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Kuwait celebrates 64 years of independence and sovereignty

KUWAIT CITY, June 19, (KUNA): Kuwait marked its 64th Independence Anniversary on Thursday, celebrating a pivotal moment in the nation's history and the beginning of its journey toward development and sovereignty.

The late Amir Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah signed the declaration of independence with the British Government Chief Political Resident in the Arabian Gulf Sir George Middleton, ending the protectorate agreement and paved way a journey of development.

Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem said: "On this day of our beloved nation

... On this day we move from one stage to another stage of history and we fold a page from the past ... and open a new page through this agreement through which Kuwait earned its complete independence and full sovereignty."

Three years after the declaration, a decree was signed on May 18, 1964 merging the national day with the day in which Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem assumed office, making it February 25. Celebrations were held on that day as of 1965.

Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem took

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PM Diwan photo
HH the PM chairs a meeting to follow up on the implementation of agreements and memoranda of understanding signed between the governments of Kuwait and China.

PM stresses implementation of strategic pacts with China

KUWAIT CITY, June 19, (KUNA): His Highness the Prime Minister, Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, on Thursday urged the concerned ministers to follow up on the implementation of the agreements and memoranda of understanding signed between Kuwait and China.

This came in a meeting headed by His Highness to follow up on the implementation of agreements and memoranda of understanding signed between the governments of Kuwait and China.

The 15th meeting of the committee touched on the latest developments of projects included in the agreements between the governments of the two countries on cooperation in the Mubarak Al-Kabeer Port project, the electrical power system, the development of renewable energy, low-carbon green system for waste recycling, housing development, environmental infrastructure for wastewater treatment plants, and free and economic zones.

The meeting also discussed expanding cooperation and strategic partnerships, as well as investment and economic opportunities with

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REGION ON EDGE AS ISRAEL, IRAN TRADE STRIKES AND THREATS

Don't hoard, food supply stable: Kuwait

Foreign Ministry coordinates evacuation of Kuwaitis from Iran

By Abdulrahman Al-Shammari
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff and Agencies

KUWAIT CITY, June 19: Kuwait's Minister of Social Affairs and Family and Childhood Affairs, Dr. Amthal Al-Huwailah and Minister of Commerce and Industry, Khalifa Al-Ajeel affirmed Thursday that Kuwait's strategic reserves of essential commodities remain sufficient and closely monitored.

This came in a joint press statement issued by the ministries following a meeting held between the two ministers as part of the activation of the national emergency response plan and in continuation of field visits and direct monitoring of cooperative societies' preparedness.

The statement noted that the meeting reviewed reports from field teams monitoring stock levels regularly, and assessed supply and distribution data to ensure effective responsiveness to any developments.

During the meeting, the ministers instructed local companies and factories to prioritize supplying cooperative societies, emphasizing that these cooperatives are the designated entities for storing and distributing food supplies and are working around the clock to maintain market stability and meet consumer demand.

The ministers also stressed the importance of raising awareness among citizens and residents about refraining from stockpiling or hoarding food products at home, to avoid the risks of spoilage or improper storage, noting that essential goods are available consistently and there is no cause for concern.

Separately, the board of the Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) met on Thursday discussing contingency plans amid the current regional escalation.

Ambassador Khaled Al-Maqamis, KRCS Chairman, told KUNA that the society was following with concern the current developments in the region, affirming that the KRCS would continue its rescue and humanitarian roles regionally and internationally in coordination with other local authorities.

He asserted that the board had set a coordination mechanism with other state entities to swiftly respond to any emergency or developments via securing medical, food, and logistic supplies.

Al-Maqamis commended the state's current measures aimed at protecting citizens and residents alike.

Meanwhile, Acting Director General of Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR) Dr. Faisal Al-Humaidan affirmed Thursday that the institute is fully mobilizing its advanced technical and scientific capabilities in the service of the country, supporting State efforts to enhance national preparedness and effective response to radiological and nuclear incidents.

In a press statement, Al-Humaidan disclosed this is done in conjunction with the concerned authorities and in accordance with approved national frameworks in

order to protect public health and the environment. He stressed that "the institute is fully prepared to provide technical support and scientific advice to decision-makers to enhance the ability of the country to respond to any radiological or nuclear emergency -- God forbid -- in a scientific and systematic manner that mitigates the potential impact."

He stated that the institute plays a pivotal role in supporting the national emergency plan through its advanced systems, including a radiation monitoring network capable of accurately measuring and analyzing radiation levels in the air and detecting natural and industrial radiation sources. "This is in addition to laboratories specialized in analyzing radiation concentrations in soil, air, water, marine sediments and food; using the latest scientific technologies," he stressed.

He pointed out that the institute uses advanced digital simulation programs to predict the spread paths of radioactive materials in the air and water, and determine their concentrations with precise time and space; thereby, enabling the relevant authorities to take early and proactive precautionary measures.

He added the institute has a record of effective international cooperation in the fields of radiation protection and nuclear emergency preparedness, and has consistently represented Kuwait in scientific forums. "In collaboration with the relevant international organizations, and through its technical staff; KISR contributed to the preparation and updating of technical manuals and procedures for dealing with radiation accidents, in line with international standards and approved

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Photo by Rezk Tawfik
Vehicles navigate a dusty highway under low visibility conditions on Thursday.

Hot, dry winds to persist through weekend

Kuwait sees slight cooldown amid dusty skies

KUWAIT CITY, June 19, (KUNA): Acting Director of the Meteorological Department Dhirar Al-Ali has forecast hot and dusty conditions during the day and warm to hot nights this weekend, with a slight drop in temperatures compared to last week.

Speaking to the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA), Al-Ali explained that Kuwait is currently under the influence of the extended Indian seasonal low, bringing a hot, dry air mass, with active northwesterly winds that are expected to be moderate to strong at times reaching speeds of more than 60 km/h. These winds will likely stir up dust, reducing horizontal visibility to below 1,000 meters and potentially causing near-zero visibility in exposed

areas. Sea waves may reach heights of over six feet.

On Friday, temperatures during the daytime are expected to be high, with hot conditions and northwesterly winds ranging from light to moderate, occasionally becoming active at speeds between 15 and 50 km/h, raising dust in some areas. Maximum temperatures will range between 44°C and 46°C. Sea conditions will be light to moderate, with wave heights reaching two to six feet.

Friday night will be hot to warm, with northwesterly winds at 15 to 38 km/h. Minimum temperatures are expected to range between 30°C and 32°C. The sea will remain light to moderate, with waves between two

and five feet.

On Saturday, the daytime conditions will be extremely hot, with northwesterly winds ranging from light to moderate, occasionally becoming active at speeds between 15 and 45 km/h. Dust is likely in exposed areas. Maximum temperatures are expected to range between 45°C and 47°C. Sea conditions will be light to moderate, with wave heights between two and five feet.

Saturday night will be hot to warm, with light to moderate northwesterly winds at speeds between 12 and 35 km/h. Minimum temperatures will range between 31°C and 33°C, and sea conditions will continue to be light to moderate, with waves from two to five feet.

Team-up to support food security, infrastructure in crisis areas

KFAED, UNIDO agree on joint development framework

VIENNA, June 19, (KUNA): Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED) signed a memorandum of understanding with the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), aiming at establishing a joint coordination framework.

During his participation in the fourth OPEC Fund for International Development Forum, Acting Director General of Kuwait Fund, Waleed Al-Bahar, told KUNA on Thursday, that the agreement would aim to identify and coordinate potential projects for financing and exchange information, knowledge, resources, and activities available to both sides.

He explained that this cooperation is of particular importance in light of the challenges facing fragile states and conflict zones.

He said that the agreement, signed on Tuesday, would focus on supporting development projects in Palestine, particularly in the occupied Palestinian



KUNA photo
Acting Director General of Kuwait Fund, Waleed Al-Bahar with UNIDO's Director-General, Gerald Muller.

territories, as well as in Syria, Yemen, and Sudan, countries in conflict and in need of urgent development interven-

tions.

For his part, UNIDO's Director-General, Gerald Muller, told KUNA that the organization rely on partnerships to promote industrial development, support food security, and renewable energy.

He pointed out that African countries are showing great interest in practical implementation in the areas of water and energy management, particularly renewable energy and energy efficiency.

Muller added that UNIDO has extensive experience in the hydrogen sector and provide networks and technical knowledge in this field to secure the future.

He explained that food security represents an important sector in the organization's work, as the issue of food security is a priority for Arab and African countries, as well as developing countries in general.

Tech glitches stall travel plans

Expatriate teachers in Kuwait stuck in exit approval gridlock

By Abdulrahman Al-Shammari
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, June 19: A large number of expatriate teachers in various educational districts are racing against time to complete the procedures for updating their data and obtain approval for their exit requests from the administrative affairs departments.

This is a step towards obtaining the required travel permission to leave the country during the summer vacation.

Despite the efforts exerted by the educational district administrations, the slow pace of data entry, review and approval of leave requests in some districts remains an obstacle for teachers, especially since many of them have booked their travel tickets in advance, while others are still waiting for their transactions to be completed before making the booking to avoid losses or travel delays.

A number of teachers told the newspaper that there is a noticeable disparity in the speed of completing transactions between educational districts.

In some districts, procedures are completed smoothly and in record time; while in others, they face severe pressure due to overcrowding or staff shortages, leading to delays in the approval of leave requests or they do not appear in the system in a timely manner.

They pointed out that some applications remained pending for days without final approval although all requirements have been fulfilled. This puts teachers under increasing psychological pressure as travel dates approach.

They emphasized that matters have become more complicated than before despite the electronic system. "Teachers register through Sahel, then take a letter to update their data and head to the educational district only to find themselves in a queue as the travel date approaches and everyone is eager to complete travel procedures," they added.

Meanwhile, a number of teachers and principals called for accelerating the administrative workflow in educational districts, providing the necessary technical and human support to reduce congestion in educational districts, and fully activating electronic systems without the need for time-consuming paperwork. They called for prioritizing completed applications, especially for teachers who have completed their teaching duties and school commitments. They emphasized that the critical time requires flexibility and cooperation between administrations and teachers to ensure that transactions are completed before the start of the official holiday.

Moreover, educational sources confirmed that the relevant authorities in the ministry are required to follow up this issue and monitor the progress of work in educational districts to ensure smooth procedures.

They added that some districts have extended the working hours or allocated additional administrative teams to process as many applications as possible this week, out of concern for teachers' interests. They urged teachers to follow up their transactions as quickly as possible and to communicate with the schools or educational districts to avoid unintended delays.



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Protecting Kuwait's executive power from hidden networks



8
KFH named Best Investment Bank in Kuwait by MEED



9
NBK awarded Best Bank in Kuwait for 2025 & Al-Sager recognized as MENA Sustainability Leader of the Year

Newswatch

KUWAIT CITY: The Supreme Committee for the Investigation of Kuwaiti Citizenship held a meeting on Thursday, chaired by First Deputy Prime Minister Sheikh Fahad Youssef Saud Al-Sabah.

A statement by the Ministry of Interior revealed that the committee decided to strip off Kuwaiti citizenship in a number of cases, with the matter referred to the Cabinet.

Those citizenships were stripped off due to dual citizenships, forgery, fraud, attaining the document via affiliation, and conflict with the state's supreme interest. (KUNA)

BAGHDAD: Iraq's Federal Supreme Court postponed Thursday looking into appeals submitted by Iraqi President Abdulatif Rashid and Prime Minister Mohammed Al-Sudani on Khor Abdullah agreement between Kuwait and Baghdad, to June 25.

According to the court's schedule, these two sessions will be held as postponed sessions and without pleadings.

Iraq's President Abdulatif Rashid and Prime Minister Mohammed Al-Sudani launched separate appeals against a Federal Supreme Court decision to render an agreement regulating navigation in the Khor Abdullah waterway between Baghdad and Kuwait unconstitutional.

In September of 2023, Iraq's Federal Supreme Court ruled that a bilateral agreement regulating navigation in the Khor Abdullah waterway was unconstitutional, a decision Kuwait said contained "historical fallacies". (KUNA)

DUBAI: A collision between two oil tankers just east of the world's most critical oil choke point, the Strait of Hormuz, could bring about a potential environmental disaster, Greenpeace said on Thursday.

The two giant tankers, ADALYNN and Front Eagle, crashed Tuesday in the Gulf of Oman and caught fire before the Emirati national guard intervened to evacuate crew members. No injuries were reported, according to Emirati authorities.

Satellite data from NASA's Fire Information for Resource Management System showed heat signatures in the area early Tuesday morning.

Greenpeace said it had reviewed satellite imagery that showed a plume of oil stretching up to about 1,500 hectares (3,700 acres) from the crash site. The 23-year-old tanker ADALYNN belonged to a so-called Russian "shadow fleet" - known to operate older ships below basic security standards - and may have been carrying around 70,000 tons of crude oil, the group said.

"This is just one of many dangerous incidents to take place in the past years," said Farah Al Hattab of Greenpeace's Middle East and North Africa division, adding that such oil spills "endanger marine life."

The United Arab Emirates Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure did not respond to a request for comment. (AP)

Prayer Timings			
Fajr	03:13	Asr	15:23
Sunrise ..	04:48	Maghrib ..	18:50
Zohr	11:49	Isha	20:22

Local

Expected weather for next 24 hrs:

By Day: Hot with light to moderate freshening at times north-westerly wind, with speeds of 15-50 km/h causing rising dust.

By Night: Hot to rather hot with light to moderate northwest-

Weather			
erly wind, with speeds of	15-35	Jahra	46
km/h.		Salmiyah	40
		Ahmadi	40
		Nuwaisib	44
		Wafra	44
		Salmiyah	44
		Managish	46
			29
			31
			28
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			29
			26
			28



PM Diwan photo
His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah being briefed on KFAS achievements.

PM visits KFAS headquarters

KUWAIT CITY, June 19, (KUNA): His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah on Thursday visited the headquarters of the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS). His Highness the Prime Minister was presented with a visual briefing of KFAS' 2025-29 future vision.

His Highness Sheikh Ahmad Al-Abdullah lauded KFAS for its efforts throughout the years, especially its investment in technology and science to develop Kuwait's urban facade.

Other Voices

Protecting Kuwait's executive power from hidden networks

By Abdulaziz Mohammed Al-Anjeri

Some of the most damaging forms of obstruction are not imposed by outside forces, but bred within the state itself – where deliberate delays quietly neutralize strategic decisions.

In Kuwait, as in other systems shaped by decades of patronage, certain bureaucratic actors have mastered the art of administrative stalling. Hiding behind procedures, they freeze reform without saying “no.” On paper, the decision is alive; in practice, it is being quietly smothered.

This is not merely a case of weak oversight. It reflects a deeper structural problem: many officials advanced through connections, not competence. Though their political patrons are no longer in office, their influence lingers – through networks of loyalists embedded across

ministries. These actors serve not the current leadership, but a bygone order operating from the shadows.

They resist reform silently, not to serve the public good, but to suggest that past leadership was more capable, and today's officials less worthy of trust.

In functioning governance systems, decision-making isn't left to assumption. It is monitored in real time, supported by indicators, and reinforced through clear accountability. Kuwait has begun implementing digital dashboards that trace decisions step by step – an important step forward, but not a solution by itself.

Obstruction has evolved. It now wears the mask of “transformation” and “consultation.” It no longer rejects reform – it buries it in endless studies, reviews, and technicalities.

This is why Kuwait needs an Early Tracking Unit: a light, impartial mechanism that flags unusual delays, traces the movement of decisions across offices, and identifies where implementation stalls. Crucially, it should report outside the executive bureaucracy – to a neutral authority



Al-Anjeri

Chaos rules in MoE corridors as staff gear up for holidays

School admins clueless on transactions clearance

By Abdulrahman Al-Shammari
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, June 19: As the academic year draws to a close, the pressure to expedite administrative procedures -- particularly those related to leave requests, assignments and fingerprint data updates -- has intensified.

This coincides with the countdown to the summer vacation of teachers, leading to unprecedented overcrowding in the employee affairs departments in various educational districts.

Sources disclosed that the customer service halls in the educational districts have been overwhelmed by the influx of staff trying to complete their transactions. The situation has been exacerbated by delays in cost entry, fingerprint processing disruptions, and slow administrative procedures concerning attendance.

Guide

Sources said the main issue is the absence of a clear procedural guide for addressing fingerprint-related problems; while many employees

lack knowledge of how to handle forms related to missed fingerprint scans, absences or departures, although these forms are available in the systems of the Education Ministry.

“Compounding the problem is the fact that many of those assigned to administrative roles are newly appointed and lack the necessary experience. Combined with the absence of proper planning and training, this has resulted in confusion and slow processing of files; not to mention the frequent system shutdowns towards the end of the academic year,” sources elaborated.

One teacher expressed frustration: “I was marked late due to the fingerprint attendance mechanism, even though I was in class teaching. Am I supposed to leave my students just to log my fingerprint?”

Sources divulged that there is a growing demand within educational circles to separate the fingerprint attendance system used by the ministry from that of the Civil Service Commission (CSC). Teachers argued that the system does not reflect the unique nature of their work. They pointed out “the class schedule proves our presence and commitment. Yet, a missed fingerprint -- often because we are

engaged in tasks like marking or supervising activities -- unfairly impacts our evaluation,” one exasperated teacher shared.

Surge

“Many expect a surge of complaints this year regarding annual evaluations, which they believe do not reflect the teachers' actual performance. There are calls to review the current job performance evaluation mechanisms and ensure they are based on classroom productivity, not solely on fingerprint data,” sources said.

Sources also stressed the need to activate retroactive data entry and processing powers in the educational districts, so that teachers are not penalized for administrative errors beyond their control.

Sources indicated that administrative stability in schools necessitates a comprehensive reform of existing mechanisms. “This includes improving the competency of administrative personnel and overhauling the fingerprint and performance evaluation systems to protect the rights and dignity of teachers,” they suggested.



Photos by Rizk Tawfiq

UAE Ambassador to Kuwait Dr. Matar Al-Neyadi speaks to guests.

Attractive environment: Dr. Al-Neyadi

UAE embassy vows support for firms investing in Kuwait

KUWAIT CITY, June 19: Ambassador of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to Kuwait Dr. Matar Al-Neyadi has underscored the importance of the visit of Vice President, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Presidential Court Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al-Nahyan to Kuwait in early June.



Dr. Matar Al-Neyadi

In a speech delivered at the forum that brought together a select group of representatives of Emirati companies investing in Kuwait, Al-Neyadi affirmed that the visit is considered a milestone in the course of bilateral relations; considering it contributed to strengthening these relations and advancing them toward broader horizons of cooperation and integration. He said the visit witnessed the signing of several agreements and memoranda of understanding in various fields like health, education, oil and gas, law, social affairs and development, diplomacy, land transport and roads, industry and advanced technology, electricity, water and future energy, combating human trafficking, protecting data in security projects, and encouraging direct investment.

He went on to say that the forum aims to enhance direct communication and explore ways to support the economic partnership between the two countries. He pointed out that the investments of Emirati companies contribute to the advancement of economic cooperation and reflect the Emirati investors' confidence in the attractive investment environment of Kuwait, as well as the infrastructure and development facilities it provides.

He cited data for the first quarter of 2025, indicating the volume of non-oil trade between the two countries reached about AED13.4 billion (equivalent to KD1.117 billion Kuwaiti). He said this is a nine percent increase compared to the same period in 2024, reflecting the depth of the growing

economic relations between the two countries.

He added the embassy remains committed to supporting all Emirati investment initiatives and projects in Kuwait. “We reaffirm that we are partners and constant supporters of every Emirati investment initiative or project in Kuwait. We put all our capabilities at the service of national companies in terms of coordination, follow up or facilitating communication with the relevant authorities. We also open the door wide to your ideas and suggestions. We are confident that your vision will contribute to the development of the investment climate and exerting efforts toward new levels of integration,” he asserted.

He confirmed the strength of economic relations between the two countries, citing the continuous growth of the volume of trade exchange and cooperation between the private sectors in the UAE and Kuwait.

He said “I am pleased that this annual meeting is being held for the third consecutive year, as it reflects our commitment to improve communication between Emirati companies operating in the Kuwaiti market and highlight the opportunities available there.”

He stated that companies in the UAE and Kuwait have vast experience, high-quality products and advanced services. He believes the short distance between the two countries play a crucial role in providing these products and services at competitive prices that encourage consumers.

He added the double taxation avoidance agreement between the two countries took effect on May 13, following the completion of constitutional procedures. “This is an important step toward encouraging mutual investment and capital flows and strengthening the presence of companies in both markets,” he concluded.

Bid to go ‘paperless’

CSC launches 6 new e-services

KUWAIT CITY, June 19: The Civil Service Commission (CSC) has approved the promotion of selected employees based on well-defined criteria, including the availability of vacant positions at the appropriate grade level, reports Al-Anba daily.

In a development that is part of its ongoing efforts to go ‘paperless’, the CSC has launched six new smart services on the Sahel platform. This is a step toward full digital transformation and the elimination of paper-based transactions in the near future.

The CSC issued an official circular announcing the automation of several services through the integrated electronic systems. These services are now accessible on Sahel application; thereby, eliminating the need for visits to the CSC. The newly digitized services include experience calculation, employment status updates, job title changes, appointment procedures, external transfers, and the processing of end-of-service benefits.

Sources confirmed to the daily that these services are available to both Kuwaiti and expatriate employees.

In another initiative aimed at enhancing public sector governance, the Governance Indicators Monitoring and Implementation Team at the CSC recently held a coordination meeting with the Governance Team at the Ministry of Public Works.

This is one of a series of meetings aimed at supporting government institutions in adopting the Corporate Governance Guide.

The meeting covered major themes and implementation strategies of the guide and included discussions on a proposed roadmap for its application in the ministry. The goal is to foster organizational integration, improve the work environment, and strengthen internal controls in line with global best practices.

Through these initiatives, the CSC reaffirmed its full commitment to provide technical and administrative support to ministries and government agencies to ensure the successful implementation of governance principles. These efforts aim to promote transparency, improve institutional performance, and establish accountable, efficient and reliable public administration.



Farwaniya Governorate photo
Farwaniya Governor Sheikh Athbi Nasser Al-Athbi Al-Sabah received at his office the newly appointed members of the Farwaniya Governorate Council.

‘Enhance services provided to residents of Farwaniya’

KUWAIT CITY, June 19: Farwaniya Governor Sheikh Athbi Nasser Al-Athbi Al-Sabah received at his office the newly appointed members of the Farwaniya Governorate Council, in the presence of council members Lieutenant General Ali Al-Dulhadi Al-Shanfa, Hessa Abdullah Ibrahim Al-Mutawa, and Saad Abdullah Hadba Al-Rashidi.

According to a press release issued by

Farwaniya Governorate, Sheikh Athbi congratulated the new members, and highlighted the council's mission to enhance the quality of services provided to the residents of Farwaniya.

The new members expressed their gratitude for the trust placed in them and assured their commitment to making every effort in the interest of the people of Farwaniya.

Students from public schools recognized for honoring family and societal values

Al-Baghli Charity for Pious Sons celebrates Int’l Parents Day

By Fares Ghaleb
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, June 19: The Ibrahim Taher Al-Baghli Charity for Pious Sons celebrated the International Day of Parents, which falls on June 1 each year, under the patronage of acting Assistant Undersecretary for the Social Welfare Sector at the Ministry of Social Affairs Dr. Jassim Al-Kandari; with several academic and social figures in attendance.

In his speech during the ceremony, Al-Kandari confirmed that the ministry is keen on involving civil society institutions in supporting efforts to raise community awareness. He pointed out that the participation of Kuwait in such a global celebration reinforces the directives of the United Nations (UN), which designated this day to recognize the role of parents in raising and educating children and to support the concept of comprehensive social care and development.

