



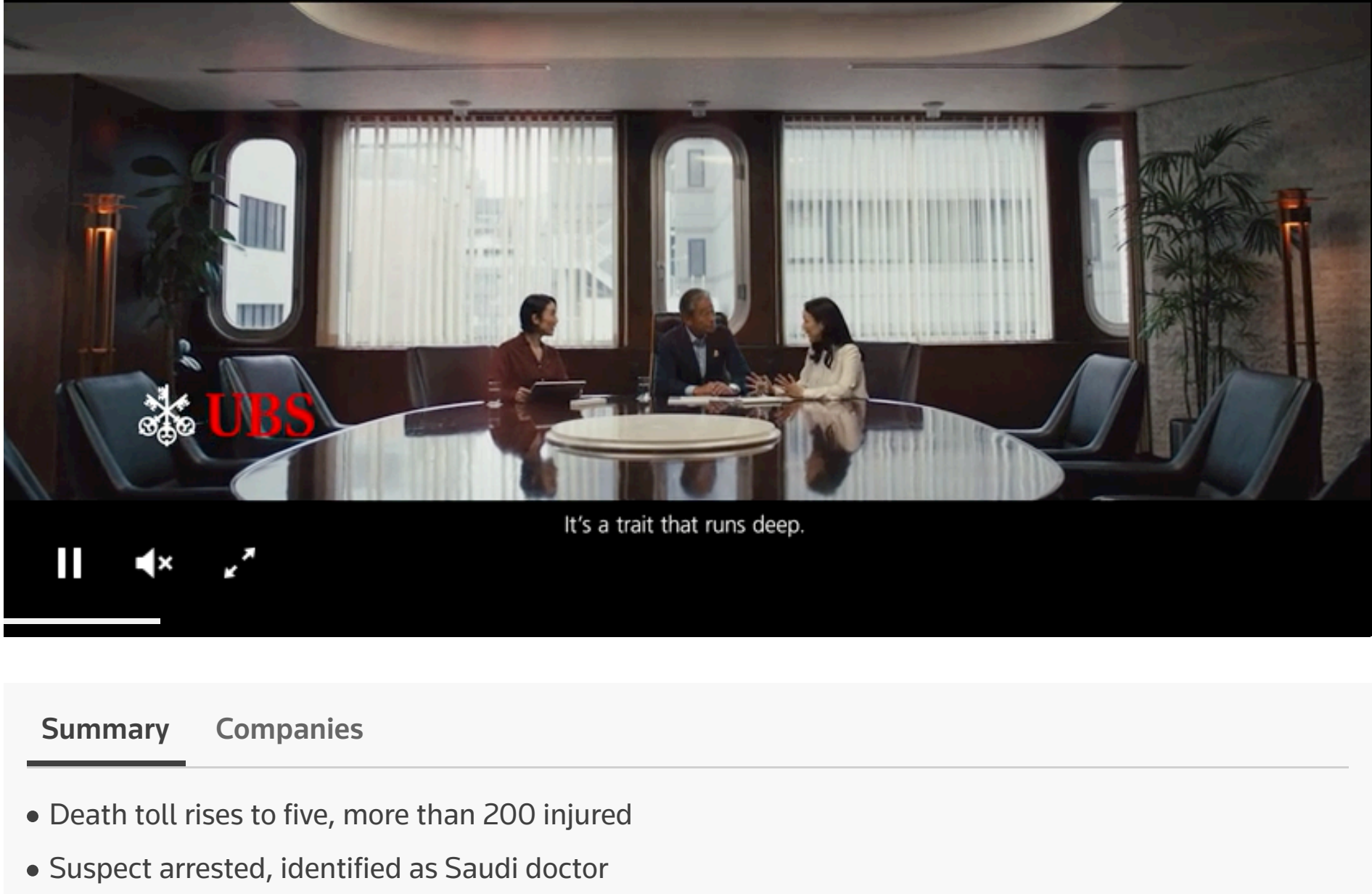
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German Christmas market attack kills five, injures 200

