

**The FORTNIGHTLY**

A Review of Middle East Regional Economic & Cultural News & Developments

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**Written & Edited by Seth J. Vogelman\***

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ISRAEL GOVERNMENT ACTIONS & STATEMENTS

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* 1. Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Visits Israel on Abraham Accords’ Second Anniversary

Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, UAE Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, arrived in Israel on a state visit on 14 September. Sheikh Abdullah arrived with a high-level UAE delegation for a visit that spanned several days. The trip also marked with the second anniversary of the historic Abraham Accords. During his visit, the UAE’s foreign minister met Israeli officials to discuss issues of mutual concern and matters related to UAE-Israel relations, as well as prospects for their cooperation. The trip comes six months after Sheikh Abdullah travelled to Israel in March, marking his first official visit to the state.

In December last year, then Israeli Prime Minister Bennett, arrived in the UAE as part of an official visit, where he met UAE President Sheikh Mohamed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan. In January this year, Israel’s President Isaac Herzog visited the UAE, marking the first-ever state visit by an Israeli president to the country. (Various 15.09)

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* 1. Israel & Bahrain Begin Talks Over Free Trade Agreement

On 20 September, Israel and Bahrain began negotiating a free trade agreement. Israel-Bahrain trade in 2021 totaled some $7.5 million. Israeli Economy Minister Barbivai met with her Bahraini counterpart Salman bin Khalifa Al Khalifa in Manama to start talks aimed at removing trade barriers between the two countries,

Apart from trade, Israeli and Bahraini institutions in April of this year signed a Memorandum of Understanding to promote coexistence between Jews and Arabs in the Middle East. In July, Israel's Prime Minister Yair Lapid spoke with Bahrain’s Crown Prince and Prime Minister Emir Salman bin Hamad al-Khalifa, and more recently, Israeli President Isaac Herzog said he would soon visit Bahrain.

While economic ties with the UAE took off, Israel's trade with Bahrain has not progressed at the same rate. Last May, Israel concluded a free trade deal with the UAE – its first with an Arab country – that officials estimate will increase trade from $1.2 billion to $10 billion in five years. (Various 20.09)

ISRAEL MARKET & BUSINESS NEWS

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* 1. Sightfull Raises $18 Million in a Series A Round to Leverage SaaS Business Data

Tel Aviv's [Sightfull](http://www.sightfull.com), the company enabling strategic analysis of business data at scale, announced an $18 million series A funding round led by Dell Technologies Capital with the participation of Norwest Venture Partners and Tiger Global. The new investment brings total funding to $24 million and will be used to accelerate product development, meet increasing market demand and expand the Sightfull team across multiple departments.

Sightfull enables SaaS companies to quickly analyze vast amounts of complex business data in order to continuously test and adjust their go-to-market strategies. Sightfull’s self-service platform is designed for use by everyone from the Revenue Operations and Finance teams to senior revenue leaders and executives, allowing them to quickly answer all their business critical questions without depending on data analysts. Sightfull’s unique brand of autonomous analysis is based on proprietary technology which enables SaaS companies to quickly identify choke-points within their organizations that are holding back revenue growth. The Sightfull platform helps SaaS companies quickly drive revenue growth by leveraging the full power of their business data. (Sightfull 13.09)

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* 1. Adaptive Shield and Tenable Partner to Enhance SaaS Security Posture

Adaptive Shield announced a partnership with Tenable, the Cyber Exposure Management company, to provide a consolidated posture management solution that correlates the risk of SaaS users and their endpoints. By correlating Tenable’s rich vulnerability insights within Adaptive Shield’s SaaS security posture technology, security teams will gain context and visibility to easily see and manage the risks that come from SaaS users and their associated devices. This partnership enables organizations to enrich their understanding of device and user posture and their influence on one another.

Tel Aviv's [Adaptive Shield](http://www.adaptive-shield.com) enables security teams to maintain a secure SaaS app stack by continuously monitoring SaaS apps, users and their devices, identifying misconfigurations, assessing SaaS-to-SaaS risk and fixing any weakness. Adaptive Shield works with many Fortune 500 enterprises and has been named Gartner Cool Vendor 2022. (Adaptive Shield 13.09)

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* 1. Opus Security Emerges from Stealth with $10 Million in Funding

Opus Security announced $10 million in seed funding led by YL Ventures with participation from Tiger Global and renowned security executives and serial entrepreneurs. Aware of the concerning challenges and skill gaps in cloud security, Opus is set to transform the way response and remediation are done in the cloud. Opus has built a singular, overarching platform that connects existing cloud and security tools and relevant stakeholders, and orchestrates the entire response and remediation process across all organizational environments based on tried-and-tested, easily deployed guidelines and playbooks. Leveraging automation to the highest degree, Opus knows when sensitive issues demand human involvement and allows automation to resolve the rest. With instant visibility and mapping of remediation metrics, Opus removes blind spots and provides security and business executives with immediate and tangible insights into the state of their risk.

Tel Aviv's [Opus](https://www.opus.security/) is a singular, overarching Cloud Security Orchestration and Remediation platform, transforming the way remediation is conducted in the cloud. Opus empowers cloud security teams to see beyond alerts and threats and gain control, knowledge and capabilities to resolve them. Opus integrates with existing security tools and orchestrates the entire remediation process across all stakeholders and organizational environments, based on tried-and-tested, easily deployed guidelines and playbooks. (Opus Security 13.09)

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* 1. CYREBRO Raises $40 Million in Series C Funding for Cloud-Based Security Center

CYREBRO announced a $40 million Series C investment led by Koch Disruptive Technologies (KDT), alongside new investor Elaia. Existing investors Mangrove Capital Partners, Prytek, Bank Mizrachi and InCapital Group are also participating in the round. The company will use this latest investment to accelerate its go-to-market strategy becoming the global solution for all Managed Security Service Providers (MSSPs), IT providers and businesses of all sizes.

Delivering the base and benefits of a true and managed SOC infrastructure to SMBs via channel partners and to enterprises, CYREBRO eliminates the extremely costly endeavor of building their own in-house SOC, which is difficult to develop and almost impossible to maintain. With its plug-and-play installation, the platform provides full-visibility of the existing security posture while delivering highly advanced cybersecurity with fast and efficient responses to cyber threats to businesses of all sizes. End customers benefit from a first-of-its-kind, complete SOC Infrastructure offering with advanced 24/7/365 capabilities, including threat intelligence and hunting, forensic investigation and incident response.

Having pioneered the first online managed Security Operations Center (SOC) Infrastructure, Tel Aviv's [CYREBRO](http://www.cyrebro.io) brings enterprise-grade cybersecurity to businesses of all sizes, ensuring fast and efficient responses to cyber threats and their mitigation. End customers benefit from a first-of-its-kind, complete SOC Infrastructure offering with advanced 24/7/365 capabilities, including threat intelligence and hunting, forensic investigation, and incident response. (CYREBRO 14.09)

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* 1. xtype Raises $5.8 Million to Accelerate ServiceNow App Development

xtype announced $5.8 million in seed funding in a round led by Columbia Capital with participation from Inner Loop Capital and SaaS Ventures. The company will use the funds to accelerate its product roadmap by growing the development team, as well as increase its presence in the US market, expanding its sales and customer success teams.

xtype's deployment and release automation platform dramatically increase enterprises' ability to deliver new features and applications on ServiceNow. The platform boosts the productivity of development teams and reduces the number of errors and escalations by combining modern DevOps practices with advanced automation and synchronization technology. Using xtype, app releases are automated, and new versions are deployed with a single click, allowing teams to adopt a Continuous Delivery approach. Additionally, the platform provides 360° real-time command and control of an organization's ServiceNow ecosystem that prevents unwanted changes from being included in a release and provides cross-instance transparency on what's been updated, where and by whom.

Tel Aviv's [xtype](http://www.xtype.io), a deployment and release automation platform native to ServiceNow, was founded in 2020. The platform is already used by dozens of leading enterprises and technology companies, including HP, Zurich Insurance, Bank of Montreal and Playtika. (xtype 14.09)

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* 1. groundcover Raises $24.5 Million for the Next Generation of APM with eBPF

Tel Aviv's [groundcover](http://www.groundcover.com), a start up with a mission to reinvent the cloud-native application monitoring domain with eBPF, raised $24.5 million in funding: $4.5 million in seed funding and $20 million in a Series A round. The A series was led by Zeev Ventures joined by previous investors Angular Ventures, Heavybit and Jibe Ventures. The funds will be used for further product development. Founded in 2021, groundcover uses eBPF to help teams monitor their K8s applications effortlessly, at scale, by pinpointing bleeding issues and providing insights to solve them much faster.

eBPF was first introduced in 2014 and allows programs to run directly in an isolated virtual machine inside the Linux kernel. In the last 24 months, eBPF has evolved to solve new use cases, becoming the next great promise in fields like network infrastructure, security and observability. groundcover utilizes eBPF to provide deep Kubernetes observability, using it to trace any type of event – from network and infrastructure, all the way to services and applications running in the user space. By using eBPF to collect observability data straight from the Linux kernel, groundcover requires no R&D efforts in the process. Together with a unique edge-compute approach to collect data efficiently, groundcover covers everything yet stores only what matters. The result is super-granular yet scalable visibility into what's really happening inside a Kubernetes cluster.

groundcover is a K8s application monitoring solution that reinvents the domain with eBPF. Built for modern production environments, it covers everything yet stores only what matters, allowing teams to scale away without worries. (groundcover 14.09)

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* 1. Dig Security Secures $34 Million Series A to Deliver Real-time Cloud Data Security

Dig Security has secured a $34 million Series A investment led by San-Francisco-based venture capital firm, SignalFire, with participation from Felicis; Okta Ventures; Nir Polak, Venture Partner at SignalFire and others; and existing investor, Team8. The latest investment will accelerate go-to-market efforts to meet the growing demand for the Dig Data Security Platform and deliver new enhancements that solve the difficult problem of securing cloud data. Dig's Series A brings its total funding to $45 million less than a year after its seed round in October 2021, enabling Dig to further advance its single platform, single policy engine approach for multi-cloud environments.

The Dig data security platform is the industry's first and only solution to combine data security posture management (DSPM), data loss prevention (DLP), and data detection and response (DDR) capabilities into a single platform. Dig is the only data security solution on the market that provides real-time detection and response to threats against data to stop potential data breaches early in the kill chain. It supports all cloud infrastructures, including AWS, Azure and GCP, and popular data clouds like Snowflake and Databricks.

Tel Aviv's [Dig Security](Dig%20Security%2014.09)‎) helps organizations discover, classify, protect and govern their cloud data. With organizations shifting to complex environments with dozens of database types across clouds, monitoring and detecting data exfiltration and policy violations has become a complex problem with limited fragmented solutions. Dig's cloud-native and completely agentless approach re-invents cloud DLP with DDR capabilities to help organizations better cope with cloud data sprawl. (Dig Security 14.09)

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* 1. Zesty Raises $75 Million for Tech that Adjusts Cloud Usage to Save Money

Zesty closed a $75 million Series B round co-led by B Capital and Sapphire Ventures with participation from Next47 and S Capital. Bringing the company’s total raised to $116 million, the proceeds will be put toward supporting product development and expanding Zesty’s workforce from 120 employees to 160 by the end of the year.

At the core of Zesty is an AI model trained on real-world and “synthetic” cloud resource usage data that attempts to predict how many cloud resources (e.g., CPU cores, hard drives and so on) an app needs at any given time. The platform takes actions informed by the model’s projections, like automatically shrinking, expanding and adjusting storage volume types and purchasing and selling public cloud instances. To increase or decrease storage, Zesty transforms filesystem volumes in the cloud into a virtual disk with a series of multiple volumes, each of which can be expanded or shrunk.

Tel Aviv's [Zesty](https://zesty.co/‎) helps organizations to be more adaptable to changing business needs by making their cloud infrastructure more dynamic. With offerings for compute, block storage, and Kubernetes, Zesty automatically scales resources to meet application demands in real-time. This helps cloud engineering teams to slash cloud costs, maintain perfect app performance, minimize the hassle of managing infra and fully realize the true flexibility of the cloud. (Zesty 13.09)

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* 1. monday.com Opens New North American Headquarters in NYC

monday.com officially opened its new North American headquarters in New York City. The 110,000 square foot space expands over four floors, at 225 Park Avenue South, tripling the team’s overall footprint in New York City when compared to its previous office in the city. monday.com has prioritized transparency from the start of the office search, giving members of the team opportunities to tour potential spaces, openly providing feedback, and sharing their list of aspirations for their new office space. Beyond that, the operations team made sure to prioritize a location that is easily accessible and commutable for the team across the city and surrounding areas, which led to the sublease of this prime Flatiron District location.

Like each of the company’s global offices, the New York space is designed to be an extension of the local team and region, both aesthetically and functionally. This includes local and approachable art, versatile workspaces, and various options for collaboration from conference rooms to double or single phone booths for taking calls.

Tel Aviv's [monday.com](https://monday.com) Work OS is an open platform that democratizes the power of software so organizations can easily build work management tools and software applications to fit their every need. The platform intuitively connects people to processes and systems, empowering teams to excel in every aspect of their work while creating an environment of transparency in business. The platform is fully customizable to suit any business vertical and is currently used by over 152,000 customers across over 200 industries in 200 countries and territories. (monday.com 20.09)

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* 1. Tres Raises $7.6 Million Dollars to Build the First Financial Data Lake for Web3 Firms

Tres has raised $7.6 million in a seed round led by boldstart ventures, with participation from F2; Mantis in partnership with The Chainsmokers; New Form; Kenetic; Blockdaemon Ventures and Alchemy. Offering one source of truth for crypto financial data, Tres's next-level data coverage and integrity empowers Web3 businesses to monitor, manage and automate their Web3 finance.

Tres has Web3 customers in the US, Israel and Europe, including Hivemind, Stakely and Blockdaemon, and has monitored, analyzed and reconciled crypto assets of more than $40 billion. Tres enables the collection and aggregation of digital asset data across disparate wallets, accounts and platforms, reducing the workload of manual spreadsheets — a process prone to human error — by 80%. The data is organized and enriched and allows finance teams to work with it the same way they handle fiat data, making the user experience seamless and familiar.

Tel Aviv's [Tres](https://www.tres.finance/) offers the first enterprise-grade financial data lake for Web3 companies looking to rapidly automate one source of truth across high volumes of blockchain data. Tres's next-level data coverage and integrity empowers finance teams to monitor, manage and automate their Web3 finance. Its data engine can process tens of millions of transactions per month, 10X more than any other existing tool. (Tres 20.09)

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* 1. Classiq Expands its Series B to $49 Million and New Offices

Classiq announced another significant expansion of its series B round to $49 million by Canadian-Israeli VC Awz Ventures, from an initial closing of $36 million by strategic investors—in the largest quantum software round to date. Along with significantly growing its R&D team (to increase from 50 to 100 workers in 2023), the firm also announced near-term growth in Japan and Europe, opening local offices in the next months.

In addition to adding new offices and bringing on new customers and investors, Classiq forged new partnerships this year with Amazon, ColdQuanta, and NVIDIA, in order to streamline quantum experimentation and accelerate the enterprise path to quantum advantage. These valuable new alliances come on the heels of the partnerships that Classiq announced late last year with The Fraunhofer Institute, the leading organization for applied research in Europe, The Chicago Quantum Exchange, and other industry consortiums.

Tel Aviv's [Classiq](http://www.classiq.io) is the leading quantum software company, taking quantum software to a higher level. Built for organizations that want to jumpstart and accelerate their quantum computing programs, their patented software automatically converts high-level functional models into optimized quantum circuits for most quantum computers and cloud providers. Customers use the Classiq platform to build software they could not create otherwise, bypassing the quantum assembly level. (Classiq 20.09)

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* 1. Data Security Startup Sentra Launches in the U.S. Market

Sentra formally announced its arrival in the U.S. market with the opening of its new North American headquarters in New York City. Backed by Bessemer Venture Partners and Zeev Ventures, Sentra enables security teams to gain full visibility and control of cloud data, as well as protect against sensitive data breaches across the entire public cloud stack. The company was recently recognized by Gartner as a Sample Vendor for Data Security Posture Management in the Hype Cycle report for Data Security 2022.

Sentra allows businesses to regain control over their data vulnerabilities and shrink the data attack surface by finding all cloud data, classifying it according to sensitivity, and then offering actionable remediation plans for data security teams. This data-centric approach ensures security professionals stay focused on the most critical data, including intellectual property, customer data, or sensitive employee records. Remediation plans can include eliminating duplicate shadow data, limiting access only to authorized users, and maintaining adequate security when data is in motion. Sentra's agentless solution easily integrates into a customer's infrastructure. The solution is gaining traction with enterprises plagued by data overload due to its ease of use and ability to achieve rapid results.

