



Oil Minister lauds firefighters
Page 5



KUWAIT GUARANTEES BANK DEPOSITS AMID GLOBAL UNCERTAINTY

Security up as Kuwait armed forces neutralize air threats

ICAO condemns airspace violations; Strait of Hormuz status quo defended

By Munif Naif

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff and Agencies

KUWAIT CITY, April 2: The Ministry of Defense stated Thursday that the Kuwait Armed Forces tracked and intercepted two cruise missiles and 13 hostile drones within the airspace of the

From surge to slide

Gold's glow dims while markets juggle tensions

By Marwa Al-Bahrawi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, April 2: Amid escalating geopolitical tensions in the region, gold continues to serve as a traditional "safe haven" for investors. However, the precious metal has seen a notable price decline after reaching record highs above \$5,600 and is currently trading within a narrow range. This has unsettled markets and raised widespread questions about the future of gold.



Hatab

Locally, experts and specialists believe that this decline is not attributable to a single factor but results from a combination of economic, financial, and behavioral variables, along with global supply chain challenges.

Mohammed Hatab, Marketing Director at Dar Al-Sabaik, explained that the drop in gold prices is driven by several factors, primarily profit-taking, as investors bought gold ahead of escalating events and then sold afterward to realize gains.

He predicted that gold will recover in the medium term, emphasizing that it will remain a safe haven, especially with continued global support.

Hatab expects gold prices to reach higher levels in the coming period.

Hatab indicated that the shift in liquidity toward oil, particularly amid concerns about its supply and the potential closure of the Strait of Hormuz, played a major role in diverting funds from gold, leading to a decline in demand.

Hatab noted that the stabilization of interest rates, rather than the anticipated reduction, along with rising US Treasury yields and a strong dollar, placed additional pressure on gold, given its status as an asset that does not generate periodic returns.

He emphasized that the biggest challenge facing the gold market in Kuwait lies in supply chains, as the market relies entirely on gold imports, particularly from the UAE and Switzerland.

Hatab clarified that the closure of Kuwait International Airport since the beginning of the tensions has halted the flow of gold into the market. Coupled with increased demand, this has led to a decrease in the supply of certain types of bullion.



Al-Mousawi

He praised the efforts of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry in streamlining procedures and strengthening market oversight to curb negative practices by some traders.

Continued on Page 4

country over the past 24 hours.

In a media briefing about the operational developments of the Iranian aggression on Kuwait, official spokesperson of the ministry Colonel Staff Saud Al-Atwan affirmed that the Armed Forces continue to perform their duties with high efficiency, reiterating their firm resolve to defend the homeland, deal with the aggression and foil threats to the sovereignty, security and stabil-

ity of the country, hence, ensuring the safety of citizens and residents.

Al-Atwan prayed that Allah Almighty grants permanent security and stability to the nation under the leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah -- Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, and to bestow mercy on the martyrs.

Continued on Page 5



The Kuwaiti flag bearing the phrase, 'O Allah, make this country safe.'

Unity in pixels

Kuwaiti flag trend symbol of strength

By Najeh Bilal, Inaas Awadh and Mohammad Ghanem

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, April 2: The Kuwaiti Flag's symbolism of unity and sovereignty was highlighted when it became a prominent feature of public interaction on social media platforms, serving as a collective expression of loyalty and a sense of belonging under the current circumstances.

The flag, which has always symbolized solidarity and resilience, has returned to reaffirm that the true strength of Kuwait lies in the unity of its people and their full support for their leadership.

Recently, WhatsApp in the country witnessed a widespread public campaign as users simultaneously posted images of the Kuwaiti Flag as their status updates, manifesting societal cohesion in facing the ongoing regional conflict.

Several citizens and community leaders confirmed to the newspaper that this initiative expresses a deep sense of national belongingness and embodies the unwavering support of the people for their nation and leaders in dealing with the current challenges.

Economic advisor Abdullah Al-Gharib believes that displaying the flag on WhatsApp status conveys a clear message from the Kuwaiti people about their unity and support for their country in difficult times.

He said it is an expression of support for the political leadership, indicating that he was among the first to take such action.

Attorney Salem Al-Kandari asserted that this initiative reflects the deep connection of Kuwaitis with their homeland and their readiness to defend it. He pointed out that the people have proven their attachment to their country and their willingness to sacrifice for it throughout various trials since the Iraqi invasion.

Media figure Rashid Hamoud bin Shabaan explained that a nation's strength during crises is measured not only by its military capabilities but also by its people's awareness and the cohesion of its internal front.

He considers this initiative a reflection of the Kuwaiti people's character and the depth of their loyalty, affirming that societal awareness is the first line of defense against difficulties.

Continued on Page 4

Kuwait extends deadline to surrender unlicensed arms

KUWAIT CITY, April 2, (KUNA): The Ministry of Interior announced on Wednesday the extension of an exceptional grace period for the voluntary surrender of unlicensed firearms, ammunition, and explosives for an additional week, ending on Wednesday, April 8.

In a press statement, the Ministry clarified that the extension aims to afford all individuals the opportunity to

relinquish illegal weaponry, thereby bolstering national security and public safety.

This initiative allows violators to regularize their legal standing within established statutory frameworks, it pointed out.

The Ministry underscored that the handover process is designed to be

Continued on Page 4

Healthcare system runs at full capacity ... zero pause

By Marwa Al-Bahrawi
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, April 2: The national healthcare system continues to operate at full capacity, with surgical departments and operating rooms functioning round the clock to ensure the immediate handling of emergency cases.

This integrated institutional framework is designed to guarantee the continuous delivery of high-quality medical services and maintain constant readiness to respond to evolving field developments, particularly in light of the exceptional regional

circumstances.

The Health Ministry affirmed that operating rooms are managed in accordance with the highest internationally recognized medical standards, supported by highly qualified national personnel and advanced equipment that ensures rapid and precise intervention, especially in critical cases.

In a related development, Head of the Surgery Department at Mubarak Al-Kabeer Hospital Dr. Dhari Al-Waqyan confirmed that patient safety remains a top priority.

Continued on Page 4

Kuwait's skies to dial up drama with stormy plot

KUWAIT CITY, April 2, (KUNA): The acting Director of the Meteorological Department Dhirar Al-Ali forecasted that the country will experience cloudy weather with occasional active winds and scattered light rain, sometimes accompanied by light thunderstorms, with a chance of fog in the evening during the weekend.

He explained to the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) that on Friday, daytime weather will be warm, partly to mostly cloudy, with a chance of scattered light rain later. At night, it will be cool to mild, partly cloudy, with a chance of scattered rain, sometimes accompanied by thunderstorms, and a possibility of fog forming in some areas in the evening.

On Saturday, daytime weather will be warm, partly to mostly cloudy, with active winds and a chance of scattered rain, sometimes with thunderstorms. At night, it will be cool to mild with active winds, some scattered clouds, and gradually decreasing chances of rain in the evening.



Photo by Samer Shiqer

Daily life continues in Kuwait City, as pedestrians pass beneath an imposing urban horizon.

Other Voices

Flaky patriotism without candor

By Abdulaziz Al-Anjeri

Kuwait's challenge is not only institutional weakness. It is also a culture that softens, defers or avoids confronting that weakness altogether. In times of crisis, a familiar refrain emerges; this is not the moment to question officials, not the moment to examine performance, not the moment to scrutinize decisions. But accountability is most necessary when conditions are most uncertain.

This is not an argument against reassurance. Official statements matter. Spokespersons matter. Field inspections matter. But major crises require visible, direct engagement by ministers and senior officials who can speak can-

didly to domestic, regional and international audiences. Explaining what is known, what remains uncertain and what contingencies are in place is an important duty that they must take.

In Kuwait's case, the need for that clarity is particularly acute. Unlike Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait lacks an operational oil export route that bypasses the Strait of Hormuz, leaving it more exposed if disruption is prolonged. Publicly available estimates also suggest grain storage capacity on the order of 150,000 tons sufficient for only a limited period. These are not abstract concerns. They are precisely the kinds of questions that require direct, credible answers.

The expectation of such engagement is not unreasonable. In February 2025, Kuwait's prime minister warned in Dubai that policy shifts by Donald Trump could have far-reaching consequences for the global economy.

Continued on Page 4



NBK-Egypt secures \$50 mln facility to finance MSMEs in Egypt with a focus on youth entrepreneurs

Iraq's oil hub slows to a crawl as Strait of Hormuz shutdown strangles exports

Kuwait fortifies water safety net

By Inaas Awadh

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, April 2: The Environment Public Authority (EPA) is intensifying its efforts to protect natural resources through an advanced monitoring system, which tracks water quality in accordance with the latest international standards to ensure the supply of safe and clean water to the public under the current circumstances.

In a televised statement, Head of the Chemical Testing Department at EPA Abdullah Al-Yateem stated that water quality is managed based on standards derived from the Environmental Protection Law, with the adoption of advanced chemical and biological indicators to make sure that water is free from pollutants.

He said the laboratories of EPA play a vital role in testing drinking water and

Continued on Page 4



FO details peace calls made to world leaders

Pakistan reiterates criticism of attacks on Kuwait

ISLAMABAD, April 2, (KUNA): The weekly Foreign Office (FO) roundup of important telephone conversations between the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Shehbaz Sharif, and world leaders recalled the Prime Minister's condemnation of attacks on Kuwait.

During the weekly media briefing in Islamabad on Thursday, Foreign Office spokesperson Tahir Andrabi recalled receiving a telephone call from His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah last week, expressing strong condemnation of attacks against Kuwait.

The Prime Minister apprised the Kuwaiti leadership of Pakistan's diplomatic efforts to end the Middle East war, while the Crown Prince of Kuwait appreciated his leadership, endorsed mediation efforts between Iran and the United States, and thanked Pakistan for support.

Moreover, the spokesperson



Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled



PM Shehbaz Sharif

briefed on the meeting between the Foreign Ministers of Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Turkiye and Egypt in Islamabad last week, where they expressed support for potential US-Iran talks to help end the Middle East crisis.

The Foreign Office underscored Pakistan's strong relations with

Saudi Arabia, Turkiye and Egypt, highlighting ongoing diplomatic efforts to enhance cooperation across areas of mutual interest.

According to the spokesperson, the consultations provided an important opportunity to strengthen collaboration on regional and international issues, focusing on

achieving an early and permanent end to the conflict through diplomacy, dialogue, and coordinated efforts for regional peace.

In his briefing on the Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister's visit to Beijing, the spokesperson called it a significant step in advancing bilateral and regional cooperation, strengthening dialogue and coordination between Pakistan and China on shared priorities.

He said the visit was undertaken at the invitation of Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and included in-depth discussions on bilateral, regional and global issues of mutual concern, reflecting growing strategic engagement.

Both sides also exchanged views on Afghanistan, stressing the need for peace, stability, and inclusive political processes, with a key outcome being agreement on a joint five-point peace initiative aimed at restoring regional stability.



Education Ministry photo
Minister of Education Eng. Sayed Jalal Al-Tabtabaei receives Sheikhha Intisar Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah at the ministry's headquarters.

Sheikha Intisar presents book on Kuwait history to minister

KUWAIT CITY, April 2: Minister of Education Eng. Sayed Jalal Al-Tabtabaei received Sheikhha Intisar Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah at the ministry's headquarters on Thursday morning.

According to a press release issued by the Ministry of Education, Sheikhha Intisar presented the minister with a copy of her book, titled "Kuwait in 400 Years".

Eng. Al-Tabtabaei praised this valu-

able cultural initiative, which contributes to documenting Kuwait's history.

He emphasized the importance of promoting historical and national awareness among younger generations through such high-quality publications.

The meeting reflects a shared commitment to supporting cultural and educational projects that help instill national values and foster a sense of patriotism among students.

Violations of holy sites breach law, UN decree

Israelis trying to alter Jerusalem legal, historical status

CAIRO, April 2, (KUNA): The emergency session of the Council of the Arab League at the level of permanent delegates began on Thursday under Bahrain's chairmanship to discuss Israeli occupation violations in Jerusalem and a law to execute Palestinian prisoners.

Bahraini Ambassador to Egypt and Permanent Representative to the Arab League (AL) Fawzia Zainal warned of continued Israeli occupation escalation in Jerusalem, stressing violations against Islamic and Christian holy sites, including the closure of Al-Aqsa Mosque, as a breach of international law and UN resolutions.

She said the meeting is being held amid sensitive regional conditions to address dangerous developments in Jerusalem and ongoing Israeli occupation violations affecting holy sites, noting attempts to alter the legal and historical status of the city.

Zainal said the Israeli occupation continues measures aimed at changing Jerusalem's legal and historical reality, including the closure of Al-Aqsa Mosque, describing them as incite-



Fawzia Zainal

ment to religious sentiments and violations of international law.