By Thomas Escritt and Rachel More

December 21, 2024 10:56 AM EST - Updated a min ago

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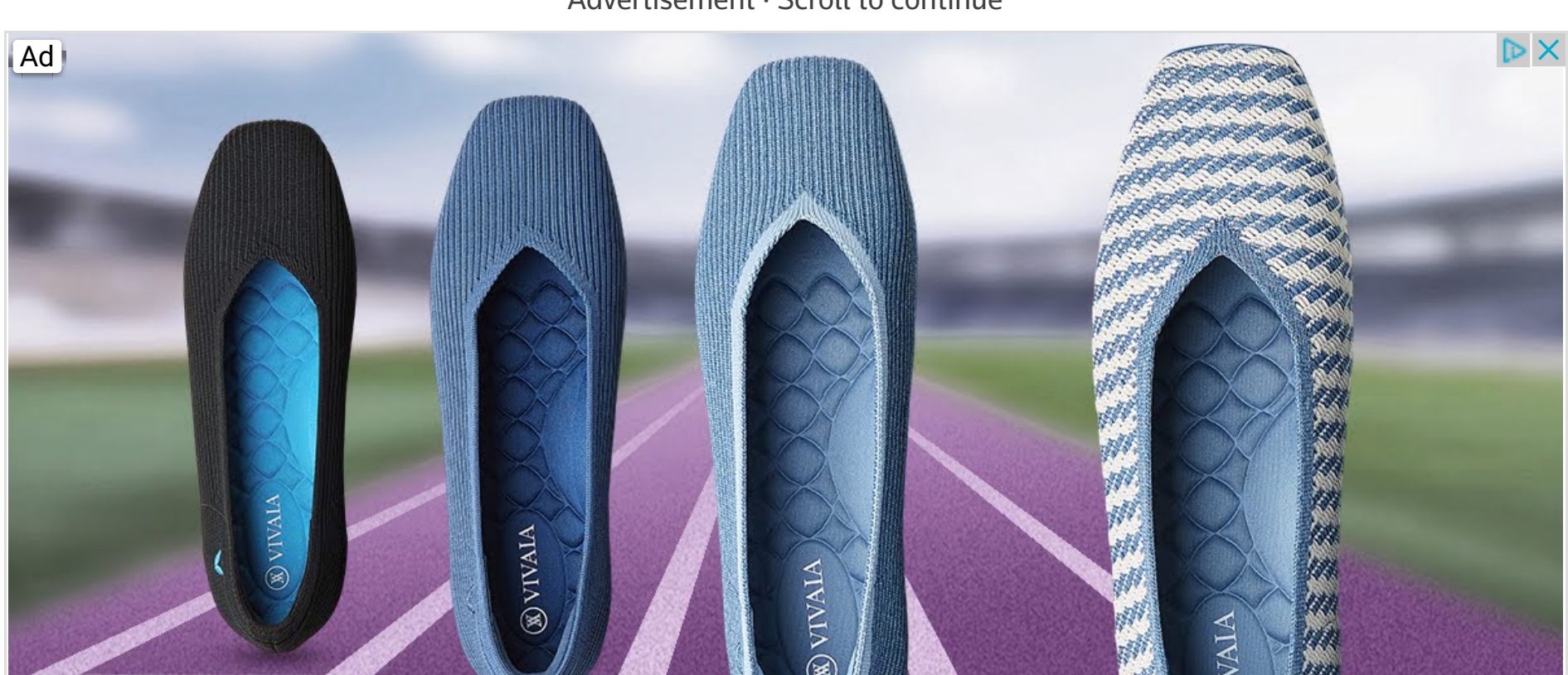
Summary Companies

- Death toll rises to five, more than 200 injured
- Suspect arrested, identified as Saudi doctor
- Minister said suspect Islamophobic, makes no comment on motive

MAGDEBURG, Germany, Dec 21 (Reuters) - German authorities are investigating a Saudi man with a history of anti-Islam rhetoric as the suspected driver in a car-ramming attack at a Christmas market in the city of Magdeburg which killed five people, officials said on Saturday.

The Friday evening attack on crowds of market visitors gathered to celebrate the pre-Christmas season comes amid a fierce debate over security and migration during an election campaign in Germany, where the far right is polling strongly.