Co-headquartered in Tel Aviv, Israel, and New York City, [Sentra](http://www.sentra.io) has been operating in stealth mode since summer 2021. Sentra allows security teams to automate the detection and remediation of data security vulnerabilities across a company's entire cloud environment. Sentra has secured early investments from a range of sources including Bessemer Venture Partners and Zeev Ventures. (Sentra 20.09)

REGIONAL PRIVATE SECTOR NEWS

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* 1. Emirates & United Sign Agreement to Expand Market Presence & Enhance Networks

Dubai carrier Emirates and United Airlines announced a codeshare and interline agreement to enhance each airline’s network. From November, Emirates customers flying into Chicago, San Francisco and Houston will be able to connect onto United flights to and from nearly 200 cities across the Americas on a single ticket. At other US airports served by Emirates, namely Boston, Dallas, LA, Miami, JFK, Orlando, Seattle and Washington DC – both airlines will have an interline arrangement in place. Meanwhile, United will launch a new direct flight between Newark and Dubai, starting March 2023. From Dubai, passengers will be able to travel on Emirates or flydubai to more than 100 cities.

The airlines said that tickets for United’s new Dubai flight are now on sale. However, codeshare activities and United’s new flight to the emirate are subject to government approvals. Customers of both airlines will soon be able to book connecting flights on a single ticket, easing check-in and luggage transfer. The agreement will also grant loyalty program members of both airlines additional reward opportunities. (GB 15.09)

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* 1. Language Associates Wins a $10.6 Million Contract for UAE

Language Associates of Arlington, Virginia was awarded a $10,589,561 indefinite-delivery/indefinite-quantity contract for English language training in support of the Air Force Security Assistance Training Squadron. Work will be performed in the United Arab Emirates and is expected to be completed by 20 September 2025. This contract involves 100% Foreign Military Sales (FMS) to the United Arab Emirates. This award is the result of a country-directed sole-source acquisition. FMS funds in the amount of $2,913,009 are being obligated at the time of award. The 338th Enterprise Sourcing Squadron, Joint Base San Antonio-Randolph, Texas, is the contracting activity. (DoD 14.09)

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* 1. Cloud Kitchen Platform The Cloud Raises $10 Million in Latest Funding Round

Third-generation B2B2C cloud kitchen platform The Cloud has raised $10 million in funding led by Middle East Venture Partners (MEVP) and Olayan Financing Company (the Middle East investment arm of The Olayan Group) with participation from Rua Growth Fund. The successful Series A funding follows an initial pre-seed round at the end of 2019, which was led by Elēkrŏn Ventures and a subsequent seed round at the end of 2020, which was led by MEVP.

The new funding round will allow The Cloud to continue its expansion in GCC and Europe. The investment also provides bandwidth for the company to increase and accelerate the development of its AI-powered kitchen matching platform.

[The Cloud](https://thecloud.ae/) was established in 2019 and is supported by Hub71, Abu Dhabi’s unique, global tech ecosystem. The Cloud has been built on the principle of the 'Airbnb of kitchens’ and allows restaurant owners to increase their kitchen utilization by transforming restaurants into cloud kitchens. The company’s proprietary tech stack and virtual brands portfolio enables restaurants to achieve a full virtual set-up in less than 30 days. (Various 16.09)

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* 1. Advent Signs MoU with Saudi Company to Distribute Fuel Cells in the Middle East

Boston's Advent Technologies Holdings, an innovation-driven leader in the fuel cell and hydrogen technology space, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Hydrogen Systems, a hydrogen energy solutions company based in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, to provide integrated hydrogen solutions and value-added support to industrial and renewable energy markets in the Middle East.

Under the MoU, Hydrogen Systems aims to utilize a vast number of existing relationships in the telecom and hydrogen energy marketplace in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere throughout the Middle East to market, sell, distribute, install and service Advent’s full line of high-temperature proton exchange membrane fuel cells and hydrogen production products. Simultaneously, Advent and Hydrogen Systems intend to collaborate and explore potential large-scale development opportunities for hydrogen fuel cell power applications across the region. (Advent 15.09)

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* 1. Nala & Saudi Excellence's First AI-Based Cloud Kitchen in Saudi Arabia

Naperville, Illinois' Nala Robotics, an AI robotics company disrupting the culinary industry with its restaurant-as-a-service platform, and the Saudi Excellence Company, a Riyadh-based tech company, announced a strategic agreement to develop, market and deliver autonomous food services to Saudi Arabia, a promising digitally connected market in the Middle East.

According to the MoU, signed in Riyadh, both companies will work together to bring advanced and affordable AI robotic solutions to restaurants and food service providers in Saudi Arabia, including establishing the country's first fully autonomous eatery that will serve a wide variety of Saudi and Middle Eastern dishes.

The partnership's immediate and longer-term objectives include establishing a R&D center for artificial intelligence and machine learning robotics, setting-up Saudi Arabia's first AI-based robotic cloud kitchen that will prepare and cook Shawarma, Doner, Tamiya and other Middle Eastern cuisine, creating a training center for AI robotics engineers and technicians and building a regional center for sales, marketing and fulfillment across the Middle East and North Africa. (Nala Robotics 15.09)

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* 1. Saudi B2C Ecommerce is Expected to Grow by 24% to Reach $31.7 Billion by 2026

The "Saudi Arabia B2C Ecommerce Market Opportunities Databook report has been added to [ResearchAndMarkets](http://www.ResearchAndMarkets.com).com's offering. According to the Q2/22 B2C Ecommerce Survey, the market in Saudi Arabia is expected to grow by 23.85% on annual basis to reach $17.5 billion in 2022. The medium to the long-term growth story of the B2C Ecommerce industry in Saudi Arabia promises to be attractive. B2C Ecommerce is expected to grow steadily over the forecast period, recording a CAGR of 16% during 2022-2026. The country's B2C Ecommerce Gross Merchandise Value will increase from $14.1 billion in 2021 to reach $31.7 billion by 2026.

From the economic viewpoint, growing retail spending across the Kingdom is primed to be among the most prominent, a trend which is a near-certainty as more products are becoming accessible to a large audience and foreign retail expenditure is being captured. All of these factors will result in several positive outcomes over the next three to four years for the e-commerce industry in Saudi Arabia. However, the high-growth potential of the e-commerce market is apparent despite its infancy.

Amid the growing competition in the online food service segment, startups are increasingly raising investment from private equity and venture capital firms to accelerate their business expansion. For instance, in March 2022, DailyMealz, a healthy food delivery app based in Saudi Arabia, announced that the firm had raised $5 million in its pre-series A funding round, which included participation from Hala Ventures, Saudi Airlines Catering, MLM investment company, and VEDA Holding, among others. The firm is planning to use the newly-acquired investment to further accelerate business expansion, which includes new products and geographical expansion.

The online grocery market has recorded strong growth over the last two years due to the global pandemic outbreak, which forced consumers to shop for groceries and food items from their homes. This resulted in many innovative startups entering the market to meet the growing demand. As the grocery delivery market continues to grow in Saudi Arabia, these startups are raising funding rounds to further increase their market share. To this end, in February 2022, Nana, which fulfills online grocery orders from its dark stores and delivers within 15 minutes, announced that the firm had raised $50 million in a funding round led by FIM Partners and STV. Notably, the firm plans to use the funding round to further consolidate its position in the regional market. Nana is planning to have more than 150 dark stores by 2022. Of those, more will be located in Saudi Arabia, as the firm aims to cover more cities across the Kingdom. According to the firm, 90% of the daily grocery needs in Riyadh are covered through NanaExpress, the online delivery service offered by Nana. (R&M 20.09)

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* 1. Allison Transmission and Anadolu Isuzu Partner on Electric Trucks & Buses

Indianapolis' Allison Transmission, a leading designer and manufacturer of conventional, electric hybrid and fully electric vehicle propulsion solutions, announced a strategic joint cooperation agreement (JCA) with Turkey's leading bus and truck manufacturer Anadolu Isuzu. As a part of this JCA, Allison eGen Power 100S electric axles will be integrated into Anadolu Isuzu's light-duty truck and midibus platforms for refuse, distribution and public transportation applications.

This integration program marks a critical step in Anadolu Isuzu’s efforts to deliver vehicles that reduce emissions and carbon footprint, while also improving vehicle performance. Allison eGen Power 100S electric axles enable the production of electric trucks and buses that not only meet the current performance criteria but go beyond them, while maintaining the quality and reliability Anadolu Isuzu and Allison have earned a reputation for over decades. (Allison Transmission 19.09)

CLEAN TECH & ENVIRONMENTAL DEVELOPMENTS

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* 1. Dubai Reduces Carbon Emissions by 21% in 2021

The emirate of Dubai has reduced its carbon emissions by 21% in 2021, the Dubai Supreme Council of Energy has announced. The Supreme Council also discussed a plan submitted by Emirates Gas Company to enhance current gas cylinders to advanced ones in terms of safety and reduced weight for the coming period. Emirates Gas Company is a subsidiary of Dubai-based ENOC.

The meeting discussed several topics, including the results achieved by the Dubai Carbon Abatement Strategy 2030, which aims to reduce 30% of carbon emissions by the end of 2030. The meeting reviewed Dubai's roadmap, which includes national initiatives and strategies to achieve net-zero carbon emissions and consolidate a low-carbon economy. These include the Net Zero by 2050 Strategic Initiative, the Dubai Clean Energy Strategy 2050, the Dubai Net Zero Carbon Emissions Strategy 2050 to provide 100% of the total power production capacity from clean energy sources by 2050, and the Dubai Carbon Abatement Strategy 2030, as well as adopting the latest technologies in this area.

The UAE announced its Net Zero 2050 Strategic Initiative in October last year to reduce carbon emissions. The UAE will also host COP28 in November 2023 at Expo City Dubai. (GB 19.09)

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* 1. Egypt to Focus on Water Crises at COP27

Egypt is planning to include the water issue among the top items for international climate action during the United Nations Climate Change Conference 2022 (COP27), which it will host in Sharm el-Sheikh in November on behalf of African countries. The move to include the water issue on the conference’s agenda comes within the framework of Egypt’s policy to adapt and reduce the negative effects of climate change on water resources, especially the Nile waters flowing from outside its border.

As part of the Egyptian government’s efforts to confront climate change and its repercussions, the state has implemented in recent years a number of projects to adapt to water scarcity. These projects include water treatment and recycling projects, such as the Bahr el-Baqar wastewater treatment plant that irrigates large agricultural lands in north and central Sinai, and Al-Mahsama water reclamation plant east of the Suez Canal. In addition, several seawater desalination projects have been established to supply coastal cities with water, including a plant in al-Alamein.

The COP27 will be the first event to include the water issues as a separate axis in the climate action, although climate change has direct repercussions on the water sector, including droughts, floods and sea-level rise. Egypt will also work on promoting investment projects in the water sector, especially in the Nile Basin countries, which represent 20% of the African continent. The water-related initiative that is expected to be launched at the COP27 will include basic clauses related to the integrated water resources management, water governance and fair distribution and sustainable use of water. This will be in the interest of the downstream countries’ positions when it comes to international rivers, as they will help them secure their share of the water as part of sustainability and undue consumption by upstream countries. (Al-Monitor 15.09)

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* 1. Renault Will Start Producing EVs at its Tangier Plant in 2023

Renault Maroc is aiming to produce 17,000 Mobilize Duo brand EVs each ear at its existing auto assembly plant in Tangier when it becomes fully operational. Half of the production inputs going into the EVs will be made from recycled materials. Morocco has transformed itself into a regional automotive powerhouse through smart incentives and consistent government policy and is now a key exporter to Europe as well as to other MENA countries, including Egypt.

Renault and Stellantis already operate Moroccan EV assembly facilities producing 700,000 cars each year. Citroen also produces around 50,000 EV buses per year with plans to double that output in two years. Overall, Morocco is targeting the production of around 1 million EVs in the next three to four years. Renault is also looking at Morocco to source materials for batteries. Renault signed an agreement with Moroccan mining firm Managem to supply it with 5,000 tonnes per year of cobalt sulfate, to be used for its electric vehicles.

Pundits are tipping Morocco as a regional leader in EVs and an EV export hub to Europe, including Fitch and the Middle East Institute. The kingdom’s mineral reserves — crucial to EV battery production, as well as its solar and wind resources qualify it to lead a green mobility revolution. To get there, Morocco has put together a comprehensive agenda: From developing a national master plan for electric mobility by the end of 2022, designating zones where fossil-fuel cars are banned, giving tax exemptions on EVs, to developing the infrastructure through an iSmart charging station. (Enterprise 21.09)

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* 1. Morocco's IAV Hassan II Will Treat its Wastewater for Watering Green Spaces

The Moroccan government is launching the construction of a new wastewater treatment plant. The plant under construction at the Hassan II Agronomic and Veterinary Institute (IAV) in the Moroccan capital Rabat will provide water for watering green spaces. In addition to improving sanitation, the project will strengthen the autonomy of the IAV Hassan II in terms of water supply, at a time when Morocco is experiencing water stress caused by drought. According to the Moroccan Ministry of Agriculture, the climate phenomenon is expected to gradually intensify across Morocco until 2050 due to a decrease in rainfall (-11%) and an increase in temperature (+1.3°C).

The Moroccan government and the IAV Hassan II will co-finance the work according to a partnership agreement signed on the sidelines of the launch of the construction work on the treatment plant. The cost of the project is estimated at MAD 10.2 million, the equivalent of €948,000. A laboratory will be built near the wastewater treatment plant for initial and continuing training, research-innovation-development on effluent treatment processes. The platform will also be a demonstration site for the various actors involved in water and sanitation issues in Morocco. (Afrik21 15.09)

ARAB STATE DEVELOPMENTS

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* 1. Lebanon's Inflation Rate Increased - But at Slower Pace - in July 2022

According to the Central Administration of Statistics (CAS), Lebanon's Consumer Price Index (CPI) jumped from 123.43% in July 2021 to register higher levels of 168.45% in July 2022. The cost of Housing and utilities, inclusive of water, electricity, gas and other fuels (grasping 28.5% of the CPI) added a yearly 110.48% by July 2022. Owner-occupied rental costs increased by 5.83% year-on-year (YOY) and the average prices of water, electricity, gas, and other fuels followed a significant increase by 460.53% YOY as subsidies were removed by the Central Bank and prices went up sharply on the global market due to the war in Ukraine.

Prices of Food and non-alcoholic beverages (20.6% of CPI) surged by 240.21% yearly. The average prices of Transportation (13.1% of the CPI) and Health (7.8% of the CPI) recorded hikes of an annual 353.85% and 284.02% respectively by July 2022. Also, Restaurant and Hotels (2.6% of CPI) increased yearly by 212.16% by July 2022 as the hospitality sector had been authorized to adopt prices listed in dollars. Costs of Clothing and Footwear (5.4% of CPI) surged by 137.94% by July 2022 and the prices of Communication (4.6% of the CPI) increased by 26.58%.

The pace of the skyrocketed inflation in Lebanon tempered for the month of July but remained relatively elevated as price volatility, higher fuel bills as well as the significant devaluation of the Lebanese pound are still weighing on the outlook. However, the softer increase could be attributed to the fact that inflation rate was already high during July 2021, thus making 2022’s rate comparatively lower on annual basis. Hence, inflationary pressures are likely to remain high during the upcoming period as global and local political and economic outlook is uncertain. (CAS 15.09)

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* 1. Jordanian Tourism Revenue Stands at $3.6 Billion Over the Last 8 Months

Jordan's tourism income in 2022's first eight months soared by 161.6% to reach $3.645 billion compared to the same reporting period of 2021, according to the latest data issued by the Central Bank of Jordan. An increase in tourist numbers to 3.175 million was the main driver of the revenue rise, in addition to Jordanians' expenditure on travel hiking by 89.4% to $1.004 billion compared to the same reporting period of 2021. In August 2022, tourism income climbed to $822.4 compared to August 2021, up 82.4%, due to tourist numbers going up by 331,600 to 715,500 visitors in the same month. Likewise, Jordanians' expenditure in August this year increased by 51.6% from the same month in 2021, amounting to $172.8 million due to a 51.3 rise in the number of tourists heading abroad. (Petra 14.09)

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* 1. Gulf Banks Raise Interest Rates, following US Federal Reserve

On 21 September, several central banks in the Arabian Gulf raised their interest rates. The Central Bank of the United Arab Emirates raised its base rate for its overnight deposit facility from 2.4% to 3.15%. The Saudi Central Bank raised its repo rate from 3 to 3.75% and its reverse repo rate from 2.5% to 3.25%. The repo rate is the interest rate on central bank purchases of securities, e.g. bonds from commercial banks. The reverse repo rate is the rate at which the central bank borrows from commercial banks.