She added that these violations coincide with the Israeli occupation Knesset's approval of a law to execute Palestinian prisoners, calling it a dangerous escalation and a grave breach of human rights and international humanitarian law threatening regional stability.

Zainal stressed that these developments require a unified Arab stance rejecting Israeli oc-

cupation violations and urging the international community to assume its responsibilities to halt them and protect the Palestinian people and their holy sites.

She reaffirmed Bahrain's position supporting Palestinian rights, including an independent state on June 4, 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital, in line with the Arab Peace Initiative and UN resolutions.

She called for intensified Arab diplomatic efforts at regional and international levels and stronger joint action to confront Israeli occupation policies and preserve the Arab, Islamic and Christian identity of Jerusalem.

Zainal stressed the importance of continued Arab coordination and consultation to enhance the ability to address current challenges and achieve security and stability in the region.

The emergency meeting was held at the request of the State of Palestine and supported by member states to confront Israeli occupation crimes in Jerusalem and holy sites, including the Knesset law on executing Palestinian prisoners.

The State of Kuwait was represented at the meeting by Permanent Representative to the Arab League Ambassador Talal Al-Mutairi.



KUNA photo
Minister of Public Works Dr. Noura Al-Mashaan conducted an inspection tour at Al-Masayel in Mubarak Al-Kabeer Governorate.

Check on infrastructure projects

Minister: Maintain quality and finish 'Al-Masayel' repairs soon

By Mohammad Ghanem
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, April 2: Minister of Public Works Dr. Noura Al-Mashaan conducted an inspection tour at Al-Masayel in Mubarak Al-Kabeer Governorate in line with the commitment of the ministry to intensify oversight of infrastructure projects.

During the inspection tour, Al-Mashaan assessed the progress of the asphalt paving work, ensured adherence to the technical specifications and standards, and urged the concerned teams to expedite completion without compromising quality standards. She also emphasized the importance of ad-

hering to the established project timelines. This tour is part of the efforts of the minister to expedite the completion of projects, particularly those related to the maintenance and repair of highways and internal roads, under the supervision of the Maintenance Engineering Sector.

Meanwhile, the Central Agency for Public Tenders (CAPT) approved the request of the ministry to float a tender for the construction, completion, operation and maintenance of rainwater drainage systems in Sabah Al-Ahmad, South Sabah Al-Ahmad, Khairan and Wafra residential areas. The deadline for classified companies to submit their bids is on April 21.

MoCI intensifies check on gold shops

Shops found selling same item at different rates

By Marwa Al-Bahrawi
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, April 2: The Commercial Control and Consumer Protection Department at the Ministry of Commerce and Industry continued its inspection campaign in gold shops.

This campaign resulted in the issuance of seven violation citations for selling the same

product at different prices and failing to display the price list that includes the manufacturing cost for gold and precious jewelry. Legal measures were taken against the violators.

In addition, the Capital and Hawally Emergency Team inspected various shops, leading to the issuance of 83 violation citations for selling prohibited goods (chewing tobacco), failure to use Arabic on invoices, absence of an exchange and return policy, absence of war-

ranty schedule for new and repaired car parts, and failure to disclose the type of meat used on menus.

Two warnings were issued to grocery stores for non-compliance with regulations on the sale and distribution of energy drinks.

The ministry affirmed that these campaigns are ongoing, and that it takes the necessary measures against violators to guarantee consumer protection and regulate the markets.

MoE continues delivery of textbooks nationwide

By Inaas Awadh
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, April 2: The Ministry of Education continued its initiative to deliver textbooks to the students' homes in all governorates as part of a comprehensive operational plan.

The campaign commenced two days ago in the Capital Governorate, followed by Mubarak Al-Kabeer, Hawally, Farwaniya and Ahmadi. It is set to conclude in Jahra Governorate -- a remarkable achievement completed in less than two weeks, proving the efficiency of the organizational framework and the speed of implementation.

In a statement to Kuwait News Channel, Senior Supervisor of Girl Scouts and Guides in Ahmadi Governorate Abrar Al-Dosari revealed that the work will continue on Friday, Saturday and Sunday in preparation for the final stage of the initiative in Jahra Governorate. She confirmed that the initiative will be fully completed on Sunday.

The ministry is utilizing a structured organizational mechanism to implement this initiative. It begins with providing messengers with lists containing students' names and their respective schools, along with home addresses and contact numbers of the students and their parents. The messengers then proceed to the designated schools to collect the textbooks, which are organized according to grade level.

In another development, the ministry announced the conclusion of the two-week national campaign titled, "From Our Children's Hearts ... to the Heroes of the Nation."

The ministry confirmed the participation of students from all educational levels in the campaign, which was launched as per the directive of Minister of Education Eng. Sayed Jalal Al-Tabtabaei, with the aim of strengthening the sense of loyalty and belonging, while instilling social responsibility among students.

The ministry expressed its deep appreciation and gratitude to all participating students, as well as the educational staff, school administrations and parents who contributed to the success of the campaign.

The ministry added that this level of participation is a manifestation of the integrated roles of the educational sector and society in instilling national values in future generations.



Farwaniya Governorate photo
Farwaniya Governor Sheikh Athbi Nasser Al-Athbi Al-Sabah receives senior fire department officers.

'Rapid response and efficiency vital amid current challenges'

KUWAIT CITY, April 2: Farwaniya Governor Sheikh Athbi Nasser Al-Athbi Al-Sabah received at the governorate headquarters on Thursday morning Director of the Farwaniya Prevention Department of the Kuwait Fire Force (KFF) Brigadier General Mohsen Al-Qudaihi, Director of the Farwaniya Fire Department Brigadier General Othman Al-Wazgh, Head of Ardiya Fire Station Colonel Mohammad Al-Khalidi, Inspection Supervisor Colonel Yaqoub Yousef, Licensing Supervisor Colonel Hassan Al-Khalif, and Projects Studies Supervisor Colonel Mohammad Al-Habib.

According to a press release issued by Farwaniya Governorate, the governor was briefed on the efforts of the prevention and firefighting teams in enhancing public safety and responding to

incidents and reports, particularly amid current challenges that require rapid response and efficient performance.

He praised the vital role of KFF, and commended their high level of preparedness and proactive plans in mitigating risks and protecting lives and property.

Governor Sheikh Athbi emphasized that these efforts highlight their professionalism and dedication to fulfilling their national duty.

At the end of the meeting, the guests expressed their gratitude and appreciation to the governor for his continued support and attention to the progress of work. They affirmed the continuation of all efforts to enhance public safety and ensure an effective response to various emergency situations throughout the Farwaniya Governorate.

Kuwait strongly raps Knesset nod to execution of prisoners

KUWAIT CITY, April 2, (KUNA): The Kuwaiti Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed strong condemnation and denunciation on Thursday of the Israeli occupation Knesset's approval of the so-called law allowing the execution of Palestinian prisoners.

The ministry stressed that it was a flagrant violation of all international laws and norms, particularly the provisions of international humanitarian law related to the protection of prisoners and detainees.

This came in a statement by the Ministry saying that this escalation represents a dangerous approach to legitimizing and entrenching policies of systematic killing, reflecting a trend toward institutionalizing practices based on racial discrimination, in violation of the human rights of

the brotherly Palestinian people and undermining international efforts aimed at promoting respect for human rights and achieving justice.

The Ministry expressed deep concern over the conditions of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli occupation prisons amid grave violations and inhumane practices, including ill-treatment, torture, starvation, and deprivation of basic rights.

It called on the international community and the UN Security Council to assume their legal and humanitarian responsibilities and take deterrent measures to halt these illegal policies and practices, ensure the necessary protection for Palestinian prisoners in accordance with international law and relevant conventions, and hold accountable those responsible for crimes committed against them.

Kuwait vows better service for people hit with autism

KUWAIT CITY, April 2, (KUNA): Minister of Social Affairs, Family and Childhood Affairs Dr. Amthal Al-Huwaila affirmed that World Autism Day is an important occasion to raise public awareness of autism spectrum disorder, highlight rights, and support inclusion and empowerment across society.

She said in a press statement on Thursday that the Public Authority for Persons with Disabilities continues to develop services for people with autism through specialized rehabilitation and awareness programs

aimed at improving quality of life and strengthening integration.

Al-Huwaila added that supporting individuals with autism is a shared responsibility requiring coordination between government bodies, civil society institutions, and families to create an inclusive and safe environment that enables participation.

She stressed Kuwait's continued national efforts to empower people with autism and enhance their participation in various fields, reflecting the state's commitment to inclusion, equality, and equal opportunity principles.

diwaniya ديوانية

A DIGEST OF PUBLIC OPINION

Misleading world ... actors vary in bomb hits on ports

"THE Kuwaiti statement on the bombings of Mubarak and Shuwaikh ports may have led some to believe that the attacks were carried out by Iranian missiles, but the reality was different. The attacks on our ports originated in Iraq from drones and missiles launched from southern Iraqi regions," Kuwaiti journalist **Hassan Ali Karam** wrote for *Al-Seyassah* daily.

"Kuwait believed that these missiles and drones were launched from Iraqi areas close to the Kuwaiti border, and that Iran mistakenly assumed they came from Kuwaiti territory. This misunderstanding only fuels Iranian aggression toward Kuwait and the targeting of its facilities."



Hassan Ali Karam

"The attacks on Kuwait ports, particularly Mubarak Port, which is still under construction, are not random. They reflect coordination with Iran, though Iraq also has its own objectives. Iraqi authorities went into a frenzy when Kuwait began developing Mubarak Port, which overlooks the Kuwaiti waterway of Khor Abdullah, and they began fabricating false narratives and making baseless claims."

"Our focus here is not on the name of the creek, but on the fact that these militias are causing damage to Kuwait, and, I believe, to our brothers in Baghdad to a similar extent. These troublemakers who attacked Mubarak Port may have imagined they had achieved their goal, believing that Kuwait had been weakened by their senseless attacks. Yet the construction of Mubarak Port, carried out by Chinese contractors, continues, and any attempt at sabotage only delays the project's completion."

"It is painful to witness such attacks carried out by foolish political actors who fail to grasp the magnitude of their actions and the harm inflicted on national infrastructure, whether Iraqi or Kuwaiti. Ultimately, our neighborly relations endure beyond any incident, no matter how significant. Undoubtedly, the Iraqi government bears responsibility for failing to restrain these immature militias. We value strong neighborly relations and the shared use of resources."

"We reiterate - as long as missiles and drones are launched from Iraqi soil, the Iraqi government remains accountable for this recklessness. Our neighborly ties are far more enduring than the harm caused by such actions, which ultimately affects us all."

Also:

"Three full months have passed in the blink of an eye! The first quarter of 2026 has flown by. Where are we? What have we accomplished? Will we depart without leaving a trace? Nothing stirred us, not the ticking of the clock, nor the passage of time, nor even those who quietly left this world during these months. Yet one truth alone is enough to shake us to our core - a quarter of our lives has slipped by unnoticed," columnist **Bassam Fahad Thunayyan Al-Ghanim** wrote for *Al-Seyassah* daily.

"Three months have simply passed. They asked for no permission, waited for no one, and granted no extra chances. They passed as beautiful moments do when we fail to seize them, and as our lives slip away when we become preoccupied with other concerns."

"The question isn't: How did the time pass? Everyone knows the answer. The real, painful, honest question is: Where were we during it? How many plans did we write with enthusiasm, only to abandon them at the first sign of distraction? How many goals did we set high, only to quietly lower them? How many moments could have made a difference, yet we let them slip by like strangers? Time flies, but we are the ones who ignore it, even while knowing how swiftly it moves."

"We wake up, we work, we get busy, we chase the world, we run after endless details, then we go back to sleep, only to repeat the same cycle. Then we are surprised to find that a part of our lives has passed, as if it never existed. The painful truth is not that time passes, but that it passes while we are absent from it—living without presence, without impact, without true meaning in what we do."

"The question isn't - How did the time pass? Everyone knows the answer. The real, painful, honest questions are - Where were we during it? How many plans did we write with enthusiasm, only to abandon them at the first sign of distraction? How many goals did we set high, only to quietly lower them? How many moments could have made a difference, yet we let them slip by like strangers? Time flies, but we are the ones who ignore it, despite knowing how swiftly it moves."

never existed. The painful truth is not that time passes, but that it passes while we are absent from it, living without presence, without impact, without true meaning in what we do. Amid this relentless pace, we need to pause for a moment. The problem isn't the speed of time, but our absence from it. We need to re-examine ourselves, our priorities, and the way we spend our days."

"Are we living as we truly want, or merely following habit and routine? Are we moving closer to our goals, or simply reaching the end of another day with nothing new to show for it? We may not be able to reclaim the past, but there is still time, and life still holds opportunities."