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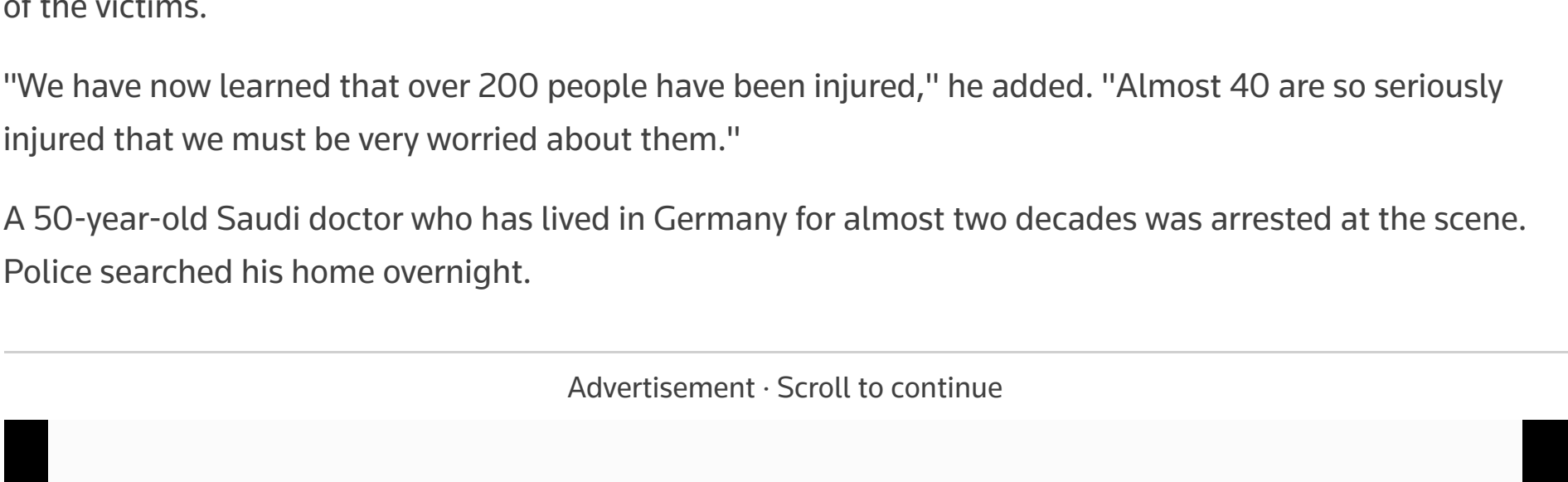
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"What a terrible act it is to injure and kill so many people there with such brutality," Chancellor Olaf Scholz said in the central city, part of the former East Germany, where he laid a white rose at a church in honour of the victims.

"We have now learned that over 200 people have been injured," he added. "Almost 40 are so seriously injured that we must be very worried about them."

A 50-year-old Saudi doctor who has lived in Germany for almost two decades was arrested at the scene. Police searched his home overnight.

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The motive remained unclear and police have not yet named the suspect. He has been named in German media as Taleb A.

A spokesperson for a specialist rehabilitation clinic for criminals with addictions in Bernburg confirmed that the suspect had worked as a psychiatrist for them, but had not been at work since October due to sickness and holiday leave.

Posts on his X account, verified by Reuters, indicated support for anti-Islam and far-right parties, including the Alternative for Germany (AfD), as well as criticism of Germany for its handling of Saudi refugees.

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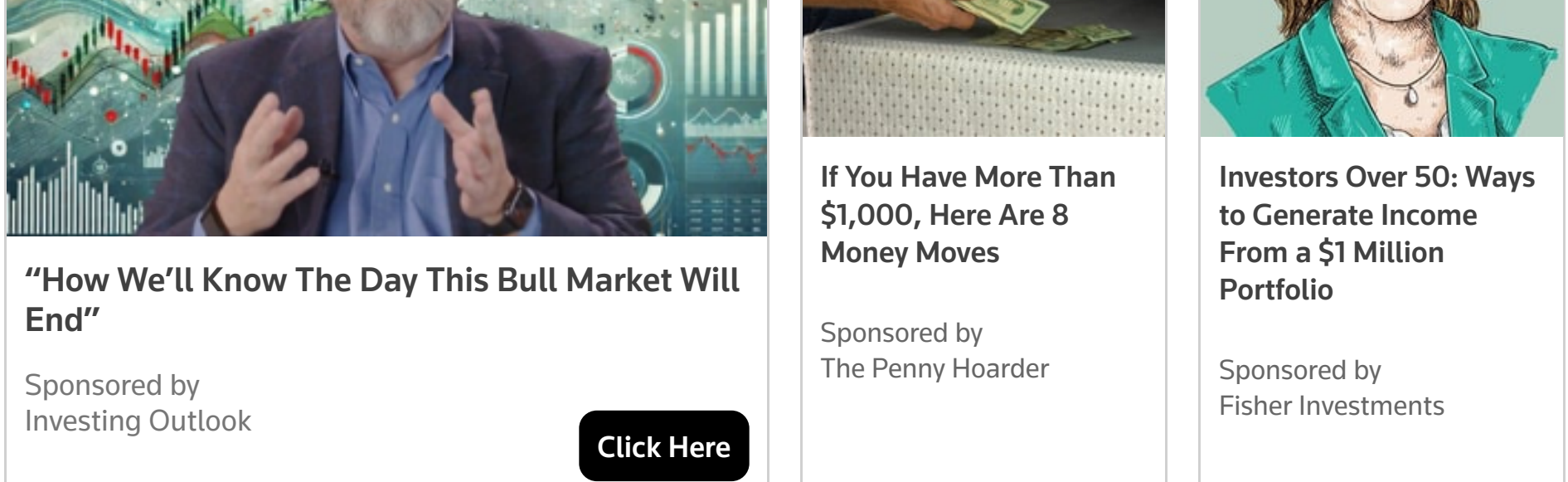
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German Interior Minister Nancy Faeser said the suspect's Islamophobia was clear to see, but she declined to comment on motive.

