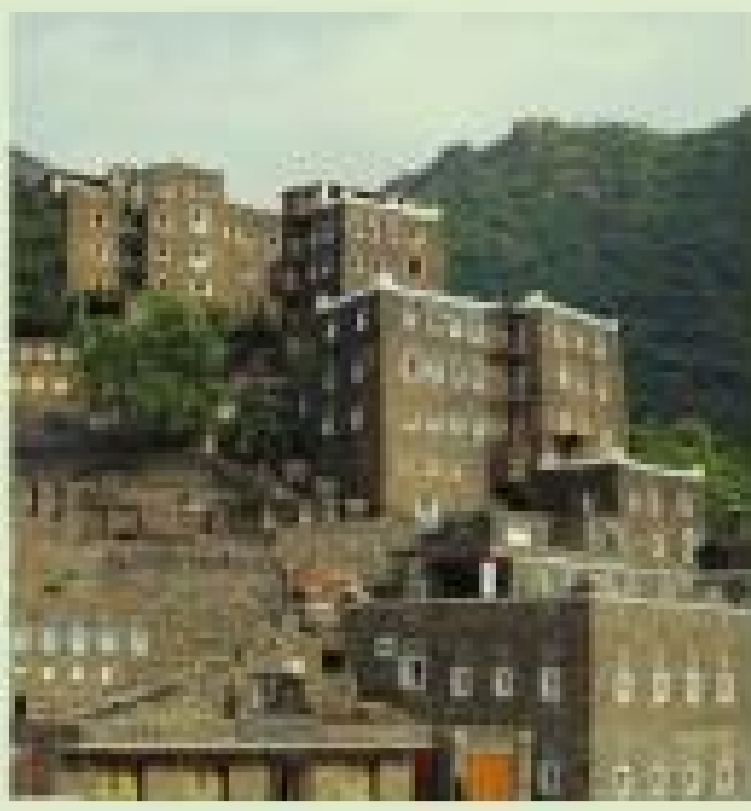


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SATURDAY, December 9, 2023
Jumada Al-Awwal 25, 1445
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ARAB NEWS

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The Voice of a Changing Region

We need to see a significant ramping up of humanitarian aid. It is unacceptable that aid is being restricted and has been restricted because of bureaucratic obstacles.

Prince Faisal bin Farhan
Saudi foreign minister



Palestinians offer funeral prayers for the six men killed by Israeli forces in the occupied West Bank on Friday. Reuters

TERROR STRIKE
US Embassy in Baghdad targeted with 7 mortars

Reuters Washington

Approximately seven mortar rounds landed in the US Embassy compound in Baghdad during an attack early on Friday, a US military official said, in what appears to be one of the largest attacks against the embassy in recent memory.

It also marked the first time the US Embassy had been fired on in more than a year, apparently widening the range of targets after dozens of attacks on military bases housing US forces in Iraq and Syria since mid-October amid fears of broadening conflict in the region.

No group claimed responsibility, but previous attack against US forces have been carried out by Iran-aligned militias which have targeted US interests in Syria and Iraq over Washington's backing for Israel in its Gaza war.

Explosions were heard near the embassy, in the center of the capital, at about 4 a.m. on Friday. Sirens calling on people to take cover were activated. State media said the attack damaged the headquarters of an Iraqi security agency.

The US military official added that Ain Al-Asad air base, which hosts US and other international forces in western Iraq, had also been targeted but the projectiles did not land in the base.

Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani directed security agencies to pursue the perpetrators, describing them as "unruly, lawless groups that do not in any way represent the will of the Iraqi people," a statement from his office said.

He also said that undermining Iraq's stability, reputation and targeting places Iraq has committed to protect were acts of terrorism.

MIDDLE EAST WAR

Arab ministers demand Gaza truce

• Saudi FM: World not focused on ending war • Scores killed in besieged enclave and West Bank

Arab News Jeddah

Israeli forces maintained a relentless bombardment and ground invasion across Gaza on Friday, two months after Hamas's deadly attack sparked a war that has decimated the Palestinian territory, triggering an extraordinary UN bid for a ceasefire.

The fighting has left 17,487 people dead in Gaza, mostly women and children, according to the latest toll from Gaza's Health Ministry.

It reported 40 dead in strikes near Gaza City on Friday, and dozens more in Jabalia and the main southern city of Khan Younis.

Israeli forces also killed six Palestinians in a raid on a refugee camp in the occupied West Bank, as it conducted a "counterterrorism" operation. Those who lost their lives included a 14-year-old boy and an 18-year-old.

The foreign ministers of several Arab countries and Türkiye, on a visit to the US, called for an immediate cessation of hostilities in the Gaza Strip, urging Washington to support a UN resolution on a humanitarian ceasefire.

"Our message is we believe it is absolutely necessary to end the fighting immediately," said Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan, speaking on behalf of the group.

The UN Security Council was ex-

INSIDE

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pected to vote on a resolution calling for an immediate ceasefire.

Prince Faisal, who was in Washington as part of a visit of the Arab-Islamic Ministerial Committee, said: "One of the disturbing facts of this conflict is that ending the conflict and the fighting doesn't seem to be the main priority," for the world.

He added: "Our message is consistent and clear that we believe that it is absolutely necessary to end the fighting immediately.

"We also need to see a significant ramping up of humanitarian aid. It is unacceptable that aid is being restricted and has been restricted because of bureaucratic obstacles."

The prince said: "I certainly would hope that our partners in the US will do more ... we certainly believe they can do more."

Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry said the "solution is a ceasefire," while his Jordanian counterpart Ayman Safadi called putting an end to the fighting the No. 1 priority. "If the UN Security Council fails to adopt the resolution that is simply calling for humanitarian pauses, that is giving Israel a license to continue its massacre against civilians in Gaza," he said.

"The message that's being sent is

that Israel is acting above international law ... and the world is simply not doing much. We disagree with the US on its position vis-à-vis on the ceasefire," he said.

Deputy US Ambassador to the UN Robert Wood told a meeting of the UN Security Council that while the US strongly supports a durable peace in Gaza, "we do not support calls for an immediate ceasefire."

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas said an international peace conference should be called to work out a lasting political solution leading to the establishment of a Palestinian state.

UN chief Antonio Guterres said that Hamas brutality could never justify "collective punishment" of Palestinians.

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RECORD
November 2022
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THE LARGEST LIGHT ART FESTIVAL IN THE WORLD

NOV 30 — DEC 16

Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 initiative has charted a clear course, delineating public policies geared toward human rights and achieved rapid progress.
Dr. Hisham Al Al-Sheikh
 Deputy head of the Saudi Human Rights Commission



Radar

KSA today



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Experience a variety of exhilarating activities including trampolining, a soft play area, a ninja course, virtual reality, arcade and carnival games all under one roof. For booking and more, visit Saudi events app.



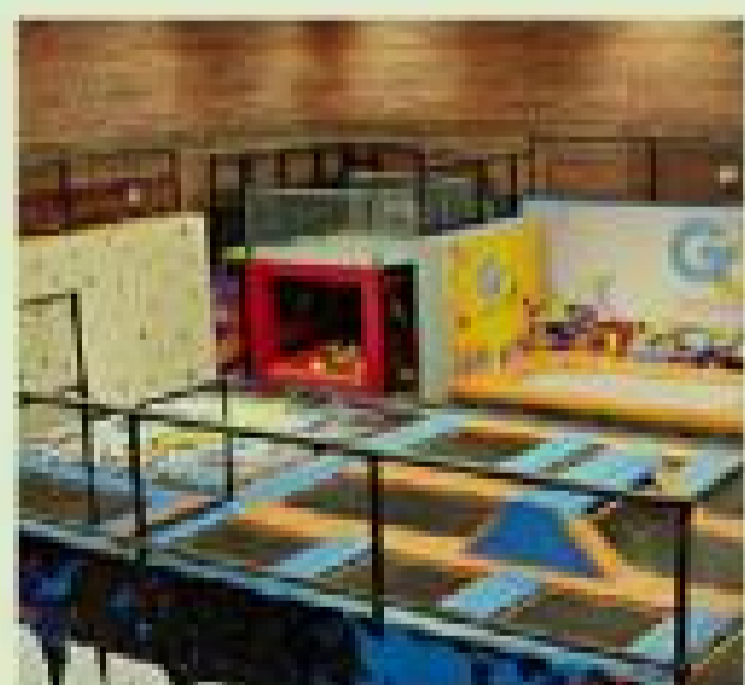
Riyadh Traditional market

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Alkhubar Fun and fitness

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The Register

THE PICTURES THAT MARK THE DAY



Saudi Arabia has agreed to provide an additional \$8 million to help tackle the threat posed by the decaying Safer oil tanker anchored off the Yemeni coast.

An agreement was signed in Riyadh by Ahmad bin Ali Al-Balaz, assistant supervisor for operations and programs at the Saudi aid agency KSRelief, and Dr. Abdallah Al Darfari, assistant secretary-general and director

of the UN Development Programme's regional bureau for Arab states. The deal adds to the efforts of KSRelief to tackle the environmental and economic threats posed by the aging tanker.

Today's Number

3.5%

Saudi Arabia's non-oil activities increased by 3.5 percent in the third quarter of 2023, compared to the same period of the previous year, official data showed.

Review

Lunch Room in Riyadh

DHAI BATTAL ALMUTAIRI

Lunch Room opened its doors in Riyadh last winter and is so busy that a week's advanced reservation is required.

It is one of the few spots in Riyadh with a true appreciation for brunch — a midday meal with a delightful combination of breakfast and dinner — a preferred option for many locals these days. Everyone can find something they like on a single sweet and savory menu, though it might take you a very long time to decide on what to order.

The menu is divided into six sections: the "Market" section, which includes a variety of salads; the "Clay Oven" section with 48-hour sourdough flatbread; the "Panouzz" section; the "Ode to Egg" section; the "Sweet Instinct" section; and the "Coffee Commune" section, which offers delicious baked goods.

There are also options for sharing. The double-cooked sweet potato with miso-caramel aioli is a



great one, and the pide bread with honeycomb and gaymer, which is a thickened cream traditionally made using water buffalo milk, is a dish that you will most likely see at every table there, as it is the most ordered item at Lunch Room.

Some of the sweet options include the buckwheat Dutch pancakes with salted honey butter topped with whipped mascarpone and honeycomb, sourdough pancakes priced at SR46 (\$12.26), salted dark chocolate babka priced at SR52, and the famous Lunch Room French toast with yuzu sabayon and poached shiso berries.

For savory lovers, Lunch Room offers a range of options too, including the baked halloumi ragu, zaatar chimmichuri with panouzzo priced at SR44, house lasagna, organic fried eggs and pastrami, sous vide poached egg with hollandaise pulled ribs on potato buckwheat bilni (priced at SR88), and the Rolex-inspired Ugandan street bite.

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



LONDON Cable damage

Thousands of passengers on the London Underground's Elizabeth Line were stuck for hours on Thursday night after the power went out between London Paddington and Heathrow Airport because of cable damage.

Many of them forced their way out of the carriages and walked through freezing weather to their destinations.

Only two passengers were hurt during the unexpected chaos, with some trains waiting for more than three hours before the police arrived and evacuated passengers.

"We are so sorry for the difficult journeys passengers endured on our railway last night and we will be investigating how and why it happened," said a Network Rail spokesman on Friday.

"The knock-on effects from last night mean operators will not be able to run a full service from Paddington today and passengers should check before they travel," the spokesperson added. "Repairs are ongoing and we hope to have the railway fully open by the weekend."

TV personality Rachel Riley was among the passengers who were stuck. She took to X to address the situation, writing, "Nearly 4 hours after we got on, we're getting off the Elizabeth line, woohoo!"

Singer James Blunt was also among those trapped in the carriages. "Been stuck somewhere outside Paddington for close to 4 hours now. Out of peanuts and wine," he wrote on X.

SAD DEMISE Keisha Nash

Actress Keisha Nash, the former wife of actor Forest Whitaker, has died aged 51.

The couple's daughter, True Whitaker, confirmed her mother's death in an Instagram post on Thursday, but did not disclose the cause.

"Goodbye mommy. I love you 4ever and beyond," True wrote over a black-and-white photo of her mother. "The most beautiful woman in the world... thank you for teaching me every single thing I know. I'll see you in my dreams and I'll feel you in my heart."

The 25-year-old also shared another photo of her

mother with the lyrics for Leon Russell's "A Song for You" scrolling over the image while Donny Hathaway's cover of the song played.

Nash and Whitaker met in 1994 on the set of the movie "Blown Away," in which they played boyfriend and girlfriend.

Whitaker proposed to Nash in 1995 and the pair were married the following year in Montego Bay, Jamaica. Their marriage ended after 22 years in December 2018, with the pair citing "irreconcilable differences" as the reason behind the split.

The actors have another daughter together, 27-year-old Sonnet Noel. Both also have children from previous relationships.



The Region

The Middle East Roundup

Arab News Jeddah

- Held in partnership with Bibliotheque nationale de France and France Museums, Louvre Abu Dhabi is featuring some of the oldest texts of the three monotheistic religions at the Letters of Light exhibition. With more than 240 artworks on display, visitors will discover important and beautiful manuscripts of the Quran, Bible, and Torah, how

the holy books emerged, and the way that they have been passed down over the years. The exhibition will run until Jan. 14, 2024.

- The digital skills training program titled Search Engine Optimization will be held on Dec. 9 from 10 a.m. to noon via Zoom. To book a spot for this virtual event, visit calendar.jo.

- Infinity Escape Room Center is

inviting people in Antelias, Lebanon, to join and play board games, challenge themselves with puzzles in the escape room, or celebrate special occasions with their loved ones.

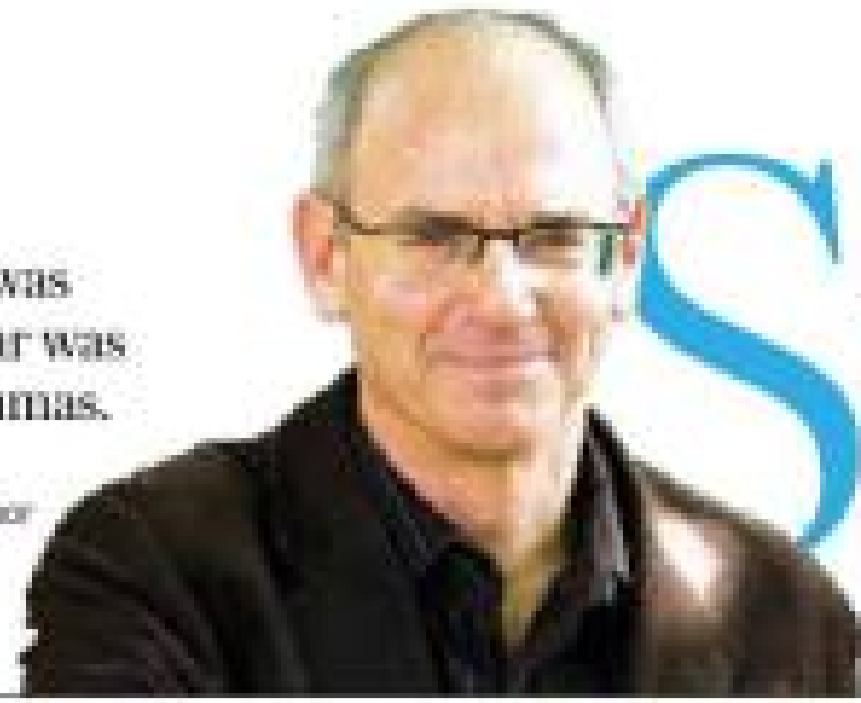
- Racers from around the world will showcase their skills at the Rotax MAX Challenge Grand Finals 2023, which is taking place for the second time in Bahrain at the Bahrain International Circuit, Sakhir.

