According to castle staff, the burglar alarm went off at 10:30 p.m. A police spokesperson said that officers arrived at the scene of the crime within minutes.

"If you were in Arundel on Friday evening and saw any suspicious activity around the area of the castle, please contact us," said Molly O'Malley, detective constable of Chichester CID. "The castle only reopened to visitors on May 18 so, if you were visiting during the past few days, do you on reflection recall anyone behaving at all suspiciously? If you are offered or hear of anyone offering for sale any of the items stolen, we would also like to hear from you."

IN PERIL Sasha Johnson

Black Lives Matter (BLM) activist Sasha Johnson, 27, is reported to be in a critical condition after being shot in the head.

Her Taking the Initiative Party said the attack, which took place in the early hours of Sunday in south London, had followed many death threats.

Police said there was no evidence the attack was targeted or if she had received any credible threats against her, adding the investigation was ongoing.

She was taken to hospital with life-threatening injuries and officers have appealed for witnesses.

Imarn Ayton, a friend of Johnson, told the BBC that doctors had operated on the activist and it had gone well. She was now with her parents, Ayton said.

She added that

Johnson was at a party or gathering at the time of the shooting but did not believe her friend was the intended victim. "As far as I am aware, this incident is more related to rival gangs as opposed to her activism."

Johnson, who is an Oxford Brookes University graduate and a mother, has been leading the BLM movement in the UK and is a member of the Taking the Initiative Party's leadership committee.

"This was a shocking incident that has left a young woman with very serious injuries," said a police official. "Our thoughts are with her family who are being provided with support at this terribly difficult time. If you saw anything suspicious in the Consort Road area in the early hours of Sunday morning, or if you have heard information since that could help detectives, it is crucial that you get in touch."



The Region

The Middle East Roundup

Arab News Dubai

- The International Conference on Medical and Health Sciences will take place in Dubai on May 25. The event aims to provide an opportunity for participants to exchange their ideas and knowledge in person with their peers.
- Dubai Helishow will take place until May 25. The event brings to

gether the international helicopter community and customers including state representatives and trade visitors from the Gulf region, the Middle East, India and Africa.

• The Era Oran trade show will take place in Algeria until May 26 with an aim to offer an opportunity to all participants to present their activities to the public and exchange knowledge with professionals.

- Emirati family-owned Rabdan Equestrian Club is organizing horseback riding through the pristine dunes of the Al-Wathba desert until May 31.
- "Abstraction and Calligraphy — Toward a Universal Language" at the Louvre Abu Dhabi explores the calligraphy of Asia and North Africa. The exhibit will last until June 12.

Prayer Times in Saudi Arabia

May 25	Fajr	Sunrise	Dhuhr	Asr	Maghreb	Isha
Makkah	4:14	5:39	12:18	3:33	6:57	8:27
Madinah	4:05	5:34	12:19	3:42	7:04	8:34
Riyadh	3:37	5:05	11:51	3:14	6:36	8:06
Abha	4:11	5:34	12:07	3:25	6:40	8:10
Dammam	3:18	4:48	11:37	3:05	6:25	7:55

Today's Number

249k

The total number of mines cleared by the Saudi Project for Landmine Clearance (Masam) since its launch in 2018 to protect Yemeni civilians. More than 1.1 million mines have been planted by the Iran-backed Houthis, claiming hundreds of civilian lives. Masam is one of several initiatives undertaken by Saudi Arabia to help ease the suffering of the Yemeni people.

Who's Who



Ahmad Al-Musained

Ahmad Al-Musained has been general manager of corporate communications at the Ministry of Environment, Water and Agriculture since September 2020. He is also the ministry's spokesperson.

Before joining the ministry, Al-Musained served as director of corporate communications and spokesman for Flynas between 2018 and 2020.

He worked as manager of the media center at the General Authority of Civil Aviation from 2016 to 2018 and head of the internal and external media departments at the General Customs Authority from 2008 to 2014.

From 2016 to 2017, Al-Musained taught at the Imam Mohammed Ibn Saud Islamic University as an associate lecturer. He also worked as a journalist and managed the newsroom at Al-Hayat daily.

He holds a master's degree in mass communication and is a media doctoral candidate.

He completed several courses in leadership, conferences and seminars management, and campaign planning and execution. For two years, he studied corporate communications and developed cross-cultural and interpersonal communication skills in the US.

Throughout his career, Al-Musained ran many successful campaigns. The most recent example is the "Together Forever" campaign launched by Flynas to spread messages of hope during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. He also organized and managed other campaigns launched by the Ministry of Environment, Water and Agriculture such as "Let's Make It Green," a massive drive to plant 10 million trees in Saudi Arabia.

The militias believe they can carry out attacks that won't provoke a response, yet will create enough friction to induce us to leave.

Gen. Frank McKenzie
US military commander in the Middle East



Spotlight



Drones prior to a drill in central Iran, where military planners hope to turn the tide of modern warfare with the latest technology. Their lethality (right) has recently been proven in Iraq. AFP

MIDDLE EAST

Can Iranian drone tech force a shift in balance of power?

Armed drones used by Iran-backed militias against US and allies reflect a qualitative change in asymmetric warfare

Paul Iddon Irbil, Iraq

The drone threat posed to US and coalition personnel by Iran-backed militias is growing, and defenses against such threats remain limited — particularly in the face of Tehran's growing capabilities. That was the clear message delivered by the US military commander in the Middle East during his most recent visit to Iraq.

Marine Gen. Frank McKenzie's warning came in the wake of a rash of drone attacks launched by Iran's proxies and allied groups in the region against coalition positions and regional partners of the US, a development viewed by many as a sign of a shift in the strategic balance of power.

"We're working very hard to find technical fixes that would allow us to be more effective against drones," the US Central Command (CENTCOM) commander said. "We're open to all kinds of things. The army is working it very hard. Still, I don't think we're where we want to be."

Take the drone attack launched from Iraq in January that targeted Saudi Arabia. Or the explosives-laden drone strike in April that targeted the US troop base at Irbil International Airport inside the normally secure autonomous Kurdistan region, causing a large fire and damage to a building.

While the attacks did not cause major casualties, they nevertheless underscored the evolving nature of the threat, and Iran's rapidly advancing drone capabilities.

The Iran-backed Houthi militia in Yemen has frequently used loitering munitions, also known as suicide drones, against Saudi Arabia's civilian and military infrastructure, which appear to feature

components based heavily on an Iranian design.

In the conflict in the Gaza Strip, the Palestinian group Hamas used kamikaze-type drones against Israel, which exhibited many similarities to the same Iranian design.

A recent Reuters report suggests that Iran has changed its strategy in Iraq. Instead of relying on larger established Shiite militia groups to carry out proxy attacks against US and coalition forces, it is now relying on much smaller militia groups completely loyal to Tehran.

The regime reportedly took 250 of these fighters to Lebanon last year, where they were trained by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) advisers to fly drones and carry out rocket attacks. The result has been a spate of drone attacks, both within and originating from Iraq.

Weaponry of this kind can be difficult to defend against, even for US forces operating advanced air defense systems, according to experts.

"The use of weaponized drone systems in Yemen, or during the latest conflict in Gaza, is a blueprint for how drones will be used in conflict from this point forward," Dr. James Rogers, of the Center for War Studies at the University of Southern Denmark, told Arab News.

"The ability to send multiple drones and missiles all at once means that even the most sophisticated defense systems can be saturated and overrun."

Iran's fingerprints are all over the recent proliferation of armed drones among non-state actors and militias throughout the Middle East. As Rogers notes, the distance and deniability afforded by the drone has made it "a valued tool" in Iran's arsenal.

"The Iranian drone program has innovated with sophisticated,

BOOBY-TRAPPED DRONE ATTACK IN IRAQ

A coalition airbase was targeted in Iraqi Kurdistan in April



Maj. Gen. Hossein Salami, commander of the IRGC, has instructed his forces to train smaller militia groups loyal to Tehran to operate and deploy drones. AFP

indigenously produced drones, which it supplies to regional allies," he said.

"This broad diffusion of Iranian drone technologies makes it almost impossible to tell who conducted a lethal drone strike in the region, and thus who should be held responsible and accountable. This is only going to get more difficult."

The designs Iran supplies are similar to Tehran's own models, notably the Ababil series. Variants of these drones have appeared in the Houthi and Hamas arsenals, and in that of Iran's main regional proxy, the Lebanese Hezbollah.

The technology has the added benefit of being easily disassembled for covert transport and reassembly at its destination.

For example, an anonymous Iraqi official told the Associated Press news agency that the drone that targeted Riyadh in January was delivered to Iraqi militiamen "in parts from Iran ... assembled in Iraq, and launched from Iraq."

The efficacy of the weapons in question has been augmented by recent advancements in commercial drone technology.

"Now a number of non-state actors have Iranian designs. They are able to produce their own systems, fitted with commercially available technologies, which they can then supply to their allies," Rogers said. "In essence, the drone is out of the bag, and the threat is spreading."

Iran is well aware it has found a chink in its opponents' armor — and is exploiting this vulnerability.

The Biden team had signaled loudly even before it took office of its determination to find a pathway back into the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action with Iran. This stated objective has since translated into indirect talks in Vienna.

Strategic and defense experts believe Iran has been testing the US administration with calculated provocations in multiple theaters, partly in an effort to take the measure of President Joe Biden, and partly as a way to gain leverage in the nuclear negotiations.

Nicholas Heras, senior analyst and program head for State Resilience and Fragility at the Newsline Institute, says Iran's defense establishment is "leaning into a strategy of utilizing drone forces to present asymmetric challenges to more technologically advanced state actor competitors."

"Iran is building best-in-class capabilities with the concept of drone swarms in the air and at sea,

which is a skill set that worries US defense and intelligence officials who are required to protect US forces deployed to the Middle East," Heras told Arab News.

"The IRGC is the global leader in disseminating the tactics, techniques and procedures for drone warfare to non-state actors, who can then execute highly sensitive attacks against Iran's opponents while giving Iran the ability to deny that it ordered the attacks."

The IRGC's preferred models of choice are kamikaze drones, which crash into their respective targets and explode on impact, since they are easy to assemble, easy to operate, easy to use for overwhelming swarm attacks, and very challenging to counter. Such drones are most likely what McKenzie has in mind.

"There is no one anti-air system that will work best against the drone warfare methods that the IRGC is teaching Iran's partners and proxies," Heras said.

"Countering Iran's networked drone warfare requires active signals intelligence to identify operatives and drone manufacturing sites, and rapid reaction strikes to hit them before they get off the ground."

The threat posed by drones to the US — and, by extension, to its regional partners — has become impossible to ignore even by an administration whose stated goal is to end America's "forever wars" and focus on the threats from Russia and China.

"These small- and medium-sized (drones) present a new and complex threat to our forces and those of our partners and allies," McKenzie told Congress in April.

"For the first time since the Korean War, we are operating without complete air superiority."

Twitter: @pauliddon



Health drive The King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center on Monday launched a medical campaign to combat blindness and other eye disease in Sudan. The drive has been launched in cooperation with Al-Badr Charitable Foundation.

SPA

ROYAL ORDER

Free visa extension for stranded expats

1,157 new coronavirus cases reported in Saudi Arabia

Huda Ashair Jeddah

King Salman has ordered the extension of visit, exit and return visas' validity without fees in an effort to lessen the effects of COVID-19 in Saudi Arabia.

Visas of expat residents of the Kingdom from red-list countries prohibited from entering Saudi Arabia due to an uncontrolled outbreak in their respective countries will be extended until June 2. The extension includes resident permits and visitors visas. Visas will be automatically renewed, according to the General Directorate of Passports.

In addition, the General Authority of Civil Aviation (GACA) issued guidelines for institutional quarantine procedures and for those who are non-Saudis citizens, not immunized and those coming from red-listed countries. Along with details on the insurance policy, the guide reiterates the importance of following regulations and protocols in the airports, the use of Tawakkalna and the health and vaccination requirements for travel and for those arriving.

GACA suggests downloading the guide and keeping it for reference when needed.

Saudi Arabia's Health Ministry announced that more than 12.9 million doses of the COVID-19 vaccine have been administered so far. That is equivalent to 37.3 doses for every 100 people. Specifically, 95,161 doses were given in the past 24 hours.

The Kingdom reported 1,157 new cases on Monday, raising the total number of confirmed cases to 442,071. That means Saudi Arabia makes up less than 0.3 percent of total cases globally.

There are 9,130 active cases with 1,334 of them being critical, a decrease of 10 patients in the past 24 hours.

According to the figures provided by the MOH, Makkah had the highest number of new confirmed

cases with 357 instances followed by Riyadh (320) and Madinah (300). The region with lowest confirmed cases is Jouf with only five cases.

The ministry recorded 15 new COVID-19-related deaths, raising the national death toll to 7,264.

The MOH reported that 987 patients have recovered from COVID-19, bringing the total number of recoveries in the Kingdom to 425,677.

About 81,094 PCR tests were administered in the past 24 hours, raising the total number of tests conducted in the Kingdom so far to more than 18.6 million.

The Ministry of Interior has recently updated the list of fines for violating COVID-19 protocols, including penalties for social gatherings. Gatherings beyond the numbers specified by authorities in a single or specific space without a residential relation inside houses, farms and the like will be fined SR10,000 (\$2,700).

As for family gatherings beyond the specified number in one space inside homes, farms, camps, chalets or open areas for people living in the same neighborhood, the fine is SR15,000. Gatherings for social purposes such as funerals and parties exceeding the specified numbers will attract a fine of SR40,000.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The Health Ministry reported that 987 patients have recovered from COVID-19, bringing the total number of recoveries in the Kingdom to 425,677.
- There are 9,130 active cases with 1,334 of them in critical condition.
- The ministry recorded 15 new COVID-19-related deaths, raising the death toll to 7,264.

SYMPOSIUM

Al-Issa calls on religious leaders to play role in fight against drugs

SPA Jeddah

An international symposium was held to discuss ways of combating drug addiction, the Saudi Press Agency reported, with the Centre for Responsible Leadership (CRL), the Clinton Foundation, and the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health taking part.

The CRL chairman and secretary-general of the Muslim World League, Dr. Mohammed bin Abdul Karim Al-Issa, former US President Bill Clinton, and Dr. Ellen J. MacKenzie, the dean of Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, were the participants.

Al-Issa told the symposium that the primary objective of religious and social leadership, and specialist

scientific centers, was to launch initiatives to distance people from addiction and expose them to treatment.

He stressed the need to embrace and help the addicted, and the importance of the role played by society in spreading awareness

Linking addiction to shame and failure would complicate the problem.

Dr. Mohammed bin Abdul Karim Al-Issa
Muslim World League chief

about the dangerous phenomenon.

He said religious values encouraged people to help others, especially those afflicted by drug addiction, and he called for an open dialogue about drugs and the

threats they posed.

Al-Issa said that linking addiction to shame and failure would complicate the problem and that care of the afflicted was a method that should be adopted by everyone. He emphasized the importance of conveying reassuring messages to the addicted to encourage them to voluntarily seek help, care, and treatment.

Clinton said the increase in the number of deaths caused by drug addiction during the pandemic demanded firm action by religious and scientific leaders through initiatives that would end the crisis.

MacKenzie said that addiction affected all societies and that religious and scientific leaders should work side by side for a better future free of drugs.

TheSpace

A new roadmap to ensure a sustainable environment

ABEER S. AL SAUD



The environment is about more than just our surroundings; it is an intricate and interconnected system on which the lives of all living beings depend.

That is why it is one of the main pillars of the UN sustainable development goals.

The discourse on climate and environmental sustainability started in 1987, when a group of 22 countries, including Saudi Arabia represented by Dr. Saleh Alathel, drafted "Our Common Future" — a report that introduced the definition of sustainable development.

The 1987 Brundtland Commission Report described sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

It paved the way to the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, where Saudi Arabia also participated with a large delegation of experts led by former Finance Minister Mohammed Ali Abasalkhalil.

The Kingdom continues to remain committed to cooperate with the international community in its efforts to ensure sustainable development and climate protection.

Reiterating the Kingdom's stance on this issue, King Salman told the Climate Summit on Earth Day on April 22: "The objective is sustainable development and to achieve this, there must be a comprehensive methodology that takes into account the different developmental circumstances that exist in the world."

Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 also lays great emphasis on economic and environmental sustainability. The Kingdom has consolidated its position as a leading country working for environmental solutions with the launch of several initiatives and mega-projects, such as the Saudi and the Middle East Green Initiatives, which will reduce carbon emissions to serve the planet and its inhabitants.