"The goal isn't to change your life all at once, but to regain your awareness, to be present, to live each moment as it should be lived, to leave a mark, however small, to improve something within yourself, to grow closer to those you love, and to leave behind something worth remembering. We are not measured by the number of years we live, but by what we accomplish within them and by the impact we leave."

"And as we enter the second quarter of this year, it won't just be another number on the calendar. It will be another opportunity - an opportunity to start anew, to correct our course, to grow closer, to live with greater awareness. Time waits for no one, but it grants a chance every day to those who seek to leave this world having made a lasting impact that benefits others."



"When we were young, we often heard the chant, 'O Abu Salem, give us weapons. We will fight on your behalf,' during demonstrations that erupted in response to Iraqi threats against Kuwait, most notably around the time of independence in 1961 and again in 1969," columnist Eng. **Adel Al-Jarallah Al-Kharafi** wrote for *Al-Seyassah* daily.

"That period came to be known as the 'Silent Crisis.' That patriotic spirit continues to this day, forming a foundation for national unity."

"Today, in this war waged against us by a neighboring enemy, the approach has changed, as Kuwait now has an army, a National Guard, and a Ministry of Interior that defend the nation with valor."

"It is natural that wars in the modern era differ from those of the past. Modern warfare relies primarily on technology, especially when there are minds capable of utilizing all available means and striving for further innovation to enhance defensive capabilities."

"Kuwait has many young elites working to defend it in all fields. Despite this, there are challenges in some areas, including a shortage of media experts, especially those who can appear on local, regional, and international television channels and clearly explain the situation without exaggeration."

"These individuals play a crucial role, as they form the core of the effort to refute the claims the enemy seeks to spread. The media battle is as important as the military and security battles. However, this area still needs more experts, while those who interfere with the management of some media institutions should be removed."

"The management of public affairs in all areas is commendable, despite all the emerging difficulties, because this war is different from all previous wars."

"Nevertheless, Kuwait has proven its ability to confront these challenges. The national spirit of Kuwaitis has not been fully reflected abroad. Many volunteers work in various fields, yet their efforts are still unrecognized. There is untapped potential, including the expertise of retired military personnel and those who experienced the Iran-Iraq War, participated in the liberation of Kuwait, and were part of the Kuwaiti resistance."

"This stage requires the participation of everyone in defending national security. The circle of volunteer recruitment must be expanded."

"Why not establish an authority dedicated to organizing the recruitment of these volunteers in case of any emergency? Everyone in Kuwait is ready to cooperate to protect the homeland."

"The proposed authority would be responsible for registering volunteers' specializations, assessing each volunteer's capabilities, and managing these teams during emergencies as well as in times of peace and stability."

"Training courses should be organized for volunteers. Sixty percent of Kuwaitis are young people whose important role should be harnessed to activate the slogan, 'O Abu Salem, give me a weapon, we will fight on your behalf.'"

"Abu Salem refers to the late Amir, Sheikh Sabah Al-Salem (May God have mercy on him)."

— Compiled by Simi K. Kutty



KUNA photo

Assistant Chief for Financial Affairs and Resource Management Major General Riyadh Al-Tawari with representatives from the Middle East Telecommunications Company.

KNG inks accord with METC to upgrade military databases by employing 'AI-tech'

KUWAIT CITY, April 2, (KUNA) : Kuwait National Guard (KNG) announced Thursday the signing of a contract to implement a project to develop military databases using artificial intelligence (AI) technologies with the Middle East Telecommunications Company (METC). KNG said in a press statement that the signing took place in the presence of Assistant Chief for Financial Affairs and Resource Management Major General Riyadh Al-Tawari, along with senior commanders and officials from resource

management, information systems, and project preparation departments.

Al-Tawari affirmed that the project comes in implementation of KNG leadership directives and the objectives of its strategic plan 2030, aimed at enhancing digital transformation and improving operational efficiency and readiness.

He added that the project represents added value and a qualitative shift in the National Guard, aiming to support military and admin-

istrative operations through data analysis and risk prediction, improving decision-making speed and accuracy, while automating procedures and boosting institutional efficiency.

The executing company said the project will rely on advanced AI solutions while adhering to the highest standards of information security and data governance, noting that implementation will proceed in phases including planning, development, and operation to achieve full system integration and efficiency.

No to communal hatred

4 years jail for inciting sectarian strife: court

By Jaber Al-Hamoud

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, April 2: The Criminal Court, presided over by Judge Al-Dhuwaihhi Mubarak Al-Dhuwaihhi, with Judges Salem Bader Al-Zayed and Ibrahim Abdul Nasser Khuraibat as members, sentenced an individual to four years in prison with hard labor for inciting sectarian strife through social media.

The court also ordered the confiscation of his mobile phone, the deletion of all messages found on it, and the closure of his account for one year.

On January 16, 2026, the Public Prosecution accused the defendant of posting comments on his personal X account that incited hatred and contempt against a segment of society and attacked the Sunni sect using derogatory language. He also used his mobile phone to carry out these acts, as detailed in the case file and investigations.

The court affirmed that the defendant's criminal responsibility was firmly established, emphasizing that the impact of his actions went beyond mere verbal abuse to something far more serious and profound.

It clarified that sectarian rhetoric disseminated through open digital platforms does not target a specific individual but reaches an unlimited audience, placing it within the scope of public dissemination.

The court stressed that such rhetoric is likely to incite societal tension and division, threatening national unity, which forms the foundation of the state.

Illegal resident jailed 3 years in rumor-spread

By Jaber Al-Hamoud

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, April 2: The Court of Appeals upheld the ruling of the Criminal Court, which sentenced an illegal resident to three years in prison for disseminating false news about the Central Agency for Remedying Illegal Residents Status (CARIRS).

In its reasoning, the Criminal Court asserted that the dissemination of news, particularly content that affects the prestige and standing of the nation, requires careful verification and thorough investigation.

However, the defendant exceeded this boundary by publishing claims deemed to be inciting public opinion without presenting credible evidence to substantiate his assertions, and he relied on unverified statements.

The court added that the allegations of the defendant defamed the nation and undermined its position, contradicting the established approach on the protection of human rights.

It affirmed that the actions of the defendant were not intended for reform, as they were rather aimed at inciting discord and harming public interest.

In another case, the Criminal Court, presided over by Judge Al-Dhuwaihhi Al-Dhuwaihhi, acquitted one defendant of possessing hashish with intent to traffic, while ordering the detention of two other defendants in the same case.

Attorney Abdullah Shuja' Al-Otaibi, who represented the acquitted defendant, attended the trial. He argued that the charges against his client were invalid, pointing that his client was not in the country at the time of the alleged incident, had neither been arrested nor interrogated, and was not confronted with any evidence. He said the case file does not contain any investigation report, warrant or arrest order mentioning his client.

Al-Otaibi explained that the sole basis for the charges was a confession by one defendant implicating another, which is legally inadmissible unless supported by corroborating evidence.

He pointed out that the arresting officer initially acknowledged during the investigation that the seized items belonged to another defendant, then later contradicted his own statement, thereby, weakening the evidentiary value and casting doubt on its credibility.

He asserted that the legal elements of the drug trafficking charge were not fulfilled, as no narcotics, paraphernalia or money were found in his client's possession, and no forensic reports established his use of drugs.

He also stated that the WhatsApp messages presented in the case were inadmissible as evidence, because they could not be conclusively attributed to the defendant.

He added that criminal judgments must be founded on certainty and firm conviction, rather than on doubt or speculation.

He reiterated that the case file lacked any conclusive evidence linking his client to the alleged incident, hence, the need for his acquittal.

Doors of six NGOs 'shut'

Breaches prompt action

KUWAIT CITY, April 2: In a move aimed at protecting the rights of beneficiaries and ensuring the integrity of institutional operations, Minister of Social, Family and Childhood Dr. Amthal Al-Huwailah issued a decision to dissolve six non-governmental organizations (NGOs), reports *Al-Seyassah* daily.

In a press statement on Wednesday, Al-Huwailah stressed that the decision was taken after a thorough review of the administrative and financial reports and confirmation of observations, which necessitated taking legal measures.

She affirmed the continuous commitment of her ministry to apply the law on every-one, asserting that the aim is to correct the

course and improve performance, which will positively impact the quality of services provided to the community.

She stated that the ministry closely monitors and evaluates the performance of NGOs, and intervenes whenever necessary to guarantee compliance with the applicable regulations and bylaws.

She called on all entities under the supervision of the ministry to fully abide by the regulatory controls and act responsibly to achieve public good and boost public trust in civil society work.

On the other hand, Assistant Undersecretary for Financial, Administrative and Cooperative Affairs at the ministry Dr. Sayed Issa announced the completion of tests for 48 supervisory positions in 18 cooperative societies, but the interviews have been postponed due to the current circumstances.

He said this is a prelude to the third phase of the Kuwaitization of support positions, which will generate more than one thousand jobs for the citizens.

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LOCAL

Kuwait envoy raises alarm over Iran's threat at Lisbon meeting

GCC bloc flags energy and food supply risks

MADRID, April 2, (KUNA): Kuwait's Ambassador to Portugal Hamad Al-Hazeem participated, alongside GCC ambassadors and heads of missions, in a meeting at the Portuguese Parliament to discuss Iranian attacks and their implications for regional and international security and stability.

Al-Hazeem told KUNA on Wednesday that the meeting, which included ambassadors from the UAE, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia, was held with the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Jose Cesario, to review regional developments and their impact on global energy security and supply chains.

He expressed appreciation at the outset of the meeting, held at the request of GCC ambassadors, for Portugal's supportive stance toward GCC countries, commending Lisbon's early issuance



KUNA photo
Kuwait's Ambassador to Portugal, Hamad Al-Hazeem, with the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Portuguese Parliament, José Cesário.

of a statement condemning the Iranian attacks and expressing solidarity, reflecting the depth of relations and friendship between the Gulf states and Portugal.

The ambassador provided a comprehensive

briefing on the nature of the Iranian attacks, noting that Iran had launched more than 5,200 missile and drone strikes, with approximately 85 percent targeting GCC countries compared to 15 percent directed toward Israeli occupation.

Al-Hazeem warned that such developments carry serious consequences, particularly as Iran's closure of the Strait of Hormuz directly impacts global energy supplies, in addition to its repercussions on food security due to the GCC's key role in fertilizer production, which could lead to shortages and disrupt global food supply chains.

For his part, Cesario affirmed Portugal's support for the right of GCC countries to defend their security and stability, expressing full solidarity with the bloc in facing these challenges.

He added that Portugal's position is based on firm principles, highlighting the country's support for relevant international resolutions, including UN Security Council Resolution 2817, adopted by 136 countries, as well as a Human Rights Council resolution approved on March 25 in Geneva, reflecting Portugal's commitment to standing with GCC states.

Sudan expresses solidarity with Kuwait, offers logistical support

KHARTOUM, April 2, (KUNA): Chairman of Sudan's Transitional Sovereignty Council Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan announced on Wednesday the opening of all Sudanese ports and airports to accommodate Kuwait's needs, affirming his condemnation of the aggressive Iranian attacks against Kuwait and the Gulf countries.

This came during a meeting with Kuwait's Ambassador to Sudan Dr. Fahad Al-Dhafiri, where Al-Burhan expressed his country's full solidarity with Kuwait and the Gulf countries, as well as their right to defend themselves.

Al-Burhan praised Kuwait's support of Sudan in international and regional forums, commending the strong bilateral relations between both countries, as well as confirming his readiness to respond to the invitation to visit Kuwait.

Al-Dhafiri told KUNA that during the meeting, the two sides reviewed the aggressive attacks by Iran on vital Kuwaiti and Gulf facilities, as well as ways to strengthen the bilateral relations.



KUNA photo

The Chairman of the Sudanese Sovereignty Council and Commander-in-Chief of the Army, Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, during his meeting with the Ambassador of the State of Kuwait to Sudan, Dr. Fahad al-Dhafiri.

Continued from Page 1

Healthcare system

He disclosed that work in the operating rooms is conducted with a high degree of efficiency, driven by the medical teams' strict adherence to the technical protocols at every stage of surgical intervention.

He said medical procedures are carried out with precision, from pre-operative preparation to post-operative care, utilizing detailed checklists to as per the safety standards and minimize errors.

He also confirmed the availability of strategic reserves of medications and essential medical supplies.

Meanwhile, Dr. Mirvat Al-Saleh, Consultant in General Surgery, stated that the hospital is equipped with a comprehensive system, which includes seven fully operational surgery rooms functioning at maximum capacity, in addition to emergency units that handle urgent cases round the clock.

She said the hospital is fully ready to handle critical cases, as well as specialized oncological surgeries.

This is part of the ongoing commitment of the ministry to ensure the preparedness of the medical sector and uninterrupted delivery of high-quality services, reflecting the resilience of the healthcare system and its capacity to respond effectively to various challenges and developments.