Prayer Times in Saudi Arabia

Dec. 9	Fajr	Sunrise	Dhuhr	Aar	Maghreb	Isha
Makkah	5:25	6:45	12:12	3:18	5:39	7:09
Madinah	5:30	6:52	12:13	3:13	5:34	7:04
Riyadh	5:02	6:24	11:45	2:45	5:05	6:35
Abha	5:10	6:28	12:02	3:12	5:34	7:04
Dammam	4:51	6:14	11:31	2:28	4:48	6:18

The belief that Hamas was deterred from going to war was in Israeli heads, not in Hamas.

Ahron Bregman
UK-based Israeli historian, author
and political scientist.



Spotlight

RESEARCH & STUDIES
THE MIDDLE EAST, BETTER EXPLAINED

ARAB NEWS

ISRAEL-HAMAS CONFLICT

What went wrong on October 7?

Israelis seek explanations for intelligence failure that allowed Hamas assault despite specific warnings from army observers

Jonathan Gornall London

On Oct. 6, 1973, Israel was taken completely unawares by an attack by a coalition of Middle East states, led by Egypt, that came very close to wiping it off the map.

In the end Israel, backed by a massive airlift of advanced weaponry and other support from the US, survived the Yom Kippur War, albeit at great cost — more than 2,600 of its soldiers were killed, and thousands more wounded.

But “it was a massive intelligence failure,” said Ahron Bregman, a UK-based Israeli historian, author and political scientist.

Afterward, in a society left “in a state of deep collective shock,” hard questions were asked of Israel’s politicians, the military and the intelligence community and, “supposedly, lessons were learnt.”

But almost exactly 50 years later to the day, on Oct. 7, 2023, Israel was taken by surprise once again, this time by a Hamas assault that left at least 1,200 Israeli citizens and soldiers dead, and saw almost 250 carried back into Gaza as hostages.

Now, in an Israel wracked and divided by self-doubt, anxiety and anger at the failure of its government and much-vaunted military forces not only to anticipate and prevent the attack, but also to respond to it in a timely fashion, hard questions are being asked once again about what went wrong, and who is to blame.

“Like in the Yom Kippur War, the Israelis had all the information in front of them — everything, all the details,” said Bregman, a senior teaching fellow in the Department of War Studies at the UK’s King’s College London, who served in the Israeli army for six years.

“This was another massive intelligence failure on the part of the Israelis.

“In the future, the Hamas attack on the seventh of October will be taught in military schools, alongside Pearl Harbor, Operation Barbarossa (Germany’s surprise attack on Russia in 1941) — and the Yom Kippur War.”

Thanks to a startling leak, presumably from within Israel’s intelligence community, it is clear that the failure in the run-up to Oct. 7 was all the more remarkable because Israel had acquired a copy of Hamas’ battle plan prior to the attack.

On Nov. 30 The New York Times ran an exclusive story claiming that Israeli officials had obtained the plan “more than a year before it happened... But Israeli military and intelligence officials dismissed the plan as aspirational, considering it too difficult for Hamas to carry out.”

Hamas had “followed the blueprint with shocking precision” and, concluded The Times, “what could have been an intelligence coup turned into one of the worst miscalculations in Israel’s 75-year history.”

Disenchanted intelligence operatives are not the only Israelis coming forward with revelations about Israel’s failings leading up to Oct. 7.

Evidence is now emerging that in the months, weeks and days leading up to the Hamas attack repeated warnings by Israeli army observers tasked with monitoring the “Iron Wall” between Israel and Gaza were ignored or dismissed.

Video feeds from cameras along the length of the high-tech fence, which in 2021 was given a \$1 billion upgrade, are monitored day and night by members of the Israel Defense Forces’ Combat



On Oct. 7 yes, there was a very sophisticated fence. But there was nobody to protect it, because most of the troops were elsewhere.

Palestinian militants broke through the border fence to launch attacks, main, and take away hostages from southern Israel, below, on Oct. 7 while barrages of rockets, inset, were fired at Israel. Social media/AFP file

Some members of the Israeli War Cabinet, bottom, and Major-General Aharon Haliva, head of IDF’s military intelligence directorate, have taken responsibility for the Oct. 7 intelligence failure. Social media/AFP

Intelligence Collection Corps.

The wall seemed formidable: a 6-meter-tall fence, topped with razor wire and embedded in deep concrete foundations to foil tunneling, bristling with sophisticated surveillance systems and remote-controlled machine guns mounted on towers along its length.

But on Oct. 7, the high-tech wall was defeated by a combination of low-tech bulldozers, explosives and drones that dropped bombs into the machinegun nests.

One of the first targets of the Hamas fighters who poured through the breached fence was a military base at the kibbutz of Nahal Oz, about 1 kilometer inside Israel. There, 25 of the 27 all-female observer unit were killed.

As Israelis look for answers to explain why the Hamas attack was so successful, and the Israeli military’s response so inadequate, the two women who survived the attack on the base have now come forward with allegations that repeated warnings given by them and their colleagues were brushed aside by superior officers.

Israel makes much of the fact that women serve alongside men in its armed forces. With certain exceptions, every Jewish, Druze or Circassian citizen over the age of 18 does compulsory military service. Men are expected to serve for at



IN NUMBERS

1,200

People, including Israelis and foreigners, killed in October Hamas attack.

240+

People taken hostage by Hamas and allied groups, some of whom were released later.

17,177

People killed in Palestine since Israeli launched retaliatory campaign.



there was a very sophisticated fence, like nothing else anywhere in the world. But there was nobody to protect it, because most of the troops were elsewhere, in the West Bank.”

Inevitably, social media is abuzz with conspiracy theories about Oct. 7, including that the Israeli government knew about the impending attack but let it happen, in order to justify a wholesale assault on Gaza.

The slow response by Israel’s military to the attack is attributed to a claim, accompanied by the hashtag #BibiKnew, that Netanyahu ordered the IDF to stand down on the day.

“But I think we have too many solid explanations for this intelligence failure to start believing in conspiracy theories,” said Bregman.

“It was not in Netanyahu’s interests to go to war. His entire strategy was to have Hamas in power so he did not have to do the two-state solution.”

least 32 months and women, who frequently feature in IDF videos, for a minimum of 24.

But one explanation for the failures on Oct. 7, said Bregman, “is in my view to do with gender.”

“Most of the observers along the border, who follow and report on Hamas activities, are women soldiers,” he said.

“Yet in the weeks and months leading up to Oct. 7, they kept reporting to their superiors, all of whom were men, of course, saying ‘Look, they are preparing an attack on us, here is all the information,’ and they were dismissed.

“And I believe that one of the reasons why they were dismissed was the fact that they were young women.”

But the military’s deadly lack of confidence in its female observers was just one of several failings that contributed to the disaster on Oct. 7, Bregman says, including “the very existence of the fence.

“There is a psychological dimension here. You think ‘Well, I’ve got a fence, I am protected,’ and then you start cutting corners, thinking you don’t need so many troops in this area.

“On Oct. 7 yes,

The success of the attack was not due entirely to Israeli failings.

“If you look back at the military history of Hamas, you can see that it is a very adaptable organization, and the Israelis failed to realize this,” said Bregman.

It is also clear that, in the words of “a source close to Hamas,” speaking to Reuters, “Hamas used an unprecedented intelligence tactic to mislead Israel over the last months, by giving a public impression that it was not willing to go into a fight or confrontation with Israel while preparing for this massive operation.”

As part of this subterfuge, Hamas had refrained from attacking Israel for two years, and created the impression that “it cared more about ensuring that workers in Gaza ... had access to jobs across the border and had no interest in starting a new war.”

Yossi Mekelberg, professor of international relations and an associate fellow of the MENA Program at UK-based international affairs think tank Chatham House, has no doubt that there will be a full accounting for the disaster of Oct. 7 when the fighting finally stops.

“There are rumors and leaks and although it’s clear that there was a systemic failure, until we hear evidence under oath in an investigation it’s difficult to know exactly what happened,” he said.

“But there must be an inquiry, there is no other option. When the war is over, and a lot of reservists are discharged, they will be the first to demand an inquiry, the families of those who were killed on Oct. 7, the families of those who were taken hostage, the families of the soldiers that were killed since Oct. 7, they will all relentlessly demand an inquiry, and rightly so.”





Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan meets with US Sen. Lindsey Graham. They discussed key regional issues.

REGIONAL SECURITY

Saudi foreign minister holds talks with Republican senator

Prince Faisal, Lindsey Graham discuss the need to create conditions for the return of stability to Gaza

Arab News Riyadh

Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan met with US Senator Lindsey Graham, the Foreign Ministry said.

Prince Faisal stressed the necessity of a ceasefire to bring the killing to an end and to avoid a further escalation that could have dangerous repercussions for regional security.

The Saudi diplomat discussed the situation in Gaza with the Republican politician and stressed that all efforts be made to ensure that humanitarian relief corridors are secured to ensure the safe delivery of aid.

Israel is conducting a deadly assault on the enclave, which Palestinian officials said has killed 17,000

people. Israel has vowed to eradicate the Hamas militant group that attacked settlements near Gaza on Oct. 7, which resulted in 1,200 people being killed and around 240 hostages taken.

Prince Faisal also discussed with Graham the need to create conditions for the return of stability to Gaza and the restoration of a path to peace to ensure that Palestinian people obtain their

HIGHLIGHT

Prince Faisal stressed the necessity of a ceasefire to bring the killing to an end and to avoid a further escalation that could have dangerous repercussions for regional security.

legitimate rights. The meeting was also attended by Saudi ambassador to the US Princess Reema bint Bandar.

Separately, Saudi Arabia's third ship of aid for Gaza has arrived at Port Said in Egypt.

The goods will be distributed by the Kingdom's aid organization, KSRelief, the Saudi Press Agency reported.

The ship carries 300 large containers weighing 1,246 tons. This includes 200 containers with medical supplies, and 100 with food, long-life infant formula, and shelter materials.

A few days ago, two ships dispatched by KSRelief arrived at Port Said carrying similar cargo to help Palestinians affected by Israel's bombardment.

'PORTS OF CULTURE'

Jeddah's fifth book fair sees 1,000 publishers participate

Nada Hameed Jeddah

More than 1,000 local, Arab and international publishing houses are displaying their products at the fifth Jeddah Book Fair launched on Thursday by the Literature, Publishing and Translation Commission under the slogan "Ports of Culture."

The event, being held at Jeddah Superdome until Dec. 16, includes seminars, panel discussions, poetry readings, and workshops on the publication of comics and Japanese manga.

The inaugural day commenced with the attendance of France's Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Ludovic Pouille, who is leading a delegation from his country.

Pouille told Arab News: "It is a momentous occasion as the French pavilion is taking part for the first time at the Jeddah fair, and France is the exclusive participant with a dedicated pavilion, making it a tremendous honor and source of immense pleasure for me."

According to Pouille, the French pavilion will have 15,000 titles from the nation's biggest publishing houses.



The inaugural day commenced with the attendance of France's Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Ludovic Pouille, who is leading a delegation from his country. AN photo by Nada Hameed

During his visit, Pouille had the chance to engage with 12 Saudi students from King Abdulaziz University's French language department.

France's pavilion offers daily language courses for free.

Larry Lamartiniere, the director of Alliance Francaise in Jeddah, told Arab News: "France is very famous for its book culture. We at the Jeddah book fair offer daily courses for kids, teenagers, and adults from 5 to 7 p.m. at the pavilion. It is a chance to learn and explore more about the culture and the language." Pouille added: "People will learn French, read French because, at the end

of the day, I'm a true believer in the dialogue of culture, and in the diversity, and what better symbol to diversity than the French pavilion here in the heart of the Jeddah book fair."

Commenting on the role of reading in society, Pouille said: "I think that books today are more important than ever. Everybody is on the screen. Everybody is on the phone, taking a book, taking the time to read, either a kid or an adult. It's absolutely essential. It brings you wisdom. It brings you knowledge, brings you openness. You need to read. That's my message today to everybody."

TheSpace

Kissinger understood from King Faisal how to act as a statesman

FAISAL AL-SHAMMERI



The death of former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger on Nov. 29 has generated much analysis on US foreign policy and America's role in the world.

Kissinger belonged to the realist school of international relations that emphasizes power, the articulation of a national interest by an elite, and the creation of a strategic equilibrium to establish order in the relations among states and the different political entities and groups. This philosophy originates in the series of European wars that dominated the continent for centuries. Kissinger was attempting to make the US assume a foreign policy rooted in the diplomatic tradition of realism or realpolitik. In other words, Kissinger was trying to Europeanize US foreign policy, which was often based on ideals and principles, not goals and the observation of legal agreements.

The most interesting thing about Kissinger is that he was regarded as a man of high intellect. His renowned undergraduate thesis, "The Meaning of History: Reflections on Spengler, Toynbee and Kant," completed at Harvard College in 1950, is still viewed as a leading research thesis. His doctoral dissertation submitted in 1954 to Harvard, titled "Peace, Legitimacy, and the Equilibrium: A Study of the Statesmanship of Castlereagh and Metternich," was a thorough investigation of the 1815 Congress of Vienna that addressed how to preserve a European balance of power in a revolutionary age following the Napoleonic Wars, and as nationalism gained momentum. Kissinger's lengthy memoirs totaling thousands of pages, such as his first volume, "White House Years," are written as literature where the art of how to script a novel is obvious. He portrays his characters as displaying both the glories and foibles of human nature.

Notably, he subscribed to the significance of leadership in shaping the course of history. Many leaders who dealt with him were awestruck by his cerebral talent. But the reality of world politics is not that simple. Kissinger's practice of diplomacy made him encounter great leaders. He acknowledges that they were more intellectual than him, and wiser in their thoughts than what he always entertained in terms of ideas and concepts. He appreciated

the leadership qualities in a few people he had audiences with. He underlined the credibility of a leader when asserted an analytical framework in which he examined the world around him and the goals of his nation, striving to contribute to the understanding of a certain subject even if he did not know much about it. The leader is someone who defines goals larger than himself or his country.

Kissinger hailed King Faisal as a great leader. It was Kissinger who was awestruck by King Faisal and not the other way around. It was King Faisal who projected a strategic perspective that countered Kissinger's mastery of geopolitics. It was King Faisal who combined idealism and realism in his approach to foreign policy compared to Kissinger, who stuck strictly to even a few arcane concepts of realpolitik.

This is what Kissinger said about King Faisal in his memoirs: "Faisal combined religious intensity and diplomatic shrewdness. Religion gave him the inner strength to face perils and seek to overcome them with serenity. It also provided cohesion to a country moving toward modernization. By his reputation for piety, Faisal combined exaltation and anonymity, great influence and aloofness from

the fray. Faisal managed the extraordinary feat of positioning himself exactly into the calm eye of the hurricane, though he never forgot the storms raging around him.

"Faisal deserves his reputation for rectitude. He was as honorable as he was subtle. He weighed his words scrupulously. He never spoke idly, each sentence had its significance, even though it took slower minds a while to catch on. We were fortunate that toward the US Faisal maintained a feeling of genuine friendship — which we reciprocated — balanced by doubt about our acumen and ultimate steadiness. He was a man of his words; indeed, he delivered more than he promised. In 30 years in high office, he had seen enough of the volatility of American politics not to entrust the future of his country (in the US). He always hedged his bets, wherever possible, in favor of the US, but not if that jeopardized the interests of Saudi Arabia."

