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## &FINALLY

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# ARAB NEWS

*The Voice of a Changing Region*

WAR IN EUROPE

## EU leaders defy Russia with visit to Ukraine

'It's about future of our children'

Reuters/Holy

Three European prime ministers visited Kyiv on Tuesday in a show of support for Ukraine and defiance of Russia nearly three weeks into an invasion aimed at capturing the capital.

"It is our duty to be where history is forged. Because it's not about us, but about the future of our children who deserve to live in a world free from tyranny," said Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki, who traveled to Kyiv by train with Czech Prime Minister Petr Piala and Janez Jansa of Slovenia.

Piala said the aim was "to confirm the unequivocal support of the entire European Union for the sovereignty and independence of Ukraine."

The visit came amid new hopes that the war could end sooner than expected, as Moscow may be coming to terms with its failure to impose a new government on Kyiv by force.

In the latest hint at compromise, President Volodymyr Zelensky said Ukraine was prepared to accept security guarantees that stopped short of its long-term objective of NATO membership.

Ukraine understood that it did not have an open door to join NATO yet, Zelensky said.

"If we cannot enter through open doors, then we must cooperate with the associations with which we can, which will help us, protect us ... and have separate guarantees."

Peace talks between Russian and Ukrainian delegations via a video link restarted on Tuesday after a pause on Monday, the first time a round of talks had continued to a second day.

link restarted on Tuesday after a pause on Monday, the first time a round of talks had continued to a second day.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said it was too early to predict progress.

"The work is difficult, and in the current situation the very fact that the talks are continuing is probably positive," he said.

The three European leaders arrived in a city still under bombardment. About half of the 3.4 million population has fled and residents spend nights sheltering in underground stations.

Four people died in Russian shelling of the capital in the early hours.

However, despite reducing some

### BACKGROUND

Peace talks between Russian and Ukrainian delegations via a video link restarted on Tuesday after a pause on Monday, the first time a round of talks had continued to a second day.

cities to rubble, Europe's biggest invasion force since the Second World War has been halted at the gates of Kyiv, and Russia has failed to capture any of Ukraine's 10 biggest cities.

In his most confident public statement yet, Zelensky called on Russian troops to surrender.

"You will not take anything from Ukraine. You will take lives," he said. "But why should you die? What for? I know that you want to survive."

**Related reports** **Page 7**

**Opinion** **Page 9**



Firemen battle flames at a housing block that was shelled by Russian forces in the Sviatoshynsky district, Kyiv. AFP

RESOLVING CRISIS

## Gulf states offer new peace talks on Yemen

Saeed Al-Batati AL-MAKTOUM

The six member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council on Tuesday offered unprecedented peace talks at the GCC's Riyadh headquarters between the warring factions in Yemen, including the Iran-backed Houthi militia.

The talks are expected to begin on March 27 and continue for at least a week.

"The putschist Houthis would have some seats in the talks," a government official told Arab News, and Yemeni government ministers and outspoken politicians such as Ahmed Al-Maysari, Saleh Al-Jabwani and Abdul Aziz Al-Sabri would also be invited. "Almost no one will be excluded," the official said.

Yemeni Information Ministry official Najeeb Ghallab told Arab News the government supported any Arab initiative to end the war, but warned that the Houthis could sabotage the proposed talks.

"We are most supportive of any Arab role to bring Yemenis together under the umbrella of the Gulf Cooperation Council," he said.

However, powerful factions in the Houthi movement who benefit from the war, and Iran, which uses the militia as its stooge, would reject any calls for peace.

"The Houthis believe that gathering Yemenis ... under one umbrella will weaken their role," he said.

On the ground in Yemen, two soldiers were killed in a car bomb attack on a southern military commander's convoy in Abyan province. Brig. Gen. Abdul Latif Al-Sayed survived the assassination attempt.

Gen. Al-Sayed is the Abyan commander of the Security Belt, the military forces of the separatist Southern Transitional Council.

The governor of Aden, a member of the STC, survived a car bomb attack in the port city in October last year that killed six people.

## The Brief

### DHAKA-RIYADH TIES

Bangladesh is hopeful of signing a number of major investment deals with Saudi Arabia during a two-day visit to Dhaka by the Kingdom's Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan. **P11**

### OIL CHALLENGE

OPEC said that oil demand in 2022 faced challenges from the Russia-Ukraine conflict and rising inflation as crude prices soar. **P11**

### LADIES GOLF

KSAU will host the third Aramco Saudi Ladies International golf tournament from March 17. The \$1 million event will be held at the Royal Greens Golf and Country Club. **P15**

## NATION IN TURMOIL

## Another former PM pulls out of Lebanese elections

Fouad Siniora says it's time to make way for new generation, urges his supporters to reject 'opportunist'.

Najia Houssari Beirut

Former Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora on Tuesday bowed out of parliamentary elections in May to "make room for the new generation."

"The Lebanese people's uprising showed us the need to renew political blood, support promising faces, and facilitate the way for experts who have not been given the chance to serve the nation," he said.

Siniora was prime minister from 2005 to 2008, and is currently the Future Movement's parliamentary leader. He joins former prime ministers Saad Hariri and Tamman

Salam, incumbent Najib Mikati and Lebanon's former UN ambassador Nawaaf Salam in pulling out of the elections.

Voting is scheduled to take place on May 15 as the Lebanese people face economic meltdown, mass unemployment and an almost worthless currency.

Siniora said: "My decision not to run for election does not mean that I will be boycotting; on the contrary, I hope my position makes room for the new generation. I will be fully invested in the elections in all their aspects, without running for office."

He urged citizens to turn out to vote "so as not to allow opportunists

'I will be fully invested in the elections in all their aspects, without running for office,' said Fouad Siniora.

to gain ground amid calls not to participate in this national duty. I call on our people in Beirut, Sidon, the north, the Bekaa Valley, Mount Lebanon, and all over Lebanon to participate in these elections."

Nearly 900 candidates had

applied to contest the election by the deadline at midnight on Tuesday. Interior Minister Bassam Mawlawi said work was underway "to secure IDs and personal status extracts, and all other voter needs."

He said: "We are working to secure electricity during the voting process and until the sorting of ballots ends." There would be about 7,000 polling stations throughout the country, he said.

Dar Al-Fatwa,

Lebanon's highest Sunni religious authority, said it would support neither a candidate nor a list. "Our role is limited to advising people to choose the best candidate for the state-building project," it said.

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# Radar

The newly approved personal status law will boost and create more efficiency in resolving family-related cases and enhance transparency.

Walid Al-Samaani  
Guest Columnist

## KSA today



Jeddah

### Montage Editing

Learn the basics of shooting a creative montage video on your mobile this evening with Rasha Al-Amry. The women-only workshop will start at 5 p.m. For registration and more details, visit upgrade-sa.com.



Akhbar

### Karaoke Rooms

Bring out your inner singer and enjoy yourself with Yellow Karaoke, where professionalism is not required. Visitors can book a room to avoid worrying about disturbing others. The room packages and other details can be found on the Hala Yalla app.



Dhahran

### Ewan Café

Food lovers can visit Ewan Café at Ithra Center's Plaza to discover new flavors from the wide selection of contemporary food available. The cafe offers à la carte menu and grab-to-go meals. Doors are open daily except on Sunday from 9 a.m. to 11:30 p.m.



Riyadh

### Crystal Maze

The popular British TV game show "Crystal Maze" is now here at Riyadh Boulevard. Only four to eight people can play in each round. For booking and more details, visit tickets.riyadhseason.sa.

## TheRegion

The Middle East Roundup

Arab News Dubai

- March 10 is the last day of Khalid Al-Bowaij's book launch for his work "Khadijah" at the Bahrain National Theatre. The book and exhibition include a new adaptation of the art of historical miniatures, in addition to modern art forms that accompany the poetic text.
- Look skyward to enjoy the Saudi

Hawks, the Royal Saudi Air Force's spectacular aerobatic display team, soaring in formation across the sky during the air show at Expo 2020 in Dubai.

- World Art Dubai, the region's largest affordable contemporary art fair, returns for its 2022 edition with an incredible roster of talented local and international artists, both established and

emerging, at the Dubai World Trade Centre. The fair runs until March 19.

- Oman Sustainability Week, a national platform that aims to highlight Oman's commitment to sustainability leadership, continues at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre in Muscat. The event brings together key stakeholders to focus on the core message of sustainability as a national objective.

## The Register

THE PICTURES THAT MARK THE DAY



Nepalese Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba received Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan during his official visit to the republic.

At the reception, they discussed ways to

further strengthen bilateral relations between the two countries and reviewed regional and international issues of mutual concern.

The prince also met his Nepalese counterpart Dr. Narayan Khadka, and the two foreign ministers signed a general

agreement on cooperation between Kathmandu and Riyadh.

On Monday, Prince Faisal met with Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa in the south Asian country's capital Colombo.

## What's Trending

Today's hot topics explained by Nada Jan



BIG, HAPPY FAMILY

### Kourtney, Travis

G Kourtney Kardashian said that she and her fiancé are planning on having a baby together.

In the trailer for the upcoming show "The Kardashians," the 42-year-old reality star and 46-year-old Blink-182 drummer Travis Barker revealed their desire to expand their family.

Other scenes in the trailer, which sister Kim tweeted on Monday, show Kourtney lying on a bed at a doctor's office and Travis kissing her hand while holding it.

Both celebrities have children from previous marriages. Kourtney shares Mason, Penelope, and Reign with Scott Disick. Travis shares Landon and Alabama with Shanna Moakler.

The couple announced their engagement last October and, as seen in the trailer, the engagement ceremony will be featured.

It also gives glimpses of the family members' reactions to the engagement. Kris Jenner tears up with happiness and Kim jokes about their mother's reaction to her own past marriages: "She's never had a reaction like that for me, and it's happened, like, a few times."

The show will also reveal more about Kim and Pete Davidson's relationship, Kris sharing something that Kanye West had once told her, and Kylie Jenner's second pregnancy.

It premieres on April 14 on Disney+.

PRIDE AND HONOR

### Hamilton to add mother's name

F1 world champion Lewis Hamilton made an announcement at Expo 2020 Dubai on Monday, saying he was planning to honor his mother by adding her maiden name Larbalestier to his before the next season started.

"It would mean the world to my family to win an eighth title, it would mean a lot to me knowing that, for example, I am really proud of my family's name, Hamilton," he told the crowd. "None of you might know that my mum's name is Larbalestier, and I am just about to put that in my name. I don't fully understand the whole idea that when people get married the woman loses their name, and I really want my mum's name to continue on with the Hamilton name."

His parents Carmen and Anthony split when he was little and she took on her new husband's name, Lockhart, after getting married again.

The 37-year-old

Brit did not reveal how his name would look, but said he was in the process of changing it and hoped things worked out before the weekend.

If the name-changing process goes through, Hamilton will race under a new name at the season-opening Grand Prix in Bahrain, which takes place this weekend.

Although he was previously

noncommittal about his future and took a two-month break from social media, Hamilton said in February that he had "come back to fight" for his eighth title.

"That's what, I'm here for."

He added that he wanted to do something nobody had ever done before, winning an eighth title. It would be his big motivation and would mean "everything" to him.



## Today's Number

# 325k

The King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center's Masam project for clearing mines in Yemen dismantled, during the second week of March 2022, a total of 1,332 mines planted by the Houthi militia across Yemen, including 14 antipersonnel mines, 935 anti-tank mines, 395 unexploded ordnance and eight explosive devices. Since the beginning of the project, as many as 325,277 mines have been dismantled.

## Review



### The Things You Can See Only When You Slow Down

GHADI JOUDAH

"The Things You Can See Only When You Slow Down: How to Be Calm in a Busy World" is a mindfulness guide written by Haemin Sunim, a South Korean Zen Buddhist monk.

The author guides the reader through a deep and mindful state in an ever-evolving and fast-paced world by using wise anecdotes and lessons.

The book is a collection of essays, with each discussing a different aspect of an individual's life such as love, passion, mindfulness, spirituality, and the future.

Sunim offers the advice that slowing down is the key to self-reflection and better understanding our emotional state of mind on a more complex and deeper level.

He passes on his rich wisdom in the form of stanzas that help the reader confront everyday challenges with practical tools. In almost every chapter, the reader is reminded of the book's theme of self-reflection and consciously treading through life.

In one of his chapters, the author explains that if a person is so quick to notice somebody else's character flaws then it most probably means that they too suffer from these flaws.

Another piece of advice says that if a person does not like you, it has nothing to do with you as it is a "them" problem not a "you" problem.

"The Things You Can See Only When You Slow Down" is Sunim's first book. It was translated into over 30 different languages and has sold over 3 million copies worldwide.

## Prayer Times in Saudi Arabia

March 16	Fajr	Sunrise	Dhuhr	Asr	Maghreb	Isha
Makkah	5:13	6:28	12:30	3:54	6:31	8:01
Madinah	5:12	6:29	12:31	3:56	6:31	8:01
Riyadh	4:44	6:01	12:02	3:28	6:03	7:33
Abha	5:03	6:37	12:19	3:42	6:20	7:50
Dammam	4:29	5:49	11:49	3:14	5:49	7:19



# News Saudi Arabia



**Combining past and present** The festivities of 'Al-Baraha 3' in the governorate of Qatif continue in the presence of large numbers of attendees, exceeding 40,000 in four days. The events will run until the end of official school holidays.

SPA

## EDUCATION

# In-person teaching to fully resume in Saudi schools from March 20

Ministry of Education announces the official end of remote learning

Nada Hameed Jeddah

Remote learning will end and in-person teaching will fully resume in schools in Saudi Arabia on March 20, the Ministry of Education announced on Monday. From that date, students will be required to be present in class each day and there will be no more virtual lessons.



Students will be required to be present in class each day and there will be no more virtual lessons.  
Photo: @es\_mshe

After two years of disruption to teaching and learning as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the ministry has directed educational departments across the Kingdom to start applying updated school guidelines, including arrangements for the full resumption of in-person teaching at all levels from kindergarten up. Elementary students were already attending in-person lessons on a part-time basis, for two or three days a week.

Social-distancing measures will be scrapped and morning assemblies will resume. Other in-class and extracurricular activities will also resume and students will be able to pray next to each other once again.

### SPEEDREAD

The ministry has directed educational departments to start applying updated school guidelines, including arrangements for the full resumption of in-person teaching at all levels from kindergarten up.

Teachers will continue to use the remote-learning platform Madrasati (My School) to prepare lessons, assignments and tests. They are also asked to continue to use the educational resources available on the platform, as well as content on the AIN educational TV channels.