The Qatar Central Bank raised its deposit rate from 3% to 3.75%, its lending rate from 3.75% to 4.5% and its repo rate from 3.25% to 4%. The Central Bank of Bahrain raised the rate for its one-week deposit facility from 3.25% to 4%, as well as its overnight deposit rate from 3.00% to 3.75%, the four-week deposit rate from 4.00% to 4.75% and lending rates from 4.50% to 5.25%.

These 0.75% increases correspond to the US Federal Reserve raising interest rates by the same percentage on the same day. Gulf states tend to mirror the US monetary institution’s interest rate decision. Gulf central banks also raised rates in July in response to the Fed. The Central Bank of Kuwait, however, raised its discount rate from 2.75% to just 3%. Kuwait has raised its rates by a smaller percentage than the Fed in the past, and this could reflect a more bullish outlook on inflation.

Inflation is rising throughout the Middle East, in part due to supply chain disruptions resulting from the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Central banks often raise interest rates to discourage spending in an effort to reduce inflation. Israel and Egypt usually make interest-rate decisions on their own timetable, so they may not raise rates immediately — or at all. Turkey notably cut interest rates last month, despite skyrocketing inflation in the country. (Al-Monitor 21.09)

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* 1. Indian Exports to the GCC Rise by 44% to $43.9 Billion in FY 2021-22

According to the Federation of Indian Export Organizations (FIEO), Indian exports to the GCC grew by 44% in FY 2021-22 to $43.9 billion compared to last FY’s $27.8 billion. Exports to the UAE topped the list, reflecting 68% growth valued at $28 billion compared to $16.7 billion in 2021. India is the UAE’s second-largest trading partner and largest in terms of exports.

FIEO officials said paper and allied products’ exports to the GCC touched $638 million in 2021, with the UAE taking a major share in the trade at $386 million. The cumulative demand for paper and allied products in the GCC market is estimated to be over $3.8 billion. Apart from the UAE, Indian exports to Saudi Arabia grew by 49%, Oman by 33%, Qatar by 43%, Kuwait by 17% and exports to Bahrain increased by 70%.

In the case of the paper industry, India has a 16% market share in GCC and the target is to corner a 25% market share by 2027, with the signing of the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with other Gulf countries. India and the UAE signed CEPA in February this year which came into force on 1 May. The India-UAE CEPA is expected to lift merchandise trade to $100 million by 2030. (GB 21.09)

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* 1. UAE's Barakah Nuclear Energy Plant Completes Unit 3 Start-Up

UAE authorities have successfully started up Unit 3 of the Barakah Nuclear Energy Plant in Abu Dhabi, the Emirates Nuclear Energy Corporation (ENEC) has announced. The milestone shows the significant progress being made in activating the four units of Arab World’s first multi-unit operational nuclear plant. Unit 3, once commercially operational, will add another 1,400 megawatts of zero-carbon emission electricity capacity to the national grid, a major boost for UAE energy security, and a major step forward in tackling climate change.

The achievement comes one year after Unit 2’s successful start-up. The next key milestone would be to connect Unit 3 to the national electricity grid in the “coming weeks”. The clean electricity generated at Barakah is sustainably powering homes, business and high-tech industries across the UAE. Barakah is now spearheading domestic energy security and sustainability in parallel.

Nawah, the operating and maintenance subsidiary of ENEC, and the Korea Electric Power Corporation (KEPCO) have been safely progressing through a comprehensive testing program. Testing was undertaken under the “continued oversight” of the UAE’s independent nuclear regulator, the Federal Authority for Nuclear Regulation (FANR). It follows the World Association of Nuclear Operators’ (WANO) completion of a Pre-Start-Up Review (PSUR), prior to receipt of the Operating License. Unit 4 is in the final stages of commissioning prior to completion of construction.

Barakah Plant is an essential component of the UAE’s Net Zero 2050 Strategy. The plant is a catalyst for innovation in the clean energy transition, including SMR development and next generation reactors, and a bridge to other clean fuels like hydrogen. When fully operational, the plant will prevent 22.4 million tons of carbon emissions — the leading cause of climate change — every year. (KT 23.09)

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* 1. Etihad Rail Signs Four MoUs with International Railway Companies

Etihad Rail has signed four memorandums of understanding (MoUs) with international companies such as SNCF International, France’s national state-owned railway company; Alstom, a global leader in the green and smart mobility sector; Progress Rail, a Caterpillar company, one of the world’s largest integrated and diversified suppliers of railroad and transit products and services worldwide, and Thales Group, a global leader in advanced technologies that services sectors such as defense, aeronautics, space, transport, and digital identity and security domains. The signing of the agreements took place at InnoTrans 2022, the leading international trade fair for transport technology, which was held in Berlin, Germany from 20-23 September 2022.

The agreements, which were signed by officials from both sides, aim to support the UAE’s economic development by driving the growth of the rail industry in the UAE and the region and cover key areas which include rail operations and maintenance, service facilities, passenger stations, and cargo transportation while ensuring the integration of the latest technologies, the exchange of knowledge and expertise, and investing in research and development.

In other developments, Etihad Rail has successfully completed the connection between the railway freight terminal at the Industrial City of Abu Dhabi (ICAD), which is the largest inland freight railway terminal in the country, and the UAE National Rail Network. (GB 23.09)

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* 1. UAE & China Sign MoU to Collaborate on Joint Space Projects

UAE’s Mohammed bin Rashid Space Centre (MBRSC) signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the China National Space Administration (CNSA) on 16 September. The agreement marks the start of the first joint space project between China and the UAE, and lays the groundwork for future opportunities for space cooperation between the two parties. The UAE will also receive CNSA’s support for a future lunar mission.

China continues to focus on moon exploration through its participation in many space projects, such as the ‘Change 5’ mission, which landed over the “ocean of storms” on the moon’s surface in December 2020, collecting 1.73 kilograms of lunar samples and bringing them to Earth for study. Meanwhile, the Emirates Lunar Mission, launched in 2020, is scheduled for a November launch. An integral part of the mission, the ‘Rashid’ rover, a 10 kilogram four-wheel robotic vehicle developed by Emirati engineers, will be carried to the lunar surface on a Japanese lander, Hakuto-R Mission 1, as part of its agreement with Japan’s ispace. The mission will blast off on a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket from Florida’s Kennedy Space Centre, becoming the first Emirati and Arab mission to explore the moon. (GB 18.09)

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* 1. Oman Wants to Repurpose Its Natural Gas Network to Transport Hydrogen

The owner and operator of Oman’s gas pipeline system, state-owned OQ Gas Networks, has begun tests to assess the network’s readiness to transport hydrogen across the country. A feasibility study on integrating hydrogen into existing natgas networks is close to being complete, with initial tests transporting hydrogen at low levels proving promising.

Oman’s hydrogen strategy envisions the country producing the equivalent of 10 GW of hydrogen by the end of the decade and 30 GW by 2040. Several large-scale projects have been announced over the past 18 months. Omani oil and gas company OQ is working with InterContinental Energy and EnerTech on a 14 GW facility which will be powered by 25 GW of wind and solar energy. ACME and Scatec are partnering on a green ammonia plant that will produce 1.2 million tons of ammonia powered by 3.5 GW of renewable energy. The country plans to export much of what it produces, and earlier this month said it would begin looking at constructing a hydrogen export terminal.

Though interest in hydrogen in the GCC is substantial, the topic of transport is still open. Qatar is currently focused on natgas export for blue hydrogen production overseas, while other countries are still struggling with the right strategy. When it comes to Oman’s overall hydrogen strategy, the country is “creating new structures and introducing various projects. (Enterprise 22.09)

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* 1. Saudi Data & AI Authority and stc to Develop Digital Technologies & AI Solutions

The stc Group and Saudi Data and Artificial Intelligence Authority (SDAIA) have signed a MoU to implement many national initiatives to enhance artificial intelligence (AI) and digital solutions in Saudi Arabia. The MOU, signed during the Global AI Summit held in Riyadh, intends to localize digital solutions and exchange experiences and knowledge in the field of data management and governance. As part of the agreement, stc will support data quality globally within the best practices, along with assisting startups in adhering to data governance and implementing a personal data protection system. It will contribute to accelerating the rate of compliance with data regulations at the national level along with activating awareness messages to protect personal data.

The memorandum will entail the provision of solutions and services on the stc’s sustainability platform to charities that are listed on the ‘Ehsan’ platform. It will also support NGO projects and programs adopted by SDAIA. Furthermore, the partnership will aim to develop environmental services and products, and specialized volunteering projects, as well as provide assessments to evaluate the capabilities and competencies of trainees, employees and leaders. (GB 15.09)

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* 1. Saudi Crown Prince Unveils National Strategy for Esports & Video Games

Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman shared the kingdom's “National Gaming and Esports Strategy” Thursday, a plan to make Saudi Arabia a leader in the sector by 2030. Salman said the initiative will contribute $13 billion to Saudi Arabia’s GDP and create 39,000 jobs by 2030. The strategy is part of the kingdom’s Vision 2030 initiative to diversify the economy and reduce dependence on oil.

Saudi Arabia has shown intense interest in the video game industry under Salman’s leadership. The Salman-led Public Investment Fund bought a 5% stake in Nintendo in May. In August, the fund unveiled shares in US video game developer Take-Two Interactive worth more than $1 billion. The Public Investment Fund also launched an esports group of its own in January.

Esports have grown throughout the region in recent years. Qatar set up a gaming complex in 2019. There is also an increasing number of gaming companies sprouting up in Israel. (Al-Monitor 16.09)

►►North Africa

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* 1. Egypt Gas Revenues Could Rise More Than 50% This Fiscal Year

Egypt wants to generate $8.5-10 billion in natural gas revenues in FY 2022-2023, up from $6.5 billion last year, Oil Minister El Molla told Al Arabiya. El Molla cited the government’s electricity rationing strategy as being a key driver for the higher expected revenues, telling the broadcaster that Egypt was able to make additional shipments in August due to lower domestic consumption. Egypt has made two additional gas shipments since the decision to ration electricity consumption came into force last month, Prime Minister Madbouly said recently.

Bloomberg forecasts Egypt to export 8.2 million tons of LNG this year due to higher spot prices in Europe. Gas prices in Europe have surged on the back of the war in Ukraine, which has seen Russia cut gas flows in response to financial and energy sanctions imposed by the EU and US. (Enterprise 18.09)

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* 1. Egypt Seeks Two-Child Policy Amid Deteriorating Economic Conditions

Egypt is suffering from overpopulation, coinciding with deteriorating economic conditions and price hikes. According to the Egyptian Central Agency for Mobilization and Statistics data, Egypt’s population stood at 103,855,911 people on 2 September. In response, during a press conference on 25 August, Egyptian Prime Minister Madbouly renewed the call to commit to having two children only, for a period of 10 years, so that citizens are able to enjoy the benefits of the national projects implemented by the government.

Madbouly further called on Egyptian media, civil society and intellectuals to assist the state in contributing to reducing the population increase at the rate of 1 million births each year for a period of 10 years. Shortly after Madbouly’s call, Egyptian media began publishing press reports on the importance of the two-child policy and its benefits for both the family and children in terms of access to education, better services, money saving and more.

The Egyptian government began taking steps months ago to push citizens to reduce childbearing by not granting benefits to more than two children. In late 2021, the Egyptian Ministry of Supply announced that only families of four can obtain the subsidy ration card. (Al-Monitor 18.09)

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* 1. Morocco’s Inflation Rate Rose by 8% in August 2022

Morocco’s inflation rate remains high, reaching a new peak at the end of August with an increase of 8% compared to last year, according to the latest figures from the country’s High Commission for Planning (HCP). August’s increase in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) is 0.3% higher than July’s, the HCP noted, attributing this increase to the 1.5% rise in the index of food products and the 0.5% decrease in the index of non-food products.

The increases in food products observed between July and August 2022 concern mainly fruit with 9.6%, fish and seafood with 2.2%, as well as milk, cheese, and eggs with 1.4%. This is in addition to vegetables, coffee, tea, and cocoa, which increased by 1.1%, meat by 1.%, oils and fats by 0.5%, and sugars, jams, honey, chocolates and sweets by 0.4%. For non-food products, the decline has mainly affected the prices of fuels by 10.1%, the HCP reported.

Compared to the same period last year, the consumer price index recorded an increase of 8%. The HCP attributed this growth to a 14.1% increase in the index of food products and a 4% increase in the index of non-food products. (HCP 22.09)

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* 1. Abdelmalek Essaadi University & University of Haifa Partner on Marine Research

Morocco’s Abdelmalek Essaadi University in Tetouan and Israel’s University of Haifa signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to advance cooperation in marine research. The MoU signing falls under the framework of academic cooperation between Rabat and Jerusalem. This new partnership will include marine sciences and the fields of sustainable aquaculture, marine technologies and ecological research.

The MoU follows the launch of the first exchange program between Morocco and Israel in late August. The program is led by Mohammed VI Polytechnic University (UM6P) and Israel’s Ben-Gurion University. This summer, Ben-Gurion University hosted four Moroccan students specializing in data science and health systems.

Despite facing limited opposition at home, the two nations have over the past two years demonstrated a strong shared will to reinforce and advance bilateral cooperation. The recent appointment of a new Israeli envoy to Rabat, as well as the forthcoming opening of Israel’s embassy in Rabat are set to provide an additional boost for the relations. (MWN 15.09)

TURKISH, CYPRIOT & GREEK DEVELOPMENTS

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* 1. Turkey's Central Bank Makes Another Big Rate Cut Despite 80% Inflation

On 22 September, Turkey’s central bank lowered the benchmark rate by 1% to 12%, despite soaring inflation measuring above 80%. The move, which contradicts that of global economies that are raising rates to control prices, sunk the Turkish lira to record lows of 18.38 against the dollar. The slide of the currency is likely to further hit consumers already facing high energy, food and housing costs.

Turkey plunged into a fresh economic crisis when President Erdoğan launched an unorthodox economic experiment nearly a year ago in attempting to bring down chronically high inflation by slashing interest rates. The move prompted the lira to slump, losing 44% of its value by the years-end. The Turkish leader maintains the unorthodox belief that high borrowing costs lead to higher prices, which opposes established economic theory.

Turkey expects inflation to ease to 65% by end of the year, according to government forecasts released earlier this month. Turkey’s inflation rate increased to 181.4% in August from 176% in July, according to a nationwide measure for inflation published by ENAG Group, an independent body of Turkish academics. ENAG says it uses virtually the same methods and data set as the statistical institute to calculate inflation. Most Turks do not believe in official inflation data, opinion polls show. (Ahval 22.09)

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* 1. Cypriot Families Can’t Cope With One Income

According to a Phileleftheros daily report, an average Cypriot family of four cannot get by on one minimum salary, pushing them into poverty. Cypriot households need more than €2,000 a month to get by, well over the median wage of €1,573, while inflation continues to erode their income. A family of four must put a roof over its head by renting or buying a three-bedroom apartment or house, and renting an apartment in the capital Nicosia would cost a household between €800 to €1,000. If a family can afford a bank loan to buy property, their monthly instalments will be between €900 and €1,000 for a mortgage of €200,000.

Next on the list would be shopping for food and other essentials, adding another €400 to €500 to a household’s monthly budget. After putting the necessary food on the table, a household will need to cover the expenses for transportation needs, such as getting to work and taking the kids to school and their afternoon activities. As Phileleftheros calculates, that would mean a minimum of €100 to €200 for fuel. The cost of maintaining a vehicle has not been added to the calculation.

Expenses for basic commodities don’t end there, as the household has to secure running water, electricity, and internet, adding at least €400 to the overall bill. The bill is further inflated when the cost of children’s extracurricular activities and private lessons are added. Additional costs may apply if the family has a young child under six. At the end of every month, a family will have seen a minimum of €1,500 to €2,100 spent on a very tight budget.

According to the Cyprus Statistical Service, the median wage in Cyprus is €1,573, while the EU-SILC European survey calculates it at €1,727, 9% higher than CyStat. A national minimum wage set at €940 comes into effect next January. (FM 12.09)

GENERAL NEWS AND INTEREST

\*ISRAEL:

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* 1. On Eve of Jewish New Year, Israel’s Population Approaches 10 Million

According to an announcement by Israel’s Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) on 20 September, the population of Israel is 9.593 million people. According to the CBS 7,069,000 residents of the state are Jews (about 74% of the population), 2,026,000 are Christian or Moslem Arabs (about 21%), and the rest are defined as other (i.e. Christians who are not Arabs, other religions, and people without religious classification in the Interior Ministry). The CBS forecast that the Israeli population will reach 10 million by 2024, 15 million by 2048 and 20 million by the end of 2065.