Elsewhere, the Kingdom's NEOM project is a

city that embodies sustainability throughout all of its sectors such as energy generation and waste management.

Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who is a big supporter of ecotourism, recently announced, "The Line," a city of 1 million residents that preserves 95 percent of the nature within NEOM, with zero cars, zero streets and zero carbon emissions.

The Saudi Green Initiative is a collection of huge projects, policies, strategies that aim to make the Kingdom and the rest of the world environmentally sustainable for future generations.

And as a major superpower in the Middle East, Saudi Arabia pioneered a regional initiative as an expansion and part of its Saudi Green Initiative

called the Middle East Green Initiative. It is part of the Kingdom's plans that were introduced to implement massive tree plantation and afforestation projects in Saudi Arabia and the Middle East.

Another project is the Middle East Riviera on the Red Sea, which aims to be a model in sustainable ecotourism as the main attraction for it is the environment.

The rapid industrialization that began in the 18th century catapulted civilization to new heights, wealth and abundance, which improved the quality of life and wellbeing of developed nations.

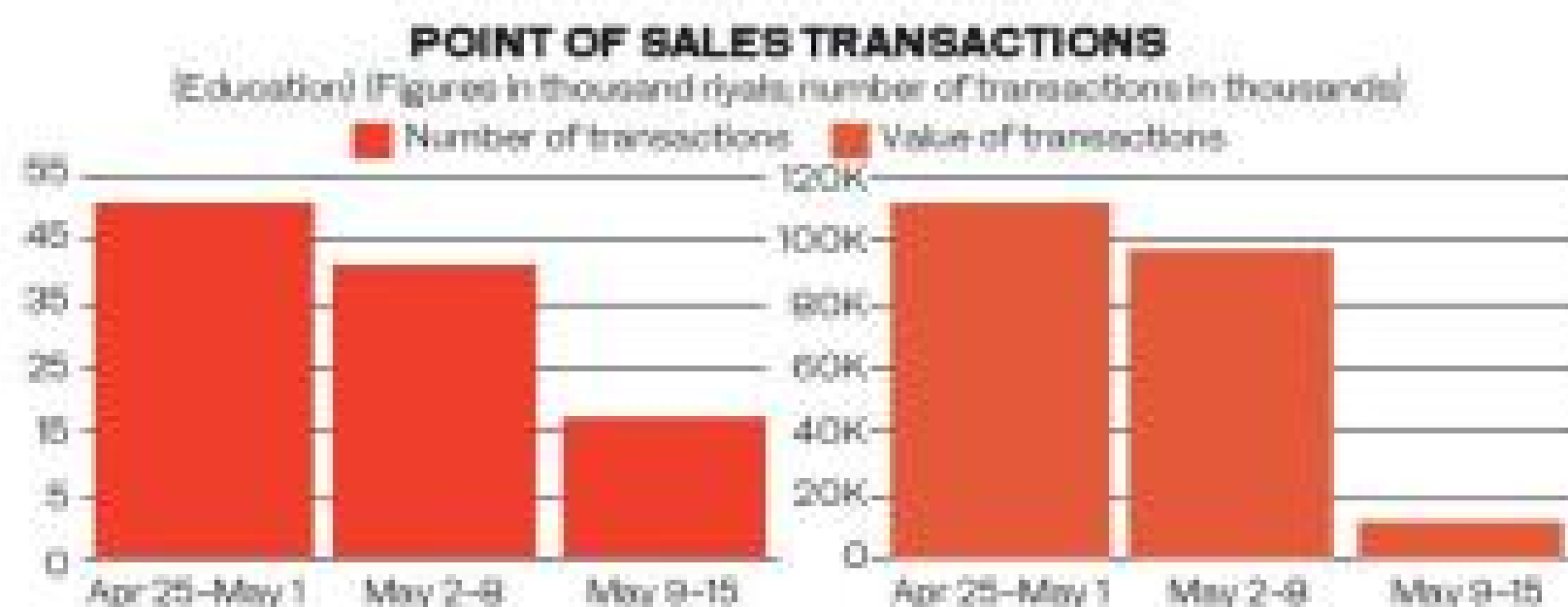
However, this massive development came at a cost as it required a heavy consumption of natural resources and led to several environmental issues.

As we transition from the "Information Age" to the "Conceptual Age," there are many ways to use the skills of the current era in designing initiatives, programs, projects, products and services to preserve people, animal and plant species and our planet.

Abeer S. Al-Saud is an Op-Ed writer for Arab News exploring development, peace and cultural topics. The views expressed in this piece are personal. [Twitter: @_alsaud515](#)

The Day's FIGURES

Source: SAMA



Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Partnership

Saudi tourism fund signs deal to boost investments

The Saudi Tourism Development Fund (STDF) on Monday signed two agreements with the Arab National Bank (ANB) to increase the financing of tourism projects in the Kingdom.

One agreement includes the provision of joint financing mechanisms between the two parties to support tourism projects in the Kingdom. The other deal spells out mechanisms to provide STDF with financial guarantees to provide financing solutions to small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the tourism sector.

STDF CEO Qusai Al-Fakhri said the agreements will give a boost to the Kingdom's tourism sector.

He said the initiative will help develop tourism agencies in major cities.

Al-Fakhri said STDF will continue forging partnerships with the banking sector to boost investments and help achieve the Kingdom's goals for the tourism sector.

AN Jeddah

Environment

Red Sea company to plant over 15 million trees

In line with the Saudi Vision 2030, the Red Sea Development Co. will plant more than 15 million shrubs and trees in its Red Sea Project.

Raed Al-Baseet, head of corporate environment and sustainability, said the plants and saplings will be provided through the company's nursery.

He said the company also seeks to increase the percentage of seaweeds to help absorb carbon dioxide. Al-Baseet told the Saudi Press Agency that the company aimed to increase mangroves and coral reefs.

He said that ensuring a sustainable environment was at the core of the company's policies.

He said: "We know ... that this area will become a destination for renewable tourism. To ensure achieving ecological diversity and balance, which we aspire to realize by 2040, we have conducted surveys taking into consideration the long-term environmental impacts of the operational actions of the scheme." SPA Tabuk

Zero shadow

Sun will align directly over Kaaba on Thursday

Astronomers say that the sun will align with the Kaaba at the Grand Mosque on Thursday at 12:18 local time.

The disc of the sun will be positioned immediately over the Kaaba and it will lose its shadow for a brief time, said Majed Abu Zahra, head of the Jeddah Astronomical Society.

Astronomers said the celestial phenomenon called "zero shadow" occurs twice every year at the Grand Mosque because of its location between the Equator and the Tropic of Cancer.

Due to the tilt of the Earth's axis, the sun travels at 23.5 degrees north and south of the celestial equator. The sun falls directly overhead on places lying over the equator during equinox.

Abu Zahra said people can determine the exact direction of the Kaaba by placing a wooden stick vertically in the ground; the direction of the Qibla will be the exact opposite to the stick's shadow.

SPA Jeddah



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News Saudi Arabia

LIFE IN SAUDI ARABIA

British expat using social media to dispel misconceptions about KSA

‘I could live anywhere in the world — I choose to stay in Saudi Arabia,’ says Abdurahman Afia

Saleh Fareed Jeddah

A British expatriate who has lived in Saudi Arabia for more than two decades is showcasing the changing face of the country to hundreds of thousands of followers around the world — and dispelling some of the misconceptions about life in the Kingdom

Abdurahman Afia was born and grew up in London. He moved to Saudi Arabia with his wife, Khadija, in 2000, and their four children — 26-year-old Abdullah, 24-year-old Abdurahman, 20-year-olds Anas and Aisha — were raised there.

He has watched the nation evolve and grow in the past 21 years, and recently decided to embrace the power of social media and use it to show the world what modern-day Saudi Arabia and its people are really like.

The 46-year-old is fast becoming a social media sensation, with 1.4 million followers on TikTok, more than 24,000 on Twitter and 100,000 on Instagram. He shares with them a varied mix of entertaining, informative and compelling content in Arabic and English, including amusing and interesting anecdotes and snippets from his day-to-day life in the Kingdom, recipes for shawarma, which he clearly adores, and his appreciation of the famous Al-Baik chicken nuggets, one of the country's most popular fast-food treats.

Afia, whose original first name was Joel, found himself on the road that would eventually lead to Saudi Arabia at a young age.

“I was born in London in 1974 and grew up as an atheist,” he told Arab News. “At 16 years of age, a friend of mine asked me if I knew the purpose of my creation: Why was I alive? That question started a search for answers.

“The search continued until just after my 18th birthday, when one day I found a Muslim who would come every Sunday to Speakers’ Corner in London’s Hyde Park.” This is a section of the park where anyone is free to come and share their lawful ideas and beliefs with the public.

“After many months had passed I asked him to help me understand more about the religion of Islam, and shortly after that I accepted Islam as my way of life,” Afia said. It gave him a sense of peace and purpose. “I’d never had before,” he added.

He then began to forge a career, first as an educator and then as an expert in leadership development. He holds a number of qualifications, the most recent of which is a master of business administration from the University of Northampton. He studied for it alongside his eldest son, Abdullah, and they graduated together in 2019.

Afia’s first job when he arrived in Saudi Arabia in 2000 was as a senior English instructor with



I have visited countries all over the world, from East to West, yet I have never felt safer than when in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Abdurahman Afia said he has discovered many admirable qualities that are common to the people of all regions of the Kingdom, including generosity to guests, love of traditional culture, and good manners.

Social media

The reality is Saudi Arabia has one of the largest numbers of female entrepreneurs in the world and an incredible number of Saudi ladies now graduate from university.

language-training center Direct English. The following year he became a center director. In 2004, he was appointed an English-language coordinator at King Abdul Aziz University in Jeddah, before moving to King Saud University in Riyadh in 2008, where he held a number of positions until 2011.

He worked at several educational establishments for the next five years before becoming vice director of the preparatory program at the University of Dar Al-Uloom in 2016. In 2019, he co-founded and became a managing partner of i2iCorporate, a company that provides leadership training and coaching.

Afia said that as he has explored the Kingdom over the years, he has discovered many admirable qualities that are common to the people of all regions, including generosity to guests, love of traditional culture, and good manners. Yet he has also noticed that some characteristics are particularly strongly associated with certain regions.

“I have found the people of Yanbu to be incredibly relaxed and calm,



Afia and his eldest son, Abdullah, graduated together in 2019.

the people of Makkah to be seriously business minded, the people of Dammam to be so happy, the people of Jeddah to be so welcoming, and the people of Riyadh to be so noble,” he said. “And yet at the same time all the regions of Saudi Arabia reflect the characteristics I’ve just described.”

Afia said he has had the opportunity over the past 21 years to move to other countries but is happy to remain in Saudi Arabia.

“I have the ability to live anywhere in the world but I have chosen to stay in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for 21 years because I cannot find the peace, security and lifestyle that I have found here,” he said.

“I have raised my family here, built an incredibly successful career as a leadership development consultant here, and always have access to world-class medical care.

FASTFACTS

- **Abdurahman Afia was born and grew up in London.**
- **He moved to Saudi Arabia with his wife and children in 2000.**
- **The 46-year-old is fast becoming a social-media sensation, with 1.4 million followers on TikTok, more than 24,000 on Twitter and 100,000 on Instagram.**
- **He shares with them a varied mix of entertaining, informative and compelling content in Arabic and English.**

“My friends and family can visit whenever they like, and these days you can get a tourist visa within minutes. These are some of the reasons I continue to choose to live

in the Kingdom.”

For many years, Afia said, his parents who live in London, refused to visit him in Riyadh. But after much convincing, in 2016 they eventually agreed and discovered they had been missing out on a fascinating and friendly country with many hidden gems to discover.

“I am delighted to say they absolutely loved the time they spent here,” he said. “They found the Saudi people to be so kind and welcoming, and at the same time found in the city of Riyadh everything they could want.”

Afia said he has been asked many times by friends and relatives in the UK what life is like in the Kingdom and whether it is a safe place to live. He is always happy to share his experience and observations.

“In 21 years of living in Saudi Arabia I haven’t once needed to call the police,” he said. “I haven’t been the victim of a crime, nor ever even felt the threat of a crime.

“It is very normal to be able to sit outside a cafe with one’s wallet and phone on display without ever having to worry about someone stealing them. This is in stark contrast to my own beautiful city of London, where more than 340 mobile phones are stolen every day.

“I have visited countries all over the world, from East to West, yet I have never felt safer than when in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.”

However, many people still have misconceptions about the country and its people, Afia said,

the main one being that women are oppressed, uneducated and undervalued.

“The reality is Saudi Arabia has one of the largest numbers of female entrepreneurs in the world and an incredible number of Saudi ladies now graduate from university,” he said.

Another popular misconception, he added, is that citizens of the Kingdom are unhappy and unfriendly. In fact, he said, his experience as an expatriate has been that the Saudi people are some of the warmest, friendliest and happiest people he has ever met. So he decided to put the record straight about his adopted home.

“After 21 years of living here, raising a family and having a successful career, my goal through social media is to show the world the reality of Saudi Arabia,” he said. “I believe it is one of the most misunderstood countries in the world, a diamond that most of the world is unaware of.”

His ambitions for revealing the truth behind the misconceptions about Saudi Arabia extend beyond social media to more traditional media outlets.

“I am in discussions with some television networks to produce a show in which I would visit all the regions of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and explore and share my experiences with the world,” he said.

“I believe passionately that this would bring a huge amount of awareness about this beautiful land I am so happy to continue to live in.”

NOBLE GESTURE

Saudi father pardons son’s killer minutes before execution

Mohammed Al-Kinani Jeddah

A convicted killer was “pardoned” by the Saudi father of his victim on Monday morning, minutes before he was due to be executed.

Awad Suleiman Al-Amrani from Tabuk in northwestern Saudi Arabia, whose son was killed in a brawl four years ago, stipulated that neither the killer nor his family should celebrate the forgiveness. He also said that the family should not attempt to raise money from

donors or attend any events that might be organized as a result of the waiver.

He did not demand any blood money in compensation for his son’s death, and so the killer will be released.

As news of the pardon spread on social media, Al-Amrani was praised for his forgiving nature. In appreciation of his “noble” gesture, some Twitter users posted Qur’anic verse 40 of surah Al-Shura, which says: “The

BACKGROUND

Awad Suleiman Al-Amrani from Tabuk in northwestern Saudi Arabia, whose son was killed in a brawl four years ago, pardoned the killer without seeking blood money.

recompense for an injury is an injury equal thereto (in degree): But if a person forgives and makes reconciliation, his reward is due from Allah: For (Allah) loveth not those who do wrong.”

Others said that Al-Amrani’s decision was in keeping with the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, who said: “Whosoever introduces a good practice in Islam, there is for him its reward and the reward of those who act upon it after him without anything being

diminished from their rewards.”

In a message posted on Twitter, Saudi citizen Bandar Al-Atwi wrote: “The father has gained a promise from the Almighty to reward him for his noble act.” Quoting verse 32 of surah Al-Maidah, he added: “If anyone saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of the whole people.”

Waleed Khaled Darraj, a lawyer in Jeddah, told Arab News that the freed man and his family must adhere to the demands and

conditions set by the victim’s father.

“If written and approved by the court, all that the father has requested should be followed, otherwise the waiver becomes invalid and the victim’s family has the right to demand beheading,” he said.

He said that while executions are permitted under Shariah as a deterrent to safeguard lives and preserve the human soul, Islam also urges its followers to forgive whenever possible.

News Middle East

ANGER OVER PRO-ASSAD RALLY

Lebanese parties reject return to ‘militia behavior’

Partisan groups in Lebanon return to language of war in light of deadly stalemate, say leading politicians

Najla Houssari Beirut

Lebanese political parties have reacted strongly to a Beirut demonstration on Sunday by the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP), with the speaker of the Lebanese parliament reiterating the need for a national government on Monday.

Chants by SSNP members were “a return to the language of the civil war,” the parties said.

The demonstration, authorized by the Ministry of Interior, took place in light of a complex and deadly political stalemate.

It also came after four days of raising pictures of Syrian President Bashar Assad, with Syrian workers and refugees, who were cheering Assad, being attacked by some Lebanese citizens.

The SSNP demonstration came within the framework of the commemoration of the liberation of southern Lebanon from the Israeli occupation.