Taleb A. appeared in a number of media interviews in 2019, including with German newspaper FAZ and the BBC, in which he spoke of his work as an activist helping Saudi Arabians and ex-Muslims flee to Europe.

"There is no good Islam," he told FAZ at the time.



[1/12] A police car secures an entrance of the Christmas market on the Breitscheidplatz, after a car rammed into a crowd of people at the Magdeburg Christmas market, in Berlin, Germany December 21, 2024. REUTERS/Alamy Live Purchase Licensing Rights

A Saudi source told Reuters that Saudi Arabia had warned German authorities about the attacker after he posted extremist views on his personal X account that threatened peace and security.

These warnings were given multiple times since he left Saudi Arabia in 2006, the source said, without going into further detail.

A risk assessment conducted last year by German state and federal criminal investigators came to the conclusion that the man posed "no specific danger", the Welt newspaper reported, citing security sources.

Germany's domestic and foreign intelligence agencies both declined to comment on the ongoing investigation.

Andrea Reis, who had been at the market on Friday, returned on Saturday with her daughter Julia to lay a candle by the church overlooking the site. She said that had it not been for a matter of moments, they may have been in the car's path.

"I said, 'let's go and get a sausage', but my daughter said 'no let's keep walking around'. If we'd stayed where we were we'd have been in the car's path," she said.

Tears ran down her face as she described the scene. "Children screaming, crying for mama. You can't forget that," she said.

Scholz's Social Democrats are trailing both the far-right AfD and the frontrunner conservative opposition in opinion polls ahead of snap elections set for Feb. 23.

The AfD, which enjoys particularly strong support in the former East, has led calls for a crackdown on migration to the country.

Its chancellor candidate Alice Weidel and co-leader Tino Chrupalla issued a statement on Saturday condemning the attack.

"The terrible attack on the Christmas market in Magdeburg in the middle of the peaceful pre-Christmas period has shaken us," they said.

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Additional reporting by Andreas Rinke in Berlin and Pasha Magid in Riyadh; Editing by Alexandra Hudson and Hugh Lawson

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Berlin correspondent who has investigated anti-vaxxers and COVID treatment practices, reported on refugee camps and covered warlords' trials in The Hague. Earlier, he covered Eastern Europe for the Financial Times. He speaks Hungarian, German, French and Dutch.

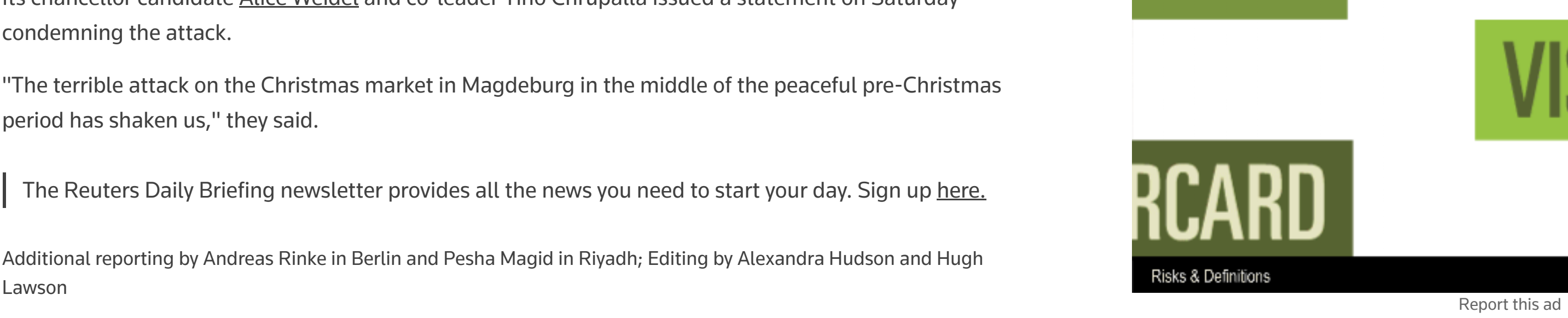
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Suffering from heavy cold, Pope Francis to lead Sunday prayers from residence

Europe - December 21, 2024 - 11:29 AM EST - 30 min ago

Pope Francis, who has just turned 88 and has been suffering from a heavy cold, will lead the regular Sunday Angelus prayer from inside his residence as a precaution, the Vatican said in a statement on Saturday.

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