The Israeli population grew by 187,000 (about 2%) over the past year. According to the data, 177,000 babies were born in Israel this year; 49,000 people made aliyah; and 2,000 Israelis returned to Israel after living abroad. Average life expectancy for Israeli men is 80.5 years compared to 84.6 years for women. Nevertheless, some 53,000 people have died, including 4,400 from COVID since the last Jewish New Year.

Jews in Israel who are at least 20 years old define themselves as 45.3% secular, 19.2% traditional, 13.9% traditional-religious, 10.7% religious and 10.5% as Ultra-Orthodox (Haredi).

The data showed that 89.3% of Israelis are satisfied with their daily life, the figure being higher among Jews (91.5%) than among Arabs (70.7%). This information also showed that 70.4% of Jews are satisfied with their financial situation, compared to 51.1% of non-Jews.

The CBS added that 74% of Israelis live in cities, 15% in local councils, 10.4% in regional councils, and the rest in communities without municipal status. (CBS 20.09)

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* 1. Rosh Hashanah – the Jewish New Year

Rosh Hashanah, commonly known as the Jewish New Year, is celebrated on the first and second days of the Hebrew month of Tishrei. This year that date falls on the afternoon of 25 September and continues until the evening of 27 September. In Hebrew, Rosh Hashanah literally means "first of the year." The name Rosh Hashanah is not used in the Bible to discuss this holiday. The Bible refers to the holiday as *Yom Ha-Zikaron* (the day of remembrance) or *Yom Truah* (the day of the sounding of the *shofar*). The holiday is instituted in Leviticus 23:24 - 25. The shofar is a ram's horn; the sounding of the *shofar* in the synagogue is one of the most important observances of this holiday. The Bible gives no specific reason for this practice, though one that has been suggested is that the shofar's sound is a call to repentance. No work is permitted on Rosh Hashanah. Much of the day is spent in synagogue, where the regular daily liturgy is somewhat expanded. In fact, there is a special prayer book called the *machzor* used for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur because of the extensive liturgical changes for these holidays. Religious services for the holiday focus on the concept of G-d's sovereignty. One popular observance during this holiday is eating apples dipped in honey, reflecting the wish for a sweet new year.

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* 1. Fast of Gedaliya Marked on 28 September

The Fast of Gedaliya (or *Tzom Gedaliya,* fallingon 3 Tishrei), follows Rosh Hashanah. This year it is observed on 28 September. It marks the assassination of Gedaliya ben Achikam and the exile of the small Jewish community that remained in Israel after the Destruction. When Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylonia, destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem in 586 BCE and exiled the Jewish people to Babylonia, he allowed an impoverished remnant to remain in the land and appointed Gedaliah Ben Achikam as their Governor. Many Jews who had fled to Moab, Ammon, Edom, and other neighboring lands returned to the land of Judea, tended the vineyards given to them by the king of Babylonia and enjoyed a new respite after their earlier oppression. However, political machinations led Yishmael Ben Netaniah, to assassinate Gedaliah. Yishmael murdered Gedaliah, together with most of the Jews who had joined him and numbers of Babylonians whom the Babylonian King had left with Gedaliah. The remaining Jews feared the vengeance of the Babylonian King and fled to Egypt. The surviving remnant of Jews was thus dispersed and the land remained desolate, until the Jewish polity was re-established in some 70 years’ time. The fast is observed from daybreak until the stars appear in the evening.

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* 1. Yom Kippur – Holiest Day in the Jewish Calendar – Falls on 4/5 October

On the evening of 4 October and until after sunset on 5 October, Israel and world Jewry ‎will observe Yom Kippur, or the Day of Atonement. The holiest day on the Jewish calendar, ‎falling on the tenth of Tishri, it is a day marked by fasting, prayer and penitence for one's sins ‎against their fellow man and G-d. Yom Kippur atones only for sins between man and G-d, not ‎for sins against another person. To atone for sins against another person, you must first seek ‎reconciliation with that person, righting the wrongs you committed against them if possible. ‎That must all be done before Yom Kippur.‎

Yom Kippur is a complete Sabbath; no work can be performed on that day. It is a complete, 25-‎hour fast beginning before sunset on the evening before Yom Kippur and ending after nightfall ‎on the day of Yom Kippur. The Talmud also specifies additional restrictions that are less well-‎known: washing and bathing, anointing one's body (with cosmetics, deodorants, etc.), wearing ‎leather shoes and engaging in sexual relations are all prohibited on Yom Kippur. As always, ‎any of these restrictions can be lifted where a threat to life or health is involved. In fact, ‎children under the age of nine and women in childbirth (from the time labor begins until three ‎days after birth) are not permitted to fast, even if they want to. It is customary to wear white on ‎the holiday, which symbolizes purity and calls to mind the promise that our sins shall be made ‎as white as snow. The day long fast is widely observed even among Israel's secular public and ‎most of the country's Jewish population attend all or part of the day's synagogue services. The ‎fast is concluded with a shofar blast and rejoicing. ‎

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* 1. Sukkot Holiday Celebrated

The Jewish festival of Sukkot begins at sunset on Sunday, 9 October until nightfall on 17 October (in Israel). The festival ends on day later outside of Israel. The holiday begins on the Hebrew date of 15 Tishrei, the fifth day after Yom Kippur. The word "Sukkot" means "booths" and refers to the temporary dwellings that Jews are commanded to live in during this holiday. The commandment to "dwell" in a sukkah can be fulfilled by simply eating all of one's meals there or by actually living in the sukkah as much as possible, including sleeping in it. The holiday commemorates the forty-year period during which the children of Israel were wandering in the desert, living in temporary shelters. There are intermediate days during the week, which begins and ends with a holiday, referred to as Chol Ha-Mo'ed.

Another observance related to Sukkot involves what are known as the Four Species (*arba minim* in Hebrew) or the lulav and etrog. Jews are commanded to take these four plants and use them to "rejoice before the L-rd." The four species in question are an *etrog* (a citrus fruit native to Israel), a palm branch (in Hebrew, *lulav*), two willow branches (*arava*) and three myrtle branches (*hadas*). The six branches are bound together and referred to collectively as the lulav. The etrog is held separately. With these four species in hand, one recites a blessing and waves the species in all six directions (east, south, west, north, up and down, symbolizing the fact that G-d is everywhere).

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* 1. Aliyah Increases by 128% During 2022 With 60,000 New Immigrants Since Last Year

Israel absorbed 60,000 new immigrants over the past Jewish year and expects to see the total reach 65,000 by the end of 5782, a 128% increase compared with 2021, when 28,500 Jews immigrated to Israel. The country from where the most immigrants came over the past year was Russia with 47%. That was followed by Ukraine at 25%, the US 6%, France 4%, and Ethiopia 2%. Some 12% arrived from other countries.

Operation “Olim Return Home,” the drive to absorb immigrants from the countries directly affected by the Russian-Ukraine war, saw 39,214 immigrants arrive since February, including 11,191 from Russia and 7,513 from Ukraine. An additional 19,774 immigrants have not yet settled their status. World Jewry donated close to $100 million into this operation.

The city that absorbed the largest number of new immigrants in 5782 was Tel Aviv, with 6,327 immigrants, followed by Haifa with 6,182, Netanya with 6,069, and Jerusalem with 4,285. Israel has absorbed 323,000 immigrants over the past decade. (Various 21.09)

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* 1. Saudi Arabia to Send Its First Woman Into Space

On 22 September, Saudi Arabia announced plans to send a woman into space for the first time as part of its new mission program. A crew will be launched next year that will include the first Saudi female pilot and astronaut, thus marking an important historical event for the kingdom. The kingdom's astronaut program aims to produce qualified Saudi citizens that will take part in short and long-term space flights, as well as participate in scientific experiments, international research and future space-related missions.

The new program comes under the aegis of Saudi Vision 2030 and will fall under the National Space Strategy — the details of which will be announced in the coming months. (SPA 22.09)

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* 1. Morocco Requires TOEFL & DALF Certificates for Ph.D. Candidates

Starting from this school year, Ph.D. candidates in Morocco will have to provide proof of English and French language mastery through TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) and DALF (Advanced Diploma in French Language) certificates. Morocco’s Minister of Higher Education Miraoui announced the decision, stressing the need for a new cohort of Moroccan Ph.D. holders that possess the linguistic and digital skills necessary to become future university professors.

The minister highlighted Morocco’s efforts toward improving its scientific research and higher education, with producing competent and skilled university graduates being the first step toward achieving this goal. The Moroccan Ministry of Higher Education has created new programs and majors, which are taught exclusively in English. In addition, several Moroccan universities have included new subjects - taught in English - within their programs. The minister added that around 12,000 university students will be taught at least one subject in English this year. Miraoui hoped that Moroccan university students would be able to fluently speak three languages - Arabic, English, and French - with the aim of overcoming the challenges of integrating into the job market.

Earlier this month, Morocco’s Minister of National Education, Pre-School, and Sports Benmoussa announced his ministry’s plans to increase the number of English teachers this school year. Morocco’s shift towards the English language proves that the country acknowledges the value and relevance of the globalized language in the current international context, particularly in academia and the job market. (MWN 22.09)

ISRAEL LIFE SCIENCE NEWS

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* 1. TytoCare, Vivaz & Nebula Partner to Bring Innovative Virtual Care to Spain

TytoCare announced a partnership with Vivaz, the health insurance brand of Línea Directa Aseguradora, a leading healthcare insurer in Spain, to bring the TytoCare solution to the Spanish market. Vivaz will integrate TytoCare into its current offering, enabling clinic-quality primary care from anywhere, at any time. TytoCare will be distributed by Nebula-VPC, a major healthcare distributor in the Spanish market.

While traditionally telemedicine in Spain involves a simple phone or video call with a doctor, TytoCare goes far beyond that, utilizing a straightforward, all-in-one diagnostic tool to generate accurate patient information and provide high-quality medical services anytime, anywhere. Vivaz clients can now access remote primary care visits through TytoCare's TytoHome solution, replicating an in-person doctor visit from the comfort of home with comprehensive remote exams resulting in diagnoses. TytoCare's CE Mark-approved handheld examination kit enables users to perform comprehensive physical exams of the heart, skin, ears, throat, abdomen, and lungs, and measure heart rate and body temperature, which are key for treating many acute and chronic conditions.

Netanya's [TytoCare](https://www.tytocare.com/‎) is a telehealth company using AI to transform primary care by putting health in the hands of consumers. TytoCare seamlessly connects people to clinicians to provide the best virtual home examination and diagnosis solutions. Its solutions are designed to enable a comprehensive medical exam from any location and include a hand-held, all-in-one tool for examining the heart, lungs, skin, ears, throat, abdomen and body temperature; a complete telehealth platform for sharing exam data, conducting live video exams and scheduling visits; a cloud-based data repository with analytics; and built-in guidance technology and machine learning algorithms to ensure accuracy and ease of use for patients and insights for healthcare providers. (Tyto Care 15.09)

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* 1. Israeli Study Finds Two Antibodies Can Fight All Known COVID Strains

Israeli scientists say they have identified antibodies that are so powerful in neutralizing the coronavirus that they could eliminate the need for more vaccine boosters. A research team at Tel Aviv University experimented with numerous antibodies and found that two in particular neutralize all known strains of the coronavirus, including Delta and Omicron, in a lab setting.

Antibody infusions are already used to treat some coronavirus patients, and these antibodies could be used to concoct a particularly potent infusion. Based on their performance in lab conditions, the antibodies could provide the extra protection that today comes from booster shots, which could potentially make extra shots unnecessary among vaccinated people.

On a technical level, the reason for the success of the two antibodies seems to be that they bind to a different part of the coronavirus spike protein than most others. This latest research comes from investigations that began in October 2020. Researchers sequenced all the B immune system cells from the blood of people who had recovered from the original COVID strain in Israel, and isolated nine antibodies that the patients produced. Now, the top two antibodies have been tested against a range of variants, and performed well against all of them.

The effectiveness of the first antibody, TAU-1109, in neutralizing the Omicron strain is 92%, and in neutralizing the Delta strain, 90%. The second antibody, TAU-2310, neutralizes the Omicron variant with an efficacy of 84%, and the Delta variant with an efficacy of 97%. The antibodies are named TAU because they were identified at Tel Aviv University. (Various 19.09)

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* 1. TempraMed New Insulin Protection Device With Reusable Temperature Shield Cap

TempraMed is launching a new-generation insulin pen-cap temperature shield that takes its exclusive, industry-standard insulin protection to new levels of efficacy and convenience. Branded the "VIVI Cap multi-model", this new product builds upon the company's pioneering of temperature designed control devices, and technologies specifically engineered to provide patients with diabetes with better, hassle-free protection for their in-use insulin. Temperature protection and control management for injectable and temperature-sensitive pharmaceuticals are critical to helping patients live with diabetes and, most significantly, live better lives.

The VIVI Cap multi-model is suitable for use with a wide range of pre-filled and refillable insulin pens. It protects insulin in-use from extreme temperatures which can quickly degrade its performance. The VIVI Cap is self-contained – no refrigeration, ice packs, external power or batteries required. It's small, lightweight and easy to use. It features a built-in temperature sensor and easy-to-read temperature indicator. It is also scientifically validated, FSA/HSA eligible and TSA compliant. The VIVI Cap multi-model fits in a purse, pocket or backpack. Better yet, it fits in patients' lives, providing a carry-anywhere solution that will continue working 24/7, 365 days a year – for years to come.

Tel Aviv's [TempraMed](https://tempramed.com/) develops, manufactures and markets innovative personal storage solutions for injectable medications. Its goal is to fill the previously unmet need for people who inject medications and would like to live their lives more spontaneously, more conveniently and more safely. (TempraMed 15.09)

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* 1. SNDL Makes First Export of Premium Dried Flower from Canada to Israel

Calgary's SNDL, Canada's largest regulated products platform, and IM Cannabis Corp. announced that SNDL has completed its initial international export of approximately 167 kilograms of premium dried flower from Canada to Israel as part of its total commitment with IMC. SNDL and IMC have agreed to the aggregate export of 1,000 kilograms of high-quality dried flower products for processing and distribution in the Israeli medical cannabis market.

For IMC, the completed export marks another major step forward in streamlining its expansive global operations that include Israel, Canada, and Germany. "The medical cannabis market in Israel has shifted towards premium and ultra-premium cannabis products. By forming an international partnership with SNDL, we are improving our global supply chain and enhancing our ability to provide the Israeli market with the high-quality products it has come to expect," said Oren Shuster, Chief Executive Officer of IM Cannabis.

SNDL views the international market as an emerging opportunity to increase revenue from its cannabis operations. The Company is optimistic that an increasing number of global markets will refine regulations, allowing for lower-barrier access to high-quality cannabis products produced by trusted suppliers from Canada.

Glil Yam's [IMC](https://imcannabis.com) is a leading international cannabis company providing premium products to medical patients and adult-use recreational consumers. IMC is one of the very few companies with operations in Israel, Germany and Canada, the three largest federally legal markets. The ecosystem created through its international operations leverages IMC's unique data-driven perspective and product supply chain globally. With its commitment to responsible growth and financial prudence, and the ability to operate within the strictest regulatory environments, IMC has quickly become one of the leading cultivators and distributors of high-quality cannabis globally. (SNDL 15.09)

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* 1. ProFuse Technology Secures $2.5 Million to Reduce Cultivated Meat Production Costs

Kiryat Shmona's [ProFuse Technology](https://profuse-tech.com/), a Foodtech start-up that aims to revolutionize cultivated meat production by shortening its duration, improving its quality, and increasing yields, announced the completion of a $2.5 million seed funding round (and a total of $3.75 million since its establishment). The round was led by NY based investment company Green Circle, specializing in Foodtech, with the participation of existing shareholders - OurCrowd, Tnuva and Tempo. New investors include Siddhi Capital, a leader in investments in cultivated meat, Kayma, the investment arm of De-Levie, a meat industry specialist, and other individual investors.

The company will use the funds to collaborate with cultivated meat producers, obtain FDA regulatory approval, and expand the research and development team, as well as its laboratories. The funds will also position the company to source significant capital raising at the end of Q2/23 to commercialize its customer collaborations.