At the forefront of the celebrating parties was Hezbollah, whose supporters spread in the border areas.

Those groups waved Lebanese and Hezbollah flags, and drove their cars and motorbikes to smash an iron gate bearing an Israeli symbol before traveling to

the town of Naqoura.

The speaker of the Lebanese parliament, Nabih Berri, warned on Monday that “creating crises on purpose, if it continues without a quick initiative to address them, will topple Lebanon.”

Berri called on “the loyalists and the opposition to feel the danger of the fateful stage.”

He urged political forces and NGOs “to liberate Lebanon from the complex of choosing personal interests over the interests of the homeland by some people, and recognize that our governmental problem is 100 percent internal.”

Berri said: “The only solution is to form a national government, without preconditions, with nonpartisan competencies, no obstructing third for anyone, according to the French initiative, and its only program of action should be to restore the confidence of the Lebanese and the Arab brothers in Lebanon.”

Political activist Naufal Daou told Arab News that “what is happening in Lebanon is just smoke bombs to divert attention from the main problem, which is the Syrian and Iranian occupation of Lebanon.”

He clarified that “all that happened in recent days is an attempt to cover up the basis of the problem and to distract people.”

He added: “As long as we do not acknowledge the main problem, which is related to the wrong re-

gional and international positioning of Lebanon, and as long as we remain as part of the Syrian-Iranian system, there are no solutions and no one is ready to help us.

“The international community is telling us to reform and fight corruption. This is your business.

“But when we say to the international community that we are occupied by Iran, the issue of Lebanon becomes the focus of foreign treatments.”

The SSNP demonstration soon evolved into a military parade without weapons.

Party members covered their faces with masks and wore black and khaki colors.

Video footage circulated on social media of groups participating in the demonstration shouting chants against the leader of the Lebanese Forces (LF), Samir Geagea, threatening to kill him in the same way former President Bashir Gemayel was killed in 1982.

The Judicial Council issued a death sentence against Habib Al-Shartouni, a member of the SSNP,

for the murder of Gemayel.

The LF said in a statement that “the chant that was used at the demonstration was a clear admission of killing and an explicit call to kill.”

The LF announced that it would file a case before the competent authorities “against those responsible

FASTFACT

The speaker of the Lebanese parliament, Nabih Berri, has warned that ‘creating crises on purpose, if it continues without a quick initiative to address them, will topple Lebanon.’

for the celebration.”

The leader of the Free Patriotic Movement, MP Gebran Bassil, joined the denouncers.

Bassil said that “every call to kill is reprehensible, and it is a return to the language of war that is rejected because fueling instincts undermines the principle of the state.”

Bassil added: “We reject the re-

turn to militia behavior, and there is no place to justify it. As for respecting the martyrs, especially the president of the republic, it is a duty, and we all have martyrs.”

The head of the LF’s foreign affairs department, Richard Kouyoumjian, warned that no one can bring back Syrian tutelage to Lebanon.

He called for “every displaced Syrian who has chanted in support of Assad to return to Syria because we cannot continue as a lawless country.” The Future Movement MP Rola Al-Tabash denounced “the paramilitary parades in Beirut, the closure of roads and intimidation of citizens, insults and confessions of assassinations and threats to commit others.”

On Twitter, she asked: “What is the position of the judicial and security agencies regarding what happened? What is the position of the administration that raises the banner of sovereignty regarding replaying the scenes of war?”

MP Nadim Gemayel, the son of the former president, said: “Bashir,

after 40 years, still terrifies them.”

The Progressive Socialist Party said that “civil peace and respect for its requirements is one of the most prominent pillars of the Taif Accord, which ended the civil war and laid the basis of national reconciliation that must be adhered to above all considerations, hoping that those concerned realize the urgent necessity to achieve a government settlement before it is too late.”

The Lebanese “are experiencing unbearable daily oppression,” the party added.

The media office of Interior Minister Mohammed Fahmy referred to a split within the SSNP.

It said: “Some members of the party obtained a license from the ministry to hold a ceremonial gathering and pledged to abide by the conditions of the ministry. Others within the party objected to the request on the grounds that the license applicants do not represent the party.”

Fahmy’s office added that “the ministry does not interfere in disputes within parties.”

IMMUNITY

Yemen resumes vaccination campaign as supplies dwindle

Saeed Al-Batati Al-Mukalla

Hundreds of Yemenis thronged to health facilities across government-controlled areas to receive COVID-19 vaccines on Monday as the country resumed its campaign to inoculate thousands of vulnerable people.

Shortly after receiving 360,000 doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine, Yemen in April kicked off a national COVID-19 vaccination campaign, targeting health workers, the elderly and people with serious diseases.

The campaign was paused for several weeks due to poor turnout from the targeted groups, prompting health officials to consider opening vaccinations to the public at large.

But this week, health facilities saw unprecedented visits after Saudi Arabia made it mandatory for travelers from Yemen to receive a COVID-19 vaccination before crossing into the Kingdom.

Long queues of people seeking inoculation were seen on Monday outside hospitals and makeshift health centers in the southern cities of Aden, Taiz, Shabwa, Abyan, Lahj and Hadramout.



A Yemeni health worker receives a dose of the COVID-19 vaccine. File/AFP

Some health facilities closed doors after entire vaccine stocks were depleted, while others sent urgent appeals for more doses.

The provincial office of the Ministry of Health in Marib asked travelers to receive jabs at other facilities outside the province after it ran out of vaccines.

According to the official news agency SABA, Qasem Bubaibeh, Yemen’s health minister, said that Marib ran out of doses after health centers close to the Al-Wadiah border crossing with Saudi Arabia vaccinated 3,287 people

in just two days.

The Health Ministry set up two new medical points to meet the surge in demand for vaccines from Yemenis looking to travel to the Kingdom, he added.

Health facilities in the densely populated city of Taiz also reported similar turnouts, with authorities warning that the 70,000 doses in the city “might be gone within a week.”

Dr. Ahmed Mansour, a health official in Taiz, told Arab News: “The number of people is big and our stock will last for one

week. We have sent a request for 100,000 more doses.”

He urged the country’s health ministry to urgently dispatch further doses along with the salaries of health workers who are battling the virus and sudden influx of people seeking vaccines.

The Iran-backed Houthi militia have blocked the distribution of vaccines in areas under their control, which prompted the Yemeni government to urge health workers in Sanaa and other northern areas to head to southern provinces to receive the jab.

Mansour said that dozens of health workers have “secretly” received COVID-19 vaccines at health centers in Taiz since April.

“They came from Sanaa and Ibb. The Houthis neither offer health workers the vaccine nor allow them to travel to government areas to get it,” Mansour added.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, the Houthis have refused to disclose the true number of coronavirus deaths in territories under their control, and have blocked attempts by local and international organizations to investigate the crisis.

HAWKISH PREMIER

Gaza violence and unrest at home raise specter of new Israel election

AFP Jerusalem

Israel’s battle with Gaza militants and unprecedented inter-communal violence at home have further complicated efforts to form a government, raising the specter of yet another general election, experts say.

That could be a political boon to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, whose best hope of extending his record 12 straight years in office could hang on what would be the fifth Israeli election since April 2019.

But the ideologically divided anti-Netanyahu camp still has a narrow window to reach a deal that would oust the hawkish premier: Centrist opposition leader Yair Lapid’s 28-day mandate to form a government expires on June 3.

“Most analysts regard a fifth election as the most probable outcome,” said Toby Greene, a political scientist at Bar Ilan University.

“But we have 10 days left, and that’s a very long time in Israeli politics.”

It was widely expected that any deal reached by Lapid would have to bring on board both Naftali Bennett’s right-wing Jewish nationalist Yamina party, and at least some

pro-Palestinian and non-Zionist Arab lawmakers.

But hopes for any such deal were dealt a severe blow this month as militants in the Palestinian enclave of Gaza launched rockets into Israel, while multiple mixed Jewish and Arab communities inside Israel were gripped by a wave of inter-communal violence.

That forced Bennett to “reconsider his choice to form a government together with Arab-supported parties,” said Yohanan Plesner,

Most analysts regard a fifth election as the most probable outcome.

Toby Greene
Political scientist

president of the Israel Democracy Institute think tank.

Before conflict flared with armed Palestinian groups Hamas and Islamic Jihad on May 10, Netanyahu’s political future looked precarious.

On trial for bribery, fraud and breach of trust, the premier had failed in a March 23 vote to secure enough seats with his allies to build a majority in Israel’s 120-seat parliament.

News Middle East

INVESTIGATION

Turkey's deep-state apparatus under the spotlight amid bombshell claims

Former interior minister and former intelligence official at center of trials over extrajudicial killings

Arab News Ankara

The bombshell revelations of Turkey's exiled mafia boss Sedat Peker on his YouTube channel have triggered an in-depth look into the country's deep-state apparatus.

At the center of the trials are Mehmet Agar, a former interior minister and police chief, and Korkut Eken, a former intelligence official.

To what extent the Turkish government will handle the serious accusations against its high-profile politicians and whether Interior Minister Suleyman Soylu, who is at the center of claims on state-mafia relations, will resign are still matters of concern. No parliamentary inquiry has been launched yet.

Agar and Eken will be retried over 18 extrajudicial killings that occurred in the 1990s after an appeals court decided to reverse their acquittals in a ruling that was adopted on April 5 but surprisingly conveyed to lawyers on Sunday.

The appeals court asserted that the evidence, especially the bullets used in the murders, was not suitably examined.

Agar and Eken made headlines recently with the allegations by organized crime boss Peker, who accused them of committing several unlawful acts under the state apparatus, including involvement in an international drug-smuggling scheme and the assassination of investigative journalists Ugur Mumcu and Kutlu Adali during their terms.

Journalist and peace advocate Adali was shot dead in front of his home in July 1996, in the Northern Cyprus administration. The murder has remained unsolved.

Adali's spouse filed a case with the European Court of Human Rights against Turkey, and in March 2005 the court found that Ankara had not conducted a proper investigation into the murder of



Turkish police officers detain a demonstrator as they clash during a recent rally in Istanbul. AFP

FASTFACT

Mehmet Agar and Korkut Eken made headlines recently with the allegations by organized crime boss Sedat Peker, who accused them of committing several unlawful acts, including involvement in an international drug-smuggling scheme and the assassination of investigative journalists.

the Turkish Cypriot journalist.

On Monday, Turkish police detained Atilla Peker, brother of Sedat, after he said he assigned his brother to a botched mission to kill Adali 25 years ago upon orders of the state.

Mumcu, a globally known investigative journalist, was also killed by a car bomb in January 1993 outside his apartment in the Turkish capital of Ankara. Peker claimed it was Agar who stepped in first to the crime scene.

Sinem Adar, associate at the Center for Applied Turkey Studies at the German Institute for In-

ternational and Security Affairs, said that the state-mafia organized crime triangle is not new in Turkey.

"Still, one key difference in the current moment is the degree of institutional deterioration and fragmentation of power within the state, which together wipe away even the pretense that allegations would be investigated," she told Arab News.

"In fact, except for a few officials from the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), we have so far not heard from the president implying that any serious investiga-

tion will take place," she said.

In order to clear his past before entering politics, Agar allegedly killed all Kurdish businessmen from whom he was receiving money in return for drug dealing.

Among the businessmen allegedly slain by the former minister, there is Savas Buldan, husband of Pervin Buldan, the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party co-chair.

The Kurdish lawmaker is set to apply for the re-launching of a judicial process over the killing of her husband.

Tolga Agar, Mehmet's son and a

lawmaker from the AKP, was also accused of having raped and killed a Kyrgyz journalist who filed a complaint with the gendarmerie about the lawmaker just a day before she was found dead.

According to Adar, Peker's allegations and revelations demonstrate that the state-mafia organized crime triangle is no longer a secret that surprises many when it comes out in the light.

"It is rather a public performance through which parties show each other their power, audacity and sometimes even their panic — a performance that slaps one in the face as the very evidence of political and institutional decay," she said.

As Peker pledges to continue whistleblowing on his past ties with the highest echelons, this will be a serious litmus test for the Turkish government to demonstrate its public relations skills for containing this unprecedented political crisis and take decisive actions against the criminal underworld ahead of elections in 2023.

One thing is clear: This latest wave of allegations will seriously undermine the approval ratings of the government in the long run as it has already lost considerable public support recently, with the opposition mayors of Ankara and Istanbul rising as potential challengers.

As for the likely implications of the revelations and allegations on the electoral behavior, Adar noted that the AKP, as well as its far-right ally the Nationalist Movement Party, have been steadily losing popular support.

"This decline is not reversible. No doubt about it. Peker's allegations are, in this sense, another hit to an already losing alliance," she said.

"More than the electoral support, however, the damage reflects itself more in terms of solidifying and accentuating the already existing conflict and competition among different cliques within the ruling alliance," Adar added.

DIALOGUE

Egyptian minister hopes on-hold dam talks will resume soon

Mohammed Abu Zaid Cairo

An Egyptian minister said he hoped that talks on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), which are currently on hold, would resume soon.

Ethiopia began work on the dam in 2011. Egypt fears the GERD will threaten its water supply from the Nile, while Sudan is concerned about the dam's safety and its own water flow.

Talks between the three

countries over the filling and operation of the dam have come to a halt. Egypt's Water Resources and Irrigation Minister Mohammed Abdel-Aty said he hoped the talks would resume soon and that there would be a speedy negotiation process.

But he also stressed that Egypt would not accept unilateral illegal behavior in the waters of the Nile, saying there would be a "water shock" if Ethiopia started the second filling process.

"It is simply like someone who earns an income of EGP100 (\$6.40) per month and then gets levied taxes that amount to EGP27. This represents a shock to the employee, which is exactly the case

Water Resources and Irrigation Minister Mohammed Abdel-Aty



FASTFACT

Water Resources and Irrigation Minister Mohammed Abdel-Aty stressed that Egypt would not accept unilateral illegal behavior in the waters of the Nile, saying there would be a 'water shock' if Ethiopia started the second filling process.

of the second filling. This shock will be estimated at 27 percent of the water share reaching the downstream countries."

He added that Egypt's water consumption reached 80 billion cubic meters on an annual basis and needed to reach 114 billion cubic meters.

"There is no country in Africa that reuses water like Egypt, and we reuse water at least four times."

There was intense diplomatic activity earlier this month, with

Jeffrey Feltman, US envoy to the Horn of Africa, and Felix Tshisekedi, president of the Democratic Republic of Congo and the current session of the African Union, holding talks in an effort to reach a settlement. Abdel-Aty said the US envoy had listened to all stakeholders but had yet to make a proposal.

Egypt and Sudan are calling for a binding and comprehensive deal that guarantees the rights and interests of all three countries.

SAFETY FIRST

Egypt moves to calm black fungus panic as two cases detected

Mohammed Abu Zaid Cairo

Only two instances of black fungus infection have been detected in Egypt, said a top official who stressed that the cases were not a cause for concern. Citizens should not fear the infection, said Hossam

Hosni, head of the scientific committee to combat the coronavirus virus in Egypt.

In televised statements, Hosni indicated that he had diagnosed two cases with the infection.

"But the matter had nothing to do with the coronavirus," he said.

Hosni said that the two cases were contracted due to a health condition linked to immunosuppressants and drugs that were aimed at improving immune strength.

He urged people to stop sharing messages that spread fear about the disease. "Some people have shared that the disease requires the removal of the nose or eye," he said.

The sharing of this information was a "terrifying matter," which

was far from the truth, Hosni said.

He explained that the disease could be treated through medication.

Hosni noted that treatment for the fungal disease was fully available in Egypt, and surgery was the last stage used in dealing with the infection.

The Egyptian Ministry of Health has denied the spread of the black fungus in the country among those infected with the coronavirus.

The ministry's move came after rumors attributed the death of comedian Samir Ghanem to the infection.

Khaled Mujahid, assistant to the Egyptian health minister, said that black fungus was not an unusual disease, but rather a side-effect of

some immunodeficiency patients.

There was no need for panic, he said. Mujahid called on social media users and media outlets to stop spreading false information and to ensure accuracy in what they reported. He urged them to consult scientific and health institutions when reporting medical matters.

Enas Abdel Halim, a member of the Egyptian parliament, called for clarification on the strategy that the Ministry of Health intends to implement, and the disclosure of the treatment protocols followed to prevent the spread of the disease.

Black fungus is caused by a mold found in soil and decomposing organic matter such as rotting leaves, according to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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Myanmar's junta leader Min Aung Hlaing cast doubt on the return of Rohingya Muslim refugees who fled to Bangladesh in comments made in his first interview since taking power in a Feb. 1 coup.



