

A UAE-based startup addresses gaps in women's medical care

Fri, 2020-06-26 19:02

DUBAI: Investment in the Middle Eastern health care sector is booming. Over \$144 billion will be plowed into medical facilities across the Middle East and North Africa by the end of 2020, with Gulf Cooperation Council nations contributing more than half of the total expenditure, according to Al-Masrah Capital.

But while much attention is being paid to the region's general rise in non-communicable diseases, more focus must be given to female-specific health issues, says Sophie Smith, founder of UAE-based startup Nabta Health.

"Women's health has been under-researched and underfunded since time memorial," she said. "So much global testing is still done only on men, which means women still get adverse reactions to medicines, for example."

Nabta, which she dubs a "hybrid health care" company, aims to address gaps in local women's health care, and to make affordable and accessible health care available to the next generation of women.

According to Smith, a new model of health care is required, "one that improves clinical outcomes by removing some of the inherent inefficiencies in the health care ecosystem."

Nabta says it uses a combination of digital solutions and cutting-edge research to slash time and expenses in treating regional female health care issues.

The social enterprise also supports women by providing hundreds of health-related articles on its online portal www.nabtahealth.com and social media support groups in Arabic and English.

Nabta's business model is based around care pathway models. Its first pathway concerns fertility and enables the diagnoses of polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS), a condition that Smith says is responsible for around 70 percent of local infertility.

The Nabta solution for PCOS incorporates a pay-as-you-go virtual consultation and a 48-hour couriered blood test.

"We can diagnose in three months rather than years, and for significantly less than it would cost in a clinic. Our solution affords women more privacy and autonomy," Smith said.

SOPHIE SMITH'S TIPS FOR INNOVATORS

- * You do not need to reinvent the wheel.
- * You have to be passionate about your business idea or you will run out of steam. Try to solve a personal problem or something that resonates with you personally.
- * If you want to make a lot of money and help millions of people, you will need to find other people who are operating in the same space and believe in impactful business.
- * Get a co-founder who has a complementary skill set. A co-founder with a tech background is a big plus.
- * Make sure you get a good advisory board in place and ensure they make time for you.

In the coming years, Nabta hopes to deliver care pathways for ailments such as endometriosis, gestational diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and reproductive cancers, as well as PCOS aftercare.

Concerned by what she views as a “provider-led and provider-centric” health system in the UAE, Smith stresses that Nabta is an independent company, focused on bettering women’s health care.

“The local health care system is very commercially driven. A lot of the laboratories and health care providers are given kickbacks. Patients often get given tests they don’t need because of commissions,” she said.

“We don’t take kickbacks. We’d happily see that aspect of the health care system eliminated forever.”

Nabta, which is headquartered in Sharjah Innovation Park, has partnered with the University of Sharjah to help expedite its research and development ambitions.

“Our plan this year is to sign some joint ventures so we can more effectively innovate on a pathway-by-pathway basis and really become more disruptive in women’s health care,” Smith said.

The social enterprise is also focused on closing its seeding round, before launching its Series A round in June.

Women’s health has been under-researched and underfunded since time memorial.

Sophie Smith

Smith, who initially set up Nabta with \$110,000 of combined co-founder funding, says she wants to build a “trusted global leader in women’s health.”

She added: “We want to acquire companies that can help us add to our services. The more money we make, the more people we can help.”

Currently, Nabta employs 21 people across the region, including five developers based in Egypt.

“In this region, there’s a huge amount of growth potential for female-focused hybrid health care solutions,” Smith said.

“We eventually will export globally, but for now we’re very much focused on the Middle East,” she added.

“Nabta, which means blossoming plant in Arabic, is here to support women’s health care as they blossom throughout their lifetime.”

This report is being published by Arab News as a partner of the Middle East Exchange, which was launched by the Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Global Initiatives to reflect the vision of the UAE prime minister and ruler of Dubai to explore the possibility of changing the status of the Arab region.



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Seawater seeping into decaying oil tanker off Yemen coast

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Fri, 2020-06-26 14:13

CAIRO: The United Nations said an abandoned oil tanker moored off the coast of Yemen loaded with more than 1 million barrels of crude oil is at risk of rupture or exploding, causing massive environmental damage to Red Sea marine life, desalination factories and international shipping routes.