### STRATEGIES AND OPPORTUNITIES

## Experts in economics, urban development call for investment in sustainable cities

Hebshi Al-Shammari Riyadh

Experts in economics and urban development stressed the importance of reconciling economic development with preserving the environment during a virtual panel discussion organized by Prince Sultan University in Riyadh on Monday.

The panel discussion, titled "Managing the City Economy: Challenges, Strategies and Opportunities" and moderated by the economist Talat Hafez, was attended by Prince Faisal bin Ayyaf, mayor of Riyadh, and several local and international experts.

Le-Yin Zhang, professor of urban economic development at the Bartlett Development Planning Unit, University College London, noted that the fastest-growing

cities are in three countries: China, India and the US.

Zhang, who is also the author of "Managing the City Economy," stressed that the net-zero agenda was a crucial step toward a

### HIGHLIGHT

Edward Glaeser, the Fred and Eleanor Glimp professor of economics at Harvard University, said it was necessary to reformulate economies to balance investment against concern for the environment.

green economy.

A huge challenge facing urban economies is that the annual rate of decarbonization must rise by 500 percent, she explained, noting that income from oil and gas sales

will be halved in the 2020s.

She pointed to three main opportunities for innovation to achieve net-zero: Through the development of advanced batteries, the hydrogen electrolyzer and direct air capture and storage. These were in addition to equipment manufacturing, infrastructure and low-carbon services, such as photovoltaics and electric vehicles.

"A new competitiveness could be developed in the process," she said, citing China's city of Shenzhen, which alone produced more than 40 percent of electric vehicle batteries globally in 2021.

She concluded that developing countries needed to find a new force in this technology landscape and that it was "necessary to balance fear and optimism in the net-zero drive."

## The Case

### Most important aspects of social security law in KSA

DIMAH TALAL AL-SHARIF



The social security system plays a major role in the stability of many families. In today's article, we will address the most important aspects of the social security law in the Kingdom.

The law is mainly concerned with establishing measures to address poverty, ensuring a minimum income to meet the basic needs of each beneficiary by estimating minimum pension and providing appropriate support.

It also provides social protection to beneficiaries in need, enabling them to achieve financial independence and become productive persons through training and qualification. The beneficiaries should abide by all the ministry's requirements regarding their rehabilitation and education plans.

The following categories are excluded from the nationality requirement: A non-Saudi woman who is married to a Saudi; a non-Saudi widow or divorced woman with Saudi children; the children of a Saudi widow or divorced woman from a non-Saudi husband; and individuals with disabilities, widows and orphans, including orphans with mobility cards.

In the following situations, the pension will be suspended, especially if one of the eligibility

criteria is missing: if it was proven to the ministry that the data provided is incorrect; if the beneficiary delays in updating the personal data requested by the ministry for a period exceeding 30 days from the date he or she was notified; if it was proven that the eligible beneficiary has not adhered to his or her rehabilitation plan; if the beneficiary, who is able to work, is not looking for work or has not applied to the employment platforms approved by the ministry; or if the beneficiary waives the pension or passes away.

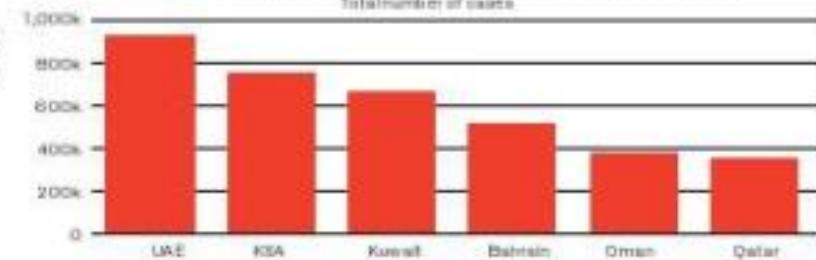
To ensure that social security is not being exploited, the law stipulates penalties, whereby a fine of no more than SR5,000 (\$1,330) or a prison term of no more than three months or both shall be imposed on each beneficiary who has a pension and did not spend it on dependent family members.

Moreover, a fine not exceeding SR10,000 or imprisonment for a period not exceeding one year or both shall be imposed on anyone who received such amounts from social security inappropriately.

Dimah Talal Al-Sharif is a Saudi lawyer and legal consultant. Twitter: @dimah\_alsharif

## The Day's FIGURES

### COVID-19: MOST AFFECTED GCC COUNTRIES



## Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

### Promoting talent

#### Red Sea Film Festival reveals 12 projects

The Red Sea International Film Festival on Tuesday announced the 12 projects from upcoming filmmakers in the Kingdom and the Arab region who have been selected for the Red Sea Lodge.

The lodge is a mentoring program launched in collaboration with the Turino Film Lab and a key part of the festival's drive to support and promote grassroots talent.

At the first edition of the festival in December, The Red Sea Lodge 2021 winners "The Zarqa Girl" by Zaid Abusamdan and "The Photographer of Medina" by Dalyah Bakheet both received a grant of \$100,000.

The initiative hosts five intensive labs that take a diverse talent at the early stages of their careers through the essentials of filmmaking to bring their authentic stories to the screen.

The eight-month program has been designed to nurture and support emerging talent, improve access to Arab content and promote the region's talent on the international stage. The final workshop will take place during the second edition of the festival, which is scheduled to run from Dec. 1 to 10 in Jeddah.

Of the 12 projects selected, six are from Saudi Arabia while the others are from Egypt, Algeria and Lebanon, with 50 percent of the concepts directed, produced and written by women. AN Jeddah

### Urban planning

#### Jeddah authorities clear slums on govt land

Jeddah municipality cleared 76,350 square meters of slums on government land in the Breman area on Monday as part of efforts to improve the aesthetic appearance of neighborhoods.

Teams carried out field tours and discovered 20 workshops and warehouses in the Al-Ajwad neighborhood, removing four trailers.

The municipality said that the sites were operating in violation of regulations, resulting in health and environmental risks.

The municipality said that teams will continue to monitor slum sites, calling on citizens to help improve municipal services by reporting violations through the Balady app or by phoning the 940 call center.

Meanwhile, the Riyadh Municipality earlier this month banned construction or demolition activities in the city from the Maghris call to prayer (5:00 p.m.) until 7 a.m.

Violators of the prohibition will be fined SR10,000, the municipality said on its Twitter account.

The regulation aims to keep neighborhoods and residents free from disturbances, said the tweet.

The Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development announced last summer a rule that bans working outside from 12 p.m. until 3 p.m. lasting until the month of September.

SPA Jeddah

### Fighting terrorism

#### OIC condemns deadly attack in Burkina Faso

The General Secretariat of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation has condemned a deadly attack targeting security forces in northern Burkina Faso.

OIC Secretary-General Hussein Ibrahim Taha described the attack as a heinous operation, and offered his condolences to the families of the victims and to the government and people of Burkina Faso.

He reiterated the OIC's solidarity with Burkina Faso and its support for the fight against terrorism.

Armed militants killed at least eight people in the township of Arbinda in northern Burkina Faso on Monday, bringing the total number killed in three days of violence to more than 30.

The area has suffered several deadly raids by militants linked to Al-Qaeda and Daesh, which for years have sought to gain control over a swathe of arid terrain where Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger meet.

Meanwhile, at least seven people were killed in the fifth attack to strike the country's north in under a week, security sources said Tuesday.

"Armed men on Monday morning attacked a (water) drilling site at Tonni Oule" in Soum province, one source said. "While sabotaging the installation, they shot dead three civilians and wounded three others. Four members of the VDP who tried to counter the attackers were also killed," the source added. SPA, AFP Jeddah



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# News Saudi Arabia

EXPLORING CULTURE – WITH A TWIST

# Digital project to help Arab communities thrive using NFTs

The collection features 'the 22 Arab countries stenciled on the borders of each NFT in traditional kufic script'

Jasmine Bager Riyadh

**Non-fungible tokens, better known as NFTs, have become all the rage. Last month, the Diriyah Biennale and fine arts company Sotheby's hosted the Middle East's first digital art forum, in Riyadh.**

Around the same time, a group of like-minded Arabs came together to create The First Arabs, a digital community set up to explore Arab culture through NFTs — but with a twist.

In addition to creating and celebrating 10,000 Arab-centric, hand-drawn characters as NFTs, The First Arabs aims to help support high-impact nongovernmental organizations as a fundamental part of its mission.

The group's members have vowed to tackle underfunded issues in their communities and build partnerships with global and local NGOs to advise them on their crypto fundraising initiatives, as well as use a large share of their NFT sales and future royalties in perpetuity to support important Arab causes.

Think of them as philanthropic "phygital" — physical and digital — nomads looking to create "an authentic Arab community at the cutting edge of blockchain technology," working to do good in the Arab world.

They are now stealthily launching in the metaverse and Arabverse, similar to the culture of NFTs and crypto bros, they choose to remain pseudonymous in order for the focus to be on the community rather than individuals.

One Saudi member of the The First Arabs team told Arab News: "The First Arabs is about the community and not the team. We aim to create a truly inclusive community from across the Arab world, a community that transcends national differences.

"We do not want to influence direction based on our own nationalities or perspectives, and the goal is for the community to manage and vote on key decisions, such as which NGOs to support, and other topics as we grow."

Physical money is fungible, meaning it can be traded or exchanged for equal amounts; \$1 equals \$1. NFTs involves trading two things that are not equal.

"NFTs are essentially kind of derived somewhat, you could say, from cryptocurrencies; cryptocurrencies popped up after the financial recession in 2008, since then, it's gone through trials, tribulations, tests, and ups and downs, and continues to push forward, and the industry is now very heavily invested in that direction.

"It used to be just small circles, early adopters, and then it moved



In addition to creating and celebrating 10,000 Arab-centric, hand-drawn characters as NFTs, The First Arabs aims to help support high-impact NGOs as a fundamental part of its mission. Supplied

## HIGHLIGHT

**The group's members have vowed to tackle underfunded issues in their communities and build partnerships with global and local NGOs to advise them on their crypto fundraising initiatives, as well as use a large share of their NFT sales and future royalties in perpetuity to support important Arab causes.**

of each NFT in traditional kufic script, the oldest calligraphic form of the Arabic language, to keep our message of pan-Arab community central to the art.

"And, in addition to being the gateway to The First Arabs, TFA holders will own the full commercial rights to their NFT."

The First Arabs describe the metaverse as "the collective consciousness online." People, essentially, can be whoever they want to be. At a time when finding fame as a social media influencer may seem desirable to some, others are rethinking how they are identified on the Internet, perhaps wanting to share less. By using NFTs, users will be able to curate who they are — and what they are — in the metaverse.

Despite being a world shrouded in anonymity, owning an NFT, even if the person chooses to be anonymous, can still be a status symbol. Owners of Bored Ape NFTs, for example, are in the elite category of that world. Last year, a Bored Ape Yacht Club NFT sold for \$2.8 million, equal to 100.9 Ethereum.

A cryptocurrency wallet is required to purchase and store an NFT and the Ethereum blockchain is the host of the BAYC, so buyers need to download that in order to activate their crypto wallet. The First Arabs will probably be working on creating an

Arab-centric version of that.

"A lot of the discussions now ask, are the majority of nonprofits crypto native or crypto? They're not. What will it take for them to be?" Is that a deal breaker?

Because at the end of the day, what is the goal? The goal is to help the people in need that need these funds.

"So, are we going to say that, no, they only get the funds if they come through crypto? Because eventually, what they need to do ultimately is convert that crypto to the form of payment that they're going to use."

"The next step is identifying NGOs and nonprofits that focus on Arab initiatives and social work. But the main question remains: Do those places we would like to donate to have digital wallets, and can they accept digital payments? The next question is vital: Will they?" The First Arabs member added.

During the last few decades, Saudi Arabia has morphed from having residents who barely used dial-up to a tech-savvy population, most with smartphones.

Traditionally, many Arabs were part of nomadic groups that collectively belonged to the same tribe or community in the region, and The First Arabs is perhaps the next iteration of that — in the metaverse frontier.

## STRIKING THE RIGHT CHORD

# Self-taught Saudi pianist shines across the Kingdom

Lama Alhamawi Riyadh

**Self-taught Saudi pianist Eman Gusti charmed the audience during her recent International Women's Day performance at the French ambassador's house in Riyadh.**

She played a few solo pieces and also accompanied Saudi opera singer Samson Albahiti on the piano.

Gusti picked up the piano at the young age of seven and developed her passion for music from her mother. Since then, she has performed in shows across the Kingdom.

## FAST FACTS

- Eman Gusti is a member of the Earth Orchestra and a professionally licensed musician. Having performed over 150 shows, she is considered a seasoned veteran at the age of 24.

- She now composes her pieces and has developed her craft over the years by teaching herself to translate the musical notations.

- She said she had support from the Ministry of Culture and the Music Commission and will soon receive a scholarship to further her studies.



Eman Gusti said there needed to be a certain connection of 'passion' and 'love' between a person and their instrument to strengthen that relationship. Photo/Huda Bashatah

music flourished into the talent she has today.

When she was 15, her father gifted her a piano to continue practicing even before she was in high school.

Gusti is a member of the Earth Orchestra and a professionally licensed musician. Having performed over 150 shows, she is considered a seasoned veteran at the age of 24.

She has played in shows across the Kingdom, including in Jeddah and Alkhobar.

She has also performed alongside celebrities such as Majid Almuhandis and even traveled to Switzerland to play at the World Economic Forum in Davos.

The pianist said there needed to be a certain connection of "passion" and "love" between a person and their instrument to

strengthen that relationship.

She said she was often asked to perform many audience favorites that her followers had heard her play.

"There are some pieces I am always asked to play. One of them is 'Secret Garden' and 'Mariage D'amour' - 'Wedding Of Love.' It's French music by Richard Clayderman."

She said she was a bit nervous

with a new crowd at the beginning of every performance, but then, as soon as she began, her nerves were immediately calmed. Gusti hoped to inspire many more women to pursue their passion.

"I have a belief that everyone should follow their dreams and work hard to make them a reality. I wish to set an example for girls in my country."

She now composes her pieces

and has developed her craft over the years by teaching herself to translate the musical notations.

"I learned by self-learning until I achieved the level to compose my music notation to translate the music and perform in events."

She said she had support from the Ministry of Culture and the Music Commission and will soon receive a scholarship to further her studies.