Faisal Al-Shammeri is a political analyst. X: @MR_Alshammeri

The Day's FIGURES

FINISHED PROJECTS IN NYRIL October 2023



Source: KShelf

Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Achievements

Kingdom's role to boost human rights discussed

The deputy head of the Saudi Human Rights Commission recently outlined the Kingdom's achievements on human rights at an event in Beijing.

Speaking at an international symposium to mark the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Dr. Hisham bin Abdulrahman Al Al-Sheikh said Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 initiative had charted a clear course, delineating public policies and programs geared toward human rights and achieved rapid progress.

The symposium, organized by the Chinese Fund for Human Rights Development, provided a global platform to discuss challenges in the field.

SPA Beijing

Culture

King Abdulaziz Falconry Festival a 'beloved event'

A Bahraini falconer family has praised the King Abdulaziz Falconry Festival in Saudi Arabia as a "beloved" event in the sport's calendar.

The festival is organized by the Saudi Falcons Club at its headquarters in Malham, north of Riyadh, until Dec. 14, with elite falconers joining from the Kingdom, Gulf and around the world.

Bahraini falconer Mohammed Abdulwahab Al-Hajiri said that the festival holds a special place for his family, adding that he and his siblings have attended the event since its first edition, and have seen its development firsthand. This year, the family brought 45 falcons to the festival. SPA Riyadh

Security

Attempts to smuggle Captagon pills thwarted

Saudi Arabia's Zakat, Tax and Customs Authority thwarted two attempts to smuggle more than 250,000 Captagon pills.

Officers seized the substances hidden in a car and a truck attempting to enter the Kingdom via Al-Haditha Port, the Saudi Press Agency reported.

The drug haul had an estimated street value of between \$2.5 million and \$6.25 million, according to research published in the International Addiction Review-Journal, based on the assumption that users pay between \$10 and \$25 per pill.

Authorities foiled the first attempt to smuggle 138,728 pills found hidden in wooden boxes inside a truck's body.

AN Riyadh



Visitors and residents will have abundant opportunities to enjoy Soudah Peaks with year-round outdoor activities in the clean, cool mountain air, from mountain trails and hiking paths to paragliding, mountain biking, horse riding, and zip-lining. Supplied

TOURISM

Soudah Peaks: the luxury mountain destination at the Kingdom's highest point

The area stands 3,015 meters above sea level and offers adventurers, thrill-seekers, and lovers of serenity a special place in Asir

Hussam Al-Mayman Riyadh

Soudah Peaks, a sustainable luxury mountain destination under construction by the Public Investment Fund's Soudah Development, lies in the southwest region of Saudi Arabia.

It stands 3,015 meters above sea level — the highest point in the Kingdom — and will offer adventurers, thrill-seekers, and lovers of serenity a special place in Asir.

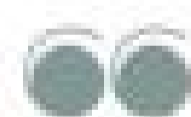
"Soudah Development and Soudah Peaks, as a destination that our company has been developing under the ownership of the Public Investment Fund ... we believe, has done something very, very important," said Srđan Susić, chief sustainability officer at Soudah Development. "Out of 630 sq. km under Soudah Development, we are developing only a small portion of it. So, the built footprint is not going to be very, very large."

He added 28 percent of the land being used has been placed under numerous forms of natural protection.

Daniel McBrearty, chief development officer for the company, said: "The masterplan for Soudah Peaks epitomizes meticulous design within a sustainable environmental framework, reflecting an unwavering commitment to responsible development. Acknowledging the region's rich biodiversity, Soudah Development is dedicated to preserving and nurturing these invaluable assets."

Susić added that this information is important for the PIF-backed developer to enhance and extend protective coverage of the area.

"We are very keen on restoring



Soudah Development and Soudah Peaks, as a destination that our company has been developing under the ownership of the Public Investment Fund ... we believe, has done something very, very important.

Srđan Susić
Chief sustainability officer
at Soudah Development

around 19 priority cultural heritage sites. The ecosystems around us have been very productive in the past, and this allowed the local communities to build significant assets like old houses, old palaces, old mosques, old integrated villages ... some of them we hope to see on UNESCO's World Heritage Sites list," he said.

Part of these efforts include a partnership with the National Center for Wildlife, which witnessed the recent release of 10 Arabian mountain gazelles into

the wild, with the aim of reintroducing more wildlife to enhance biodiversity.

As well as support endangered animals, the developers' environmental initiatives will plant 1 million trees by 2030 and rehabilitate parks and forests to enhance vegetation cover, conserve biodiversity and restore ecosystems.

Visitors and residents will have abundant opportunities to enjoy Soudah Peaks with year-round outdoor activities in the clean, cool mountain air, from mountain trails and hiking paths to paragliding, mountain biking, horse riding, zip-lining and more. An 18-hole golf course will sit atop the Soudah plateau with stunning views and average temperatures of 20 C.

The serene settings will offer nature lovers a chance to enjoy national parks, a network of hiking trails, local farms and find harmony with nature through a collection of luxury wellness experiences including exclusive eco-spa resorts, meditation centers and yoga retreats.

Soudah is also home to a rich tapestry of traditional folk music, poetry, art, locally produced



HIGHLIGHTS

• Part of these efforts include a partnership with the National Center for Wildlife, which witnessed the recent release of 10 Arabian mountain gazelles into the wild, with the aim of reintroducing more wildlife to enhance biodiversity.

• As well as support endangered animals, the developers' environmental initiatives will plant 1 million trees by 2030 and rehabilitate parks and forests to enhance vegetation cover, conserve biodiversity and restore ecosystems.

honey, coffee farms and local customs passed down over generations. There are more than 200 documented heritage sites, from hamlets, mosques and minarets to watchtowers and mountain forts, and many will be considered for inclusion on the UNESCO List of World Heritage Sites.

There will also be 80,000 square meters of retail area, more than 30 additional attractions, 1,336 residential units, and 2,700

hospitality keys.

"The project encompasses six unique districts — Tahlal, Sahab, Sabrah, Jareen, Rijal, and Red Rock — each offering world-class facilities, from hotels, luxury mountain resorts, and chalets to villas, premium residential units, and diverse entertainment options," said McBrearty.

Each district is curated with a different emphasis to cater to sports, adventure, wellness, and cultural enthusiasts. Soudah Peaks' development is structured across three phases ... (with phase one encompassing over 940 hotel keys, 340 residential units, and 32,000 square meters of retail space.)

Tahlal will serve as the primary hub for tourists, offering upscale dining and shopping, hospitality, entertainment, and conference spaces, all within a sustainable ecosystem. Perched atop Soudah, it offers breathtaking views of the Sarawat Mountains.

The cliff-top Sahab district will provide thrilling attractions, mountain experiences, and a hub centered around mountain sports, including hiking, paragliding, biking and zip-lining.

A high-altitude performance and rehabilitation center will offer top-notch training facilities for extreme athletes.

Sahab will also feature 15 glamping pods, over 360 luxurious hotel rooms, serviced apartments, and commercial spaces for entertainment.

Sabrah district, which will be a remote luxury residential and hospitality destination with a wellness spa, yoga pavilion, and meditation retreats, is located on the southern plateau of Soudah Peaks. It offers peace and tranquility, with 180 different types of premium hotel rooms, 350 opulent second homes, and commercial spaces to support the residential community, all surrounded by an authentic integration within the natural landscape.

With Soudah's green agricultural landscape, Jareen district will adopt a sincere approach to fostering a sense of connection with the natural world. Hiking paths meandering through the heritage sites and agricultural landscape, along with culinary excursions to small organic coffee and honey farms, are sure to delight nature lovers. Jareen will have 35 distinctive glamping pods with a range of boutique stores and dining options perched on the mountainside.

The Rijal district will offer opportunities to experience authentic culture and heritage by fusing the past, present, and future. This destination, which is surrounded by historic architecture and situated within the Rijal Almaa heritage village, will combine park areas and outdoor event space to provide a variety of year-round events. Rijal will have 80 boutique hotel rooms with chic, heritage-inspired luxury interiors, as well as boutique stores and real food options.

News Middle East

'HEINOUS CRIME'

Hamas condemns Israel over images showing detained Palestinians in underwear

Reuters Cairo

A senior Hamas official has accused Israeli forces of carrying out a "heinous crime against innocent civilians" after images of detained Palestinian men stripped to their underwear in Gaza circulated on social media.

Izzat El-Reshiq, who is in exile abroad, urged international human rights organizations to intervene to show what happened to the men and help secure their release.

The International Committee of the Red Cross said it was concerned by the images and that all detainees must be treated with humanity and dignity in accordance with international humanitarian law.

Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian, whose country backs Hamas, also criticized Israel, accusing it on X of "barbarity in the treatment of innocent captives and citizens."

Israeli TV On Thursday showed footage, which Reuters has verified, of what it said were captured Hamas fighters, stripped to their underwear with heads bowed sitting in a Gaza City street.

"We are talking about individuals who are apprehended in Jabalia and Shejaiya (in Gaza city), Hamas strongholds and centers of gravity," Israeli government spokesperson Eylon Levy told a briefing when asked about the images.

"We are talking about military-age men who were discovered in areas that civilians were supposed to have

evacuated weeks ago."

Israeli's military has been telling civilians to leave areas where it plans to operate after launching its campaign to eliminate Hamas in Gaza following the group's Oct. 7 killing spree in Israel.

One photo showed more than 20 male detainees kneeling on the pavement or in the street, with Israeli soldiers looking on and dozens of shoes and sandals abandoned on the road.

A similar number of detainees, also semi-naked, were crammed into the back of a truck nearby.

Some Palestinians said they recognized relatives in the images and denied they had links to Hamas or any other group. Some, they said, were boys or youths.

Reshiq said the detainees had been captured at a school in Gaza that was being used as a shelter after weeks of Israeli bombardments that have displaced many Gazans.

Hamas held Israeli forces responsible for the lives and safety of the detained men, Reshiq added.

"And we urge human rights organizations to immediately intervene to expose this heinous crime against innocent civilians taking refuge in a school that had turned into a shelter because of Israeli aggression and massacres, and to put pressure by all means to secure their release," he said.

The London-based Arabic language news outlet Al-Araby Al-Jadeed said one of the men detained was its correspondent Diaa Kahlout.



Demonstrators stage a rally in the Spanish Basque city of Gernika in solidarity with the Palestinians. Activists rallied under the slogan 'Stop the massacre in Gaza.' AFP

It urged the international community and rights groups to denounce the arrest of journalists.

The Committee to Protect Journalists called for his release.

Some Palestinians identified the place where the men were captured as the northeastern town of Beit Lahia, an area that Israel had warned civilians to leave and has been encircled and besieged by Israeli tanks for weeks, Reuters confirmed the

FASTFACT

The International Committee of the Red Cross says it is concerned by the images and that all detainees must be treated with humanity and dignity in accordance with international humanitarian law.

location was Beit Lahia

Hani Almadhoum, a Palestinian American based in Virginia, said he saw relatives in one image, including his 12-year-old nephew, and that they had no links to Hamas or other factions.

"We strongly emphasize the importance of treating all those detained with humanity and dignity, in accordance with international humanitarian law," Jessica Moussan,

ICRC Media Relations Adviser, Middle East, said in a statement.

Husam Zomlot, head of the Palestinian Mission in London, said on X the images evoked "some of humanity's darkest passages of history."

Palestinian politician Hanan Ashrawi said on X the incident was "blatant attempt at the humiliation & degradation of Palestinian men ... stripped & displayed like war trophies."

ATROCITIES

Israelis kill 6 Palestinians in West Bank assault

14-year-old boy among the dead as troops storm Al-Fara refugee camp amid intense fire

AFP Ramallah

Israeli forces shot dead six Palestinians on Friday in a raid on a refugee camp in the occupied West Bank, the Palestinian Health Ministry said, as the army confirmed it conducted a "counterterrorism" operation.

The ministry said those who lost their lives included a 14-year-old boy and an 18-year-old.

It said they had been killed "by bullets from the occupation (Israel) in the Al-Fara refugee camp" near Tubas.

The Palestinian Red Crescent also reported having treated six people wounded by gunfire, one of them critically.

"Clashes escalated with the (Israeli) forces who stormed the camp amid intense fire and ... explosions," said the official Palestinian news agency Wafa.

The Israeli army said in a statement that during a joint military and Shin Bet counterterrorism operation, "two wanted suspects were apprehended," listing both as prominent "terrorists" who had previously been imprisoned.

"During exchanges of fire, a number of terrorists were killed," it added.

"Two M-16 rifles were found on the terrorists who were killed."

Residents of the camp gathered for funeral processions on Friday morning, carrying the bodies of those killed in the raid through the streets.

The spot where one of them was shot had been turned into a makeshift memorial, with a pool of blood surrounded by stones and a Palestinian flag draped nearby.

Violence has flared in the territory since the outbreak of the war between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

On Wednesday, the Palestinian



A woman reacts during the funeral of Omar Abu Baker, 16, in the West Bank. The boy was killed in an Israeli raid, near Jenin. Reuters

Health Ministry said four Palestinians, two of them teenagers, were killed in multiple Israeli operations around the West Bank, which has been occupied by Israel since 1967.

The Palestinian Authority says Israeli fire and settler attacks in the West Bank have killed at least 263 Palestinians since the Israel-Hamas war began.

This exceeds the entire death toll of 235, most of them Palestinians,

killed in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict last year.

Last month, 14 Palestinians were killed in an Israeli raid in the city of Jenin, according to the Ramallah-based Palestinian health ministry.

It was the highest West Bank death toll from a single raid since 2005, according to UN records.

Israel's military said at the time that soldiers and other security forces had killed "several

terrorists" with a drone strike and others in gunfights, seizing weapons and destroying a "tunnel shaft containing ready-to-use explosive devices."

Israeli officials and military have regularly charged that the Jenin refugee camp in the city had turned into a "terrorist hub" where armed groups are among tens of thousands of residents.

According to the medical charity Doctors Without Borders or MSF, since the war erupted, Palestinian gunshot victims in the West Bank are now being shot more often in the head and torso rather than the limbs.

Without specifying who was responsible for the shootings, MSF's international president Christos Christou said on Thursday there had been a "clear shift" in the injuries witnessed by MSF staff.

"When you see that shift in the trauma, you will see more and more dead people," he said.

CONFLICT

Drone strike kills four pro-Hezbollah militants in Syria

AFP Beirut

Four pro-Hezbollah militants were killed on Friday in an Israeli drone strike on their car in the south of Syria, a war monitor said.

The four militants "working on behalf of Hezbollah" were killed in Madinat Al-Baath town in the province of Quneitra, close to the Israeli-annexed Golan Heights, said the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights head Rami Abdel Rahman.

The monitor was unable, however, to confirm if the combatants were Syrian or not, but they were not part of the Syrian army, Abdel Rahman said.

The day before, the Observatory, which has a network of sources in Syria, reported that Israel hit sites close to Damascus with eight missiles, as well as a "regime military post in the province of Quneitra," without causing any casualties. The strikes were a response to the bombardment of Israeli-annexed Golan, the monitor said.

On Dec. 2, two Syrian Hezbollah fighters and two officers of the Revolutionary Guards, were killed in an Israeli airstrike on Hezbollah sites close to Damascus, the monitor said.

The official news agency of the Revolutionary Guards, Sepah News, reported on the same day that two members of the guards had died on an "advisory mission" in its ally Syria, but did not specify where and when they were killed.