Gold's glow

Hatab noted that the shift toward land transport offers a viable solution, despite the logistical and security challenges involved.

Meanwhile, gold expert Alamdar Al-Mousawi stated that the recent declines in gold prices, despite escalating geopolitical tensions, reflect a shift in market dynamics.

He affirmed that gold maintains its status as a safe haven, though within a more complex equation than before. Al-Mousawi explained that the traditional link between crises and rising gold prices is no longer absolute. Gold's movements are influenced by multiple factors, including the strength of the US dollar, interest rate trends, global liquidity levels, and investor risk appetite.

The recent surge in gold prices was driven by expectations of escalating tensions, followed by a market correction, with prices falling to levels between \$4,100 and \$4,500, reflecting profit-taking and risk reassessment.

He described the current market situation as "pre-pricing," where markets anticipate political and economic developments before restoring equilibrium despite ongoing uncertainty.

Al-Mousawi also highlighted the emergence of some unethical practices by a limited number of traders, including hoarding gold bars or offering them at inflated prices, exploiting the current uncertainty and supply shortages.

He praised the government's efforts in intensifying monitoring and inspection campaigns in markets in various governorates, which have contributed to stabilizing the market, curbing price manipulation, and protecting consumers.

Al-Mousawi emphasized that the current supply crisis is one of the most significant challenges, particularly regarding air and sea freight, while efforts are underway to find alternatives through land transport.

He noted that these circumstances may temporarily affect the availability of gold in the local market.

Al-Mousawi said global developments, including export restrictions imposed by Russia, are a supporting factor for prices in the medium term due to the potential for a global supply shortage.

He predicted that gold will resume its upward trend in the coming period, driven by continued geopolitical tensions and increased investment demand.

In addition, gold expert Hiba Al-Shammari stated that recent gold price movements have contradicted expectations of prices rising above \$5,000.

She explained that gold is currently experiencing a "temporary lull." This price drop has led some bullion traders to refrain from selling, either because they purchased their bullion at high prices or in anticipation of a price rebound. Markets are no longer driven solely by geopolitical events but are now significantly influenced by other rapidly changing factors, such as political statements and sudden shifts in political stances.

One of the most significant challenges the market has faced recently was the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, which caused a rise in oil prices while gold prices declined, an unusual scenario that has puzzled analysts.

Al-Shammari emphasized that geopolitical tensions have also contributed to a stronger dollar, which has negatively affected gold prices, noting that the market is currently experiencing a period of sharp fluctuations.

She predicted that gold prices will recover in the coming period, suggesting that they could rise again to reach record levels of up to \$6,000.

Kuwait fortifies

seawater, while ensuring comprehensive monitoring at all stages of the water cycle. He added that monitoring efforts include regular field visits to randomly collect samples of drinking water in all governorates, which are then analyzed to ensure compliance with established standards.

He pointed out this is in addition to the monitoring of marine sources through the collection and laboratory testing of samples from coastal areas from north to south.

He affirmed that the ongoing coordination with relevant authorities, which provide EPA with testing results, enhances the overall efficiency of monitoring efforts. He stated that these efforts extend to monitoring marine life, through the testing of fish and other marine organism samples to ensure their safety.

He confirmed that EPA remains committed to implementing the best environmental practices and guaranteeing the sustainability of water resources.

He stressed the importance of raising awareness and promoting optimal water usage, while reassuring that drinking water, the sea and marine life in Kuwait are safe and free from pollutants.

MoSA employees union condemns Iranian aggression

By Fares Ghaleb

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, April 2: The Interim Committee for the Management of the Social Affairs Ministry Employees Union strongly condemned the Iranian aggression against the State of Kuwait, indicating that such an act is a flagrant violation of international conventions and an unacceptable assault on the sovereignty, security and stability of the nation.

The committee reaffirmed its unwavering support for the political leadership, and commended all measures the State has been taking to maintain national secu-

urity and stability.

The committee made the statement during its inaugural session after the issuance of Ministerial Decree No. 6/2026 on its formation, marking a significant milestone in the institutional journey of the union.

The session focused on administrative and financial files with the aim to improve workflow and establish organizational frameworks that ensure the continuity of services provided to members of the General Assembly.

In an official statement, the committee confirmed its full readiness to exhaust its resources to support State institutions and fortify the home front, reflecting

its sense of national responsibility and social cohesion in facing regional challenges.

The committee confirmed that the coming period will feature disciplined work governed by the applicable laws and regulations, while remaining committed to protecting the gains of Social Affairs Ministry employees and their professional rights.

It stated that protecting employee rights and promoting job security are among its top priorities, while emphasizing its commitment to being a dedicated voice for employees and support their professional concerns through an approach based on transparency and in cooperation

with the relevant authorities.

It then expressed deep appreciation to First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef for trusting it in managing vital affairs.

It also appreciated the support and follow up of Minister of Social, Family and Childhood Affairs Dr. Amthal Al-Huwailah and Undersecretary Khalid Al-Ajmi for enabling it to fulfill its duties.

It reiterated that its doors remain open to ministry employees, putting its capabilities at their disposal to protect public interest and their rights and benefits.



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Flaky patriotism

If that level of strategic awareness exists at the top, it is natural to expect it to be reflected in a more visible and coherent public communication effort.

When governments do not explain themselves, others will fill the gap. Analysts, commentators and speculation will inevitably step in, but they cannot substitute for official clarity. States lose credibility when they do not speak openly.

Patriotism, especially in moments of danger, should not be confused with the suspension of scrutiny. A state is not weakened by candid public explanation; it is weakened when uncertainty is left to rumor, inference and improvisation.

Continued from Page 1

Security up

Meanwhile, Director General of the Public Relations and Security Media General Department at the Interior Ministry and its official spokesperson Brigadier General Nasser Bouslaib announced in a similar media briefing that the Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) teams dealt with 11 reports about shrapnel falling from defensive interception operations in the last 24 hours, increasing the total number of reports since the beginning of the Iranian attacks to 640.

During the briefing, Bouslaib conducted a visual presentation outlining the efforts of the concerned teams in dealing with reports about falling shrapnel or objects outside the threat zone.

He reiterated the ministry's warning against being misled by rumors or circulating unverified information, stressing that it monitors content published on various social media platforms and deals with the sources and promoters of such rumors in accordance with legal procedures. He asked the public to obtain information only from official and accredited sources to avoid legal accountability and to maintain security and stability.

On the other hand, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry stated Thursday that it continues to work on maintaining food security and market stability by implementing an integrated system of regulatory and supervisory measures under the current circumstances.

In a press statement, spokesman of the ministry Abdullah Al-Herz revealed that the ministry has intensified inspection campaigns and field monitoring of markets to ensure the availability of essential commodities and to regulate prices, in addition to closely monitoring imports and exports to guarantee the smooth flow of goods and prevent the shortage of food products.

He disclosed that the ministry is directly dealing with supplier companies to strengthen the strategic stockpile and it has taken proactive steps to ensure the market is fully prepared to face challenges, thereby, proving the State's preparedness and the efficiency of its institutions in crisis management.

He affirmed that supply chains in Kuwait remain stable and uninterrupted, and that the State is exerting tremendous efforts to guarantee the availability of essential goods in sufficient quantities and at reasonable prices, conveying a message of reassurance to all those living in the country.

Furthermore, Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah affirmed on Thursday the solid position of Kuwait regarding the status of the Strait of Hormuz as a

natural international waterway in accordance to the international law and the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which guarantees the right of transit passage.

Sheikh Jarrah made the statement at the ministerial meeting called by the United Kingdom, with the participation of a number of brotherly and friendly countries, to discuss the situation in the Strait of Hormuz. The meeting was held via videoconference.

He asserted that Kuwait rejects unilateral measures or attempts to create, impose or consolidate a new status quo that contravenes international law.

He also underscored the importance of continuing coordination within a sustainable framework and a clear action plan for procedural tracks with the international partners in a manner that guarantees effective outcomes to maintain the security of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz and other vital waterways, and prevent any party from exploiting them or avert their exposure to threats and coercion.

Also, the Council of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) recently issued a resolution strongly condemning Iran's violation of the sovereignty of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

In a press statement, the Public Authority for Civil Aviation (PACA) disclosed that ICAO described the violation as a direct threat to civil aviation safety and demanded an immediate cessation of all such unlawful activities.

It stated that the resolution followed the 237th session of the council, during which it adopted the formal protest submitted by the State of Kuwait. The protest detailed the "grave violations" that Iran and affiliated armed groups committed against the Kuwaiti sovereignty and airspace, citing breaches of the Chicago Convention on International Civil Aviation.

According to the statement, Kuwait's letter documented the attacks on its civil aviation infrastructure and the enormous operational losses.

In response, the 36-member ICAO Council adopted deterrent measures, such as referring the resolution to the relevant United Nations bodies and putting the matter under continuous review. It sent an official correspondence to all member states about the resolution, while formally notifying the Iranian authorities on their mandatory compliance with international aviation conventions. It denounced the "unlawful military deployment of drones" in violation of the Chicago Convention, indicating that such actions have exposed vital international air corridors to catastrophic risk.

The resolution stated that the current security climate has forced affected states to implement emergency proto-

cols, including airspace closures and flight diversions, resulting in global air traffic disruption.

The council also deliberated on a joint working paper submitted by the GCC states and Jordan, which condemned the "blatant" Iranian incursions into their respective airspaces.

The council affirmed that these actions are a violation of Article One of the Chicago Convention, which guarantees absolute state sovereignty over territorial airspace, as well as the United Nations Charter and international humanitarian law.

It cited United Nations Security Council Resolution 2817/2026, which considers the Iranian attacks on civilian infrastructure and airports as violations of international law.

Meanwhile, PACA Chief Sheikh Eng. Humoud Mubarak Al-Jaber Al-Sabah Sheikh emphasized that the resolution of the ICAO Council conveys an "unequivocal message" that state sovereignty and the safety of international civil aviation are inviolable obligations.

He underscored the commitment of ICAO to activate all legal instruments to safeguard the global aviation system from "reckless military threats," affirming that Kuwait's sovereignty remains a 'red line.'

He revealed that during the 237th session of ICAO, Kuwait conducted a comprehensive presentation to the member states, detailing the "severe damage" to its civil aviation infrastructure and facilities as a result of these hostilities.

He added that other affected nations also provided testimonies regarding the operational and structural impact of the attacks.

In related news, coinciding with the implementation of the new fiscal year 2026/2027 budget, and in a move to bolster financial stability and reassure the banking sector, Minister of Finance Dr. Yaqoub Al-Rifai affirmed that the Central Bank of Kuwait guarantees customer deposits in banks, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

In an interview with Kuwait TV, Minister Dr. Al-Rifai emphasized that Kuwait's financial and monetary situation is stable and reassuring, liquidity is readily available, local and international money transfers are proceeding normally, and employee salaries are being transferred to their bank accounts on time.

Dr. Al-Rifai stated that current events, the escalation of tensions, and the circumstances surrounding the closure of the Strait of Hormuz will affect oil prices and export volumes, adding that the Ministry of Finance is committed to its current budget.

He confirmed that the ministry has thoroughly prepared for all possible scenarios.

When presenting the budget, Dr. Al-Rifai emphasized the commitment to

attracting foreign investment and establishing joint ventures with investors during the current fiscal year.

He explained that the estimated Kuwaiti oil production for the current year is 2.6 million barrels per day, with an estimated price of \$57 per barrel. The price of oil is \$1.5 per barrel, while the break-even price in the current budget is estimated at \$90.5 per barrel.

There is a plan and strategy to increase non-oil revenues according to annual targets. These revenues are estimated at KD 3.5 billion this year, a 20 percent increase achieved through improved collection efficiency and the digitization of systems, in addition to a review of fees and services, along with reforms to the state's financial structure.

Subsidies were allocated as follows:

- KD 1.77 billion for energy (45 percent of total subsidies)
- KD 963.7 million for education (24 percent of total subsidies)
- KD 533 million for food, supplies, and construction materials.

Capital expenditures are distributed among 117 new projects worth KD 57.9 million and 551 ongoing projects worth KD 1.6 billion, in addition to the purchase of assets valued at KD 667 million.

Maintenance costs amount to approximately KD 713.4 million, representing a 37 percent increase over last year's total capital expenditures.

Dr. Al-Rifai stated that the major projects funded in the current budget include the Kuwait International Airport expansion, Mubarak Al-Kabeer Port, the Kabd wastewater treatment plant, and the second phase of the Subiya wastewater treatment plant.

He also mentioned that other capital projects include the expansion of the Kuwait Cancer Center for the Ministry of Health and the construction of 48 new schools and branches of the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET).

Dr. Al-Rifai indicated that capital spending covers the construction of three football stadiums in Sabah Al-Ahmad City, Jaber Al-Ahmad City, and Al-Mutlaa City, as well as cultural centers in Jahra, Mubarak Al-Kabeer, and Farwaniya.