Meanwhile, Houthi militants who control the area where the ship is moored have denied UN inspectors access to the vessel. Internal documents obtained by The Associated Press shows that seawater has entered the engine compartment of the tanker, which hasn't been maintained for over five years, causing damage to the pipelines and increasing the risk of sinking. Rust has covered parts of the tanker and the inert gas that prevents the tanks from gathering inflammable gases, has leaked out. Experts say maintenance is no longer possible because the damage to the ship is irreversible.

For years, the UN has been trying to send inspectors to assess the damage aboard the vessel known as the FSO Safer and look for ways to secure the tanker by unloading the oil and pulling the ship to safety.

But one European diplomat, a Yemeni government official and the tanker's company owner said that Houthi militia have resisted. The diplomat said the militia are treating the vessel as a "deterrent like having a nuclear weapon." All three individuals spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the subject with a reporter.

"They do say that openly to the UN, 'We like to have this as something to hold against the international community if attacked,'" the diplomat said. "Houthis are definitely responsible for failure of the UN to look at the ship."

Money is also an issue, the diplomat said, adding that the Houthis initially were demanding millions of dollars in return for the oil stored in the tanker. The UN is trying to reach an arrangement where money could be used to pay workers and employees at Yemen's Red Sea ports, the diplomat added.

Some experts, however, criticize both the Houthis and the UN for failing to fully understand the magnitude of the crisis with the abandoned ship.

Ian Ralby, founder of I.R. Consilium, who specializes in maritime and resource security, told the AP that UN's efforts to send a team to assess the ship is "futile." What the vessel needs is a salvage team, he said.

"It's real shame that they wasted so much money and time in this futile operation," said Ralby. "If you are taking these years to get a simple team

to assess, we will not have a second chance to salvage,” he added.

Ralby, who has written extensively about the tanker, told the AP that amid declining oil prices the cost spent on cleaning up the environmental damage from an explosion or leakage will be much more than the millions worth of oil on the ship.

But the Houthis have refused to back down from their demands.

The Iranian-backed Houthi militia are in control of the western Red Sea ports, including Ras Issa, 6 kilometers (3.7 miles) from where the FSO Safer tanker has been moored since the 1980s.

The floating tanker is a Japanese-made vessel built in the 1970s and sold to the Yemeni government in 1980s to store for export up to 3 million barrels pumped from oil fields in Marib, a province in eastern Yemen. The ship is 360 meters (1,181 feet) long with 34 storage tanks.

A senior official at the state-owned oil company in charge of the tanker, said because of a shrinking operational budget, which used to be around 20 million dollars a year before the war, the company could no longer afford to purchase fuel needed to run the boilers on the ship. The boilers are needed to power generators that, among other things, keep an inert gas that prevents explosions flowing. The tanker needs 11,000 tons of the fuel, which cost about 8 million dollars each year.

“After the stoppage of the boilers the strong majority of the equipment and the machines of the tanker stopped because they all depend on steam power,” the company official said. That includes the machines that power the ventilation system, which reduces humidity and prevents corrosion, he said. Over the past two years, the Yemeni government in exile, the UN, and western diplomats have been sounding the alarm and putting pressure on Houthis to secure the tanker. The militants initially agreed to let inspectors examine the tanker but later backtracked.

The more delays in reaching a solution to the vessel, the more dangers it poses, Sharaf Eddin said.

The British ambassador to Yemen urged the Houthis on Friday to give UN inspectors access to the vessel “right now.”

Michael Aron said that 63,000 fishermen will lose their livelihoods, the crops of 3.25 million Yemeni farmers will be devastated and the port of Hodeidah will be closed if the vessel ruptures or explodes.

A recent internal government memo obtained by the AP shows that earlier this month a diving team was dispatched by the state-run oil company that owns the tanker to seal holes in the ship that have allowed seawater to leak into the engine room.

The divers were able to make repairs, but it remain unclear if the work will hold, according to the July 13 report.

“We believe that the plugs/seals that were installed to prevent the entry of seawater into the engine room space will not withstand/hold long,” the report read.

An earlier letter dated Oct. 2019 sent by the Yemeni minister of oil – who is affiliated with the Saudi-backed government – to the prime minister, and seen by the AP, found other problems with the tanker.

“Rust has covered some parts of the tanker along with equipment, fire

distinguishing system stopped working, and what is more dangerous is that the gas which was covering the oil inside the tanks has leaked out. It was used to protect the tankers from exploding," the letter read.

The oil minister's letter recommended three different approaches to deal with the tanker: make repairs, pump the oil to another ship, or to pull the tanker away and safely unload it in another port.