A health worker inoculates a woman with the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine, inside a closed cinema in Taguig, Metro Manila, on Monday. Reuters

ENCOURAGING TURNOUT

WHO cites vaccine rollout to refute 'hesitancy' claims

Many Filipinos 'eagerly waiting' to get inoculated, senior WHO official says

Elle Aben Manila

The World Health Organization (WHO) on Monday cited the Philippine's COVID-19 vaccine rollout, rejecting claims of public reluctance to get inoculated against the disease.

"Right now, we don't see a lot of (COVID-19) vaccine hesitancy in the Philippines. Actually, the issue is that the vaccine supply cannot meet the demand," Dr. Rabintra Abeyasinghe, WHO representative to the Philippines, said during a virtual press briefing on Monday.

He added that while there had been initial vaccine hesitancy in the Philippines — triggered mainly by an anti-dengue vaccine controversy in 2018 — in terms of the COVID-19 jabs, many Filipinos were willing to get vaccinated.

"We know that the Philippines

has traditionally had some vaccine hesitancy. What we see now is that people are eagerly waiting to receive vaccines," Abeyasinghe said.

"So it's not an issue of vaccine hesitancy, (but rather an issue) of preference for a particular brand of vaccine," he added.

Abeyasinghe explained that the WHO was "very encouraged" by the Philippines' vaccine rollout, where more than 4 million shots had been administered as of Sunday. Despite launching its vaccination drive in March this year and experiencing several challenges in accessing the bulk of vaccines required for the campaign, Abeyasinghe said that the government's inoculation program has been "commendable."

"Overall, we are very encouraged with the vaccine rollout. Over the weekend, I think, we exceeded over 4 million (vaccine doses administered), and we are closing on 1 million people fully protected now. So this is very en-

couraging," he said.

The increase in the number of COVID-19 vaccines used by the Philippines placed it at the number 37 spot in the global ranking of countries that have administered the COVID-19 vaccines so far.

However, with some Filipinos

FASTFACT

The increase in the number of COVID-19 vaccines used by the Philippines placed it at the number 37 spot in the global ranking of countries that have administered the COVID-19 vaccines so far.

waiting to be inoculated with specific vaccine brands, especially those manufactured by the US, Abeyasinghe said that it "does not matter which vaccine one is getting" since all jabs with an emergency use authorization (EUA) were "safe and effective."

"These vaccines are largely used to prevent severe disease and deaths, and we know that all of the vaccines are doing that effectively ... We are not advocating for preference for one or the other brand," he said.

Infectious disease specialist, Dr. Edsel Salvana, of the University of the Philippines-Philippine General Hospital, agreed, telling reporters that all EUA vaccines were "very effective" against severe disease — the most important outcome for the shots.

He underscored that from a scientific standpoint, "the best vaccine that one can get is the one that is already available."

Meanwhile, following reports of the illicit sale of COVID-19 vaccines and vaccination slots, Malacanang spokesperson, Harry Roque, said during the press briefing that such measures were prohibited "as no vaccine has received authorization for commercial use yet and all were just under EUA."

SPECIAL COURT

Myanmar's Suu Kyi makes court appearance in person for the first time

AP Bangkok

Myanmar's ousted leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, appeared in court in person Monday for the first time since the military arrested her when it seized power on Feb. 1.

One of her lawyers, Min Min Soe, told The Associated Press by phone that Suu Kyi was able to meet with her defense team for about 30 minutes before the hearing began at a special court set up inside the city council building in Naypyitaw, the capital.

The lawyers also met with Win Myint, who was president of the government Suu Kyi led as state counselor and faces some of the same charges.

Suu Kyi's only previous court appearances have been by video link and she had not been allowed to meet in person with any of her lawyers. Min Min Soe said Suu Kyi wanted to tell Myanmar's people that her National League for Democracy party will stand by them.

She said that "since the NLD was founded for the people, the NLD will exist as long as the people



Myanmar's ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi appear with other defendants at a court in Naypyitaw, Myanmar in this still image taken from video. Reuters

exist," Min Min Soe said after the hearing. She appeared to be referring to the ruling junta's threat to dissolve the party.

Rhin Maung Zaw, head of Suu Kyi's legal team, said "she seems fit and alert and smart, as always."

"Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is always confident in herself, and she is confident in her cause and confident in the people," he said, using an honorific for a respected older

woman.

Monday's hearing concerned several of the six charges Suu Kyi faces and was largely procedural.

There are two counts of violating the Natural Disaster Management Law for allegedly violating COVID-19 pandemic restrictions during the 2020 election campaign; illegally importing walkie-talkies that were for her bodyguards' use; unlicensed use of the radios; and

spreading information that could cause public alarm or unrest.

The most serious charge that Suu Kyi faces is breaching the colonial-era Official Secrets Act, which carries a penalty of up to 14 years' imprisonment, but that is being handled by a separate court.

Suu Kyi's supporters say the proceedings are politically motivated and are meant to discredit her and legitimize the military's seizure of power. If convicted of any of the offenses, she could be banned from running in the election that the junta has pledged to hold within one or two years of its takeover.

The military ousted Suu Kyi's government after her party won a landslide victory in a general election last November that would have given it a second five-year term in office. Before the start of democratic reforms a decade ago, Myanmar was ruled by the military for 50 years.

The junta claims it was justified in taking power because of alleged widespread election fraud, especially irregularities in voting lists.

Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Still open

Nepal: Everest climbs continue despite COVID-19

A Nepali government official said on Monday that many foreign climbers were continuing their attempts to summit Mount Everest despite reports of a COVID-19 outbreak at the base camp of the world's tallest peak.

Mira Acharya, a director at the Department of Tourism that oversees climbing activities, said the government had not received any notice of a COVID-19 outbreak at the Everest base camp and that expeditions were continuing through the climbing season that ends next week.

"Even some climbers whose teams had stopped climbing are continuing their expeditions," she said without giving any names. Reuters

Death row

Foreigners arrested in Bali on narcotics charges

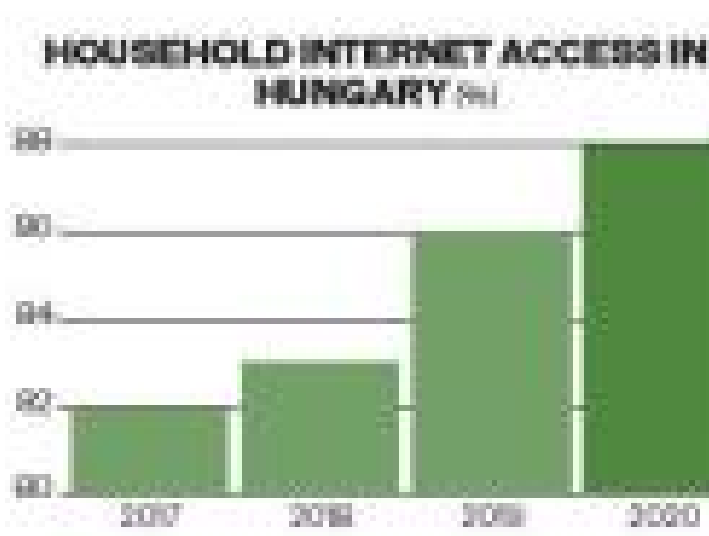
A British hotel owner and an Italian tourist have been arrested for alleged possession of narcotics on Indonesia's resort island of Bali, police said Monday.

Kenneth Daniel Kutsch, a British man who has a hotel business on neighboring Lombok island, and his Indonesian partner, Ni Ketut Dewi Seniwati, were arrested in the parking lot of a restaurant in Bali on May 7 after residents reported narcotic transactions in the area.

Indonesia has extremely strict drug laws, and convicted dealers are sometimes executed by firing squad. More than 150 people are currently on death row, mostly for drug crimes. AP

The Day's FIGURES

Source: Statista



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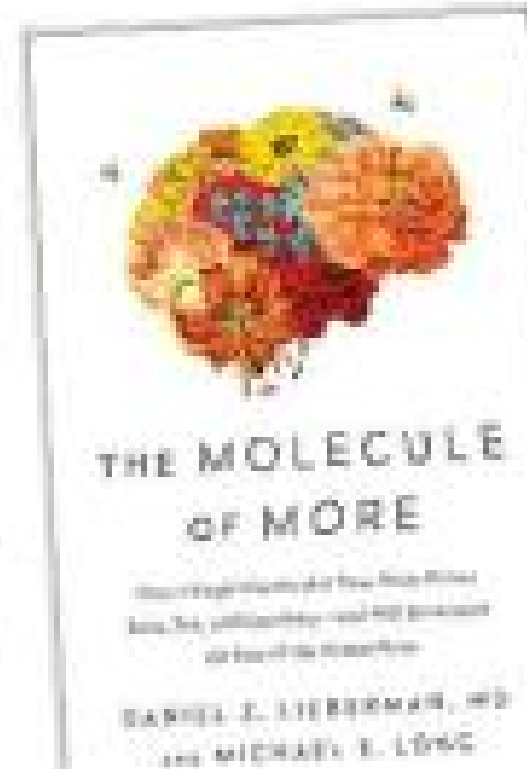
The Molecule of More

DANIEL Z. LIEBERMAN AND MICHAEL E. LONG

In *The Molecule of More*, George Washington University professor Daniel Z. Lieberman, MD, and Georgetown University lecturer Michael E. Long present a potentially life-changing proposal: Much of human life has an unconsidered component that explains an array of behaviors previously thought to be unrelated, including why winners cheat, why geniuses often suffer with mental illness, why nearly all diets fail, and why the brains of liberals and conservatives really are different. Dopamine is the chemical of desire

that always asks for more — more stuff, more stimulation, and more surprises. In pursuit of these things, it is undeterred by emotion, fear, or morality. Dopamine is the source of our every urge, that little bit of biology that makes an ambitious business professional sacrifice everything in pursuit of success, or that drives a satisfied spouse to risk it all for the thrill of someone new.

Simply put, it is why we seek and succeed; it is why we discover and prosper. Yet, at the same time, it's why we gamble and squander.



Booming business

Nigerians block highway after kidnapping surge

Hundreds of protesters partially blocked a highway into Nigeria's capital Abuja on Monday after residents reported a spate of kidnappings in the area.

Setting tires on fire, a crowd barricaded a section of the Abuja-Kaduna highway in the Tafa area of Niger state, bordering the federal capital.

"Five days ago, they kidnapped four people, and then they came back again, yesterday, and kidnapped 16 people," one protester said.

Africa's most populous country has been plagued by kidnappings for years, with criminals largely targeting the wealthy and prominent.

But more recently, the pool of victims has expanded and the vulnerable and poor across the country are now also taken for ransom. AFP

Eyeing sanctions

NATO envoys to discuss Belarus 'forcible landing'

The NATO allies will meet on Tuesday to discuss Belarus' forced diversion of a European passenger flight carrying an opposition activist.

Several NATO members have denounced Belarus' decision to force the Ryanair flight from Athens to Vilnius to land and to detain dissident journalist Roman Protasevich.

EU leaders, most of whose governments are also NATO allies, were to meet later Monday to discuss imposing tougher sanctions on Alexander Lukashenko's regime.

On Sunday, NATO secretary general Jens Stoltenberg denounced the diversion.

Some member states have gone so far as to call the action a "state hijacking" and Belarus' neighbor Poland called in an "act of state terrorism." AFP

أنت حرٌ حتى يُصيبك الحب. ثَمَّكَ الأشياء وتُعتَصِي بها
حيثما شئت، فلَمَّا تُعشِقُ تتكفَّلُ الأغلال، وتُقل ما في اليد.
(صالح زمانان)

YOUR DAILY ARABIC PROVERB

Until you are touched by love, you are free. You own things and take them wherever you want; but once in love, shackles become tighter and you are left with only a few possessions.

Saleh Zamanan
(Saudi poet)

Opinion

Red Sea security requires international cooperation

DR. ABDEL AZIZ ALUWAISHEG



Dr. Abdel Aziz Aluwaisheg is the GCC Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs & Negotiation, and a columnist for Arab News. The views expressed in this piece are personal and do not necessarily represent GCC views.
Twitter: @abuhamad1

International competition for influence in the Red Sea region has intensified over the past few years, as concerns about its security and stability have grown dramatically. Great powers and trading nations are elbowing each other to gain a foothold in the region. The US maintains its largest African base in Djibouti (Camp Lemonnier), while France, Italy, Japan and others also have a significant military presence there. Beijing has set up a Chinese People's Liberation Army Support Base in Djibouti.

However, while many nations are seeking to gain a military foothold in the Red Sea region, cooperation between them has been limited due to a lack of effective platforms to manage their competition and direct it toward achieving the best results. There have, however, been effective international partnerships in fighting piracy, arms smuggling and illicit trade in the Gulf of Aden, the Arabian Sea and off Somali shores. The Combined Maritime Forces (CMF), a coalition of 33 nations, is the best-known and has been quite effective through its task forces CTF-150 (maritime security), CTF-151 (counter-piracy) and CTF-152 (Gulf maritime security). There is also the EU's Operation Atalanta that fights piracy off the coast of Somalia. These efforts are limited by their mandates and geographical scope and need to be expanded to include the Red Sea and new emerging threats.

The attention given to the May 15 inauguration of Djibouti President Ismail Omar Guelleh for a fifth term was indicative of how much the international community values stability in the region. Heads of state and government from neighboring countries and notable emissaries from great powers and

others attended the ceremonies in Djibouti. President Guelleh has been in office since 1999, witnessing the country's rising strategic significance and international and regional competition over influence.

Djibouti's stability, in sharp contrast to the turmoil in neighboring Somalia and Ethiopia, has contributed to Red Sea security, as has its relative prosperity compared to its neighbors. With about 1 million inhabitants, Djibouti is the Horn of Africa's smallest country, but it has the highest per capita income. It has a rather modest per capita gross domestic product of just over \$3,400, but that is six to eight times more than Eritrea, Ethiopia and Sudan.

By contrast, regional conflicts, political instability, poverty and a governance deficit in some of the countries overlooking the Red Sea have left many spaces ungoverned, providing opportunities for terrorists, pirates, organized crime gangs and rogue states to take advantage of those gaps and threaten the region's security.

The Red Sea stretches between two important narrow passageways: Bab Al-Mandab Strait and the Suez Canal, through which about 10 percent of world trade and 4 million barrels of oil a day pass. But they also represent possible chokepoints should they be blocked.

Looked at from the Gulf Cooperation Council perspective, there is great urgency to deal with Red Sea security. The most immediate security threats include attacks by drone boats and anti-shiping missiles, sea mines, piracy, terrorism and arms smuggling. They also include human trafficking, drugs and cyberattacks.

Civil wars, political disputes, poverty, and corruption contribute significantly to the

lawless state of parts of the Red Sea region. The breakdown in state authority has magnified the threats by creating ungoverned spaces, as has the limited capacity of security forces in a number of Red Sea states.

While the piracy threat has been degraded off Somalia, former pirates now provide protection for illegal fishing boats, while some cooperate with Daesh and other terror groups. Iran has exploited the instability in the region to smuggle weapons and threaten freedom of navigation. Its boats are also among the main beneficiaries of illegal fishing.

Human trafficking has been a key concern in the Red Sea region. For example, almost all illegals who are apprehended in Saudi Arabia come across the Red Sea or the Yemeni border. Traffickers also smuggle children and teenagers from the poorer countries along the Red Sea to Europe and pay local warlords and terrorists to facilitate their trade. Much of the illicit drug trade, which used to go from Asia through Iraq and Syria, now goes through East Africa, run by organized crime gangs and facilitated by terrorist groups, which get some of their funding from such operations.

In sum, these conditions have created formidable collaboration opportunities for organized crime gangs, terrorists and rogue states. And they are getting more sophisticated in how they take advantage of law and order gaps where they exist.

To deal with these multiple and growing threats, there is an urgent need to provide better coordination at the regional and international levels. Last week, the German Berghof Foundation hosted a timely discussion on Red Sea maritime security. From this excellent virtual discussion, it was clear there

is great interest on both shores of the Red Sea, as well as internationally, in bolstering Red Sea security in the widest sense. There is also considerable support for a trilateral cooperative framework that includes countries and regional organizations from both Red Sea shores, together with international players. The three groups do not have to agree or work together on all issues, but they need to coordinate their efforts.