Al-Kandari praised the pioneering role played by Ibrahim Taher Al-Baghli Charity, which serves as a good example in terms of shouldering the social responsibility and adheres to humanitarian principles derived from the teachings of the Islamic religion, the Kuwaiti Constitution, and the authentic values of society. He emphasized that the charity fully supports the efforts of the State and the ministry in caring for parents and providing them with a decent life. He pointed out that Kuwait is one of the leading countries in implementing international laws and conventions related to parents' rights; and it is committed to providing financial and moral support



Group photo during the Ibrahim Taher Al-Baghli Charity for Pious Sons celebration of the International Day of Parents.

to families through legislation covering all forms of social care for vulnerable and needy groups; thereby, contributing to the cohesion of the Kuwaiti family and its empowerment.

He explained that this year's theme, 'Raising Parents', is a reflection of the importance of providing parents with the knowledge and tools necessary to care for their families. He revealed that it calls for the provision of practical resources, educational support, and the implementation of more specialized studies and research; indicating Kuwait is committed to international agreements that guarantee parents' rights, and recognize the importance of their role in promoting peace and reconciliation within societies.

Meanwhile, Hawra Al-Baghli -- Vice Chairperson of the Social Committee at the charity -- delivered a speech on be-

half of Chairman of the Board of Directors of the charity Ibrahim Al-Baghli. She said the ceremony is a manifestation of one of the projects of the charity dedicated to celebrating the efforts of parents, as well as honoring the parents of students who won the 'Al-Baghli Award for the Pious Son'; a competition for students from schools under the Ministry of Education for the 2024/2025 academic year.

She stressed the importance of the role of the charity in strengthening the international position of Kuwait by joining the whole world in celebrating parents and affirming the educational and social messages it conveys. She explained that parenting is an acquired skill that requires time, support and training --something the charity seeks to consolidate through its various programs.

She also stated that UNICEF intends to launch the 'Parenting Skills Month' in 2025, which intersects with the objectives of the current celebration. "The campaign seeks to highlight the challenges and successes faced by parents, in addition to providing practical parenting tips and tools," she revealed.

At the conclusion of the ceremony -- after a documentary film was shown about the charity's activities and the contributions of the winning students; the sponsor, the organizing committee and the competition winners were honored in a festive atmosphere that reflected the great appreciation for the role of the Kuwaiti family in building society and raising generations.

Ad fee hike faces pushback

MoC sets conditions for staff secondment between sectors

Move aims to ease investor burden

By Inaas Awadh
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, June 19: The Legal and Financial Affairs Committee at the Municipal Council, chaired by Fahad Al-Abduljader, held its meeting Wednesday; during which it agreed on the referral of two items on its agenda to the executive body as follows:

■ Letter of Vice Chairman of the council Khaled Al-Mutairi and members Walid Al-Dagher, Fahd Al-Abduljader, Nasser Al-Jadaan and Nassar

Al-Azmi regarding the removal of violations on sports club walls;

■ Review of licenses for shops and investment projects to verify the implementation of approved terms and conditions, with the aim of providing the committee with reports for each governorate.

The committee also proposed amending advertising license fees to prepare a detailed report in this regard. It is worth noting that the proposal was submitted by a company specializing in advertising and publicity. This company owns and operates outdoor advertising spaces, including screens, facades and glass sides. Given the varying sizes of these media -- from large to small screens -- the company's business was negatively impacted by the advertising license fees stipulat-

ed in Advertising Regulation No. 599/2023. The amendments increased advertising screen license fees from KD36 to KD75 per meter. Furthermore, the fees for glass facades and sides were increased from KD25 to KD50 per meter; thereby, affecting the cost of selling advertisements on these media.

In its letter to the committee, the company indicated that the increase stipulated in the new advertising regulations was implemented without taking into consideration the screen size; hence, the significant impact on large screens.

The company stated that its demand to review the fees for billboards, facades and glass sides stipulated in the advertising regulations stems from its commitment to improve the investment environment to serve all stakeholders.

By Mohammed Al-Enezi
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, June 19: The Ministry of Communications has issued a decision to regulate the mechanism for employee secondment between its various sectors.

The decision stipulates that transfer requests between sectors must be submitted through a formal application, in the approved format, during the months of January and July each year.

These applications are subject to a set of controls and criteria, including the requirement to obtain official approvals from the relevant departments, starting with the employee's current organizational unit and ending with the receiving entity.

The decision also ensures that the

human resource needs of each sector are taken into consideration, preventing any disruption to workflow in the employee's current sector due to the transfer. Transfers are not permitted until the employee has completed a specified period in their current position, except in special cases that require the approval of the relevant assistant undersecretary.

Certain vital sectors, such as the telecommunications sector, are excluded from external transfers, except under special circumstances as determined by the ministry.

The Ministry of Communications has made the transfer request form available on its official website, with the condition that all required information and approvals must be completed prior to submission.

JUNE

Room Promotion

Weekdays (Saturday - Wednesday)	
Queen Cabana (2 persons inclusive of breakfast) per night.	2 Bedroom Chalet (4 persons inclusive of breakfast) per night.
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Hawally Governor Ali Al-Asfar, during his inspection tour of Salah Al-Din High School for Boys.

Hawally Governor hails smooth exam process at local high school for boys

KUWAIT CITY, June 19: Hawally Governor Ali Al-Asfar, during his inspection tour of Salah Al-Din High School for Boys, praised the efforts exerted to ensure the smooth running of exams with the highest standards of discipline and accuracy, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The governor was accompanied by Head of the school's examination committee Mohammed Abbas.

Al-Asfar expressed his appreciation for the dedication of the school administration and teaching staff in providing a positive and stimulating educational environment, and wished the students success.

He was reassured that the students were taking their exams smoothly and with ease.

Al-Asfar was also briefed on the progress of the exam paper marking process.

'Eyeless' wins Big Picture competition

Kuwait's Murad claims 1st place at world wildlife photography contest

WASHINGTON, June 19, (KUNA): Kuwaiti photographer Mohammad Murad has won the first place in the Wildlife category of the Big Picture Contest held in California, USA. The contest is one of the world's most prominent nature photography competitions, attracting thousands of entries from around the globe.

The contest announced on its website Tuesday that Murad's photo, titled "Eyeless," won first place in the Terrestrial Wildlife category. The photo, taken during an expedition to the Mongolian wilderness, captures a rare Pallas' cat covered in frost and snow—a silent moment that tells a story of resilience in the face of harsh climate conditions.

"Eyeless" was selected from over 8,000 global entries and will be displayed as part of the Big Picture Exhibition at the California Academy of Sciences in San Francisco, scheduled to open on October 2, 2025.

The exhibition will feature a collection of inspiring images aimed at raising environmental awareness and highlighting the beauty and fragility of planet Earth.

The selection of Mohammad Murad is a significant achievement, adding to the list of distinguished Arab photographers on the global stage. It reflects his prominent presence in the nature photography community and his ongoing commitment to conveying wildlife stories to people around the world.

Photographer Mohammad Murad told Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) on this occasion that "this honor is a testament to the power of visual narrative in photography," adding, "This photo was born from a moment of deep contemplation in which I saw how the battle for survival arises without a voice and how the power of life is manifested in the most cruel and silent moments."

He expressed his pride in this win and in



Kuwaiti photographer Mohammad Murad won the first place in the Big Picture competition in California, USA.



KUNA photos
The photo 'Eyeless' won the first place in the Big Picture competition in California, USA.

sharing this moment with the world, stressing that "this victory is not only for me, but for dear Kuwait and for raising its name in international forums."

He dedicated this achievement to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, may God protect them, in recognition and appreciation of their continuous support for Kuwaiti youth in various fields.

Deal aims to curb evasion and boost investment

Kuwait, Austria sign DTAA agreement



KUNA photo
The Ambassador of the State of Kuwait to the Republic of Austria, Talal Al-Fassam, signs with the State Secretary at the Austrian Ministry of Finance, Barba Ebinger-Miedl, a protocol amending the Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement.

VIENNA, June 19, (KUNA): Kuwait and Austria on Tuesday signed a protocol to amend the Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (DTAA) to avoid instances of tax evasion.

Kuwait's Ambassador to Austria Talal Al-Fassam and on behalf of Austria the State Secretary at the Ministry of Finance Barba Ebinger-Miedl both signed the agreement.

In a statement to KUNA Ambassador Al-Fassam said that this protocol aims to enhance financial transparency through the effective exchange of tax information, and "it represents a milestone in the path of financial and economic cooperation between the two friendly countries."

He also emphasized that this step comes within the framework of both countries' efforts to develop their tax systems in line with international standards.

The agreement reflects both sides' commitment to facilitating the flow of capital, stimulating investment, and providing legal protection for investors, thus strengthening economic trade relations between both countries, added Al-Fassam.

Jahra prepares for development plans

Ahmadi approves power line projects

By Inaas Awadh
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, June 19: The Ahmadi Governorate Committee at the Municipal Council, chaired by Nasser Al-Azmi, on Thursday held its first meeting for the fourth legislative term.

During the meeting, the committee approved the request of the Ministry of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy to allocate overhead lines connecting Shagaya Z main transformer station to Wafra Z main transformer station.

The committee referred the request to the executive authority to allocate an overhead line route from

Umm Al-Hayman W station to the electrical transformer stations within the Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) territory in order to prepare a detailed study in this regard.

Meanwhile, the Jahra Governorate Committee -- chaired by Abdullah Al-Enezi -- will hold its first meeting for the current term next Wednesday to discuss several items on its agenda, especially the request for a comprehensive study to convert some plots in Old Jahra from residential to investment uses.

The committee will also deliberate on the following:

- Letter of the Jahra governor about the sustainable model public restroom initiative in Jahra Governorate;
- Request of the Public Authority for Roads and Transportation (PART) to amend the road network design in order to connect the Special Education Schools Complex to the surrounding roads in South Al-Oyoun;
- Request of the Ministry of Health to change the use of the Pest Control Center located in Block 90, Jahra to a kidney dialysis center, with its boundaries modified and to add another area;
- Two proposals of member Abdullah Al-Enezi -- construct two pedestrian bridges over Jahra Expressway 80 opposite Al-Qairawan and Doha and expand Al-Naeem Housing Project (low-cost housing).

Absolute rejection of efforts to decimate Palestine's historical presence: Al-Hayyen

GENEVA, June 19, (KUNA): Kuwait's Permanent Representative to the UN and other International Organizations in Geneva Ambassador Nasser Al-Hayyen expressed Tuesday absolute rejection of any attempts to decimate Palestine's historical and cultural presence including its geographic and demographic characteristics, or to convert archaeological sites into exclusive tourism projects.

This came in a speech delivered by Ambassador Al-Hayyen in his capacity as Chairman of the Council of the GCC country ambassadors before the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva during the interactive dialogue with the fact-finding mission on the occupied Palestinian territories.



Al-Hayyen expressed deep concern over the committee's documented systematic targeting of cultural and religious sites in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

He commended the committee's conclusion that the destruction of these landmarks, the restrictions on accessing them, and attempts to erase the historical connection constitutes a flagrant violation of the rights of the Palestinians and undermines their national identity.

He also condemned the practices of the occupying power and the policy of collective punishment while expressing the GCC's rejection of any justification or pretexts for describing the Israeli occupation aggression as self-defense.

On behalf of the GCC's countries, he welcomed the fact-finding mission's reports and the Committee's accentuation of the Israeli flagrant violations of international and human rights laws.

Kuwait and Belgium talks deepen bilateral relations



KUNA photo
The State of Kuwait and Belgium hold the fifth round of political consultations in Brussels.

Boosting trade and cooperation

BRUSSELS, June 19, (KUNA): Kuwait and Belgium held the fifth round of political consultations on Wednesday in Brussels, aiming to strengthen bilateral relations and expand areas of mutual cooperation.

According to a statement received by KUNA, the Kuwaiti delegation was led by Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs for European Affairs Ambassador Sadeq Marafi, while the Belgian side was headed by Ambassador Director General for Bilateral Relations at the Belgian Foreign Ministry

Brigitte Stevens.

Kuwait's Ambassador to Belgium and Head of its Missions to the EU and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Nawaf Al-Enezi, was also present.

The consultations focused on enhancing bilateral relations, particularly in political, economic, and investment sectors, the statement said.

Discussions included investment opportunities for Belgian businesses in key sectors in Kuwait, as well as mechanisms to promote trade and broaden economic cooperation.

Both sides exchanged views on regional and international issues of mutual interest, stressing the importance of continued coordination in multilateral forums.

They also reviewed ongoing coop-

eration between the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the European Union, especially considering Kuwait's current presidency of the GCC, with a focus on strengthening strategic partnerships in regional security, energy, and sustainable development.

In a statement to KUNA, Al-Enezi emphasized that the fifth round of consultations reflects the growing strength of Kuwait-Belgium relations and enhances political and diplomatic dialogue between the two friendly countries.

He also highlighted the increasing momentum in Kuwait-EU relations, driven by Kuwait's commitment to deepening strategic partnerships based on mutual respect and shared interests.

Kuwait renews support for a peaceful Sudan

KHARTOUM, June 19, (KUNA): Kuwaiti Ambassador to Sudan Dr. Fahad Al-Dhafiri on Wednesday reiterated Kuwait's support for a political solution in Sudan and efforts to preserve its unity and sovereignty.

This came during a reception by Sudanese Prime Minister Dr. Kamil Idris of the Kuwaiti Ambassador in his office in the interim capitol (Port Sudan), in the first official meeting between the two sides since Idris assumed office.

Al-Dhafiri conveyed greetings of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, reassuring at the same Kuwait's support for Sudan in various fields, as Kuwait was the first to respond to Sudan's recent humanitarian crises through a 34-plane air bridge and ships loaded with aid since the conflict began in April 2023, hoping for a political solution to the current crisis.

Premier Idris presented thanks for the Kuwaiti distinguished support; offered without conditions or agendas,



KUNA photo
The Sudanese Prime Minister receives the Kuwaiti Ambassador.

pointing out that these efforts stem from Kuwaiti values and firm principles.

Continued from Page 1

PM stresses

China, and accelerating the implementation of these major projects in line with the country's development vision.

The Assistant Foreign Minister for Asian Affairs and member and rapporteur of the Ministerial Committee, Ambassador Samih Jawhar Hayat, gave a detailed explanation of the cooperation, consultation and coordination existing between the governments of the two countries.

The meeting was attended by Head of the Prime Minister's Diwan Abdulaziz Al-Dakheel, Minister of Public Works Dr. Noura Al-Mashaan, Minister of State for Municipal Affairs and Minister of State for Housing Affairs Abdullah Al-Mishari, Minister of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy Dr. Subaih Al-Mukhaizeem, Director General of the Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority Sheikh Dr. Meshal Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Head of the Fatwa and Legislation Department Counselor Salah Al-Majed, Assistant Foreign Minister for Asian Affairs, and member and rapporteur of the Ministerial Committee Ambassador Samih Jawhar Hayat.

Kuwait celebrates

carefully measured steps for this day since assuming office in 1950, securing independence and paving way for adopting a constitution.

He signed a decree on August 26, 1961 to hold elections of the Constituent Assembly, mandated with writing the constitution.

The 183-article constitution was completed in nine months, it laid the foundations for a sturdy democratic regime putting the Kuwaiti people on a path of progress and prosperity.

On September 7, 1961, an Amiri decree was signed specifying the shape and colors of the Kuwaiti flag, the very first flag to be flown following the independence.

Kuwait made many accomplishments at many levels over the past 64 years, meeting aspirations of citizens, playing a major role in regional and international issues, and has become a global humanitarian center.

The State of Kuwait became member in the Arab League on July 20,

1961.

UN Security Council began on November 30, 1961, considering the State Kuwait's application to join the United Nations, and on May 14, 1963 the application was approved and Kuwait became UN's 111th member.

The 15-year reign of Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem, who was dubbed, "father of independence" and "father of constitution" was peppered with achievements.

At that time, the State of Kuwait accomplished 43 laws and legislation, including the nationality law, monetary law, passports law and the organization of government departments.

New departments were established in order to cope with the development of the nation, like public works, health, publication, knowledge, municipality, post and telephone, electricity and water, social affairs, awqaf, radio and television.

Kuwait remains on a steady path of preventative diplomacy, crises mediation and effort contributing to solving outstanding regional and international issues.

Don't hoard,

best practices," he revealed.

He then emphasized the importance of relying on official and reliable sources in disseminating information, especially in cases of specialized technical nature.

In related news, Foreign Affairs Minister Abdullah Al-Yahya affirmed Wednesday that Kuwait puts the safety of Kuwaiti citizens abroad on top of its priorities in view of the ongoing security developments in the region.

In a telephone interview with Al-Akhbar News Channel, Al-Yahya asserted "we are always prepared to maintain direct communication with our embassies and consular offices abroad, and to closely monitor the locations of Kuwaiti citizens in Iran. No injuries have been reported among Kuwaitis in Iran from last Friday until Wednesday."

He said "the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is currently identifying the number of Kuwaitis stranded in the Islamic Republic of Iran, as part of the emergency plan of the State. Efforts are ongoing to ensure their

return to the country as quickly as possible. The evacuation process is being carried out through the land borders between Iran and Iraq, where citizens are being transported to Kuwait. Although the figures are constantly changing, the accurate number of citizens in Tehran will be finalized soon."

He revealed that Kuwait, as the current chair of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), held a virtual meeting on Saturday with the foreign ministers of other GCC member states; during which they condemned the Israeli attacks on Iran.

He also reaffirmed the council's continuous efforts to urge Iran to return to the negotiating table, and called for an immediate ceasefire and de-escalation in the region. "Kuwait is working within a GCC framework to monitor any radioactive indicators that might result from the escalation. So far, all indicators are normal. Kuwait operates its consular mission only from Tehran, and it is coordinating with other GCC consuls in different parts of Iran to offer help for Gulf citizens," he asserted.

In addition, the Public Authority for Industry (PAI) has underscored the importance of securing major factories with strategic stocks of food, water and medicines; as well as ensuring the safety of its employees, particularly in Shuaiba Industrial Area, its headquarters, branches and subsidiaries.

During an Emergency Committee meeting held recently as per the directive of Minister of Commerce and Industry Khalifa Al-Ajeel, acting Director General of PAI Jarallah Al-Dousari stressed the need to focus on precautionary measures; taking into consideration the rapid developments in the region.

He confirmed that PAI continuously exerts tremendous efforts to protect its human resources and facilities, calling for coordinated action to deal with emergencies.

He also affirmed the activation of emergency teams and evacuation plans, in addition to the establishment of a direct hotline to guarantee rapid response and coordination with relevant authorities to monitor field readiness.

Also, in its coordination meeting with the Union of Charitable Societies and Endowments, the Ministry of Social Affairs discussed the readi-

ness of charitable organizations to deal with emergency situations.

Undersecretary of the ministry Khaled Al-Ajmi, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the union Saad Al-Otaibi, and Board members Fidaa Al-Waqyan and Mohammad Ashkanani attended the meeting as well.

Al-Otaibi affirmed that the meeting reflects the strong partnership between the ministry and the charitable sector with the aim to enhance national unity during crises.

The union delegation praised the ministry's role and assured the readiness of associations and endowments to fulfill their duty in serving the community.

During the meeting, the union presented an initiative to strengthen the institutional preparedness of the charitable sector to face crises through four main tracks:

- Supporting needy groups and enhancing community protection,
- Providing supplementary humanitarian food supplies,
- Organizing specialized volunteer work in civil defense, health, and community services,
- Intensifying awareness campaigns to combat rumors and promote reassurance.

Furthermore, Minister of Information and Culture and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi underscored the need to disseminate accurate and reliable information to the public.

In a statement to Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) when he visited the headquarters of the agency on Wednesday, Al-Mutairi stressed the importance of concerted efforts between official media outlets and to work with professionalism and objectivity.

During the visit, Al-Mutairi met with acting Director General of KUNA Mohammad Al-Mannai and several department heads. He was briefed on the media emergency plan of the agency to monitor the latest news and developments not just in the region, but around the world as well.

He praised the sincere national efforts of KUNA's staff, indicating the need to abide by professional journalistic standards and ensure they remain updated with local and international developments.

He expressed his full support for everything that activates the national

role of the agency and his commitment to strengthen cooperation between State institutions, particularly in the media sector.

In latest development, Israel's defense minister threatened Iran's supreme leader on Thursday after the latest missile barrage from Iran damaged the main hospital in southern Israel and hit several other residential buildings near Tel Aviv. Israel meanwhile struck a heavy water reactor that is part of Iran's nuclear program.

At least 240 people were wounded by the Iranian missiles, four of them seriously, according to Israel's Health Ministry. The vast majority were lightly wounded, including more than 70 people from the Soroka Medical Center in the southern city of Beersheba, where smoke rose as emergency teams evacuated patients.

In the aftermath of the strikes, Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz blamed Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and said the military "has been instructed and knows that in order to achieve all of its goals, this man absolutely should not continue to exist."

U.S. officials said this week that President Donald Trump had vetoed an Israeli plan to kill Khamenei. Trump later said there were no plans to kill him "at least not for now."

Israel carried out strikes on Iran's Arak heavy water reactor, in its latest attack on the country's sprawling nuclear program. The conflict began last Friday with a surprise wave of Israeli airstrikes targeting military sites, senior officers and nuclear scientists.

A Washington-based Iranian human rights group said at least 639 people, including 263 civilians, have been killed in Iran and more than 1,300 wounded. In retaliation, Iran has fired over 400 missiles and hundreds of drones, killing at least 24 people in Israel and wounding hundreds.

Meanwhile, an Israeli military official said that Iran used a missile with multiple warheads in an attack Thursday, posing a new challenge to its defenses.

The official spoke on the condition of anonymity in line with military regulations.

There was no immediate independent analysis that could be made. However, Iran has hinted in the past that it was pursuing such weaponry.

Instead of having to track one warhead, missiles with multiple warheads can pose a more difficult challenge for air defense systems, like Israel's Iron Dome.

Two doctors told The Associated Press that the missile struck almost immediately after air raid sirens went off, causing a loud explosion that could be heard from a safe room. They spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to brief media.

The hospital said the main impact was on an old surgery building that had been evacuated in recent days. After the strike, the medical facility was closed to all patients except for life-threatening cases, it said. Soroka has over 1,000 beds and provides services to around 1 million residents of Israel's south.

There were no serious injuries from the strike on the hospital.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu condemned the attack and vowed a response, saying: "We will exact the full price from the tyrants in Tehran."

Iran has fired hundreds of missiles and drones at Israel, though most have been shot down by Israel's multi-tiered air defenses, which detect incoming fire and shoot down missiles heading toward population centers and critical infrastructure. Israeli officials acknowledge it is imperfect.

Many hospitals in Israel activated emergency plans in the past week, converting underground parking to hospital floors and moving patients underground, especially those who are on ventilators or are difficult to move quickly.

Israel also boasts a fortified, subterranean blood bank that kicked into action after Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023 attack ignited the ongoing war in the Gaza Strip.

Israel's military said its fighter jets targeted the Arak facility and its reactor core seal in order to prevent it from being used to produce plutonium.

"The strike targeted the component intended for plutonium production, in order to prevent the reactor from being restored and used for nuclear weapons development," the military said. Israel separately claimed to have struck another site around Natanz it described as being related to Iran's nuclear program.

‘Consular officers will be on lookout for posts and messages’

US resumes visas for foreign students but demands access to social media accounts

WASHINGTON, June 19, (AP): The US State Department said Wednesday it is restarting the suspended process for foreigners applying for student visas but all applicants will now be required to unlock their social media accounts for government review.

The department said consular officers will be on the lookout for posts and messages that could be deemed hostile to the United States, its government, culture, institutions or founding principles.

In a notice made public Wednesday, the department said it had rescinded its May suspension of student visa processing but said new applicants who refuse to set their social media accounts to “public” and allow them to be reviewed may be rejected. It said a refusal to do so could be a sign they are trying to evade the requirement or hide their online activity.