Israel has undertaken hundreds of airstrikes in Syria since the start of the country's civil war in 2011, targeting the positions of the Syrian army and groups affiliated with Iran, such as Hezbollah.

CRACKDOWN

EU adds two top Hamas commanders to 'terrorist list'

AFP, Reuters Brussels

The EU has added two of Hamas's top military commanders to its terrorist blacklist, linking them directly to the Oct. 7 attacks on Israel.

Brussels said Mohammed Deif, 58-year-old commander general of the Hamas military wing, the Ezzedine Al-Qassam Brigades, and his deputy Marwan Issa had been added to its sanctions list.

"The two individuals are subject to freezing their funds and other financial assets in EU member states," it said.

"It is also prohibited for EU operators to make funds and economic resources available to them."

The statement, issued by the European Council, said the listing came in "response to the threat posed by Hamas and its brutal and indiscriminate terrorist

attacks in Israel" on Oct. 7.

The EU announcement came as Hamas said that Israel had bombed Gaza's medieval Omari Mosque causing widespread destruction to the building and calling it a "heinous, barbaric crime."

Photographs carried by media in Gaza showed massive damage to the mosque, with fallen walls and roofs and a huge crack at the bottom of the stone minaret.

Reuters journalists from Gaza identified the minaret in the picture as the Omari Mosque.

A spokesperson for the Israeli military did not respond to a request for comment on the damage to the mosque.

The Omari Mosque is the oldest and biggest in the tiny Palestinian enclave, which has been under Israeli bombardment since an Oct. 7 Hamas attack that Israel says killed 1,200 people.

News Middle East

VIOLATION OF NORMS

Indian academics protest Israeli envoy's interference on campus

Scholars say that Ambassador Naor Gilon crosses boundaries of his diplomatic brief

Sanjay Kumar New Delhi

Indian scholars are warning against Israeli interference in academic freedom on their campuses after one university canceled a lecture on Palestinian history following a complaint by Tel Aviv's envoy.

Naor Gilon, the Israeli ambassador in New Delhi, has regularly hosted briefings for journalists and made public statements attacking academics and media outlets

critical of Israel's deadly bombardment of Gaza.

When Achin Vanaik, a retired professor of international relations and global politics from the University of Delhi, presented his lecture on the history of conflict in Palestine at O.P. Jindal Global University last month, Gilon wrote to the institution's vice chancellor expressing his "concern and extreme disappointment" over "an event delegitimizing the state of Israel."

The controversy spurred by the letter resulted in the cancellation of Vanaik's planned lecture at the

Indian Institute of Technology Bombay and sent a shockwave among academics, leading to 470 of them to issue a joint statement last week objecting to the "Israeli ambassador's interference with academic freedom on Indian campuses," which "disrespects the competence of Indian scholars to analyze historical and political situations for themselves."

Prof. Apoorvanand Jha from the Faculty of Arts of the University of Delhi told Arab News that the Israeli ambassador has crossed "all the limits," and not for the first time.

"He has been issuing threatening letters, which in fact scared the university vice chancellor. But it's a clear violation of the norms diplomats follow worldwide. They don't comment on internal matters, they never do that," Jha said.

"It's a clear interference in the internal life of India; no diplomat does it. We criticize America, we criticize other countries, we hold seminars criticizing US imperialism and the US warmongering, and at no point of time has the US ambassador ever tried to interfere."

Last month, Gilon drew criticism

from journalists after he publicly attacked Frontline — one of the country's most prominent magazines, which has been critical of Israeli attacks on Palestinians.

But the ambassador's interventions to silence academic debate are seen as going over the limit of what is tolerable.

"This does not come under the brief for diplomats. He has crossed all the borderlines of diplomacy," said Nadeem Khan, co-founder of the India-Palestine Friendship Forum.

"He is behaving as if he is the

boss of India. How can an ambassador dictate an Indian magazine? It is just beyond imagination. Not only that, he is also interfering in debates on campuses."

For Pamela Philipose, fellow at the Indian Council of Social Science Research, the Israeli envoy's efforts were attempts to control the narrative in a "provocative and proactive" way.

"It actually raises hackles; it shows arrogance and impunity of a very high order. He really surpasses his diplomatic brief and, yes, he has crossed the red line," she said.

GRAVE CRISIS

Gaza health system 'is on its knees'

AFP Geneva

Gaza's health system is on its knees and cannot afford to lose another ambulance or a single hospital bed, the World Health Organization has warned.

"The situation is getting more and more horrible by the day ... beyond belief, literally," WHO spokesperson Christian Lindmeier told a press briefing in Geneva.

"The health system is on its knees. Gaza cannot afford to lose any more health facilities, another single ambulance, any more hospitals ... or even a single hospital bed more."

The UN's humanitarian agency OCHA said late on Thursday that only 14 of the 36 hospitals in the

Gaza Strip were functioning in any capacity. The UN says about 80 percent of the population has been displaced, facing shortages of food, fuel, water, and medicine, along with the threat of disease.

"Children and people begging and crying for water — we're at that level, where the most normal and basic supplies are not available anymore," Lindmeier said.

"Right now, the calculation for Gaza is 1 to 2 liters of fresh water a day — that's water for everything, not only for drinking.

"People are starting to cut down telephone poles to have a little firewood to keep warm or cook if they have anything available.

"Civilization is about to break down."



A family arrives at Khan Younis's Nasser Hospital after their home was hit in an Israeli strike in the southern Gaza Strip city. AFP

HUGE LOSS

Palestinian poet Refaat Alareer killed in Israel's Gaza offensive

AFP Bande de Gaza

The Palestinian poet Refaat Alareer, one of the leaders of a young generation of authors in Gaza who chose to write in English to tell their stories, was killed in an Israeli strike, his friends said.

"My heart is broken. My friend and colleague Refaat Alareer was killed with his family a few minutes ago," wrote his friend, the Gazan poet Mosab Abu Toha, on Facebook.

"I don't want to believe this. We both loved to pick strawberries together."

Israel had conducted further raids on Thursday evening in the north of the Gaza Strip, according to Hamas authorities.

Alareer had said a few days after Israel began its ground offensive

in October that he refused to leave northern Gaza, the epicenter of the fighting at the time.

"Refaat's assassination is tragic, painful and outrageous. It is a huge loss," his friend Ahmed Alnsoq wrote on X.

The Literary Hub website also paid tribute to him, while author and journalist Ramzy Baroud wrote on X: "Rest in peace Refaat Alareer. We will continue to be guided by your wisdom today and for eternity."

Rest in peace Refaat Alareer. We will continue to be guided by your wisdom today and for eternity.

Ramzy Baroud
Author



Alareer, a professor of English literature at the Islamic University of Gaza, where he taught Shakespeare, among other subjects, was also one of the co-founders of the "We are not numbers" project, which pairs authors from Gaza with mentors abroad who help them write stories in English about their experiences.

The project edited the book "Gaza Writes Back," chronicles of life in Gaza by young Palestinian authors, and published "Gaza Unsilenced."

In November, Alareer published a poem on X entitled "If I must die" that was shared tens of thousands of times. It concludes with the words: "If I must die, let it bring hope, let it be a tale."

open to the idea of gradually reopening Kerem Shalom.

The crossing sits on the triple border between Israel, Gaza and Egypt.

"We're still negotiating, and with some promising signs at the moment" that access through Kerem Shalom would soon be possible, Griffiths said in Geneva.

But Israel poured cold water on the idea of fully reopening the crossing, telling AFP following Griffiths's comments that it would only allow aid truck inspections before directing supplies toward the Rafah Crossing between Egypt and Gaza.

LOGISTICAL PROCESS

Griffiths sees 'promising signs' of Gaza aid access via Israel

AFP Geneva

UN humanitarian chief Martin Griffiths said he saw promising signs that a major crossing from Israel into Gaza might be opened soon to allow in aid.

The Kerem Shalom checkpoint was responsible for 60 percent of goods getting into the besieged Palestinian territory before Oct. 7 and the start of the war between Israel and Hamas.

Griffiths said that in recent days, there had been signs that Israel and Egypt have become much more

Anji Chairs
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Experts said that better stormwater drainage systems would not have been able to prevent the flooding caused by very extremely heavy rains. AFP

INDIA CYCLONE

Hundreds stranded; plants closed in flood-hit Chennai

14 have died in flooding, triggered by torrential rains that started on Monday

Reuters Chennai

Volunteers waded through stagnant water to hand out food and supplies, and some manufacturing plants remained shut in India's southern tech-and-auto hub district of Chennai on Friday, four days after cyclone Michaung lashed the coast.

At least 14 people, most of them in Chennai and its state of Tamil Nadu, have died in the flooding, triggered by torrential rains that started on Monday.

The cyclone itself made landfall further north in Andhra Pradesh state on Tuesday afternoon.

Authorities said some low-lying areas of the state were still inundated and government officials and volunteers were taking supplies to people stuck in their homes in slums and other areas.

The larger Chennai area is home to the Indian units of several global firms including Hyundai Motor,

Daimler and Taiwan's Foxconn and Pegatron which do contract manufacturing for Apple.

While many of them including Pegatron and Foxconn resumed operations within a day or two of the cyclone making landfall, some plants of the TVS group located in the worst-affected areas are yet to open, industry sources said.

Adani Krishnapatnam Port in Andhra Pradesh, said on Friday the cyclone had "very badly affected" its operations and it was declaring a force majeure period starting Dec. 3.

Force majeure is a notice used to describe events outside a company's control, such as a natural disaster, which usually releases it from contractual obligation without penalty.

State-run Madras Fertilizers notified stock exchanges that its Chennai plant has been shut and is tentatively expected to resume operations within two to four weeks.

Information technology services

providers told staff to work from home for the week, while schools and colleges closed. A few schools and colleges were converted into temporary shelters.

This week's floods in Chennai brought back memories of the extensive damage caused by floods eight years ago which killed around 290 people.

FASTFACT

The larger Chennai area is home to the Indian units of several global firms including Hyundai Motor, Daimler and Taiwan's Foxconn and Pegatron which do contract manufacturing for Apple.

In Andhra Pradesh, the damage from the cyclone was relatively contained, with roads damaged and trees uprooted as big waves crashed into the coast.

Defense Minister Rajnath Singh visited Chennai on Thursday and announced New Delhi will release

a second instalment of 4.5 billion rupees (\$54 million) to Tamil Nadu to help manage the damage. The federal government has also approved a 5.6 billion-rupee project for flood management in Chennai, he said.

Chennai residents questioned the ability of the city's infrastructure to handle extreme weather.

"Not only has urbanization itself caused a problem, but the nature of the urbanization has preyed upon open spaces, holding areas like marshlands and flood plains," social activist Nityanand Jayaraman said.

Experts have, however, said better stormwater drainage systems would not have been able to prevent the flooding caused by very heavy and extremely heavy rains.

"This solution would have helped a lot in moderate and heavy rainfall, but not in very heavy and extremely heavy rains," Raj Bhagat P, a civil engineer and geo-analytics expert, said on Wednesday.

Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Ancient Rome

Bakery 'prison' uncovered in Pompeii

Archaeologists in the ancient Roman city of Pompeii have discovered a "bakery-prison" where slaves and donkeys were locked up to grind the grain needed to make bread, the archaeological site said on Friday.

A cramped room with no view of the outside world and small windows high in the wall with iron bars was uncovered during the excavations, which are part of a larger project to secure the slopes around the unexplored areas of the city. Indentations in the floor coordinated the movement of the animals who were forced to walk around blindfolded for hours, the archaeological park statement said.

"It is the most shocking side of ancient slavery" and its "brute violence," said Pompeii's director Gabriel Zuchtriegel. Reuters

Conning the elderly

French police arrest 2 for bedbug scam

French police have arrested two men for fraud after they sold bedbug pest control services to elderly people who did not need them, charging them hefty sums for the service.

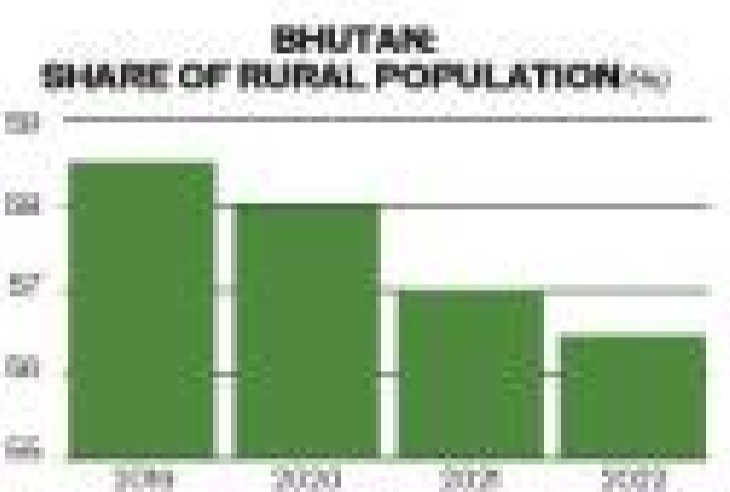
The two men, operating in eastern France, telephoned their victims, usually women over 90, telling them there had been a bedbug infestation in their neighborhood.

Preying on widespread fears of bedbugs that gripped France this autumn, they gained access to their targets' homes passing themselves off as health officials.

They then pretended to inoculate the space against bedbugs with an aerosol.

Accepting only credit card payments, they charged between 300 and 2,100 euros (\$324-2,265) per visit. AFP

The Day's FIGURES



Source: Statista

What We Are Reading Today

FROM AROUND THE WEB & IN PRINT

Laws of the Land

TRISTAN G. BROWN

Today the term fengshui, which literally means "wind and water," is recognized around the world. Yet few know exactly what it means, let alone its fascinating history.

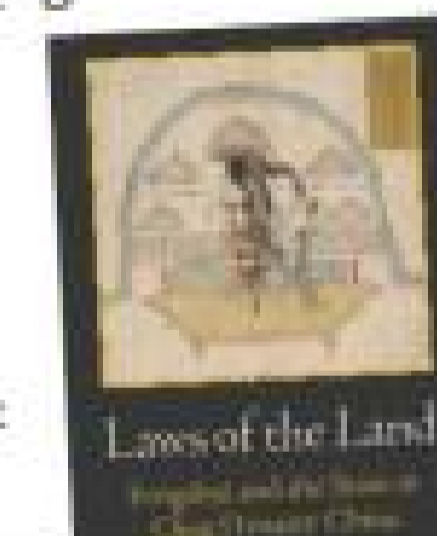
In "Laws of the Land," Tristan Brown tells the story of the important roles — especially legal ones — played by fengshui in Chinese society during China's last imperial dynasty, the Manchu Qing (1644–1912).

Employing archives from Mainland China and Taiwan that have only recently become available, this is the first book to document

fengshui's invocations in Chinese law during the Qing dynasty.

Facing a growing population, dwindling natural resources, and an overburdened rural government, judicial administrators across China grappled with disputes and petitions about fengshui in their efforts to sustain forestry, farming, mining, and city planning.

"Laws of the Land" offers a radically new interpretation of these legal arrangements: They worked.



FACES PRISON

Hunter Biden hit with federal charges for evading tax

Reuters Los Angeles

The Department of Justice has filed new criminal charges against US President Joe Biden's son, Hunter, accusing him of failing to pay \$1.4 million in taxes while spending millions of dollars on a lavish lifestyle.

Hunter Biden, 53, was hit with three felony and six misdemeanor tax offenses, according to an indictment filed in US District Court, Central District of California.