ProFuse technology was founded in June 2021 as part of the FRESH START Foodtech incubator operating under the Innovation Authority and a consortium of 4 partners: Tnuva, Tempo, OurCrowd, and Finistere Ventures. ProFuse Technology's revolutionary solution promotes the price parity of cultivated meat with that of animal origin, promoting its market arrival. The company aims to receive FDA approval and sell its products as early as mid-2023. As a B2B supplier, ProFuse provides media supplements to leading cultivated meat companies that reduce the muscle creation and growth phase cost, a process that constitutes about 50% of the total production cost. The company has several cooperation agreements with most of the world's leading companies in the field. (Profuse Technology 15.09)

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* 1. CytoReason Expands Collaboration with Pfizer to Deliver AI for Drug Discovery

CytoReason announced an extension of its multi-year partnership with Pfizer to use CytoReason’s artificial intelligence technology for Pfizer’s drug development programs. Under the terms of the agreement, Pfizer will make a $20 million equity investment, have options to license CytoReason’s platform and disease models, and fund supplementary project support, in a deal potentially worth up to $110 million over the next five years.

Since launching the collaboration in 2019, Pfizer has used CytoReason's biological models in its research to enhance the understanding of the immune system, as it develops innovative drugs for immune-mediated and immuno-oncology diseases. CytoReason's platform has provided Pfizer with multiple insights in research and development programs across over 20 diseases. The new research agreement and investment will support the development of additional disease models and the creation of high-resolution models, spanning across a number of therapeutic areas.

Tel Aviv's [CytoReason](http://www.cytoreason.com/) is a leading technology company developing computational disease models. The company collects proprietary data from pharmaceutical companies and uses it to simulate human diseases – tissue by tissue, cell by cell. With CytoReason's massive database and AI-led platform, pharma and biotech companies can identify new opportunities, shorten trial phases, reduce development costs, and increase the likelihood of drug approval. (CytoReason 20.09)

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* 1. ANINA Transforms Ugly Vegetables into an Artistic Ready Meal

Rishon LeZion's ANINA Culinary Art is reshaping the future of ready meals by merging art with technology through a culinary experience of meals from upcycled vegetables. Each whole "meal-in-a-pod" is all-natural, loaded with nutrients, and made from so-called "ugly" vegetables.

The ANINA pod is a complete meal made from vegetables that have been rejected for sale due to a less-than-perfect appearance — a major source of fresh produce waste. The new, convenient, ready to cook format is a single-size portion that allows for a quick and nutritious meal in just a few minutes. It can be cooked on the stovetop or in a microwave. Each disc-shaped container holds two full cups of vegetables—40% of an adult's daily nutritional requirements—and is ideal for consumers seeking a fast nutritious & delicious meal solution at work or home. Each ANINA pod provides a plant-based meal replete with protein, high in fiber, and free from colorants or preservatives. The products are currently available online, at premium and boutique bakeries, and at co-working spaces outlets.

[ANINA](http://www.aninafoodtech.com) was founded in June 2020 and has secured $3.3 million in a safe round from Strauss Group by The Kitchen Hub, Unovis, Unorthodox ventures, AgFunder VC, Wordcreate Inc. and the Israeli Innovation Authority (IIA). (ANINA Culinary Art 21.09)

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* 1. Ivory Dentin Graft, the First and Only Dentin Graft, Receives CE Mark

Developed by Ivory Graft, the Ivory Dentin Graft is a new dentin graft. This graft material has been tailored for use in dental procedures based on the advantages of autologous dentin grafts, documented and proven in years of scientific research and publications. An active organic matrix, Ivory Dentin Graft retains the natural form of the sourced porcine dentin, as well as the protein matrix. Ivory Dentin Graft is sourced from natural dentin, without additives. Dentin's composition is very similar to bone, therefore its biological and physicomechanical properties make it an ideal grafting material.

This unique dentin graft substitute has been clinically proven to support new hard tissue formation. A prospective, randomized, semi double-blinded with blinded assessments clinical study was conducted. The study compared subjects grafted with Ivory Dentin Graft (Investigational group) and subjects grafted with a porcine cortico-cancellous heterologous bone mix (Comparator group) for alveolar ridge preservation following tooth extraction. At 4 months post-procedure – the study demonstrated Ivory Dentin Graft's efficacy results: superior promoting of good interface between the host bone and graft material (85% vs 40%), and 50% more increase of new bone formation (60.75% vs 42.81% respectively). These two features are important for tissue regeneration and integration, which follow tooth extraction and grafting, and facilitate osteogenic activity.

Established in 2013, Kfar Saba's [Ivory Graft](https://ivorygraft.com/) is focused on developing, manufacturing and marketing porcine dentin graft materials for the repair or augmentation of bone defects. Ivory Graft has developed a naturally sourced, bioresorbable dentin graft material with an active organic matrix. Ivory Dentin Graft is CE marked, and the regulatory process for FDA clearance is underway. Ivory Graft's plans for future products include orthopedic (spine) applications as well as additional dental devices. (Ivory Graft 21.09)

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* 1. BioChange's Regum Scientifically Proven to Heal Gum Recession Disease

BioChange was able to treat periodontitis (gum recession disease) in canines. The use of BioChange's ReGum led to a 100% improvement in comparison to the standard-of-care treatment regimen, with a significant regeneration of periodontal tissue (including gum and bone tissues).

ReGum, based on BioChange's novel scaffold technology, triggers a mechanism of repair and regeneration by the patient's own cells. With time, the scaffold biologically degrades, leaving behind only autologous, regenerated, healthy tissue. While currently ReGum is commercially available for veterinary use only, the company plans it to be approved for use in humans within the next couple of years. ReGum is now available commercially worldwide. While ReGum is currently commercially available for veterinary use only, the company expects regulatory approval for use in people within the next couple of years.

Yokneam Illit's [BioChange](https://biochange.life/‎) has developed a breakthrough technology for tissue regeneration - a unique scaffold that stimulates tissue repair and remodeling at the applied site. The scaffold is based on natural biomaterials designed for implantation, using a minimally invasive procedure. It mimics the healthy Extra Cellular Matrix (ECM) and triggers the body to repair itself. Multiple long-term animal studies confirm the safety and efficacy of the technology. The company is now selling products in the veterinary and research markets and is committed to beginning its first clinical study in aesthetic dermatology in 2023. Several other products based on the CellFoam platform technology are in development to enrich BioChange's pipeline. (BioChange 22.09)

ISRAEL PRODUCT & TECHNOLOGY NEWS

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* 1. SatixFy Poised to Enable Direct-to-Cell 5G Non-Terrestrial Networks

SatixFy Communications is highlighting the potential for its technology to play a key role in the development of direct-to-cell satellite 5G services. This is a rapidly emerging area of satellite communications in which SatixFy believes it can play an important role in moving the technology forward in the coming years.

SatixFy’s 2nd generation Digital Beamforming ASIC Prime 2.0 utilizes “True Time Delay” technology and has a modular and scalable architecture that enables building large antenna arrays in different frequency bands spanning from L-band to Ka-band. Additionally, the Prime2 ASIC supports a large capacity (up to 8GHz, which can be further aggregated to expand to 64GHz) with up to 128 dual polarized beams all of which allow a large number of devices to be serviced by a single antenna. The beams can be configured dynamically in a very short time to support beam hopping that further optimizes the utilization of satellite resources to support a large number of devices on the ground. Prime 2.0 will deliver all these features at a very low DC power.

Rehovot's [SatixFy](http://www.SatixFy.com) develops end-to-end next-generation satellite communications systems, including satellite payloads, user terminals and modems, based on powerful chipsets that it develops in house. SatixFy’s products include modems that feature Software Defined Radio (SDR) and Fully Electronically Steered Multi Beam Antennas (ESMA) that support the advanced communications standard DVB-S2X. SatixFy’s innovative ASICs improve the overall performance of satellite communications systems, reduce the weight and power requirements of terminals and payloads, and save real estate for gateway equipment. (SatixFy 13.09)

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* 1. SodaStream Unveils a 360° Repositioning

SodaStream announced a full 360° brand-repositioning. Following its digital transformation and consumer centric strategy launched three years ago, the company is tapping into its consumers' growing interest in design, innovation, mixology, and user-experience fields. As the trend of making fresh sparkling water at home continues to grow, and as consumers seek more approachable premium products, especially in the food and beverage sector, SodaStream is introducing a full top-to-bottom redesign of the company's symbol, color palette, websites, and is introducing a new tier of elevated products.

At the heart of the new positioning is the brand's call to Push for Better, inspired by the action one takes when pushing the SodaStream sparkling water maker button. "Push for Better" is brought to life in the brand's new visual identity, leading to a "ripple effect" of positive change, inspired by the power of a simple push of a button and the stream of change that it sets in motion – for both consumers and the planet.

SodaStream is also revealing "SodaStream Collection", a new premium product tier that represents its advanced and designed product range. "SodaStream Collection" offers elevated experiences through superior innovation, quality, and design. The Collection range will consist of SodaStream's new sparkling water makers – the Art and the Duo, and will also include future innovations designed by global renowned designers.

Kfar Saba's [SodaStream](http://www.sodastream.com) is the world's leading sparkling water brand. Operating in over 47 countries across the globe, SodaStream empowers consumers to create perfect personalized sparkling beverage experiences with just a push of a button. By allowing its users to make better choices for themselves and the planet – SodaStream is revolutionizing the beverage industry and changing the way the world drinks. (SodaStream 15.09)

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* 1. Brenmiller Signs MoU to Explore Integration of bGen for Green Hydrogen Production

Brenmiller Energy signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Green Enesys Deutschland and Viridi Energias Renovables Espana, two European based developers of green energy projects, to perform engineering studies for incorporating bGen TES for Green Enesys’ and Viridi REs’ proposed green hydrogen production facilities throughout Spain.

Green Enesys and Viridi RE are currently developing three green hydrogen projects in Spain, with the goal of decarbonizing the European Union’s industrial, power generation and transportation sectors. The projects will have a combined capacity to produce over 100,000 tonnes of green methanol annually. Under the terms of the MoU, Brenmiller will work with Green Enesys and Viridi RE to conduct feasibility studies for each of the three projects If the results of the engineering studies are favorable and the parties enter a definitive agreement to supply thermal energy storage systems, Brenmiller’s bGen TES will be charged with wind and solar power and be used to produce clean steam, a critical component of the hydrogen-to-green methanol conversion process for the projects.

Rosh HaAyin's [Brenmiller Energy](https://bren-energy.com) delivers scalable thermal energy storage solutions and services that allow customers to cost-effectively decarbonize their operations. Its patented bGen thermal storage technology enables the use of renewable energy resources, as well as waste heat, to heat crushed rocks to very high temperatures. They can then store this heat for minutes, hours, or even days before using it for industrial and power generation processes. With bGen, organizations have a way to use electricity, biomass and waste heat to generate the steam, hot water and hot air they need for a variety of applications, including, for example, to mold plastic, process food and beverages, produce paper, manufacture chemicals and pharmaceuticals or drive steam turbines without burning fossil fuels. (Brenmiller Energy 16.09)

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* 1. OneLayer to Secure Koch Industries Private Cellular Network Site

OneLayer announced a $6.5 million equity investment from Koch Disruptive Technologies (KDT), the venture capital arm of Koch Industries. Alongside the investment, OneLayer will secure the private LTE network of a site of a manufacturing subsidiary of Koch Industries. The investment brings total funds raised by OneLayer to more than $14.5 million.

OneLayer's solution provides visibility, context-based segmentation policies, and a zero-trust security approach for both IT and OT devices that are connected to private cellular networks. OneLayer delivers this end-to-end security across the private cellular network by integrating with the cellular packet core and the IT network firewalls, asset management tools, and other existing security solutions. Koch Industries is exploring the use of private cellular networks to enable connectivity for autonomous vehicles with real-time compute demands over high bandwidth and coverage for laptops and tablets, enabling predictable coverage for IT and OT devices.

KDT's investment will be used to address the growing demand for OneLayer's Security Platform in multiple verticals, enhance the company's cyber lab capabilities, expand the company's commercial reach through its global ecosystem and channel partners, and to fuel the company's overall sales and marketing efforts.

Tel Aviv's [OneLayer](https://one-layer.com) provides enterprise-grade security for private LTE/5G networks. Its platform and IoT security toolkit can be implemented in private cellular networks to provide better visibility, control and protection for organizations. The company was founded by world-class cybersecurity experts with a deep understanding of both cellular protocols and IoT security needs and veterans from the IDF's 8200 and 81 intelligence units. (OneLayer 15.09)

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* 1. Israel Airports Authority Installs SaverOne Systems to Fight Traffic Accidents

The Israel Airports Authorities, operator of Ben Gurion Airport in Tel Aviv, announced that it will fight traffic accidents with the help of the SaverOne system in Israel. An initial pilot project in the operational areas of Ben Gurion Airport will prevent drivers from using their cell phones, sending messages, etc. The technology will help prevent accidents in the operational area of Ben Gurion Airport, an area which is full of vehicles and planes.

The system installed in the vehicle disables a driver's ability to use their cell phone while driving, except for receiving incoming calls, navigation and listening to music. The advantage of the pilot is that it does not interfere with receiving work instructions but does not allow unwanted active use of the cell phone. The system only affects the driver's area, while other passengers are unrestricted and able to use their mobile phones as usual. SaverOne's technology specifically recognizes the driver area in the vehicle and prevents the driver from accessing distracting applications such as messaging while allowing navigation, without user intervention or consent, creating a safer driving environment.

Petah Tikva's [SaverOne](https://saver.one/‎) is a technology company engaged in the design, development and commercialization of transportation safety solutions designed to save lives by preventing car accidents resulting from distraction, by the use of mobile phones while driving. The SaverOne system provides an advanced driver safety solution that can identify and monitor mobile phones located in the driver's vicinity and selectively block use of distracting applications that may become life-threatening. (SaverOne 15.09)

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* 1. CADY's Automatic Technology Analyzes Electronic Circuit Designs in Minutes

Tel Aviv's [CADY](http://www.cadysolutions.com), a graduate of the fifth batch of Intel Ignite, Intel's startup acceleration program, announced the launch of a revolutionary SaaS product, with a unique ability to read, and understand electronic component datasheets to create a formal language database. Based on this database, CADY's product automatically performs an analysis of electronic circuit diagrams, providing an additional layer of protection, identifying errors and preventing them from flowing downstream. The product expedites end-product time to market and saves vast resources for hardware companies worldwide.

CADY is the first company worldwide to overcome the challenge of automatic reading and understanding of electronic component datasheet information. By aligning the datasheet information with the actual circuit design, CADY's system detects discrepancies between the datasheet information and the actual design and generates a report detailing errors and warnings. A typical electronic circuit design review process is performed manually, cumbersome, and repetitive. It is extremely time consuming and error prone. CADY's design inspection system is both more efficient and reliable compared to any other technology in the market. It verifies the accuracy of the design within minutes, thereby eliminates the iterative review and error correction processes, reduces costs, increases profitability, and expedite product market introduction, while reducing the probability of reputation-damaging errors that might reveal themselves only when the product hits the market.

Following a successful collaboration with Intel's startup acceleration program, Intel Ignite, CADY's PoC (Proof of Concept) was tested in a real design environment. The product provided great value to five different business units at Intel, among them Intel's Thunderbolt Group (TBT), by identifying errors in their electrical design and thereby saving considerable resources. (CADY Solutions 15.09)

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* 1. Safe-T Gains Momentum with its Anti-Fraud Solution

Safe-T Group announced that its enterprise privacy unit won three new leading customers to use its advanced solution for advertising fraud detection, mitigation, and prevention. Advertising fraud is an existing and growing industry issue, one that causes a waste of billions of dollars annually for both enterprises and consumers. According to Business of Apps, the total cost of advertising fraud in 2022 reached $81 billion, predicted to increase to $100 billion by 2023.

Safe-T Group's privacy enterprise unit offers top-of-the-line technology and advanced solutions to their customers. Due to the continuous rise of advertising fraud activities and the economic effect on advertising budgets, anti-fraud solutions, as well as solid and secure infrastructures, are a necessity. They expect demands for this segment to keep growing and to represent a bigger share in proceeds from their privacy enterprise unit. Safe-T’s platform provides an adaptive solution for identification and blocking of existing and new fraud methods, preventing various fraud methods including click fraud, click hijacking, hidden malware, inappropriate content, ad placements and more.

Herzliya's [Safe-T Group](http://www.safetgroup.com) is a global provider of cyber-security and privacy solutions to consumers and enterprises. The Company operates in three distinct segments, tailoring solutions according to specific needs. The segments include, enterprise cyber-security solutions, enterprise privacy solutions, and consumer cyber-security and privacy solutions. The solutions are designed for both advanced and basic users, ensuring full protection for all personal and digital information. (Safe-T Group 19.09)

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* 1. Arbe’s Lynx Surround Imaging Radar Wins AutoSens Brussels Award

Arbe Robotics announced that its latest product, Lynx Surround Imaging Radar, won the AutoSens Brussels Silver Award 2022 for Hardware Development of the Year. The AutoSens Brussels Award 2022 celebrates the “best and the brightest working at the cutting-edge of innovation in ADAS and autonomous vehicle technology.” Arbe won the silver award out of a strong list of applicants with ground-breaking products on the market today.