The Trump administration last month temporarily halted the scheduling of new visa interviews for foreign students hoping to study in the US while preparing to expand the screening of their activity on social media, officials said.

Students around the world have been waiting anxiously for US consulates to reopen appointments for visa interviews, as the window left to book their travel and make housing arrangements narrows ahead of the start of the school year.

On Wednesday afternoon, a 27-year-old Ph.D. student in Toronto was able to secure an appointment for a visa interview next week. The student, a Chinese national, hopes to travel to the US for a research internship that would start in late July. “I’m really relieved,” said the student, who spoke on condition of being identified only by his surname, Chen, because he was concerned about being targeted. “I’ve been refreshing the website couple of times every day.”

Students from China, India, Mexico and the Philippines have posted on social media sites that they have been monitoring visa booking websites and closely watching press briefings of the State Department to get any indication of when appointment scheduling might resume.

In reopening the visa process, the State Department also told consulates to pri-



Chinese students wait outside the US Embassy for their visa application interviews, in Beijing on May 2, 2012. (AP)

oritize students hoping to enroll at colleges where foreigners make up less than 15% of the student body, a US official familiar with the matter said. The official spoke on condition of anonymity to detail information that has not been made public.

Foreign students make up more than 15% of the total student body at almost 200 US universities, according to an Associated Press analysis of federal educa-

tion data from 2023. Most are private universities, including all eight Ivy League schools. But that criteria also includes 26 public universities, including the University of Illinois and Pennsylvania State University. Looking only at undergraduate students, foreign students make up more than 15% of the population at about 100 universities, almost all of them private.

International students in the US have been facing increased scrutiny on several fronts. In the spring, the Trump administration revoked permission to study in the US for thousands of students, including some involved only in traffic offenses, before abruptly reversing course. The government also expanded the grounds on which foreign students can have their legal status terminated.

As part of a pressure campaign targeting Harvard University, the Trump administration has moved to block foreign students from attending the Ivy League school, which counts on international students for tuition dollars and a quarter of its enrollment. Trump has said Harvard should cap its foreign enrollment at 15%.

This latest move to vet students’ social media, the State Department said Wednesday, “will ensure we are properly screening every single person attempting to visit our country.”

In internal guidance sent to consular officers, the department said they should be looking for “any indications of hostility toward the citizens, culture, government, institutions, or founding principles of the United States.”

Jameel Jaffer, executive director at the Knight First Amendment Institute at Columbia University, said the new policy evokes the ideological vetting of the Cold War, when prominent artists and intellectuals were excluded from the US.

“This policy makes a censor of every consular officer, and it will inevitably chill legitimate political speech both inside and outside the United States,” Jaffer said.

The Trump administration also has called for 36 countries to commit to improving vetting of travelers or face a ban on their citizens visiting the United States. A weekend diplomatic cable sent by the State Department says the countries have 60 days to address US concerns or risk being added to a travel ban that now includes 12 nations.

US President Trump says supporters ‘more in love’ with him than ever

WASHINGTON, June 19, (AP): US President Donald Trump on Wednesday downplayed any notion that his supporters are cooling on him amid uncertainty over whether he will order a US strike on Iran, addressing a rift between some of his most vocal MAGA backers and national security conservatives.

“My supporters are more in love with me today, and I’m more in love with them, more than they even were at election time where we had a total landslide,” Trump told reporters as a new flagpole was erected at the White House, with machinery whirring in the background. “I may have some people that are a little bit unhappy now, but I have some people that are very happy, and I have people outside of the base that can’t believe that this is happening, they’re so happy,” he said.

Trump huddled Tuesday in the Situation Room with his national security team, and on Wednesday, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth told lawmakers on Capitol Hill that the Pentagon was providing Trump with possible options on Iran but would not say whether the military was planning to assist with Israeli strikes.

“I may do it, I may not do it,” Trump said Wednesday, in the exchange with reporters. “I mean, nobody knows what I’m going to do.”



US President Donald Trump speaks as a flag pole is installed on the South Lawn of the White House on June 18, in Washington. (AP)

Also:

WASHINGTON: The American flag has long flown from a pole on the White House roof, but that’s always been too small for President **Donald Trump**, who wants everything to be bigger and more beautiful.

On Wednesday, massive new flagpoles were erected on the North and South Lawns of the White House.

“It’s such a beautiful pole,” Trump said as workers used a crane to install the latest addition to the South Lawn. He returned to the same spot later in the day, saluting

as the stars and stripes were hoisted for the first time.

The second pole, on the North Lawn, is close to Pennsylvania Avenue. The two poles are the most notable exterior modification to the White House since Trump returned to the presidency with grand ideas for remaking the building.

He’s already updated the Oval Office, adding gold accents, more portraits and a copy of the Declaration of Independence. Workers have begun paving over the grass in the Rose Garden, and there are plans to construct a new ballroom somewhere on the White House grounds.

US Senate Republicans hold hearing on Biden’s mental fitness as Democrats boycott

WASHINGTON, June 19, (AP): Nearly six months after Joe Biden left the White House, Senate Republicans are still scrutinizing his presidency, kicking off the first in what’s expected to be a series of congressional hearings this year on his mental fitness in office.

Republicans on the Senate Judiciary Committee brought in three witnesses Wednesday - none of whom served in Biden’s administration - to scrutinize his time in office, arguing that Biden, his staff and the media must be held accountable. Democrats boycotted the hearing and criticized Republicans for “arm chair diagnosing” Biden when the committee could be looking into serious matters.

Sen. John Cornyn of Texas, who co-chaired the hearing, said that they will aim to “shine a light on exactly what went on in the White House during Biden’s presidency.”

“We simply cannot ignore what transpired because President Biden is no longer in office,” Cornyn said.

A spokesperson for Biden declined to comment on the hearing.

It was the first in what could be several hearings about Biden in the coming months. Over in the House, the Oversight Committee has subpoenaed several of Biden’s former staff members, along with his White House doctor, ordering him to testify at a June 27 hearing “as part of the investigation into the cover-up of President Joe Biden’s cognitive decline.”



Sean Spicer, former White House press secretary, host of The Sean Spicer Show, arrives to testify at a Senate Committee on the Judiciary hearing on Capitol Hill on June 18, in Washington. (AP)

Questions about Biden’s age and fitness erupted last summer after his disastrous performance in a debate against Donald Trump, which ultimately led to his withdrawal from the race.

Even after Trump won back the presidency in November, Republicans have continued to hammer on Biden’s age, citing in part new reporting about Biden that was published this year.

Trump now alleges that Biden administration officials may have forged

the former president’s signature and taken sweeping actions without his knowledge, though he provided no evidence of that happening. But Trump has ordered lawyers at the White House and the Justice Department to investigate.

Republicans played clips during the hearing Wednesday of Democrats defending Biden. In the montage, the Democrats talk about how Biden was mentally sharp when he was in office.

Massive security operation for NATO summit turns parts of The Hague into fortress

THE HAGUE, Netherlands, June 19, (AP): Locals, art lovers and diplomats like to meet over a meal and a drink in the historic Gastrobier Berlage behind a landmark art museum in The Hague.

But the usual stream of visitors turned into a trickle when fences started rising outside as part of super-tight security around a meeting of NATO leaders that is smothering the Dutch city in a massive military and police operation called Orange Shield.

Parts of the usually laid-back city, where NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte used to ride his bicycle to work while munching on an apple when he was prime minister of the Netherlands, are turning into a military fortress.

“It’s dead,” Berlage owner Bianca Veenhof said as she looked at an almost empty terrace at the start of what should have been Wednesday’s lunch-time rush.

Parking spots have been blocked off by freshly installed security fencing, workers in nearby offices have been told to stay home and public transit lines near the grounds have been diverted.

The city that markets itself as the global hub of peace and justice because of the international courts it hosts is turning into a city of security



Security ahead of the NATO summit in The Hague, Netherlands on June 18. (AP)

and inconvenience for the June 24-25 meeting that is scheduled to feature leaders of the 32-nation alliance, including US President Donald Trump.

The summit comes as global geopolitical tensions soar and conflict escalates in the Middle East.

In what they are calling the biggest security operation ever staged in the Netherlands, authorities are locking down parts of the city, closing off

roads, and shutting down airspace.

Temporary barricades and metal mesh fences surrounding the World Forum summit venue are just a fraction of the measures that radiate out from The Hague.

Some 27,000 police officers - about half of the country’s entire force - will be on duty around the summit along with more than 10,000 defense personnel.

Military police will protect delegations. Frigates will patrol the North Sea, F-35 fighter jets and Apache helicopters will take to the skies and air defense systems will be on alert. Bomb squads will comb the venue for explosives.

Convoys carrying leaders will be whisked with military police escorts along closed-off highways from airports to their accommodations. While civilian drones are banned from the airspace around the summit and other key locations, police and military drones will buzz around the skies over the summit venue and other locations where leaders gather.

Police and riot police also will be on hand for several protests that have already been announced, including an effort by demonstrators to shut down a major highway into the city.



Russian President Vladimir Putin, (fourth left), meets with the heads of international news agencies at the newly renovated St. Petersburg Rimsky-Korsakov State Conservatory on the sidelines of the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum in St. Petersburg, Russia on June 19. (AP)

Death toll from latest attack climbs to 28

Zelenskyy calls for more pressure on Russia

KYIV, Ukraine, June 19, (AP): Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Thursday said a Russian missile strike on a nine-story Kyiv apartment building was a sign that more pressure must be applied on Moscow to agree to a ceasefire, as Moscow intensifies attacks in the three-year war.

The drone and missile attack on Kyiv early on Tuesday, the deadliest assault on the capital this year, killed 28 people across the city and injured 142 more, Kyiv Military Administration head Tymur Tkachenko said on Thursday.

Zelenskyy, along with the head of the presidential office Andrii Yermak and Interior Minister Ihor Kljmenko, visited the site of the apartment building in Kyiv’s Solomianskyi district Thursday morning, laying flowers and paying tribute to the 23 people who died there after a direct hit by a missile

collapsed the structure. “This attack is a reminder to the world that Russia rejects a ceasefire and chooses killing,” Zelenskyy wrote on Telegram, and thanked Ukraine’s partners who he said are ready to pressure Russia to “feel the real cost of the war.”

Tuesday’s attack on Kyiv was part of a sweeping barrage as Russia once again sought to overwhelm Ukrainian air defenses. Russia fired more than 440 drones and 32 missiles in what Zelenskyy called one of the biggest bombardments of the war, now in its fourth year.

As Russia proceeds with a summer offensive on parts of the roughly 1,000-kilometer (620-mile) front line, US-led peace efforts have failed to gain traction. Russian President Vladimir Putin has effectively rejected an offer from US President Donald Trump for an immediate 30-day cease-

fire, making it conditional on a halt on Ukraine’s mobilization effort and a freeze on Western arms supplies.

Meanwhile, Middle East tensions and US trade tariffs have drawn world attention away from Ukraine’s pleas for more diplomatic and economic pressure to be placed on Moscow.

Russia in recent weeks has intensified long-range attacks that have struck urban residential areas. Yet on Wednesday, Putin denied that his military had struck such targets, saying that attacks were “against military industries, not residential quarters.”

Speaking to senior news leaders of international news agencies in St. Petersburg, Putin said he was open to talks with Zelenskyy, but repeated his claim that the Ukrainian leader had lost his legitimacy after his term expired last year - allegations rejected by Kyiv and its allies.

Czech coalition government survives no-confidence vote over bitcoin scandal

PRAGUE, June 19, (AP): The Czech government survived a parliamentary no-confidence vote called by the main opposition party on Wednesday over a bitcoin-related scandal.

Only 94 opposition lawmakers in the 200-seat lower house of Parliament voted in favor of dismissing the four-party coalition led by conservative Prime Minister Petr Fiala.

At least 101 votes were needed to oust the government at the end of a two-day debate.

The main opposition centrist ANO (YES) movement led by populist billionaire Andrej Babiš requested the vote after the Justice Ministry accepted a donation of bitcoins and sold them for almost 1 billion Czech koruna (\$47 million) earlier this year.

Justice Minister Pavel Blažek resigned from his post over the issue on May 30 and was replaced by Eva Decroix on June 10.

Blažek said he wasn’t aware of any wrongdoing, but didn’t want the coalition to be harmed by the scandal. Fiala said he believed Blažek acted with goodwill.

Decroix said she will order an in-



A bitcoin token is placed on a mirror for a photograph in Prague, Czech Republic on May 11. (AP)

dependent probe into the ministry’s activities in the case.

The scandal focuses on the fact that the bitcoins were donated to the ministry by a person who was previously convicted of drug dealing and other crimes, while it was not clear why he did it.

The opposition has accused Blažek

of possible money laundering, because it wasn’t clear where the bitcoins originated, and demanded the resignation of the entire government. The issue is being investigated by the national police’s organized crime unit.

It was the fourth no-confidence motion since the government took over after a 2021 election.

America

Hundreds gather to remember Hortmans: Hundreds

of people, some clutching candles or carrying flowers to lay in front of a memorial, gathered outside Minnesota’s Capitol on Wednesday evening for a vigil to remember a prominent state lawmaker and her husband who were gunned down at their home.

As a brass quintet from the Minnesota Orchestra played, Gov Tim Walz wiped away tears and comforted attendees at the gathering for former House Speaker **Melissa Hortman** and her husband, Mark,



Hortman

who were killed early Saturday in the northern Minneapolis suburbs.

Colin Hortman, the Hortmans’ son, embraced Walz and lay a photo of his parents on the memorial. (AP)

□ □ □

Two men get life sentences: Two men were sentenced Wednesday to lifelong terms in prison in the shooting death of an 11-year-old boy outside an Albuquerque baseball stadium in 2023 that prompted the New Mexico governor to issue a controversial gun ban, the district attorney’s office in Albuquerque said.

Investigators say a truck carrying a mother and three young children was mistaken for another vehicle in the shooting as vehicles were leaving the stadium. Gunfire killed 11-year-old Froylan Villegas and paralyzed cousin Tatiana Villegas, while Foylan’s mother and baby brother were unharmed. (AP)

Asia

Suu Kyi supporters celebrate ex-leader's birthday: Thousands of supporters of Myanmar's jailed former leader Aung San Suu Kyi celebrated her 80th birthday Thursday by attempting to set a world record for the most birthday greeting videos, while others took to the streets in demonstrations against the military government that ousted her.

Kalo Say Htoo, an organizer of the birthday video campaign, said the original goal was to collect 80,000 greeting videos to honor Suu Kyi and achieve a recognized Guinness World Record.

The number of videos collected surpassed 103,000 on Thursday, tripling the current record of 32,207 achieved in 2017, organizers said.

Suu Kyi was arrested in February 2021 when the military seized power from her democratically elected government. She was convicted on more than a dozen charges for offenses that her supporters say were concocted to keep her out of politics. She remains regarded by many in Myanmar as the country's legitimate leader while serving a 27-year prison term.

Kim Aris, Suu Kyi's son living in London, said in a statement on Facebook Thursday that the campaign is a powerful testament to his mother's global support.

"It's my hope this achievement brings urgent attention to her plight and that of the people of Burma," said Aris, using the country's former name. "Her voice may be silenced, but her flame will never be extinguished."

Aris planned to run 80 kilometers (49.7 miles) to honor his mother's birthday, while encouraging others to show support with the numerical theme, such as walking for 80 minutes or making 80 recipes.

More than 6,800 civilians are estimated to have been killed by security forces during a widespread armed struggle against military rule that began after generals seized power from Suu Kyi's elected government, according to figures compiled by nongovernmental organizations. (AP)

Flights resume at Indonesia's Bali airport: Flights at I Gusti Ngurah Rai International Airport on Indonesia's resort island of Bali have returned to normal as the eruption of Mount Lewotobi Laki-Laki in East Nusa Tenggara province has receded, according to information from the airport and a government institution on



Thursday.

Gede Eka Sandi Asmadi, head of the communications and legal division at I Gusti Ngurah Rai International Airport, confirmed that flights have resumed normal operations. There were no reports of cancellations for either international or domestic flights on the airport's website on Thursday.

"Several airline flights that were previously canceled due to the eruption of Mount Lewotobi Laki-Laki have gradually returned to operation," he said.

The Volcanology and Geological Disaster Mitigation Center stated that Mount Lewotobi Laki-Laki has gradually eased its eruption after Tuesday's activity, which sent a column of ash up to 10 km into the sky.

On Thursday, the eruption continued, but the ash column could not be seen as it

was obscured by clouds, according to the center. (Xinhua)

China activates emergency response to flooding: China's Ministry of Water Resources on Thursday activated a Level-IV emergency response for flood control in nine provincial-level regions as heavy rains lash parts of the country.

The emergency response covers Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Anhui, Henan, Hubei, Hunan, Guangxi, Chongqing and Guizhou, according to the ministry.

The ministry has dispatched three work teams to Hunan, Hubei and Anhui to provide on-site guidance for local flood control efforts amid the heavy rainfall.

China's National Meteorological Center on Thursday renewed a yellow alert for rainstorms, forecasting torrential downpours in parts of Anhui, Jiangsu, Hubei, Hunan, Guizhou and Guangxi from 2 p.m. Thursday to 2 p.m. Friday. Severe convective weather, including thunderstorms and strong winds, is also expected in some of these regions.

Local authorities have been urged to strengthen real-time monitoring and early warning systems, ensure the timely evacuation of residents from high-risk areas, and take precautions against urban waterlogging, according to the ministry. (Xinhua)

Quake hits 107 km SE of Nemuro, Japan: An earthquake with a magnitude of 5.9 jolted 107 km SE of Nemuro, Japan at 23:08:05 GMT on Wednesday, the US Geological Survey (USGS) said.

The epicenter, with a depth of 14.9 km, was initially determined to be at 42.79 degrees north latitude and 146.67 degrees east longitude. (Xinhua)

3 suspected rebels killed in Philippines: Three suspected rebels were killed in a clash in Leyte province in the central Philippines, the Philippine military said Wednesday.

The military said troops clashed with alleged members of the New People's Army (NPA) on Tuesday morning in Carigara.

No soldiers were killed or wounded in the fighting.

NPA rebels have been fighting government troops since 1969. Military data showed that the NPA's personnel strength has declined since its peak of around 25,000 armed members in the 1980s. Despite its dwindling fighters, the NPA continues to launch small-scale attacks in the countryside. (Xinhua)

Comments were negotiation tactic: Paetongtarn

Thai PM's leaked phone call with Cambodia's Hun Sen sparks outrage, political turmoil

BANGKOK, June 19, (AP): Thailand's Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra faced growing calls for her resignation in a deepening political crisis set off by a leaked recording of her negotiating with Cambodia's former leader in the two nations' latest border dispute.

Paetongtarn apologized to the public on Thursday, after a major coalition partner used the leaked phone call to pull out of the fragile government led by her Pheu Thai Party. Paetongtarn has already been criticized for a perceived soft stance toward Cambodia, especially by right-wing nationalists who are longtime foes of her father, former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra.

The latest border dispute involved an armed confrontation May 28 in a relatively small no-man's-land both countries claim in which one Cambodian soldier was killed.

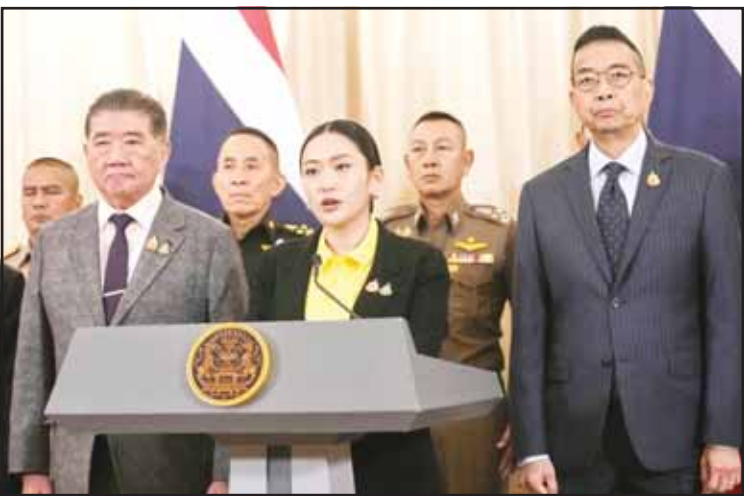
Cambodia's Senate President Hun Sen posted the full, 17-minute phone call on his Facebook page after a shorter version was leaked Wednesday. He said he recorded the conversation "to avoid any misunderstanding or misrepresentation in official matters," adding that he shared the recording with at least 80 people.

In the recording, Paetongtarn was heard calling Hun Sen "uncle" as they discussed through translators whether they should lift border restrictions imposed after the deadly clash. Backlash revolved around her calling a Thai army commander in charge of the border area where the clash happened as "an opponent." Critics said she was trying to please Hun Sen too much and made Thailand look weak.

Paetongtarn said her comments were a negotiation tactic and that her goal was to bring peace between the countries.

However, she said she would no longer engage in a private talk with Hun Sen as she could not trust him. "It's now clear that all that he cares about is his popularity in the country, without considering impacts on relations with other countries," she said.

Thailand's Foreign Affairs Ministry said it submitted a protest letter over the leaked recording with the Cambodian ambassador, saying that Cambodia's actions



were unacceptable and "a breach of diplomatic etiquette, a serious violation of trust, and undermines conduct between two neighboring countries."

Paetongtarn has described the two families as having close, longtime relationships. Her father Thaksin and Hun Sen reportedly regard each other as "godbrothers." In 2009, Hun Sen appointed Thaksin as a Cambodian government adviser, but Thaksin soon resigned the position.

Hours after the leak, the Bhumjaithai party, the biggest partner in Paetongtarn's ruling coalition, said it would quit because of the leaked phone call. The party's statement said the recording "posed an impact on Thailand's sovereignty, territory, interests and the army." The party called for Paetongtarn to take responsibility for the damage, although they did not say how.

There has already been a rift between Bhumjaithai and Pheu Thai over reports that the former would be shuffled out of the powerful Interior Ministry. Several Bhumjaithai leaders are also under investigation over the alleged rigging of the Senate election in which many figures who are reportedly close to the party claimed a majority of seats.

The departure of Bhumjaithai left the 10-party coalition with 255 seats, just above the majority of the 500-seat house.

Opposition leader Natthaphong Ruengpanyawut of the People's Party on Thursday called for Paetongtarn to dissolve Parliament and hold a new election. He said the leaked phone call was "the last straw" that destroyed people's faith in her administration.

Dozens of nationalists protesters gathered near the Government House on Thursday, holding Thai national flags and signs calling for Paetongtarn to resign. Some senators said they will file a motion to impeach her, and several other individuals also filed complaints over the matter to law enforcement agencies.

People have also expressed concern that Paetongtarn's comment towards the local army commander could potentially lead to a military coup. Her father, Thaksin, was ousted in a coup in 2006, and Thaksin's sister, Yingluck Shinawatra, became prime minister in 2011 and was also toppled by the military in 2014.

The military said in a statement Thursday that it would like the people to "maintain confidence in the Royal Thai Army's steadfast commitment to constitutional monarchy and its readiness to execute its constitutional mandate of protecting national sovereignty through established legal frameworks and institutional mechanisms."



Boats are anchored near Manzanillo beach to be removed from water ahead of the arrival of Hurricane Erick in Acapulco, Mexico on June 18. (AP)

Erick makes landfall in southern Mexico as Category 3 storm

Powerful Hurricane Erick made landfall in Mexico's southern state of Oaxaca early Thursday, the National Hurricane Center in Miami said.

The hurricane's center was located about 20 miles (30 kilometers) east of Punta Maldonado. Its maximum sustained winds were clocked at 125 mph (205 kph). It was moving northwest at 9 mph (15 kph), the hurricane center said.