He faces up to 17 years in prison if convicted. The Justice Department said its investigation into Biden is ongoing.

"The Defendant engaged in a four-year scheme to not pay at least \$1.4 million in self-assessed federal taxes he owed for tax years 2016 through 2019," the indictment read.

It added that he had instead spent huge sums "on drugs, escorts and girlfriends, luxury hotels and rental properties, exotic cars, clothing, and other items of a personal nature" including over \$70,000 on drug rehabilitation.

Hunter Biden's lawyer, Abbe Lowell, said in statement that his client had repaid his taxes in full, accusing US Special Counsel David

Weiss, who is leading the probe into Hunter Biden, of renegeing on a previous agreement and political bias.

"If Hunter's last name was anything other than Biden, the charges in Delaware, and now California, would not have been brought," Lowell said.

Weiss "bowed to Republican pressure" to file earlier gun charges against Hunter Biden, Lowell wrote, added new tax charges after the taxes were repaid, and did not respond to a request a meeting to discuss the investigation.

The White House refused to comment.

It was not clear when Hunter Biden would appear in court.

The indictment says Hunter Biden "earned handsomely" while serving on the boards of Burisma, a Ukrainian industrial conglomerate, and a Chinese private equity fund.

Prosecutors said that between 2016 and October 2020, he received more than \$7 million in total gross income.

That included nearly \$2.3 million from his position on the board of directors of Burisma between 2016 and 2019, the filing says.



Hunter Biden, 53, was hit with three felony and six misdemeanor tax offenses, according to an indictment filed in District Court, Central District of California.

Hunter Biden's affiliation with Burisma has been the focus of years of attacks from Republican lawmakers who have accused him of leveraging his family name to make money overseas.

"The Defendant had a legal obligation to pay taxes on all his income, including income earned in Ukraine from his service on Burisma's Board, fees generated by deal-making with the Chinese private equity fund, as well as income derived from his work as a lawyer and other sources," the indictment said.

Adding to Hunter Biden's income was work for CEFC China Energy Co. Ltd, a Chinese energy conglomerate.

As Hunter Biden's income increased, so did his spending, according to the filing.

In 2018 alone, the indictment read, Hunter Biden "spent more than \$1.8 million, including approximately \$772,000 in cash withdrawals, approximately \$383,000 in payments to women, approximately \$151,000 in clothing and accessories."

The indictment added: "The Defendant did not use any of these funds to pay his taxes in 2018."

Russia

Putin tells soldiers: I will run again for president in 2024

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Friday told soldiers who had fought in the Ukraine war that he would run for president again in the 2024 election, a move that will allow the former KGB spy to stay in power until at least 2030.

Putin was handed the presidency by Boris Yeltsin on the last day of 1999.

After Putin awarded the Ukraine war veterans with Russia's highest military honor, a lieutenant colonel asked the president to run again. "I will not hide that I have had different thoughts at different times but it is now time to make a decision," Putin told Zhoga and the other decorated soldiers. "I understand that there is no other way."

"I will run for the post of president," Putin was shown in television footage saying in the Grand Kremlin Palace. Reuters

South Africa

Hundreds held underground in gold mine protest

Rebel miners blockaded more than 400 workers underground in a South African gold mine on Friday while 250 staged their own protest in a platinum mine, company and union representatives said.

Some 447 gold miners were originally being held below ground east of Johannesburg in a near repeat of a three-day protest in October, the operator said.

The latest incident follows the murder this week of a company investigator who had looked into the earlier events.

A small group of balaclava-wearing employees was behind the "hostage situation" that began at the start of Thursday's night shift, he said. The rebels had taken control of the miners' security access cards "so they are not able to get out from underground," Hassam said. AFP

لَمْ أَجِدْ فِي الْغَابِ فَرْقًا بَيْنَ رُوحٍ وَجَسَدٍ
فَالهُوَ مَاءٌ تَمَادَى وَالنَّدَى مَاءٌ رَكَدٌ
(جبران خليل جبران)

YOUR DAILY ARABIC PROVERB

In the forest, I did not find any difference between a soul and a body. Air is but a water that flows while dew is a water that stands still.

Gibran Khalil Gibran
Lebanese-American intellectual and poet

Opinion

Turkiye, GCC seek formal partnership amid regional challenges

SINEM CENGİZ



Sinem Cengiz is a Turkish political analyst who specializes in Turkey's relations with the Middle East. X: @sinemcngz

The 44th summit of the Supreme Council of the Gulf Cooperation Council, held on Tuesday in Doha, was significant in several respects. The session was the first to be held outside Saudi Arabia since 2018 and the first to be hosted by Qatar since the AUUa Declaration was signed in January 2021, ending the three-year diplomatic rift.

The summit was held in special circumstances, as the region is witnessing many hot developments, most notably the ongoing devastating Israeli onslaught against the Gaza Strip. These are extremely important developments that have many implications for the GCC and regional security. Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani underlined that the Gulf nations can play a role in solving the major problems facing the region and the world.

This summit was also remarkable because Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan was present as a guest. World leaders to have attended previous summits include Nelson Mandela, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Francois Hollande. Erdogan was in Qatar for a two-day visit on the invitation of Sheikh Tamim. The highlight of his visit was the ninth meeting of the Qatar-Turkiye High Strategic Committee, which aimed to review all aspects of relations between the two countries and explore ways to deepen them.

The photo of Erdogan with the Gulf leaders

taken at the end of the GCC summit was a significant indication of Ankara's burgeoning relationship with the bloc's member states. The inclusion of Erdogan at the GCC summit also reflects Turkiye's commitment to fostering stronger ties within the region. It aims to find common ground on mutual interests such as bilateral relations, economic partnerships and regional security concerns.

Erdogan's discussions with the GCC leaders had two dimensions. First was their mutual interest on regional topics, particularly the Palestinian issue and Israel's aggression on Gaza. The GCC leaders praised the role played by Erdogan and the Turkish government in terms of its support for the Palestinian cause and people. Second was the importance of enhancing their cooperation within the framework of strategic dialogue between the GCC and Turkiye. The significance of implementing joint action plans and strengthening the Turkiye-GCC partnership was emphasized.

The GCC declared Turkiye as a strategic dialogue partner in 2008. With the establishment of the High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council as a mechanism to allow greater institutionalized collaboration, Turkiye became the first non-Gulf country to acquire the status of strategic partner. This was considered as a huge step on the way to strategic relations. This initiative codified the framework for conducting the relationship and cleared the way for additional

intergovernmental meetings. Turkiye and the GCC countries held ministerial meetings from the beginning of the strategic dialogue mechanism and Ankara also launched several initiatives with individual Gulf states at the bilateral level.

Five ministerial strategic dialogue meetings between Turkiye and the GCC have been held so far, while Turkiye will host the sixth in the first quarter of 2024. This meeting will take place after a very long break that saw crises both within the GCC itself and in its relations with Ankara. The summit will be an outcome of Ankara's normalization of its relations with the GCC states since early 2021. The deterioration of Turkish-Gulf relations in the past decade adversely affected the chances of them institutionalizing their ties, such as through a free trade agreement or discussions on strategic cooperation.

In a speech at the closing session of the summit, Erdogan stressed the great interest that Turkiye holds in strengthening cooperation with the GCC countries, expanding business ties and establishing partnerships in various fields, as well as seeking new opportunities for cooperation.

The most important challenge in Turkiye-GCC strategic relations is the lack of institutionalization. So far, relations have been personal and issue-based, rather than based on any strategy toward the region. There is a divergence of approaches within the GCC itself. All of these factors complicate the

creation of a common Turkiye-GCC strategy toward the region. Also, despite the strong economic foundations of this relationship, a free trade agreement has not yet been reached, while Turkiye has so far only been able to conclude such a deal with the UAE.

Over the course of the last decade, several regional developments have overshadowed the progress of the GCC's integration process and its strategic relationship with Turkiye. This has led to little concentration on the economic and social aspects of cooperation between Turkiye and the GCC. However, there is now a window of opportunity for the two sides to benefit from the new political atmosphere and redirect their energies toward more solid and institutional partnerships that could mitigate any future divergences. Turkiye seems keen to share its strength, know-how and experience with the GCC states to help with the massive transformations going on in these countries under their ambitious vision plans.

In a changing global order, Turkish-GCC relations are dependent on several material, ideational, regional and domestic factors. Turkish policymakers' conceptions of the country's place in the regional order appears to be a crucial dimension of their relationship with the GCC states. From the Gulf side, true cooperation with Turkiye relies on strong intraregional cooperation between the GCC states.

The inclusion of Erdogan at the GCC summit reflects Turkiye's commitment to fostering stronger ties

COURTESY: AMALIO NAIM/ANWAR AL-AWAMI



Whichever way one looks at it, Advanced Asia and China could have 250 million fewer working-age people by 2050

'Aging Asia' offers challenges and opportunities for Middle East

EHTESHAM SHAHID



Ehtesham Shahid is an Indian editor and researcher based in the UAE. X: @e2eham

In a utopian world, the Middle Eastern youth would be jetting off to care for Japan's rapidly aging population. In exchange for their humanitarian efforts, they would imbibe immense wisdom, absorb splendid culture and, of course, learn a thing or two about technology. Perhaps, we can also learn a lesson from how Asia celebrates aging. That would amount to a region with a youth bulge complementing the world's most rapidly aging country.

For now, that seems like scenes from a sci-fi movie. Yet, seemingly outlandish notions are not always preposterous, as they help us better understand the world around us. The picture painted above has its basis in a recent McKinsey report aptly titled "Asia on the cusp of a new era." Terming "demography as destiny," the report claims that Asia still has the people to fuel substantial growth. However, the headwinds of aging are fiercest in the "Pacific Rim's higher-productivity regions."

Aided by young rural migrants, Asia has traditionally supported the shift from agriculture to industry, triggering economic growth, urbanization, demographic changes and environmental impact. To put things in perspective, an additional 600 million people will live in Indian and Chinese cities alone by 2050. However, the undercurrent of a more profound change is now visible as "China and Advanced Asia," as the report outlines, are aging rapidly.

So, what are its ramifications for the continent and beyond? Aging requires Asia to move its work to where the workers will be, apart from dealing with the first-order higher dependency ratio challenge. As the workforce shrinks due to aging, value chains typically shift to areas with younger populations to help maintain production levels. Such a realignment might involve moving specific industries to countries with younger demographics, such as Indonesia and India. In other words, Japan and China's losses could be India and Indonesia's gains.

Technological innovation and automation can compensate for workforce shortages caused by aging populations. Investment in education, training and upskilling workers can enhance productivity, while improved labor market efficiency, including better job matching and mobility, can help address productivity challenges. However, the more desirable option would be greater regional economic integration to facilitate these shifts and ease the movement of goods, capital and labor across borders. Whichever way one looks at it, Advanced Asia and China — "aged Asia" — could have 250 million fewer working-age people by 2050.

Conventional wisdom says the Middle East, with its strategic location and significant investment resources, could play a vital role in these shifting value chains, especially in logistics and finance. Economies in the region seeking diversification away from oil could

benefit from increased trade and investment opportunities with Asia. A few other factors are also craving attention. Increased competition for foreign investment and technology might arise even though the Middle East could leverage its strengths to cater to the energy needs of rapidly developing Asian economies.

Political and economic stability is crucial for such shifts in value chains. Regions with political unrest or economic instability might not attract the necessary investment. There is also a risk of overdependence on certain industries or foreign investment, which could lead to economic vulnerabilities. Environmental sustainability is another concern, as rapid industrialization, if not appropriately managed, can lead to increased pollution and resource depletion.

The existing demographic synergies between Asia and the Middle East are critical. It encompasses labor migration, economic interdependence, cultural exchanges, educational collaborations, investment flows and mutual influences in tourism, healthcare and political strategies. These synergies reflect a complex and evolving relationship with significant implications for both regions and create a dynamic interplay, influencing migration, economic policies, cultural exchanges and development strategies.

Labor migration is one of the most significant demographic synergies between the two sides. Many countries in the Middle East, especially

in the Gulf Cooperation Council region, have historically relied on labor from Asian countries. As Asian countries deal with aging populations, there is potential for collaboration in healthcare, particularly in areas of elder care and medical technology, which can benefit Middle Eastern countries as they develop their healthcare infrastructure.

Notably, like the diverse Middle East, at least five Asias are bound to follow different trajectories. As the McKinsey report highlights, "Asia was largely in a demographic sweet spot in the 'Era of Markets.'" Between 1990 and 2022, 55 percent of global growth in the working-age population was in Asia. Moreover, the region's working-age population grew faster than its overall population. Some jitter is bound to surface when indices shift and other underlying factors kick in. An embattled Middle East, however, would hope for the aging Asia to bounce back.

Aging Asia presents both challenges and opportunities for the Middle East. The challenges, in terms of labor dynamics and economic interactions, present alongside a range of possibilities. These include driving innovation, fostering new bilateral relations and catalyzing economic diversification and development in healthcare and other sectors. How Middle Eastern countries navigate and leverage these dynamics will determine the overall impact on their socio-economic landscape.

Opinion

Afghans find a credible opposition voice to the Taliban

LUKE COFFEY



Luke Coffey is a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute. X: @LukeCoffey

Russia's invasion of Ukraine shows no sign of a peaceful conclusion. Meanwhile, the world remains focused on Israel's war on Gaza. Sometimes it seems that policymakers have all but forgotten about Afghanistan.

After taking power more than two years ago, the Taliban have learned that resisting is much easier than governing. There is a nationwide shortage of basic medical supplies. Tens of millions of Afghans suffer from food insecurity. The economic situation remains bleak, with reports of fathers even selling off their young daughters for marriage to much older men to get money for food. Natural disasters have also taken their toll on the country. Major earthquakes in Herat in October killed almost 1,500 and left 144,000 needing humanitarian aid. The international community has not worked out a way to ensure that much-needed humanitarian aid reaches those most affected without lining the pockets of the Taliban elite in Kabul.

Meanwhile, the cycle of violence that has plagued Afghanistan for more than four decades remains unchecked. Daesh is an increasingly deadly force in the country and has been responsible for a number of mass casualty attacks. According to reports published by the UN, Al-Qaeda remains active. Smaller regional terrorist groups, such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan,

have also taken advantage of the Taliban's hospitality.

However, despite the tragic situation, there remains a glimmer of hope for the country's future. This week more than 50 representatives from different anti-Taliban opposition and resistance groups gathered in Vienna for the third meeting of the so-called Vienna Process for a Democratic Afghanistan.

A smaller group first met in September 2022, the first such gathering of opposition figures on the international stage since the Taliban regained power. The first meeting of the Vienna Process was also notable because it acknowledged the leader of the National Resistance Front of Afghanistan, Ahmad Massoud, as the de facto leader of this anti-Taliban opposition movement.

The NRF was formed in August 2021 in the aftermath of the Taliban's capture of Kabul. Massoud, the son of the late Soviet and Taliban resistance fighter Ahmad Shah Massoud, escaped from the city to his family's ancestral homeland in the Panjshir Valley. Since then, the NRF has been active across northern Afghanistan as the only credible and non-extremist armed opposition to the Taliban.

The second gathering in Vienna last April featured an even more diverse group of participants, including activists from many different backgrounds, ethnic groups and religious affiliations, as well as representatives from the Hazara, Uzbek and Sikh minorities.

Almost half the participants were women.