He emphasized that salaries and subsidies are a priority along with the expansion of government spending in the current budget, stressing that subsidies are estimated at KD 3.9 billion, a 10.5 percent decrease compared to last year.

Dr. Al-Rifai revealed that the number of government employees, excluding military personnel, is 402,600, with their salaries in the current budget estimated at around KD 11.8 billion, adding that the budget of the Public Institution for Social Security is KD 3.4 billion, with an additional KD 617 million allocated for subsidies to national workers in the private sector.

Al-Roumi conveys leadership's gratitude

Oil Minister lauds firefighters

KUWAIT CITY, April 2, (KUNA): Minister of Oil and Chairman of Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC), Tareq Al-Roumi, conveyed the greetings and appreciation of the political leadership to firefighters working across Kuwait's oil sector, in recognition of their sincere efforts and dedication in carrying out their national duty.

In a press statement on Thursday, KPC said the remarks came during a field visit by Minister Al-Roumi to some oil facilities.

He was accompanied by KPC Chief Executive Officer Sheikh Nawaf Saud Al-Nasser Al-Sabah and received by Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC) CEO Wadha Al-Khateeb, along with several deputy CEOs and senior officials from the companies.

The visit included teams from KNPC, Kuwait Integrated Petroleum Industries Company (KIPIC), and Kuwait Aviation Fueling Company (KAFCO).

In turn, Sheikh Nawaf Al-Sabah expressed pride in the oil sector's manage-



Oil Minister Tareq Al-Roumi greets oil sector firefighters during a field visit, commending their dedication and heroic service in protecting lives and facilities.

ment over the heroic role and sacrifices made by firefighters in protecting lives and property.

He prayed to Almighty Allah to safeguard Kuwait, its leadership, citizens, and residents from all harm.



KPC photos

Oil Minister and Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation, Tareq Al-Roumi, during his visit to the firefighters in the Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC), Kuwait Integrated Petroleum Industries Company (KIPIC) and Kuwait Aviation Fueling Company (KAFCO).



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WH ballroom expected to get approved days after judge's ruling halting work

US Democrats sue to block Trump's executive order targeting mail ballots

WASHINGTON, April 2, (AP): Democrats sued Wednesday to block President Donald Trump's latest executive order restricting mail voting, arguing that the US Constitution empowers states and Congress, not the president, to determine who is eligible to vote by mail.

The lawsuit marks the second round of battles over the president's power to control elections. Trump's opponents handily won the first round last year, blocking his initial executive order intended to reshape election procedures by convincing multiple federal judges that it was likely unconstitutional.

Trump on Tuesday announced that his administration would compile lists of who is eligible to vote in states and that the U.S. Postal Service would only mail ballots to those who met that criteria. Critics note that there's little time to comb through voter rolls before ballots start going out for this fall's elections, in some places as soon as September, and question whether the administration's list would be reliable.

The lawsuit was filed by Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, the

Democratic National Committee and other party organizations working on campaigns for the House, Senate and governor offices around the country. Trump is one of the defendants, along with top administration officials.

"We will see him in court and we will beat him again," Schumer said in a statement.

Democrats said Trump was attempting to strike at the heart of America's democratic machinery.

"President Trump has tried again and again to rewrite election rules for his own perceived partisan advantage," their lawsuit said. It adds that "our Constitution's Framers anticipated this kind of desire for absolute power," dispersing the power to control elections to individual states and Congress.

Mail voting has existed for more than a century and had steadily been increasing in popularity in both Democratic and Republican states until 2020. Then Trump decided to target the method, levying baseless claims of mass fraud. As a result, it's become less popular among Republicans and more among Democrats, giving Trump additional incentive to throttle it before



Work continues on the construction of the ballroom at the White House in Washington on April 1. (AP)

midterm elections that will determine whether his party continues to control Congress.

Trump himself often votes by mail, as recently as in a special election in Florida last month.

Since he returned to office, Trump

has tried to interfere in state-run elections, citing often-disproven falsehoods about how fraud cost him the presidency in 2020. Repeated investigations, including ones by Republicans, showed no significant fraud in the 2020 vote.

Nonetheless, Trump has called for his administration to "take over" voting in Democratic areas, launched a probe of the 2020 vote fueled by election conspiracy theories and unsuccessfully pushed Congress to pass a law that would create new hurdles on voting, including a requirement that people provide in-person, documentary proof of citizenship when registering. That bill has stalled in the U.S. Senate over Democratic opposition.

Also:

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump's White House ballroom is expected to win approval from a key agency on Thursday, days after a federal judge ordered a halt to construction unless Congress allows what would be the biggest structural change to the American landmark in more than 70 years.

The National Capital Planning Commission, the agency tasked with approving construction on federal property in the Washington region, is going ahead with the vote because US District Judge Richard Leon's ruling on Tuesday affects construction activi-

ties, not the planning process, commission spokesperson Stephen Staudigl said.

But despite the agency's expected approval, the judge's ruling and the legal fight over the ballroom could stall progress on a legacy project that Trump is racing to see completed before the end of his term in early 2029. It's among a series of changes the Republican president is planning for the nation's capital to leave his lasting imprint while he's still in office.

The vote had initially been scheduled for March but was pushed to Thursday because so many people signed up to comment on it at the commission's monthly meeting. The comments were overwhelmingly opposed to the ballroom.

Before voting Thursday, the commission will also consider some design changes to the 90,000-square-foot (8,400-square-meter) ballroom addition that Trump announced aboard Air Force One on Sunday as he flew back to Washington from a weekend at his Florida home.

He removed a large staircase on the south side of the building and added an uncovered porch to the west side.

America

Baby killed by stray bullet in Brooklyn: A 7-month-old baby in a stroller was killed by a stray bullet Wednesday afternoon when a man on a moped shot at a group of people on a Brooklyn sidewalk, authorities said.

The shooting was believed to be gang-related and the child an unintended victim, police said.



Mamdani

"There are no words that can mend the heartbreak this family is feeling right now," Mayor Zohran Mamdani told reporters in a briefing near the spot where the shooting happened. "A life that had barely begun was taken in an instant."

The shooting unfolded around 1:20 pm after two men sped down a street on a moped and the man on the back of the vehicle fired at least two shots at a street corner where several adults and children were gathered. No other injuries from the shooting were reported by police.

The moped sped off, but crashed into an oncoming car two blocks away, Police Commissioner Jessica Tisch said. The impact threw both men off the vehicle so hard that the moped's passenger lost both his shoes, she said.

One of the men on the moped was hurt in the crash and brought to a hospital, where he was in police custody in connection with an unrelated investigation, police said. The other man fled and was still being sought by police Wednesday afternoon. (AP)

Brief fire causes evacuation at Detroit building: A fire on Wednesday caused the evacuation of a historic building owned by Wayne State University in Detroit.

Video from TV stations showed thick rolling clouds of black smoke near the top of the 14-story Maccabees Building, a nearly century-old building designed by Albert Kahn, along Woodward Avenue, just north of downtown.

The fire on the 11th floor was contained, Wayne State said on social media, and no injuries were reported. Authorities said it likely began in the heating and cooling system.

Wayne State has owned the building for more than 20 years and has offices there, including the Computer Science Department and African American Studies. But it is not generally known as a place for classes.

The Maccabees was the home of early radio and TV studios, including radio broadcasts of "The Lone Ranger," starting in the 1930s, and "The Green Hornet." (AP)

Immigrants seeking asylum ordered to countries they've never been to, but end up stuck in limbo

WASHINGTON, April 2, (AP): The Afghan man had fled the Taliban for refuge in upstate New York when US immigration authorities ordered him deported to Uganda. The Cuban woman was working at a Texas Chick-fil-A when she was arrested after a minor traffic accident and told she was being sent to Ecuador.

There's the Mauritanian man living in Michigan told he'd have to go to Uganda, the Venezuelan mother in Ohio told she'd be sent to Ecuador and the Bolivians, Ecuadorians and so many others across the country ordered sent to Honduras.

They are among more than 13,000 immigrants who were living legally in the US, waiting for rulings on asylum claims, when they suddenly faced so-called third-country deportation orders, destined for countries where most had no ties, according to the nonprofit group Mobile Pathways, which pushes for transparency in immigration proceedings.

Yet few have been deported, even as the White House pushes for ever more immigrant expulsions. Thanks to unexplained changes in U.S. policy, many are now mired in immigration limbo, unable to argue their asylum claims in court and unsure if they'll be shackled and put on a deportation flight to a country they've



A US Immigration and Customs Enforcement flight operates out of King County International Airport-Boeing Field on Aug 23, 2025, in Seattle. (AP)

never seen.

Some are in detention, though it's unclear how many. All have lost permission to work legally, a right most had while pursuing their asylum claims, compounding the worry and dread that has rippled through immigrant communities.

And that may be the point. "This administration's goal is to instill fear into people. That's the pri-

mary thing," said Cassandra Charles, a senior staff attorney with the National Immigration Law Center, which has been fighting the Trump administration's mass deportation agenda. The fear of being deported to an unknown country could, advocates believe, drive migrants to abandon their immigration cases and decide to return to their home countries.

Things may be changing.

In mid-March, top Immigration and Customs Enforcement legal officials told field attorneys with the Department of Homeland Security in an email to stop filing new motions for third-country deportations tied to asylum cases. The email, which has been seen by The Associated Press, did not give a reason. It has not been publicly released, and DHS did not respond to requests to explain if the halt was permanent.

But the earlier deportation cases? Those are continuing.

In 2024, a Guatemalan woman who says she had been held captive and repeatedly sexually assaulted by members of powerful gang arrived with her 4-year-old daughter at the U.S.-Mexico border and asked for asylum. She later discovered she was pregnant with another child, conceived during a rape.

In December, she sat in a San Francisco immigration courtroom and listened as an ICE attorney sought to have her deported.

The ICE attorney didn't ask the judge that she be sent back to Guatemala. Instead, the attorney said, the woman from the Indigenous Guatemalan highlands would go to one of three countries: Ecuador, Honduras or across the globe to Uganda.

Until that moment, she'd never heard of Ecuador or Uganda.

US-Europe rift widens as Trump lashes out at NATO allies over Mideast war

WASHINGTON, April 2, (AP): US President Donald Trump has been fuming about NATO, musing about leaving the alliance, ratcheting up his criticism of European leaders and exposing a wider rift in the trans-Atlantic alliance - this time over the Iran war.

"NATO treated us very badly, and you have to remember it because they'll be treating us badly again if we ever need them," Trump said Wednesday at a private White House lunch for the upcoming Easter holiday that was posted online by a Business Insider reporter.

The president also suggested in an interview to The Telegraph newspaper in the UK, published Wednesday, that he could potentially try to leave the alliance.

Yet in his televised Wednesday evening address to the American people about the Iran war, Trump chose not to mention NATO by name, suggesting only that countries that depend on oil flowing through the Strait of Hormuz "must grab it and cherish it" because the US would not.

Trump's tension over NATO reflects the potentially dangerous consequences of breaking up the alliance, the limits on his own power to do so and the careful mending of the relationship performed by fellow world leaders. But one certainly is that Trump's displeasure with NATO appears to be a feature of his presidency, rather than an issue that can be easily settled.

Congress passed legislation in 2023 that would prevent any president from pulling out of NATO without its approval. The Trump administration, during his first term, had insisted the president had such authority on his own. It's unclear whether Trump would challenge in any way the new law, which is the first of its kind and with the NATO provision specifically championed at the time by Trump's secretary of state, Marco Rubio, who was a Florida senator at the time.

There are efforts under way to re-inforce America's relationship with NATO, with its secretary-general, Mark Rutte, scheduled to visit Washington next week. The visit by Rutte was confirmed by a White House official who was not authorized to comment on the yet to be formally announced visit and spoke on the condition of anonymity.

UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer said his government was "fully committed to NATO" and called it "the single most effective military alliance the world has ever seen."

Before a Trump speech later Wednesday, US Sen Mitch McConnell, a Kentucky Republican, and Sen Chris Coons, a Delaware Democrat,



People watch a TV screen showing a live broadcast of US President Donald Trump speech at the Seoul Railway Station in South Korea on April 2. (AP)



NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte speaks during the NATO Secretary General's Annual Report for 2025 at NATO headquarters in Brussels on March 26. (AP)

said in a joint statement that "NATO is the most successful military alliance in history" and stressed that the Senate "will continue to support the alliance for the peace and protection it provides" the United States, Europe and the world.

Many European leaders have felt political pressure over the war, which faces opposition in their countries and has sent petroleum prices soaring as Iran has effectively shut the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow waterway between Iran and Oman through which about one-fifth of the world's oil passes.