The storm was downgraded slightly before making landfall, from a powerful Category 4 to a Category 3. While slightly reduced in power, Erick is still considered a major hurricane as a Category 3, which can carry winds of up to 129 mph (210 kph).

The storm threaded the needle between the resorts of Acapulco and Puerto Escondido, tearing into a sparsely populated stretch of coastline near the border of Oaxaca and Guerrero states. Agricultural fields blanket the low-lying coastal area between small fishing villages.

Erick is expected to rapidly weaken as it crashes into the coastal mountains of southern Mexico, and the system is likely to dissipate late Thursday or early Friday, the hurricane center said.

The storm threatened to unleash destructive winds near where the eye crashes ashore, flash floods and a dangerous storm surge, forecasters said. (AP)

Bolsonaro used intelligence agency to spy on judges and lawmakers, says police

RIO DE JANEIRO, June 19, (AP): Brazil's federal police accused former president Jair Bolsonaro and 35 others of involvement in a sprawling scheme that used the country's intelligence agency to spy on members of the judiciary, lawmakers and journalists.

The seal on the 1,125-page document, which adds to the far-right leader's woes, was lifted by the country's Supreme Court on Wednesday.

The federal police document said Bolsonaro was both aware of the scheme and its main beneficiary. Investigator Daniel Carvalho Brasil Nascimento, who chairs the probe, named one of the former president's sons, Rio de Janeiro councilor Carlos Bolsonaro, as a key plot member. The police investigation focuses on a so-called parallel structure in Brazil's intelligence agency.

"(Bolsonaro and Carlos) were responsible for the definitions of the criminal organization's strategic guidelines, for choosing the targets of the clandestine actions (against opponents, institutions, the electoral system) so they would politically gain from these operations," the federal police said. "They are the decision center and the main recipients of illicit advances."

The storm threatened to unleash destructive winds near where the eye crashes ashore, flash floods and a dangerous storm surge, forecasters said. (AP)



Brazil's former president Jair Bolsonaro arrives at a rally on Copacabana Beach in support of a proposed bill to grant amnesty to those arrested for storming government buildings in an alleged coup attempt in 2023, in Rio de Janeiro on March 16. (AP)

Also:

RIO DE JANEIRO: Heavy rains have killed at least two people in Brazil's southern region Rio Grande do Sul, the state's civil defense agency said on Wednesday, just over a year after the region was hit by record-breaking floods.

A 65-year-old man is also missing and more than 2,600 people have been

forced to flee their homes, the agency added. The rains have caused blackouts, landslides, washed-out roads and collapsed bridges across the state.

Many of the areas affected were damaged during the floods in May last year, which killed more than 100 people and prompted promises to take measures to avoid a repeat of the dramatic events.

Congo and Rwanda to sign peace deal on June 27, major step in ending fighting

DAKAR, Senegal, June 19, (AP): Congo and Rwanda will sign a peace agreement in Washington on June 27, a joint press release from the nations and the US State Department said Wednesday. Both countries have agreed to the terms of the deal aimed at ending fighting in eastern Congo.

Congo has accused Rwanda of backing M23 rebels in the east of the country. U.N. experts say the rebels are supported by about 4,000 troops from the neighboring nation.

The decades-long conflict escalated in January, when the M23 rebels advanced and seized the strategic Congolese city of Goma, followed by the town of Bukavu in February.

The draft agreement includes "provisions on respect for territorial integrity and a prohibition of hostilities; disengagement, disarmament, and conditional integration of non-state armed groups," the joint statement said.

The agreement that will be signed also includes a commitment to respecting territorial integrity and the conditional integration of non-state armed groups.

Both countries have in the past held peace talks that have largely stalled, including talks hosted by Qatar.

Corneille Nangaa, leader of the Congo River Alliance, a coalition of rebel groups, told The Associated Press in April that international sanctions and Congo's proposed minerals deal with the United States in search of peace would not stop the fighting.

M23 is one of about 100 armed groups that have been vying for a foothold in mineral-rich eastern Congo near the border with Rwanda. The conflict has created one of



US Secretary of State Marco Rubio hosts a signing ceremony in which Congo's Foreign Minister Therese Kayikwamba Wagner, (left), and Rwanda's Foreign Minister Olivier Nduhungirehe, (right), pledge to work toward a peace deal at the State Department in Washington on April 25. (AP)

the world's worst humanitarian crises and has displaced more than 7 million people.

Also:

KINSHASA, Congo: Congo's Minister of Justice Constant Mutamba announced his resignation on Wednesday following an investigation into the alleged embezzlement of \$19 million, according to a statement released by the former minister.

Mutamba has been under investigation for allegedly embezzling funds intended to finance the construction of a prison in Kisangani, a city in the north of the country.

In his statement, Mutamba, 37, claimed the legal actions against him were a plot by the Rwandan government.

"After escaping several attempts at poisoning and physical elimination, the mafia networks, including those infiltrated in the service of our enemies, succeeded in humiliating me because of my commitment," he said.

Earlier this year Mutamba advocated for the use of the death penalty for journalists who covered the actions of Rwandan-backed M23 rebels in the east, saying on the social media platform X that anyone who reports on "the activities of the Rwandan army and its M23 auxiliaries, will now suffer the full force of the law."

Appointed in 2024, Mutamba was a presidential candidate in 2023 and has previously positioned himself as an anti corruption figure in a country whose development has been stifled by chronic corruption with its population of more than 100 million people struggling with high poverty and hunger levels despite its rich minerals.

Nigerian prez orders crackdown on gangs

ABUJA, Nigeria, June 19, (AP): Nigeria's President Bola Tinubu has directed security agencies to hunt down the perpetrators of a weekend attack that killed at least 150 people in the country's northcentral, as he faces growing pressure over a worsening security crisis.

Tinubu visited Benue state, the site of the recent deadly attacks, seeking to calm tensions and promise justice for the victims. "We will restore peace, rebuild, and bring the perpetrators to justice. You are not alone," the Nigerian leader said on X.

Assailants stormed Benue state's Yelewata community from Friday night till Saturday morning, opening fire on villagers who were asleep and setting their homes ablaze, survivors and the local farmers union said. Many of those killed were sheltering in a local market after fleeing violence in other parts of the state.

Authorities in Benue state blamed herdsmen for the attack, a type of violence frequently seen in northern Nigeria's decadeslong pastoral conflict.



Nigeria President Bola Ahmed Tinubu visits the victims of a recent gun attack on a village at the hospital in Benue, north-central, Nigeria on June 18. (AP)

Business

Award underscores Bank's leadership and commitment to delivering tailored investment solutions

KFH named Best Investment Bank in Kuwait by MEED

KUWAIT CITY, June 19: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) has been named Best Investment Bank – Kuwait at the prestigious MEED MENA Banking Excellence – Corporate & Investment Awards 2025. This recognition affirms KFH’s industry leadership, the deep trust it has gained from its clients, and its unwavering commitment to delivering tailored financial and investment solutions. These efforts support client growth and contribute significantly to the ongoing development of capital markets.

Criteria and mechanism KFH’s selection for this award followed a rigorous evaluation process that measured performance across several criteria, including market activity, advisory strength, innovation, and the impact on clients. The bank demonstrated consistent excellence in all key areas of investment banking. Its ability to add strategic value through complex transactions and its regulatory leadership set it apart from competitors and solidified its position as the top choice in this year’s awards.

Outstanding performance The award was received by Sulaiman AlOthman, Senior Vice President of



Sulaiman Al-Othman receiving the award.

the Investment Banking Division at KFH Capital, during a ceremony held in Dubai. AlOthman stated that the award is a testament to KFH’s outstanding achievements and its leadership role in the investment banking industry across the region.

In 2024, KFH Group strengthened its position as a global leader in Sukuk issuance through its investment arm, KFH Capital. The bank led and arranged more than \$23 billion in

Sukuk for sovereign and corporate entities across various sectors and regions. Among its notable achievements, KFH Capital acted as lead manager for a \$1 billion Sukuk issuance by Al Rajhi Bank, and also arranged Sukuk issuances worth \$1 billion for Dubai Islamic Bank and \$800 million for First Abu Dhabi Bank (FAB). Additionally, it served as the global coordinator for KFH’s own \$1 billion Sukuk issuance.

KFH Capital played a key

role in other major regional deals as well. It served as joint lead manager for two Sukuk transactions worth \$3.5 billion for the Saudi Public Investment Fund (PIF) and led the issuance of a \$3 billion international Sukuk for Aramco. The firm also supported Turkey Wealth Fund (TWF) in its inaugural international Islamic finance transaction, helping raise \$750 million at competitive pricing.

MEED Founded in 1957, MEED (Middle East Eco-



KFH HQ

omic Digest) is a prominent business intelligence platform focused on economic and financial developments in the Middle East. The MEED MENA Banking Excellence Awards – Corporate & Investment

recognize outstanding performance in the banking and financial services sector, honoring institutions and individuals for their innovation, service quality, and commitment to client success.

HSBC convenes GCC stock exchanges and corporates in London

Global investors explore diversification opportunities in Gulf as tariff uncertainty persists

KUWAIT CITY, June 19: Over 300 global institutional investors met with all seven bourses from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and over 100 GCC corporates at HSBC’s GCC Exchanges Conference in London this week. The event comes as global economic uncertainty reshapes capital flows, with investors turning to the Gulf’s reform-driven growth and maturing capital markets.

Now in its fourth year, conversations at the Conference focused on the increasing appeal of the GCC, as the region continues to register record IPO pipelines, deepen sovereign and corporate bond markets, and expand private credit platforms – all underpinned by strong fiscal buffers and multi-year economic transformation agendas. The continued liberalisation of GCC financial markets and the introduction of privatization programmes by GCC governments are converging at a time when investors are seeking diversification from global volatility.

GCC capital markets remained resilient in the first quarter of the year with IPO proceeds 33% higher compared to the first quarter of 2024, despite a slowdown in issuances globally.[1] Boursa Kuwait’s continued commitment and focus on Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) practices highlights its importance as a tool to drive growth and serve as a key factor in evaluating regulatory and financial risks.

Ahmed AlMurad, Head of Wholesale Banking in Kuwait said: “Global investors are recalibrating for resilience and the GCC’s balance sheet strength and sophisticated financial markets ecosystem make it a capital magnet. As the largest international bank in the country with a priority to connect global investors with opportunities in Kuwait, we play a key role in supporting the country’s develop-



HSBC’s GCC Exchanges Conference in London.

ment and strengthening its role as a leading financial and investment center in the Middle East.”

Attendees at the GCC Exchanges Conference included Boursa Kuwait’s Chief Financial Officer, Mr. Naim Azad Din, and the company’s Head of Markets, Noura Al-Abdulkareem.

Speaking at the event, Boursa Kuwait’s Head of Markets, Noura Al-Abdulkareem, said: “Boursa Kuwait’s participation in international investment conferences, corporate days, and roadshows underscores its pivotal role in positioning the Kuwaiti capital market as a compelling destination on the global investment landscape. These platforms are instrumental in showcasing

the market’s competitive strengths and reinforcing its reputation as a transparent, efficient, and regionally significant financial hub. They also provide valuable opportunities to exchange knowledge, share expertise, and adopt global best practices—bolstering investor confidence and advancing our vision of a sustainable market that aligns with evolving global economic trends.”

This year, for the first time, HSBC brought together Emerging Market Macro Strategists with GCC attendees, as EM investors dial-up their exposure to the Gulf’s capital markets, driven by strong GDP projections relative to the broader EM pool.

Rescue over liquidation

How bankruptcy law creates new beginning from financial distress

KUWAIT CITY, June 19: As part of the Memorandum of Cooperation signed between the Union of Investment Companies (UIC) and Kuwait Accountants and Auditors Association (KAAA), an introductory seminar was held under the title, “How the Bankruptcy Law Creates a New Beginning from Financial Distress.”

Participants included representatives of the public and private sectors, along with a number of experts in the legal and economic fields.

Chairman of the Board of Directors of UIC Abdullah Hamad Al-Tarkeet explained that the new Bankruptcy Law is a qualitative shift in the legal and economic landscape of Kuwait. “Rather than viewing financial distress as just a crisis, the law establishes an advanced legislative framework focused on restructuring and recovery -- prioritizing rescue over liquidation,” he disclosed.

He said the new law provides a realistic and constructive path for financially troubled companies and investors to return to viability without enduring lasting stigma or facing procedural hurdles. He pointed out that this legislative shift promotes transparency, financial discipline, and trust in the investment ecosystem. He affirmed that it also contributes to reducing systemic risk and fostering a more resilient, equitable, and growth-oriented business environment -- a key enabler for Kuwait’s long-term sustainable development.

Speaking on behalf of KAAA, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the association Sabah Mubarak Al-Jalawi stated that the seminar is the first in a series of awareness initiatives led by the Arbitration, Accounting, Tax and Bankruptcy Center of the association in partnership with UIC. “These efforts aim to educate stakeholders on the new bankruptcy law, its practical applications, and its potential to revive distressed enterprises,” he added.

He stressed that the law plays a vital role in job creation for the national workforce, while protecting shareholders’ rights. He added the center seeks to provide services that strengthen the local business environment by developing legal and technical competencies; in line with

the latest global practices in accounting, arbitration, taxation and bankruptcy. “The center is committed to delivering high-quality training content to enhance legal and financial literacy and prepare a new generation of qualified professionals; thereby, fostering a balanced and sustainable economic and legal framework,” he explained.

UIC Secretary General Fadwa Darwish reaffirmed the union’s longstanding commitment to advancing legal and economic awareness as a core part of its mission. She noted that this commitment extends beyond its member institutions to the wider professional and economic community. “We believe that knowledge is the foundation of genuine and lasting development,” she said.

The seminar featured presentations by a distinguished panel of experts:

■ Dr. Mohammad Abdullah Rabah Al-Mutairi, Attorney and Associate Professor of Commercial Law at the College of Law at Kuwait University

■ Dr. Ahmad Ali Al-Khudair, Assistant Professor of Civil and Commercial Procedure Law at Kuwait University

■ Professor Bader Abdul Latif Al-Farsi, Member of KAAA and Head of the Bankruptcy Sector at association

The speakers addressed three main topics:

1. The Legal Framework of the Bankruptcy System in Kuwait
2. Procedural Aspects before the Bankruptcy Administration and Courts
3. Practical Insights and Case Studies from Real-World Applications

The symposium concluded with a call to action for greater collaboration among stakeholders; emphasizing the importance of coordinated programs and joint initiatives to promote legal and financial literacy, enhance professional standards, and support the effective implementation of the Bankruptcy Law.

Participants agreed that such efforts are essential to protect the business environment, stimulate economic development, and strengthen the competitive position of Kuwait regionally and internationally.



Chairman of the Board of Directors of UIC Abdullah Hamad Al-Tarkeet, right, explaining the new Bankruptcy Law.

Boursa ends week in green; KD 124 mln turnover

KUWAIT CITY, June 19, (KUNA): Boursa Kuwait ended Thursday on a positive note, with the general index climbing 57.67 points (0.73%) to close at 7,951.10. Trading was robust, as 667.2 million shares changed hands in 34,274 transactions, totaling 124.1 million Kuwaiti dinars (approximately \$405

million). The Main Market Index edged up 10.69 points (0.16%) to 6,860.43, with 425.5 million shares traded across 21,922 transactions, valued at 46.2 million dinars (\$150.8 million). The Premier Market Index advanced 72.22

points (0.85%) to reach 8,616.06, on a volume of 241.7 million shares in 12,352 transactions worth 77.8 million dinars (\$253.9 million).

Meanwhile, the Main 50 Index slipped 28.46 points (0.42%) to 6,789.92, with 260.9 million shares traded in 9,840 transactions, totaling 19.8 million dinars (\$64.6 million).



Muhannad Al-Borno receives the Sustainability Leader Award on behalf of Mr. Issam Al-Sager.



Muhannad Al-Borno and Kholoud Abdullah receive the award for Best Bank in Kuwait.



Shadi Kheder, Rana Atallah, and Vikram Viswanathan receiving the NBK Wealth Award.



MEED Banking Excellence Awards

NBK Wealth awarded ‘MENA Best Fund Management for 2025’

NBK awarded Best Bank in Kuwait for 2025 & Al-Sager recognized as MENA Sustainability Leader of the Year

KUWAIT CITY, June 19: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) has received three prestigious accolades from MEED magazine as part of MENA Banking Excellence Awards. Presented annually, these honors recognize the region’s most distinguished financial institutions and spotlight those setting new benchmarks in innovation, customer experience, and leadership within the banking sector.

During the awards ceremony held by MEED magazine in Dubai, NBK was honored with three major distinctions, including “Best Bank in Kuwait - 2025” — a new milestone that reaffirms the Bank’s leading position in the financial sector. Additionally, Mr. Isam Al-Sager, NBK Group Vice Chairman and CEO, was named “MENA Sustainability Leader of the Year” in recognition of his outstanding leadership and pivotal role in driving the Bank’s sustainability agenda. His contributions have positioned NBK as a model for advancing one of the most vital causes shaping the future of coming generations.

In the meantime, NBK Wealth was named MENA Fund Manager of the Year- 2025, further cementing the Group’s standing as one of the region’s leading asset management firms.

The Best in the Local Market

NBK’s recognition as the Best Bank in Kuwait for 2025 reaffirms its outstanding track record in delivering an exceptional banking experience—one that not only fulfills customers’ needs but consistently exceeds their expectations. Renowned for pioneering innovative banking services and advanced payment solutions, NBK continues to lead the way in digital banking, making its name synonymous with innovation and excellence in Kuwait and across the region.

Furthermore, NBK holds the highest credit ratings among all banks in the region, as affirmed by leading international credit rating agencies—Moody’s, S&P’s, and Fitch. The Bank also stands out for its expansive local and international network, spanning key global financial centers, including China, Geneva, London, Paris, New York, and Singapore, alongside a strong regional presence across Lebanon, Egypt, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and the UAE.

BMEED honored Mr. Isam Al-Sager, NBK Group Vice Chairman and CEO, with the MENA Sustainability Leader of the Year Award. This recognition affirms his pivotal role in steering NBK toward numerous sustainability milestones and reinforcing the foundations of sustainable development in Kuwait and across all the markets where the Bank operates.

Among NBK’s most notable milestones in this area is the integration of ESG standards across its operations and corporate culture—an approach that supports the transition to a sustainable, low-carbon economy and aligns with Kuwait’s national roadmap to achieve carbon neutrality by 2060.

Over the past year, the Bank has made significant



Muhannad Al-Borno, Kholoud Abdullah, Shady Kheder, Rana Atallah, and Vikram Viswanathan receiving the awards.

strides in advancing its sustainability agenda, most notably through the successful issuance of its inaugural US\$500 million green bonds—the first of their kind by a Kuwaiti financial institution. By the end of 2024, the Bank’s sustainable finance portfolio had reached US\$4.97 billion, representing nearly 50% of its US\$10 billion target by 2030. Additionally, the Bank published its first Green Bond Allocation and Impact Report, underscoring the positive environmental outcomes resulting from the deployment of bond proceeds.

NBK has been at the forefront of banks embracing the shift toward sustainable finance, launching a comprehensive suite of green transformation products and services across its branches. These include eco friendly housing loans, sustainability-linked financing, and consumer loans for electric vehicles—reinforcing the Bank’s commitment to supporting environmentally responsible choices and advancing the transition to a low-carbon economy.

Mr. Al-Sager was also ranked first in Kuwait and third in the banking and financial services sector across the Middle East in Forbes magazine’s 2024 list of Sustainability Leaders in the region—further underscoring his influential role in driving sustainable practices within the banking industry.

NBK Wealth, the leading wealth management group, was awarded “MENA Best Fund Management for 2025” at the MEED Banking Excellence – Corporate and Investment Awards 2025, hosted by MEED in Dubai.

This recognition reaffirms NBK Wealth’s standing as one of the region’s top asset managers and underscores the strength of its investment philosophy—anchored in aiming for capital growth, prudent strategies, and a commitment to developing innovative solutions that address client needs and seeks to deliver sustainable, long-term returns.

NBK Wealth’s receipt of this award also highlights the professional expertise of its asset management team,

whose capabilities have led to a consistent track record and strong performance across its investment products and solutions.

The company’s asset management team continues to deliver value to clients across both conventional and Sharia-compliant funds. The team is led by seasoned fixed income investment professionals with diverse expertise spanning treasury, investments, and accounting, and brings together more than 40 years of combined experience in portfolio management, trading, and credit analysis.

NBK Wealth’s asset management team adopts a dynamic approach to fund management, consistently working to expand its local and regional client base, enhance investment maturity, and introduce more advanced and innovative fixed income products — all while closely aligning with the prevailing market landscape and global interest rate trends.

Moreover, NBK Wealth’s asset management team manages a range of separately managed accounts (SMAs) for high-net-worth clients, offering multiple strategies that include, but not limited to, short-term, ultra-short-term, and moderate approaches—tailored to suit both conventional and Shariah-compliant investment preferences.

NBK Wealth stands as the largest comprehensive wealth management group in Kuwait and one of the leading players in the regional industry. It has reinforced its global footprint through an integrated network of operations across nine cities in five countries worldwide.

Furthermore, NBK Wealth provides a comprehensive suite of financial solutions tailored to the distinct needs of high-net-worth individuals and families across the MENA region, leveraging the strength and stability of its affiliation with the NBK Group.

By harnessing its deep market insight, global footprint, and dedication to innovative investment strategies, NBK Wealth enables its clients to pursue their long-term financial goals with steadfast confidence.

NBK Wealth is a brand registered under the name of National Bank of Kuwait S.A.K.P (“NBK”), for use by the Asset Management business of, among other NBK group entities, Watani Investment Company K.S.C.C. , a leading investment firm and its affiliates worldwide, combined with the Private Banking services of NBK worldwide, which is one of the largest and oldest financial institutions in the region.

MEED, one of the world’s most prestigious publications established in 1957, is renowned for its in-depth analysis of economic developments across the Middle East. In collaboration with Global Data Financial Services’ Retail Banker International and Private Banker International, the MENA Banking Excellence Awards honor institutions that deliver outstanding innovation in banking, financial services, and customer experience.

Kuwait economy set to rebound to 2% in '25, reforms still crucial

Growth on rise, but smart spending will shape thriving future

RIYADH, June 19: Economic growth across the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is projected to increase in the medium-term to 3.2% in 2025 and 4.50% in 2026. This growth is likely to be driven by the expected rollback of OPEC+ oil production cuts and robust expansion of non-oil sectors.

According to the latest edition of the Gulf Economic Update (GEU), regional growth was 1.7% in 2024 – an improvement from 0.3% in 2023. The non-hydrocarbon sector remained resilient, expanding by 3.7% – largely fueled by private consumption, investment, and structural reforms across the GCC.

At the same time, global trade uncertainty presents challenges, as a global economic slowdown remains a key downside risk for the region. To mitigate these risks, GCC countries need to accelerate economic diversification reforms and strengthen regional trade.

“The resilience of GCC countries in navigating global uncertainties while advancing economic diversification underscores their strong commitment to long-term prosperity,” said Safaa El Tayeb El-Kogali, Division Director for the GCC countries at the World Bank. “Strategic fiscal policies, targeted investments, and a strong focus on innovation, entrepreneurship, and job creation for youth are essential

to sustaining growth and stability.”

The report titled “Smart Spending, Stronger Outcomes: Fiscal Policy for a Thriving GCC”, discusses the effectiveness of fiscal policy in ensuring macroeconomic stabilization and encouraging growth. The topic is particularly relevant as oil price fluctuations strain budget balances in several countries across the region. Some GCC countries are projected to experience increasing fiscal deficits in 2025, emphasizing the need for understanding the effectiveness of fiscal policy.