# News Middle East



Relatives mourn during the funeral of 16-year-old Palestinian Nader Rayan at the Balata camp near the northern city of Nablus on Tuesday. Rayan was shot by Israeli forces in the head and chest. AFP

## MIDEAST CRISIS

# Israel troops kill two Palestinians

Palestinian authorities say the deaths bring to 20 the number of Palestinians killed by Israelis this year

AFP Nablus

**Israeli troops killed two Palestinians in separate shootings in the occupied West Bank Tuesday, the latest in a flurry of deadly clashes as a US envoy tours the region seeking to ease tensions.**

A 16-year-old died in an exchange of fire with troops carrying out an arrest raid outside the northern city of Nablus, the Palestinian Health Ministry and Israeli security forces said.

Separately, a Palestinian in his 20s was killed in Qalandiya outside Jerusalem, the ministry said.

Teenager Nader Haitham Rayan died in Balata camp near Nablus after being hit by bullets to the head, chest and hand, the ministry said. It did not give further details on the circumstances of his death.

A spokesman for Israel's border police said a Palestinian had been killed.

"A terrorist fired at our troops who responded and killed him," he said.

The exchange of fire came as Israeli troops were leaving the camp after arresting a Palestinian fugitive wanted for alleged terrorism offenses.

"Just as they were preparing to exit the camp, a terrorist arrived

on a motorbike and fired toward them," the spokesman added.

Rayan's body was wrapped in a Palestinian flag ahead of his burial on Tuesday, during which gunmen

**FASTFACT**  
A 16-year-old died in an exchange of fire with troops carrying out an arrest raid outside the northern city of Nablus.

fired into the air.

The Palestinian Health Ministry said another nine people were wounded in the exchanges, one of them seriously.

The second death occurred in Qalandiya, a town on Jerusalem's northern outskirts that hosts the main checkpoint between annexed East Jerusalem and the northern West Bank.

Aziz Shaham, in his 20s, was killed by a "live round to the head," the ministry said.

Commenting on the violence in Qalandiya, the border police said riots erupted when forces entered the area to arrest "two people involved in terrorist activities."

"Hundreds of rioters threw heavy objects from the roofs of houses endangering Israeli forces" who fired in response, a statement said, without mentioning the reported fatality.

Hundreds gathered for Shaham's funeral, including gunmen from the Al-Quds Martyrs' Brigade, the armed wing of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas' Fatah faction.

Palestinian authorities said the two deaths brought to 20 the number of Palestinians killed by Israeli forces this year.

With violence flaring in the West Bank, US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Hady Amr was in the region for a tour aimed in part at trying to "reduce tensions," a US Embassy spokesperson said.

Amr is also seeking "to implement specific economic steps that will improve lives," the spokesperson added.

## HEINOUS CRIME

# Gangrape of young woman leads to fresh protests in Sudan

Reuters Khartoum

Protesters marched in Khartoum and other cities on Tuesday, one day after a Sudanese government official said security forces had gang-raped a young woman.

Rallies in Khartoum and several other cities were called after reports of the assault emerged late on Monday. One flyer read: "Wars are not fought on women's bodies."

Sudan has been rocked for months by protests rejecting an Oct. 25 military coup, organized by neighborhood-based resistance committees.

Protesters in the capital on Tuesday faced heavy tear gas and stun grenades as they marched toward the country's presidential palace.

Among them were many young women and girls, and some carried signs reading, "They will not break you" and "We will not be broken."

"What happened yesterday is not just oppression of women but of the whole Sudanese people, and we will continue to take to the street until our demands of freedom, justice, and human dignity are granted," said Amira Salih, a 38-year-old teacher.

Sulaima Ishaq, who heads Sudan's Violence Against Women Unit at the Ministry of Social Development, said a 19-year-old South Sudanese woman, who was not a protester, was on a public bus as protests wound down on Monday evening, when forces fired tear gas, causing passengers to disperse.

The woman was then raped by two members of the forces and assaulted by others, Ishaq told Reuters, adding that the incident was under investigation by police.

Eyewitnesses told Reuters they could see the forces attacking the woman from nearby buildings.

Police did not respond to a request for comment.

In December, the UN said it had received 13 allegations of rape and gang rape after a Dec. 29 attempted sit-in was dispersed in central Khartoum.

## POSITIVE DEVELOPMENT

# Aid worker Zaghrati-Ratcliffe, imprisoned in Iran, 'gets her British passport back'

Reuters London, Dubai

British-Iranian aid worker Nazanin Zaghrati-Ratcliffe has had her British passport returned, British lawmaker Tulip Siddiq said on Tuesday, as Tehran and London pressed on with talks about a long-standing £400 million (\$820 million) debt.

"I am very pleased to say that Nazanin Zaghrati-Ratcliffe has been given her British passport back," Siddiq, who is the member of parliament for where Zaghrati-Ratcliffe used to live in London, said on Twitter.

"She is still at her family home in Tehran, I also understand that there is a British negotiating team in Tehran right now," she added on Twitter.

If Britain had a negotiating team out in Iran, Prime Minister Boris Johnson's spokesman said: "I'm not going to get into further speculation at this point."

A spokesperson for Siddiq's office told Reuters the lawmaker had based her remarks on information from Zaghrati-Ratcliffe's family.

Separately, her lawyer Bojtan Kermani, when asked whether Zaghrati-Ratcliffe will be released, told Reuters: "I am hopeful that we will have good news soon."

Kermani said his view was based on



Nazanin Zaghrati-Ratcliffe with her daughter Gabriella in a June 10, 2016 photograph provided by the Free Nazanin campaign in London. AFP

meetings and discussions he had had with the Iranian judiciary about the case of the Zaghrati-Ratcliffe, a project manager with the Thomson Reuters Foundation who was arrested at a Tehran airport in April 2016 and later convicted by an Iranian court of plotting to overthrow the clerical establishment.

Her family and the foundation, a charity that operates independently of Thomson Reuters and its news subsidiary Reuters, deny the charge.

Reuters was unable to independently establish the status of Zaghrati-Ratcliffe.

Commonwealth Office said: "We have long called for the release of unfairly detained British nationals in Iran. We don't comment on speculation."

The Thomson Reuters Foundation declined immediate comment on Siddiq's statement. Richard Ratcliffe did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Iranian officials did not immediately reply to a request for comment on the remarks by Siddiq and Kermani.

Asked for comment, a spokesperson for Britain's Foreign and

Iran's clerical establishment says Britain owes the money that Iran's Shah paid upfront for 1,750 Chieftain tanks and other vehicles, almost none of which were eventually delivered after the Islamic Revolution of 1979 toppled the US-backed leader.

While the British and Iranian governments have said there is no connection between the debt and the case of Zaghrati-Ratcliffe, Iranian state media in 2021 reported unidentified Iranian officials saying she would be freed once the debt was paid.

Iranian officials did not comment when asked whether the amount has been paid by Britain as reported by some Iranian outlets.

Zaghrati-Ratcliffe, who served most of her first sentence in Tehran's Evin Prison, was released in March 2020 during the coronavirus pandemic and kept under house arrest at her parents' home in Tehran. In March 2021, she was released from house arrest but she was summoned to court again on the new charge.

In April 2021, she was then sentenced to a new term in jail on charges of propaganda against Iran's ruling system, charges she denies. However, that sentence has not yet started and she is banned from leaving the country.

## NUCLEAR CRISIS

# Foreign Minister Lavrov says Russia received US guarantees on Iran deal

AFP Moscow

Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Tuesday that Moscow had received guarantees from Washington on its ability to trade with Tehran as part of ongoing talks to salvage the Iran nuclear deal.

"We received written guarantees. They are included in the text of the agreement itself on the resumption of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on the Iranian nuclear program," Lavrov said at a press conference in Moscow with Iranian counterpart Hossein Amir-Abdollahian.

More than 10 months of talks in Vienna have brought major powers close to renewing the landmark 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on regulating Iran's nuclear program.

The negotiations halted after Moscow earlier this month demanded guarantees that Western sanctions imposed following its military operation in Ukraine would not damage its trade with Iran.

Lavrov said that the guarantees Moscow had received from Washington would protect Russian involvement in Iran's sole Bushehr nuclear energy plant.

The minister said Moscow and

Tehran share the position that Western sanctions are imposed with the aim of overriding international law and accused Washington and its partners of directing the penalties "primarily against ordinary citizens."

The 2015 deal gave Iran sanctions relief in exchange for curbs on its nuclear program.

The agreement aimed to ensure Iran would not be able to develop a nuclear weapon, which it has always

**Lavrov said that the guarantees would protect Russian involvement in Iran's sole Bushehr nuclear energy plant.**

denied seeking. "Russia will not be an obstacle to reaching an agreement," Iran's Amir-Abdollahian said at the press conference with Lavrov.

"There will be no relation between Ukraine's developments ... and Vienna negotiations," he said, referring to the ongoing conflict and talks on renewing the 2015 agreement.

He praised Russia's "very positive and constructive role" in the talks and said Moscow would "stay beside the Islamic Republic of Iran until the end of the negotiations and reaching a good, strong and lasting agreement."



# News International

## DIPLOMACY

# Bangladesh eyes big investment deals as Saudi FM arrives in Dhaka

Projects worth billions of dollars to be discussed during visit: Bangladeshi authorities

### Shehab Bumon Dhaka

**Bangladesh was hopeful of signing a number of major investment deals with Saudi Arabia during a two-day visit to Dhaka by the Kingdom's Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan, officials said on Tuesday.**

The prince flew into the Bangladeshi capital on Tuesday afternoon and was scheduled to meet the country's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on Wednesday and lay the foundation stone for the Arabic Language Institute of the Islamic Arabic University in Dhaka.

Sirazul Islam, executive chairman of the Bangladesh Investment Development Authority, said projects worth billions of dollars would be discussed during Prince Faisal's trip.

"Most of the Saudi investment proposals are involving the public sector. Further investments from Saudi Arabia will depend mostly on our success of handling the investment proposals in the pipeline," Islam added.

"At the moment we can't exactly predict the volume of investment as it depends on the success of discussions. But we hope it will be billions (of dollars) and there will be a whole gamut of discussions."

The projects are related to oil refineries, gas transmission, fertilizer production, aviation, port management, construction, and hospitality.

Islam said that among the Saudi companies that had expressed interest in investing in Bangladesh were oil giant Aramco, transformer producer Engineering Dimensions, utility provider ACWA Power, industrial conglomerate

Al-Fanar Group, and Al-Hokair Group, one of the largest entertainment and hospitality firms in the Middle East.

The Bangladesh Foreign Ministry's director general for West Asia, tqbal Hussain, told Arab News that the Bangladeshi government would be seeking to strengthen its

**HIGHLIGHT**  
Major schemes are related to energy, aviation, port management, construction sectors.

ties with the Kingdom during the prince's visit.

"We are looking for stronger political and investment ties with the Kingdom as both countries have very good bilateral relationships," he said, adding that Bangladesh was preparing more than 100

special economic zones for potential investors. "Seeking investment from the Kingdom will be one of our top issues as there is an ongoing campaign to attract more and more foreign investment in the country."

Dhaka was also hopeful of increasing the number of migrant workers it sends to Saudi Arabia, which is Bangladesh's main labor market and already hosts more than 2.5 million Bangladeshi expats.

Migrant workers are the second-largest contributor of Bangladesh's foreign remittances, after the garment sector.

"Saudi Arabia is the largest market for Bangladeshi migrants," Hussain said. "There is demand for Bangladeshi migrants in the Kingdom and we are ready to export more workers in all skilled and unskilled categories."



Indian Muslim students spend time at a cafe after they were denied entry into their college for wearing the hijab in Udupi, Karnataka state, India, on Feb. 24. File/AP

### CONTROVERSY

## Indian court upholds state hijab ban in schools, colleges

### Sanjay Kumar New Delhi

A high court in India's southern state of Karnataka upheld on Tuesday a ban on the wearing of hijab in classrooms, ruling that the Muslim head covering is not "essential" to Islam.

The hijab controversy took off in late January after Muslim girls at a government-run secondary school in Karnataka's Udupi district began protesting a new rule that prevented them from attending classes if they wore the hijab.

After the local administration backed the school and banned the wearing of the hijab and "clothes which disturbed peace" at educational institutions, a small peaceful protest held by the Udupi schoolgirls grew into rallies that spilled into other states.

The Karnataka High Court's ruling comes after weeks of deliberations following petitions arguing that India's constitution guarantees Muslim women the right to wear headscarves.

The court dismissed the pleas,

saying the state government had the right to prescribe uniforms for students.

"The school regulations prescribing dress code for all the students as one homogeneous class serve constitutional secularism," Chief Justice Ritu Raj Awasthi of the Karnataka High Court said in the judgment.

"We are of the considered opinion that the wearing of the hijab by Muslim women does not form a part of essential religious practice."

The court also said that students cannot object to school uniforms, prescribing it as a "reasonable restriction and constitutionally permissible."

Activists fear the hijab ban could pave the way for further discriminatory measures targeting the Muslim community, which makes up about 12 percent of the population in Karnataka, a state that is a stronghold of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party.

"The verdict is unacceptable, unjust and violates human

rights and constitutional rights. It dehumanizes Muslim women and sets a disturbing precedent," student activist Afreen Fatima said.

"The ruling IUP and the right-wing forces have co-opted Indian institutions and the court is also becoming a tool in the hands of the majoritarian forces to further

### FASTFACTS

- Karnataka High Court said students 'cannot object to uniforms prescribed by schools.'

- Ruling comes after protests that spilled into other Indian states.

### humiliate Muslims'

Since coming to power in 2014, the local government has passed a series of rules seen as discriminating against Muslims and other religious minorities, including regulations making it difficult for interfaith couples to marry, and for people to convert to Islam or Christianity.

Poet and teacher Nabiya Khan, who wears the hijab, said the verdict is "emotionally exhausting."

Shayma S., a Muslim activist and doctoral student at Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi, told Arab News that the ban amounted to "literal denial of education and women's right to exercise their choice."

"The rights of the minorities are being violated in many ways. This is one more layer to that violation," she said, expressing hope that the Karnataka ruling would be reversed.

Anas Tanveer, a lawyer representing the petitioners, said the decision is going to be challenged in the Supreme Court.

"The court has gone into essential religious practice when it should not have," he told Arab News.

"The question essentially is whether the state has power to issue such notifications which are against the law, the statute or the rules."

# Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

### Pandemic

## Millions under lockdown in China as virus surges

Tens of millions of people were under lockdown across China on Tuesday, as surging virus cases prompted the return of mass tests and hazmat-suited health officials to streets on a scale not seen since the start of the pandemic.

China reported 5,280 new COVID-19 cases on Tuesday, more than double the previous day's tally, as the highly transmissible omicron variant spread across a country that has stuck tightly to a zero-COVID strategy.