The U.K. is working on plans that could help assuage Trump, and Starmer said military planners will work on a postwar security plan for the Strait. On Thursday, British Foreign Sec-

retary Yvette Cooper will host a virtual meeting of 35 countries that have signed up to help ensure security for shipping in the Strait - after the fighting ends.

Iulia-Sabina Joja, a senior fellow at the Middle East Institute, alluded to Trump's exhortation Tuesday for allies to "go get your own oil" in a social media post insisting it wasn't America's job to secure the Strait.

"The Europeans are not keen to go into an active warfare situation, to so-called 'get' their energy out of the Strait," said Joja, a former deputy project manager at NATO Allied Command Transformation in Virginia.

As energy prices have spiked, Trump has called NATO allies "cowards" for not sending their military ships to the Strait.



In this photo provided by Mediterranean Saving Humans, an Italian Coast Guard rescue boat at dock in the southern Italian island of Lampedusa, disembarks survivors and bodies rescued from a dinghy filled with migrants at about 80 nautical miles from the island of Lampedusa, Italy on April 1. (AP)

Italy finds 19 migrants dead from dinghy off Lampedusa

The Italian coast guard found 19 bodies and rescued 58 people after intercepting a dinghy filled with migrants that was in distress about 80 nautical miles from the southern Italian island of Lampedusa, a coast guard spokesperson said.

The rescue took place Tuesday night with the Italian coast guard

operating in the Libyan search and rescue zone during rough weather conditions, said spokesperson Roberto D'Arrigo on Wednesday.

"We were the only ones able to intervene, as there were no other ships or rescue teams in the area. Sea conditions were pretty extreme, with waves of more than 6-7 meters (20-23 feet)," he said.

D'Arrigo said the migrants had probably departed from Libya. The victims likely died of hypothermia but the cause of the deaths still needs to be verified.

The survivors were brought to Lampedusa after a 10-hour trip and are in the care of local health services, the coast guard said. (AP)

Russia claims full control of Ukraine's Luhansk region but Kyiv denies it

KYIV, April 2, (AP): Russia's armed forces have taken control of the entire Luhansk region of Ukraine, the Russian Defense Ministry claimed Wednesday, but a Kyiv military official denied the claim as Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy prepared for talks with US envoys trying to mediate an end to Moscow's invasion.

"Units of the Group of Forces West have completed the liberation of the Luhansk People's Republic," the Russian Defense Ministry said in a statement.

However, the spokesperson for Ukraine's Joint Forces grouping, Viktor Trehubov, said there were no changes to report in that region.

"Unfortunately, we only hold small patches there (in Luhansk), but those positions have been held by 3rd brigade for a long time," Trehubov told The Associated Press by phone.

Russian claims of battlefield progress have in the past shown discrep-



In this photo provided by the Ukrainian Emergency Services on April 1 rescue workers put out a fire in a residential building damaged in a Russian strike in Lutsk, Ukraine. (AP)

ancies. The Moscow-appointed head of Luhansk announced its full capture

last June. Ukrainian officials have in the past said that Moscow makes false claims of advances to persuade U.S. negotiators that a Russian victory in Ukraine is inevitable.

US-led diplomatic efforts over the past year to stop the fighting, now in its fifth year, have so far failed to break the deadlock on key sticking points, and Washington's attentions are currently focused on the Iran war.

Zelenskyy said he would hold a video call later Wednesday with US President Donald Trump's envoys Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner to discuss the possibility of further trilateral negotiations.

Russia illegally annexed four eastern regions of Ukraine - Luhansk as well as Donetsk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia - in September 2022, but it never fully controlled them.

Russian President Vladimir Putin said last October that Ukrainian forces still held 0.13% of Luhansk.

Luxon reshuffles cabinet

NZ and Cook Islands sign defense pact

WELLINGTON, New Zealand, April 2, (Agencies): New Zealand and the Cook Islands have signed a new defense and security declaration in the Cook Islands' Rarotonga, a New Zealand government statement said Thursday.

"This declaration outlines a set of important political commitments that the Cook Islands and New Zealand have made to one another which provide clarity on key aspects of our special constitutional relationship," New Zealand Foreign Minister Winston Peters was quoted as saying.

"We look forward now to further enhancing the broad range of cooperation between New Zealand and the Cook Islands, as well as navigating together the complex strategic environment and the many shared challenges we face," Peters said.

Following the signing of the declaration, New Zealand will also restore financial support to the Cook Islands that has been paused over the past two years, said the minister, who started his one-day visit to Rarotonga on Wednesday.

The fraught diplomatic standoff that prompted Wellington to pause millions of dollars in aid to Avarua was hardly a clash of geopolitical heavyweights: New Zealand has a population of 5 million, while Cook Islands has 15,000 people.



Cook Islands Prime Minister, and outgoing Chair of the Pacific Islands Forum, Mark Brown, speaks at the opening of the annual Pacific Islands Forum leaders meeting in Nuku'alofa, Tonga on Aug 26, 2024. (AP)

Also:

WELLINGTON: New Zealand Prime Minister **Christopher Luxon** reshuffled his cabinet on Thursday ahead of the Nov. 7 general election.

The reshuffle brings new talent to tackle economic challenges from the Middle East conflicts and global fuel disruptions, Luxon said in a state-

ment.

"The past few weeks have underlined how important energy security is, and as such, I will be elevating the energy portfolio to senior minister Simeon Brown," Luxon said.

The changes also bring Chris Penk into the cabinet as the defense minister. Enditem

Asia

Myanmar to elect president on April 3: Myanmar's Union Parliament announced on Thursday that it will elect the country's president on Friday, with three vice presidents having passed the scrutiny of presidential candidate qualifications.

The vice presidents are Min Aung Hlaing, Nan Ni Ni Aye, and U Nyo Saw.

The elected representatives of Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) and Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) on Tuesday elected Min Aung Hlaing and Nan Ni Ni Aye as vice presidents, respectively. U Nyo Saw was elected as a vice president by the group of military representatives from both houses of Myanmar's Union Parliament later that day.

The presidential electoral college, composed of all representatives of the Union Parliament, will elect the president from among the three vice presidents. (Xinhua)



U Nyo Saw

China coal mine accident kills 4: Four people trapped in a coal mine accident in north China's Shanxi Province were confirmed dead by local authorities on early Thursday.

The accident happened in Xingxian County of Shanxi at 9:15 pm Wednesday when roof collapsed in the coal mine, trapping four people. Their bodies were recovered as of 2:46 am Thursday. (Xinhua)

Cyberscam suspect extradited to China: A businessman with alleged links to a multi-billion dollar online scam operation has been extradited from Cambodia to China, according to state agencies.

Li Xiong, a Chinese-Cambodian citizen who is a former

chairman of the Huione Group, was arrested in Cambodia by a joint task force following an investigation over several months, according to the Interior Ministry.

Li is suspected of involvement in offenses including operating gambling dens, fraud, unlawful business operations and concealing and disguising the proceeds of crime, China's state news agency Xinhua reported, citing Beijing's Ministry of Public Security.

He is believed to be a high-ranking member of a criminal syndicate led by Chen Zhi, the founder of business and banking conglomerate Prince Holding Group, who is accused of running an online scam operation. Chen was extradited in January. Both men had their Cambodian national status canceled before being sent to China. Their legitimate enterprises have denied any wrongdoing.

US prosecutors in October unveiled conspiracy charges against Chen, alleging he masterminded a multinational fraud network using his other businesses to launder its profits. Chen had claimed he received \$30 million a day from the scams, according to the U.S. indictment.

Cybercrime has flourished in Southeast Asia in recent years, particularly in Cambodia and Myanmar, with illegal operations making huge profits from victims around the world, according to United Nations experts and other analysts.

The illicit industry is closely involved in human trafficking, with foreign nationals employed to run romance and cryptocurrency scams, often after being recruited with false job offers and then forced to work in conditions of near-slavery.

The Huione Group has been accused by the US Treasury Department of laundering billions of dollars for transnational criminal organizations, including North Korean hackers and Southeast Asian scam networks. It designated Huione a "primary money-laundering concern," restricting any connections to the American financial system and prohibiting U.S. financial institutions from handling its business.

The group's digital banking arm, Huione Pay, had its license revoked by the National Bank of Cambodia due to noncompliance and its role in an "illicit online marketplace" that facilitated billions in criminal transactions." (AP)

Mount Dukono erupts again

Earthquake off Indonesia topples buildings, kills 1 and sets off small tsunami

MANADO, Indonesia, April 2, (Agencies): An undersea magnitude 7.4 earthquake toppled buildings in parts of northern Indonesia, sent people fleeing from their homes, killed at least one person and generated a small tsunami Thursday.

Strong shaking lasting 10 to 20 seconds was felt in Bitung in North Sulawesi province as well as in Ternate city in neighboring North Maluku province, according to the Disaster Management Agency. The provinces border the Molucca Sea, where the quake was centered.

Initial assessments showed light to severe damage in parts of Ternate, including a church and two houses. In Bitung, damage assessments were still underway, the agency said.

"We had just woken up and suddenly the earthquake hit ... we all ran out of the house," Bitung resident Marten Mandagi said. "The shaking was very strong."

Indonesia's Search and Rescue Agency reported a 70-year-old woman

died in a building collapse in North Sulawesi's Manado city and another resident was injured. At least three injured people were hospitalized in Ternate.

Videos released by the rescue agency showed damaged structures and flattened houses, while television stations broadcast scenes of people rushing outside and gathering in streets to avoid the risk of collapsing buildings.

Dozens of aftershocks followed, including one of 6.2 magnitude. Authorities are continuing to gather information on damage and possible victims from multiple areas, particularly remote villages, as they work to assess the scope of the disaster.

Tsunami waves up to 75 centimeters (30 inches) above normal tides were recorded at several monitoring stations around the Molucca Sea coast. Indonesia's meteorological agency lifted its tsunami warning hours after the quake, and the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology said



Police officers inspect a damaged building following an earthquake in Manado, North Sulawesi, Indonesia on April 2. (AP)

there was no destructive threat to the country, which is north of the quake's epicenter.

Indonesia, a vast archipelago of

more than 280 million people, sits on major seismic faults and is frequently hit by earthquakes and volcanic eruptions.

Also:

JAKARTA: Mount Dukono in North Halmahera, Indonesia's North Maluku province, erupted again on Thursday at 11:22 local time, sending a thick white-to-gray ash column up to 1,500 meters above the peak, or about 2,587 meters above sea level, the Center for Volcanology and Geological Hazard Mitigation reported.

Mount Dukono previously erupted on Tuesday morning, sending a column of volcanic ash up to 900 meters above its peak.

JAKARTA: A fire broke out on Wednesday night at a bulk LPG filling station in Cimuning, Bekasi City, West Java Province, Indonesia, injuring 12 people, local authorities said on Thursday.

The incident occurred at around 21:30 local time at a facility in the Mustikajaya district. Firefighters from multiple stations, assisted by local residents, managed to bring the blaze un-

der control after several hours.

All victims sustained burn injuries and were receiving intensive medical care.

Authorities are continuing to collect data on the victims and have launched an investigation into the cause of the fire.

JAKARTA: Indonesia has condemned attacks on its peacekeepers in Lebanon and called on the United Nations to take immediate steps to protect personnel, according to a press release from the country's Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Wednesday.

The release said Indonesia's Permanent Representative to the UN Umar Hadi expressed "deep sorrow, anger, and frustration" during an emergency UN Security Council session over the March 29-30 attacks that killed three Indonesian UNIFIL peacekeepers and injured five others.

UNHCR says clashes displace more than 50,000 in SW Somalia

MOGADISHU, April 2, (Agencies): Political clashes in Somalia's Southwest State have displaced more than 50,000 people over the past two weeks, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said Wednesday.

The UNHCR said escalating political tensions and confrontations between the Somali government and the Southwest State authorities have significantly increased insecurity in Baidoa city in the state, which hosts international peacekeepers and humanitarian agencies.

"Although large-scale armed clashes did not occur, following the withdrawal of state forces and a largely peaceful takeover, prolonged tension and the fear of imminent fighting triggered pre-emptive mass displacement," the UNHCR said in its latest flash update.

The alert comes after Somali National Army (SNA) troops took control of Baidoa on Monday, prompting the regional leader to resign days after the local administration announced it was cutting ties with the central government. The SNA troops then took full control of the city.

The UNHCR said public services were severely disrupted, with schools, health centers and local businesses



Armed al-Shabab fighters ride on pickup trucks as they prepare to travel into the city, just outside the capital Mogadishu, in Somalia on Dec 8, 2008. (AP)

temporarily closed, limiting access to essential services and livelihoods.

"Three people were killed and five were injured, including women and children among the casualties. The violence has forced families to flee, exposing them to heightened protection risks," the UN agency said.