Government spending

The report finds that government spending in the GCC region has effectively stabilized economies, especially during recessionary episodes. The findings show that a 1-unit increase in fiscal spending can boost non-hydrocarbon output by 0.1-0.45 units in the region. The report also finds a marginal impact of government investment on non-hydrocarbon output – a 0.07 percent change in potential output for a one-time percentage point increase in investment.

The report also showcases Oman’s fiscal consolidation journey as a noteworthy example of effective economic reform and responsible fiscal management. It highlights the challenges Oman has faced due to oil dependency, the measures it implemented to restore fiscal balance, and the encouraging outcomes of these reforms. Under its Medium-Term Fiscal Plan 2020-2024, Oman introduced wide-ranging reforms to diversify revenue sources, improve expenditure efficiency, and prudently managing hydrocarbon windfalls. Oman’s reforms have yielded tan-

gible results since 2022, with a marked improvement in its fiscal position and a significant reduction in public debt.

GCC Countries Outlook

Bahrain: Growth is predicted to stabilize at 3.5% in 2025 after two years of decline. The improvement relative to 2024 (3% growth) is driven by the completion of BAPCO refinery upgrades and robust non-hydrocarbon growth in sectors supported by Bahrain’s Economic Vision 2030, including infrastructure, logistics, financial technology, and tourism. In 2026-2027, overall growth is expected to average 2.9% thanks to continued non-hydrocarbon growth and the expansion of Sitra oil refinery.

Kuwait: Economic growth is expected to recover significantly and reach 2.2% in 2025, compared to -2.9% in 2024 and -3.6% in 2023. The phase out of OPEC+ production caps and the expansion of non-hydrocarbon sectors supported by credit growth and large infrastructure projects explains this positive outlook. Over 2026-2027, economic growth is predicted to remain stable at 2.7%, while long-term economic outlooks hinge on the successful implementation of structural reforms and diversification efforts.

Growth prospects

Oman: Growth is expected to gradually accelerate to 3% in 2025 (compared to 1.7% in 2024), 3.7% in 2026 and 4% in 2027. The rebound in oil production (2.1% oil GDP growth in 2025), along with solid non-hydrocarbon growth (3.4%) driven by robust growth in construction, manufacturing and services is expected to drive these sustained improvements in growth prospects.

Qatar: Economic growth is projected to remain stable at 2.4% in 2025 (2.6% in 2024), before accelerating to an average of 6.5% in 2026-2027 due to the expansion of LNG capacity. These improved prospects are supported by strong non-hydrocarbon growth, particularly in education, tourism, and services. The hydrocarbon sector is expected to grow timidly in 2025 (0.9%), before undergoing a significant boost in 2026 thanks to the North Field LNG expansion coming online, supporting a 40% rise in LNG output. Non-hydrocarbon growth is expected to remain robust thanks to infrastructure upgrades and international investments.

Saudi Arabia: Economic growth is projected to continue recovering after declining to 1.3% in 2023, rising to 2.8% in 2025 and an average of 4.6% in 2026-2027. The phasing out of OPEC+ voluntary production cuts is expected to take hydrocarbon GDP growth to 6.7% in 2026 and 6.1% in 2027. Meanwhile, non-oil GDP is expected to continue rising steadily, by 3.6% on average between 2025 and 2027, as the Kingdom pursues its economic diversification agenda under Vision 2030.

United Arab Emirates: Economic growth is expected to maintain its ascending trend to reach 4.6% in 2025 and stabilize at 4.9% in 2026 and 2027. Non-oil sectors are bound to remain a key engine of growth (4.9% growth in 2025), thanks to targeted public investment, governance improvements, and expanding external partnerships. Meanwhile, the normalization of oil production levels thanks to the phasing out of OPEC+ voluntary cuts is expected to support this ascending trend.



Jazeera Airways

Seasonal route runs 3 times weekly

Jazeera Airways restarts direct flights to Abha

KUWAIT CITY, June 19: Jazeera Airways, Kuwait’s leading low-cost carrier, is resuming direct flights to Abha, in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, starting 15 July 2025. The seasonal route will operate three times a week until the end of September 2025, providing a convenient connection for travelers from Kuwait and across the region to one of Saudi Arabia’s most scenic and culturally rich destinations.

Known as the “Bride of the Mountain,” Abha offers a unique summer escape with cooler temperatures ranging between 25–30°C, a vibrant cultural heritage, and picturesque mountain landscapes. Located in the Aseer region at the southern end of the Red Sea, Abha serves as an ideal base to explore the natural beauty and elevated terrains of southwestern Saudi Arabia.

Commenting on the relaunch, Barathan Pasupathi, Chief Executive Officer of Jazeera Airways, said: “We are excited to bring back

our seasonal service to the beautiful city of Abha – a destination that offers refreshing mountain breezes, breath taking natural landscapes, and a rich cultural heritage, making it an ideal getaway for summer travelers across the region. This route reflects our continued commitment to providing accessible and value-driven travel options to destinations beyond the ordinary. We extend our sincere thanks to the General Authority of Civil Aviation (GACA), the Saudi Tourism Authority (STA) and the Saudi Air Connectivity Program for their strong collaboration and unwavering support in making this relaunch possible.”

Abha is the seventh destination served by Jazeera Airways in the Kingdom, further strengthening the airline’s footprint in Saudi Arabia. In addition to direct traffic from Kuwait, the airline continues to facilitate connections from across its wider network into the Kingdom via Kuwait.

Flight Schedule: Kuwait (KWI) – Abha (AHB)					
Flight No.	Frequency	From	To	Departure (Local Time)	Arrival (Local Time)
J9 0237	Tuesday, Friday, Sunday	KWI	AHB	16:50	19:00
J9 0238	Tuesday, Friday, Sunday	AHB	KWI	20:00	22:00

Note: Flight times and frequencies are subject to change.

AI tools rise, but authenticity matters in job hunts

Adaptability, communication beat credentials in 2025 hiring



Graduates of Academy of Hope Adult Public Charter School hug following the organization’s graduation ceremony on Tuesday, June 17, 2025 in Washington. Students received General Education Development (GED) diplomas, National External Diploma Program (NEDP) degrees, Certified Nurse Aide Training (CNAT), and CompTIA A+ IT certifications. (AP)

The Conversation is an independent and nonprofit source of news, analysis and commentary from academic experts.

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By Murugan Anandarajan
Drexel University

“We found that employers increasingly prioritize self-management skills like adaptability, ethical reasoning and communication over technical skills such as digital literacy and cybersecurity.”

Every year, I tell my students in my business analytics class the same thing: “Don’t just apply for a job. Audition for it.” This advice seems particularly relevant this year. In today’s turbulent economy, companies are still hiring, but they’re doing it a bit more carefully. More places are offering candidates short-term work experiences like internships and co-op programs in order to evaluate them before making them full-time offers. This is just one of the findings of the 2025 College Hiring Outlook Report. This annual report tracks trends in the job market and offers valuable insights for both job seekers and employers. It is based on a national survey conducted in September 2024, with responses from 1,322 employers spanning all major industries and company sizes, from small firms to large enterprises. The survey looks at employer perspectives on entry-level hiring trends, skills demand and talent develop-

ment strategies. I am a professor of information systems at Drexel University’s LeBow College of Business in Philadelphia, and I co-authored this report along with a team of colleagues at the Center for Career Readiness. Here’s what we found: Only 21% of the 1,322 employers we surveyed rated the current college hiring market as “excellent” or “very good,” which is a dramatic drop from 61% in 2023. This indicates that companies are becoming increasingly cautious about how they recruit and select new talent. While confidence in full-time hiring has declined, employers are not stepping away from hiring altogether. Instead, they’re shifting to paid and unpaid internships, co-ops and contract-to-hire roles as a less risky route to identify talent and “de-risk” full-time hiring. Employers we surveyed described internships as a cost-effective talent pipeline, and 70% told us they plan to maintain or increase their co-op and intern hiring in 2025. At a time when many companies are tightening their belts, hiring someone who’s already proved themselves saves on onboarding reduces turnover and minimizes potentially costly mishires. For job seekers, this makes every internship or short-term role more

than a foot in the door. It’s an extended audition. Even with the general market looking unstable, interest in co-op and internship programs appears steady, especially among recent graduates facing fewer full-time opportunities. These programs aren’t just about trying out a job. They let employers see if a candidate shows initiative, good judgment and the ability to work well on a team, which we found are traits employers value even more than technical skills. We found that employers increasingly prioritize self-management skills like adaptability, ethical reasoning and communication over technical skills such as digital literacy and cybersecurity. Employers are paying attention to how candidates behave during internships, how they take feedback, and whether they bring the mindset needed to grow with the company. This reflects what I have observed in classrooms and in conversations with hiring managers: Credentials matter, but what truly sets candidates apart is how they present themselves and what they contribute to a company. Based on co-op and internship data we’ve collected at Drexel, however, many students continue to believe that technical proficiency is the key to getting a job.

In my opinion, this disconnect reveals a critical gap in expectations: While students focus on hard skills to differentiate themselves, employers are looking for the human skills that indicate long-term potential, resilience and professionalism. This is especially true in the face of economic uncertainty and the ambiguous, fast-changing nature of today’s workplace. Employers also told us that artificial intelligence is now central to how both applicants and employers navigate the hiring process. Some companies are increasingly using AI-powered platforms to transform their hiring processes. For example, Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia uses platforms like HireVue to conduct asynchronous video interviews. HR-focused firms like Phenom and JJ Staffing Services also leverage technologies such as AI-based resume ranking, automated interview scheduling and one-way video assessments. Not only do these tools speed up the hiring process, but they also reshape how employers and candidates interact. In our survey, large employers said they are increasingly relying on AI tools like resume screeners and one-way video interviews to manage large numbers of job applicants. As a result, the candidate’s presence, clarity in

communication and authenticity are being evaluated even before a human recruiter becomes involved. At the same time, job seekers are using generative AI tools to write cover letters, practice interviews or reformat resumes. These tools can help with preparation, but overreliance on them can backfire. Employers want authenticity, and many employers we surveyed mentioned they notice when applications seem overly robotic. In my experience as a professor, the key is teaching students to use AI to enhance their effort and not replace it. I encourage them to leverage AI tools but always emphasize that the final output and the impression it makes should reflect their own thinking and professionalism. The bottom line is that hiring is still a human decision, and the personal impression you make matters. While our research focuses on early-career hiring, these findings apply to other audiences as well, such as career changers, returning professionals and even mid-career workers. These workers are increasingly being evaluated on their adaptability, behavior and collaborative ability - not just their experience. Many companies now offer project-based assignments and trial roles that let them evaluate performance before making a permanent hire. At the same time, employers are investing in internal reskilling and upskilling programs. Reskilling refers to training workers for entirely new roles, often in response to job changes or automation, while upskilling means helping employees deepen their current skills to stay effective and advance in their existing roles. Our report indicates that approximately 88% of large companies now offer structured upskilling and reskilling programs. For job seekers and workers alike, staying competitive means taking the initiative and demonstrating a commitment to learning and growth. ■ So what can students, or anyone entering or reentering the workforce, do to prepare? ■ Start early. Don’t wait until senior year. First- and second-year internships are growing in importance. ■ Sharpen your soft skills. Communication, time management, problem-solving and ethical behavior are top priorities for employers. ■ Understand where work is happening. Over 50% of entry-level jobs are fully in-person. Only 4% are fully remote. Show up ready to engage. ■ Use AI strategically. It’s a useful tool for research and practice, not a shortcut to connection or clarity. Stay curious. Most large employers now offer reskilling or upskilling opportunities - and they expect employees to take initiative. One of the clearest takeaways from this year’s report is that hiring is no longer a one-time decision. It’s a performance process that often begins before an interview is even scheduled. Whether you’re still in school, transitioning in your career or returning to the workforce after a break, the same principle applies: Every opportunity is an audition. Treat it like one. (AP)

Famous names bet big on your next phone plan

Trump Mobile debuts, joining celebrity wave in wireless

NEW YORK, June 19, (AP): More and more celebrities are looking to attach their names to your phone. Or rather, wireless services that could power it. From cosmetics to snacks, brands launched or co-owned by high-profile figures are just about everywhere you look today. But several big names are also venturing into the market for mobile virtual network operators - or MVNOs, an industry term for businesses that provide cell coverage by leasing infrastructure from bigger, more established carriers. U.S. President Donald Trump’s family was the most recent to join the list with the launch of Trump Mobile this week. Here’s what to know. On Monday, The Trump Organization (currently run by the president’s sons Eric and Donald Jr.) unveiled Trump Mobile. The company says this new business will offer cell service, through an apparent licensing deal with “all three major cellular carriers” in the U.S., and sell gold phones by August. Trump Mobile marks the latest in a string of new Trump-branded offerings - which already span from golden sneakers to “God Bless the USA” bibbles - despite mounting ethical concerns that the president is profiting off his position and could distort public policy for personal gain. “This raises a real question about a conflict of interest,” said Ben Bentzin, an associate professor of instruction at The University of Texas at Austin’s McCombs School of Business. As the sitting president, Trump appoints

leadership for the Federal Communications Commission - and the family’s new phone venture exists under this regulatory authority. All of this sets Trump Mobile apart from other big names that have recently ventured into the wireless business. Still, its launch arrives as a growing number of celebrities tap into this space. Just last week, actors Jason Bateman, Sean Hayes and Will Arnett launched SmartLess Mobile, a name that mirrors the trio’s “SmartLess” podcast. Now live across the contiguous U.S. and Puerto Rico, SmartLess Mobile runs on T-Mobile’s 5G Network. Another wireless provider with ties to fame is Mint Mobile. While not launched by celebrities, Ryan Reynolds purchased an ownership stake in Mint in 2019. Mint’s parent, the Ka’ena Corporation, was later acquired by T-Mobile in a deal worth up to \$1.35 billion. Beyond names of famous people, well-known brands that weren’t traditionally in the phone business have also got in on the action over the years - particularly outside of the U.S., Forrester Research senior analyst Octavio Garcia Granados notes. He points to Walmart’s “Bait” mobile plan in Mexico, for example, as well as Italian soccer club AC Milan launching its own mobile SIM cards for fans. “The MVNO market is not new,” said Garcia Granados. “What’s new is the development on how it’s consumed and the (ease) for brands to launch such plans.”

MVNOs have also emerged outside of high-profile brands or launch teams. Bentzin points to Straight Talk and Cricket - which are now owned by Verizon and AT&T, respectively. Still, traditional celebrity endorsements are common across the board. And in recent years, “influencer marketing” has been “the fastest growing area of advertising and promotion,” he notes. For Trump Mobile, the pitch seems to be all about having an “all-American service” while also tapping into the fan base of the president. The company noted Monday that it chose to unveil Trump Mobile on the 10th anniversary of Trump launching “his historic presidential campaign.” The name given to its flagship offer, The 47 Plan, and the \$47.45 monthly fee make reference to the president’s two terms. And a mock-up of the planned gold phone on the company’s website shows Trump’s “Make America Great” slogan on the front screen. According to the company, Trump Mobile’s 47 Plan will include unlimited calls, texts and data through partner carriers, as well as free roadside assistance and telehealth services. It also says the new phone, called the “T1 Phone,” will be available for \$499 in August - but notes that this device won’t be designed or made by Trump Mobile. Still, the company emphasized that these phones will be built in the U.S. Experts have since shared skepticism about that being possible in two months. And beyond the future T1

Phone, others stress that a monthly cell service fee of just under \$50 is pricey compared to other MVNO options today. “It’s not actual lower pricing. It’s really trading on the fan base, if you will, of Trump,” said Bentzin. SmartLess Mobile and Mint Mobile, of course, don’t carry these same political ties. And the wireless plans offered by both boast less expensive offerings. T-Mobile-owned Mint advertises “flexible, buy-in-bulk” plans that range from \$15 to \$30 a month. Each option includes unlimited talk and text nationwide, but vary depending on plan length and data amount. Mint, founded in 2016, says it started “because we’d had enough of the wireless industry’s games” - and promises to help consumers avoid hidden fees. SmartLess Mobile’s plans also start at \$15 a month. Depending on the data amount purchased, that base fee can rise to \$30 - but all of its plans similarly offer unlimited talk and text using T-Mobile’s network. When launching last week, SmartLess underlined that its goal is to help people stop paying for the data they don’t use, noting that the majority of data used by consumers today happens over Wi-Fi. “Seriously, if your phone bill knew how often you’re on Wi-Fi, it would be embarrassed,” Hayes said in a statement for SmartLess Mobile’s June 10 launch. MVNOs have proven to be attractive acquisitions to big wireless carriers over the years. But whether or

not the star factor promises significant demand has yet to be seen for the market’s most recent entrants. For the more established Mint Mobile, Reynolds’ investment is a success story. The 25% stake that the actor reportedly owned in 2023, when the company announced that it would be acquired by T-Mobile, was estimated to give him a personal windfall of over \$300 million in cash and stock. And since that deal closed, Reynolds has remained in his creative role for Mint and as the face of many campaigns - helping the brand continue to attract new customers. It’s no surprise that the potential of such business returns might attract other celebrities to make similar investments, Bentzin notes. Still, newer ventures are untested. And “as the market becomes more crowded, it could be harder and harder to pick off individual consumers,” he added. Beyond a high-profile name, quality of service and what consumers can afford is also critical. “The competition battleground here is brand and price,” Bentzin said. Still, if the marketing is right and product meets consumer needs, experts like Garcia Granados note that MVNOs can be a profitable business, for both the brands that start them and the telecommunications giants - like T-Mobile, Verizon and AT&T - offering this “wholesale” access to their infrastructure. As a result, he said, such high-profile ventures become “a catalyst for others to follow.”

“Beyond names of famous people, well-known brands that weren’t traditionally in the phone business have also got in on the action over the years - particularly outside of the U.S.”

Singer marks 20 years of 'Motivation' with a bold tour

Jeezy looks back on the album that changed everything

NEW YORK, June 19, (AP): When Jeezy released his commercial debut two decades ago, he prepared a contingency plan in case his musical aspirations weren't achieved.

"You don't know if you're going to be around in 20 years," said the drug dealer-turned-rap legend. "The streets change fast. But it's also a safe haven, too, 'cause it was like, 'OK, well, if it doesn't work, maybe I can go back.'"

But there would be no need: "Let's Get It: Thug Motivation 101" was met with monumental success. The album, deemed a classic by critics and fans, detailed the Atlanta rapper's navigation of the drug trade and street life. It debuted at No. 2 on the Billboard 200 with singles like "Soul Survivor" featuring Akon - which reached No. 4 on the Hot 100 - and "Go Crazy," featuring a Jay-Z verse many consider one of his greatest.

With distinctive ad-libs as memorable as his vivid storytelling, Jeezy displayed his gift of motivation, inspiring a vast cross-section of fans.

"The music and the words resonated so well because they came from a real place. I wasn't trying to entertain - I was trying to reach," said the "My President" rapper, who has built a business empire consisting of real estate and partnerships.

In honor of the album's 20th anniversary, Jeezy is launching his "TM:101 Live" tour on June 27 in Miami, encouraging fans to come sharply dressed for the upscale



Jeezy poses for a portrait on Tuesday, June 10, in New York. (AP)

performances. The Color of Noize Orchestra will back him, along with guest DJ Drama from their acclaimed "Trap or Die" mixtape.

Jeezy spoke with the Associated Press about the album's legacy, social media discourse surrounding him and ex-wife Jeannie Mai, and his infamous snowman

shirts that were banned at schools over accusations of promoting drug culture. This conversation has been edited for clarity and brevity.

AP: It's hard to describe the magnitude of "TM:101" when it dropped. What was that time like?

Jeezy: I just had this feeling that - if I could just get it out - that it would be life-changing for me. So, there was a lot of things I was up against at that time and I must say personally, that was probably the most adversity I ever faced. ... I tore my vocal cords because I had polyps on my vocal cords and didn't know it. And then around the same time, I was hit with Bell's palsy. And around that time, the album got leaked.

If you're doing something to change your life and you know that the only other avenues are prison or death, you're just like, "This gotta work."

AP: Schools across the country began banning your snowman shirts. What's the legacy of them?

Jeezy: Samuel L. Jackson told me something a long time ago - a great friend of mine - he just said the snowman represents people that were demonized, and it was bigger than me. ... It was this imagery of something that I was inspiring to be. And to know that they would suspend kids from school and keep them from wearing something that would represent that tells me that the message was loud and clear. ... "We got a people's champ."

AP: How have you managed your transition from street to corporate life?

Jeezy: It's like a tree: It grows where it's soft at, not where it is hard. It's just like over time, leaves fall off, branches fall off but the tree continues to grow.

Everybody don't have the same vision or goals. And if you allow them, they'll sink the ship - or they'll chop down the tree.

AP: You've been private about your relationships, so how have you dealt with the social media coverage about your divorce?

Jeezy: I just live my life, man. You know, joy, peace, and freedom, brother. I don't know these people, so I can't even feel no type of way. That's on them - I got better things to do. I've got goals, dreams, aspirations, so I don't get caught up in it, 'cause I don't go for the good, either. ... I'm not reading the comments to see what somebody said about me good, because none of it matters.

AP: You're leading community service initiatives. What is that important to you?

Jeezy: I do want to shout out LISC (Local Initiatives Support Corporation) which is my partner on my non-profit space. They're amazing. We're actually focusing in on prostate cancer, and then also helping the inner city youth with education, entrepreneurship. ... I'd like to shout out the Urban League of Atlanta, and we have the Young CEOs program.

It's great to put out projects, it's great to do tours. But it's also great to help your people in the process.

Variety

LONDON: The Princess of Wales canceled plans to attend Royal Ascot on Wednesday as she continues to balance the demands of her public duties against the realities of her recovery from cancer.

Kate, as Prince William's wife is commonly known, has been gradually returning to public duties since last fall, when she announced that she had completed chemotherapy and would return to work. At the time, she said her road to full recovery would be long and she would "take each day as it comes."

Royal Ascot, a five-day series of horse races, is the centerpiece of the summer social season in Britain, with members of the royal family attending throughout the meeting.

Racegoers had hoped to see Kate on Wednesday, as Prince William was scheduled to awarding race prizes. William attended without his wife.

Kate, 42, announced on Sept. 9 that she had completed treatment six months after revealing she had an undisclosed type of cancer.

The announcement came six weeks after Buckingham Palace said King Charles III was also being treated for cancer, stretching the ability of the royal family to keep up with its busy schedule of public appearances. Charles has also returned to public duties. (AP)

LONDON: Fans of the Irish-language hip-hop group Kneecap mobbed sidewalks outside a London court Wednesday as a member of the trio faced a terror-related charge in what he says is a politically motivated effort to silence the band's support for Palestinians before its appearance at the Glastonbury Festival.

Rapper Mo Chara, whose real name is Liam Óg Ó hAinnidh, was released on unconditional bail after the hearing at Westminster Magistrates' Court. His next court appearance is scheduled for Aug. 20.

The single charge against Chara stems from a Nov. 21 concert in north London where he waved a Hezbollah flag in a manner that aroused "reasonable suspicion" he supported the Lebanese militant group, which is banned in Britain as a terrorist organization, the Metropolitan Police Service said in a statement last month.

Prosecutor Michael Bisgrove told the court on Wednesday Chara wasn't being prosecuted because of his support for the Palestinians or criticism of Israel.

"He's well within his rights to voice his opinions and solidarity, as is anybody else," Bisgrove said. "The allegation in this case is a wholly different thing and deals with a video recording showing that, in November of last year, Mr. O hAinnidh wore and displayed the flag of Hezbollah, a proscribed terrorist organization, while saying 'up Hamas, up Hezbollah.'" (AP)

FRISCO, Texas: The Dallas Cowboys cheerleaders say they are getting a serious increase in pay.