That approach, which pivots on hard localized lockdowns and has left China virtually cut off from the outside world for two years, appears stretched to the limit as omicron finds its way into communities. AFP

### Politics

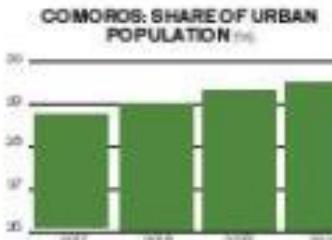
## Thai deputy PM proposes calling of snap election

Thailand could call an election in November after it completes its hosting of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit, a deputy prime minister said on Tuesday, the first indication of polls before the government's term ends.

Pravit Wongswan, an influential royalist and former army chief, was responding to news reports that he had met some leaders of the 17-party coalition on Monday to propose house dissolution after the summit in mid-November.

Thai election law stipulates an election must be held within 60 days of parliament being dissolved. "I said when APEC is completed the government will be free and if we dissolve the house we can do so then," Pravit told reporters on Tuesday. Reuters

## The Day's FIGURES



Source: Statistics

## What We Are Reading Today

FROM AROUND THE WEB & IN PRINT

### The Divided States of America

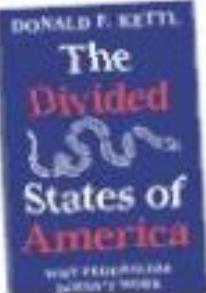
DONALD F. KETTL

Federalism was James Madison's great invention. An innovative system of power sharing that balanced national and state interests, federalism was the pragmatic compromise that brought the colonies together to form the US. Yet, even beyond the question of slavery, inequality was built into the system because federalism by its very nature meant that many aspects of an American's life depended on where they lived. Over time, these inequalities have created vast divisions between the states and made federalism fundamentally unstable. In *The Divided*

States of America

Donald Kettl chronicles the history of a political system that once united the nation—and now threatens to break it apart.

Exploring the full sweep of federalism from the founding to today, Kettl focuses on pivotal moments when power has shifted between state and national governments—from the violent rebalancing of the Civil War, when the nation almost split in two, to the era of civil rights a century later, when there was apparent agreement that inequality was a threat to liberty and the federal government should set policies for states to enact.



### Weather

## Dust from Sahara gives gritty tinge to Spain's skies

Spain issued extremely poor air quality ratings for Madrid and a large swath of the country Tuesday after a mass of hot air from the Sahara dumped dust after crossing the Mediterranean.

The national air quality index qualified as "extremely unfavorable" — its worst rating — the capital and large parts of the southeast coast.

Spain's weather service described the dust storm from the Sahara as "extraordinary and very intense," while adding that it was unclear if it was the worst episode of its kind on record.

The service forecast that the dust will continue to accumulate through Wednesday and could reach northwards as far as the Netherlands and northwestern Germany. AP

### Conflict

## Rebel attacks in eastern Congo kill more than 60

Suspected Islamist militants have killed more than 60 people over five days of attacks on villages in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, local residents said on Tuesday.

The assailants, believed to be rebels from the Allied Democratic Forces, have targeted at least five villages, and the offensive was still ongoing, the residents told Reuters.

Overwhelmed by violence in its eastern regions, Congo's government-appointed military officers to run North Ituri and neighboring Ituri province in May, Uganda sent more than 1,000 troops in December to wage joint operations against the ADF. But the attacks have continued unabated as ADF fighters have lashed out at local civilians in retaliation for the military campaigns. Reuters

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إن كنت في نعمة فلرّعها  
فإن المعاشر تزيل النعم  
عن بن أبي طالب - ر

**YOUR DAILY ARABIC PROVERB**  
*If you find yourself blessed with good fortune, cherish it, as sin undermines blessings.*

Ali bin Abi Taleb  
(The fourth caliph)

# Opinion

## Lebanon's last chance as Ukraine fallout looms

BAHAA HARIRI



Bahaa Hariri is the eldest son of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri.  
Twitter: @bahaa\_hariri

situation has the potential to escalate at a frightening pace.

The elections in May remain the last chance Lebanon has to vote for a government that is willing to implement concrete policies to ease the pain of our people. Inaction or maintaining the status quo is not an option. As long as the people of Lebanon allow sectarian politics to continue, the country will be subject to manipulation, political interference and attempts to cause more chaos from the outside as well as from the political elites within.

Unfortunately, the political establishment in Lebanon has closed ranks, determined to maintain its tenuous grip on power, and there is worrying speculation that the elections could be delayed. Unhelpfully, whereas the US and EU had been applying pressure on Lebanon to hold these elections, another side effect of the crisis in Ukraine is that their attention could be elsewhere.

We should not underestimate the political elites' desire to maintain their tenuous grip on power by avoiding electoral

accountability. After all, nothing better highlights the political establishment's desire for self-preservation than its reaction to the Port of Beirut explosion. Nobody — not a single government official or Cabinet member — has been held to account for a completely avoidable tragedy that cost Lebanon 219 souls and billions of dollars. Any attempt at due process has been continually blocked by those motivated solely by maintaining the current status quo. That such actions mean forcing the victims' families into a never-ending campaign for justice is of little concern to such people.

My father, Rafik Hariri, was a passionate advocate for Lebanon and the Lebanese people. He rose to prominence in the aftermath of the civil war with the sole agenda to rebuild Lebanon and put our nation on the path to prosperity. He fought for a Lebanon free from the sectarian constraints that led to the civil war and wanted to build a country that worked for everyone, not just the elites. In the end, he paid the ultimate price, yet his

vision for a better, more prosperous Lebanon shines a light on a potential path to prosperity and a return to the kind of Lebanon my father died trying to build.

To honor his legacy, I have been an early supporter of Sawa Li Lubnan, a new political party that is fighting to end the sectarian stranglehold on Lebanese politics and is willing to implement the much-needed reforms to our judiciary, politics and economy. I hope my fellow countrymen and women see in Sawa a chance at a fresh start.

The clock is ticking as the reverberations of what Russia started in Ukraine approach Lebanon. I hope that the Lebanese people wake up to this stark reality. There is no good reason to back the old sectarian parties, which have done nothing in recent years to improve the dire situation facing Lebanon. If the people do not act now and back parties like Sawa Li Lubnan, there may not be a Lebanon left.

I just pray they act before the crisis in Ukraine reaches our shores.

Russia's decision to invade Ukraine will have ramifications that reverberate around the world for years to come. In the West, the immediate concern remains the invasion's impact on the oil and gas markets. Yet, in countries like Lebanon, with just six weeks to two months of wheat reserves, the war's impact on agricultural supply chains could well be the straw that finally breaks the camel's back.

With an economy struggling due to the impacts of decades of corruption, a financial crisis and COVID-19, the upcoming parliamentary elections have never been so important. My fellow Lebanese face a bleak future, with no jobs for workers, no fuel at the gas stations and food at record prices. Children are already going hungry up and down the country and, should the crisis in Ukraine continue, food prices will only skyrocket further. Given Lebanon imports more than 80 percent of its wheat from Ukraine, the

**There is no good reason to vote for the old sectarian parties, which have done nothing in recent years to improve the country's dire situation**



**The longer the conflict continues, the more it is locked into a deadly routine in which the lives of Palestinians tragically count for very little**

## Palestinians' suffering under Israel's brutal occupation laid bare

YOSSE MEKELBERG



In her annual report to the UN Human Rights Council that was released last week, High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet devoted a short passage to the abuses of Palestinian human rights in the territories occupied by Israel. Despite its conciseness, it was damning, which should deeply worry those who believe that Israelis and Palestinians can one day live together peacefully, while respecting each other's rights.

Bachelet expressed her concern at the deteriorating situation in the occupied Territories, mainly from what she described as "a dramatic rise in the number of Palestinians killed by Israeli forces." In one year, the number of Palestinians killed in these circumstances went up tenfold, from 32 in 2020 to 320 in 2021. And if it is not the security forces that are showing contempt for Palestinian lives, the high commissioner's report warned that settler violence is also on the rise, not only in the number of incidents but also in their severity. Furthermore, with the almost absolute power that Israel exerts over Palestinians, arrests also doubled in 2021, including an increase of 30 percent in cases of "administrative detention," which typifies the arbitrary nature of the occupation by depriving detainees of their freedom without due legal process, let alone conviction.

Occupation as a form of repression has many faces and all of them are looking to ensure that the occupied feel despairing and hopeless to the point that they lose the will to resist. There is an Israeli military presence almost everywhere in the West Bank, including incursions into areas that are supposed to be under complete Palestinian Authority control. Soldiers use force at will,

detaining both adults and children with no shred of evidence of lawbreaking, and in certain cases using vastly excessive force that leads to the killing of Palestinians with almost complete impunity.

For example, Amar Shafiq Abu Afifa, a 19-year-old college student, was this month shot dead by an Israeli soldier while he was hiking with a friend. According to a B'Tselem researcher who investigated the incident, he was shot in the head as he ran away in fright after hearing the soldier shouting in Hebrew, even though he posed no threat. Just a few days earlier, Israeli forces shot dead a 13-year-old Palestinian boy, Mohammed Reaq Salah, near Al-Khadir village in the West Bank. According to the Israeli authorities, the boy threw a Molotov cocktail at Israeli forces. Even if this was the case, one would think that highly trained soldiers could have neutralized a boy of this age without killing him.

These are only two examples of lives lost in an asymmetric conflict that, the longer it continues, the more it is locked into a deadly routine in which the lives of Palestinians tragically count for very little. The imposition of the will of one people on another with the use of overwhelming military force — while also utilizing its economic might and somehow enjoying the support of the most powerful country in the world and as the rest of the international community turns a blind eye — is creating among the Palestinians a sense of hopelessness, as well as deep anger at the profound and daily injustices perpetrated by the occupiers.

Last month was particularly violent and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs produced a long list of what can only be described as the constant harassment

of Palestinians, including confiscating, demolishing or forcing owners to demolish their own homes or other structures in Area C, which is under complete Israeli control, and East Jerusalem, which was illegally annexed by Israel. Whenever these occurrences take place, they negatively affect the lives of Palestinians, displace families, including young children, and end in the loss of livelihood. No wonder there is a deep and desperate resentment waiting to explode.

As part of its scare tactics, Israel has normalized the use of not only disproportionate force against militant opposition, but in many cases unwarranted and unprovoked violence against ordinary Palestinians. The OCHA reported that, in February, Israeli forces carried out 139 search and arrest operations against 258 Palestinians across the West Bank. By any standards, this was a deliberate and provocative escalation, which in some cases triggered clashes between Palestinians and Israeli security forces and perpetuated a vicious cycle, in which Israeli forces respond by killing and maiming protesters with live ammunition, rubber bullets and tear gas. This in turn provokes further protests. Many such Palestinian protests are against the expansion of settlements and the behavior of settlers, who are violently preventing Palestinian farmers from accessing their land to cultivate crops and feed their livestock.

Another extremely disturbing aspect of the Israeli occupation that did not escape Bachelet's attention is the "repressive measures taken by Israel against human rights defenders and civil society activists, based on vague and unsubstantiated allegations, and with potentially far-reaching consequences for their activity." One of the

methods employed by Israel to suppress dissent among Palestinians is to harass human rights defenders and civil society organizations in a crude attempt to silence them and, by that, deprive the millions of people living under occupation of a voice and a leadership to counter injustice.

For instance, what began last July with a great trumpet blast from Israel's Defense Minister Benny Gantz, when he designated six Palestinian human rights and humanitarian groups as "terrorist organizations" under the country's counterterrorism law, has still not been backed up with evidence. After all, to accuse internationally and highly respected nongovernmental organizations of diverting funds to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, which is classified as a terrorist organization, is a very severe allegation, but where is the evidence? However, the damage to these groups has been done and the people who work for them know that they are watched and can be detained without trial indefinitely. In the meantime, the Israeli security forces remain free to operate as they wish with minimum scrutiny.

Considering the turmoil the world is currently engulfed in, it might be considered naive to expect the international community to pay much attention to or develop any coherent approach toward what is taking place in the Occupied Territories. Yet it is not unreasonable. That turmoil does not lessen the suffering of the occupied and the oppressed elsewhere and its potential consequences, to which the international community will be forced to respond when a situation for which it is partly responsible due to its apathy breaks down in a wholesale conflagration.

## Opinion

# Uncertainty grips Iran nuclear deal

OBAMA AL-SHARIF

**O**ne unexpected casualty of Russia's war on Ukraine could be the revival of the 2015 Iran nuclear deal. After almost a year of painstaking and sometimes deadlocked negotiations in Vienna between Iran and the P5+1 group, it finally appeared that a deal was in sight. Even the Russian envoy to the talks, Mihail Ulyanov, tweeted on March 3 that negotiations were "almost over." Western diplomats concurred that it was a matter of hours before a deal was struck. But a day later, as Russia was waking up to a series of unprecedented Western punitive sanctions, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said that Moscow would insist on written guarantees before backing a new nuclear deal with Iran.

Even the Iranians, who had relied on Russia's backing when they rejoined the talks last year, were shocked at the Kremlin's about-face. One Iranian official criticized Moscow for linking US sanctions against Russia to Moscow's approval of any revised nuclear deal with Tehran, according to media reports. A diplomatically besieged Kremlin is now playing with any card it can get its hands on, even if it means the collapse of the Vienna talks.

Officially, Tehran blamed the US for the sudden "pause" in negotiations and urged Washington to reconsider its position. But instead of putting pressure on America's European allies, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian headed to Moscow on Tuesday for talks with his Russian counterpart. That underlined how much Tehran sees Russia as having the final say on what now seems like a troubled deal.

The so-called pause is good news for a number of parties that had resisted the revival of the



Iran nuclear deal over a number of issues, including Tehran's regional behavior. That matters not only to Israel, but also to Gulf countries and others that see Iran's proxies wreaking havoc in Iraq, Syria and Yemen.

But that may not be the case for the Biden administration and its European partners. The war in Ukraine and the punitive measures taken against Moscow have changed the agenda and made reaching a deal with Iran even more urgent.

For now, the Iran deal has become hostage to an inconclusive war that Russia has launched and whose devastating global effects are spreading every minute. Closer to home, Iran chose to send its own message to the US and Israel by launching 12 ballistic missiles against a target or targets in Iraq's northern city of Irbil on Sunday. Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps claimed responsibility and said it had hit Israeli "strategic centers." This was a rare occasion when Iran, rather than its proxies, fired at Western targets in Iraq.

Whether Moscow's new position on the Vienna talks will derail a deal or only delay it is not known. The Biden administration is running out of time. Tehran wants an end to sanctions, while Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett, who has offered to mediate between Moscow and Kyiv, may score some points with Russia that could turn the pause in the Vienna talks into an open-ended impasse. What is now clear is that the nuclear deal has become a pawn in a complex geopolitical chess game.