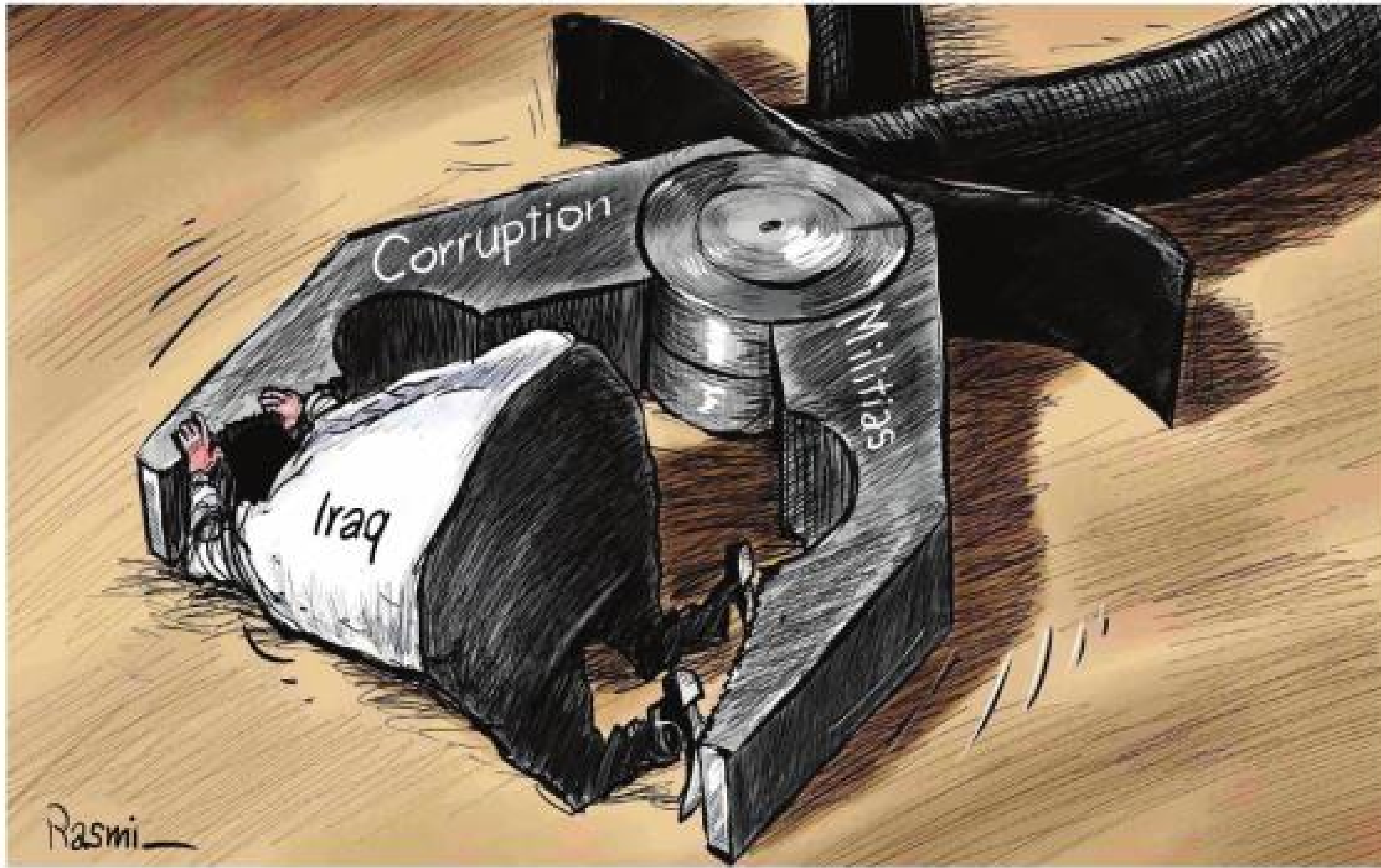
Defense cooperation is probably the most urgent. By its nature, some such cooperation can only take place between like-minded nations and co-operable forces. Joint exercises, training, and capacity building should be enhanced. The CMF coalition partners should look into extending their mandate geographically to include the Red Sea and in scope to include new threats such as cyberattacks and human trafficking. Expanding the mandate of the EU's Operation Atalanta should also be encouraged.

Greater cooperation and knowledge sharing between security forces is needed to fight terrorism, including the training of coast guards, to disrupt terrorist movement and funding and degrade their ability to recruit and radicalize youths.

Trade and investment cooperation is key to addressing some of the root causes of security threats by providing jobs and legitimate livelihoods.

International and regional organizations could provide useful platforms for greater cooperation between Red Sea littoral states, for dialogue between relevant regional and global players, to manage competition, and to harness their capabilities. They should also work to coordinate and enhance trade, investment and aid flows.

Civil wars, political disputes, poverty, and corruption contribute significantly to the lawless state of parts of the Red Sea region



These people feel that participation in the election grants unmerited legitimacy to the Iranian regime

Iran's presidential election threatened by boycott calls

DR. MOHAMMED AL-BULAMI



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At a time when the Iranian regime is desperately seeking to secure the largest possible turnout for the presidential election scheduled for June 18 — in order to avoid any repetition of the embarrassing scenario that occurred during the previous parliamentary election — recent days have seen unprecedented and rapidly growing calls for the vote to be boycotted.

This is shocking since the growing talk of boycotting the election has even spread to the hard-line advocates of the Iranian revolution, who were, until very recently, among its most fervent defenders. One prominent figure, Faehz Hashemi Rafsanjani, claimed that the election offers nothing and will do nothing to change the unsatisfactory status quo in the country.

Former Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has threatened to boycott the election if the Guardian Council decides to disqualify him from standing as a candidate. Ahmadinejad is essentially dog whistling to instruct his supporters to stay away from the polling stations if he is disqualified.

Relatives of the victims of the regime's 2009

attacks on the Green Movement and family members of those killed by regime forces amid the social and political protests of December 2017 and November 2019 have also threatened to withhold their votes. In addition, family members of those aboard the Ukrainian passenger plane that was shot down in January 2020 by the regime's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and relatives of detainees killed in Iranian prisons are supporting the calls to boycott the election.

Meanwhile, 231 civil and political activists from 50 cities and 25 provinces across Iran have issued a message to the Iranian people, calling on them to boycott the June election. The activists asserted that, by not participating in this election, the Iranian people could move toward achieving a peaceful transition of power away from the fundamentalist regime to a democratic and secular leadership.

While there have been many calls to boycott Iran's elections in the past, they have never been as strong, numerous and determined as those witnessed in the past few weeks.

There is a general feeling of dissatisfaction among those supporting a boycott. These people feel that participation in the

election grants unmerited legitimacy to the Iranian regime.

In addition, there is a widespread perception that the election will only lead to a meaningless reshuffle of junior officials, while Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei will continue to wield absolute power, having the final say over political, economic and security affairs.

The hard-liners within the Iranian regime understand that disqualifying candidates, especially the leaders of the so-called reformist movement, could result in a significant number of their supporters and backers boycotting the election.

These hard-liners also realize that having candidates with diverse platforms could enhance the turnout. However, it seems unlikely they will reverse the disqualification policy of the Guardian Council for several reasons. Most importantly, the hard-liners will not allow the reformists to return to power at any cost, even if this means a low voter turnout.

It is widely acknowledged that disqualifying a large number of candidates from the presidential race, whether they are reformists, conservatives or moderates, will result in the candidate favored by Khamenei and the IRGC

commanders winning the election.

Guardian Council spokesman Abbas Ali Kadkhodaei asserted that a low turnout would not delegitimize the election. Reality suggests otherwise, however, with many believing that remarks like Kadkhodaei's mask deep concern within the Iranian regime about the possibility of a significant boycott, possibly even surpassing the woeful turnout at Iran's last parliamentary election in February 2020, which saw a record abstention rate that surpassed 57 percent.

The regime, fearing this possibility, could resort to various means to encourage the Iranian street to get out and vote.

Given the growing boycott calls and media reports, as well as opinion polls suggesting a record low turnout on June 18, the regime's old strategy of threats and intimidation are unlikely to work in forcing the Iranian electorate to the polling stations. The general disillusionment with the regime and its policies and the expectation that a hard-line president will soon take Rouhani's place in the presidential Saadabad Palace means that anyone hoping to achieve a high turnout in the election, like that witnessed in 2017, is likely to be disappointed.

Opinion

US media in slight shift

KERRY BOYD ANDERSON

Shifts in how the US media reports on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and how Americans talk about it were obvious during the latest round of violence. These shifts are important, even if they are not yet likely to significantly shape US policy.

Media coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has shifted significantly in the last 10 to 15 years. However, it is important to understand that the starting point was a profoundly pro-Israel viewpoint. Twenty years ago, the spectrum of mainstream reporting, academic discussions and conversations within the foreign policy world was very limited. At one end of the spectrum were voices that saw the conflict primarily through an Israeli lens, while also expressing some concern for the Palestinians — and mostly blaming Palestinians for their problems. The other end of the spectrum was vehemently pro-Israel, framing the Palestinians as liars, whiners and terrorists. Anyone who expressed opinions beyond that spectrum was seen as extreme or fringe.

Today, one end of the spectrum has expanded significantly. The spectrum now includes ideas that were previously fringe, such as giving equal credence to Palestinian and Israeli voices, blaming Israel for Palestinian deaths, recognizing that there is a huge disparity in the death toll when Israel and Hamas go to war, and so forth. These ideas were largely unacceptable in mainstream reporting 20 years ago, but now they appear frequently in mainstream media outlets. The other end of the spectrum remains extremely pro-Israel.

Multiple factors are driving this shift. Changes in the media landscape have eroded the power of a few outlets to determine what information and perspectives Americans receive. Social media has also played a major role, allowing



Palestinians and human rights organizations to circumvent traditional media and government censors and provide images, videos and voices of what the Palestinians are truly experiencing on the ground.

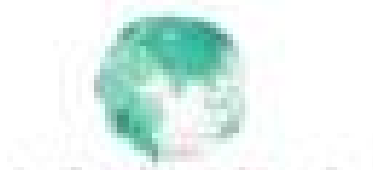
While far more Americans are today open to hearing Palestinian perspectives, the center point of American dialogue is far from overtly pro-Palestinian. Some Palestinians have expressed frustration with this.

It is critically important, however, to note that the US media environment is increasingly polarized. The shift to be more inclusive of Palestinian perspectives has occurred among left-leaning and some mainstream outlets. Right-wing outlets have, if anything, narrowed their focus to pro-Israel perspectives. Fox News coverage, for example, has remained extremely pro-Israel, frequently avoiding any mention of the number of Palestinian fatalities while highlighting Israeli deaths.

The shift in reporting and discussions about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is real, but it is unlikely to change US policy any time soon. Palestinians, who were previously viewed as extreme or less credible than Israelis, now have real opportunities to have their voices heard by Americans. At the same time, Israel remains a firm US ally with significant support among many Democrats and very solid backing from Republicans, but it can no longer dominate the information and perspectives that Americans receive.

Kerry Boyd Anderson is a writer and political risk consultant with more than 10 years' experience as a professional analyst of international security issues and Middle East political and business risk. Her previous positions include deputy director for advisory with Oxford Analytics and managing editor of Arms Control Today. **Twitter:** @KBAresearch

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United Palestinians have changed the course of history

RAMZY BAROUD



The Palestinian revolt of 2021 will go down in history as one of the most influential events in irreversibly changing the collective thinking in and around Palestine. Only two other events can be compared with what has just transpired in Palestine: The revolt of 1936 and the first intifada that began in 1987.

Since the signing of the Oslo I Accord, which ended the first intifada in 1993, the story of Palestine has been on a dismal trajectory — disunity, factionalism, political rivalry and, for the privileged few, massive wealth. Nearly four decades have been wasted on a self-defeating political discourse centered on American-Israeli priorities, mostly concerned with "Israeli security" and "Palestinian terrorism."

Predictably, the already-powerful Israel became more emboldened, tripling the number of its illegal colonies in the West Bank, along with the population of its illegal settlers. Palestine was segmented into tiny, isolated South Africa-style Bantustans, each carrying a code — Areas A, B and C — and the movement of Palestinians within their homeland became conditioned on them obtaining various colored permits from the Israeli military. Women forced to give birth at military checkpoints in the West Bank, cancer patients dying in Gaza while waiting for permission to cross to better-equipped hospitals and other similar scandals became the everyday reality of Palestine and the Palestinians.

With time, the Israeli occupation of Palestine became a marginal issue on the agenda of international diplomacy.

Even the international solidarity movement for Palestinian rights became confused and fragmented — a direct expression of the Palestinian political confusion and fragmentation. In the absence of a unified Palestinian voice amid the prolonged political feud, many took the liberty of lecturing Palestinians on how to resist, what "solutions" to fight for and how to conduct themselves politically.

It seemed that Israel had finally gained the upper hand — permanently.

Desperate to see Palestinians rise again, many — including intellectuals and political leaders — called for a third intifada. It was as if the flow of history in Palestine adhered to fixed academic notions or was compelled by the urging of some individual or organization.

The rational answer was, and remains, that only the Palestinian people will determine the nature, scope and direction of their collective action. Popular revolts are not the outcome of wishful thinking but of circumstances, the tipping point of which can only be decided by the people themselves.

Ramzy Baroud has been writing about the Middle East for over 20 years. He is an internationally syndicated columnist, a media consultant, an author of several books, and the founder of PalestineChronicle.com. **Twitter:** @RamzyBaroud

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World must seize the moment to end Israeli occupation

CHRIS DOYLE



Israelis are starting to relax after another Benjamin Netanyahu-Hamas ceasefire. After 11 days of violence, they can restart their lives and get out of the shelters. Next week should also see a return to pre-pandemic normality. That is welcome. But not for one second should anyone suggest this is a ceasefire and calm for Palestinians. This is the typical error of world leaders and politicians, whose energies will fade away within days if the precedent of the many previous wars on Gaza is adhered to.

Only ending the blockade of Gaza, opening up its economy and investing in livelihood support and infrastructure will make a genuine difference. If Palestinians in Gaza have hope and a future, then the lure of joining armed groups may be dulled.

Will the international community work to de-escalate in Jerusalem? Sunday's entry of more than 120 extremist Jews to Al-Haram Al-Sharif, flanked by heavily armed Israeli forces, hardly bodes well. The status quo agreement has to be enforced.

The international community did not have a good war. The Biden administration was pedestrian in getting out of the blocks and barely referred to Palestinian rights and suffering at all. The US was also the roadblock at the UN Security Council, blocking three resolutions. Even its post-ceasefire statement did not call for an end to the blockade of Gaza. The major European states were little better.

However, certain elements of the last month showcase some positive changes. Firstly, there has been a significant sea change in the nature of the conversation in the US. Joe Biden may

May 2021 became such a tipping point. Palestinians rose in unison, from Jerusalem to Gaza and every inch of the Occupied Territories, as well as refugee communities throughout the Middle East. By doing so, they solved an impossible political equation. The Palestinian "problem" was no longer that of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem alone, but also the Israeli racism and apartheid that have targeted the Palestinian communities inside Israel. Further, it was also the crisis of leadership and the deep-seated factionalism and political corruption.

When Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu decided on May 8 to unleash hordes of police and Jewish extremists on Palestinian worshippers at Al-Aqsa Mosque, who were protesting the ethnic cleansing of the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood in East Jerusalem, he was merely attempting to score a few political points among Israel's most chauvinistic right-wing constituencies. He also wanted to remain in power, or at least avoid prison as a result of his ongoing corruption trial.

He did not anticipate, however, that he was unleashing one of the most historic events in Palestine: one that would ultimately solve a seemingly impossible Palestinian quandary. True, Netanyahu's war on Gaza killed hundreds and wounded thousands. The violence he perpetrated in the West Bank and in Arab neighborhoods in Israel killed scores. But it was the Palestinians who claimed victory, with hundreds of thousands of people rushing to the streets in the wake of the ceasefire to declare their triumph as one unified, proud nation.

Winning and losing wars of national liberation cannot be measured by gruesome comparisons between the number of dead or the degree of destruction inflicted on each side. If this was the case, no colonized nation would have ever won its freedom. Palestinians won because, once more, they emerged from the rubble of Israeli bombs as a whole — a nation determined to win its freedom whatever the cost. This realization was symbolized by the many scenes of Palestinian crowds celebrating while waving the banners of all Palestinian factions, without prejudice and without exception.