The minister wrote that because of the "collapsing condition" of the vessel, the best solution is to pull it away to another port.

"We are notifying you about this dangerous situation to do your best and to get Yemen and the region out from such environmental dangers," he wrote.

The letter came months after the UN's projects arm, known as UNOPS, put out a tender to hire an international agency to inspect the vessel after an initial agreement with Houthis.

The UN hired a team of experts and had them standing by in Djibouti. The AP obtained a copy of the tender letter and documents showing the experts' proposed inspection program and a list of equipment needed, including gas detector and oil sampling kits.

But the Houthis backed out of the agreement before the repair crew could be sent to Yemen.

Mark Lowcock, the UN humanitarian chief, told the UN Security Council last year that the UN assessment team was ready to be deployed but "the necessary permits remain pending with the Ansar Allah authorities" in reference to Houthis.

"I would just like to note that this is additionally frustrating when one recalls that the same authorities wrote to the United Nations early last year requesting assistance with the tanker and promising to facilitate our work," he added.



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Pirates attack tanker Stolt Apal off Yemen
Disaster warning over 'ticking time bomb' Yemen tanker

[Turkey releases 3 journalists accused of revealing state secrets](#)

Thu, 2020-06-25 20:58

ANKARA: In a surprise move, Turkey on Wednesday released three journalists charged with revealing state secrets in their coverage of the deaths of Turkish intelligence officers in Libya.

However, three others were remanded in custody while they stand trial on

charges of revealing the identities of two members of Turkey's intelligence agency.

The high-profile case, with the defendants facing up to 19 years in jail, has been closely monitored by domestic and international press freedom groups following the arrest of the journalists four months ago.

The journalists who appeared in court on Wednesday worked for media outlets supporting the political views of the Turkish opposition, ranging from ultra-nationalists to pro-Kurdish and socialist segments.

Baris Terkoglu, Ferhat Celik and Aydin Keser were released from prison following the court decision, while the other three defendants will remain in jail until the next hearing, which is set for Sept. 9.

"This trial should not exist since the indictment fails to prove its claim of conspiracy by the journalists," said Ozgur Ogret, Turkish representative for the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ).

"But since it exists, all the defendants should have been released on Wednesday to be tried without arrest," he told Arab News.

Another source of controversy was the identity of the intelligence officer being leaked – before any media reports – by an opposition MP, Umit Ozdag, during a parliamentary speech.

Baris Pehlivan, one of the three journalists still behind bars, said during his defense that the group are victims of a "political operation" that was held through the "funeral ceremony of the martyr."

Ogret said the arrest of the journalists was "potentially deadly" because of the pandemic.

"No journalist should be in prison for reporting at any time, but jailing journalists now is a risk to their health and possibly life," he said.

In a report on June 10, the US-based Center for American Progress said that Turkey's censorship "is rapidly reshaping how Turks get their news, with major implications for Turkish foreign policy, political polarization and President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's rule."

When Twitter recently suspended more than 7,300 Turkish accounts, arguing that these were part of a network associated with the youth wing of the government, Ankara said in a harshly worded statement that these were attempts to "redesign Turkish politics."

The government also accused Twitter of acting as a "propaganda machine" with a political agenda.

Meanwhile, Turkey's court of appeal on June 23 upheld a nine-year prison sentence given to Canan Kaftancioglu, the Istanbul chair of Turkey's main opposition party, over anti-government tweets she posted seven years ago.

Renan Akyavas, Turkey program coordinator at the Vienna-based International Press Institute, said the Turkish government has been suppressing media outlets for a long time.

“Especially when it comes to the most topical and sensitive issues in Turkey’s agenda, journalists from all sides of the political spectrum have been targeted by authorities. The release of three journalists yesterday is at best only the smallest hint of ‘justice,’ given that the other three remain in prison for at least another two months,” she told Arab News.

Akyavas added that the journalists should not have been jailed for reporting on a topic in the public interest.

“A known fact already in the public domain cannot be criminalized. The right thing here would be to drop all charges against these journalists without delay,” she said.

Akyavas said that public pressure on individual cases can influence institutions and decision-makers, “even though the overall landscape on media freedom is still in a terrible state.”



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Committee to Protect Journalists slams Turkey over media rights Turkey jailing more journalists than any other country: Report

Dubai police arrest Instagram 'stars' behind Dh1.6bn international online fraud scam

Thu, 2020-06-25 20:41

DUBAI: Dubai Police have arrested 12 cybercriminals, including Instagram celebrities "Hushpuppi" and "Woodberry," on allegations of fraud involving 1.6 billion dirhams (\$435 million).

