

Gaming lovers square off in Riyadh eSports tournament

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A handout picture made available by the Saudi Arabian Federation for Electronic and Intellectual Sport on March 4, 2018, shows people attending the GSA E-Sports Cup in Riyadh

Hundreds of Saudi men and women squared off in a video game

tournament in Riyadh at the weekend, organisers said, in the conservative kingdom's biggest ever eSports contest.

The eSports [tournament](#)—in which players face off on computers instead of turf—was held in the capital from Thursday through Saturday.

Organisers said they were flooded with 30,000 registrations for over a little more than 1,300 spots in the competition, highlighting the growing gaming community in the kingdom.

Saudi teenagers were among the winners, taking home cash prizes of up to 10,000 riyals (\$2,667), organisers said.

"eSports is open to everyone, the ultimate equalizer, male or female, big or small, anyone can step up to the challenge, anyone can win," said Prince Faisal bin Bandar bin Sultan Al-Saud, president of the Saudi Arabian Federation for Electronic and Intellectual Sport.

"We have great untapped talent in Saudi... This (is) just the beginning."

The tournament is part of a modernisation drive by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who is seeking to balance unpopular subsidy cuts in an era of low oil prices with more entertainment and sporting options.

Sports simulation video games are hugely popular in a country of more than 30 million people, the majority of whom are under 25.

eSports are to be included as a medal sport for the first time at the 2022 Asian Games in Hangzhou and proponents are pushing for Olympic status.

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