One of the cheerleaders has said during the second season of the Netflix series "America's Sweethearts: Dallas Cowboy Cheerleaders" that the members are getting a 400% boost in pay.

The cheerleaders have been pushing for pay increases for years. In 2019, the Cowboys settled a lawsuit with a former cheerleader that led to the squad doubling the per-game pay, from \$200 to \$400. The latest raise is four times that.

"Our efforts were heard and they wanted to give us a raise," four-year veteran Megan McElaney said on the show. "And we ended up getting a 400% increase, which is like, life-changing."

According to ESPN, the Cowboys agreed to pay four cheerleaders a total of \$2.4 million nine years ago to settle claims by the women that the team's longtime public relations chief, Rich Dalrymple, filmed them in the dressing room.

Film

Spielberg's 'shark' delivers timeless lessons to Hollywood

50 years on, 'Jaws' still haunts our shores

NEW YORK, June 19, (AP): Fifty years after "Jaws" sunk its teeth into us, we're still admiring the bite mark.

Steven Spielberg's 1975 film, his second feature, left such a imprint on culture and Hollywood that barely any trip to the movies, let alone to the beach, has been the same since.

Few films have been more perfectly suited to their time and place than "Jaws," which half a century ago unspooled across the country in a then-novel wide release accompanied by Universal Pictures' opening-weekend publicity blitz. "Jaws" wasn't quite the first movie to try to gobble up moviegoers whole, in one mouthful (a few years earlier, "The Godfather" more or less tried it), but "Jaws" established - and still in many ways defines - the summer movie.

That puts "Jaws" at the birth of a trend that has since consumed Hollywood: the blockbuster era. When it launched in 409 theaters on June 20, 1975, and grossed a then-record \$7.9 million in its first days, "Jaws" set the template that's been followed ever-after by every action movie, superhero flick or dinosaur film that's tried to go big in the summer - a sleepy time in theaters before "Jaws" came around.

And yet the "Jaws" legacy is so much more than being Hollywood's ur-text blockbuster. It's not possible to, 50 years later, watch Spielberg's film and see nothing but the beginning of a box-office bonanza, or the paler fish it's inspired. It's just too good a movie - and too much unlike so many wannabes since -- to be merely groundbreaking. It's a masterpiece in its own right.

Documentary

"It supercharged the language of cinema," the filmmaker Robert Zemeckis says in the upcoming documentary "Jaws @ 50: The Definitive Inside Story," premiering July 10 on National Geographic.

That documentary, with Spielberg's participation, is just a small part of the festivities that have accompanied the movie's anniversary. Martha's Vineyard, where "Jaws" was shot, is hosting everything from concerts to "Jaws"-themed dog dress-ups. "Jaws," itself, is streaming on Peacock through July 14, along with a prime-time airing Friday on NBC, with an intro from Spielberg. The "Jaws" anniversary feels almost more like a national holiday - and appropriately so.

But if "Jaws" is one of the most influential movies ever made, Hollywood hasn't always drawn the right



This image released by Peacock shows Roy Scheider in a scene from 'Jaws.' (AP)

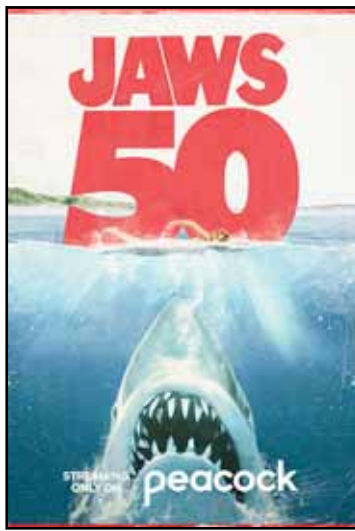
lessons from it. "You're gonna need a bigger boat" has perhaps been taken too literally in movies that have leaned too much on scale and spectacle, when neither of those things really had much to do with the brilliance of Spielberg's classic.

For the film's 50th anniversary, we looked at some of the things today's Hollywood could learn from "Jaws" 50 years later.

Every time I rewatch "Jaws" - which I highly recommend doing on some projected screen, even a bedsheet, and preferably with an ocean nearby - I marvel at how much it gets from its Martha's Vineyard setting.

Where U.S.-made film productions are shot has been a hot button issue lately. Various incentives often determine movie shooting locations, with set dressings, or CGI, filling in the rest. But "Jaws" shows you just how much more than tax credits you can get from a locale.

Spielberg was convinced the adaptation of Peter Benchley's novel - inspired by Benchley's childhood summers on Nantucket - shouldn't be done in soundstages. After look-



This image released by Peacock shows promotional art for the film 'Jaws.' (AP)

ing up and down the Atlantic coast, he settled on Nantucket's neighboring island. Like his first film, the Mojave Desert-set "Duel," Spielberg wanted his mechanized shark to swim in a real, definable place.

"I felt the same way about 'Jaws,'" Spielberg says in the documentary. "I wanted to go to the natural environment so there was some kind of verisimilitude. So it needed to be in the ocean, out to sea."

It wasn't easy. The budget for "Jaws" nearly tripled to \$9 million and the shoot extended from 55 to 159 days. Spielberg would never again be under financial pressure on a picture, but the tortured "Jaws" production put him under a microscope. An AP report from 1975 began: "It is news when a 26-year-old film director goes \$2 million over budget and two and a half months over schedule and manages to avoid getting fired."

More than any other time in his career, Spielberg fretted.

"'Jaws' was my Vietnam," he told Richard Schickel. "It was basically naive people against nature and nature beat us every day."

It also infused every inch of the frame with smalltown New England

flavor in the way that no soundstage, or CGI, ever could.

When Spielberg was ready to start filming, his star attraction wasn't. The mechanized shark, nicknamed "Bruce" after the director's attorney, suffered frequent failures that forced Spielberg to find different approaches to shooting his shark scenes early in the film.

"Jaws" instead became, to Spielberg, a kind of homage to Alfred Hitchcock's "Psycho." The suspense came less from the shark than the fear of the unknown and that spine-tingling question: What's in the water? Spielberg, with the significant aid of John Williams' instantly iconic score, delayed the appearance of his Great White until well into the film.

"The visual ellipsis," the critic Molly Haskell wrote, "created far greater menace and terror, as the shark is nowhere and everywhere."

Animation

Spielberg once estimated that Bruce's mechanical delays added \$175 million to the movie's box office. On its initial run, "Jaws" grossed \$260.7 million domestically in 1975. Adjusted for inflation, that's about \$1.5 billion. Nowadays, the shark would almost certainly be done, like most movie creatures, with computer animation. But "Jaws" showed that often the most powerful source of dread is our imagination.

This is the time of year when the fate of the world often hangs in the balance. All manner of summer movies have had no bones about destroying cities for a mere plot point. Yet for all its terror, "Jaws" features only a handful of deaths. All of its drama is human-scaled. Compared to more swaggering blockbusters today, "Jaws" would be considered a modest, mid-budget movie.

That's partially why you have to almost remind yourself that the movie has only three main characters in Martin Brody (Roy Scheider), Matt Hooper (Richard Dreyfuss) and Quint (Robert Shaw). Casting director Sherry Rhodes peopled the cast with locals from the island, many

of whom inject the film with little moments of day-to-day humanity. "Jaws," in that way, feels more like a community than a cast.

On the one hand, "Jaws" had little to do directly with its times. The Vietnam War had just ended. Watergate had just led to the resignation of President Nixon. The heart-stopping story of a shark off the Massachusetts shoreline promised escapism.

Yet "Jaws" has endured as a parable of capitalism, pulled out time and time again to illustrate those endlessly repeating clashes of cash versus social safety.

"Amity is a summer town," says Amity's mayor, Larry Vaughn (Murray Hamilton) in the film. "We need summer dollars."

The shark gets the theme song and the movie poster, but the real villain of "Jaws" wears a pinstripe suit and smiles for the cameras. "As you can see, it's a beautiful day and the beaches are open," he says. More than the predator in the ocean, he, and the town, feast on human flesh.

There are boatloads of movies - including the three sequels that followed after - that have tried in vain to capture some of the magic of "Jaws." But what happened in June 1975, let alone on Martha's Vineyard the year before, isn't repeatable. Even the greatest movies are products of a thousand small miracles. That title? Benchley came up with it minutes before going to print. The iconic poster came from Roger Kastel's painting for the book. Scheider, for instance, learned about the movie by overhearing Spielberg at a party. Williams relied on just two notes for one of the most widely known film scores in movie history.

But no ingredient mattered more on "Jaws" than the man behind the camera. Filmmaking talents like Spielberg come around maybe a couple times a century, and in "Jaws," he emerged, spectacularly. What's maybe most striking about "Jaws" 50 years later is how much it still doesn't look like anything else.

The alt-country indie rock band taking the world by storm

Wednesday’s Hartzman reflects on songwriting growth

NEW YORK, June 19, (AP): A pit bull puppy peeing off a balcony. Mounted antlers in the kitchen on a crooked nail. Pink boiled eggs stay afloat in the brine. For its dedicated audience, the North Carolina alt-country-meets-indie rock band Wednesday is an exemplar in evocative songwriting, where whole worlds are found in short lyrical lines.

And that says nothing of what they sound like. The most exciting band in contemporary indie rock is informed by Drive-By Truckers and Pavement in equal measure, a distinctive sonic fabric of lap steel, guitar fuzz, folksy and jagged vocals.

On Sept. 19, they will release their sixth and most ambitious full-length, “Bleeds.”

“My songwriting is just better on this album,” Wednesday’s singer and songwriter Karly Hartzman explains. “Things are said more succinctly ... the immediacy of these songs was the main growth.”

Wednesday began as Hartzman’s solo project, evidenced in 2018’s sweet-sounding “yep definitely.” They became a full band on 2020’s “I Was Trying to Describe You to Someone,” a dive into guitar distortions, and 2021’s “Twin Plagues,” a further refinement of their “creek rock” sound. The lineup consists of Hartzman, bassist Ethan Baechtold, lap steel player Xandy Chelmis, guitarist Jake Lenderman and drummer Alan Miller. Some also tour with Lenderman’s solo project, MJ Lenderman. (Hartzman and Lenderman previously dated.)

Wednesday’s last album, the narrative “Rat Saw ...,” was named one of the best albums of 2023 by The Associated Press partially for its uncanny ability to dive into the particularities and complications of Southern identity. “Bleeds” sharpens those tools.

“Originally, I was going to call it ‘Carolina Girl’ but my bandmates did not like that,” Hartzman jokes.

“Bleeds” comes from the explosive opening track, “Reality TV Argument Bleeds.”

She likes how the band name and album title sound together - “‘Wednesday Bleeds,’ which I feel like I do, when I play music ... I’m almost, in a way, bloodletting and exorcising a demon.”



Karly Hartzman of the band Wednesday poses for a portrait on Wednesday, June 11, in Greensboro, N.C. (AP)

Lyrically, “Bleeds” features some of Wednesday’s best work - even in the revisiting of an older song, “Phish Pepsi,” that hilariously references both the jam band and the most disturbing movie released in 2010 - a kind of specificity born from Hartzman’s writing practices. During the COVID-19 pandemic, she and Lenderman “wrote 20 lines of writing each day,” a practice adopted from Silver Jews’ David Berman. She’s also a documentarian of memory: She takes notes of things her friends say and images that are affecting, to later collage them together in songs.

“The well never runs dry,” Hartzman says. “Because I’ve admitted not every-

thing can come from inside. I need to look outward outside of myself for inspiration.”

Remembering, she says, “is the goal for most of the (expletive) I do. ... I care. I want stories to persist.”

“Bleeds” manages cohesion across a variance of sound. “Wasp” is hard-core catharsis; lead single “Elderberry Wine” drops guitar noise for shimmery, fermented country. “Wound Up Here (By Holding On),” which references the Appalachian poet Evan Gray, is a pretty indie rock track about a hometown hero who drowns.

The quietest moment on the album, the plucked “The Way Love Goes,” was written as “a love song for Jake when we were still together. ‘Elderberry Wine’ as well.” Hartzman explains. “‘Elderberry Wine’ is kind of talking about me noticing slight changes in a relationship.”

These are not breakup songs; they exist right before the point of dissolution. “Sweet song is a long con / I drove ya to the airport with the E-brake on,” she sings on the latter.

Later: “Sometimes in my head I give up and / Flip the board completely.”

“I’m understanding how sound creates emotion. That’s what I’m learning over time,” Hartzman says of her musical growth. “I’m also listening to more music with every year that passes. So, my understanding of what’s possible, or what I can be inspired by, shifts.”

A number of the songs pull from childhood memory, as they always have across Wednesday’s discography. “I think about growing up a lot,” she says. “When I think of trying to tell ... a story that’s vivid and intense, that’s just the easiest time in my life, where everything felt vivid and intense.”

Longtime fans of the band will find recurring themes and characters from past songs. For example, “Gary’s” from their 2021 album returns as the “Bleeds” closer in “Gary’s II,” where he gets into a bar fight.

“In a way, I’m writing the same songs over and over, but I’m just trying to make them better,” she says.

There is always more humanity to excavate. And often, those emotions, “they aren’t done with you,” she adds. “They’re not letting you go.”

So, let the bloodletting begin.

Television



Park Sung-hoon, (from top left), Hwang Dong-hyuk, Lee Byung-hun, Yim Si-wan, Lee Jung-jae, from bottom left, Kang Ae-sim, and Jo Yu-ri attend the premiere of the third season of Netflix’s ‘Squid Game’ on Wednesday, June 18, at The Plaza Hotel in New York. (AP)

Chinese period drama captivates viewers worldwide

‘Legend of Zang Hai’ fuels C-drama boom

BEIJING, June 19, (Xinhua): With its ads displayed on digital billboards in cities such as Tokyo and Bangkok, and its views climbing on video-streaming portals like Disney+, “Legend of Zang Hai” is the latest example of a Chinese TV series making inroads into the global market.

Featuring a star-studded cast led by Chinese mega-popular actor Xiao Zhan and renowned director Zheng Xiaolong, “Legend of Zang Hai” revolves around the protagonist Zang Hai’s pursuit of revenge years after his family was murdered and his quest for justice amid Machiavellian struggles in the fictitious dynasty of Da Yong.

Since its release on May 18, “Legend of Zang Hai” has not only become a domestic hit across the Chinese mainland, Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan, but has also been aired to audiences in over 190 countries and regions in the world, via online platforms such as Youku and Disney+.

During its premiere week, the drama swept popular TV charts of countries such as Singapore and Malaysia, and trended on social media in Thailand, Vietnam, Egypt, Ukraine, India and some other countries. According to data-monitoring platform Beacon, as of June 18, “Legend of Zang Hai” had garnered more than 2.2 billion views, constantly leading the platform’s daily broadcast chart during its month-long run.

On the international rating and review platform IMDb, “Legend of Zang Hai” scored a peak 9.5 out of 10 points in terms of its overall rating and stabilized at the current 8.8 points. “The show is brilliantly crafted, with stunning visuals and smart storytelling that keeps you hooked. Every episode is packed with twists, suspense and emotional depth,” one of the most-liked reviews on IMDb stated.

Besides the appeal of its overarching story and audiovisual techniques, this drama also integrates a series of traditional heritage elements throughout its scenes -- presenting these in a seamless and realistic manner. According to a rough tally, the drama features 18 types of traditional cultural heritage, like centuries-old puppetry, mortise and tenon techniques, embroidery, wood carving, lantern shows, Kunqu Opera and more.

“Although ‘Legend of Zang Hai’ is a drama set in a fictional context, the creative team has always adhered to the principle of realism in its production, and strove to be genuine and credible in every detail,” said the drama’s chief director Zheng.

Mysterious

In addition, mysterious traditional elements, such as geomancy and astrology featured in the drama, have also intrigued overseas viewers, sparking cross-cultural discussions among both viewers and media commentators.

“It is very rare to come across a script as perfect and engaging as this, with an engaging yet logical and tight storytelling style...Not only that, it also applies the beauty of Eastern culture, such as feng shui, construction, burial, astrology, puppetry, shadow plays, etc.,” commented an IMDb reviewer who gave the drama a perfect score.

“For fans of epic historical dramas with soul, this is a must-watch. And for those unfamiliar with Chinese television, ‘Legend of Zang Hai’ is the perfect gateway -- a show that proves great storytelling transcends language and borders,” said another on IMDb.

Beyond traditional viewership, the suspense drama has sparked a “co-creation” phenomenon. Fans ac-

tively participate in the narrative through social media analysis, fan fiction, and detailed breakdowns of the plot and symbolism, turning passive audiences into engaged collaborators.

A viewer noted, “I kept discussing with my friends and checking comment sections and social networks while watching the show -- every episode became a group investigation.”

With ever-improving quality in terms of both content creation and production, China’s television dramas, often abbreviated as C-dramas on video platforms, have gained a growing fan base worldwide over recent years.

In 2024, Chinese costume drama “The Double,” which focuses on the female protagonist’s romance and revenge story, was released on streaming platforms such as Netflix, garnering approximately 200 million views overseas and securing an 8.2-point IMDb rating.

Featuring unique eastern aesthetics, another costume drama, “Love Between Fairy and Devil,” has made a splash on overseas platforms like Reddit since its global release back in 2022.

Other C-dramas such as “The Starry Love,” “Till the End of the Moon,” and “The Legend of Shen Li” have also generated waves of social media buzz among overseas audiences, thanks to their cultural and aesthetic depth.

Earlier this year, the global reach of C-dramas was again highlighted when American punk-rock icon Patti Smith praised young Chinese actor Wang Xingyue for his performance in costume comedy “Perfect Match.” “A great show. You are a wonderful artist,” she wrote, while punctuating her comment with four clapping emojis.

agricultural heritage and renowned Geographical Indication (GI) products such as Phka Romduol Rice, Kampot Pepper, Kampot-Kep Salt, and Kampong Speu Palm Sugar,” it added. (Xinhua)



NEW YORK: In the early days of Israel’s attack on Iran, US-operated Radio Farda, which broadcasts in the Persian language in Iran, debunked a state media report that an Israeli pilot had been shot down and captured.

Its journalism has continued despite the **Trump** administration’s threat to its future, along with a Persian-language television outlet run by Voice of America.

Radio Farda, a branch of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and based in Prague, has continued broadcasting even though its managing editor estimated that more than half of its staff



Trump

had been furloughed. VOA’s Persian staff, ordered to go on administrative leave in March, were suddenly ordered back to work last Friday afternoon.

Several Iranians have contacted the radio network to express appreciation for reporting that they do not get on Iranian state media, she said. At the same time, families in Iran of five Radio Farda staff members have been pressured by people in the government who want to see the broadcasts stopped, she said. (AP)

NEW YORK: My Cultura, iHeartMedia’s podcast network dedicated to elevating Latino voices and stories, has announced a major expansion of its collaboration with award-winning actress, producer, director and philanthropist Eva Longoria. Hyphenate Media Group -- the studio she co-founded in partnership with industry leader Cris Abrego, who serves as the group’s CEO -- has acquired an equity share in My Cultura and will also be represented on its Board of Advisors. As part of the new deal, Hyphenate and Longoria will executive produce a slate of new original podcasts with iHeartMedia’s My Cultura. (AP)

Tech Tip

‘No more lost pets’: Use smart tech to keep track

LONDON, June 19, (AP): “Have you seen the cats?”

That’s a common refrain in my household because our two felines, Maple and Juniper, can venture outside through a flap in the backdoor. Like many other London house cats, they’re free to come and go, roaming the surrounding backyards and beyond, equipped with microchips to identify them if they get lost.

If your cat likes to prowl outdoors for long stretches, or your dog has a tendency to run off, it can be distressing when they don’t return as expected. If you’re worried about your furry friend’s whereabouts, technology can help you keep tabs on them.

How pet tech works

Dedicated pet trackers are collar-worn devices that typically use GPS signals to pinpoint the location of the animal wearing them. They use a 4G cellphone signal or your home Wi-Fi connection to relay the position to a smartphone app.

There are many products on the market. Tractive, Jibbit and Pawfit are among brands that offer trackers for both dogs and cats. Devices for the latter are generally smaller and lighter.

Dog trackers with integrated collars are available from Fi and Whistle. PetTracer is a cat collar that uses both GPS and radio signals from a home base station. FitBark, also for dogs, has an Apple Watch app to monitor location and other activity.

Garmin has a range of GPS dog collars that work with handheld devices resembling walkie-talkies, but they’re pricey and aimed at outdoors enthusiasts like hunters.

Phone signals

Most trackers let you designate a safe zone on a map, usually your house and surrounding area, and alert you if your pet has left it.

They usually operate on the 4G LTE spectrum commonly used by wireless carriers. It typically has the longest range of any cellular signal, said Andrew Bleiman, Tractive’s executive vice president for North America.

That means strong connectivity in most of Europe and North America “unless you’re in a really far flung place like the middle of a national park,” Bleiman said.

What it costs

Exact price depends on brand and model. Most devices sell for less than \$100. However, keep in mind you’ll also have to pay a subscription fee for the cell service to function.

While that could cost \$100 or more a year, for some pet owners it’s worth the “peace of mind,” Bleiman said.

Battery life

The collars usually have a built-in rechargeable battery but battery life varies. Most will be last at least two to three days before they need charging, and a lot longer in ideal conditions.

One big factor is signal strength. The battery will drain faster if the device has to work harder to pick up the GPS or connect to Wi-Fi. Some save power by not sending coordinates in the safe zone.

Other features

Like fitness watches for humans, pet tracking apps offer health and activity monitoring features. You can see how long your cat or dog has spent resting or exercising on a daily or hourly basis.

But be aware, a tracker is “not going to keep your pet in the backyard,” Bleiman said. It will only “alert you when they leave the virtual fence area that you set up.”

How to use it

This One TechTip was inspired by Maple, who once went AWOL for days. It turned out he was hanging out in a backyard 10 doors



An Apple Air Tag and a Chipolo Bluetooth tracker are seen on a keyring next to a cat in London, Thursday, May 29, 2025. (AP)

down the street. We only found out after the residents got hold of a pet microchip scanner to look up our contact details to let us know so we could retrieve him.

Tractive provided a loaner device to try. Using the included breakaway collar, we put it on Maple, who clearly didn’t like it at first. He dashed out the back door and jumped through a hole in the fence.

Over the next day, I used the Tractive app to monitor his movements. It showed his travels back and forth onto various neighboring properties. He came back to rest for a few hours around midnight, went out to prowl again around 3 a.m, then came back after an hour to nap some more.

It was fascinating to see where he was spending his time. According to the app’s “heatmap,” one of Maple’s favorite spots was the same backyard where we had to retrieve him previously.

Losing track

About 24 hours after I attached the Tractive collar on Maple, I noticed he was no longer wearing it. It had somehow come off.

If you can’t find your pet’s exact location, or the device gets lost, Tractive has a “radar” feature to pinpoint it with your phone’s Bluetooth. Other brands have similar features.

On the app’s map, I could see it was in a nearby backyard and that I was getting closer because the circle was getting bigger. But I couldn’t figure out where it was and, not wanting to disturb the neighbors, I gave up.

Bleiman recommends using a harness for cats that don’t like collars, but I’m not convinced.

Microchips

It’s common for cats and dogs to be implanted with microchips, with the details added to a database. That makes it much easier to reunite owners with lost dogs and cats, even if they’ve strayed hundreds of miles away or gone missing for years.

Pet microchips, about the size of a grain of rice implanted just below the skin, are legally required in some European countries. There’s no federal law in the U.S., though some places like Hawaii now require them, so check with state or local authorities.

But there’s some confusion about what microchips can do. Because they don’t have a power supply, they can’t be tracked in real time. Whoever finds your pet would need to take it to a vet or a shelter to can scan the device for contact details.

Air Tags and similar devices are another option

Many pet owners use Bluetooth trackers like Apple’s Air Tags, Samsung’s SmartTags or similar devices from Tile, Cube and Chipolo, which rely on low-power signals relayed by passing smartphones.