Finally, it can unequivocally be asserted that the Palestinian resistance scored a major victory, arguably unprecedented in its proud history. This is the first time that Israel has been forced to accept that the rules of the game have changed, likely forever. It is no longer the only party that determines political outcomes in occupied Palestine, because the Palestinian people are finally a force to be reckoned with.

be the first president to have to acknowledge and consider views from Democrats advocating an approach that includes rights for Palestinians.

Palestinian voices are also beginning to be heard in major media outlets and not blocked or ignored. Driving this momentum is a new generation of articulate, fearless Palestinians who will not retreat or be intimidated. This is also a sign of a reversal of the fragmentation of Palestinian society, as younger civil society actors appear far more relevant than the jaded, discredited political leaders.

Secondly, the framing of this as combating a regime of apartheid has moved from a fringe term to part of the mainstream debate. Understanding the true nature of the processes on the ground is vital if one is to move toward a solution. This means that the systemic discrimination against Palestinians within Israel has to be dismantled along with the occupation.

To avoid the traditional post-war Gaza failures, the international community has to break the mold. Accountability is key. Also, stop the lip service promising to resolve the underlying issues and get on and do it. Occupation is conflict and an aggression against Palestinians every hour of every day.

This requires negotiations, but not those based on freezing or perpetuating the occupation. The negotiations must be about implementing the laws and resolutions the international community has already passed. That must be the fundamental foundation for a true and lasting peace that both peoples need and can cherish.

Chris Doyle is director of the London-based Council for Arab-British Understanding. **Twitter:** @Doylech

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

Saudi Finance Minister Mohammed Al-Jadaan expects to raise \$38 billion through asset sales and \$16.5 billion through public-private partnerships.



Business

OPPORTUNITIES

Saudi Arabia aims to raise \$55bn by 2025 through privatization program

\$38 billion to be raised by asset sales, the rest via public-private partnerships

Arab News Riyadh

Saudi Arabia is seeking to raise about \$55 billion over the next four years through its privatization program as it looks to reduce its budget deficit, according to Saudi Finance Minister Mohammed Al-Jadaan.

Al-Jadaan expects to raise \$38 billion through asset sales and \$16.5 billion through public-private partnerships, he told the Financial Times.

The Saudi government has identified 160 projects in 16 sectors, including asset sales and public-private partnerships through 2025.

Asset sales will include government-owned hotels, television broadcasting towers, and cooling and water desalination plants.

The plan does not include Public Investment Fund entities or the sale of other assets of Saudi Aramco. The privatization law will be enacted in Saudi Arabia in July of this year.

Last year, Saudi Arabia sold all its flour mills to a group of local and international investors for around \$1.5 billion, with HSBC advising on the deals.

The National Privatization Center (NCP) in March also announced the creation of the Registry of Privatization Projects, a comprehensive central database of information and documents related to projects targeted for privatization.

According to director-general of Strategic Communication and Marketing at the NCP, Hani



The Saudi government has identified 160 projects. Asset sales will include hotels, television broadcasting towers, and cooling and water desalination plants. Reuters/Flo

Al-Saigh, the new system seeks to enhance the existing privatization system. One of its most important roles will be to strengthen the existing governance and ensure fairness and transparency.

"The law allows participants from the private sector to set up

a committee to submit grievances related to the bidding and selection procedures of privatization projects and lay the regulatory basis to compensate the aggrieved in case the gap cannot be addressed," he told Arab News.

Dimah Talal Al-Sharif, a Saudi

legal consultant at the law firm of Majed Garoub and a member of the International Association of Lawyers, told Arab News that the ongoing privatization drive is a national project that is not solely related to government ministries.

"Privatization will create more

job opportunities and improve the level of public service due to competition, which is an important element in the private sector. However, people will need more assurance on job security as it exists in the public sector," she said. "Continuity will be for those

who prove their ability to perform well, adhere to the regulations and achieve the goals set for each employee because, in order for privatization to succeed, there must be a change in the method of operating and managing public projects."

CRYPTOCURRENCY

Bitcoin not for us, says HSBC CEO

Reuters London

HSBC has no plans to launch a cryptocurrency trading desk or offer the digital coins as an investment to customers, because they are too volatile and lack transparency, its CEO Noel Quinn told Reuters.

Europe's biggest bank's stance on cryptocurrencies comes as the world's biggest and best-known, Bitcoin, has tumbled nearly 50 percent from the year's high, after China cracked down on mining the currency and prominent advocate

Elon Musk tempered his support.

HSBC's stance also contrasts with rival banks such as Goldman Sachs, which Reuters in March reported had restarted its cryptocurrency trading desk.

"Given the volatility we are not into bitcoin as an asset class, if our clients want to be there then of course they are, but we are not promoting it as an asset class within our wealth management business," Quinn said.

"For similar reasons we're not rushing into stablecoins," he said, referring to the digital currencies

NUMBER

50%

Europe's biggest bank's stance on cryptocurrencies comes as the world's biggest and best-known, Bitcoin, has tumbled nearly 50 percent from the year's high, after China cracked down on mining the currency and prominent advocate Elon Musk tempered his support.

that seek to avoid the volatility associated with typical cryptocurrencies by pegging their value to assets such as the US dollar.

Bitcoin traded at \$34,464 on Monday, down nearly 50 percent in just 40 days from its year high of \$64,895 on April 14.

Pressure on the currency intensified after the billionaire Tesla Chief Executive and cryptocurrency backer Musk reversed his stance on Tesla accepting bitcoin as payment.

China, which is central to HSBC's growth strategy, said last Tuesday

that it had banned financial institutions and payment companies from providing services related to cryptocurrency transactions.

Reuters reported in April that HSBC had banned customers in its online share trading platform from buying shares in bitcoin-backed MicroStrategy, saying in a message to clients that it would not facilitate the buying or exchange of products related to virtual currencies.

Quinn said his skeptical stance on cryptocurrencies partly arose from the difficulty of assessing the transparency of who owns.

COVID-19: How \$50 billion could be translated into \$9 trillion

CORNELIA MEYER

Numbers are powerful tools to illustrate the economic consequences of policies and behaviors. Last Friday, during a virtual G20 health summit co-hosted by Italy — which holds the G20 presidency — and the EU, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) released a report showing what it would take to share vaccines more equitably throughout the world.

The numbers raised were stark, but the opportunities promised bright prospects. While about half of the US population and 55 percent of the UK have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, fewer than 2 percent of people in Africa have received a jab. Some countries have not even reached the one percentile.

If anything, this shows just how the pandemic has fueled inequalities not only within countries, but also between them.

The question arises as to what can be done to avert a further falling behind of developing countries? Indeed, while poverty on a global level had been decreasing year after year,

poverty levels are increasing again for the first time in a generation. The World Bank estimates that the virus will have pushed 115 million additional people into extreme poverty, while the World Food Programme fears that 270 people will face starvation, more than double compared with pre-pandemic levels.

No wonder that multilateral aid agencies are extremely worried about these numbers: The IMF's paper proposed \$50 billion in funding to support vaccination efforts for developing countries. The Fund said said \$35 billion should be dispersed in the form of grants to the Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator, a partnership launched by the World Health Organization in April of last year to develop tools to fight COVID-19. A further \$15 billion should be contributed by governments and multilateral development banks in the form of concessional finance.

The mathematics, as laid out in the report, are convincing. The IMF hopes that, with the help of the program, 40 percent of the world's population could be vaccinated by the end of



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2021 and 60 percent would get there by the middle of next year. According to the Fund's calculations, this should result in \$9 trillion in extra global gross domestic product between now and 2025 — split 60 to 40 between developing and developed countries.

IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva told Bloomberg Television in an interview that these economic gains would translate into \$1 trillion of extra tax revenues in developed countries, because their economies will recover more quickly than they would otherwise.

Economic forecasts are always difficult and rarely hit the precise dollar mark. However, the pandemic had a devastating effect on the global economy and health sector experts and economists alike agree that unless the whole world is protected against the virus, societies will not be able to return to normal, which will be costly.

The \$50 billion investment is designed to go into distributing excess vaccines from the developed to the developing world, the production of extra doses to satisfy global

demand, and the establishment of test and trace systems in developing countries, as well as the boosting of their vaccination infrastructure once the desired doses arrive.

If we put the \$50 billion against the \$16 trillion which the IMF estimates governments have spent so far in supporting households and business in pandemic support, it seems money well spent. If we look at the potential gains in terms of \$9 trillion, the program would represent a tremendous return on investment. Even if the numbers turn out to be lower in the end, the proposal is still a bet worth taking — especially as the international community would have done "the right thing."

Let us also not forget that the IMF released the paper just as US President Joe Biden supported the demands of India and South Africa that pharmaceutical companies should forgo their patent rights on COVID-19 vaccines, which will necessitate lengthy debates in the World Trade Organization and other bodies. In contrast, the \$50 billion promises a lot of bang for the buck in a relatively short time frame.

Business Saudi Arabia

POSITIVITY

Saudi-listed companies see total profits surge 44 percent in Q1 2021

Return to normality after COVID-19 pandemic, rising oil price and demand helped rebound

Ruba Obaid Jeddah

Companies listed on the Saudi stock exchange (Tadawul) reported a 44 percent year-on-year increase in aggregate net profit during the first quarter (Q1) of 2021, after declining for eight quarters, according to a report by financial data platform Argaam.

The listed firm reported total net profit was SR107.88 billion (\$28.77 billion) compared to SR74.86 billion achieved during the

same period in 2020.

One of the key reasons behind the increase was the accelerated return to normal life after partial or complete lockdown as part of measures implemented during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, economist and financial analyst Talat Zaki Hafiz explained to Arab News.

“The energy and the banking sectors have helped in pushing the total market profitability upward,” Hafiz said, noting that the two prime sectors’ profit grew by 28 and 20 percent respectively in Q1 2021 compared to the same period last year.

In general, energy firms accounted for 74 percent of the total aggregate profit for listed companies in Q1 2021, reporting a 28 percent profit rise year-on-year to SR79.32 billion.

Hafiz said that Saudi Aramco had contributed positively to the total profits of the listed companies due to its 24 percent profit growth of SR78.59 billion this year, compared to SR65.63 billion in the same period in 2020.

“This is due to the improvement in the oil prices and the demand as well,” Hafiz said. “Also, the consolidated SABIC financial results have helped improve Aramco’s

FASTFACTS

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- One of the key reasons behind the increase was the accelerated return to normal life after partial or complete lockdown as part of measures implemented during the coronavirus disease pandemic, analyst explains.

overall financial results.”

SABIC reported SR4.86 billion net profit in Q1 2021, supported by a 24 percent year-on-year rise in revenue, as average selling product prices increased.

The Argaam report also highlighted that the materials and public utilities sectors turned profitable this year, from losses in Q1 of 2020.

Excluding Saudi Aramco’s financial results, the first quarter’s combined earnings this year show a surge of 159 percent to SR29.29 billion, from SR11.33 billion in Q1 2020.

In the first quarter of this year,

65 companies reported a rise in profits compared to the same period in 2020, while 23 firms turned to profit after reporting losses in Q1 2020.

However, 42 companies posted a drop in earnings, compared to Q1 2020, while 43 firms also posted losses in Q1 2021, including 12 that slipped into the red.

With the net profit of Saudi Arabian Mining Co. (Maaden) at SR761.2 million, the materials sector contributed 9 percent to the market’s total combined earnings, with SR9.64 billion in total profit, compared to losses of SR626.9 last year.



Hotels in Alkhobar city, in Saudi Arabia’s Eastern Province, reported the highest average occupancy level in the Kingdom with 63.5 percent. Shutterstock

HOSPITALITY SECTOR

Ramadan hotel occupancy rebounds close to pre-pandemic levels

Ruba Obaid Jeddah

The Middle East’s hotel occupancy rates approached 2019 levels during Ramadan and Eid Al-Fitr this year, according to data from the hotel management analytics firm STR.

The report highlighted near-normal occupancy levels in the region during the holy month, helping key markets outperform global peers.

Hotels in Alkhobar city, in Saudi Arabia’s Eastern Province,

reported the highest average occupancy level in the Kingdom with 63.5 percent.

On the country’s west coast, Jeddah’s occupancy levels dropped during the last week of Ramadan but climbed back during Eid to 58.6 percent. With the return of Umrah this year for vaccinated or COVID-recovered pilgrims only, Makkah’s hotel industry showed improved performance, although it remains below its full capacity due to safety measures and the suspension of overseas pilgrims.

FASTFACT

67%

Research found that the Kingdom’s expected 67.1 percent increase in room supply over the next three years was the highest among the 50 most populated countries.

Makkah’s market of over 42,000 hotel rooms showed nearly 35 percent occupancy during Ramadan this year compared to less than 20 percent in 2020, and above 80 percent in 2019.

Regionally, Eid occupancy rates varied across key markets.

Normally, leisure markets like Jeddah, Dubai, and Sharjah would report high occupancy during holiday periods, while business-based capital markets like Riyadh, Kuwait City, and Doha host fewer travelers. During the peak week

this year, Sharjah enjoyed an average occupancy rate of 67 percent, followed by Doha (65.5 percent), Abu Dhabi (63.6 percent) and Dubai (60 percent).

A separate global STR report from March said that Saudi Arabia had the world’s biggest hotel pipeline.

The research found that the Kingdom’s expected 67.1 percent increase in room supply over the next three years was the highest among the 50 most populated countries.

EXPANSION

Alhokair to bring Flying Tiger and Alo Yoga to KSA

Arab News Dubai

Saudi retail giant Alhokair is bringing Flying Tiger and Alo Yoga to the Kingdom.

The arrival of American leisure brand Alo Yoga and Danish variety retailer Flying Tiger Copenhagen comes as Fawaz Abdulaziz Alhokair Co. looks to expand its offering after a tough year for the retail sector. It is part of a wider strategy to expand its retail portfolio and move into new lifestyle categories, according to a bourse filing on Monday.

Alo Yoga, which sells a collection of yoga clothing and accessories, will open in the Kingdom Center in Riyadh — its first outlet outside the US.

Alhokair is planning to open 45 Flying Tiger stores in five years, with nine outlets and an online store operational in the first year.

The Danish retailer currently has around 900 stores in 27 countries.

Saudi Arabia’s retail sector is one of the Kingdom’s priority areas as it seeks to reduce its reliance on oil.

Alhokair is moving forward with an ambitious expansion plan, aiming to open around 57 food and beverage outlets in the next 12 to 16 months, and at least another 50 retail stores in the fashion, cosmetics, beauty and sports sectors, the company’s CEO told Arab News.

“We are always exploring every interesting brand that has a future potential,” Marwan Moukarez, CEO of Alhokair, said in March.

Startup of the Week

By Zikir: A classy twist to your Subhah

AMEERA ABID JEDDAH

Twenty-five-year-old student Abdullah Al-Aidroos came up with the idea for “By Zikir” because he wanted to be able to give gifts that represented his religion and tradition but were also unique.

“I believe that this is a better gift to give to your loved ones; instead of things that are widely found in the market,” he told Arab News.

“By Zikir” is a startup that sells Subhah (beads that are used to keep count while saying prayers). These beads are a part of the Islamic tradition and are often carried in a pocket or a bag. In Al-Aidroos’s opinion, gifts are

meant to be individual and that was the main driver behind setting up of his business.

“When I was sure that this was the path I wanted to pursue, I traveled to Egypt and then to Turkey to research the art of making Subhas,” the entrepreneur said. “I bought the raw material from those countries and brought it back to Makkah to design them.”

He said that his friends and family pushed him to start the business



officially and gave him a lot of encouragement. A key element of the products he designs is their individuality. “I feel like a part of the maker’s soul becomes a part of the product, since they treat it with care and respect, and I think this gives a personality to the product.”

For the entrepreneur, the main challenge was deciding on the pricing. He explained that Subhah are widely sold and can be

purchased at a low price. “Whereas, we worked very hard on our products, they are handmade, and the quality was very high, so the prices were higher as well,” he said.

One of the achievement Al-Aidroos is most proud of from his entrepreneurial journey is how quickly he learnt the basics of running a business. “The budgeting, manufacturing, shipping the raw materials and selling the product took me six months to learn and get used to.”

Long-term, Al-Aidroos hopes to export his products internationally.