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## ARAB NEWS

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# How COVID-19 reflected and shaped regional differences in US

KERRY BOYD ANDERSON



**T**he US is a large country, with regions that have their own subcultures, climates, demographics, economies and politics. COVID-19 affected US regions at different times and in different ways. Those varying experiences have shaped Americans' views of the pandemic.

So far, the US has experienced five major "waves" of the virus. The first wave hit cities the hardest, as the virus was most likely to show up initially in cities and then spread among their dense populations. In the spring of 2020, US cities saw surges in infections, hospitalizations and deaths. New York City was the epicenter of that wave, but other cities such as New Orleans and Seattle also struggled.

According to recent data analysis from the Pew Research Center, drawing on data from The New York Times, the first wave struck densely populated areas much harder than less populated areas. Given the political alignments with urban and rural areas in the country, this also meant that populations that tend to vote for Democrats had far more infections and deaths than places that tend to vote Republican.

The reality that Democratic-leaning populations suffered far more than Republican-leaning Americans early in the pandemic played a major role in shaping partisan views of COVID-19. The different experiences mapped onto other cultural and political divides, encouraged by then-President Donald Trump. The early experience with the pandemic melded with other partisan characteristics to forge Democrats' tendency to take the virus more seriously than Republicans and to support more mitigation measures.

The virus spread beyond densely populated areas to more rural Americans, however. While the lower levels of population density might have offered some protection, less populated areas were more vulnerable in other ways. They tend to have older populations more susceptible to the virus. And rural Americans are less likely to have access to nearby healthcare facilities.

Experience with the first wave also shaped partisan differences, leading many outside of populous areas to feel that the pandemic was mostly a coastal city problem. The third — and most deadly — wave hit during the winter of 2020/2021 and was much harder on the rest of the country. While the cities that initially

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suffered fared better, the middle and south of the country struggled. As Pew notes, in the first wave, the "death rate in the 10 percent of the country that lives in the most densely populated counties was more than nine times that of the death rate among the 10 percent of the population living in the least densely populated counties." However, in the other waves, "the nation's least dense counties have registered higher death rates than the most densely populated places." Furthermore, after the first wave, deaths have been higher in deeply Republican areas than in strongly Democratic areas.

The US began vaccinations during the third wave, in early 2021. When the fourth wave, involving the more severe delta variant, arrived in fall 2021, vaccinations played a major role in shaping how the pandemic played out across the country. The denser, more Democratic areas that suffered badly in the first wave tended to have significantly higher vaccination rates and managed relatively well during the delta wave. This fourth wave again hit less dense areas of the country harder, reflecting their lower vaccination rates. Unfortunately, vaccination had also become politicized; for example, a Gallup survey from September found that, among adults, 92 percent of Democrats had received at least one vaccine dose, compared to 56 percent of Republicans. The omicron variant was more evenly spread across the country but still led to more deaths in Republican-leaning areas.

The long-term consequences of regional differences during the pandemic are difficult to predict, but will be significant. For example, schools were more likely to remain open in areas governed by Republicans, which might leave Democratic areas with more learning loss.

While 70 percent of Americans say that it is time to move on with regular life, according to a recent Monmouth University poll, there is still a deep partisan divide shaping the extent to which Americans are ready to move on. The poll found that 80 percent of Republicans, 71 percent of independents and only 47 percent of Democrats agreed. These partisan differences will continue to shape attitudes and politics in different regions of the country. If no new and severe variants emerge, then Americans are likely to soon reach a consensus that it is time for life to return to normal, but the scars of the last two years will last.

# Israel-Turkey marriage of interests depends on stability

ZAID M. BELEBAGI



**I**sraeli President Isaac Herzog's visit to Turkey last week marked a change in approach to bilateral relations, as both parties chose to draw attention to their mutual interests and the necessity of their willingness to now cooperate.

Couched by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in terms such as "historic" and "a turning point," Ankara spared no expense in hosting Herzog. The importance of the occasion was not lost on the Israelis, who, following the diplomatic coup of the Abraham Accords, have felt concerned regarding unresolved tensions with one-time allies like Turkey. Keen to isolate Iran regionally, the visit was an opportunity to mend ties through offering opportunities to Ankara, while limiting the opportunities for Israel's regional security hegemony to be undermined.

Surrounding the steps toward a rapprochement with Israel is the wider Turkish regional charm offensive. Groaning with economic troubles, Ankara has been trying to end its perceived isolation by improving strained ties with several countries in the region, including Egypt, the UAE and Saudi Arabia.

Turkey's strained relations with Egypt and Israel have seen Greece and Cyprus' stars rise as the East Mediterranean Gas Forum, to which Turkey is not a party, has grown in importance. There is no doubt that the Turkish olive branch to Israel is intended to dislodge these Greek interests, but any hope that Tel Aviv might reciprocate has, at least publicly, been refuted by an Israeli government source, who in January said: "Improvements in Jerusalem-Ankara relations will not come at the expense of Israel's alliance with Greece and Cyprus."

Nevertheless, following the Biden administration's withdrawal of its support for an envisioned Israel-Cyprus-Greece pipeline last month and renewed fears of compromised gas supplies following Russia's invasion

of Ukraine, there is now greater scope for cooperation. The possibility of building an Eastern Mediterranean pipeline to bring Israeli natural gas to Turkey and then to Europe is an urgent priority for Ankara, which has been crippled by power shortages and skyrocketing energy bills. Faced with the very real possibility of a big tent opposition bloc threatening to unseat Erdogan in next year's presidential and parliamentary elections, the government is desperate for a solution to the country's cost of living crisis as it aims to win over a forlorn electorate.

Over dinner with Herzog, Erdogan said he raised "the Palestine issue" and "the improvement in the social and political status of Palestinians." Despite the outward friendliness of the state visit, the Palestinian question remains the most prominent cause for differences of opinion between the two countries. However, having unsuccessfully sought to undermine the Abraham Accords, Turkey now seems to be more concerned with sharing interests with Israel rather than differences.

Aside from currying favor with Washington, improved relations with Israel will rebuild Turkey's tarnished status as an investment destination.

Ahead of the trip, Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett underlined the importance of "stability" in regards to his country's foreign policy. The apparent lack of predictability from Ankara will continue to affect its political and economic fortunes. The previous plan to build an underwater pipeline to see Israeli natural gas transported to Europe was to bypass Turkey despite the favorable rights it offered Israel because the latter preferred the reliability it had found in its Greek and Cypriot interlocutors. Aside from Turkey's efforts to mend bridges with regional countries, the most valuable exercise it can engage in is to embark on transparent and clear plans that will reassure allies and investors alike.

Zaid M. Belbagi is a political commentator, and an adviser to private clients between London and the GCC.

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# Business



The trade flow of €1.2 billion and foreign direct investment between Greece and Saudi Arabia does not reflect the level that it should be.

**Kostas Fragogiannis**  
Greek deputy minister for economic  
diplomacy and overseas

## ANALYSIS

# How bad is the Russian economy, really?

Russia is one of the least indebted countries globally, with national debt equaling 17.9% of GDP

Mona Alami Ryach

**On March 9, Russia's central bank ordered new capital controls, limiting withdrawals in foreign currencies.**

The Bank of Russia or the Central Bank of the Russian Federation, CBR, declared that it would cap cash withdrawals of citizens holding accounts in foreign currency to \$10,000 until Sept. 9.

The decision came on the backdrop of a Fitch Ratings warning of an imminent Russian government default on its external debt. At the end of February, Russia's central bank had already introduced some capital controls and doubled its key policy rate to 20 percent per annum. The measure was an attempt to prevent the free fall of the ruble since the beginning of the Ukraine invasion on Feb. 24 and sanctions imposed by the US, the EU, UK and Japan.

But is the war sustainable in the long run?

"There are two main sets of reserves that many people thought would allow Russia to fund its war and weather sanctions. The first is the foreign reserves held by the CBR, worth about \$640 billion. Sanctions against the CBR mean that it cannot access those reserves held abroad, nor can it easily exchange its domestically held reserves on international markets," said Robert Person, professor of international relations at the US Military Academy (West Point), while speaking in his personal capacity to Arab News.

This situation essentially limits Russia's ability to shore up the ruble, use its funds to pay off some of its debt, or pay for imports. Many hinted at Russia's rising reserves from 2015 onward as evidence of Russia's growing war chest. But that money is only good if Russia can access it and, right now, it cannot access a large portion of those funds, explained Person.

### National Wealth Fund

The second set of reserves is Russia's National Wealth Fund, known as NWF. "This is where surplus revenue from energy sales gets deposited when oil prices are high. Again, many people pointed to this fund as evidence of Putin's ability to fund a long-term war or



Budget deficits in Russia are often in positive territory. In 2019, the deficit was a surplus of 1.8 percent, followed by a deficit of 3.8 percent in 2020 and a surplus of 0.4 percent in 2021. Shutterstock

### HIGHLIGHTS

Analysts polled by the CBR showed the Russian economy is expected to contract by 8 percent in 2022.

Other challenges faced by Russia stemmed from US President Joe Biden's announcement on March 9 to impose an immediate ban on Russian oil and other energy imports in retaliation for Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The Russian currency was trading at 121.85 in mid-day trading on March 14, down from previous close of 132.8, representing an extraordinary drop from the 75 rubles to a dollar, before the crisis.

weather sanctions indefinitely," pointed out Person.

However, the academician reasoned that this assumption has two main problems. During the financial crises of 2009 and 2014 in Russia, Moscow had to withdraw heavily from this fund to support the economy. "It is not a bottomless piggy bank," added Person.

Valued at \$180 billion in June 2021, Russia's NWF is far smaller than Saudi Arabia's PIF in comparison, valued at around \$430 billion, he remarks. The NWF value stood at \$74.9 as of Feb. 1, 2022, according to most recent data from Russia's Ministry of Finance.

### Banking sanctions

Another problem the Russian government is facing is banking sanctions, which block Russia's ability to convert their funds into

foreign currencies, limiting their usability, said Person. "The recession Russia is likely to experience in 2022 onward is to be far more severe than what they saw in 2009, 2014, or 2020. Whatever funds from the NWF Russia can spend is unlikely to last very long in providing macroeconomic stability," argued Person.

Analysts polled by the CBR showed the Russian economy is expected to contract by 8 percent in 2022. However, this survey was conducted before the 20 percent interest rate hike was announced by the CBR.

### Military expenditures

Today, the most intriguing question is how much is Russia spending on its war efforts since the onset of tensions in 2014. Person said it is tough to estimate,

especially since Russia denied any involvement in the Donbas conflict from 2014 until its current invasion.

However, overall Russian military expenditures rose steadily throughout Russian President Vladimir Putin's reign, reaching a peak of just over \$200 billion in 2016, he added.

Other challenges faced by Russia stemmed from US President Joe Biden's announcement on March 9 to impose an immediate ban on Russian oil and other energy imports in retaliation for Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The UK said it would phase out its Russian oil imports by the end of 2022. If more countries follow suit, this could prove disastrous for Moscow. Russia is counting on high oil prices to boost its revenues.

### Economic strength

Russia's economic strength is that it is one of the least indebted countries globally, with its national debt equaling 17.9 percent of the GDP, according to Person.

Budget deficits are often in positive territory. In 2019, the Russian budget deficit was a surplus of 1.8 percent, followed by a deficit of 3.8 percent in 2020 and a surplus of 0.4 percent in 2021.

Yet, Russia's Finance Ministry said it was preparing to service some of its foreign currency debt in rubles if sanctions prevented banks from paying their debts in the currency they were issued in, according to Reuters.

Person further said that it was still too early to tell how hard the sanctions would hit the key macroeconomic indicators such as the GDP, inflation, and unemployment.

### ENERGY OUTLOOK

## OPEC flags risk to oil demand outlook from Ukraine war, inflation

Reuters London

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries said on Tuesday that oil demand in 2022 faced challenges from Russia's invasion of Ukraine and rising inflation as crude prices soar, increasing the likelihood of reductions to its forecast for robust demand this year.

Oil prices shot above \$130 a barrel this month, hitting peaks not seen since 2008, as Western sanctions tightened on Moscow over its invasion of Ukraine and disrupted oil sales from Russia, helping to fuel inflation that was

already rising. In a monthly report, OPEC stuck to its view that world oil demand would rise by 4.15 million barrels per day in 2022 and increased its forecast of global demand for its crude.

But OPEC, which just a month ago had raised the possibility of a more rapid demand increase in 2022, said the war in Ukraine and continued concerns about COVID-19 would have a negative short-term impact on global growth.

World oil consumption is expected to surpass the 100 million bpd mark in the third quarter, in line with OPEC's forecast last month. OPEC nudged up its forecast of the year's total oil use by about 100,000 bpd to 100.90 million bpd.

### HIGHLIGHTS

OPEC stuck to its view that world oil demand would rise by 4.15 million barrels per day in 2022 and increased its forecast of global demand for its crude.

World oil consumption is expected to surpass the 100 million bpd mark in the third quarter.

### Oil prices

Oil prices tumbled to their lowest in almost three weeks on Tuesday as supply disruption fears eased and surging COVID-19 cases in China spurred demand concerns.

Brent futures were down \$7.89, or 7.3 percent, at \$99.01 a barrel by 1440 GMT while US West Texas Intermediate crude was down \$7.97, or 7.7 percent, at \$85.04.

Brent fell as low as \$97.44 and WTI hit \$93.54, their lowest since Feb. 25.

The steep decline followed a statement from Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, saying that Moscow is in favor of the 2015 Iran nuclear deal resuming as soon as possible.

The talks to revive the nuclear accord, which would lead to sanctions on Iran's oil sector being lifted and allow Tehran to resume crude exports, had recently stalled because of Iranian demands.

Prices extended losses from the previous day's 5 percent decline as a Ukrainian negotiator said on Tuesday that talks with Russia over a ceasefire and withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukraine are ongoing. Meanwhile, Western sanctions against Russia have failed to deter China and India from buying Russian crude.

# Business Saudi Arabia



The annual rate of growth in consumer prices in February was driven by higher costs of gasoline and food prices, the General Authority for Statistics, also known as GASTAT, said on Tuesday. Reuters/File

## ECONOMY

# Saudi Arabia's inflation rate rises to 1.6% in February

Annual growth in prices for transportation sector as a whole slowed to 4.3 percent

### Arab News Riyadh

**The annual rate of growth in consumer prices accelerated to 1.6 percent in February driven by higher costs of gasoline and food prices, the General Authority for Statistics, also known as GASTAT, said in a press release published online.**

Annual inflation stood at 1.2 percent in January 2022.