The most recent meeting was even more noteworthy. Although the center of gravity for the conference was Massoud and the NRF, other significant groups and personalities were represented. For example, senior figures of the National Resistance Council for the Salvation of Afghanistan, also known as the Ankara Coalition, participated. This included former MP Mohammadi Muhaqeq and former vice president of Afghanistan Yunus Qanuni. The notorious Abdul Rashid Dostum, an ethnic Uzbek Afghan commander and longtime Afghan powerbroker, sent

a personal representative to deliver his message to the attendees. There were international observers from the US, and European and regional countries. On the final day of the meeting, they took part in the discussions.

Almost as significant as last week's meeting in Vienna was the flurry of diplomatic activity by anti-Taliban opposition that took place in the lead-up to the event. In October, Massoud traveled to France to meet government officials and activists. He then continued on to Brussels, where he met with members of the European Parliament and held meetings with parliamentarians. Last month, he was invited as a special guest by French President Emmanuel Macron to take part in the Paris Peace Forum. At the event he was seated next to other heads of state and senior officials. It is also worth noting that Ismail Khan,

the former resistance fighter and governor of Herat, left Iran for the first time since fleeing from the Taliban in 2021, and traveled to Tajikistan. This was important because Tajikistan serves as the political home of the NRF. During Khan's visit to Tajikistan, he held meetings with Massoud and Emomali Rahmon, the Tajikistan president. Khan's visit demonstrates a growing alliance between northern and western Afghans in opposing the Taliban.

It remains to be seen what the future of the Vienna Process holds. With each gathering the participants grow in numbers and importance. After only three meetings, the Vienna Process has united a diverse group of Afghans on a common platform. All believe that the status quo under the Taliban is unacceptable. They emphasize that the protection of basic human rights,

especially equal rights for women and minorities, are nonnegotiable. They have also agreed to "support all forms of resistance against the Taliban" including armed opposition.

While many countries are willing to work with the Taliban as the de facto leaders of Afghanistan, few have had any level of engagement with the NRF or the Vienna Process. This is shortsighted. If there can be engagement with the Taliban, then there is no reason not to also engage with opposition groups. It is time for the international community to accept that the Vienna Process is a credible Afghan voice of opposition to the Taliban.

Daesh is an increasingly deadly force in the country

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If we value our future, we must put a price on nature

ERIK BERGLOF



Erik Berglof is Chief Economist at the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. ©Project Syndicate

For millennia, natural infrastructure, such as river systems, wetlands, coastal plains, sand dunes, and forests, supported the development of human civilization. In fact, our ability to harness such infrastructure, for everything from food and drinking water to storm-surge protection and flood mitigation, has been central to our success as a species. And it will prove vital to our future survival.

Technological advances propelled the evolution of infrastructure. Green turned to gray, with concrete, cable, and steel delivering energy, communications, and transportation — and, with them, unprecedented growth and development. But while rapid modernization produced once-unimaginable prosperity, it has had grave unintended consequences, not least the environmental degradation and greenhouse-gas emissions that are jeopardizing our very existence.

The question now is how to meet urgent environmental goals — reducing emissions and protecting and restoring nature and biodiversity — while enabling developing economies to fulfill their legitimate growth aspirations. The answer, as a recent report from the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank suggests, may well begin with an explicit acknowledgement of nature as infrastructure.

Viewing nature as infrastructure is transformative, because it forces us to think in a more systemic way. As we pursue growth

and development, we must not only avoid damaging nature, but also strengthen and enrich it through "nature-positive" investments, all while tapping its vast potential to deliver essential services.

Biologists already do this when they benchmark how to restore degraded land. But now economists must get on board and enhance their tools for capturing the value and complexity of natural capital. Biodiversity, for example, covers not just the number of species, but also their genetic diversity and diversity of functions. Yet another dimension of biodiversity is the complex evolutionary history of species — when they were separated on the "tree of life." It is only by

deepening our understanding of biodiversity that we will comprehend nature's full potential and our impact on it.

This knowledge is site-specific, and acquiring it will require contributions from scientists and local populations. The

good news is that there are already models for such collaboration. The vast Sanbei reforestation project, aimed at preventing two large deserts from merging in northern China, was a flawed endeavor at the start, with only single tree types planted. But, over the course of two decades, deeper knowledge of the local environment and the participation of local communities transformed it into a success.

Governance and incentives are also crucial to protect and nurture natural infrastructure. In Indonesia, mangroves have long protected communities, particularly poorer

households, from deadly tidal floods, but these are being depleted in regions with weaker state capacity. In Egypt, by contrast, efforts to restore mangroves have been aided by revenues from eco-tourism and beekeeping, which produces honey and supports the delivery of vital pollination services.

The nature-as-infrastructure approach demands that we assess what nature can deliver before considering gray solutions, and it can help countries close their infrastructure gaps in truly sustainable ways. But gray infrastructure will always be necessary for growth and development. This demands that we design it better, to minimize its impact on nature. For example, renewable-energy infrastructure has a large ecological footprint, and road infrastructure fragments and damages ecosystems. Solutions like co-locating infrastructure on brown sites and providing auxiliary infrastructure, such as wildlife highway crossings, green urban spaces, and nature-restoration offsets, can help mitigate these effects.

Of course, financing might pose a challenge. The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, agreed a year ago, assumes that between \$598 billion and \$824 billion per year will be needed by 2030 to close the biodiversity funding gap. Such sums, essential to protect and then begin to restore nature, can be generated only by valuing nature properly, and creating markets that will mobilize private

and institutional capital.

To this end, "nature as infrastructure" must be developed as an asset class, using new tools and financial instruments. At the micro level, this will require better pricing of nature's services — for example, usage charges or permits and taxes for damaging activities — and adaptive local regulations. Micro-level policies can support the development of other financial instruments and, eventually, markets — for performance-linked bonds, policy-based lending, debt-for-nature swaps, and nature credits, to name a few — to channel more finance into nature. Lessons from carbon markets should be heeded in order to avoid repeating past mistakes.

Special attention must be paid to low-income economies, many of which are highly vulnerable to climate change and environmental degradation, but have rich natural endowments that should be valued

properly. Multilateral development banks can catalyze the nature-as-infrastructure approach, ensuring that it is incorporated into all aspects of their operations. Ultimately, this approach should also guide individual infrastructure projects and national growth strategies.

The consequences of the infrastructure decisions we make today will be felt for decades to come. Only by committing to invest in green — and to build gray better — can we ensure we lay the groundwork for a fairer, more sustainable, and inclusive global economy.

Governance and incentives are crucial to protect natural infrastructure

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The future of commerce is hyperlocal and omnichannel, with consumers expecting brands to be closer to them, to deliver faster and offer a personalized experience.

Mostafa Abolnahr
Omniful cofounder and CEO



Business



In the recent funding landscape, the fintech sector emerged as the frontrunner in terms of funding volume, raising \$485.9 million, primarily driven by the significant rounds raised by Tamara and Tabby. SPA

FAST FACT

Noteworthy among these rounds were a \$250 million debt round secured by Saudi Arabia-based Tamara, a substantial \$200 million series D funding by the Kingdom's Tabby, and \$130 million raised by Egypt's MNT-halan through securitized bonds.

STARTUP WRAP

Saudi Arabia's startup ecosystem leads November's funding spree with \$338m

UAE came in second with \$284 million across 22 deals and Egypt followed with \$130.5 million over 5 deals

Nour El-Shaerl Cairo

Saudi Arabia's startup ecosystem continues to dominate the region after raising the most funds in the Middle East and North Africa during November.

According to Wamda's Monthly report, the MENA region saw \$764 million raised across 42 rounds in November - a 390 percent month-on-month increase and a 74 percent growth year-on-year.

Saudi Arabia topped the charts with \$338 million secured across nine deals. The UAE came in second with \$284 million across 22 deals and Egypt followed with \$130.5 million over 5 deals.

Furthermore, the remaining capital was raised by startups based in Kuwait, Morocco, Oman, and Tunisia.

Funding activity experienced a notable resurgence across all stages, with mega rounds constituting a significant portion of the capital influx.

Noteworthy among these rounds were a \$250 million debt round secured by Saudi Arabia-based Tamara, a substantial \$200 million series D funding by the Kingdom's Tabby, and \$130 million raised by Egypt's MNT-halan through securitized bonds.

Collectively, these three rounds made up around 76 percent of the total funding raised during November.

In the recent funding landscape, the fintech sector emerged as the frontrunner in terms of funding volume, raising \$485.9 million, primarily driven by the significant rounds raised by Tamara and Tabby.

This sector also ranked second in terms of the number of deals,

recording nine in total. Furthermore, a notable boost to the super app sector's funding status was recorded with the industry raising \$131 million during the month, thanks to MNT-Halan's round.

The education technology sector managed to secure \$41.4 million in funding, largely due to a major transaction by Saudi Arabia-based Noon.

Additionally, several other sectors witnessed funding rounds reaching into the tens of millions.

Notable among these were Saudi-based Retailo's \$15 million, Saudi Ajras' \$28 million, UAE's Flow48's \$25 million, and Emirati Immensa's \$20 million round.

Out of the 42 deals reported, 10 successfully attracted direct global investment, predominantly from US-based investors.

Within the region, UAE-based investors took the lead, participating in 21 deals, with Modus Capital standing out through its investment of \$2.8 million across eight startups via its venture builder program. Saudi Arabian investors followed closely, engaging in 10 deals.

In terms of founder gender dynamics, male-founded startups dominated the funding scene, securing \$753 million across 29 deals, accounting for 98.5 percent of the total funding.

In stark contrast, female founders received less than 2 percent of the overall capital, amounting to \$9 million. Mixed-gender founding teams raised the remaining 0.2 percent.

The report indicated that nine startups did not disclose

Mtor's founder and CEO, Mohamed Maged, established the startup in April 2022. Supplied



Omniful provides merchants with a unified management system, warehouse management system, and transport management system to scale their businesses.

The company aims to utilize its fresh influx of capital to boost its operations in existing markets, primarily the UAE and the Kingdom, as well as double down on its technology development.

Nishad, the company's chief technology officer, said: "As a product-led organization, our technology is a clear differentiator, making us the platform of choice for omnichannel merchants and high-volume 3PL (third party logistics) fulfillment providers. Over the next year, we will double down on growing our technology capabilities in India, while also planning for the launch of our platform there."

Egypt's Mtor closes \$2.8m in a pre-seed round

Egypt's online car parts marketplace Mtor has closed a \$2.8 million pre-seed funding round led by Algebra Ventures with participation from Dutch Founders Fund, Aditum Ventures, Loftyline Capital Management, and angel investors.

Founded in 2022 by Mohamed Maged, Moaz El-Megharbel, Mohamed Altaf, and Khaled Kandil, Mtor aims to revamp the car parts industry in Egypt with a unified online platform.

"It can be a car owner's nightmare to get their car serviced. Mtor was founded to fundamentally transform this reality and make the process easier and more efficient, empowering a layer of local car workshops that are well rounded with quality parts, a suitable price position, and a good customer experience," Maged, CEO of Mtor, said.

The company aims to utilize the received funding to further grow its product range and expand its local workshop client base.

their exact funding amounts. A conservative estimate of \$100,000 was assigned to each of these ventures.

Supply chain and ecommerce enabler Omniful raises \$5.85m

Supply chain and ecommerce enabler startup Omniful, co-headquartered in Saudi Arabia and the UAE, has raised \$5.85 million in a seed funding round.

Led by VentureSouq, the round saw participation from 500 Global, DASH Ventures, Jahez Group, as well as SEEDRA Ventures, Bunat Ventures, Hala Ventures, and RZM Investments, along with family offices including Al Basheed, Siraj Holding, Al Bawardi, Al Nafea, and a number of angel investors.

Founded in 2022 by Mostafa Abolnahr and Alankrit Nishad,

Omniful provides merchants and fulfillment providers with a unified management system, warehouse management system, and transport management system to scale their businesses.

Abolnahr, also the company's CEO, said: "The future of commerce is hyperlocal and omnichannel, with consumers expecting brands to be closer to them, to deliver faster and offer a personalized experience. At Omniful, we are equipping merchants in this \$4 trillion industry with a single platform to manage all their sales channels and deliver on time and in full, improving their efficiencies by 40 percent and their customer retention by 15 percent."

He added: "Our seed round marks a major milestone, and together with our investors, we are excited about going out of stealth and launching our sales and marketing efforts in the Middle East, Africa, and India, followed by Europe and US."



Business Saudi Arabia

VISION 2030

Saudi crown prince reveals urban plan, branding for Qiddiya City megaproject

He says the city aims to be the foremost global destination for entertainment, sports and culture

Arab News Riyadh

Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman on Thursday revealed the urban plan and global branding for Qiddiya City, a massive entertainment project under construction on the outskirts of Riyadh.

The crown prince, who chairs the board of directors of the Qiddiya Investment Company, said the city aims to quickly establish itself as the foremost global destination for entertainment, sports and culture, which will benefit the Kingdom by helping to boost its economic

growth, international standing and strategic position, the Saudi Press Agency reported.

It is also designed to improve quality of life, the prince added, and to position Riyadh as one of the top 10 economies in the world.

The investment in Qiddiya is a cornerstone of Saudi Vision 2030, he said, which aims to develop and diversify the Kingdom's economy, reducing the country's reliance on oil revenues and creating thousands of job opportunities for Saudi youth.

Qiddiya, which is one of the major projects overseen by the Public Investment Fund, is envisioned as an essential source



Qiddiya's branding adopts 'play' as its main concept, based on research showing this to be vital for cognitive development, emotional expression, social skills, creativity and health. Supplied



FASTFACT

The investment in Qiddiya is a cornerstone of Saudi Vision 2030 which aims to develop and diversify the Kingdom's economy, reducing the country's reliance on oil revenues and creating thousands of job opportunities for Saudi youth.

of support for the Kingdom's ambitious tourism and economic goals, in addition to improving the quality of life for residents and visitors. It is expected to help attract local, regional and international investors, which will in turn provide support to Riyadh.

Work on the Qiddiya project, in the form of about SR10 billion (\$2.7 billion) invested in construction projects, began in 2019.

It was revealed that the branding for Qiddiya will adopt as its main motif the concept of "play," based on decades of research showing this to be vital for cognitive development, emotional expression, social skills, creativity and

physical health. Studies have also shown the positive effects of recreational activities on society, including their ability to help overcome differences and bridge divisions between individuals, and enhance empathy and social cohesion.

Qiddiya City, described as a one-of-a-kind destination that promises to provide endless fun and excitement for residents and visitors through unrivaled entertainment, sports events and activities, culture and exceptional urban living, will eventually include 600,000 residents and 60,000 buildings in an area covering 360 square kilometers.

It is expected to create more than 325,000 jobs, generate a nominal gross domestic product of SR135 billion a year, and attract 48 million visitors annually.

Located about 40 minutes from the center of Riyadh, overlooking the stunning scenery of the Tuwaiq mountains, Qiddiya City's attractions will include a gaming and esports district, a motorsports racetrack, golf courses, a massive water park, and the Six Flags Qiddiya theme park. It will also be home to a sports stadium that includes the world's largest Olympic museum. Its first facilities are expected to open within two years.

COOPERATION

Saudi Arabia, IAEA discuss cooperation on nuclear energy

Ranvir Nayyar Dubai

The International Atomic Energy Agency, the global overseer of the nuclear industry, says it is collaborating with Saudi Arabia to assist the Kingdom in developing its nuclear power production sector.

Given its key role in the regional energy landscape, there is a pressing need for production to transition from fossil fuels to low-carbon or zero-carbon emitting sources.

Wei Huang, director at the Department of Nuclear Energy of IAEA told Arab News in an interview on the sidelines of the 2023 Climate Change Conference that the Kingdom's "very fast development" towards nuclear energy has been noticed by the agency.