Arbe’s Lynx Surround Imaging Radar is the only long-range, high resolution, 360° sensing solution with 12\*24 RF channels that outperforms the current industry 3x4 corner radars, and the most advanced 12x16 front radars, making it an industry-first surround radar able to enhance the perception system and sensor fusion. Lynx Surround Imaging Radar was designed to complement Arbe’s Phoenix Perception Radar, to work together to deliver unified perception and interference avoidance. Lynx can also be used as a front radar for ADAS.

Tel Aviv's [Arbe](https://arberobotics.com/‎/), the global leader in Perception Radar Chipset Solutions, is spearheading a revolution in sensing, enabling truly safe driver-assist systems today while paving the way to full autonomous-driving. A critical sensor for L2+ and higher autonomy, Arbe solutions are 100 times more detailed than the most advanced radars on the market, providing full sensing coverage around the vehicle. (Arbe Robotics 19.09)

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* 1. Compete Aligns with Globalization Partners to Enhance Global Recruitment Process

Compete will be partnering with (G-P), the leading Global Employment Platform that makes it fast, simple, and compliant for companies to hire anyone, anywhere. Together, they will enable companies to hire talent in over 187 countries smartly and competitively.

Compete provides immediate insights into complete compensation package data and enables organizations to develop more effective workforce management strategies. Compete empowers leaders with analysis of over 50 types of benefits, real-time benchmarking data, advanced analytics, and tailored insights to support hiring decisions, identify risks, improve retention, and develop informed compensation policies. The real-time benchmarking of compensation data provided by Compete reflects a dynamic talent environment. This is one where organizations are reliant on accessing the right data to make smart decisions around talent acquisition to reduce the pay and equity gap many organizations are experiencing.

Taking the guess out of guesswork, Ramat Gan's [Compete](http://www.competewith.com) gives an unfair advantage with immediate insights into complete compensation package data, including parental leave, work from home policies, and health benefits. An easy-to-use SaaS solution, Compete provides real-time data and instant analysis with advanced filtering capabilities perfectly tailored for tech companies. Founded in 2020, Compete is trusted by hundreds of leading tech companies around the world. (Compete 20.09)

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* 1. Loox Launches First Shopify Post-Purchase Upsell Solution that Displays Photo Reviews

Loox announced the release of "Loox Upsells", a tool for ecommerce sites to increase the average order value by enabling online sellers to display photo reviews next to post-purchase upsell offers. The launch of Loox Upsells marks the next step for Loox to extend their innovative portfolio of products and solutions that help ecommerce brands grow by leveraging customer-generated content. Loox Upsells is the first post-purchase upsell solution in the market that makes it possible for Shopify merchants to add photo reviews and connect a visual-centric review approach with a sales solution.

Loox currently works with 100,000 Shopify merchants, including over 1,000 Shopify Plus enterprise-level brands, such as Birchbox and Zumba. With over 9,500 reviews on the Shopify App Store, Loox is one of the most popular solutions for Shopify merchants.

Ramat Gan's [Loox](https://loox.app) is the peer-to-peer marketing platform for Shopify stores. More than 100,000 merchants humanize their brand with visual reviews and referrals through Loox. Brands of all sizes use Loox to automatically collect and display photo & video reviews, resulting in boosted trust, more word of mouth & referrals, and increased customer retention & sales. (Loox 20.09)

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* 1. Perception Point Wins 2022 SaaS Awards for Best Security Innovation in a SaaS Product

Perception Point has been declared the winner of the Best Security Innovation in a SaaS Product (B2B, Enterprise) category in the international SaaS Awards program. Perception Point's next-gen SaaS threat prevention solution addresses today's rapidly changing cybersecurity landscape with a one-stop-shop for protecting organizations by isolating, detecting, and remediating all threats across their main attack vectors, including email, web browsers and cloud collaboration apps.

The solution offers the best detection accuracy in the industry, powered by a combination of seven layers of proprietary static and next-gen dynamic detection engines, scanning 100% of content including text, files and URLs. Every customer receives an all-included managed Incident Response service free of charge. The IR service optimizes detection engines on-the-fly, fully manages and analyzes all incidents and handles end-user requests, to continuously deliver the highest detection rates while drastically reducing the strain on SOC teams, saving up to 75% of their resources.

Tel Aviv's [Perception Point](https://perception-point.io/) is a Prevention-as-a-Service company for the fastest and most accurate next-generation detection and response to all attacks across email, cloud collaboration channels, and web browsers. The solution's natively integrated incident response service acts as a force multiplier to the SOC team, reducing management overhead, improving user experience and delivering continuous insights; providing proven best protection for all organizations. (Perception Point 20.09)

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* 1. Arbe & HiRain to Provide Perception Radars for Autonomous Trucks in China

Arbe Robotics announced that HiRain Technologies, the leading Chinese ADAS Tier 1 supplier, was selected by the Port of RiZhao in Shandong Province to provide perception radars based on Arbe's chipset. The deployment has been implemented on FAW Trucks and on automated guided vehicle (AGVs), providing autonomous driving capabilities, advanced perception, and true safety. The first deployment started at the RiZhao port and is expected to expand to additional ports across China.

Earlier this year, HiRain announced that it is undertaking major OEM and autonomous driving projects with the Radar Solution it developed using Arbe's Perception Radar Chipset, projected to reach mass production by 2023. HiRain's perception radar solution based on the Arbe chipset has the highest channel count in the industry with 48 transmitting channels and 48 receiving channels and provides free space mapping of the full surroundings of the vehicle. The radar solution was chosen for its effectiveness in highly dense port environments to increase staff safety, reduce operational risks, and enhance efficiency. The parties plan to expand the deployment to highways by supporting port-to-port autonomous driving.

Tel Aviv's [Arbe](http://www.arberobotics.com) is spearheading a revolution in sensing, enabling truly safe driver-assist systems today while paving the way to full autonomous-driving. A critical sensor for L2+ and higher autonomy, Arbe solutions are 100 times more detailed than the most advanced radars on the market, providing full sensing coverage around the vehicle. (Arbe Robotics 20.09)

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* 1. Inuitive launches NU4100 with Advanced AI Capabilities

Inuitive launched its new NU4100, an expansion of its Vision and AI IC portfolio. Based on Inuitive's unique architecture and advanced 12nm process technology, the new NU4100 IC supports integrated dual-channel 4K ISP, enhanced AI processing, and depth sensing in a single-chip, low-power design, setting the new industry standard for Edge-AI performance.

The NU4100 is the second generation of the NU4x00 series of products. The NU4x00 series is ideal for Robotics, Drones, VR, and Edge-AI applications that demand multiple sensor aggregation, processing, packing, and streaming. It is specifically designed for robots and other applications that must sense and analyze the environment using 3, 6, or more cameras, as they make real-time actionable decisions based on that input. The new NU4100 supports multi-camera designs and can simultaneously process and stream two imager channels of up to 12MP, or 4K resolution, each at 60 frames per second (fps), while running advanced AI networks. This IC enhances the level of integration for products using Inuitive technology and speeds the AI processing power by 2X-4X while consuming 20% less power than Inuitive's first generation.

Ra'anana's [Inuitive](http://www.inuitive-tech.com)'s disruptive Vision-on-Chip processors introduce all-in-one chips with a wide range of integrated capabilities, outstanding performance, and optimal size and cost efficiency. These game-changing processors support simultaneous depth sensing, positioning and location algorithms (SLAM), and AI-based object detection and recognition while dramatically shortening both system latency and response time, saving power, and improving overall performance (high frame rate and camera resolution, and a wide FOV). (Inuitive 22.09)

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* 1. Granulate & RealCloud Partner to Optimize Cloud Performance for Customers

RealCloud, a leading provider of continuous cloud management and optimization solutions, has partnered with Granulate to provide customers with an enhanced portfolio of solutions for cloud infrastructure optimization. A leading cloud management company in South America, RealCloud serves over 180 enterprise customers.

Granulate's solution provides AI-driven infrastructure and workload optimization for any computing environment, empowering businesses to reduce cloud, on-prem, and hybrid infrastructure expenses by up to 63% and attain an up to 5X increase in throughput. Granulate's Workload Optimizer does this by learning the specific needs of an application, its resource usage pattern, and data flow to identify bottlenecks and prioritization opportunities. RealCloud focuses on speeding up processing as well as reducing compute time and costs, now aided with Granulate technologies as well as others provided to its customers.

Tel Aviv's [Granulate](http://www.Granulate.io), an Intel company, optimizes OS and runtime resource management, resulting in improved performance metrics and reduced compute costs. The technology is fully autonomous, optimizing workloads without requiring engineering and development resources or code changes. Granulate's solution provides AI-driven infrastructure and workload optimization for any computing environment, empowering businesses to reduce cloud, on-prem and hybrid infrastructure expenses by up to 63% and attain a 5X increase in throughput. (Granulate 21.09)

ISRAEL ECONOMIC STATISTICS

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* 1. August Inflation Rate Falls More Than Expected

Israel's Consumer Price Index (CPI) fell by 0.3% in August, the Central Bureau of Statistics announced. Pundits had expected a fall, but the actual decline was more than expected. The rate of inflation for the twelve months to the end of August was 4.6%, down from 5.2% for the twelve months to the end of July.

The main contributor to the fall in the CPI in August was a 17.7% decline in fuel prices, which took 0.6% off the general index. The transportation factor item fell by 3.7% as a result. The home rental item rose by 0.6%, but for the 15% of tenants renewing leases this year, rents have risen by 3.5%. Home prices, which are not included in the CPI, rose by 1.9% in June-July in comparison with May-June, completing an 18% year-on-year rise. (CBS 15.09)

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* 1. Israel Achieves 6.8% Annualized Second Quarter Growth

Israel’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) grew at an annualized rate of 6.8% in the second quarter of 2022, according to figures from the Central Bureau of Statistics. This follows a 2.7% decline in GDP on an annual basis in the first quarter. In an international comparison with thirteen advanced countries, Israel has the highest economic growth in comparison with the corresponding quarter of 2021. In that period, Israel’s GDP jumped 7.4%, which compares with 6.2% in Austria, 5.4% in the Netherlands, 4.1% in Sweden, 3% in South Korea and just 1.7% in Germany and the US.

The CBS attributes the return to routine in the second quarter, which led to the rise in GDP, with the hospitality and air travel services in the private consumption category, and incoming tourism in the exports category, contributing significantly to the rise in GDP in this quarter. Another possible explanation is inflation. Price rises across the board, from food to energy, did not make Israelis consume less, making the GDP numbers grow even more.

Support for that explanation can be found in the private consumption figure, which rose by an annualized 10.7% in the second quarter. Israelis spent 4.3% more in the second quarter on fuel, power, and housing than in the previous quarter. Public spending rose by an annualized 4.4% in Q2/22. The increase would have been greater were it not for an annualized 20.8% drop in defense spending. (CBS 18.09)

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* 1. Housing Starts in Israel Boom

Building starts in Israel are starting to approach the peak of the great wave of immigration from the former Soviet Union in the 1990s. In the twelve months to the end of June 2022, construction began on 72,540 housing units. This is a scale not seen in Israel since 1995. In Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, building starts reached decades-long peaks, according to Central Bureau of Statistics figures.

In the first half of 2022, some 38,000 homes were started, and the approximately 81,000 building permits issued between July 2021 and June 2022 will ensure that the pace of construction will remain high at least for the next year. TAMA (National Outline Plan) 38 continues to be the main basis for urban renewal construction.

The 72,540 homes started between July 2021 and June 2022 represent a 24.3% increase in comparison with the previous twelve-month period. The figure is similar to that recorded in 1995. The all-time record number of housing starts is the 83,500 recorded in 1991. Between 2015 and 2020, the figure was 53,000-57,000 annually. Some 47% of the building permits issued between July 2021 and June 2022 were in the Tel Aviv and Central Districts (24.7% and 22.9% respectively). In Jerusalem, 4,514 homes were started issued between July 2021 and June 2022, 94% more than in the previous twelve-month period, while Bet Shemesh saw a 130% rise over the previous period, with 3,000 homes started, a record.

The numbers reinforce the importance of TAMA 38 in its different versions when it comes to housing starts. In the reporting period, construction began on some 11,000 homes under TAMA 38/2, which covers demolition and rebuilding. Including TAMA 38/1 (reinforcement of existing buildings and addition of extra floors), TAMA 38 accounts for 70% of housing starts nationwide. In the Tel Aviv and Central Districts, the proportion reaches 80%. (Globes 21.09)

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* 1. Israel's Employment Rate Highest in Four Years

According to the Central Bureau of Statistics' Manpower Survey for August 2022, the rate of employment in Israel rose from 60.9% in July to 61.6% in August, among those aged over 15 in Israel. Seasonally adjusted, the employment rate rose from 61.1% in July to 61.5%. This figure, however, included 0.4% of the population (about 16,800 people) who were absent from work all the week of the survey; that is, they are technically employed but in practice do not at present have work.

The figures represent a substantial rise in the employment rate in comparison with the period of the COVID-19 pandemic, at the height of which the proportion of people in Israel in employment fell to 57.7%. In fact, the current rate of employment is even higher than in 2019, and the last time such a high rate was recorded was in August 2018, exactly four years ago, when, seasonally adjusted, 61.6% of the population over 15 was employed, that is, just 0.1% more.

Nevertheless, the unemployment rate also rose in August, from 3.7% in July to 4.1%. Unemployment is defined as being in the workforce (i.e., actively looking for work) but not actually employed. The rise is in contrast to the rate of employment, but is still at what is considered a very low level.

It appears that the Israel economy has returned to full employment. This is all the more impressive considering the country’s relatively low rate of inflation, which in August fell to an annual rate of 4.6%, due to the fall in fuel prices. (Globes 19.09)

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* 1. Israel Climbs to First Place Worldwide in Digital Quality of Life Survey

According to the annual Digital Quality of Life Index 2022, Israel ranked first overall on digital well-being among 117 countries worldwide. Israel climbed to the first spot — overtaking Denmark’s two-year lead — from fourth in last year’s survey, and eighth in 2020. The survey is compiled annually by the virtual private network provider Surfshark, based on factors such as internet affordability and quality, infrastructure and digital government services.

Denmark moved to second place, with Germany, France and Sweden rounding out the top five in the 2022 index. The Netherlands, Finland, Japan, the UK and South Korea came in next for the top 10. The US dropped to 12th place, behind Lithuania, from fifth last year. Congo, Yemen, Ethiopia, Mozambique and Cameroon had the worst showings and were in the bottom five countries.

In the 2022 survey, Israel boasted the most affordable mobile internet access in the world. The index looked at the number of hours people had to work per month to afford access and found that Israelis can buy 1GB of mobile internet for as cheap as 5 seconds of work per month, 58 times less than in the US. Broadband internet affordability was more expensive, at 19 minutes of work, but better than the global average of six hours of work.

Israel had a mixed showing in the other categories. For internet quality, which looks at the speed and stability of mobile and broadband connections, Israel dropped to 21st place from 11th in 2021. Chile shot up to first place in this pillar, followed by Denmark and the United Arab Emirates. The US came in sixth. In electronic infrastructure, which determines how well-developed and inclusive a country’s existing electronic infrastructure may be, Israel ranked 28th, up one spot from 29th in 2021. Denmark, Sweden and the Netherlands were in the top three.

In e-government, which measures how advanced and digitized a country’s government services are, Israel dropped down to the 33rd sport, down from 29th last year, and well below the US, which came in first place in this category, and all European countries.

According to the most recent report by M-Lab — a partnership between New America’s Open Technology Institute, Google Open Source Research, Princeton University’s Planet Lab and others, and compiled by Cable — Israel ranked 67th out of 224 countries for internet speed in 2021. According to the data, Israel has a mean download speed of 34.97 megabits per second, above the global average of 28.69 Mbps but below the Netherlands with about 107 Mbps, Singapore with 97.61 and the US with a mean download speed of 92.42 Mbps. Higher internet speeds have also been linked to GDP growth and in helping close social inequalities, research has shown. (Tech Israel 15.09)

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* 1. Credit Suisse Says Average Wealth in Israel Rose by 17.6% in 2021

The average wealth of an adult in Israel rose by 17.6% in 2021 to $273,500, putting Israel among the six largest gainers in the world, according to the 13th annual Global Wealth Report published by the Credit Suisse Research Institute (CSRI).