What to know about the Nimbus variant

New COVID variant may cause ‘razor blade’ sore throats: experts

NEW YORK, June 19, (AP): The COVID-19 variant that may be driving a recent rise in cases in some parts of the world has earned a new nickname: “razor blade throat” COVID.

That’s because the variant — NB.1.8.1, or “Nimbus” — may cause painful sore throats. The symptom has been identified by doctors in the United Kingdom, India and elsewhere, according to media outlets in those countries.

Other COVID-19 symptoms of any variant include fever, chills, cough, shortness of breath or loss of taste or smell.

Experts say there isn’t major cause for concern with the Nimbus variant, but here’s what else you need to know about it.

Here’s where the variant causing ‘razor blade throat’ is spreading

The rise in cases late last month is primarily in eastern Mediterranean, Southeast Asia and western Pacific regions, the World Health Organization said May 28. The new variant had reached nearly 11% of sequenced samples reported globally in mid-May.

Airport screening in the United States detected the new variant in travelers arriving from those regions to destinations in California, Washington state, Virginia and New York.

You aren’t likely to get sicker from this variant than others

Not so far, anyway.

The WHO said some western Pacific countries have reported increases in COVID cases and hospitalizations, but there’s nothing so far to suggest that the disease associated with the new variant is more severe compared to other variants.

COVID-19 vaccines are effective against the Nimbus variant

Yes.

The WHO has designated Nimbus as a “variant under monitoring” and considers the public health risk low at the global level. Current vaccines are expected to remain effective.

Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. announced last month that COVID-19 shots are no longer recommended for healthy children and pregnant women — a move immediately questioned by public health experts.

Perfect workout for seniors

Chair yoga: A safe way to manage arthritis, osteoporosis, and stress

WASHINGTON, June 19, (AP): Chair yoga modifies traditional yoga poses to suit older adults and those with physical limitations. But as AP Life-styles Writer Leanne Italie explains, that doesn’t mean it’s any less of a workout. As older adults embrace active lifestyles, chair yoga has surged in popularity.

In this episode of “The Story Behind the AP Story,” Italie explains the origins of chair yoga, its benefits and how it works.

Haya Panjwani, host: Hi, I’m Haya Panjwani, and I’m the host of “The Story Behind the AP Story.” Today we’re joined by Leanne Italie, a lifestyles reporter for The Associated Press. Hi, Leanne. How are you doing?

Leanne Italie, AP lifestyles reporter: I’m great. How are you?

Panjwani: I’m great. Thank you for asking. Today we’re going to talk about chair yoga. What is it?

Italie: Yeah, sure, so chair yoga has a really sort of interesting and important history. Traditional yoga done on the floor on mats is over 5,000 years old, but chair yoga is a relatively new offshoot.

In 1982, a yoga instructor named Lakshmi Voelker noticed that a student of hers in a traditional yoga class who was in her 30s and suffered from arthritis was having trouble getting down on the floor. So, Voelker decided to adapt some poses for use in a chair. And she has since sort of become the guru of chair yoga, and she has written, since co-written a book about it.

Chair yoga has really gone a long way in boosting the accessibility of yoga itself to many age groups, including older people and people who have physical limitations.

Panjwani: Are there any communities that benefit from chair yoga in particular?

Italie: Absolutely. I mean, chair yoga is great for anybody who wants a gentle workout, but it’s not easy, and there are many, many benefits. So, obviously, it has a lot to offer older people, particularly older women who are prone to osteoporosis, and it’s a gentle and safe way to improve your flexibility, your strength and your balance. It helps minimize the risk of falls and



Whitney Chapman, (right), conducts a chair yoga class at the Marlene Meyerson JCC Manhattan, in New York, March 28, 2025. (AP)

fractures.

There’s not a body part that it really doesn’t help. It helps the spine, the hips, the legs, all engaged. It also helps your core, helps you strengthen your core and your back, and it can help manage stiffness and pain associated with a lot of conditions, including arthritis and osteoporosis. It’s not difficult to adapt traditional yoga poses for a chair, which I found kind of surprising, because, you know, yoga looks so daunting sometimes, and there are so many - there’s a spiritual aspect to yoga that a lot of people don’t realize, you know, in the West. You know, in addition to all the physical benefits, you know, there are relaxation benefits there’s, you know, stress management benefits, like from the breathing and the mindfulness aspect of yoga. So, all of that can be adapted to a chair as well.

Panjwani: How is chair yoga linked to better well-being or fall prevention?

Italie: Yeah, I mean, while there’s a lot of research on regular traditional yoga, there is some research that breaks out chair yoga in particular. One study from 2012 found that 15 minutes of chair yoga significantly improves physical and psychological markers for stress. And then another study in the April 2023 journal Healthcare indicates that chair yoga went a long way

to counter knee osteoarthritis in women 65 and older. There are other benefits, too, like for instance, office workers who spend a lot of time hunched over screens can just do chair yoga right there in their chair at their desks, and that can really improve posture.

Panjwani: Your story talks about the divide between men and women who do yoga. Why is that?

Italie: I find this really, really interesting, and in the story that we did on chair yoga, we asked some longtime yoga participants, practitioners, what they thought — some women in their 70s and their 80s who’ve been doing yoga for 40, 50 years, why are there not more men in your classes? And they said, well, there’s no one definitive answer here, and there’s no way to avoid a massive generalization on who men are as a group. But, you know, so you do get different answers depending on who you ask. But, data from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention do show that women are more than twice as likely as men to practice yoga.

You know, ancient yoga over the many thousands of years was exclusively reserved for men. And then it became popular in Western culture in the 1960s and ’70s as part of sort of the hippie counterculture movement and the New Age movement.

‘New hope to end HIV epidemic’

FDA okays medicine reducing risk of acquiring AIDS by almost 100 pct

WASHINGTON, June 19, (Agencies): The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has approved a medicine that would reduce the risk of acquiring HIV in adults and adolescents by 99.9 percent.

Gilead Sciences, which developed the drug, announced that FDA approved Yeztugo (lenacapavir), an injectable HIV-1 capsid inhibitor as pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) to reduce risk of sexually acquired HIV in adults and adolescents weighing at least 35kg, making it the first and only twice-yearly option available in the US for people who need or want PrEP.

Data show that 99.9 percent of participants who received Yeztugo in the Phase III Purpose One and Purpose Two trials remained HIV negative, it said.

“This is a historic day in the decades-long fight against HIV. Yeztugo is one of the most important scientific breakthroughs of our time and offers a very real opportunity to help end the HIV epidemic,” Daniel O’Day, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Gilead Sciences, said in a statement.

“This is a medicine that only needs to be given twice a year and has shown remarkable outcomes in clinical studies, which means it could transform HIV prevention,” he added.

Approval was Based on Phase III Purpose one and purpose two Data that Showed 99.9 percent of Participants Remained HIV Negative on Twice-Yearly Injectable Yeztugo.

The company said Yeztugo, nearly 20 Years in the making, represented a Major Breakthrough in the Fight Against HIV.

Gilead was founded in 1987 to bring new hope in the face of devastating diseases.

The World Health Organization (WHO) said a virus attacks white cells thus making the immune system vulnerable and caused Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS).

The world’s only twice-a-year shot to prevent HIV is the first step in an anticipated global rollout that could protect millions — although it’s unclear how many in the US and abroad will



This photo provided by Gilead Sciences shows a vial of the company’s HIV prevention medication, Yeztugo, (lenacapavir) at a manufacturing facility in La Verne, Calif., in June 2025. (AP)

get access to the powerful new option.

While a vaccine to prevent HIV still is needed, some experts say the shot made by Gilead Sciences — a drug called lenacapavir — could be the next best thing. It nearly eliminated new infections in two groundbreaking studies of people at high risk, better than daily preventive pills they can forget to take.

“This really has the possibility of ending HIV transmission,” said Greg Millett, public policy director at amfAR, The Foundation for AIDS Research.

Condoms help guard against HIV infection if used properly but what’s called PrEP — regularly using preventive medicines such as the daily pills or a different shot given every two months — is increasingly important. Lenacapavir’s six-month protection makes it the longest-lasting type, an option that could attract people wary of more frequent doctor visits or stigma from daily pills.

But upheaval in US healthcare — including cuts to public health agencies and Medicaid — and slashing of American foreign aid to fight HIV are clouding the prospects.

Millett said “gaping holes in the sys-

tem” in the US and globally “are going to make it difficult for us to make sure we not only get lenacapavir into people’s bodies but make sure they come back” twice a year to keep up their protection.

Gilead’s drug already is sold to treat HIV under the brand name Sunlenca. The prevention dose will be sold under a different name, Yeztugo. It’s given as two injections under the skin of the abdomen, leaving a small “depot” of medication to slowly absorb into the body. People must test negative for HIV before getting their twice-a-year dose. Gilead warned. It only prevents HIV transmission — it doesn’t block other sexually transmitted diseases. Some researchers who helped test the shot advise cold packs to counter injection-site pain.

Global efforts at ending the HIV pandemic by 2030 have stalled. There still are more than 30,000 new infections in the US each year and about 1.3 million worldwide.

Only about 400,000 Americans already use some form of PrEP, a fraction of those estimated to benefit. A recent study found states with high use of PrEP saw a decrease in HIV infections, while rates continued rising elsewhere.

Sanofi, Abu Dhabi join forces on new vaccines

ABU DHABI, UAE, June 19, (AP): The Department of Health - Abu Dhabi (DoH), the regulator of the healthcare sector in Abu Dhabi, has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Sanofi, a research and development-driven, AI-powered healthcare biopharma company at the BIO International Convention 2025, in Boston, USA. The collaboration will leverage the Emirate’s health-tech ecosystem and advanced research infrastructure to drive the development of new global vaccines and strengthen regional capabilities in vaccine manufacturing.

In the presence of H.E. Dr. Noura Khamis Al Ghaithi, Undersecretary of the Department of Health - Abu Dhabi and Laurie Gery, Global Head of Business Development, Vaccines at Sanofi, the agreement was signed during the BIO International Convention in Boston, USA, by Dr. Asma Al Mannaai, the Executive Director of the Health Life Sciences Sector at the DoH and Baptiste de Clarens, General Manager Greater Gulf, Vaccines at Sanofi.

Dr. Asma Al Mannaai, the Executive Director of the Health Life Sciences Sector at the DoH, said: “DoH is

partnering with Sanofi to expedite the development of new global vaccines. This initiative aims to shorten the timeline from early research to public availability by utilising advanced technologies, real-time data analysis, and conducting parallel clinical trial phases. By combining Sanofi’s global scientific expertise with Abu Dhabi’s state-of-the-art infrastructure, we set new benchmarks for resilience, innovation and international partnerships. Abu Dhabi offers a globally connected, purpose-driven environment for leading research and together we will drive a transformative change that will safeguard the health and well-being of our community while contributing to global health security.”

Both entities will work together to streamline regulatory processes, enhance manufacturing preparedness, and promote knowledge sharing between local and international experts. This partnership reflects Abu Dhabi’s strategic goal to establish itself as a leading center for bio- and pharmaceutical innovation and underscores the emirate’s commitment to advancing proactive, technology-driven healthcare solutions.

Conflict, disease devastate Sudan’s kids: UN

UNITED NATIONS, June 19, (Xinhua): Ongoing military conflict and disease outbreaks are having a devastating impact on children in Sudan, UN humanitarianists warned Wednesday.

Children account for half of the 30 million people in need of humanitarian assistance in Sudan and half of the 12 million people displaced since civil war broke out in April 2023. Those who are separated from family or unaccompanied face heightened risks of abuse, exploitation and trauma, said the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

As the conflict in Sudan continues, the country’s children are in urgent need of protection services. Yet due to severe funding shortfalls, less than 18 percent of the children in need have received that critical support so far this year, said the office.

Disease is also taking a heavy toll on children in Sudan. Since cholera broke out in the country in July 2024, the

Federal Ministry of Health has reported more than 80,000 suspected cases and over 2,000 deaths. This includes nearly 7,300 cases and more than 230 deaths affecting children under the age of 5, said OCHA.

Sudan is also coping with a measles outbreak. Since the start of this year, more than 2,200 suspected cases, including five deaths, have been reported in the country, with more than 60 percent of cases affecting children under 5, it said.

UN partners working on health are responding to the measles outbreak. But as with the ongoing cholera response, their efforts are hampered by gaps in data on disease cases, as well as severe shortages of vaccines, supplies and trained personnel, said OCHA.

The office called for an immediate cessation of hostilities and for unhindered humanitarian access so that the United Nations and its partners can scale up support for children and other civilians in desperate need.

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'This outcome reflects our collective responsibility to uphold fair and safe competition'

Russian athletes excluded from luge at Milan-Cortina Olympics

TAMPERE, Finland, June 19, (AP): Russian luge athletes will be banned from competing at the 2026 Milan-Cortina Olympics even as individuals with neutral status, the sliding sport's governing body decided.

The International Luge Federation has kept Russian athletes from competing in major international luge events - such as World Cups and world championships - since the 2021-22 season in response to the country's invasion of Ukraine and the ongoing war.

At a meeting of the FIL congress in Tampere, Finland, officials voted 24-7, with one invalid ballot, to extend that ban that was first put in place in 2022 and extended again in 2024. A second vote then took place on the no-

tion of letting Russian sliders try to compete under a neutral flag at the upcoming Olympics; that was defeated 24-8.

"The Congress has made its position clear," FIL president Einar Fogelis said. "This outcome reflects our collective responsibility to uphold fair and safe competition. We fully respect the diversity of views within our community, especially from our athletes."

The Milan-Cortina Olympics open on Feb. 6.

"The vote today by the FIL to exclude Russian athletes from competing this season, including the Olympic Games, was not made arbitrarily or without deep discussion - information and input from the athletes, FIL mem-

bers, as well as event organizers was collected and considered," USA Luge CEO Scott Riewald said Wednesday. "Ultimately, the decision was made in the name of athlete safety and ensuring fairness of competition."

It's not clear if the International Bobsled and Skeleton Federation will follow luge's lead. Russian sliders have also not competed in those sports at the top international levels since the end of the 2021-22 season.

Also unclear: if any Russian sleds would have had a legitimate hope of qualifying even if they were allowed to try. Without being on the circuits in more than three years, it's impossible to assess which athletes would be competitive enough to secure

Olympic bids.

There were 28 sliders from Russia - 10 in luge, six in skeleton and 12 in bobsled - at the 2022 Beijing Games, though they competed under the Russian Olympic Committee flag and not the actual Russian flag. That was part of the sanctions levied against Russia for the state-sponsored doping scandal that overshadowed the 2014 Sochi Olympics.

The Beijing Games closed four days before the attack on Ukraine started, and Russian athlete Tatyana Ivanova won a bronze medal in women's singles luge.

At the 2024 Paris Olympics, Russia and military ally Belarus were excluded from team sports but athletes in individual sports could apply for neutral status to compete. A total of 32 accepted invitations from the International Olympic Committee after passing eligibility tests that included not publicly supporting the war and not having ties to military and state security agencies.

The FIL reviewed the results of an anonymous polling of luge athletes who were surveyed about the prospect of letting Russian athletes resume sliding. It said the survey "revealed a broad range of concerns and opinions regarding safety, Olympic quotas, anti-doping compliance, and fairness."

"Athletes hold a wide range of views," FIL athletes' commission chair Leon Felderer said. "There are many concerns and arguments on both sides."



Tatyana Ivanova, of Russian Olympic Committee, celebrates winning the bronze medal in the luge women's singles at the 2022 Winter Olympics, Tuesday, Feb. 8, 2022, in the Yanqing district of Beijing. (AP)

Mexico through to knockouts with solid win over Suriname



Mexico forward Santiago Gimenez (11) attacks against Suriname goalkeeper Etienne Vaessen, left, and defender Shaquille Pinas (19) during a CONCACAF Gold Cup soccer match in Arlington, Texas. (AP)

Montes scores twice

ARLINGTON, Texas, June 19, (AP): Defender Cesar Montes scored twice in a six-minute span in the second half and defending champion Mexico struggled early but managed to get past Suriname 2-0 to secure a spot in the knockout round of the CONCACAF Gold Cup.

Montes opened the scoring on a header off a corner kick in the 57 and added another goal in the 63rd minute for the Mexicans, who defeated the Dominican Republic 3-2 in the opening match of the tournament.

With three goals in the tournament, the 28-year-old defender, who plays for Lokomotiv of Moscow, currently shares the scoring lead with Costa Rican Manfred Ugalde.

"I am excited about the goals, but the priority is keeping a clean sheet. I obviously didn't imagine it; that's what strikers are for, but as long as I



Mexico defender César Montes (3) celebrates his goal with Marcel Ruiz during a CONCACAF Gold Cup soccer match against Suriname in Arlington, Texas. (AP)

can help the team in that way, I'll do it," Montes said.

Montes had scored only once in his 53 previous national team games before to the Gold Cup, in a friendly match against Panama in June 2021.

With the win, Mexico leads Group A with six points and will play Costa Rica next Sunday in Las Vegas aiming to secure the first place ahead of the second round.

The Costa Ricans are lead by

former Mexican coach Miguel Herrera, who managed el Tri in the 2014 World Cup.

"We have an intense match coming up. It's a good team. Miguel is a respected coach in Mexico, and he'll definitely want to beat us. But we're going to go out and work hard and try to fight for the group lead," added Montes.

The Mexicans lead the group on goal difference and will secure the top spot with a draw.

"We knew it was a difficult group and that's how it has been so far, although it might not seem like it because of the two wins, but it wasn't easy," Mexico's coach Javier Aguirre said.

The Costa Ricans defeated the Dominican Republic 2-1 earlier for their second win of the Gold Cup and also qualified for the second round. Suriname and the Dominicans are eliminated.

Suriname has lost all four official matches played against Mexico and will try to close the tournament with a win when they play the debutant Dominican Republic next Sunday.

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Owner of Earthquakes puts team on the market

SAN JOSE, Calif., June 19, (AP): The owner of the San Jose Earthquakes announced Wednesday that he has begun the process of selling the Major League Soccer club.

John Fisher, who also owns baseball's Athletics, acquired the Earthquakes with Lew Wolff in 2007 for a \$20 million expansion fee, bringing the team back in 2008 after a two-year hiatus.

"The San Jose Earthquakes and PayPal Park have been an important part of our lives for nearly two decades," Fisher said in a statement released by the team. "We are proud of the role the Quakes have played in the growth of soccer throughout Silicon Valley. The Bay Area is a special place, and we're deeply grateful to the fans, players and staff who've been with us on this journey."

The Earthquakes have hired the New York-based investment firm Moelis & Co. to lead the sale.

The Earthquakes, then known as the San Jose Clash, were a founding member of MLS in 1996. The team won MLS Cup titles in 2001 and 2003.

The Quakes also own and operate PayPal Park, an 18,000-seat stadium which is also the home of the National Women's Soccer League team Bay FC.

"On behalf of Major League Soccer, I want to thank the Fisher family for their longstanding commitment to the Earthquakes and the San Jose community," MLS Commissioner Don Garber said in a statement. "Under their leadership, the club invested in world-class facilities like PayPal Park, built a highly respected youth academy and helped grow the game in one of the nation's most dynamic markets."

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Thomas and Held score 14 apiece to lead Mercury past Sun

UNCASVILLE, Conn., June 19, (AP): Alyssa Thomas had 14 points, 11 assists and eight rebounds against her former team, Satou Sabally added 12 points and a season-high 15 rebounds as the Phoenix Mercury beat the Connecticut Sun 83-75.

Phoenix (9-4) has won three in a row for the first time this season.

Lexi Held added 14 points, Kahleah Copper 13 and Kitija Laksa 11 for the Mercury.

Connecticut (2-10) is off to its worst start in franchise history. The Sun have lost four straight games and five

quarter.

Rookie Aneesa Morrow scored a season-high 16 points for the Sun. Jaci Sheldon hit three 3s and finished with 13 points. Olivia Nelson-Ododa added 10 points, a career-high 14 rebounds and a season-best three blocks.

The Mercury snapped a four-game skid against Connecticut and a six-game losing streak at Mohegan Sun Arena.

Phoenix scored the game's first 10 points as Connecticut started 0 for 5 from the field and committed four turnovers before finishing 4-of-19 shooting in the first

quarter.

Sheldon had 11 points, including three 3s, as Connecticut used a 16-4 run to trim its deficit to 39-35. Sheldon capped the run with the reverse layup. Thomas had two layups and an assist as the Sun scored nine of the last 11 first-half points to take a 48-36 lead into the break.

Thomas, who helped the Sun reach the WNBA Finals in 2019 and 2022 and was traded to Phoenix in the off-season, returned from a five-game absence due to a calf injury.

Beale misses selection Skelton returns as Australia picks uncapped duo for Test against Fiji

SYDNEY, June 19, (AP): Wallabies head coach Joe Schmidt has picked uncapped Corey Toole and Nick Champion de Crespigny, recalled giant lock Will Skelton and given veteran prop James Slipper a chance to push for another Lions series in a 36-man Australia squad selected for next month's test against Fiji.

The Australians will play Fiji on July 6 at Newcastle, north of Sydney, in preparation for a three-test series against the British and Irish Lions, which starts July 19 in Brisbane.



Australia Rugby's head coach Joe Schmidt comments at Stanmore Public School in Sydney, Australia after the announcement of the rugby union squad that will be considered for a position in the three-test series against the British and Irish Lions. (AP)

Schmidt unveiled the squad on Thursday, returning hooker David Porecki for his first Wallabies squad since the failed 2023 World Cup campaign, which included a group-stage loss to the Fijians.

Western Force backrower Champion de Crespigny and Brumbies winger Toole were the only uncapped players in the squad, earning selection through strong form in Super Rugby Pacific.

Skelton, who plays for La Rochelle in France, was the only overseas-based player picked in the preliminary squad.

"He's well-known to the players (and) he's very much an established part of the team," Schmidt said. "He was with us on the spring tour last year, so for him to slot back in is pretty easy."

Schmidt said there was "a lot of healthy, robust discussion" in the selections but the immediate aim was on the test against Fiji.

Other overseas-based backs were part of the selection considerations, including James O'Connor, Samu Kerevi, Bernard Foley and Marika Koroibete, but Schmidt said this Wallabies squad reflected the time put into honing Australia-based playmakers.

Tom Lynagh, Noah Lolesio and Ben Donaldson were included as the options at flyhalf.

"We've invested in three guys in that No. 10 spot. We felt trying to balance things up, we're going to keep investing in those guys," Schmidt said. "All three of them

have made improvements to their game (and) increased their own confidence to drive the game and communicate the game to other players. We didn't want to interrupt that."

With utility back O'Connor, who has performed well for the Crusaders this year, and Kurtley Beale missing selection, Slipper is the only active player from the 2013 Wallabies squad seemingly still in contention to face the British and Irish Lions again.

Australia squad:

Forwards: Allan Alaalatoa, Angus Bell, Nick Champion de Crespigny, Matt Faessler, Nick Frost, Langi Gleeson, Tom Hooper, Fraser McReight, Zane Nonggorr, Billy Pollard, David Porecki, Tom Robertson, Will Skelton, James Slipper, Darcy Swain, Carlo Tizzano, Taniel Tupou, Rob Valetini, Jeremy Williams, Harry Wilson.

Backs: Filipo Daungunu, Ben Donaldson, Jake Gordon, Len Ikitau, Max Jorgensen, Andrew Kellaway, Noah Lolesio, Tom Lynagh, Tate McDermott, Hunter Paisami, Dylan Pietsch, Harry Potter, Joseph-Aukuso Suaali, Corey Toole, Nic White, Tom Wright.