Police said the suspects were arrested in a special operation dubbed "Fox Hunt 2" that revealed a hidden online fraud network that was committing crimes outside the UAE.

The crimes include money-laundering, cyber fraud, hacking, criminal impersonating and scamming individuals, police said Thursday.

Those arrested included Raymond Abbas – known on Instagram as "Hushpuppi" – and Olalekan Jacob Ponle, who goes by the social media name Woodbery. They were arrested with 10 other suspects on allegations of fraud involving large sums of money.

.@DubaiPoliceHQ take down "Hushpuppi", "Woodberry", ten international cybercriminals in a special operation dubbed "Fox Hunt 2" pic.twitter.com/SGwhxDWrE8

– Dubai Media Office (@DXBMediaOffice) [June 25, 2020](#)

Police said they seized more than 150 million dirhams in cash and confiscated 13 luxury cars. They released a video detailing how the arrest took place.

The gang is accused of creating websites that look identical to those of well-known companies and banks. Through these platforms, people were deceived to send emails and messages that prompted them to log in or transfer payments to the gang's bank accounts.

Hushpuppi often posts pictures on social media with his luxury cars including a Ferrari and Rolls Royce and a private jet.

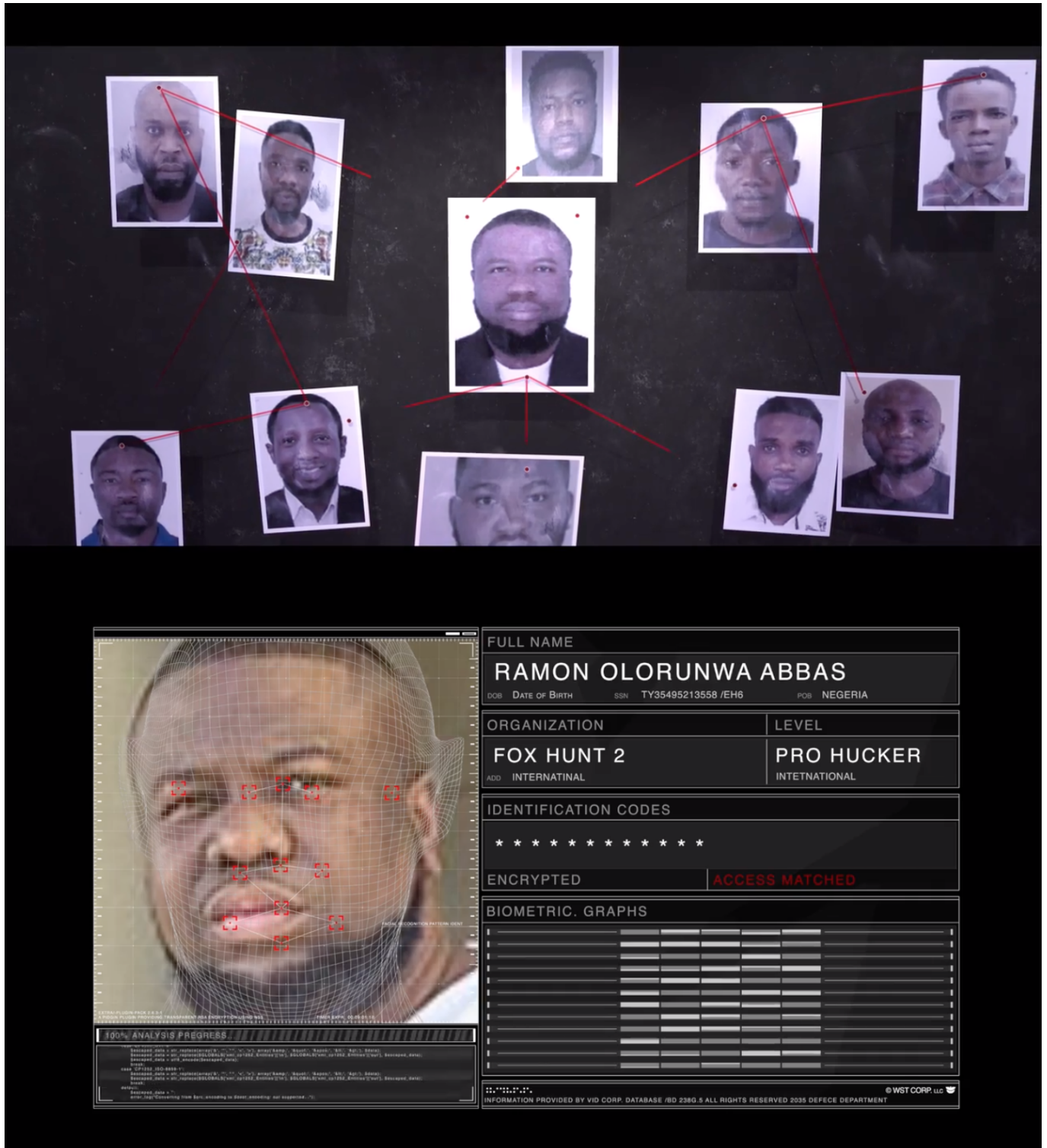
"The team has started to track the gang including Hushpuppi, who celebrated his wealth via social media platforms, under a businessman facade, in an attempt to lure victims from all over the world," Brig. Jamal Salem Al Jallaf, Director of Criminal Investigation Department (CID) at Dubai Police, said.