In February, prices for gasoline 91, gasoline 95 and diesel grew 26.7 percent, 25.9 percent and 21.1 percent year-on-year, respectively. Still, this marks a relative

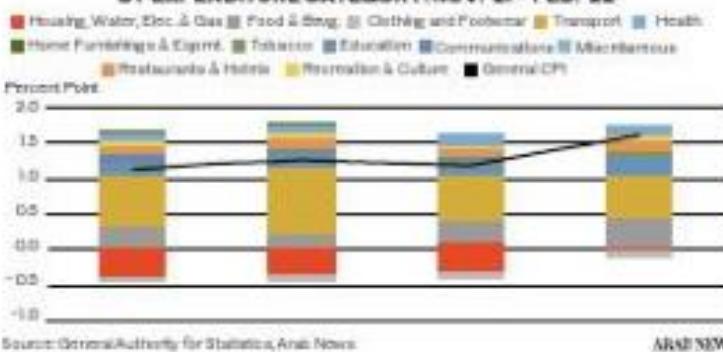
moderation compared to just over 30 percent growth in January and 45 percent in December 2021.

The annual growth in prices for the transportation sector as a whole slowed to 4.3 percent in February from 4.9 percent in January.

However, this group remained the main contributor to headline inflation in February, given the group's 13 percent — third largest — weighting in the general consumer price index, according to data compiled by Arab News.

On the other hand, the contribution of the food group — the second largest after transportation in February — has more than doubled since December 2021.

### SAUDI ARABIA'S ANNUAL INFLATION: RELATIVE CONTRIBUTION BY EXPENDITURE CATEGORY, NOV. '21 - FEB. '22



Source: General Authority for Statistics, Arab News

percent in September 2021.

As a result, the contribution of this group to the headline inflation decreased sevenfold in February compared to January and has become negligible compared to January when this group was the third most important factor — after transportation and food groups — in terms of impacting the headline figure.

Among other changes, it is worth mentioning the 2.2 percent growth in prices for the miscellaneous items group.

Growth in prices quickened from 1.2 percent in January making the group the third most important factor in February, after transportation and food.

### TOURISM

## Riyadh hotel industry bounces back as KSA recovers from pandemic

### Arab News Riyadh

Riyadh's hotel industry reported a steady performance level in February, with 72.2 percent occupancy in hotels as Saudi Arabia continues its recovery from the pandemic.

According to preliminary data from STR, a company that provides marketplace insights for global hospitality sectors, this was Riyadh's third February since 2015 with an occupancy level above 70 percent.

The average daily rate for a hotel room now stands at SR632.09 (\$173.81).

The revenue per available room in February was SR47LOL, the market's second-highest of the pandemic-era, behind December 2021.

### FAST FACTS

- Saudi Arabia's Sustainable Tourism Global Center has appointed eight international industry experts as envoys.

- Located in Europe, Asia and the US, the newly appointed envoys will be the center's ambassadors to support the transformation of tourism in the Kingdom.

### Industry experts

Saudi Arabia's Sustainable Tourism Global Center has appointed eight international industry experts as envoys, the Saudi Press Agency reported.

Located in Europe, Asia and the US, the newly appointed envoys will be the center's ambassadors to support the transformation of tourism in the Kingdom into an environmentally-friendly industry.

The ambassadors include the former Greek Tourism Minister Harry Theoharis, the former director of National Travel and Tourism Office of the US, Isabel Hill, the former head of Mobility at the World Economic Forum, Christoph Wolff, and the former CEO of Pacific Asia Travel Association, Mario Hardy.

# Smart cities must lead the way to a sustainable future

FUAD AL-ZAYER



**T**oday over half of the world's 7 billion population live in cities, and more than two-thirds of people are expected to live in urban areas by 2050.

Forecasts say that by 2050 about 64 percent of the developing world and 86 percent of the developed world will live in metropolitan areas. Furthermore, nearly all the global population growth up to 2030 will be absorbed by cities — leading to around 1.1 billion new urbanites in just under a decade.

New solutions are urgently needed to manage scarce resources and space as a result of this trend. Governments and city planners must understand how to build sustainable cities that address the challenges of our time — from managing climate change, easing poverty, providing quality education, and protecting natural habitats. The cities of tomorrow must be more efficient and environmentally friendly to boost the quality of life of their inhabitants and reduce the ecological footprint of their urban spaces. And hence, the concept of smart sustainable city was born.

According to the UN definition, a smart sustainable city is, "an innovative city that uses information and communication technology and other means to improve the quality of life, efficiency of urban operation and services, and competitiveness, while ensuring that it meets

the needs of present and future generations with respect to economic, social, environmental as well as cultural aspects."

The smart city concept is a solution to address the challenges of urbanization while providing an urban ecosystem that integrates digital technology, with knowledge, assets with minimal impact on the environment. However, smart cities must address technological, economical, and governing barriers that still exist.

A recent study looked at different cities around the world and their provision around issues such as — technology, the environment, social, economics, social development, air quality, energy transition, quality of living, waste per population, and water sustainability.

This study concluded that Denmark's Copenhagen was the most sustainable smart city, followed by Oslo in Norway and Zurich in Switzerland. Copenhagen tops this list for using technology to make the city greener, making clever use of wireless data, GPS in buses, and sensors in sewers and garbage cans to assess the state of the city in real-time. This data can then be used to cut traffic, air pollution, and CO2 emissions. Denmark is also committed to becoming fossil fuel free by 2030, with over 30 percent of all transport fossil fuel consumption already removed through the use of sustainable transportation.

However, the concept of smart and sustainable cities is also a hot topic in The Middle East and North Africa /GCC region, where environmental considerations are becoming increasingly important, due to high population growth. Almost every major city in the GCC has a smart city road map. Riyadh, for example, has a smart city initiative that aims to allow the Riyadh municipality to manage its public services and utilities through a central control center that integrates with systems in various municipalities and departments.

Also, some smart sustainable cities in the GCC are being built from the ground up. In Dubai, The Sustainable City is a 50-hectare development, and is the first net-zero energy development in the UAE. Its masterplan amalgamates energy-efficient designs with a people-centric philosophy that includes nature and animals, making for better public spaces. For example, parking areas are topped by solar panels that are connected to the electrical grid to supply energy to different parts of the city.

Also, Saudi Arabia unveiled plans to build a zero-carbon, hyper-connected city in a 170-kilometer strip in NEOM in the northwest of Saudi Arabia, called The Line. The \$1-billion futuristic megacity is being designed around people, without cars and streets. But it will also be built around nature, rather than over it, preserving large areas of land for

conservation. With sustainability in mind, The Line will comprise carbon-positive urban developments powered by 100 percent clean energy, providing a pollution-free sustainable environment for residents.

"We plan to transform the concept of a conventional city into that of a futuristic one. A city of a million residents that preserves 95 percent of nature with zero cars, zero streets and zero carbon emission," said Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, during the launch of the development in January 2021.

Saudi Arabia also launched the Prince Mohammed Bin Salman Non-profit City last November, which is to be built to the west of Riyadh. This city is the first nonprofit city in the world and is expected to be a model for the development of the nonprofit sector globally. While the focus of the city is nonprofit, it will also be a first-class sustainable city, with over 44 percent of the project's 3.4 square kilometers dedicated to open green spaces.

Sustainability is a powerful force for positive change in our world — one that drives transformation, innovation, and improvement across all aspects of society, including smart cities.

As the world's population is expected to jump by an estimated 33 percent by 2050, and with nearly 70 percent of those people living in urban areas, sustainability will be a key component for smart cities everywhere.

# Business News



Bitcoin, the leading cryptocurrency internationally, traded lower on Tuesday, falling by 1.18 percent to \$38,362 at 10:32 a.m. Riyadh time. Shutterstock

## Cryptocurrency

# Bitcoin predicted to become legal tender in many countries

Several crypto exchanges obtain licenses to operate in different Gulf countries

Rayana Alqubali | Riyadh

**As crypto continues to galvanize attention from both the authorities and investors, a number of analysts are suggesting bitcoin could become legal tender in many countries.**

Anthony Scaramucci, founder of investment management firm Skybridge Capital, expects more countries to adopt bitcoin alongside their domestic and international currencies.

"I think bitcoin will be used by many Latin American countries as legal tender over time, not just El Salvador, but other countries," Scaramucci said.

El Salvador adopted bitcoin

as legal tender alongside the US dollar in September last year.

El Salvador President Nayib Bukele predicted in January that two more countries would launch a legal tender for bitcoin this year, Bitcoin.com reported.

The CEO of Devere Group, Nigel Green, also predicted in January that three countries would adopt bitcoin as legal tender this year.

Meanwhile, the CEO of crypto derivatives trading platform Bitmex, Alex Hoeptner, said in October last year that five countries will accept bitcoin as legal tender by the end of 2022.

Scaramucci also believes that the cryptocurrency could reach \$500,000 a coin in the long term, according to Bitcoin.com.

In addition, he expects more than

a billion wallets to hold bitcoin by the end of 2025, and the number of its users to reach 2.5 to 3 billion over the next decade.

"When it gets there, then I think as a mature asset, we could have a conversation about whether or not it operates as an inflation hedge," he said.

### GCC Licenses

FTX, a major crypto exchange, announced that it has obtained a virtual-asset license in Dubai and will establish a regional headquarters in the city, Bloomberg reported.

"The firm will offer complex crypto-derivatives products with centralized counterparty clearing to institutional markets," CEO Sam Bankman-Fried said in a statement.

FTX reached \$32 billion valuation after raising \$400 million in a Series C round announced in January, according to Bloomberg.

Meanwhile, Binance, the largest crypto exchange, also obtained licenses to be a service provider in Dubai and Bahrain as it sets up the stage for a major push in the Middle East, according to Bloomberg.

Binance got a license to be the first anchor in Dubai World Trade Centre, an economic free zone, a person familiar with the matter said. It also won a license from Bahrain's central bank to be a crypto-asset service provider in the country, Binance CEO Changpeng Zhao tweeted.

These two licenses represent the exchange's first regulatory approvals in the Middle East.

# Retailers ought to know what savvy digital shoppers want

FARAH THALJI



**C**onsumer expectations of sustainable, socially conscious, and personalized shopping experiences continue to grow around the world.

Shifting buying habits, such as looking for sustainable and philanthropy-based brands have become more pronounced. Connected, or digitally savvy, consumers now form 80 percent of the population in the GCC region.

Online access to product information has significantly changed product awareness and buying behavior. Retailers are now taken to task and held accountable to consumer standards, much more than ever before.

In advance of The Retail Summit which will be held in Dubai in March, there are two areas that are proving to be key for success in today's retail environment — generating brand value by investing in sustainability measures and revamping loyalty programs to capture a shifting consumer base.

### Rising demand for sustainable products

Due to a growing global demand for brand reflection on cultural and societal values, retailers are striving to build ethical value chains and communicate that to consumers.

Simon-Kucher & Partners' 2021 Global Sustainability Study reflected that around 80 percent of global consumers place importance on environmental sustainability and aspire toward more sustainable lives.

Within the UAE more specifically, one in four people have made a significant change in their purchasing habits to become more sustainable over the last five years. Even more promising, one in three are willing to switch to sustainable alternatives when they are available.

The question is — are they available?

Regionally, many brands have made moves to make their firms more sustainable, whether it is launching second-hand tailoring, adopting organic-based manufacturing, or donating to charities with every consumer purchase.

However, these sustainability practices often come at a premium, and the question becomes whether consumers are willing and able to pay.

Studies indicate that millennials, those aged between 25 and 40 years old, and Gen Z, between nine and 24, are more likely than Gen X, between 41 and 56, to pay this premium. While Gen Z consumers may have weaker purchasing power than older shoppers, it still presents a strong indicator to firms that this trend may grow over the next decade.

### Building loyalty

Growing customer loyalty is increasingly driven by robust loyalty programs, particularly those that focus on a personalized customer journey. The two often go hand in hand.

Consumers, more than ever before, expect a personal touch when they buy, such as product recommendations, promotions, and direct communication. Tailoring communication and personalizing messages make customers feel valued and contributes to building a customer-brand relationship.

As retailers continue to build their sustainable practices and assortment of eco-friendly products, loyalty programs will serve as a fundamental way to drive awareness and sales. Consumers across the GCC are willing to try eco-friendly products, but progress is needed across the market to offer sufficient products at attainable prices. Companies must prioritize the evolution of their value model to meet changing demand across the region, while using loyalty programs to cater to customers.

Farah Thalji is director at consultancy Simon-Kucher & Partners' Dubai office.

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

# BizBriefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

## EV

### Tesla raises prices for second time on rising costs

Tesla Inc. raised its prices in China and the US for the second time in less than a week, after CEO Elon Musk said the US electric carmaker was facing significant inflationary pressure in raw materials and logistics.

The increases come as costs of raw materials are surging, exacerbated by supply chain disruptions following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Prices of metals used in cars have soared, including aluminum that is used in the bodywork, palladium used in catalytic converters, and nickel and lithium that power electric vehicle batteries.

The costs have raised concerns about EV economics, as legacy automakers and startups prepare to launch new cars on the back of a long semiconductor supply crunch that is still knocking production at companies including Toyota and Volkswagen. Reuters

## Real estate

### Dubai's residential capital values inch higher

Showing tentative signs of recovering from the pandemic's negative impacts, Dubai's residential capital values for February stood at 78.1 points.

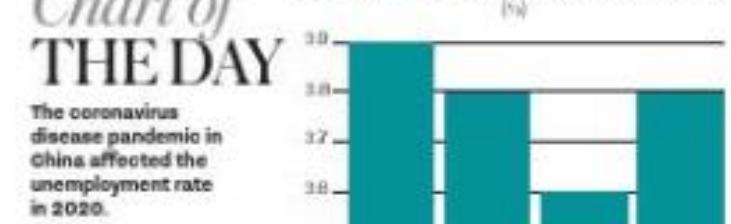
However, the current residential capital value is 21.9 percent lower than the 100 point index base of January 2014 but higher than January 2022 which stood at 77.1 points, according to UAE-based consulting firm ValuStrat.

The pace of monthly price growth was steady at just over 1 percent, Dubai villa capital values increased 2.1 percent monthly, and apartments saw marginal growth of just 0.5 percent, the report noted.