It added that displaced populations

are now living in overcrowded conditions with inadequate shelter, increasing their exposure to exploitation, abuse and gender-based violence.

According to the UNHCR, many of those displaced have lost access to essential services and livelihoods. "The trauma of the incident, combined with ongoing insecurity and uncertainty, has led to significant psychological distress, particularly among children and other at-risk groups," the agency added.

Also:

BUJUMBURA, Burundi: A massive fire that erupted at a storage unit inside a military camp in Burundi overnight set off explosives that triggered several blasts and killed 13 people, the army said Wednesday.

The inferno on Tuesday night also left at least 57 people injured. Army spokesperson **Gaspard Baratuza** said the fire was caused by a short-circuit in the storage unit. Three soldiers were among those injured, he said. It wasn't clear if all the fatalities were civilians.

Residents near the camp, located in Musaga area on the outskirts of the commercial hub of Bujumbura, the largest city in the East African country, had fled in panic.



Forensics inspect the scene of a fatal, multiple vehicle accident in Cogua, Colombia on April 1. (AP)

Road accident in Colombia kills 2 and injures 19

A pile-up at a toll booth on a busy highway in central Colombia on Wednesday morning killed at least two people and injured 19, local authorities said. Witnesses described several explosions while images of the collision showed vehicles engulfed in flames.

The crash happened when a milk truck lost control of its brakes and collided with six other vehicles and a motorcycle that were at a toll booth on a road in the

Cundinamarca region, 50 kilometers (31 miles) north of the capital, Bogota, Gov. Emilio Rey said on X.

Rey said the injured are being treated in nearby hospitals, but did not provide details on their conditions.

Images broadcast by Colombian media showed people crying while helping or rescuing those who were trapped, vehicles in flames and destroyed. (AP)

Mexico appoints Velasco as new foreign minister at critical moment for US ties

MEXICO CITY, April 2, (AP): Mexico's president on Wednesday designated Roberto Velasco, the foreign ministry's subsecretary for North America and a leading expert in bilateral relations with the US, as the country's new foreign minister during a critical time for Mexico-U.S. relations.

The previous minister, Juan Ramón de la Fuente, a 74-year-old psychiatrist who has been a key member of Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum's administration, requested to step down for health reasons, the president's office announced Wednesday on social platform X.

Velasco, a 38-year-old lawyer with a master's degree in Public Policy from the University of Chicago, has been involved in Mexico's foreign relations with the US and Canada for six years, first as North America general director and then as subsecretary. He stepped in for De la Fuente for a few weeks after a surgery last year. His appointment must be ratified by the Senate.

He is considered one of the foremost experts on the technical intricacies of bilateral relations during the end of US President Donald Trump's



US Secretary of State Marco Rubio greets Mexican Foreign Secretary Juan Ramon de la Fuente, Mexican Foreign Ministry Unit Chief for North America Roberto Velasco, and US Ambassador Ronald Johnson, (left), at Felipe Angeles International Airport in Zumpango, on the outskirts of Mexico City on Sept 2, 2025. (AP)

first administration and in this second term. He has led numerous bilateral and trilateral negotiations on security, migration, the economy, the border and the management of shared waters.

When Trump returned to power, Velasco became De la Fuente's right-

hand man during a period of turbulent relations between the two countries, which are now at one of their most critical points. It remains to be seen whether the young official has the necessary political clout at such a difficult time.

United States lifts sanctions on Venezuela's acting Prez Rodríguez

WASHINGTON, April 2, (AP): The US on Wednesday lifted sanctions on Venezuela's acting President Delcy Rodríguez, according to an Office of Foreign Assets Control entry on the Treasury Department website.

The newly announced sanctions relief represents a strong signal that the US recognizes Rodríguez as a legitimate authority in Venezuela ever since the US military captured Rodríguez's predecessor, Nicolás Maduro, and his wife on Jan. 3 in Venezuela's capital, Caracas.

The pair have since been taken to New York to face drug trafficking charges and both have pleaded not guilty.

The move allows Rodríguez to more freely work with US companies and investors. Without explicitly mentioning the sanctions targeting her, Rodríguez, in a statement, expressed hope for U.S.-Venezuela relations.

"We value President Donald Trump's decision as a step toward normalizing and strengthening relations between our countries," she said on her Telegram channel after the Treasury's announcement. "We trust that this progress will allow for the lifting of



Venezuela's acting President Delcy Rodríguez speaks next to the World Baseball Classic trophy a day after her team's victory over the United States in the championship match, at Miraflores presidential palace in Caracas, Venezuela on March 18. (AP)

current sanctions against our country, enabling us to build and guarantee an effective bilateral cooperation agenda for the benefit of our people."

Venezuela's government did not immediately respond to a request for

comment. Rodríguez and her brother Jorge Rodríguez were hit with US sanctions during Trump's first term for their role in allegedly undermining Venezuelan democracy.

Oil plummets \$12.07 Wed to \$108.55 pb

KUWAIT CITY, April 2, (KUNA): Kuwait crude oil plummeted USD 12.07 during Wednesday trading to reach USD 108.55 per barrel compared with USD 120.62 pb the day before, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) said Thursday. Brent futures dropped USD 2.81 to USD 101.16 pb and West Texas Intermediate lost USD 1.26 to USD 100.12 pb.

Business

Backed by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and supported by the European Union

NBK-Egypt secures \$50 mln facility to finance MSMEs in Egypt with a focus on youth entrepreneurs

KUWAIT CITY, April 2: National Bank of Kuwait - Egypt has secured a US\$ 50 million financing package from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), supported by the European Union (EU), to expand access to finance for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) and advance youth entrepreneurs across Egypt.

The new package comprises a US\$30 million loan to be on-lent by NBK - Egypt to local private MSMEs, alongside a further US\$20 million facility under the EBRD Youth in Business Programme, supported by the EU under the Egypt Micro and Small Financial Inclusion programme. This second tranche will be on-lent to local private MSMEs led or majority owned by entrepreneurs under the age of 35, with a focus on rural areas and supporting women-led enterprises.

The EBRD's Youth in Business loan component will be complemented by a cash incentive of up to 10 per cent for eligible sub-borrowers provided by the EU under its Egypt Micro and Small Financial Inclusion programme. It will also be accompanied by a first-loss risk cover, funded by the EBRD, a comprehensive technical cooperation package to assist NBK Egypt with programme implementation, marketing and general awareness-raising, funded by the EBRD SEMED Multi-Donor Account (SEMED MDA), as well as capacity building for sub-borrowers, provided through EBRD's Advice for Small Businesses (ASB).

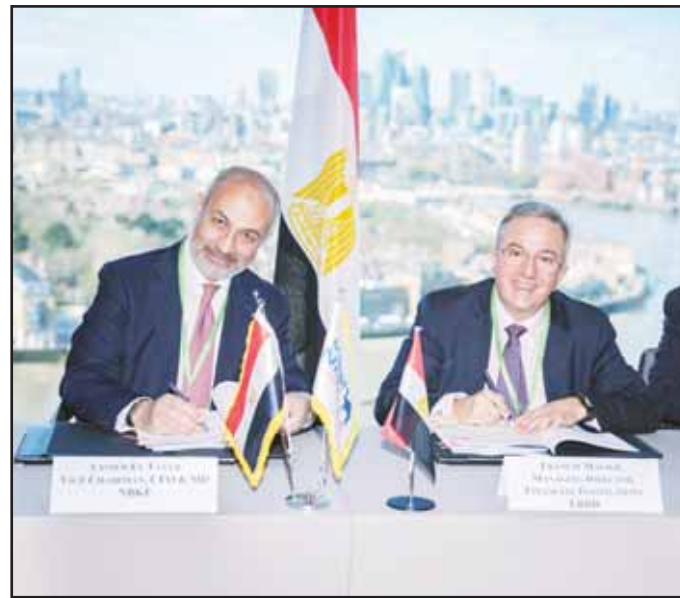
This marks the second SME and Youth in Business engagement between the EBRD and NBK Egypt, following the successful financing package signed between the two institutions in 2022.

The EBRD's Youth in Business programme enables young entrepreneurs to access critically needed financing and technical assistance to grow their small businesses via dedicated credit lines on-lent by banks and microfinance institutions. The credit lines are complemented by technical assistance for partner banks to strengthen their lending capacity.

Commenting on the signing, EBRD's Managing Director for Financial Institu-



NBK - Egypt, EBRD expand partnership with \$50 mln loan for (MSMEs) and youth-led firms.



Yasser El-Tayeb: The signing of this new financing package builds on the longstanding and fruitful partnership between NBK-Egypt and the EBRD since 2015

Francis Malige: This package underscores our commitment to fostering a more inclusive private sector in Egypt

has been a partner of the EBRD since 2015, when the Bank provided an SME loan and a trade finance facility.

The loans were signed as part of EBRD third edition of its flagship high-level conference "Pathways to Paris 2026", building on the success of our previous events in Vienna (2023) and Antalya (2024). The event was attended by several high-level representatives from financial institutions, central banks, regulators, investors, capital markets and other key stakeholders

to foster the transition to a low-carbon and climate-resilient future across the EBRD regions.

Egypt is a founding member of the EBRD, which has invested more than €14.3 billion in the country through 222 projects since it began operating there in 2012.

local SMEs, the backbone of the Egyptian economy. Our Youth in Business line will also support the Egyptian economy by providing financing to youth-led businesses, which remain highly underserved. With thanks to the EU, this package underscores our shared commitment to advancing a more inclusive private sector in the region".

NBK Egypt's Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Yasser El Tayeb said: "We are pleased to further strengthen our partnership with the EBRD through the signing of this new financing package, building on the success of our 2022 collaboration."

This financing will enable us to expand our financial solutions to support local businesses and stimulate broader economic activity, in line with National Bank of Kuwait's ambitions for Egypt and its development priorities. The Youth in Business loan will also strengthen our ability to support youth-led MSMEs by enhancing their access to finance. We would like to express our sincere appreciation to the EBRD for its continued support and to the European Union for its valuable contribution."

NBK Egypt is an Egyptian joint-stock company and a subsidiary of the NBK Group. It has been a partner of the EBRD since 2015, when the Bank provided an SME loan and a trade finance facility.

4 India routes back on network

Kuwait Airways restarts India flights from April 5

KUWAIT CITY, April 2 (KUNA): Kuwait Airways announced Thursday the resumption of four destinations in India via Dammam International Airport in Saudi Arabia, including Mumbai, Delhi, Ahmedabad and Kochi, starting from April 5.

Acting Chief Executive Officer Abdulwahab Al-Shatti said in a statement to KUNA that flights to and from Ahmedabad will operate once weekly on Sundays starting April 5, marking the first of the resumed services.

He added that flights to and from Kochi will operate twice weekly on Mondays and Wednesdays starting April 6, while Delhi flights begin April 7 weekly, and Mumbai flights commence weekly on Fridays from April 10.

Al-Shatti noted that resuming these destinations comes as part of routes recently launched via Dammam, including London, Cairo, Istanbul, Lahore and Amman, bringing the total number of Kuwait Airways destinations currently operated to nine.

He affirmed that the national carrier

continues expanding its network by adding new destinations under current conditions while proceeding with operational plans efficiently to ensure smooth travel movement and meet growing passenger demand without delays.

Al-Shatti pointed out that the airline has introduced a visa application service for Saudi Arabia for residents, provided they hold prior bookings on Kuwait Airways flights, facilitating smoother travel procedures for passengers departing through Dammam airport.

He stressed that the company is working closely with relevant authorities inside and outside Kuwait to secure optimal operational solutions, emphasizing that the safety and security of passengers and flight crews remain the airline's highest priority.

He also noted that Kuwait Airways will offer exclusive promotions to passengers in cooperation with Al-Khiraan Mall, allowing shopping before departure at competitive prices, with bookings available via hotline 171, WhatsApp 009651802050, or sales offices.

Jazeera Airways adds two India routes from April 15

KUWAIT CITY, April 2, (KUNA): Jazeera Airways announced Thursday the launch of two new destinations in India, namely Goa and Madurai, via King Fahd International Airport in Dammam, Saudi Arabia, starting April 15.

Jazeera Airways Chief Executive Officer Barathan Pasupathi told KUNA that flights to and from Goa will operate twice weekly on Wednesdays and Fridays beginning April 15, while flights to and from Madurai will operate twice weekly on Thursdays and Saturdays starting April 16.

Pasupathi added that the launch of flights to Goa and Madurai marks a new step in expanding Jazeera Airways' network in India, within the framework of the "Vande Bharat" initiative, which constitutes a key pillar of the company's operations under the current circumstances.

He explained that the new routes will be operated in a manner ensuring continuity of travel and cargo movement despite operational challenges, noting the integrated air and

land corridor provides reliable efficient alternative for passengers and essential shipments to Kuwait.