Business News



The top IATA official doesn't expect to see mergers and acquisitions activity, 'because people will be guarded about the cash they have.' Reuters

COVID-19 IMPACT

IATA's Walsh says airline industry will be smaller after crisis

Global travel demand likely to return to normality in 2024

Reuters Dubai

The head of global airline body IATA expects the industry to emerge from the coronavirus crisis smaller and more cautious, doubting airlines will try to expand through acquisitions.

The airline industry has been crippled by the pandemic, which continues to leave many aircraft around the world grounded or

flying near-empty as demand limps toward a recovery.

"It will be a smaller industry. We are not going to recover all the capacity," International Air Transport Association (IATA) Director General, Willie Walsh, said in a pre-recorded online interview broadcast on Monday. He cited the swathes of aircraft retired and employees laid off or placed on furlough. "It will be a more cautious industry. I don't expect to see M&A (mergers and acquisitions) activity, principally because

FASTFACTS

- The pandemic continues to leave many aircraft around the world grounded or flying near-empty as demand limps toward a recovery.
- Swathes of aircraft have retired and employees laid off or placed on furlough.

people will be guarded about the cash they have."

Walsh, the former CEO of British Airways-owner IAG, said spending "valuable cash resources" would be "too risky" but he believed there would be consolidation through airlines shrinking their operations and some failing.

"It's going to take airlines time to repair their balance sheets."

IATA has forecast global travel demand to return to 2019, pre-pandemic levels in 2024.

ECONOMY

Gold edges back toward highest since January, as dollar holds near lows

Reuters London

Gold firmed on Monday, edging back toward last week's 4-1/2-month peak as the dollar held near its weakest since late February, with investor focus turning to key economic readings from the US this week.

Spot gold was up 0.2 percent at \$1,883.25 per ounce, having last week reached its highest since Jan. 8 at \$1,889.75. US gold futures gained 0.4 percent to \$1,884.30.

Following last week's volatility, gold has moved above its 200-day moving average, supported by a weaker dollar and bond yields and questions about inflation, said independent analyst Robin Bhar. Gold is considered a hedge against inflation. The dollar was pinned near three-month lows, while US Treasury yields stayed subdued.

Meanwhile Bitcoin rebounded slightly, but was still under pressure following a recent crash.

"The recent slide in cryptocurrencies also boosted the appeal of gold as an alternative investment asset," said Margaret Yang, a



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strategist at DailyFX.

"Gold's upward momentum is very strong and it is likely to challenge a key psychological level at \$1,900 in the days to come."

Markets will be keen to hear if Fed speakers this week will stick to being patient with policy, while awaiting data including the US gross domestic product, jobless claims and durable goods on Thursday.

Rising US inflationary risks have spooked markets, and minutes from the Fed's last meeting suggested some policy-makers were ready to talk about reducing stimulus.

"The overall tone remains positive as the markets look at prospects for inflation, geopolitical risk and continued economic uncertainty in the face of the Indian variant of the COVID virus

and the slow rate of vaccination across much of Asia," StoneX analyst Rhona O'Connell said in a note. But gold could be bound for a correction, with prices now in "overbought" territory, O'Connell added.

Elsewhere, palladium was little changed at \$2,782.43 per ounce, silver gained 0.8 percent to \$27.74, and platinum rose 0.5 percent to \$1,172.45.

BizBriefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Foreign currencies

Egypt Banks' foreign currency assets rise to \$20bn

The total value of net assets that Egyptian banks held abroad in foreign currencies rose to \$20 billion in February, compared to \$10 billion in April 2020, according to an official from the Egyptian Central Bank (ECB).

The official said the increase in value was achieved despite the impact of the coronavirus pandemic. Haitham Adel, who is the head of treasury capital markets at the Industrial Development Bank, said the rise reflected the strength of the Egyptian banking sector and that the amount was in addition to the \$41 billion held by the ECB in foreign currencies. He added that ECB policies since 2016 had succeeded in supporting the country's banking sector, as the amount in foreign currencies before the liberalization of the exchange rate was equivalent to \$14 billion.

Mohammed Abu Zaid Cairo

Investment

Kingdom Holding returns to profit in Q1

Kingdom Holding Co. returned to profit in the first quarter as expenses and impairments declined and dividend income increased.

First quarter net profit after zakat and tax was SR91.1 million (\$24.3 million) compared with a loss of SR50.1 million in the year earlier period and a SR97.2 million loss in the final quarter of 2020, the Saudi conglomerate said in filing with the Tadawul stock exchange.

Revenue of SR174.9 million was 56 percent lower than the first quarter of 2020, but 49.9 percent higher quarter on quarter. The year-on-year return to profit was attributed to an increase in other gains and a decrease in hotel and other operating costs.

Financing charges and marketing spending were also lower, the group said.

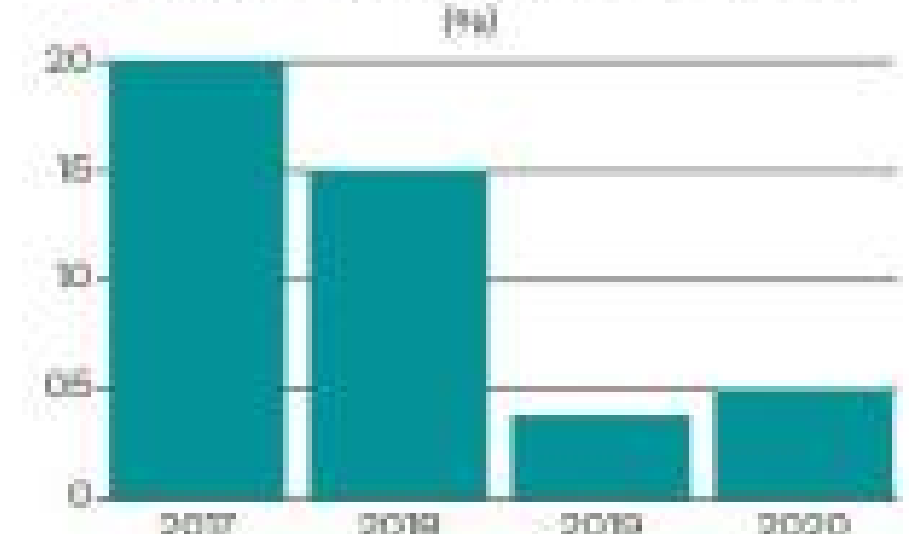
AN Riyadh

Chart of THE DAY

In 2020, the average inflation rate in South Korea amounted to about 0.5% compared to the previous year.

Source: Statista

SOUTH KOREA: INFLATION RATE (%)



What We're Reading

FOR THE TRAIN OR ON THE PLANE

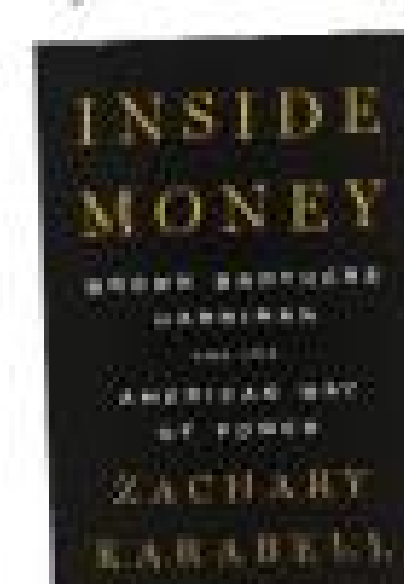
Inside Money

ZACHARY KARABELL

This is a sweeping history of the legendary private investment firm Brown Brothers Harriman, exploring its central role in the story of American wealth and its rise to global power. In *Inside Money*, acclaimed historian, commentator, and former financial executive Zachary

Karabell offers the first full and frank look inside this institution against the backdrop of American history. Blessed with complete access

to the company's archives, Karabell has created an X-ray of American power — financial, political, cultural — as it has evolved from the early 1800s to the present.



Digital currencies

Fed stepping up exploration of digital dollar

The Federal Reserve is stepping up its research and other efforts to explore the potential development of a digital version of the US dollar at a time when more consumers are using digital payments and other governments are pushing forward with their own digital currencies, Fed Governor Lael Brainard said.

As the holder of the world's reserve currency, the US must be highly involved as digital payments become more common and other countries develop digital currencies that can be used to send money across borders, she said.

"The Federal Reserve is stepping up its research and public engagement on a digital version of the US dollar," Brainard said.

The central bank must also anticipate changing consumer trends and ensure that Americans have access to "safe central bank money," Reuters

Restructuring

Liberty Steel to sell UK assets after Greensill folds

Liberty Steel on Monday launched a major restructuring to sell part of its UK assets following the collapse of financier Greensill. Liberty, which is owned by GFG Alliance, said it will look to sell its steel plant in Stockbridge, northern England, and other facilities which together employ about 1,500 staff.

Greensill's dramatic demise sparked fears over the future of GFG's 35,000 staff worldwide — which includes 5,000 at Liberty Steel in Britain. GFG, owned by Indian-British billionaire Sanjeev Gupta, had been Greensill's biggest customer at the time of the finance giant's notorious collapse in March. The announcement followed weekend meetings in Dubai between Gupta and Credit Suisse. The pair reached a so-called standstill agreement over Liberty Primary Metals Australia, according to Monday's statement. AFP

We continue to develop our extensive business capabilities in partnership with Mastercard and look forward to meeting the needs of upcoming startups.

Andrew Sims
CEO of NEC Payments



Corporate

PRESS RELEASES FROM THE WORLD OF BUSINESS AND COMMERCE

ENTERTAINMENT

AMC brings 9-screen luxury cinema to Jeddah

AMC Cinemas, in yet another move to develop the moviegoing experience in Saudi Arabia, has opened its ninth location in the Kingdom at Jeddah's Stars Avenue shopping mall. It is a first for AMC Cinemas in the Kingdom's west coast city and will offer moviegoers the same luxurious standards they have come to expect and enjoy from AMC Cinemas elsewhere.

The AMC Stars Avenue 9 cinema offers 755 seats across nine auditoriums, including eight luxury screens equipped with 4K Barco Laser projectors, surround sound, and luxe recliner and plush rocker seating throughout, together with one immersive IMAX with Laser experience providing heightened realism and an optimal movie-going experience.

Greeting guests on arrival to the cinema is AMC Cinema Souq, a reimagined and fully customizable food and beverage concept offering classic cinema fare, restaurant-quality hot foods, one-of-a-kind deserts, and creative handcrafted beverages from the AMC MacGuffins Mocktail and Coffee bar, as well as movie merchandise and much more. An additional feature of the Stars Avenue cinema will be a conference room connected to one of the main auditoriums, which will be available for private hire for meetings or parties later in the year.

The Jeddah opening is part of AMC Cinemas' expansion plan to reach the largest possible number of movie lovers across Saudi Arabia, a goal in line with government plans to diversify entertainment content, as well as providing new experiences to suit the tastes of different audiences.

Andrew Sims, chief executive



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FASTFACT

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of AMC Cinemas, said: "The AMC Stars Avenue 9 cinema in Jeddah city is part of our ongoing strategy to provide innovative and creative cinematic experiences for movie-lovers throughout Saudi Arabia. We pride ourselves on offering industry-leading, state-of-the-art technology in luxurious surroundings for an exceptional movie-going experience. We want a visit to

AMC Cinemas to be nothing short of memorable.

"By offering the latest international advances in cinema enjoyment, we continue to support the Kingdom's Vision 2030, which focuses on improving the entertainment sector. This is a vitally important part of the Kingdom's Quality of Life program and motivates us to continue our efforts to build and

provide innovative cinema."

The opening of AMC Stars Avenue 9 cinema in Jeddah city, in addition to the opening of the first cinema in Dawadmi (a town in Riyadh region) in April, brings the total number of AMC Cinemas in Saudi Arabia to nine locations, with five in Riyadh and one each in Hafar Al-Batin and Al-Majmaah governorates.

Corporate Briefs

THE BEST OF THE BEST

Annual Conference

W7Worldwide named communications partner for MENAISC

Saudi marketing communications consultancy agency W7Worldwide has, for the fifth year in a row, been named as the communications partner for the Middle East and North Africa Information Security Conference 2021 (MENAISC 2021), which will be held as a hybrid event from May 25-26.

Considered to be the biggest cybersecurity conference in the region, the event will be hosted by cybersecurity advisory company VirtuPort in Riyadh.

MENAISC 2021 brings together the best and the brightest in the information security field, creating opportunities for conference attendees to learn about cybersecurity's most important issues through first-hand interactions with peers, luminaries, and top companies who are sponsoring the event.

"We are delighted to have been chosen as a communications partner once again for MENAISC 2021 as this enables us to continue to elevate the strong communications platform we have built over the past five years for VirtuPort and the conference," said Abdullah Inayat, co-founder and director of W7Worldwide.

Recreation

Shangri-La Group launches new brand for families

Hong Kong-based hospitality company Shangri-La Group has announced the launch of its family experience brand "Family" that aims to create best-loved experiences for multi-generational families as well as provide support for customers on their parenting journeys. This new offering reflects Shangri-La's Asian heritage and strong family culture.

The Family brand houses a variety of new and existing programs specially designed to enable family guests to explore, bond and grow together.

"Family has always been at the heart of the Shangri-La brand culture and treating our guests like family remains a hallmark of the Shangri-La identity," said Hui Kuok, chairman of Shangri-La Group.

Literature

New competition to drive visibility of Arab authors

Emirates Literature Foundation's Kateb Maktoub, together with Google, is launching a competition to exponentially increase the number of Arab author pages on Wikipedia. The month-long competition will start on June 1 and calls on the public to create articles about Arabic authors in Arabic. Ahead of the competition launch, the foundation is offering a free webinar on May 30, giving attendees the Wikipedia skills they need to create author pages, so even those who have no previous experience can take part.

The aim is to create the largest number of articles about Arab authors, following the Wikipedia guidelines. The first prize winner will be awarded \$500. Runners-up will receive \$400 for second place and \$300 for third place. There is a second round of the competition that starts Aug. 1, offering another chance to compete for the prizes.

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

Mastercard welcomes NEC Payments as partner of Fintech Express

Mastercard has announced that the Bahrain-based NEC Payments is now a global partner of Mastercard Fintech Express, which connects tech-savvy startups with traditional players such as banks. The program supports digital payment innovators by making it simple to collaborate with the tech company and its partners to launch new products, add payment solutions and innovate through collaboration.

The partnership will enable other fintech players to start their Mastercard-issuing business at speed, unlocking more opportunities for the entire ecosystem. NEC Payments is the first Fintech Express partner globally, bringing new scale to the possibilities and potential for startups.

"In a constantly changing market environment, Mastercard is continuously adapting by creating new programs and partnerships to enable diversification, drive digital transformation and accelerate new players. We are delighted to welcome NEC Payments as our global partner as we together support fintech innovation, and creation of more connections, better user experiences, wider inclusion, increased competitiveness and exciting new possibilities," said J.K. Khalil, coun-

try manager, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Levant, Mastercard.

Fintech Express was launched last year and is split into three core modules. Access enables regulated entities to obtain a Mastercard license and access its network through a streamlined onboarding process. Build helps fintechs as processors to become an Express Partner by building unique tech alliances and benefiting from advantages that Mastercard provides. Connect makes it easy for startups who want to add payment solutions to their suite of products, to connect with qualified Express Partners available on the Mastercard Engage web portal, and go live with Mastercard in a matter of days.

NEC Payments is a digital banking technology and payment services provider licensed and regulated by the Central Bank of Bahrain.

Andrew Sims, CEO, NEC Payments, said: "We continue to develop our extensive business capabilities in partnership with Mastercard and look forward to meeting the needs of upcoming startups as they scale and expand, adding value as an enabler to the fintech ecosystem and as the first vertically integrated true banking-as-a-service provider in the MENA region."



J.K. Khalil, country manager, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Levant, Mastercard.

ICON OF COEXISTENCE

Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque joins travel expo

The Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque Center (SZGMC) participated in the Arabian Travel Market 2021 exhibition, which was held in Dubai during May 16-19. The participation is part of the center's strategy to play a religious, cultural and civilizational role in society.

The exhibition was an opportunity for the center to inform visitors of the role it plays in honoring the founding father of the UAE, the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al-Nahyan. The exhibition also enabled the center to shed light on Islamic heritage and noble values, and the mosque's richness in arts and aesthetics of Islamic architecture.

The SZGMC exhibition stand was located within the Department of Culture and Tourism Abu Dhabi pavilion.

The center participates annually in the event to promote its role and communicate with different cultures. The exhibition enables SZGMC to introduce the mosque as a global cultural tourist destination. Furthermore, it provides a platform for SZGMC to highlight its messages of coexistence and tolerance, which derive from values of the founding father — the late Sheikh Zayed.