According to the report, all apartment locations monitored by the valuation-based index had positive annual capital gains with the exception of Jumeirah Village, which marked a negative annual capital gain which stands at -1 percent. AN Riyadh

## Chart of THE DAY

### UNEMPLOYMENT RATE IN URBAN CHINA (%)



Source: Statista

## What We're Reading

FOR THE TRAIN OR ON THE PLANE

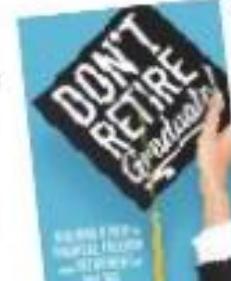
### Don't Retire

ERIC D. BROTMAN

The concept of retirement is outdated! It used to mean the end of your work life, whether you were financially ready or not.

Don't Retire... Graduate! is your degree in financial freedom and the option to work, if you choose. Retirement is not reserved for your

golden years. Double major in financial independence and retirement readiness at any age, regardless of where you start, says a review published on goodreads.com.



With this book, get a full syllabus of courses that will help you advance, not retreat, into the perfect retirement plan for you.

## Sanctions

### UK slaps heavy tariffs on Russian imports

Britain on Tuesday imposed an additional 35 percent tariff on a swathe of Russian imports and banned exports of luxury goods over Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

"We want to cause maximum harm to (Russian President Vladimir) Putin's war machine while minimizing the impact on UK businesses," the Department for International Trade said.

The list of goods covered by the additional tariffs include steel, wood, cereals, drinks, fur and white fish — worth £900 million (\$1.2 billion) a year.

"The export ban will come into force shortly and will make sure oligarchs and other members of the elite, who have grown rich under President Putin's reign and support his illegal invasion, are deprived of access to luxury goods," the DIT said.

AFP

## Economy

### Record slump in German investor morale

German investor sentiment suffered a record slide in March due to the war in Ukraine and economic sanctions on Russia, a survey showed on Tuesday, with collapsing expectations making a recession in Europe's largest economy "more and more likely."

The ZEW economic research institute said its economic sentiment index dropped to -39.3 points from 54.3 in February. The fall was the biggest since the survey began in December 1991. "A recession is becoming more and more likely. The war in Ukraine and the sanctions against Russia are significantly dampening the economic outlook for Germany," ZEW President Achim Wambach said in a statement.

An index for current conditions fell to -21.4 from -8.1. The consensus forecast was for a reading of -22.5. Reuters

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Rania (Al-Sharyoufi) will hold a pivotal role in implementing the bank's strategy and maintaining our leadership position in empowering women in the Saudi market.

**Tony Cripps**  
Managing Director at SABB

The partnership was signed at Batterjee Medical College's Jeddah campus in the presence of officials from both sides. Supplied.



#### LANGUAGE SKILLS

## Batterjee Medical College partners with British Council

In support of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, Batterjee Medical College and the British Council have entered into a cooperative agreement to accredit the college as a testing center for the IELTS exam and to provide English language courses.

The partnership was signed at BMC's Jeddah campus in the presence of Dr. Osama Kansara, CEO and general supervisor of

BMC; Dr. Tariq Al-Harbi, dean of BMC in Asir; Ghazi Al-Nusairi, chief operating officer; Ahmed Abu Alafia, consultant strategy, business development; and Ghaida Wali, public relations officer.

In attendance from the British Council were Grant Butler, director of English language services at the British Council; Adnan Khawaja, head of commercial for

#### HIGHLIGHT

BMC's agreement with the British Council comes as a step to develop international language skills and explore ways for future cooperation with universities and experts from the UK.

English language services in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Bahrain; Abdul Rahman Jumeil, account relationship manager, and Muhammad Shajju, account relationship manager.

BMC's agreement with the British Council comes as a step to develop international language skills and explore ways for future cooperation with universities and experts from the UK.

Batterjee Medical College is one of the largest and first private medical colleges in Saudi Arabia that offer a variety of specializations in healthcare.

The British Council is the UK's cultural relations organization, which aims to create opportunities for people globally to connect and engage with each other through arts, education, and the English language.

#### WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

## With new CHRO, SABB achieves 42% female leadership ratio

The Saudi British Bank (SABB) has established itself as a global leader in women's empowerment as the financial institution continues to grow its female leadership team with the latest appointment of Rania Al-Sharyoufi as chief human resources officer.

"This decision continues to demonstrate SABB's commitment to nurturing and developing both its local talent and keeping pace with the Kingdom's Vision 2030 goals for better gender equality in the workforce," the management said in a statement.

With more than a decade of industry experience, Al-Sharyoufi has occupied a number of impor-

tant positions in human resources, the most recent being as deputy to the CHRO. She has spearheaded several pilot programs and was designated as the head of human resources for SABB Takaful from March 2018 to February 2020.

Al-Sharyoufi's "wealth of practical experience, combined with her acute interest in modern methods to enhance employee environments and workforce well-being, has made her a valued asset to the company," SABB said.

SABB has been instrumental in paving the path and setting a framework for the Kingdom's Vision 2030 to reform women's economic participation rate, par-

#### BACKGROUND

According to Deloitte, in 2021, the proportion of women in leadership roles within financial services firms was 24 percent and is projected to grow to only 28 percent by 2030 — still below parity.

**Rania Al-Sharyoufi,**  
chief human  
resources officer  
at SABB.

ticularly in the financial services sector. According to Deloitte, in 2021, the proportion of women in leadership roles within financial services firms was 24 percent and is projected to grow to only 28 percent by 2030 — still below parity. SABB's newest executive appointment has raised the company's female senior management percentage to 42 percent, which is just below double the global average.

To mark this noteworthy occasion, Tony Cripps, managing director at SABB, said: "The appointment of Rania as CHRO is concrete

evidence of the success of the career development plans at SABB. As a key player in the management of our most valuable asset — our people — Rania will hold a pivotal role in implementing the bank's strategy and maintaining our leadership position in empowering women in the Saudi market."

SABB was established in 1978 as a Saudi joint stock company and is an associate company of the HSBC Group.

The bank offers integrated financial and banking services including retail banking, corporate banking, investment, private banking and treasury. SABB's paid-up capital is SR10.5 billion (\$8.46 billion).

#### FLYING HIGH

## flynas tops APEX ratings with 4 stars in low-cost carrier category

Saudi air carrier flynas, which is the leading low-cost airline in the Middle East, recently received the aviation industry's most anticipated honor — the APEX Official Airline Ratings. It is the first airline rating program based solely on certified passenger feedback.

flynas was ranked in the 4-star low-cost carrier category, the highest category of low-cost airlines in the world, ushering a new level of success for flynas.

The assessment by the Airline Passenger Experience Association, which is a network of leading airlines, suppliers, and industry-related companies, is based entirely on passenger experience. It includes passenger feedback on more than 1 million flights worldwide. The rating is the first of its kind for an airline based entirely on documented responses from passengers. An external audit firm audited the assessment results, which divided the

assessment by the Airline Passenger Experience Association, which is a network of leading airlines, suppliers, and industry-related companies, is based entirely on passenger experience.

airlines into four categories.

"flynas is proud of this new achievement, as it expresses the passengers' satisfaction and the distinction among many competitors. This credit adds to the many accomplishments and awards that flynas has achieved in previous years. It aspires to keep this success story going as a certificate of confidence in the services it provides," flynas said in a statement.

The Saudi national carrier is clas-

sified as one of the top 10 low-cost airlines in the world, a position it has achieved through operational efficiency and outstanding service to its guests.

It was also ranked as the leading low-cost airline in the Middle East by the World Travel Awards for seven consecutive years and was named the best low-cost airline in the Middle East for 2017, 2018, 2019, and 2021 by skytrax International Award.

## Corporate Briefs

### Oil & Gas

#### Krohne joins Oman Petroleum and Energy Show

Krohne Group, a global manufacturer of process instrumentation, measurement solutions and services, has announced it will join leaders of the energy sector in Muscat, Oman, at the Oman Petroleum and Energy Show. Hosted by Petroleum Development Oman under the patronage of Oman's Ministry of Oil and Gas, the 2022 edition takes place from March 21-25 at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre in Muscat.

Krohne and strategic Oman-based partners ACN will showcase their latest product and solution portfolio, contributing to the event theme of "Shaping the Future of the Energy Sector." It is the first industry outreach event since announcing a rebrand of one of the company divisions. Krohne Solutions as an entity was created to expand the existing capabilities and expertise within the company to a wider range of industries.

Frank Janssens, vice president, Krohne Middle East and Africa, said: "Krohne Solutions provides engineered turn-key solutions for the process control and automation, worldwide."

### Digital Transformation

#### Jordan conference spotlights future of governance

More than 250 government and industry experts from several ministries and industries and 40 speakers gathered to brainstorm on new ideas and discuss the roadmap for the future of digital transformation of Jordan at the 2nd Digital Transformation Jordan conference, which took place from March 14 to 15 at the Kempinski Convention Center, Amman.

Under the patronage of Ahmad Al-Hanandeh, minister of digital economy and entrepreneurship, and organized by Great Minds Events Management, the 2nd Digital Transformation Jordan is the only event in the country to cover the entire digital ecosystem.

### Environmental Preservation

#### Ajman conference to address sustainability

The Ajman Municipality and Planning Department will host the Ajman 6th International Environment Conference from March 28-29 at the Sheikh Zayed Convention and Exhibition Center. This year's edition is themed "Towards 2071 to shape the future of environmental sustainability." The conference is divided into several topics, including the subject of sustainability standards in urban residential neighborhoods, among its main topics.

Khalid Al-Hosani, executive director of the public health and environment sector at the Ajman Municipality and Planning Department, said: "In light of the continuous and advanced urban renaissance we are witnessing, especially concerning future construction needs in urban cities, it is necessary to focus on sustainability standards. The issue of sustainability standards in new urban residential neighborhoods will be one of the main themes at the Ajman 6th International Environment Conference."

## Sport News

LADIES EUROPEAN TOUR EVENT

# Host KAEC all set for third Aramco Saudi Ladies International

Leading female golfers, including Anna Nordqvist and Georgia Hall, will contest \$1m tournament

Arab News Jeddah

King Abdullah Economic City will host the third Aramco Saudi Ladies International golf tournament presented by the Public Investment Fund from Thursday, March 17.

The four-day, \$1 million event, which is part of the Ladies European Tour, will be held at the Royal Greens Golf and Country Club, the premier 18-hole championship golf course and clubhouse at KAEC, with views of the Red Sea coast as its natural backdrop.

The tournament, open free to the public, will feature top-ranked female golfers, led by major-winners and Solheim Cup stars Anna Nordqvist (NOR), Georgia Hall (ENG), Carlota Ciganda (ESP), Bronte Law (ENG) and Emily Kristine Pedersen (DEN) — a truly world-class international field.

Defending champion Lydia Ko was forced to withdraw earlier this week after testing positive for COVID-19.

The event is the second tournament of the 2022 LET season — a year that will supersede all that came before it with a total prize pool of nearly \$30 million available across the season, the largest in Ladies European Tour history, up by close to \$8 million over 2021, and more than double the prize money on offer back in 2019.

As well as its established major-winners, the field teeing it up at Royal Greens Golf & Country Club this week is stacked with a host of



England's Georgia Hall is one of the big names competing at the 2022 Aramco Saudi Ladies International. Supplied

exciting young players forecast to cement their status in world golf this year.

Australian Stephanie Kyriacou is one of them, who at 21-years-old

already has three career titles to her name — and is now a holder of both LET and LPGA Tour cards. Ten top ten finishes in 2021, including a tie for ninth at

this same event last year, firmly position Kyriacou as a favorite for this week.

Pia Babnik of Slovenia won the R&A Girls Amateur Championship

in 2019, joining the LET a year later at just 16-years-old. Last November, she claimed what was the second Tour title of her young career at Royal Greens, with victory in the individual category of the Aramco Team Series — Jeddah. Now, aged 18, she returns to the course, seeking her third professional win.

Commenting on KAEC's readiness to host leading global sporting events, Cyril Piaia, CEO of Emaar, the developer of KAEC, said: "We are delighted to host the Saudi Ladies International once again in our beautiful city of KAEC, bringing back the best players in the world."

In February, KAEC hosted the Men's PIF Saudi International, with Harold Varner III sealing the win at the Royal Greens Golf and Country Club.

"In line with the aspirations of the Kingdom's Vision 2030, we look to strengthening the country's position at the forefront of global sporting activities. We're proud that KAEC provides a vision-ready platform to host such events in the country," Piaia said.

The tournament will hold its first ladies day on Friday, March 18, with activities for women and girls, including free golf lessons led by LET professionals, as well as the chance to meet women golf stars and sign up for year-round coaching.

As part of pre-event activities to strengthen interest in the tournament, a mini-golf hole and backboard will be sent to KAEC's leading leisure destinations, including Views and Bay La Sira.

Six mini-golf holes will also be set up at the corniche to encourage people to try the sport.

## Sport Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Golf

### Smith in birdie blitz to clinch Players title

Australia's Cameron Smith charged to victory at the PGA Tour's weather-disrupted Players Championship on Monday, carding a closing six-under-par 66 to win by one shot.

The 28-year-old Queenslander roared into contention on a congested final day at TPC Sawgrass in Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida with five birdies in his opening six holes.

It was Smith's second victory of 2022 following victory at the Tournament of Champions in Hawaii in January, and was made even sweeter by the presence of his mother Sharon and sister Mel to witness the victory. AFP



Tennis

### Nadal now 17-0, No. 1 Medvedev crashes out

Rafael Nadal is still perfect in 2022.

The Spaniard defeated 27th-seeded Daniel Evans 7-5, 6-3 Monday in the third round of the BNP Paribas Open at Indian Wells, improving his record to 17-0 this year in pursuit of an ATP Tour-leading fourth title.

Nadal tied Roger Federer (2018) and Pete Sampras (1997) for the third-best overall start to a season in the Open era that began in 1968, Daniil Medvedev's rise to No. 1 in the world came crashing down in a 4-6, 6-3, 6-1 loss to Gael Monfils. Medvedev needed to reach the quarterfinals in the desert to stay at the top, where he replaced Novak Djokovic. AFP

NBA

### Towns scores season-high 60 in Wolves win

Karl-Anthony Towns erupted for a career-high 60 points as the Minnesota Timberwolves ran riot against the San Antonio Spurs in a night of high scoring across the NBA on Monday.

Towns' franchise-record masterclass was the highest individual score in a single NBA game this season and laid the foundation for a 149-139 victory on the road in Texas.

Thirty-two of Towns' points haul came in the third quarter. The 26-year-old drained seven-of-11 attempts from three-point range and was 19-of-31 from the field overall.