This year’s Global Wealth Report showcases some interesting statistics regarding wealth creation in Israel with a special focus on global developments. Although post-pandemic economic effects clearly affected most countries globally, Israel’s growth of wealth per adult showed strong resilience in 2021. According to the report, Israel was among the six largest gainers globally with a mean wealth per adult of $273,420. This number represents an increase of $41,010 in 2021 compared to 2020. (Globes 20.09)

IN DEPTH

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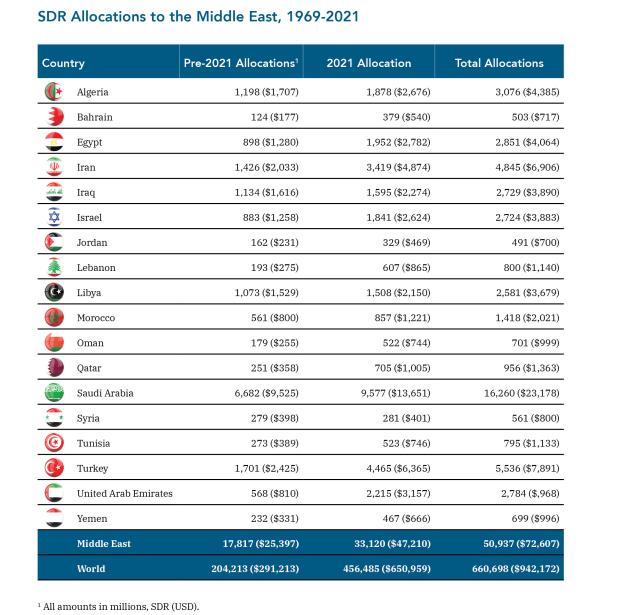
* 1. MIDDLE EAST: SDR Allocations in the Middle East - Helpful, But No Silver Bullet

Jonah Shrock posted on 20 September in [TWI PolicyWatch](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org) that various governments have made good use of last year’s unprecedented IMF allocation, but the Ukraine war, ongoing debt issues and other economic problems are a reminder that the region cannot sidestep deeper reforms indefinitely.

Last year, the International Monetary Fund dispersed the largest allocation of Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) in its history, more than twice the amount granted in the previous five decades combined. About 7% of the August 2021 allocation went to the Middle East, providing significant relief to countries whose foreign reserves had been strained by the COVID-19 pandemic. In the year since then, governments in the region have exchanged their SDRs for around $910 million worth of IMF debt relief and $6.3 billion worth of foreign currency.

**What Are SDRs?**

SDRs can be thought of as a currency created by the IMF, with a value that the institution determines in relation to a weighted basket of the U.S. dollar, euro, yuan, yen and British pound sterling. Unlike normal currencies, however, SDRs cannot be held by private individuals. Rather, they act as a stable asset in a country’s international reserves and can also be held by the IMF and a select few “prescribed holders”—mainly multinational development institutions such as the Arab Monetary Fund. For comparison, SDRs make up 2% of global reserves while the U.S. dollar makes up 57%.



**Distributing the Major 2021 Allocation**

Since 1969, the IMF has conducted four general SDR allocations and one special allocation, each time dispersing amounts in proportion to countries’ respective ranks in the IMF quota system. The 23 August 2021, allocation was by far the largest ever—in all, roughly SDR 660 billion has been allocated in the program’s history, but 456 billion of this total (equivalent to $650 billion) was allocated last August alone. At the time, officials described the unprecedented move as a response to urgent financing needs in the wake of the pandemic.

Approximately $400 billion worth of last year’s allocation went to wealthy countries, while $230 billion went to middle-income countries and $20 billion went to low-income countries. The G7 and G20 pledged to channel $100 billion worth of their SDRs through two IMF funds designed to help low-income countries and address structural challenges (e.g., climate change). So far, however, none of the promised rechanneling has occurred.

The Middle East portion of the 2021 allocation was equivalent to around $47 billion. Although the amounts distributed to needy countries such as Lebanon ($865 million) were dwarfed by what wealthy countries such as the United States received ($35 billion), the allocation still provided the region with significant liquidity at a difficult time.

**How Have Middle Eastern Countries Used Their SDRs?**

Since the allotment, various security and economic challenges have further disrupted the balance of payments for countries in the region. As mentioned above, the large allocation was originally spurred by the global need for liquidity amid the pandemic, but food and fuel prices have skyrocketed since then amid rising U.S. interest rates, a strengthened U.S. dollar and the tanking of Middle Eastern currencies such as the Turkish lira and Egyptian pound. The situation has drained foreign exchange reserves in the affected countries as the cost of imports has increased. Globally, 60% of low-income countries are debt distressed or at high risk of falling into that category. This in turn has affected how governments use their SDR allocations, including in the Middle East.

Thus far, seven countries in the region have tapped into their 2021 SDRs, with five of them using nearly all of their allocation. Egypt has used the most, in part to pay down its status as the largest IMF debtor in the world apart from Argentina, with $17.7 billion outstanding.

Iraq has used SDRs to help pay off its IMF debt entirely—it had an estimated $684 million in outstanding debt to the organization in July 2021, but it has since brought that figure down to zero for the first time since 2004, in part by tapping $184 million worth of SDR debt relief. Most other Middle Eastern countries have likewise used the allocation to lower their IMF debt.

One exception is Jordan, whose debt to the institution has actually grown by over $300 million since 2021. This partly reflects the kingdom’s decision to use just 5% of its allocation on debt relief compared to 94% exchanged for currency.

Yemen’s situation is unique as well. Between April 2020 and April 2022, it received a total of 47,329,000 in additional SDRs ($61,639,396 at the current exchange rate) via five tranches of debt service relief provided by the Catastrophe Containment and Relief Trust. Of this total, SDR 4,875,000 ($6,349,005) was provided in the past year, so the government was able to continue bringing down its IMF debt significantly without drawing on much of its August 2021 SDR allocation.

Interestingly, Iran has not touched its SDRs despite repeatedly claiming to have major financing needs. Then again, its ability to cash them in may have been affected by international sanctions, perhaps influencing Tehran’s thinking on the matter.

As for countries that exchanged substantial SDRs for currency, they tend to have expansionary government spending programs. Although SDRs do not directly finance government budgets, using them for additional foreign currency reserves will generally enable a government to spend more—which in turn increases the country’s imports and puts pressure on its foreign currency reserves. Two prominent examples are Tunisia, which exchanged SDRs to help pay a large government wage bill, and Lebanon, which sought to fund social spending. Lebanon now holds a paltry 0.3% of the SDRs it has been allocated (as the associated SDR usage table shows, it exchanged more than its 2021 allotment over the past year, so it presumably had to draw on past allotments or other potential SDR sources to cover the difference). Meanwhile, countries such as Algeria, Israel, and Saudi Arabia have participated in Voluntary Trade Agreements to purchase other governments’ SDRs in exchange for currency, thereby increasing their holdings over the past year.

**Interest Payments**

SDRs pay interest, though arguably at a lower rate than central banks could get from alternative investments. Countries receive interest payments on their SDR holdings and pay interest on their SDR allocations, so a government that holds more SDRs than it has been allocated will receive net interest and vice versa.

Overall, Middle Eastern countries currently hold around SDR 8.0 billion ($10.4 billion) less than what they have been allocated over the years—a debt that will cost the region about SDR 131 million ($169 million) per year in interest. Yet these amounts are relatively small compared to government budgets. For example, Iraq’s 2021 budget called for $89 billion in spending, which dwarfs its SDR interest bill of SDR 43 million ($56 million).

**Conclusion**

For most Middle Eastern countries, the plus-size 2021 SDR allocation served as a nice bonus rather than a lifesaver. In Saudi Arabia, for example, the government was not in desperate need of liquidity, but the extra assets helped it make large deposits in the central banks of Egypt and Pakistan, expanding the kingdom’s economic influence in both countries. In other cases, governments used the allocation to supplement their existing plans for paying down debt to the IMF.

In contrast, Lebanon and Egypt were so desperate for liquidity that they quickly used up their entire allocations. Of course, both countries are facing much more fundamental problems than a mere short-term need for liquidity. Lebanon is experiencing one of the worst economic crises in its history, while Goldman Sachs recently estimated that Egypt may need to secure a $15 billion package from the IMF even after using $2.6 billion worth of SDRs in the past year. Solving these problems will require fundamental economic reforms.

Moreover, when the IMF made the allocation in 2021, it could not have foreseen the Russian invasion of Ukraine or the global debt crisis that ensued. The latter challenge will require major debt restructuring and cooperation from China, the world’s largest creditor. While SDRs will likely be part of this solution, they are not a silver bullet.

*Jonah Shrock is a former research assistant with The Washington Institute’s Koret Project on Arab-Israel Relations.*  (TWI 20.09)

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* 1. LEBANON: IMF Staff Concludes Visit to Lebanon

An [International Monetary Fund (IMF)](http://www.imf.org/) visited Beirut, Lebanon from 19 to 21 September to discuss the recent economic developments and progress in implementation of prior actions agreed under the 7 April 2022 Staff Level Agreement (SLA) for a Four-Year Extended Fund Facility. At the end of the mission, the IMF made the following statement:

“The Lebanese economy remains severely depressed against continued deadlock over much needed economic reforms and high uncertainty. GDP has contracted by over 40% since 2018, inflation remains in triple digits, FX reserves are declining, and the parallel exchange rate has reached 38,000 LBP per USD. Amidst collapsing revenues and drastically suppressed spending, public sector institutions are failing, and basic services to the population have been drastically cut. Unemployment and poverty are at historically high rates.

“Despite the urgency for action to address Lebanon’s deep economic and social crisis, progress in implementing the reforms agreed under the April SLA remains very slow. In particular, the majority of prior actions have not been implemented:

● **The 2022 budget is yet to be approved by parliament.** The long delay in approving it means that for macroeconomic purposes the focus should now turn to preparing and approving a credible 2023 budget. This should be based on realistic macroeconomic assumptions, with the necessary revenue raising measures, including the use of a realistic exchange rate (i.e., the Sayrafa rate that should become the market rate with exchange rate unification) for all tax purposes. This should allow for a significant increase in social and investment spending and adjustment to public sector spending to re-start the basic functioning of the public administration at a time where public services are all but disappearing with noticeable impact on revenues collection.

● **Existence of the multiple exchange rates causes significant distortions to economic activity**, undermines the operations of the public sector, and creates opportunities for corruption and rent-seeking, leading to excessive pressures on the central bank’s FX reserves. The adoption of the Capital Controls and Deposit Withdrawal Limits Law that was submitted to Parliament in March is crucial to tackle these issues and reduce pressures on the central bank’s foreign currency reserves. In the present context, intervention in the exchange rate market to stabilize the exchange rate has proven to be inefficient in the absence of much needed reforms.

● **While the reform of Banking Secrecy Law that was approved by parliament in July contained some positive steps**, it fell short of the changes needed to bring it in line with best international practice. We welcome that Parliament is reviewing some of these key shortcomings, which are fundamental to fight corruption, eliminate impediments to effective banking sector supervision and restructuring, tax administration, as well as investigate financial crimes, and recover misappropriated assets.

● **The financial sector rehabilitation strategy, which was approved by cabinet, should be implemented** to allow a healthier banking system to function normally again, attract deposits and support economic activity. The large losses in the sector need to be recognized and addressed upfront, while respecting the hierarchy of claims. Small depositors must be fully protected (the SLA envisioned protection of a vast majority of deposit accounts); and recourse to public resources—assets belonging to all Lebanese citizens, with or without a bank account —should be limited.

“These and other reforms agreed in the April SLA are crucial for the recovery of the Lebanese economy to begin. Delaying their implementation only increases the costs to the country and its population. Completion of these and other prior actions is also needed for the IMF Board to consider the request for a financial program with Lebanon. (IMF 21.09)

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* 1. ISRAEL: Israel's Ongoing Role in the Struggle over Mediterranean Natural Gas

Amb. Dore Gold wrote in the [Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs](https://jcpa.org/) on 15 September that when the present Israeli government came into power, one of the tangible policy changes compared to the previous Netanyahu government was in the realm of energy policy. Prime Minister Netanyahu and his Energy Minster, Yuval Steinitz, stressed the vital importance for Israel to extract natural gas from the new finds in the Eastern Mediterranean as a top priority.

In contrast, Israel's Energy Minister, Karine Elharrar, declared in December 2021 that Israel would no longer award licenses for natural gas exploration within Israel's economic zone for the upcoming year. Instead, she stressed that 2022 would be the "Year of Renewable Energies" and that "natural gas can wait." In the year ahead, her Energy Ministry would set aside the policy recommendations of the previous government's report on natural gas policy for Israel, which included a specific recommendation for further gas exploration.

Israel now appears to be in the midst of another significant policy shift in its gas export policy for 2022. True, Elharrar recently stressed in an interview that the "energy future of the world is green, not gas." But the war in Europe over Ukraine in 2022 altered gas markets yet again. The land battles in Ukraine and the stoppage of the Russian gas supply have forced the Europeans to develop a new strategy to keep the same quantities of gas flowing, albeit from new sources. Nearly 40% of Europe's gas supply came from Russia, which was seeking to retaliate against European governments supporting Ukraine in the newest European war.



**EastMed Pipeline Project Designed to Ship Gas from Eastern Mediterranean to Europe**

In July 2022, 26 of 27 EU member states agreed to limit natural gas consumption. They also sought to diversify their gas supplies, which meant, above all, cutting back Russian imports, which they decided would be reduced by two-thirds by the end of 2022.

By June 2022, senior European officials began visiting the states of the Eastern Mediterranean with greater frequency in order to formalize their access to the best alternative they had to Russian gas. For example, the EU signed an MOU with both Israel and Egypt that would increase natural gas exports to Europe. In addition, the European Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen, was in Cairo on 17 June to announce a new gas forum for the export of natural gas to Europe.

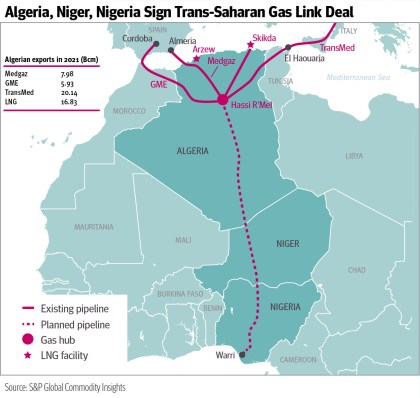
**New Pipeline Initiatives**

The European states have been taking a number of steps to deal with the impending gas crisis. First, Europe is preparing to increase its usage of liquefied natural gas (LNG). Second, there is a growing interest in reinforcing the global pipeline infrastructure for transporting gas. Thus, Algeria, Niger and Nigeria signed an MOU to build a 2,500-mile Trans-Saharan pipeline.

Massive gas discoveries were made in Mozambique and in Tanzania in 2010.

There is also the EastMed pipeline project planned to go beneath the waters of Israel, Cyprus, and Greece and reach a length of 1,200 miles. Unfortunately, the Biden administration withdrew its support for the EastMed pipeline in January 2022, even though it did not entail U.S. federal funding. The pipeline was scheduled to be completed in 2025.

These developments are happening just as Europe's need for new energy sources is soaring. Israel, Cyprus and Greece could help Europe, as could the states of North Africa and East Africa if the required infrastructure for extracting and transferring gas was in place.



There are national security implications as well from these changes. For example, when Iran backs Hezbollah threatening Israeli gas sources, it is undermining the well-being of Europe and not just Israel. Nonetheless, these Hezbollah actions against Israel have persisted.



The Karish gas platform is indisputably within Israel's economic waters and is not in the area that is disputed between Lebanon and Israel. Therefore, a unified Western strategy for energy is required that does not blindly follow a new idea for green energy that remains unproven.