During the exhibition, the grand mosque stand welcomed many visitors from different cultures. They learned how the grand mosque is one of the most important examples of Islamic architecture and a prominent cultural destination of a religious character. During the event, the center presented the aesthetics



During the exhibition, the center presented the aesthetics of Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque in an innovative way and showcased a three-dimensional display of the mosque.

HIGHLIGHT

The grand mosque stand welcomed many visitors from different cultures, who learned how the mosque is one of the most important examples of Islamic architecture.

of Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque in an innovative way, represented through an interactive screen that allowed them to take a virtual tour. The center also showed a three-dimensional display of the grand mosque and showcased a number of its distinguished publications.

Mohamed Ahmed Al-Sarrah, head of the corporate communications section at the Sheikh Za-

ayed Grand Mosque Center, said: "The center's participation in this exhibition highlights the mosque as one of the most prominent religious, cultural and tourist landmarks in Abu Dhabi. We are always keen to attend major international forums and exhibitions specialized in travel and tourism, and this exhibition is one of the most important international platforms in the Middle East region."

He added: "The grand mosque represents a unique model of Islamic and contemporary architecture — it is considered a global icon of urban beauty. It also reflects the inclusiveness of Emirati culture and the moderation and respect for others that the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al-Nahyan expressed."



I've believed for some time now without success that I could play at my best and compete in major championships.

Phil Mickelson
Oldest PGA and major winner at 50

SWEET 17

Al-Hilal celebration as Bafetimbi Gomis validates legendary status at 17-time Saudi champions

In a difficult season the French striker once again led Riyadh giants to the SPL title

John Duerden London

It has been a tough season for everyone. Well, almost everyone.

Bafetimbi Gomis continued to prosper. It was fitting that the Frenchman scored the goal that clinched league title No. 17 for Al-Hilal on Sunday.

In the penultimate round of matches in the 2020-21 Saudi Pro League, Al-Hilal knew that a win over Al-Taawoun would guarantee the championship and the Frenchman struck after just five minutes to settle any nerves. His 23rd goal of the season went unanswered by the opposition, which meant that although Al-Shabab defeated Al-Faisaly 5-1, the challengers remain four points behind with just one game left to play.

Gomis was already a legend at the club with more than 100 goals since arriving in August 2018, and while there will be debate as to whether the former French international, 36

in August, will still be in Riyadh next season, especially after the recent signing of Mali striker Moussa Marega from FC Porto (though Gomis said after Sunday's game that he wants to extend his stay), now is the time for celebration.

Al-Hilal did not have the smoothest of campaigns but held firm when it mattered.

"The players deserve praise and thanks," said Portuguese coach Jose Morais after the game. "They have the talent and the know how to manage games and I just arrived to help with some organization."

This was only the third game in charge for Morais who arrived earlier this month to replace Rogerio Micala. The Brazilian boss had not long been in the hot seat after February's departure of Razvan Lucescu, before he had to make way too. To have three coaches in one season and to win the title and get through the group stage of the AFC Champions League is a fine achievement and testament to the team's professionalism.

"I wanted to accept the challenge



Al-Hilal did not have the smoothest of campaigns in the Saudi Pro League but held firm when it mattered to clinch their 17th title. Twitter: @Alhilal_EN



They have the talent and the know how to manage games and I just arrived to help with some organization.

Jose Morais

here as I knew some of the players and how good they are," added Morais, who won the South Korean league title in 2019 and 2020 with Jeonbuk Motors. "We knew that

Al-Taawoun would be a really difficult game because of the schedule we have had and having to play a strong opponent at home but we came through it."

Al-Hilal's Colombian midfielder Gustavo Cuellar summed up the feelings of the players as they celebrated. "We have achieved a well-deserved title," Cuellar said. "We went through a difficult time this season but we knew how to come out of it and we are delighted to defend the title. We worked hard and I thank the coaches that we have

had for how they helped us."

As is the case around the world, the celebrating champions did not give much thought to the challengers. Al-Shabab pushed Al-Hilal all the way and Sunday's 5-1 win over Faisaly was their second successive victory by that emphatic scoreline. Unfortunately, in the six games prior to that, the Riyadh club picked up just four points, a mini slump that ended up costing them the title. There is little to do but vow to learn from the experience and come back stronger.

"We fought right until the end of the season and I am happy with the players, they are an excellent group and have proven themselves this season," said Carlos Inarejos, who succeeded Portuguese coach Pedro Caixinha in January. It remains to be seen if the Spaniard, just 36, is in the hot seat next season, but if so, then he will lead Al-Shabab into Asia.

"We are in second and have confirmed our place in the AFC Champions League and that is a stage in which our players deserve to play"

CRICKET

Afghanistan gears up for white-ball series with Pakistan in UAE

Sayed Salahuddin Kabul

Afghanistan's cricket team will be facing Pakistan for a white-ball series in September, ahead of the T20 World Cup in 2023, officials told Arab News on Monday.

The three-match series, which includes three One-Day Internationals (ODI) and an equal number of Twenty20 matches, will be held in the UAE.

"It's very important for both countries because the winner of this series will have a better ranking for

the World Cup," Farid Hotak, media officer for the Afghanistan Cricket Board (ACB), told Arab News.

He added that the series would be followed by matches against Australia, India and the West Indies.

Meanwhile, ACB Director Raees Ahmadzai said: "It is part of the ODI league matches to qualify for World Cup 2023 ... we (have) played three matches already with Ireland and won all three."

Both Hotak and Ahmadzai rejected media reports which

claimed that the cricket matches were a result of a meeting between Afghan cricketer Mohammad Nabi and Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan earlier this year when Khan vowed to ensure a cricket series between the two neighbors.

Several Afghans, residing as refugees in Pakistan for the past few decades, have learnt to play the sport in the neighboring country.

They have enjoyed global success in recent years by defeating more experienced and renowned

cricketing nations.

Afghan cricketers have become a source of pride for the war-torn nation, both at home and abroad, with Rashid Khan, Nabi and Golbadi Naib among the most-recognized players internationally.

A recent escalation in violence across Afghanistan — part of decades of conflict in the war-ravaged nation — has also impacted the country's sporting sector. Several sporting events, including a cricket match, have come under attack.

SERGIO SWAN SONG

Aguero signs off with Premier League double and a reminder of what Manchester City will be missing

Alam Khan Manchester

In just five magical minutes, Sergio Aguero displayed the cunning and class that has left many baffled as to why Manchester City have decided to dispense with his services — and why Barcelona are poised to land an absolute bargain.

A tearful Pep Guardiola said the striker was irreplaceable as he paid tribute following his two goals in the 5-0 win over Everton.

"He has this gift that his mum and dad gave him, or God, and he will always have it," said the City manager.

Based on Aguero's devastating display against the Toffees on Sunday, it was still hard to fathom how he will be allowed to leave for nothing when his contract ends next month.

Players of his caliber, with his natural goalscoring instincts, are priceless.

While injuries have disrupted this campaign, the Argentine turns 33 next month — the same age as Lionel Messi, a year shy of Luis Suarez and three years younger than Cristiano Ronaldo — and, like them, is far from a spent force.

Barcelona is set to sign him on a two-year deal to team up with compatriot and close friend Messi as Guardiola said: "Maybe I reveal a secret, maybe he is close to agreeing a deal for the club of my



heart, Barcelona, and going to play alongside the best player of all time, Lionel Messi," said Guardiola.

"And I am pretty sure he is going to enjoy it and make my club

Barcelona stronger and stronger."

For City to strengthen one of their European rivals could well prove an error of judgment unless the club moves as expected for a

replacement of similar stature, such as Tottenham's Harry Kane or Erling Haaland at Borussia Dortmund.

Guardiola described Aguero as "the legend," while team-mate

John Stones added: "It's an absolute honor to play with Sergio. You don't realize what kind of player and what he brings to the team and the club when he's playing.

FAST FACT

Departure of Argentine legend, club greatest striker and man who scored Manchester City's most famous goal, leaves Pep Guardiola in tears.

Manchester City's Sergio Aguero scores his side's fifth goal during the English Premier League match against Everton. AP



NBA

Booker shines as Suns sink Lakers, Grizzlies score

Devin Booker made the most of his playoff debut, scoring 34 points as the Phoenix Suns beat the reigning NBA champion Los Angeles Lakers in their Western Conference series opener on Sunday.

Booker spearheaded the 99-90 win for the second-seeded Suns over the Lakers, rallying his team after an injury restricted Phoenix veteran Chris Paul's influence.

Booker was backed by Deandre Ayton, who contributed 21 points and 16 rebounds.

In other games on Sunday, Dillon Brooks and Ja Morant combined for 57 points as the eighth-seeded Memphis Grizzlies stunned the top-seeded Utah Jazz 112-109 in their series opener in Salt Lake City. **AFP**

No looking back

IOC now in 'delivery mode' for Tokyo Games

Olympic organizers are fully focused on delivering the Tokyo Games and there is no internal debate on whether they will happen, Team GB Chef de Mission Mark England said on Monday.

England sits on an IOC National Olympic Committee working group that met virtually on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday last week.

"The mood 100 percent is we are now in delivery mode for the Games," he told reporters at the announcement of Britain's male artistic gymnastics squad. **Reuters**

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'Complimenting someone on their weight loss can be as harmful as complimenting someone on their weight gain,' superstar Demi Lovato told fans on Instagram this week while urging them to stop commenting on other people's bodies.



Finally

CLOSE UP

Gabby Barrett steals award show in Arab design

Arab News Dubai

American singer Gabby Barrett made her global Billboard Music Awards debut on Sunday and for the occasion donned a look by a designer from the Middle East.

The rising country star, who was nominated for a whopping nine awards, turned heads in a lame gold gown from Lebanese couturier Nicolas Jebran.

The "American Idol" alum, who took home three awards, wore an asymmetric, draped gown with a floor-sweeping train that was so long it required her husband Cade Foehner to get it into perfect place onstage as she accepted her awards.

She elevated the look with Stuart Weitzman heels, a Tyler Ellis clutch and jewelry from Jennifer Fisher and Dena Kemp.

"It was the first dress she tried on and we knew it was the one," Barrett's stylist Tiffany Gifford told USA Today of the gown, in a story the newspaper ran with the headline "Gabby Barrett scored at

FASTFACT

The rising country star, who was nominated for a whopping nine awards, turned heads in a lame gold gown from Lebanese couturier Nicolas Jebran.

Billboard Awards with three wins, but that gold dress stole the show."

"We really wanted to bring it and, as Gabby put it, 'Go big or go home' with the look," she added. "We wanted to make a statement and do something to commemorate such a huge accomplishment in her career."

"I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY. Unbelievable. 3 awards????????? Thank you, thank you, thank you. I'm blessed beyond measure. A moment I'll never forget! (sic)" wrote the "Goldmine" singer on Instagram, alongside a picture of herself holding up her accolades.

Barrett, 21, wasn't the only star to champion an Arab designer during the annual awards show, which took place at Los Angeles' Microsoft Theater seven months after the last pandemic-delayed event.

R&B star Kehlani also opted to wear a look from a designer from our neck of the woods.

The US singer arrived at the ceremony donning a Tony Ward ensemble for the annual show, where she was nominated for Best R&B album for "It Was Good Until It Wasn't."



The singer turned heads in a gold gown by Lebanese couturier Nicolas Jebran at Sunday's Billboard Music Awards. Getty Images

The three-piece look featured red silk taffeta and sheer mesh with beading and was plucked from the Lebanese designer's Fall 2021 Couture collection. It boasted a sequined bustier top, a bolero

jacket with voluminous sleeves and a mermaid skirt.

The 26-year-old hitmaker accessorized the dazzling number with a Bulgari necklace.

Other standout looks included

Alicia Keys, who shone in a bright pink Valentino suit and oversized cape and Priyanka Chopra Jonas who stunned in a nude, sequined, high-slit gown by Dolce & Gabbana.

BIG NIGHT

Drake, Pink win big at Billboard Music Awards

Arab News/AP New York

It was a family affair at the 2021 Billboard Music Awards: US superstar Pink twirled in the air in a powerful performance with her daughter and Drake was named artist of the decade, accepting the honor alongside his three-year-old son.

The rapper, who extended his record as the most decorated winner in the history of the awards show to 29 wins Sunday, was honored with the Artist of the Decade Award.

After receiving the Icon Award, Pink and her nine-year-old daughter showed off their powerful gymnastic skills as they spun in the air in a jaw-dropping performance. The Weeknd was on hand to accept the most wins of the night — 10. Out of his 16 nominations, the Canadian singer won honors such as top artist, top male artist, top Hot 100 song for "Blinding Lights" and top R&B album for "After Hours."



Drake

CINEMA

'F9' drives to mighty \$6.2m debut in Middle East

Arab News/Routters Dubai

Universal's testosterone-fueled franchise "Fast and Furious 9" kicked off this weekend making a massive \$6.2 million in the Middle East alone.

The film, which was released on May 20 in Saudi Arabia, made a total of \$162.4 million in seven other markets, including the United States, China, Korea and Hong Kong.

Those ticket sales easily mark the best start for a Hollywood blockbuster since COVID-19 hit.

"Moviegoers are eager to come back to theaters when the right movie is out there," Universal's president of international distribution Veronika Kwan Vandenberg said.

With this weekend's ticket sales, the franchise has pushed past \$6 billion globally.

TheSix

Beach essentials

From sunblock to sunglasses, we've gathered six chic beach accessories from regional brands to pack on your next seaside escape.



Port Tanger sunglasses

A pair of summer-ready shades are the most fashionable way to block UV rays and prevent eye wrinkles.



Soukra beach towel

Lounging on a sandy shore becomes all the more relaxing when you're lying on top of this plush made-in-Tunisia beach towel.



Joelle Paris sun protect hair elixir

Your mane requires just as much attention as your skin when it comes to defending yourself from the sun's harmful rays.



Donia Allegue turban

This turban provides women who wish to cover their hair with versatility and creativity and it will look great in those beachside photos.



Herbal Essentials sunscreen

The UAE-born brand's sunscreen lotion has SPF 30 and contains jojoba oil, rosemary oil and aloe vera, which not only moisturizes your skin but protects it from the effects of aging.



Sarah's Bag Caba

Of course, you need a stylish beach bag to store your beach towel, swimsuit and sun block. This bag from Lebanese label Sarah's Bag is waterproof, offering extra protection for your belongings.

REVIEW

'Halston' charts the ups and downs of a forgotten fashion icon

Gautaman Bhaskaran Chennai

A five-episode Netflix series, "Halston" touches on the many facets of the largely forgotten American designer's work and life. It is a vice-fueled romp, focusing on the ups and downs of the designer who shot to fame in the late 1960s and faded into obscurity due to bad business decisions and a horrifying approach to his finances.

Played by Ewan McGregor who steals the show, very little of Halston's childhood is explored and in this sense it is a little disappointing. What we know from the episodes here was that he had a

mercurial temper and an ego to be reckoned with — more of a focus on Halston's early years in Indiana would have been illuminating in understanding these character traits but we only see snippets of a dysfunctional home life.

Drugs and alcohol, as well as his muses, including Liza Minelli (wonderfully played by Krysta Rodriguez) and Elsa Peretti (a brilliant Rebecca Dayan) kept him afloat during the peak of his fame, and this is essayed in painful detail, including his own failure at finding love.

Helmed by Daniel Minahan, the series begins with Jacqueline Kennedy wearing a Halston pillbox



A clip from 'Halston.' Supplied

hat on the day of her husband's presidential inauguration. Halston rose quickly to fame, but suffered financial losses and was forced to reinvent himself as a gown guru when the taste-making first lady ended her love affair with headpieces and American women followed suit.

Based on Stephen Gaines' biography, "Halston" explores the life of America's answer to French haute couture. It is a visually stunning but cautionary tale about the destructive power of addiction, including his bizarre and incredibly expensive obsession with orchids.

The series is a standard biopic,

which like many others of its ilk wades through delight and disaster. And disaster comes when the star is talked into becoming a label for the humdrum department store J.C. Penny. It was a lucrative step but one that triggered his descent into nothingness.

Ultimately, it is a story about the friction between art versus commerce, as we see the designer's name sullied by the many brand deals he signs off on. This focus on the business of Halston's empire comes at the cost of getting to grips with his character and motivations, however, and it is something that could have been explored much more.