Best of the Rest

Mudryk faces FA charge: Chelsea winger Mykhailo Mudryk has been formally charged by England's Football Association with doping violations, the governing body said.

Mudryk, who became one of Chelsea's biggest signings when he arrived for \$108 million in 2023, hasn't played since it emerged in December that he was facing a doping investigation.

This latest step brings the Ukraine international closer to a ban, which would follow a hearing.

"We can confirm that Mykhailo Mudryk has been charged with Anti-Doping Rule Violations alleging the presence and/or use of a prohibited substance, in terms of Regulations 3 and 4 of The FA's Anti-Doping Regulations," the FA said in an e-mailed statement.

"As this is an ongoing case, we are not in a position to comment further at this time," Mudryk has previously denied wrongdoing.

"I know that I have not done anything wrong and remain hopeful that I will be back on the pitch soon," he wrote in a statement on social media in December.

Mudryk was spotted in public last month when he posed with fans ahead of Chelsea's Conference League final win over Real Betis in Poland. (AP)

Soccer fans storm field in Libya: A highly-anticipated derby in Libya's top soccer league was suspended after fans stormed the pitch and officials said Thursday the Portuguese referee and some fans were injured.

The match Wednesday between Al-Ahly Tripoli and Al-Ittihad was suspended in the 39th minute when Al-Ahly substitutes and fans stormed the pitch in protest of Al-Ittihad players' celebration of their opening goal. Al-Ittihad's bus was set on fire, the club said in a statement.

Players and soccer officials fled the stadium amid a fan disturbance outside the facility. Footage circulated online showed clashes between fans and security forces in and around the stadium.

Al-Ahly blamed what it called a "provocative act" by one of Al-Ittihad players for the disturbance.

It said in a statement that security forces used "excessive force and live fire" against fans at the club's headquarters.

Local media reported that Portuguese referee Fábio José Costa was injured. (AP)

Jeanie intends to remain as team governor

Buss family to sell controlling stake of Lakers to Walter for \$10 bln valuation

LOS ANGELES, June 19, (AP): The Buss family has agreed to sell the controlling stake of the Los Angeles Lakers to TWG Global CEO Mark Walter, doing so with a franchise valuation of \$10 billion - the highest ever for a professional sports franchise, a person with knowledge of the agreement said.

As part of the deal, Jeanie Buss - whose family has had control of the Lakers since her father bought the team in 1979 - intends to remain as team governor, said the person, who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because neither side immediately announced details.

It is not clear how much more of the Lakers that Walter is acquiring. He was part of a group that bought 27% of the Lakers in 2021. Jeanie Buss will still own at least 15% of the Lakers once this transaction is completed; by NBA rule, a governor must have at least that much of an ownership stake.

Walter and TWG Global already had the controlling interest in the Los Angeles Dodgers, Premier League club Chelsea, the Professional Women's Hockey League, and - through TWG Motorsports - owns several auto racing teams including Cadillac Formula 1.

Dodgers manager Dave Roberts said news of the sale to Walter marks "a very exciting day for the Lakers, for the city of Los Angeles."

"He's very competitive and he's going to do everything he can to produce a championship-caliber team every single year and make sure the city feels proud about the Lakers and the legacy that they've already built with the Buss family," Roberts said.

ESPN first reported the agreement.

"Mark Walter is the best choice and will be the best caretaker of the Laker brand," Lakers legend Magic Johnson, a business partner of Wal-



In this file photo, Los Angeles Lakers President Jeanie Buss dances in her seat to music as she attends the NBA basketball game between the Lakers and the Los Angeles Clippers in Los Angeles. (AP)

ter's and someone extremely close to Jeanie Buss, posted on social media. "The proof is in the pudding on what he's been able to accomplish with the LA Dodgers. Mark has been nothing short of a winner notching 2 World Series and 11 NL West divisional titles in the last 12 years!"

Johnson said he is certain Jeanie Buss made the deal only after being convinced that Walter will do right by the Lakers.

"Laker fans should be (ecstatic)," Johnson said. "A few things I can tell you about Mark - he is driven by winning, excellence, and doing everything the right way. AND he will put in the resources needed to win! I can understand why Jeanie sold the team to Mark Walter because they are just alike - they are competitive people, have big hearts, love to give back, and both prefer to be behind the scenes. This makes all the sense in the world."

Walter is intensely private in

shunning the spotlight. He is CEO of the financial services firm Guggenheim Partners, which is estimated to have more than \$325 billion in assets. Johnson is among Guggenheim's investors.

The agreement for the sale of the Lakers comes about three months after Bill Chisholm agreed to buy the Boston Celtics with an initial valuation of \$6.1 billion - which was going to be a record, topping the previous mark of \$6.05 billion sale for the NFL's Washington Commanders. The Celtics' sale is not yet finalized, pending final approval by the NBA's board of governors. That board is scheduled to meet in Las Vegas next month.

And now, the Lakers are sold with a valuation of \$10 billion - not just a record, but a total smashing of the previous mark.

The Lakers have been in the control of the Buss family for 46 years, the longest of any current NBA fran-

chise. Herb Simon bought the Indiana Pacers - currently in the NBA Finals - in 1983, the second-longest current ownership of an NBA club.

Jerry Buss bought the Lakers for \$67.5 million and made it to the NBA Finals 16 times out of his 34 seasons leading the club, winning 10 championships in that span. When he died in 2013, ownership of the Lakers went into a trust controlled by Buss' six children - who all worked for the Lakers in various capacities for several years.

Eventually, the family began clashing over control. An agreement was struck in 2017 calling for Jeanie Buss to serve as controlling owner, ending a battle that included her going to court after her brothers Jim and Johnny Buss called for a board meeting that she interpreted as a challenge to her power - shortly after she removed Jim Buss as the Lakers' executive vice president of basketball operations.

Sri Lanka in strong position



Sri Lanka's Pathum Nissanka plays a shot during day three of the first cricket test match between Sri Lanka and Bangladesh in Galle, Sri Lanka. (AP)

Nissanka hits career-best 187; Bangladesh all out for 495

GALLE, Sri Lanka, June 19, (AP): A career-best 187 by the stylish Pathum Nissanka led Sri Lanka to 368-4 in its first innings on the third day of the opening test against Bangladesh on Thursday.

That left the home team 127 runs adrift of Bangladesh, which had piled up a total of 495 all out.

On a featherbed surface, Nissanka produced an innings of sublime timing and poise, the sort that makes connoisseurs purr and opponents wince.

Nissanka, whose two previous test hundreds had come overseas, finally notched his maiden century on home soil.

A double hundred looked not just

probable, but inevitable. Alas, as it so often does in cricket, the second new ball brought about his downfall.

A touch too eager to assert, Nissanka offered a drive too early, left a gap between bat and pad, and was clean bowled by Hasan Mahmud.

"I was disappointed with the way I got out," Nissanka said. "I knew I had to see off the new ball. I thought the shot was on, but it was a good piece of bowling as well."

"We have been conscious about the run rate. We knew we were not scoring too quickly in the last cycle of the World Test Championship. That is one of the things we wanted to address."

"I hope we have done that sufficiently in this test match and we look to keep doing that moving forward."

Debutant Lahiru Udara, also looking assured during a brisk 29 off 34 balls,

peppered the boundary with six well-timed fours before offering a return catch to Taijul Islam off a leading edge.

Dinesh Chandimal then stitched together a 157-run stand for the second wicket with Nissanka, his 54 oozing class until a faint tickle down the leg side off Nayeem Hasan ended his stay.

The 38-year-old Angelo Mathews, in his final test appearance, appeared in decent touch during a fluent 39 before falling to Mominul Haque, the part-time spinner luring an edge to wicket-keeper Litton Das.

"It was an honour to bat with Angelo," Nissanka said. "He is an amazing guy. He has done a lot for the game and has helped me out too."

Captain Dhananajaya de Silva (17 not out) and the versatile Kamindu Mendis (37 not out) then took Sri Lanka to the close of play with an unbroken 37-run

partnership.

With more batting depth to come and time on its side - should the weather hold - Sri Lanka will fancy its chances of claiming a first-innings lead.

Earlier, Sri Lanka wrapped up the Bangladesh innings inside 15 minutes. Asitha Fernando took 4-86 while Milan Rathnayake and Tharindu Rathnayake picked up three wickets apiece.

Bangladesh fast-bowling coach Shaun Tait said: "Sri Lanka are a team that was competing for the WTC final six months ago. I think they batted really well."

"The pace bowlers missed a trick with the new ball. It would have been nice if they had taken a couple of wickets with the new ball."

"I think we would have taken our score at the start of the game. We got a good score. We can't ask much more than that from Bangladesh."

No room for errors

Gattuso urges mentality shift to save Italy World Cup hopes

ROME, June 19, (AP): Gennaro Gattuso is approaching his new job as the coach of an Italy squad in crisis with the same determination and combativeness he used to display on the field as a gritty midfielder.

Replacing the fired Luciano Spalletti, with the four-time champion Azzurri in real danger of failing to qualify for a third straight World Cup, Gattuso knows there's no room for errors.

"I know it's not an easy job but nothing is easy in life," Gattuso said at his presentation Thursday. "There's not much to say. There's work to do."

"I need to get inside the players' heads. I hear often that we don't have the talent or good enough players anymore. But I think we have the players. We just need to put the players in condition to succeed. We need to get Italy back to the World Cup. That's fundamental."

Spalletti was fired after Italy lost its opening qualifier 3-0 at Norway. The Azzurri are already nine points behind Norway in their World Cup qualifying group - albeit having played two matches fewer than the leader.

Gattuso's debut will be at home to Estonia on Sept. 5. Israel is also in the five-team Group I.

Italy hosts Norway in the final round on Nov. 16. Only the group winner advances directly to next year's tournament co-hosted by the United States, Canada and Mexico. The runner-up enters playoff brackets to be played next March.

That was the stage where Italy was eliminated by Sweden and North Macedonia and ruled out of the 2018 and 2022 World Cups, respectively.

But Italy's struggles go back further, with the Azzurri having failed to advance past the group phase at the 2010 and 2014 World Cups.

Gattuso, however, remains identified as one of the main catalysts of its run to the title in 2006.

"He responded without any hesitation to our call and with the same enthusiasm as when he was called up as a player to the national team," Italian soccer federation president Gabriele Gravina said.

"And not simply enthusiasm. It's really a lot more: great spirit of



Newly appointed Italian national soccer team head coach Gennaro Gattuso, left, poses for photographers with Italian Soccer Federation, FGCI, president Gabriel Gravina during a press conference, in Rome. (AP)

sacrifice, great professionalism and diligence. He told me right away that nobody wins alone, that you win as a squad and a group."

Gattuso said he wants to set a new standard of dedication whereby even injured players remain at the national team's training center.

"We have plenty of physical therapists and medical staff," Gattuso said. "If I had listened to my body, I would have played 50 fewer matches. We need to go beyond our limits."

Gattuso said he had already made calls to 35 players, including Federico Chiesa.

Chiesa was a standout on the Italy team that won the European Championship in 2021 but hasn't played much since leaving Juventus for Liverpool last year.

"I told Chiesa that he needs to find a way to play more regularly," Gattuso said.

One player who Gattuso did not call was 37-year-old defender Francesco Acerbi, who turned down his call up for the Norway match, where he was expected to mark Erling Haaland.

"I respect him," Gattuso said. "But I called other, younger players who I think can offer us something."

Bethell is the next big thing in English cricket

Stokes backs Pope as England's No. 3 batter for India series and hints at tweak to 'Bazball'

LEEDS, England, June 19, (AP): Who to pick at No. 3 out of Ollie Pope and Jacob Bethell was widely regarded as England's biggest selection poser heading into the highly anticipated, five-match test series against India.

Turns out, it wasn't much of a headache for Ben Stokes.

"It would be remarkable to choose someone else if their last knock was 170," the England captain said Thursday of the decision to keep faith with Pope after his big hundred in the one-off test against Zimbabwe last month.

The 21-year-old Bethell is the next big thing in English cricket, a rising star in all formats who made a strong start to his test career - in the No. 3 position - by scoring a half-century in each test of the three-match series against New Zealand over the winter.

However, Bethell didn't play against Zimbabwe at Trent Bridge because he was finishing off a stint in the Indian Premier League. Pope did play and, batting at No. 3, made 171 for his third biggest test knock.

Pope is the team's vice captain and remains a trusted ally of Stokes, despite continued specula-



England's captain Ben Stokes during a cricket nets session at Headingley, Leeds, England. (AP)

tion over his place in the team.

"Having him at No. 3 and, since I've been captain over three years, averaging over 40. It speaks for itself, I think," said Stokes, speaking on the eve of the first test at Headingley starting Friday.

"In this day and age, it's very tough to not see all the speculation and stuff around it, just because of how easily accessible things are. You don't even have to go hunt for it to see it these days. But I think scoring 170 in his last test match

shows how well he's handled the extra scrutiny. It comes with the territory when you are an international player."

Under Stokes and coach Brendon McCullum, whose nickname is "Baz," England has played an entertaining, aggressive, attack-at-all-costs brand of cricket that earned the label "Bazball."

It has helped turn around the fortunes of England's test team, even if some see the approach as naive at times, especially when up against the world's top sides.

Stokes hinted at a possible tweak in strategy in the series against India, which comes before England heads to Australia for the Ashes.

"India always bring excitement with them, wherever they go in the world," Stokes said. "We still want to be known as a team that plays an exciting style of cricket. But now, not that we never wanted to win every game that we played, it's about changing what we say, how we say it."

"We want to be playing an exciting game of cricket because we know that brings the best out of individuals, and us as a team. But it's about winning."

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NEWS



Sri Lanka's Angelo Mathews who plays his career last match leaves the ground after losing his wicket during day three of the first cricket test match between Sri Lanka and Bangladesh in Galle, Sri Lanka. (AP) — See Page 15

Sports

Kuwait prepares in Egypt for Gulf Championship challenge

By Khaled Al-Enezi
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, June 19: The Kuwait junior basketball team will depart for Cairo Friday to begin an external training camp running until July 5. The camp is part of the team's preparation for the upcoming Gulf Championship, scheduled to take place in Manama, Bahrain, from July 7 to 14. The tournament serves as a qualifier for the Asian Finals.

The delegation is headed by Ghazi Al-Otaibi, Treasurer of the Kuwait Basketball Federation, and includes Mohsen Al-Mutairi, Mishaal Mohammed Adarian, head coach Talal Al-Qallaf, assistant coach Yahya Al-Bahr, and team manager Talib Al-Kandari.

The squad features 12 promising players: Abdulaziz Al-Mutawa, Suwail Al-Dhafiri, Fareej Al-Fureij, Omar Al-Asaq, Abdulrahman Al-Qatifi, Omar Al-Saleh, Musaed Al-Obaidi, Abdulrahman Al-Marzouq, Ali Al-Salahi, Ali Abbas, Mishaal Al-Azmi, and Abdullah Al-Jarid.

During their stay in Cairo, the team is scheduled to play several friendly matches, including matchups against the Jordanian national team, Al-Ahly, and Al-Ittihad of Alexandria.

Ghazi Al-Otaibi emphasized that the Basketball Federation is keen on ensuring the players gain valuable experience from the camp and deliver strong performances in the Gulf Championship. He noted that this effort is part of a broader strategy to see the national team reach the podium, backed by a focused preparation plan from the technical staff.

Al-Otaibi also extended his gratitude to the Sports Authority for its continued support in developing Kuwait's national basketball teams.



Kuwait junior basketball team.

Al Hilal holds Madrid as coaches make debuts

Juventus, Man City ease to victories

MIAMI GARDENS, Fla., June 19: (Agencies): Xabi Alonso got off to a disappointing start at Real Madrid as the Spanish giant was held to a 1-1 draw by Saudi Arabia's Al Hilal in the Club World Cup.

In his first game as coach of the 15-time European champion, Alonso was denied victory when Federico Valverde's stoppage-time penalty was saved.

The VAR-awarded spot kick looked like it would hand Madrid - and Alonso - a late reprieve after being pushed all the way at Hard Rock Stadium by Al Hilal under new coach Simone Inzaghi.

But the Group H game ended tied, with Gonzalo Garcia scoring for Madrid in the 34th minute and Ruben Neves equalizing for Al Hilal from the penalty spot seven minutes later. Madrid was given a chance at victory when VAR spotted a foul by Mohammed Alqahtani on Fran Garcia in the box.

Valverde stepped up to take the penalty two minutes into added time, but he dropped to his knees after

his low effort was saved by Yassine Bounou, sparking wild celebrations from the Al Hilal goalkeeper's teammates. While it was an underwhelming start for Alonso, Inzaghi's Al Hilal made an early statement of its potential by holding its own against Madrid.

It might have been even better for Saudi Arabia's most successful team, which was without injured star striker Aleksandar Mitrovic, if Marcos Leonardo taken one of three chances in front of goal.

Manchester City and Juventus eased to wins while Salzburg found a late winner.

In Philadelphia, Phil Foden scored one goal and set up another as Manchester City secured a 2-0 victory over Morocco's Wydad Casablanca.

Despite resting key players, the Premier League side controlled the match from the outset with Foden firing home in the second minute after Savinho's effort was parried away by goalkeeper Mehdi Benabid.

Jeremy Doku doubled the lead just before half-time when he volleyed home at the far post following Foden's corner. Pep Guardiola's team cruised through much of the second half but failed to extend its lead, even after introducing Erling Haaland, Rodri and Ilkay Gundogan from the bench.

City finished the match with 10 men after Rico

Lewis was shown a straight red card for catching Samuel Obeng in the face with his boot during a sliding challenge.

"We are pretty pleased with what we saw today from those who played," Guardiola said. "We have new players; some players played in different positions. We have so many players that we need to give minutes to. Otherwise, they never can get it. The next game, 10 new players are going to be there to try to win again." In Cincinnati, Karim Onisiwo scored late as Austria's Salzburg clinched a 2-1 victory over Mexican side Pachuca.

Israel international midfielder Oscar Gloukh opened the scoring by curling a 20-yard shot into the far corner. Bryan Gonzalez equalized with a rasping free-kick that beat goalkeeper Christian Zawieschitzky at his near post.

Salzburg wrestled back the lead when Onisiwo rose highest to nod home from Mads Bidstrup's cross.

In Wednesday's late match, Randal Kolo Muani and Francisco Conceicao scored two goals each as Juventus romped to a 5-0 win over United Arab Emirates outfit Al Ain. Turkey international forward Kenan Yildiz was also on target in Washington DC as the Italian Serie A side went top of Group G.



Real Madrid's Raúl Asencio slide tackles Al-Hilal's Salem Al-Dawsari during the Club World Cup Group H soccer match between Real Madrid and Al Hilal in Miami Gardens, Fla. (AP)

Kuwaiti Ambassador to Tunisia reaffirms support for athletes

TUNIS, June 19: Kuwaiti Ambassador to Tunisia, Mansour Al-Omar, reaffirmed Kuwait's ongoing commitment to supporting national athletes participating in regional and international competitions.

His remarks came during a reception held for the Kuwaiti delegation participating in the Tunis International Paralympic Athletics Meeting. The delegation was led by Nasser Al-Ajmi, Chairman of the Kuwait Paralympic Athletics Committee, and included delegation member Fahad Al-Mutairi and athletes Faisal Sorour, Dhari Batti, and Nasser Faraj.

Ambassador Al-Omar congratulated the athletes on their outstanding performances and medal wins, commending their dedication and wishing them continued success in future events.

For his part, delegation head Nasser Al-Ajmi expressed gratitude for the warm welcome and the support provided by the Kuwaiti Embassy in facilitating the delegation's



Ambassador Al-Omar receives the Kuwaiti Paralympic delegation.

entry and easing logistical challenges at the airport. As a token of appreciation, he presented Ambassador Al-Omar with a commemorative plaque.

The Tunis International Paralympic Athletics Meeting, held from June 16 to 18, saw Kuwaiti athlete Faisal Sorour claim two gold medals, while Dhari Batti se-

cured a silver medal. Meanwhile, Nasser Faraj achieved qualification for the 2025 World Athletics Championships, set to take place in India.

Al-Qurain to face Kuwait Club in Handball Cup quarterfinals

By Khaled Al-Enezi
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, June 19: The first round of the quarterfinals in the 57th Kuwait Handball Association Cup will take place tomorrow at the Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Sports Complex. Reigning champion Kuwait Club, who has held the title for 11 consecutive years, will face Al-Qurain at 5:00 pm. The second match of the day sees Yarmouk square off against Salmiya at 6:30 pm.

Al-Qurain secured its spot in the quarterfinals after defeating Al-Sahel 36-31 in the preliminary round. Yarmouk advanced in a hard-fought match, narrowly edging past Al-Tadamon 27-26. Al-Samiya also qualified by beating Al-Nasr with a score of 36-31.

In transfer news, Al-Qadisiya is on the verge of signing Tunisian international and Shabab Al-Ahli (UAE) standout Rayan Zariat. He is expected to replace Montenegrin player Vladan, who is reportedly close to joining Kuwait Club.



Players fighting for the ball.

Kuwait Club, also known as the Whites, are expected to rely on their foreign trio: Frankis Marzo, Vladan, and a yet-to-be-confirmed European midfielder.

In a separate development, Al-Nasr handball players Jaber Al-Azmi and Sayer Al-Enezi have announced their retirement from the sport following their team's Cup Championship exit. Al-Azmi is expected to take on the role of assistant goalkeeper coach, while Al-Enezi may pursue a coaching position within the club.

Kuwait Olympic team begins preparations for the AFC U-23 Championship qualifiers

By Khaled Al-Enezi
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, June 19: The Kuwait Olympic soccer team has commenced training at the auxiliary field of Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium as part of its preparation for the AFC U-23 Championship qualifiers, scheduled to be held in Saudi Arabia in January 2026.

Placed in Group B, Kuwait will face strong competition from Japan, Afghanistan, and Myanmar, with Myanmar set to host the qualifying tournament from September 1 to 9.

The qualification format sees the top team from each of the ten groups, along with the five best second-placed teams, advancing to the final tournament. Saudi Arabia will join as the host nation, with the finals featuring 16 teams divided into



The Olympic team is preparing for the 2026 Asian Cup qualifiers.

four groups.

The team's first training session included 23 players under the leadership of Croatian coach Dario Pesic

and team manager Jarrah Al-Ateeqi. Before training began, a meeting was held emphasizing the importance of adhering to both technical and administrative instructions.

Training will continue through June 30, when the team departs for an external training camp. During this period, three friendly matches are planned to help the technical staff evaluate the players' readiness and optimize the squad's preparation.

Notably, three players – Abdulrahman Al-Rashidi, Moaz Al-Aseema, and Yousef Majed – were absent as they participate in the 2026 World Cup qualifiers with Kuwait's senior national team. They are expected to rejoin training next Wednesday. Additionally, some players missed sessions due to academic exams but will return to the team soon.

Al-Ittihad to meet Al-Nassr in semis

RIYADH, June 19: The draw for the upcoming Saudi Super Cup, marking the start of the 2025-2026 football season, took place yesterday.

According to the draw, Al-Ittihad – champion of both the Roshen Professional League and the King's Cup – will face Al-Nassr in the first semi-final clash.

In the second semi-final, league runner-up Al-Hilal will compete against Al-Qadisiyah, who finished fourth in the league and were also runners-up in the King's Cup.

The winners of these two matches will advance to the tournament final, scheduled to be held in Hong Kong from August 19 to 23.

Al-Hilal is the defending champion of the Saudi Super Cup, having



The Saudi Super Cup trophy.

secured its fifth title in the last edition. It defeated Al-Ahli in the semi-finals on penalties following a 1-1 draw before progressing to win the tournament.

Al-Nassr, on the other hand, triumphed over Al-Taawoun 2-0 in its last campaign, setting up a thrilling Riyadh derby in the final, where Al-Hilal prevailed 4-1.