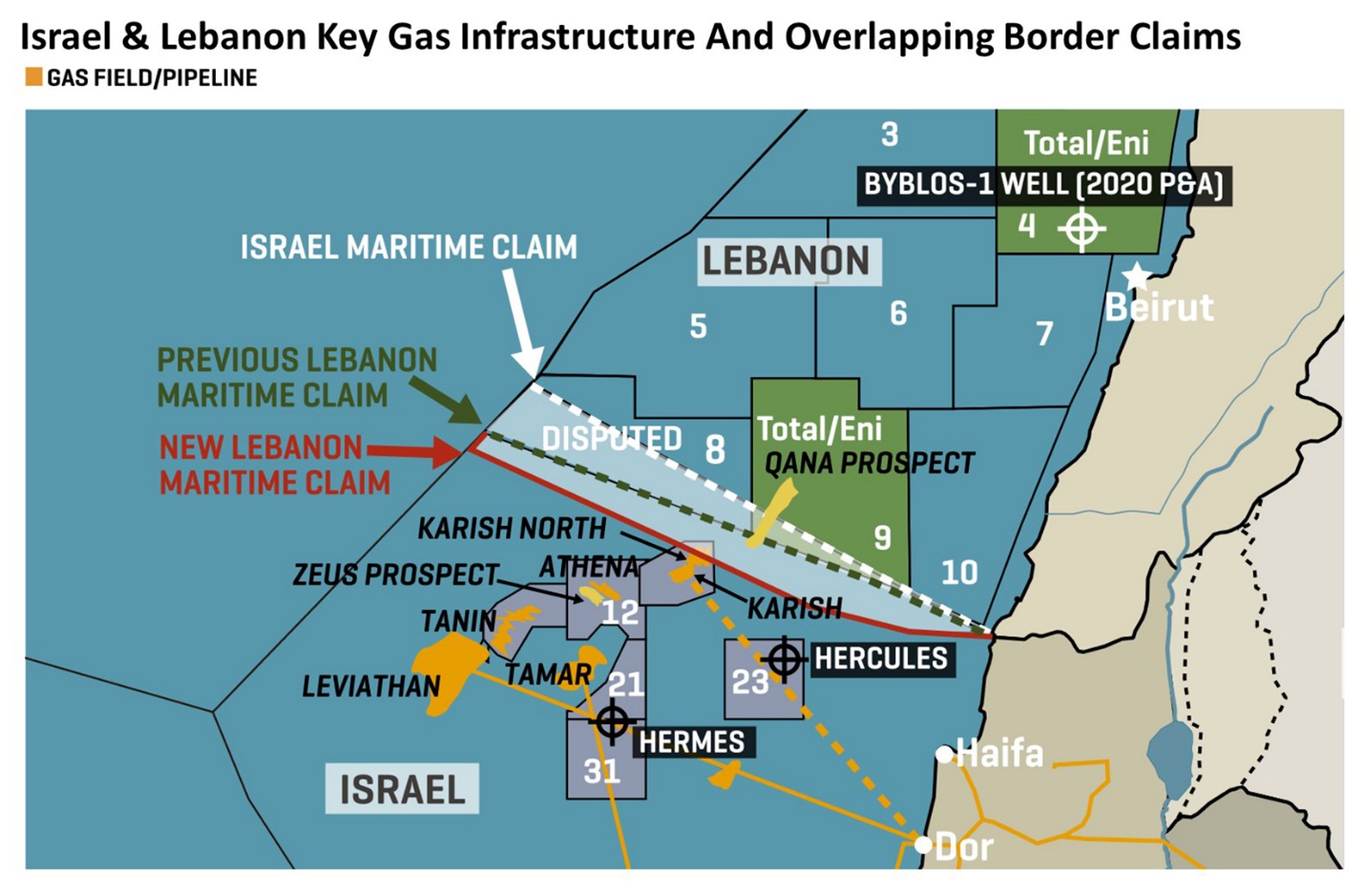
*Ambassador Dore Gold served as Israel's ambassador to the UN and as Director General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He is the President of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs.* (JCPA 15.09)

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* 1. ISRAEL: Israel’s Karish Gas Field - Diplomatic Opportunity or Casus Belli?

Simon Henderson posted in the [Washington Institute for Near East Policy](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org) on 20 September that before the end of the month, Israel is scheduled to begin production at the Karish natural gas field off its northern coast. The government’s announcement has prompted threats from Lebanese Hezbollah, ambiguous comments from certain Israeli officials, and suggestions of a possible U.S.-orchestrated diplomatic breakthrough. Karish is much smaller than Israel’s current producing fields, Leviathan and Tamar, but it has generated much more attention of late because it lies close to the disputed dividing line between Lebanon and Israel’s exclusive economic zones (EEZs)—a festering disagreement that Beirut recently exacerbated by claiming an additional maritime area south of its previous declaration. Karish North, a separate field due to come into production next year, lies within this extra claim.

In addition to complicating the countries’ broader maritime negotiations, the Karish site is also sensitive because of its potentially heightened vulnerability to attack. Unlike the production apparatus for Leviathan and Tamar, which are hidden beneath the waves and connected by long pipelines to processing platforms near the shore, Karish is tethered to a production and storage vessel floating just above the field; the same arrangement will eventually be used for Karish North. This offers a tempting target to Hezbollah, which flew three drones toward the vessel on July 2 (Israel soon shot down the aircraft). And all of these tensions are growing against a backdrop of other sensitive and relevant developments, including imminent elections in Israel and the United States, the October departure of Lebanese president Michel Aoun, and the ongoing global energy crisis prompted by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.



Whatever happens, all parties should be mindful of the challenges and timelines associated with offshore gas development. Typically, it takes five years from signing an initial contract before gas actually flows to a customer. The area must first be seismically surveyed, and a drilling rig must then be brought in to explore likely oil or gas deposits. In the deep waters of the East Mediterranean, each hole requires around ninety days to drill, and commercially viable finds usually cannot be confirmed until around day eighty-five or so. Additionally, each hole costs around $100 million—an expense that license holders will not take on until they secure a long-term sales agreement with the sovereign government (i.e., fifteen to twenty years).

**Lebanon’s Calculus**

Beirut knows that failing to reach a deal would cause internal backlash, since the country’s economy cannot afford more tensions with the international community. The political leadership hopes that agreeing to a U.S.-brokered deal on a broad maritime boundary will open other doors, such as facilitating the transfer of Egyptian (in reality, Israeli) gas to Lebanon while easing IMF and World Bank demands for reform. Given the threat of additional sanctions on corrupt politicians and the promised benefits that new gas supplies would hold for economically entrenched elites, an agreement with Israel does not sound bad at this point.

Hezbollah has its own calculations on the matter but may likewise let it pass. Crippled by internal financial problems, challenges within its fighting force, and ongoing Israeli attacks on its weapons facilities in Syria, the organization is well aware that starting another war would result in more losses than gains—at least for the time being.

If an agreement is realized, all parties need to keep in mind that the energy sector is still Lebanon’s most corrupt and failed sphere. Hence, any compromises on reform requirements will only strengthen this corrupt system and, inevitably, Hezbollah itself.

**Hezbollah’s Military Caution?**

In June, Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah warned that his forces would take action to prevent Israel from extracting Karish gas unless it makes concessions toward a final maritime boundary deal with Lebanon. Israeli security officials understood this threat as a significant departure from Hezbollah’s traditional redlines, under which the group would carry out reprisal attacks only if Israel strikes Lebanese territory or targets Hezbollah operatives.

Threatening Karish is risky for Hezbollah, since many observers believe the group does not want a full-fledged fight with Israel at a time when Lebanon is suffering severe political and financial crises. Yet Nasrallah has also seemingly concluded that the potential costs of taking this risk are outweighed by the benefits of claiming that Israel’s concessions on Karish and related matters are made possible by Hezbollah threats. After taking much flak domestically due to its intervention in the Syria war, the group likely wants to show that its weapons are now being used in the service of Lebanon’s interests, not Iran or Syria’s.

**Israel’s Financial and Security Stake**

Despite Nasrallah’s repeated threats, Israel has not been deterred from proceeding with its Karish production plans, creating a dangerous round of brinkmanship that could result in escalating local hostilities or even a larger confrontation. According to Israeli intelligence assessments, now that Nasrallah has made such serious public statements and conveyed additional warnings through intermediaries, he may feel obligated to act on his explicit threats. For their part, Israeli leaders may have boxed themselves into a corner by publicly insisting that the project will not be delayed.

Regarding the broader maritime border negotiations, Nasrallah seemingly aims to strong-arm Israel into fully conceding the prospective Qana gas field, which straddles the proposed boundary. To compensate Israel for its share of the field (reportedly 20-30%, worth approximately $200-300 million), the United States apparently suggested that the firm QatarEnergy buy out the Russian company Novatek, which recently withdrew from its partnership with French Total and Italian Eni in this block. This type of “unitization” arrangement would enable Beirut to claim that it is not dealing directly with the “enemy.” Earlier this week, the Lebanese government announced that it will take over Novatek’s 20% share in Block 9 (the Qana area) and Block 4 (north of Beirut).

U.S. envoy Amos Hochstein is still working to remove other obstacles preventing an overall deal. Earlier today, he discussed the issue with Israel’s national security advisor and Foreign Ministry director on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly meeting in New York.

**U.S.-Israel Relations**

The timing of the Karish project seems to be a key matter for the U.S. and Israeli leaders. This is partly due to the uncertainty of what will emerge from Israel’s November 1 parliamentary election; any progress on offshore issues before then could be seen as an achievement for caretaker prime minister Yair Lapid. Another mystery is whether Iran will give its Hezbollah proxy the go-ahead to permit a Lebanese deal at a time of broad regional uncertainty. For now, the various hopeful signals surrounding a potential breakthrough suggest that Washington is quietly urging restraint on Karish in order to give the rest of the diplomatic process time to play out over the next month or so.

**Biden’s Goals**

The Biden administration has defined resolving the maritime boundary dispute as a “key priority” that will promote regional stability. Yet while an agreement on this frontier may remove one source of conflict between Israel and Hezbollah, it is unlikely to alleviate their spiking tensions along the Blue Line, the land boundary that runs from the coast to the Syrian border. Moreover, any service contracts and revenue stemming from an EEZ agreement could result in funds leaking to Hezbollah—in fact, such diversions seem inevitable unless international authorities insist on sufficient oversight and a Lebanese sovereign wealth fund, which might encourage the transparent collection and disbursement of related revenue.

The Biden administration is also apparently keen on brokering a maritime deal soon because it may influence the outcome of Israel’s election. Prime Minister Lapid is currently running neck and neck with former leader Binyamin Netanyahu, and the White House would prefer a Lapid victory in order to further its goals of improving relations with the Palestinians and maintaining the status quo in the West Bank. Whatever the final terms of a maritime agreement with Lebanon, reaching a deal would burnish Lapid’s foreign policy credentials and potentially help him at the polls.

**The Syria Angle**

In addition to maritime talks, the United States has spent more than a year in drawn-out negotiations to broker a Jordanian-inspired deal for supplying Lebanon with more energy. Under its terms, electricity generated in Jordan from Israeli gas—along with certain amounts of Israeli gas itself—would be transported over Syrian territory to Lebanon.

Much of the plan’s controversy stems from the fact that Syria’s Assad regime would reportedly receive 8% of any electricity and gas transiting its territory as a form of in-kind payment—this despite its continued status as a target of sanctions via the U.S. Caesar Act, the European Union, and the Arab League. Northern Lebanon has just one electricity generation station that is both adjacent to the Arab Gas Pipeline and capable of using gas as a feedstock, so Syria is the only party in a position to generate the amount of electricity Beirut currently needs. The Assad regime is also eager for this arrangement because its own generation stations often sit idle due to lack of feedstock.

Israeli sources describe the plan as an energy extension of their country’s “good neighbors” policy toward the Syrian people during the civil war next door. In other words, Jerusalem has sought to show that it wishes Syrian citizens well even though their country remains dominated by Iranian and other proxy forces.

**Conclusion**

Lebanon’s decision to take over Novatek’s offshore stake could be part of a synchronized move toward an imminent maritime border agreement—one that also allows for Qatar’s entry into the license consortiums. Despite questions about the nature and substance of any agreement involving Lebanon and Israel (whether directly or, more likely, indirectly), the nascent deal appears to have traction, reportedly including significant Israeli concessions on the final boundary line. Yet it remains an open question whether any near-term agreements will serve as a foundation for broader bilateral progress between Israel and Lebanon or collapse within a few months like past deals. (TWI 20.09)

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* 1. SAUDI ARABIA: Teaching Chinese in Saudi Arabia

Hind Al Ansari posted in Carnegie's [Sada](https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/87950?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss) on 19 September that the Saudi government’s investment in teaching Chinese is rooted in geopolitics, but implementation challenges abound.

Nearly two and a half years after Mohammed bin Salman’s Asia tour, the Saudi government has been developing a stronger partnership and advancing economic cooperation with America’s competitor, China. One of the clearest examples of the increasingly developing ties is in the educational sector where the state is investing heavily in Chinese language education. While the end goal may be to produce a new generation of Saudis who are proficient in Chinese and oriented towards China rather than the US and Europe, a closer look at the initiative reveals significant implementation challenges that may hinder the process.

In February 2019, MBS held a meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping, in which they discussed bilateral interests and cooperation in the technology sector. The Crown Prince also announced a commitment to include Mandarin Chinese language in the curriculum of Saudi public schools—a clear symbol of Saudi Arabia’s evolving foreign policy priorities. Official Saudi media quickly rallied around the decision; Al Arabiya was among the first to publish an article about Saudi children living in China and speaking Mandarin fluently.

Many Saudis, however, expressed concerns on Twitter, with some emphasizing existing flaws in the education system. Some pointed out perceived defects in the way Arabic is taught in schools. Others raised similar concerns about the English curriculum, arguing that it does not effectively prepare students to acquire adequate language skills. The essence of the critics’ argument is that existing shortcomings in the public school system should be addressed before another foreign language is introduced.

Despite these objections, in 2020, Ibtisam Alshehri, Spokesperson at the Ministry of Education, announced on Twitter that a handful of high schools would begin to teach Chinese as an elective. In December 2021, the number of high schools that teach the language skyrocketed to over 700 in total. At the university level, the president of King Saud University signed an agreement with the Confucius Institute in 2019 to establish a Chinese language department.

Although the Ministry of Education declared that learning Chinese is optional, some universities have made it compulsory for first-year students to learn the language. For example, at University of Jeddah, the dean stressed, “anyone who wants to join the University of Jeddah must study the Chinese language skills course.” Additionally, as integration of Chinese as a foreign language expands, local teachers undergo a rigorous one-year training program to learn Mandarin from scratch and ultimately teach it in classrooms.

In a video that went viral on social media, a Saudi language instructor reads Chinese terms to a group of teachers in a small classroom in the city of Taif. The instructor uses a rote teaching methodology and asks the teachers to repeat each word after him. This methodology, along with the broader integration strategy it points to, provoked contentious debate on Twitter, and some mocked the video. According to Okaz, one of the primary goals of teaching Chinese to Saudi teachers is to relieve the Ministry of financial burdens. Intensively teaching local teachers the language—a questionable strategy—seems to be more affordable than importing Chinese instructors.

Given that Chinese is one of the hardest languages to learn with its distinct tonal system, it is not enough simply to acquire basic language skills or to have prior teaching experience. According to Voxy, the volume of Chinese characters and the complexity of the writing system make learning the language onerous, which suggests that an understanding of specialized pedagogy is necessary.

The difficulty of learning Chinese was corroborated by Saudi students attending a university in northern Saudi Arabia. In a research study by Saudi professor Hammad Al Shammari, 80% of the 25 male and female student participants strongly agreed that Chinese is more challenging to learn than Arabic. In Arabic, for example, while one word can have multiple meanings depending on the context, in Chinese, the meaning of a word changes based on subtle changes in pronunciation. The study results also indicate that students lack motivation or interest to learn the language, which could make the learning process more tedious and demanding for them.

Additionally, a lack of familiarity or exposure prior to learning may catch learners and their initial expectations off guard. In an interview by Saudi 24 TV channel, Chairman of the Saudi-Chinese Business Council, Fahad Al Arjani, discussed his experience learning Chinese. He first made the point that, unlike English, people in the Middle East are not used to hearing Chinese in their surroundings. He described the first months as a “sound shock” and emphasized that “whoever is determined to learn the language will continue. Otherwise, one will not be able to.”

Aside from linguistic difficulties, intercultural communication is an essential part of the learning process. Teaching indigenous beliefs and practices cannot be separated from language instruction. In China, for example, certain items are associated with misfortune. While in the Arab Gulf region, watches are typical gifts given to friends and family members, giving a watch or clock as a gift is frowned upon in Chinese culture; time is viewed as a metaphor for death. Students must learn such beliefs, especially since gift-giving is common in Saudi Arabia and the other GCC states. The majority of local teachers who learn Chinese are unlikely to develop cultural competency in a short period of time.

Furthermore, teaching Chinese in a conservative culture may require the exclusion of certain cultural practices. Ling Mei, a former graduate student at NYU in Shanghai, reflected on her time teaching Chinese in Saudi Arabia and described teaching Chinese culture in the kingdom as a major challenge. For example, she had to consider religious sensitivities when deciding which cultural practices to include in the curriculum.

Introducing Chinese as a foreign language in Saudi schools and universities is truly ambitious. However, the lack of a comprehensive understanding of the benefits and risks—which is largely a result of hasty implementation—strains the learning process and impedes desired outcomes. Overall, to fulfill the state’s geopolitical objective of preparing Chinese-speaking Saudi nationals and shifting their interest to the east, policymakers should work to develop effective motivational strategies to spark genuine interest in learning Chinese as a foreign language and, just as importantly, to engage them with Chinese culture.

*Hind Al Ansari is a public policy fellow at the Wilson Center’s Middle East Program. Her work focuses on social and educational reform in the Arab and Muslim world.* (Sada 19.09)

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