"Now they are in the bidding process to try to get nuclear power into their energy mix. So, we hope we can see a substantial outcome of this process. We are seeing quite strong interest in this region in using nuclear power to improve the energy mix and the security energy mix, but also help to decarbonize the greenhouse gas emissions in the region," he said.

Huang noted it is encouraging that the countries in this region, which are rich in fossil fuels, are now looking at nuclear energy as an alternative to minimize carbon emissions. He added that the IAEA supports member nations looking to develop nuclear power production.

"Our agents provide a lot of technical support to make sure the



There are 19 milestones that every country must achieve before taking the nuclear route and the IAEA assists them in reaching these landmarks. File

country can be prepared well before they are moving toward nuclear power, including help them to review their infrastructure."

He added that there are 19 milestones that every country must achieve before taking the nuclear route and that IAEA assists them in reaching these landmarks, which cover a vast spectrum from nuclear, finance, funding, human resources, safety and safeguards.

Huang welcomed statements from US Special Envoy on Climate Change John Kerry, voicing his appreciation for Kerry's emphasis on global collaboration in nuclear fusion. He highlighted the proactive engagement of the IAEA in nuclear fusion technology alongside its partners and member states.

"We see quite a significant development in this area. Of course, compared to fission, which has been widely used over decades, there is still a lot of work to be done to make sure that fusion

can really be deployed in the coming decades. And so our agency has, you know, discussed with our member states and also partner to see how much we can do. We are now working on how

We are seeing quite strong interest in this region in using nuclear power to improve the energy mix and the security energy mix, but also help to decarbonize the greenhouse gas emissions in the region.

Wei Huang
Director at the Department of Nuclear Energy of IAEA



to transfer nuclear fusion from mainly the science focus to more engineering-focused activities, including the regulatory framework on the fusion. So this is what the agency is doing now and there will be a lot of work to be done in a couple of years to make sure all the aspects had been prepared well for," Huang said.

While Saudi Arabia is at the initial stage of nuclear power development, its neighbor, the UAE, has already established three operational units at its Barakah Nuclear Power Station, while the fourth unit is in the pipeline.

"At Barakah, we have four units, of which three are operational. The fourth unit will come online soon. Together, the four units will produce about 5.6 gigawatts of electricity, which is equivalent to 25 percent of the total electricity production in the UAE. At Barakah, we have used APRI400 reactors, a Generation 3 nuclear reactor built with Korean technology, constructed to the highest level of safety and quality. Moving forward, we would like to invest in other nuclear power plants and will examine all options," Khaled Al-Shehhi, nuclear fuel quality surveillance manager at Emirates Nuclear Energy Corp., which owns Barakah, told Arab News.

The Barakah Nuclear Power Station is a \$20 billion project bagged by the Korea Hydro & Nuclear Power Co., a state-owned enterprise and one of the world's largest operators of

nuclear power plants. The company says it is also looking to develop its exports in other markets.

"We are here at COP28 to introduce our Korea Small Modular Reactor known as i-SMR. They are really sustainable energy solutions that will help nations to reach net-zero goals. Regarding the development and export of our i-SMR, KHNP is actively engaged in discussions with various countries, including Philippines and the UAE. The adoption of our i-SMR is expected to accelerate the journey toward a carbon neutrality, especially in countries facing infrastructure limitations for large nuclear power plants such as South East Asia region and some regions which have difficulties in tapping renewable energies," Sonia Sunyoung Hong, SMR overseas business team manager at KHNP told Arab News.

She added that KHNP's relationship with the UAE could be a perfect example for other nations in the region, including Saudi Arabia.

"Our relationship with the UAE is a good example of how we get countries with no nuclear experience. For instance, when we began working with the UAE in 2009, the UAE government had no experience of nuclear industry. They did not have any regulations, guidelines at all. KHNP helped and supported the government in developing concrete regulations and guidelines for the nuclear power plant implementation for the first time for the world," Hong said.

Under international humanitarian law, parties to a conflict have a clear obligation to protect civilians, including journalists.

Aya Majzoub
Amnesty International's deputy regional director for the Middle East and North Africa



Media

DEADLY PATTERN

Probe finds Israeli attack on journalists in Lebanon was likely intentional

Evidence suggests that the Israeli military had knowledge that the individuals they were firing on were civilians



The gear that belonged to Reuters journalist Issam Abdallah who was killed on Oct. 13 is displayed during a press conference by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch as they released findings from their investigations, in Beirut on Thursday. Reuters

Arab News London

Investigations by Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, Reuters, and Agence France-Presse have found that an Israeli attack on Oct. 13 was likely to have been a deliberate assault by the Israel Defense Forces on civilians, which is a war crime.

The attack killed journalist Issam Abdallah, from Reuters, and injured six others including Carmen Joukhadar and Elie Brakhya from Al Jazeera; Dylan Collins and Christina Assi from AFP; and Thaeir Al-Sudani and Maher Nazeh from Reuters.

The reports include witness testimony and are based on analysis of videos, audio, munition remnants, and satellite imagery verified by the organizations, as well as multiple interviews with officials and civilians.

Aya Majzoub, Amnesty International's deputy regional director for the Middle East and North Africa, said: "Our investigation into the incident uncovers chilling evidence pointing to an attack on a group of international journalists who were carrying out their work by reporting on hostilities.

"Direct attacks on civilians and indiscriminate attacks are absolutely prohibited by international humanitarian law and can amount to war crimes."

The findings are in line with the Committee to Protect Journalists' report "Deadly Pattern," published in May, which showed lethal force by the Israel Defense Forces had left 20 journalists dead over the last 22 years, without any accountability.



HIGHLIGHTS

• The attack on Oct. 13 occurred at around 6 p.m. The group of journalists had gathered as early as 4:45 p.m. in a clearing on a hilltop in Alma Al-Shaab, to film ongoing fighting on Lebanon's southern border with Israel.

• The attack killed journalist Issam Abdallah, from Reuters, and injured six others including Carmen Joukhadar and Elie Brakhya from Al Jazeera; Dylan Collins and Christina Assi from AFP; and Thaeir Al-Sudani and Maher Nazeh from Reuters.

The CPI said it welcomed the four reports and "reiterates its call for an immediate, independent, and transparent investigation that holds the perpetrators to account."

Ramzi Kaiss, Lebanon researcher at Human Rights Watch, said: "This is not the first time that Israeli forces have apparently deliberately attacked journalists, with deadly and devastating results."



Warring parties are obligated to take all precautions to avoid harm to civilians and must verify that targets are military objectives.

Journalists from Al Jazeera had conducted two live TV reports, the first at 4:55 p.m. and the second at 5:24 p.m., from the same location.

Live transmissions by Reuters and AFP were also broadcast on air by several television stations during that period.

The journalists had remained stationary for over 75 minutes before they were hit, and none of the evidence indicated the presence of any military target near the journalists.

All seven journalists were wearing helmets and blue ballistic vests with labels that said "PRESS," and were clearly identifiable as journalists.

Footage also shows the group wearing the clearly marked vests and helmets in the same area, near a car marked with "TV" in large letters on its hood.



The Israeli strike on October 13 merits a war crime investigation, HRW and Amnesty International said at the press conference in Beirut. AFP

Five cameras belonging to journalists indirectly captured the attack and its aftermath, shedding light on how the attack was carried out and from where.

Evidence reviewed by the organizations indicates that the Israeli military knew or should have known that the people they were firing on were civilians.

The journalists interviewed said that the first attack struck Abdallah, killing him instantly, and badly injuring photojournalist Assi.

Just 37 seconds later, the car owned by Al Jazeera was engulfed in flames and destroyed by a second attack, resulting in more injuries to journalists.

Majzoub said: "Under international humanitarian law, parties to a conflict have a clear obligation to protect civilians, including journalists, and must at all times distinguish between civilians and civilian objects on one hand and fighters and military objectives on the other."

HRW asserted that "warring parties are obligated to take all feasible precautions to avoid harm to civilians" and must "verify that targets are military objectives."

It also suggested that Israel's key allies, Germany, Canada, the US and the UK, "should suspend military assistance and arms sales to Israel, given the real risk that they will be used to commit grave abuses."

Kaiss said: "The evidence strongly suggests that Israeli forces knew or should have known that the group that they were attacking were journalists."

"This was an unlawful and apparently deliberate attack on a very visible group of journalists."



I definitely want to win more Grand Slams and put in more time in the French Open and Wimbledon, and play the Paris Olympics.

Naomi Osaka, Former world No. 1

ANALYSIS

'Day of Reckoning' in Riyadh set to reorder boxing's heavyweight division

Several top-10 fighters will clash on Dec. 23, including Deontay Wilder and Anthony Joshua

Cormac O'Donnell Riyadh

Boxing's heavyweight division is set for a major reordering when the "Day of Reckoning" takes place in Riyadh on Dec. 23, with a number of top-10 fighters vying for No. 1 status.

Leading the pack are Deontay Wilder and Anthony Joshua, who may fight each other after their bouts this month. A bout between the two has long been mooted but negotiations have broken down several times over the past few years.

They are on the same card and seeking to become the No. 1 contender for the World Boxing Council title.

Should both win their respective bouts, they will face each other for the right to challenge the winner of the undisputed heavyweight championship between WBC champion Tyson Fury and Unified Heavyweight Champion Oleksandr Usyk that will take place in February in Riyadh.

Mauricio Sulaiman, president of the WBC, recently outlined the stakes involved for Wilder and Joshua.

"We've been waiting and pushing and mediating and encouraging everyone to try to make this happen," he told Sky Sports recently.

"When Wilder was champion there were a couple of occasions where Wilder-Joshua came very close. The WBC left that window without interfering with anything that could get in the way."

Before that, there is the small matter of Wilder facing current IBF and WBO Intercontinental Champion Joseph Parker, a difficult opponent for anyone on any given night.

Parker, fresh from a knockout victory over Simon Kean at Riyadh's "Battle of the Baddest"



in October, is hoping to extend his winning streak and stake his own claim to the throne.

Meanwhile, standing in Joshua's way is Otto Wallin, who is ranked nine, and has only lost to Fury.

Wallin and Joshua faced off as amateurs over a decade ago — with the latter winning both in 2010 and 2011. It could be third time's the charm for Wallin who, since then, may have developed the skill — and the will — to finally overcome Joshua.

Wallin is currently ranked No. 2 in the IBF heavyweight rankings, with rumors of that title becoming vacant next year. Should this happen, Joshua will wish to leapfrog Wallin to face No.

Ukraine's Oleksandr Usyk, right, and Britain's Anthony Joshua during their heavyweight boxing rematch for the WBA, WBO, IBO and IBF titles, at the King Abdullah Sports City Arena in Jeddah, on Aug. 20, 2022. Usyk won against by split decision to retain his world heavyweight titles. File/AFP

I-ranked Filip Hrgovic for the IBF title.

In Riyadh, Hrgovic will face the Australian Mark De Mori who has only been beaten twice in 45 fights. This fight is crucial for Hrgovic, who needs to keep his No. 1 IBF spot to challenge for the title next year. He has his work cut out for him as De Mori has an almost 90 percent knockout rate.

Daniel Dubois, who lost to Usyk

in August, takes on the unbeaten knockout artist Jarrell Miller. Dubois lost the fight against Usyk after a contentious "low blow" ruling saw the Brit lose his momentum against the Ukrainian.

Russia's Arslanbek Makhmudov against Germany's Agit Kabayel could be the sleeper fun fight of the night. Makhmudov, the current WBC-NABF champion, has been steadily climbing the rankings, and will hope to defeat the unbeaten Kabayel, the EBU heavyweight champion.

Rounding out the heavyweights on the card is Frank Sanchez who will take on Junior Fa. This is a crucial bout for Fa, who has lost two of his last three fights. He faces

a challenging task ahead in the form of the unbeaten Sanchez, the WBC Continental Americas heavyweight champion.

"In itself it is a natural WBC elimination tournament," said Sulaiman. "You have Wilder, No. 1 Joshua, you have Parker, you have Otto Wallin, all those are highly ranked in the WBC. After Dec. 23 we're going to see a different picture in the rankings."

Looming further on the horizon is one of boxing's newest and hottest properties: Francis Ngannou. The Cameroonian has catapulted himself into the WBC top 10 by almost beating Fury. A rematch is possible, according to Fury's promoter Frank Warren.

Sport Briefs

THE BEST OF THE REST

Soccer

Messi, Miami heading to HK for friendly

Lionel Messi and Inter Miami will play a pre-season friendly in Hong Kong in February as part of the club's first-ever international tour, the Major League Soccer side said Thursday.

Inter Miami said the club will play a Hong Kong XI made up of players from the Chinese territory's First Division at the Hong Kong Stadium on Feb. 4.

"We're very excited to be visiting Hong Kong and indeed Asia for the very first time," Inter Miami managing owner Jorge Mas said in a statement.

"From the very beginning we set out to be a global club at Inter Miami. This is a wonderful opportunity to do just that." AFP

After Rahm's LIV move

McIlroy wants Ryder Cup rules rewrite

Rory McIlroy said the European side will have to "rewrite the rules" for Ryder Cup eligibility after Spain's reigning Masters champion Jon Rahm jumped ship to LIV Golf.

Saudi-backed LIV pulled off a coup Thursday when Rahm confirmed weeks of speculation by announcing he was joining the circuit in a deal reportedly worth hundreds of millions of dollars.

Ian Poulter, Lee Westwood and Sergio Garcia have all been declared ineligible to play for Europe at the Ryder Cup after signing for LIV. Henrik Stenson was removed as captain.

World No. 2 McIlroy, an outspoken opponent of LIV, said Rahm following the other players to LIV would require the DP World Tour — formerly the European Tour — to rethink its stance. AFP



Tennis

Osaka targets Paris Olympics, more Grand Slam

A "nervous" Naomi Osaka has targeted a place at next year's Paris Olympics and more Grand Slam titles after she makes her eagerly anticipated return to tennis.

The 26-year-old former world No. 1 is set to return to competition at the Brisbane International starting at the end of the month, having not played on tour since September 2022.

Osaka hopes her comeback takes her all the way to next summer's Paris Games.

"In the first chapter of my tennis I kind of got away with just being myself and playing with my instincts," she said. AFP

PREMIER LEAGUE

Eddie Howe refuses to blame Kieran Trippier after costly Newcastle United errors

Liam Kennedy Liverpool

Newcastle United boss Eddie Howe refused to point the finger at Kieran Trippier as the Magpies capitulated in the Premier League at Everton.

Three individual errors, as the game looked to be heading toward a 0-0 draw, saw the relegation-threatened Toffees claim all three points at Goodison Park on Thursday.

Late strikes from Dwight McNeil and Abdoulaye Doucoure, after Trippier handed them possession inexplicably, saw the hosts on their way, before the England fullback played substitute Beto onside as he slotted home the third in added time.

Despite that, Howe refused to blame Trippier.

The head coach said: "Kieran has been absolutely magnificent since signing for the club and has been the catalyst of our success. Collectively we were off our best today.

"We have to do better, there are reasons behind every performance and we have struggled to change players. That is a big miss with the quality of players out. The longer you do it, the harder it gets. I am disappointed, a missed opportunity, we did not grab it."

While Newcastle's home form has been up there with the title challengers, their away form has been the exact opposite. Howe's side have won just one game in the Premier League away from St James' Park, the 8-0 mauling of Sheffield United back in September.