"They were designing and mimicking company and bank websites to steal credit card data and illegally obtain victims' money before laundering the cash," he added.

Woodberry was also arrested along with 10 other men in an operation that involved six police teams.

The suspects were caught in a series of synchronized raids by six SWAT

Police confiscated 13 luxury cars, valued at about 25 million dirhams, 21 computers and 47 smartphones during the raid.





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Dubai allows foreign tourists to enter from July 7 'Evidence of fraud' at troubled UAE-based hospitals group NMC

[‘Important parallels’ between US, Arab protests: Expert](#)

Thu, 2020-06-25 19:22

LONDON: There are “important parallels” between mass protests in the Arab world and those in the US, as well as “lessons to be drawn” from them, journalist and author Sam Dagher said on Thursday during a webinar attended by Arab News and hosted by the Council for Arab-British Understanding.

However, “the context and circumstances are very different,” and “the responsiveness of the system and institutions to the protests are vastly different,” said Dagher, author of the book “Assad or We Burn the Country: How One Family’s Lust for Power Destroyed Syria.”

The main parallels, he added, are that the protests are mostly youth-led, decentralized and leaderless.

Dagher also cited similarities in slogans, protestor tactics of occupying streets and blocking roads, and the “war of narratives” between demonstrators and the government.

In the US, underlying the killing of George Floyd were “inequality, the militarization of policing and law enforcement that often sees communities of color as the enemy, the systematic poverty and huge wealth gap between blacks and other minorities and white Americans, and one of the highest rates of incarceration in the world that affects black people disproportionately,” he said.

“Obviously each Arab country had its own circumstances and varying degrees of oppression, but overall the underlying causes were pretty much similar,” he added.

The causes include “lack of justice, lack of dignity, the system serving the rulers and their cronies, poverty, lack of economic opportunities, corruption on every level coloring every facet of people’s lives, the opportunities and rights that average citizens have depending on their proximity to power, and people muzzled and oppressed for decades by different means, including brutal police-state apparatuses.”

While violence is apparent in both regions, the Arab world has seen more protestor deaths, with Iraq alone registering over 700 between November 2019 and January 2020.

“Obviously there were no shoot-to-kill orders in the US, but we all saw the extreme violence that was deployed in some cities to quell the protests,” said Dagher.

“The National Guard was deployed, and even (President Donald) Trump was contemplating sending in combat troops, active-duty troops – as happened in several Arab countries – before he was restrained by retired generals and the Pentagon itself at some point.”

But the “biggest and most important difference” between the two regions “is that the system is responsive in America, at least so far. A month into these protests, we’re seeing some important changes taking place,” said Dagher.

“For the first time, policemen are being accused of crimes, are being fired, are being imprisoned, are awaiting trial. They’re barring the chokehold from being used by police in many cities. They’re talking about even more reforms in some police departments. There’s talk of defunding the police, of moving money away from police to social services,” he added.

“Even now, the unthinkable, people are talking about reparations being paid to black Americans to compensate them for the enslavement and policies that have impoverished them over the decades,” Dagher said.

“We’re seeing an awakening, a real awakening, in America, the Middle East and other parts of the world. People are saying ‘we can’t go back to how things were,’ and I think coronavirus and its consequences are accelerating that process.”



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Iraq protesters defiant as they bury 7 killed in overnight clash
Thousands mourn George Floyd in Texas amid calls for reform