"I wish I could give you all more energy but I'm tired as hell," a weary Towns told reporters after a win that sees Minnesota improve to 40-30 to remain firmly in the hunt for an automatic playoff berth in the West. AFP

Arab News London

The world's top squash player has used a recent victory speech to highlight the difference in global attitudes toward the Russia-Ukraine conflict when compared to Israel's occupation of Palestine.

"No one should accept any killings in the world, or oppression, but we've never been allowed to speak about politics in sports, but all of a sudden now it's allowed," Egyptian squash champion Ali Farag said after winning the Optasia Championship in the UK.

"And now that it's allowed, I hope that people also look at oppression everywhere in the world. The Palestinians have been going through that for the past 74 years, but I guess because it doesn't fit the narrative of the media



Ali Farag

### HIGHLIGHTS

• Egyptian champion: "We've never been allowed to speak about politics in sports, but all of a sudden now it's allowed."

• Ali Farag gave his victory speech after winning the Optasia Championship in the UK.

of the West, we couldn't talk about it. So now we can talk about Ukraine, we can talk about Palestine."

Farag is the latest public figure to voice dismay at the wildly different treatment that the Ukraine crisis has been receiving in the media and public discourse compared to events outside Europe.

Like Farag, many have pointed out that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been ongoing for generations, but rarely receives the wall-to-wall coverage and alarm as the Ukraine crisis has.

This has extended to government attitudes toward activism, too. For example, the Boycott, Divest and Sanctions movement aimed at isolating Israeli economic and business interests has been condemned as antisemitic by the German government, but Berlin has endorsed strict sanctions on Russia over Ukraine.

Although Farag's speech on Ukraine and Palestine received applause from the audience, it was not featured in the highlights of the match on the Professional Squash Association's YouTube channel.

### WRESTLING

## Roman Reigns, Brock Lesnar to clash in biggest WrestleMania match of all time

Arab News Riyadh

Dubbed the "Most Stupendous Two-Night WrestleMania in WWE History," WrestleMania 38 will feature the biggest showdown of all time as Universal champion Roman Reigns and WWE champ Brock Lesnar go head-to-head in a Winner Take All Championship Unification match next month.

The clash comes in the wake of the fighters' recent appearance at Elimination Chamber in Jeddah,



Brock Lesnar, left, and Roman Reigns will go head-to-head at WrestleMania 38 next month. WWE

### FAST FACT

2 WWE superstars coming off February wins at Elimination Chamber in Jeddah.

While Lesnar was originally scheduled to challenge Reigns at WWE Day 1, the first Premier Live Event of the year, the highly anticipated match at WrestleMania 38 will see both Reigns and Lesnar take to The Grandest Stage of Them All for a chance to take both victories as the Universal and WWE champion.

Fans in the region can catch all the action from WrestleMania 38 weekend live and exclusively on WWE Network from April 1 to 3.

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Director Jane Campion apologized for a 'thoughtless comment' she made about Serena and Venus Williams while accepting her prize at the 2022 Critics Choice Awards. She had said: 'You don't play against the guys.'

## The Six

### Modest fashion

This month, Expo 2020 Dubai held its first modest fashion show. Presenting 20 Indonesian designers and two local creatives using the country's domestically produced fabrics, the show included both womenswear and menswear designs hailing from the Asian nation's islands.



### Itang Yunasz

Hailing from Jakarta, the pioneering Indonesian designer's collections consist of flowy drawstring dresses, ultra-comfortable kaftans, embellished lace tunics and printed maxi dresses that are equal parts modest and stylish.



### Nuna Atelier

"It's really unbelievable how Indonesian textiles and fabrics are handmade. The quality and standards of those textiles are very high," said UAE-based designer Noora Al-Alawi, who showcased designs incorporating Indonesian fabrics.



### Dulce by Safiya

UAE-based Libyan-Mexican designer Safiya Abdallah is known for her luxurious modest designs that have been worn by Gwen Stefani and Lindsay Lohan.



### Wearing Klamby

The Indonesian ready-to-wear brand is one of the most beloved modest labels with a following of 2.2 million on Instagram.



### Rorokenes

Founded in 2014 by Syanaz Nadya Wisnanto Putri, the label produces a wide range of artisan woven leather bags that are made to order.



### Bermock

Based in Bandung, Indonesia, the brand works with local craftsmen to create its luxurious knit blankets, ponchos and slippers.

# Finally

CLOSE UP

## Alexa Demie brings the red carpet to party in Alaia dress



Arab News Dubai

**Alaia is having a major moment.** Celebrities can't seem to get enough of the Paris-based label founded by the late Tunisian couturier Azzedine Alaïa and now spearheaded by Belgian designer Pieter Mulier.

The brand has been spotted on everyone from model Paloma Elsesser to singer and entrepreneur Rihanna, who last month stepped out wearing a long, hooded red leather coat custom-made by Alaïa.

Now it seems that "Euphoria" star Alexa Demie is taking a sartorial cue out of Rihanna's fashion playbook.

Demie attended the British Vogue and Tiffany & Co. Fashion and Film Party 2022 at Annabel's in London and brought the red carpet to the party in a bright crimson, hooded body-con dress with a matching shawl.

The look was plucked from the Alaïa Spring 2022 ready-to-wear collection, Mulier's debut collection honoring the legacy of the label's founder, who passed away in 2007 from a heart attack.

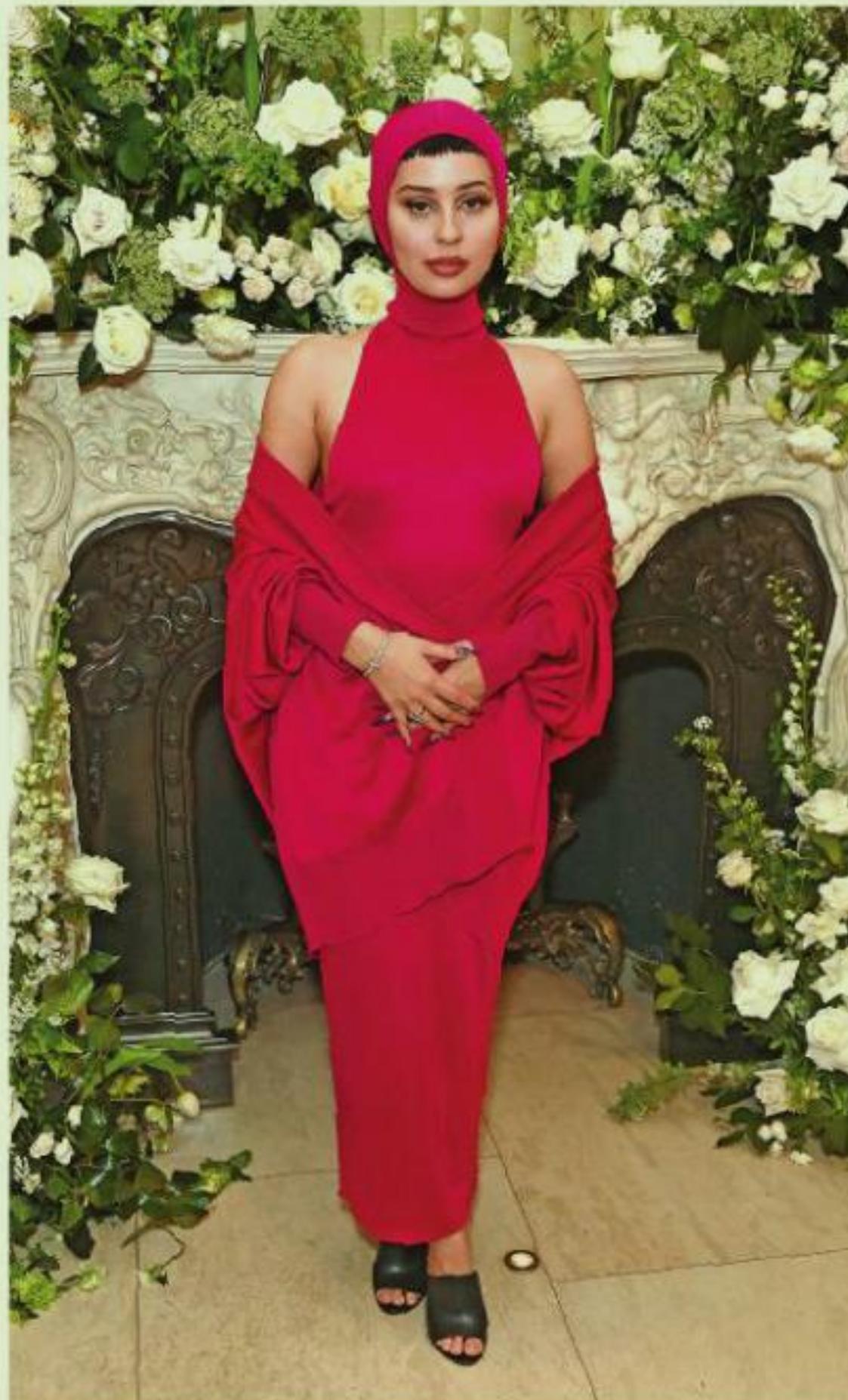
Of course, Mulier's Alaïa debut was filled with tributes to the iconic North African couturier in ways that were both subtle and instantly recognizable.

The collection was punctuated with key silhouettes that have long been synonymous with the house, including bodysuits, cinched waists, hooded tops and knits that brought to mind some of the brand's most iconic looks from over the years.

Demie opted for look number 10 from the 43-piece collection.

With its scuba-esque hood and form-fitting silhouette, the dress combined athleisure and evening wear into a single, show-stopping piece.

Haute hoods are a signature of Alaïa. One can't think of them



Alexa Demie wearing Alaïa Spring 2022 ready-to-wear in London. Getty Images

Top left: The "Euphoria" actress is known for her glamorous style. Getty Images

without recalling Jamaican model Grace Jones' on-screen wardrobe — created by the late Tunisian power colors. Who could forget the red fur-trimmed Balenciaga coat the actress wore to celebrate the debut of the second season of "Euphoria"? Indeed, red is a tricky color to pull off, but Demie does it with aplomb.

allow the dress to truly shine.

Red is one of Demie's signature power colors. Who could forget the red fur-trimmed Balenciaga coat the actress wore to celebrate the debut of the second season of "Euphoria"? Indeed, red is a tricky color to pull off, but Demie does it with aplomb.

In an interview on CBS's Sunday Morning show, the Oscar nominee said: "There's never been infidelity in our marriage. Never. Jada and I talk about everything, and we have never surprised one another with anything ever."

The couple married in 1997 and have two children together — Jaden, 23, and Willow, 21.

In July 2020, Smith opened up about having an "entanglement" with singer August Alsina in an episode of her Facebook Watch series "Red Table Talk."

The fling was years ago when she and Will were privately on a break.

### INTERVIEW

## Andrea Wazen's new bag collection is inspired by her Lebanese heritage

Roya Almously Dubai

Since launching her namesake label in Beirut in 2013, Andrea Wazen has gone on to become one of the biggest names in footwear design, grabbing the attention of celebrities and stars such as Kylie Jenner, Beyoncé, and Jennifer Lopez.

The younger sister of Lebanese fashion influencer Karen, Wazen recently launched her first handbag collection called High Hopes, adding a new scope to her brand.

She told Arab News: "I always wanted to add a matching bag to the shoe styles I design. I finally decided to proceed with it last

season during Fall/Winter 2022 with the Armid and Mandoul embroidered bags that go very well with the matching Sursock flats.

"I'm super excited to launch our latest bag, the Franca bag, which will be launching with the Spring/Summer 2022 collection," she said.

The collection has been inspired by Beirut architecture of old houses and pays tribute Wazen's own Lebanese heritage.

"Growing up with both of my parents as architects, the beautiful and unique Lebanese architecture has always been a huge part of my inspirations."

"Beirut is known for its distinguished classic architecture,



The High Hopes collection is inspired by the streets of Beirut.

trapezoidal roofs of heritage Lebanese homes, and large three-light windows. It had deeply inspired me while designing the bags collection, as I wanted my designs to reflect my heritage."

"I was solely inspired by the streets of Beirut, roofs of heritage houses around the city, and the architecturally renowned Sursock Palace. It has all the amazing details, from its three-light windows to long Sursock symbol embossed staircases," she added.

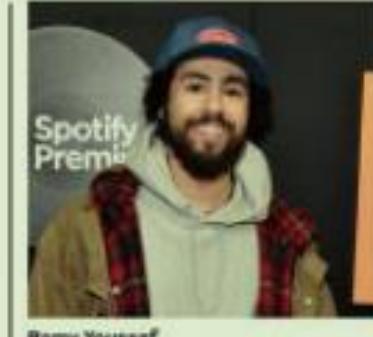
Her High Hopes collection is made up of colorful leathers and mesh fabrics, making the bags a great spring/summer collection.

Wazen's favorite piece from the

collection is the trapezoid shaped Armid bag.

She said: "It was the first bag I designed for the collection. It was inspired by the classic trapezoidal roofs of Beirut, and comes in fabulous colors such as hot pink, jade green, and lavender. It is handcrafted in beautiful nappa leather and embroidered see-through mesh, making it the perfect statement bag to an outfit."

Wazen was always passionate about designing and sketching. On what items would always be found in her own handbag, she added: "My phone for sure, a measuring tape, and a pen in case I need to doodle something."



ANIMATED COMEDY

## Ramy Youssef inks new deal with Amazon

Arab News Dubai

Egyptian-American actor Ramy Youssef is set to star in two seasons of an animated comedy series for Amazon, Variety revealed this week.

The show, yet to be named, will explore the experiences of a Muslim-American family in the early 2000s, which was "a time of fear, war, and the rapid expansion of the boy-band industrial complex."

The deal is part of the new partnership that the comedian and his production company, Cairo Cowboy, have with Amazon.

The Golden Globe winner is the co-creator of the series with US writer and TV producer Pam Brady.

The pair will be executive producers of the show with Iraqi-British journalist Mona Chalabi. A24 and Amazon Studios will co-produce.

### RUMOR DEBUNKED

## Will Smith reveals there was no 'infidelity' in his marriage

Arab News Dubai

US actor Will Smith this week denied having any affair during his marriage to actress Jada Pinkett Smith.

In an interview on CBS's Sunday Morning show, the Oscar nominee said: "There's never been infidelity in our marriage. Never. Jada and I talk about everything, and we have never surprised one another with anything ever."

The couple married in 1997 and have two children together — Jaden, 23, and Willow, 21.

In July 2020, Smith opened up about having an "entanglement" with singer August Alsina in an episode of her Facebook Watch series "Red Table Talk."

The fling was years ago when she and Will were privately on a break.