"The game was there for us to win in the second half. The first half was even and we had them penned in in the second half. We conceded the first goal and it changed the momentum of the match. Frustrating and a chance missed," he said.

"Last year our away form was good, free-scoring and the defensive record was good. We have



Newcastle United's English defender Kieran Trippier, right, reacts after conceding a second goal during the English Premier League football match between Everton and Newcastle United at Goodison Park in Liverpool, north west England on Dec. 7, 2023. AFP

not got going on the road, apart from the Sheffield United game. Something for us to analyze."

In a season full of injury blows, the Magpies again suffered a scare with skipper Jamaal Lascelles withdrawn late on. Howe, however, has allayed fears this particular injury is anything serious.

Howe said: "I don't think it is a serious one, it looks like a dead leg."

He added: "You have to take into account Lewis Miley and his age, a huge ask but he handled himself really well. We have a lot of difficult situations at the moment which we have to manage. Today I have to call the performance as I see it, we weren't at our best."

Next up for United is another tough-looking trip to Tottenham Hotspur, who have also been faltering due to injuries.

"The beauty of football is that you have another game. We are desperate for help with players back and hopefully that will happen," said Howe.

Weekend Lifestyle, Art & Culture



A commemorative statue of the Iriomote cat on Iriomote Island in Okinawa.



(Above) Kokusaidori, the bustling main street in Naha, Okinawa's capital city, is a favorite with tourists. (Right) An aerial view of Iriomote Island. Shutterstock



EAT, PLAY, LOVE

Escape to Okinawa, Japan's historic island paradise

The prefecture offers outstanding scenery, plenty of history and culture, and a laidback vibe

Julian Ryall Tokyo

Located at the intersection of trade routes that linked Japan, China, south-east Asia and the tiny islands that dot the Pacific Ocean, the Japanese prefecture of Okinawa has adopted flavors from all its neighbors, but still managed to remain true to its cultural and historic roots.

Those influences can be tasted in the area's cuisine and witnessed in its unique architectural styles, festivals and attitudes that are more laidback Pacific than formal Japanese. And local people — descendants of the Ryukyuan Kingdom that was absorbed into Japan in 1872 — still take a fierce pride in being distinct.

Now Japan's most southerly prefecture, Okinawa consists of more than 150 islands, dotted between southern Kyushu to a point just over the horizon from Taiwan. Some of the more remote islands are uninhabited while others have just a handful of homes in communities that have changed little in generations. Bullocks pull wooden carts across the beach flats and the sound of three-string "shamisen" being plucked floats on the warm evening air.

The lifestyles of those outer islands is quite a contrast to Naha, the regional capital — less than two

hours' flying time from Tokyo and connections to the Middle East.

Kokusaidori runs for more than 2 km through the heart of the city and, while touristic, is still the best place to get your first taste of Okinawa. Cafes, bars, boutiques and gaudy stores selling trinkets are cheek-by-jowl.

Okinawan cuisine is a blend of many influences, with fish abundant in the surrounding waters, pork imported from China when the Ryukyus were still independent and fruits and spices from south-east Asia. For non-Muslims, no visit would be complete without sampling goya champuru, the islands' signature dish that typically combines pork, tofu, eggs and goya, a green gourd with its own distinctive, bitter taste. Pork belly (rafute), simmered in soy sauce before being glazed with brown sugar, is another favorite, along with the local take on soba noodles.

Just off Kokusaidori is the covered market where many of the restaurants source their ingredients every day. In a warren of narrow alleyways, stalls are also piled high with every conceivable household utensil, local fabrics and electronic gadgets that you never knew you needed.

Naha is overlooked from the east by Shuri Castle. The main elements of the



(Above) Shuri Castle, the UNESCO World Heritage site that overlooks Naha in Okinawa. (Below) Goya champuru, Okinawa's signature dish. Shutterstock

UNESCO World Heritage site were razed to the ground by fire in 1945, but work is underway to rebuild the iconic red structure and it is expected to once again be fully open to visitors by 2026.

Despite the damage, the castle is still worth visiting. The fortified buildings on the site dating back to the 12th century CE, when Shuri was the center of Ryukyuan politics, diplomacy and culture. An earlier version of the castle was designated

a national treasure in 1925, but was destroyed in the fierce fighting that took place in Okinawa in the closing stages of World War II.

Its outer fortifications, gateways and courtyards escaped damage in the most recent fire, and their gracefully curving walls of limestone are markedly different from traditional Japanese castles. A series of decorated gateways lead deeper into the complex, their designs reflecting Chinese as well as Japanese and Ryukyuan influences.

Okinawa's islands are dotted with fortresses that were the power bases of local warlords, with Zakimi Castle another well-preserved example dating from the early 1400s. On the west coast of the main island, it dominates a hill overlooking the town of Yomitan and its thick

walls complement the curves of the coastline below.

The islands' recent history is overshadowed by the brutal battles that took place here in 1945. The Okinawa Prefectural Peace Memorial Museum opened in 1975 to give a fuller sense of the human tragedy. Built atop sea cliffs in the far south of the prefecture, on the site of the Imperial Japanese Army's last stand, the museum's gardens have rings of tall black stones bearing the names of each of the more than 250,000 men, women and children who died in the fighting here, regardless of nationality. A short walk away, along an avenue lined with memorials to the dead of each of Japan's prefectures, is the tiny case where the commanding officer of the defeated defenders committed suicide rather than surrender.

Peace has once more returned to Okinawa and for anyone in search of true tranquility, consider a trip to Iriomote, the second-largest of the islands. It is famous for its unspoiled natural environment and a unique species of wild cat.

Its sparse coastal communities are linked by a single road and the island's interior is largely untouched — and protected as a national park. Visitors can explore by sea kayak, while a 20-km trail leads through the jungles of the interior and the mangrove swamps of the coast, all providing an enviable escape from the pace of modern city life.



Screen Scene

NEW TO WATCH AT HOME



Mr Monk's Last Case

Starring: Tony Shalhoub, Caitlin McGee

Where: OSN+
A welcome return to the world of "Monk,"

the Emmy-award winning show about a brilliant detective with obsessive-compulsive disorder that ended in 2009. When the fiancée of Monk's stepdaughter is murdered, Monk steps out of retirement to tackle the case.

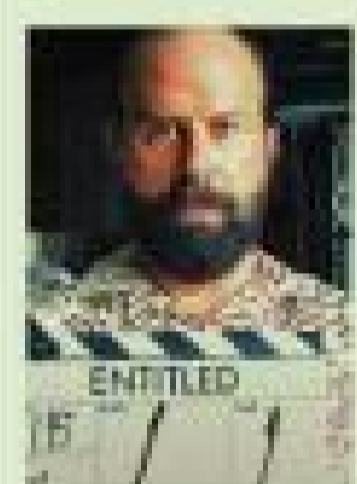


Leave The World Behind

Starring: Julia Roberts, Mahershala Ali, Ethan Hawke, Myha'la

Where: Netflix

A family taking a luxurious break on Long Island are disturbed when a blackout knocks out their communications. Then two strangers arrive at the house, and they learn the blackout is not restricted to the local area, but has spread across the world.



Entitled

Starring: Brett Gelman, Donald Sutherland, Brendan Patricks

Where: OSN+
American widower Gabe

travels to England to meet the estranged family of his late (British) wife in their crumbling gothic mansion in the countryside. Their, they compete to gain his affection — and (they hope) a share of his newly inherited fortune.



Blood Coast

Starring: Jeanne Goursaud, Nicolas Duvauchelle, Tewfik Jallab

Where: Netflix

A group of maverick police officers in Marseille try to put an end to a violent drug war that threatens to turn their city into a bloodbath. The latest recruit to the cops' daredevil team, however, appears to have an agenda of her own.



My Life With The Walter Boys

Starring: Nikki Rodriguez, Marc Blucas, Alisha Newton

Where: Netflix

Recently orphaned 15-year-old Jackie moves from Manhattan to her guardians' Colorado ranch where she must learn to adapt to country ways, as well as to life with a family of 12 — including several good-looking sons.

CULTURE

New book tackles climate change from children's perspective

Rawan Talass Riyadh

How do young people feel about climate change? That question is being posed through a new children's picture book, published to coincide with the launch of the climate change conference COP28 in Dubai.

The book, which is available in both English and Arabic, is called "Earth Champs," and it contains 44 diverse artworks made by youngsters aged 5-17 from around the globe.

"We wanted to convey a message about an important cause, like climate change, through art. We

wanted to see how children view climate change and we were surprised with the results," Lateefa Alnuaimi, the Emirati founder of LIFE Art Culture, the institution that supported the book's creation, told Arab News. "They know what it's about, but they don't how to express it, so we gave them a paper and a pen, and of course, they drew. Each young person expressed what's inside of them."

To gather the work for the book, Alnuaimi put out an open call to international schools in Europe, Africa, and the Middle East. She received nearly 1,500 entries. The selected pieces range from



sculpture to photography and drawing. They depict animals and plants, as well as environments that are in danger. There are elements of both hope and concern. "What shocked me was their way of thinking and how talented they are with the way they handle a

(Left) Children holding a copy of "Earth Champs" at the launch event. (Right) The cover of "Earth Champs." Images supplied

paintbrush or a camera," Alnuaimi said. "They were professional, which indicates how educated they are." Alnuaimi also noted that the current generation of children are generally more aware of the urgency of climate change than their elders.

"It was important to show people that children care about climate change. They're not a silent voice — they 'spoke' about it through art," she said.

Thirty copies of the book have already been privately gifted to UAE ministers and sheikhs. After COP28 ends on Dec. 12, Alnuaimi hopes to make "Earth Champs" available to purchase online and in shops. "It's a book from the UAE to the world," she said.

She also offered advice on how parents (and other adults) and educational institutions can encourage children in the region to look after the environment.

"It's important to host workshops on climate change, educate students to properly use electricity, and partake in campaigns to clean up the ocean and the desert," she said.



It was astounding what happened to 'The Present,' but I'm keenly aware that I can't rest on my previous accolades.

Farah Nabulsi
Filmmaker



Weekend



British Palestinian filmmaker Farah Nabulsi on the set of her debut feature film 'The Teacher,' which screened in competition at the Red Sea International Film Festival in Jeddah last week. Image supplied

RED SEA INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

Farah Nabulsi: 'What's happening in Palestine can't be ignored anymore'

The British Palestinian filmmaker discusses her debut feature 'The Teacher'

William Mullaly Dubai

As the war in Gaza stretches into its second month, "The Teacher," the feature debut of Oscar-nominated British Palestinian filmmaker Farah Nabulsi, which screened in competition at the Red Sea International Film Festival this week, could hardly have had a timelier airing in the region.

"The Teacher" is the latest in the canon of films chronicling the contemporary Palestinian experience under occupation, and dives into several themes that have been the subject of global discussion as the conflict between Israel and Hamas rages on. In the film, a member of the Israeli Defense Forces is held hostage in the West Bank as his parents fight for his release, international aid workers grapple with their role in supporting justice, and a schoolteacher struggles to unite his community as local settlers wage a campaign of violence.

But for Nabulsi, who was herself put into the global spotlight after the success of her debut short film "The Present" in 2020, "The Teacher" was never intended as a political statement. First and foremost, the film exists as an exploration of the human condition, as ordinary people are forced to contend with extraordinary circumstances. Its meaning, ultimately, is left for the viewer to decide.

"I did not make this film with a message," Nabulsi tells Arab News. "I didn't even set out to make a political film, but, by default, any film about Palestine is going to be considered political somehow. It can certainly be interpreted as including statements about the socio-political environment we exist in, but it is storytelling first and foremost, not an essay. I'm more interested in the individual journeys of people in that

landscape, the human dynamics and the emotional experiences.

"If I can create one moment that an audience member is left contemplating long after the film ends, if I've created one character whose humanity forges a genuine connection to this situation for the viewer, then I've accomplished what I set out to do," she continues. "If the film does contain a deeper meaning, it should be a personal one that the viewer comes to on their own. That's what exists in the movies that inspired me, and that's what I want in my movies, too."

While Nabulsi did enter filmmaking with the idea of highlighting the plight of the Palestinian people — turning her back on investment banking after an illuminating trip to the West Bank — she could never have predicted the journey her first short would take. "The Present" garnered awards at nearly every festival in which it screened, and ended up earning a BAFTA, as well as an Academy Award nomination for Best Short Film. Soon after that, it was trending worldwide on Netflix, with former CIA director John Brennan even penning a New York Times opinion piece about it entitled "Why Biden Must Watch This Palestinian Movie."

"I came to filmmaking late, but the deeper I got into it, the more it became clear to me that the industry has a graveyard of brilliant films that no one will ever see — films that people poured



(Left) Muhammad Abed El-Rahman (L) and Saleh Bakri in 'The Teacher.' (Below, from left) Producer Mohannad Malas, Farah Nabulsi, actor Muhammad Abed El-Rahman, producer Sawwan Aafari and guest attend 'The Teacher' premiere in Toronto in September. (Bottom) Saleh Bakri and Imogen Poots in 'The Teacher.' Supplied, AFP, supplied



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their hearts and souls into, but that, for one reason or another, never captured the world's attention," Nabulsi says. "It was astounding what happened to 'The Present,' but I'm keenly aware that I can't rest on my previous accolades and expect the same formula to be repeated each time. And if I try to pander to that same audience in order to provoke the same result, it will do me no good either."

"In approaching a follow up, I had to unburden myself from all of that success. I'll be grateful forever for what that film gave me, but to hold myself to that with every subsequent endeavor would be ridiculous," she continues. "In order to tell the next story, I had to focus on doing justice to these

characters and their plight, I had to be sure that my artistic expression never lost its integrity, and then let the chips fall where they may."

It's clear to Nabulsi that "The Teacher" will not be as easy for audiences to process as "The Present" proved to be. The latter followed a father named Yusef (Saleh Bakri) and his daughter Yasmine (Miriam Kanj) as they made their way through checkpoints in the West Bank in order to bring home a gift for her mother, leading to a final conflict with border patrol agents that ends with a surprisingly optimistic result. "The Teacher" features Bakri in the title role playing something much closer to an "anti-hero," in Nabulsi's words,

and resolves in a far more complicated fashion.

"There's a lot to absorb compared to the simple story of 'The Present.' There are a couple layers of injustice in 'The Teacher' and with these various characters and journeys on both sides of the conflict, there's a lot to digest — especially if you're not familiar with the reality on the ground," says Nabulsi.

"But even as people may have wildly different interpretations of the film, I think a lot of people are coming from a place of goodwill and good intentions. Most who will watch a film like this just want to understand, because what's happening in Palestine can't be ignored anymore. And with what's happening in Gaza now, though the timing of the film is coincidental, people are more focused on these issues than perhaps ever before," she continues.

Now that the film is completed and continuing its acclaimed run on the festival circuit, Nabulsi is able to sit back and begin to chart her own journey. "The Teacher" was an experience of personal growth too, one in which she developed not only as an artist, but as a person.

"If you looked at the runtimes of (my) two films, you'd say ('The Teacher') should be six times harder, but it was honestly hundreds of times more difficult. Perhaps I have myself to blame — I put so much pressure on myself, wore so many hats from beginning to end, and spent three years living and breathing this film, all day each day. And the sacrifices that come with that are heavy," says Nabulsi.

"Sometimes it's not easy to enjoy the journey. But there are moments — truly beautiful moments. I think I've become more able to recognize those triumphs and appreciate them, and then, when they're over, get down the mountain and get ready to start again," she continues. "And as difficult as this can all get, it becomes clearer and clearer to me that nothing great can come without hardship."