Moreover, Pasupathi pointed out that Jazeera Airways operations reflect demand levels and commitment to maintaining vital connectivity by enhancing air links in India compared to pre-crisis levels, highlighting importance of enabling travel during this current stage.

He then affirmed that the company continues strengthening its role in connecting communities, facilitating workforce mobility, and supporting trade and cargo flows between both countries, noting India remains a key strategic market supported by expatriates and bilateral ties.

He added that Jazeera Airways continues expanding its network under complex evolving operational conditions, stressing focus on providing reliable affordable services while ensuring continuity of movement for individuals, communities, and maintaining all vital international connections.

Bursa Kuwait ends lower

KUWAIT CITY, April 2, (KUNA): Bursa Kuwait closed Thursday's trading session lower, with the general market index slipping 15.48 points, or 0.18 percent, to end at 8,468.44 points.

Trading activity saw 230.5 million shares change hands through 19,830 cash transactions, with a total turnover of KD 72.3 million (about USD 221.2 million).

The Main Market Index dropped 15.95 points, or 0.21 percent, to 7,714.44 points, as 116.4 million shares were traded in 8,058 deals worth KD 18.4 million (approx-

mately USD 56.3 million).

Similarly, the Premier Market Index declined by 16.18 points, or 0.18 percent, to close at 9,068.35 points, recording 114 million shares traded across 11,772 transactions valued at KD 53.8 million (around USD 164.6 million).

The Main 50 Index also edged down 13.15 points, or 0.16 percent, finishing at 8,057.83 points, with trading volume reaching 109.2 million shares through 6,915 transactions worth KD 16.9 million (about USD 51.7 million).

tions, Francis Malige, said: "This new financing package marks another important milestone in our long-standing partnership with NBK Egypt to keep supporting

CBK backs cloud security training

Kuwait rolls out 'Kafa'a' cybersecurity initiative

KUWAIT CITY, April 2: Governor of the Central Bank of Kuwait and Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Kuwait Institute of Banking Studies (KIBS) Basel Al-Haroun announced the launch of the first cohort of the "Advanced Cybersecurity Leaders" program, part of the "Kafa'a" (Competency) initiative launched by the Central Bank in cooperation with Kuwaiti banks and managed by the institute, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

In a press statement issued on Wednesday, Al-Haroun explained that the program aims to develop national talent and expertise in the banking sector and the national economy, enhance technical capabilities in cybersecurity, and meet the evolving needs of the banking sector. It aligns with the Central Bank's strategic priorities of developing and strengthening technical capabilities in cloud infrastructure security to

enhance resilience against the risks posed by the rapid evolution of modern technologies used in information systems.

The high-level program is specifically designed for experienced Kuwaiti cybersecurity professionals and provides participants with advanced practical training in cloud computing security, threat detection, and security engineering, enabling them to earn internationally recognized GIAC certifications.

It also aims to equip participants with the expertise needed to defend against complex cyber threats, comply with regulatory requirements, and strengthen the security posture of the banking sector. It can address the critical shortage of cybersecurity skills in the banking sector, support compliance with evolving regulatory and industry standards, and prepare specialized personnel for

senior leadership positions in cybersecurity.

The governor went on to explain that the "Advanced Cybersecurity Leaders" program will be delivered across several specialized advanced-level training tracks. These tracks include a cloud security track, which will consist of eight weeks of training in cooperation with the SANS Institute, one of the world's leading cybersecurity training institutions that specializes in professional training and accredited certifications in the field.

He emphasized that the selection criteria for applicants were based on objective standards, including tests and personal interviews, adding that those interested in applying can view the program details and submit their applications from Wednesday, April 1 to Thursday, April 30 through the "Kafa'a" initiative website.

Iraq's oil hub slows to a crawl as Strait of Hormuz shutdown strangles exports

BASRA, April 2, (AP): Iraqi oil fields once alive with the buzz of workers are nearly deserted. Ports that pulsed with the churn of cargo have fallen still, the din of commerce replaced by the soft rhythm of waves.

A month after the war in Iran started, workers at ports and oil fields in the province of Basra, where almost all of Iraq's crude is produced and exported, have grown accustomed to rockets streaking across the sky, aimed at U.S. air bases and other strategic facilities.

The war, which began with U.S.-Israeli strikes, is dealing a heavy blow to Iraq's economy. Iraq relies on oil revenues for roughly 90% of its budget, and most of its oil is exported through the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow mouth of the Persian Gulf where Iran has effectively stopped cargo traffic during the conflict. The war also has led to a sharp reduction in the volume of imported goods reaching southern Iraq's ports, while attacks have halted traffic at the border it shares with Iran.

Unlike other countries in the Middle East touched by the war, Iraq hosts both entrenched Iran-aligned forces and significant U.S. interests, leaving it exposed to attacks from both sides. Since the war started, oil production in southern Iraq, where Basra is located, has fallen by more than 70% and the volume of imported goods reaching the country's ports has been cut in half. Drone and missile attacks have targeted American companies and military bases. Iran's allied Iraqi militias also have struck oil fields and energy infrastructure. Many foreign workers have left.

The Iraqi government should have enough funds to get through mid-May without new oil sales, according to experts, but then it will have to borrow money.

"After that, the government would resort to issuing bonds," said Ahmed Tabagchali, an expert in Iraq's economy. "But not without consequences."

Across southern Iraq, the closure of the Strait of Hormuz has prompted oil fields to scale back production and focus on domestic needs, while oil prices around the globe have risen. Basra's Zubair oil field, once producing around 400,000 barrels per day, has seen output drop to roughly 250,000, officials said.

Iran has offered assurances that Iraqi crude can safely transit the strait, said Bassem Abdul Karim, the head of the state-run Basra Oil Company, which oversees production in the province. However, because Iraq lacks its own tanker fleet and depends on chartered vessels, shipments ultimately hinge on whether tanker owners are willing to accept the heightened risks of making the journey. Most are not.

At a degassing station in Zubair, where crude is processed, production has also slowed dramatically. "It's quiet now because of the reductions," said chief engineer Ammar Hashim. "Of course we are worried."

The downturn in Zubair reflects a broader decline in Basra. Output has dropped from 3.1 million barrels per day to roughly 900,000 across the province, according to Abdul Karim.

"Exports are currently completely halted. At the moment, we are considering alternative loading areas, but none are fully operational," he told The Associated Press.



Men work on the maintenance of a pipe at a degassing station in Zubair oil field, whose operations have been reduced due to the Mideast war triggered by the U.S. and Israeli attacks on Iran, near Basra, Iraq, Saturday, March 28, 2026. (AP)

That morning, a drone crashed in the Majnoon oil field north of Basra without detonating. A security official said it's an increasingly common occurrence, adding that the drone was likely headed toward U.S. bases in Kuwait. Production at the field has been suspended due to the frequency of these events. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not permitted to speak to news media.

Hundreds of employees from American, British, Italian, French and other international oil companies have left Iraq due to the war. The departures accelerated after a March 6 drone strike hit the Burjisiya complex in Basra, a key logistics hub for Iraq's oil industry used by numerous companies. The attack targeted U.S. oil services company KBR, striking its chemical storage facility.

Another drone struck the British-Petroleum operated Rumaila oil field, prompting some foreign workers there to leave, said Abdul Karim. The field is still operating, he said. On Wednesday, multiple drones attacked a fuel warehouse linked to BP in northern Iraq.

Efforts to reroute Iraq's oil face major constraints: The country doesn't have the capacity to boost exports via its northern pipeline, and trucking through Jordan and Syria is costly and inefficient, said Abdul Karim.

Umm Qasr, Iraq's primary deep-water port, was once so noisy with imported cargo that it could give you a headache, workers there said.

Now, with the Strait of Hormuz closed, large mother ships bringing shipments to Iraq can no longer get to the port. Instead, they dock in the United Arab Emirates, where the cargo is carried by trucks and then smaller ships to get to Umm Qasr, a costly workaround.

The port's jetties are running well below their for-

mer capacity, with volumes halved by the war, according to port director Mohammed Tahir Fadhil.

When the AP visited, just one cargo ship from the U.A.E. had docked.

The threat to shipping lanes escalated after Iran destroyed two tankers on March 11 in Iraqi waters, the Marshall Islands-flagged Safesha Vishnu and the Malta-flagged Zefyros.

"Today, our only gateway for goods is the United Arab Emirates," said Farhan Fartousi, director of the Iraqi Ports Company.

On Sunday morning, Haidar Abdul-Samad, deputy director of Basra's Shalamcha border crossing with Iran, was on the phone with an Iranian official, complaining about electricity cuts that had halted trade, urging a quick resolution. The power cuts followed an airstrike that hit the Iranian side of the crossing.

Such disruptions, local officials say, have become routine.

Before the war, the crossing saw constant movement, reflecting strong familial and commercial ties between Iraqis and Iraqis in the area. It is also a key transit point for traders and pilgrims heading to Shiite holy sites in central Iraq.

That morning, trucks were backed up for miles. "Priority is given to food supplies to prevent price increases," Abdul-Samad said. "Passenger movement is not at the same level as before; activity has declined due to the war in Iran."

Once electricity was restored, 30-year-old Iranian trader Atefa Al-Fatlawi arrived with her husband and young son. She buys goods at lower prices in Basra to sell back home.

"We are scared because of the bombings," she said. "Shalamcha was targeted. Today, there were no transport vehicles at the garage because of the attack."

BUSINESS

Russia pushes alternative corridors

Putin flags Strait of Hormuz risks to global energy trade

MOSCOW, April 2, (KUNA): Russian President Vladimir Putin has said that the Strait of Hormuz is one of the most important passages for transporting energy resources, stressing that any disruptions there directly affect international trade, oil, and gas prices.

This came during an international transport and logistics forum in Saint Petersburg, in which Putin confirmed that the current geopolitical situation imposes increasing challenges on the stability of energy markets and global supply chains, stated the Kremlin.

He expressed Russia's readiness to contribute to the international transport and logistics system, pointing out that his country possesses

advanced logistical capabilities that can help enhance the diversification of global trade routes.

Putin mentioned that transport and logistics sectors constitute a fundamental pillar of the global economy, and that Russia is continuing to work on developing transportation and infrastructure projects, including international corridors, railways, and ports, to strengthen its position as a 'global logistics hub.'

The forum is being held within Moscow's strategy to strengthen its position as a 'key hub' in global trade, as the forum brings together senior government officials, transport and logistics company leaders, and investors to discuss the future of this vital sector.

Why US gas prices change so fast?

DES MOINES, April 2, (AP): The near-daily changes in U.S. gas prices are dizzying for drivers, who are left feeling frustrated and cash-strapped by the highest fuel costs since 2022.

With the Iran war pushing up prices worldwide, the U.S. average for a gallon of gas topped \$4 on Tuesday, according to AAA.

Prices can change from one day to the next or from one nearby station to another, forcing drivers in the U.S. to game out the right moment to fill up or hunt for cheaper prices.

Experts say differences in price aren't typically decided by any individual gas retailer, and most of them aren't pocketing the extra pennies when prices rise. The uncertainty at the pump is trickling down from a massive, volatile oil and gas market that's making it hard for gas stations to keep up.

Lonnie McQuirter, director of operations at 36 Lyn Refuel Station in south Minneapolis, said his margins have gotten much tighter. About a mile (1.6 kilometers) off Interstate 35, the neighborhood convenience store posted \$3.399 a gallon for regular gas on Wednesday, which is about 18 cents lower than the metro average, according to AAA.

"We price based on what we're able to buy fuel at, and how well we can operate," McQuirter said. He declined to speculate about his competitors, saying, "They've got different economics."

Wholesale fuel prices, which shift multiple times a day, are the main reason McQuirter said he's charging more than a month ago. He's also facing higher credit card fees and rising costs to maintain pumps.

In times like these, with consumers "screaming for help," McQuirter said small operators like him act more on emotion than greed.

"We're in our stores every day looking our customers in the eye," he said. "It really takes a toll when people are having to cut back on certain things in order to afford to live."

A lot of it is outside the gas retailer's control. Roughly half the price at the pump pays for the cost of crude oil, the main ingredient in gasoline, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration. About 20% goes to refiners who turn crude into gas.

Those costs have risen as crude oil prices jumped in response to the war and shipping disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz. Gas retailers are adjusting the price at the pump to account for the higher price they just paid for their next shipment of gasoline.

Taxes - federal, state and local - account for nearly 20% of the price, while about 10% is left for retailers, who still have to pay for transportation, labor and other expenses.

Retailers' markup has averaged about 38 cents a gallon over the past five years, according to the convenience store trade group

NACS, citing data from research firm OPIS. After expenses, stations may keep roughly 15 cents per gallon, said Jeff Lenard, a vice president at NACS.

"Some make more, some make less," Lenard said.

Patrick De Haan, head of petroleum analysis at GasBuddy, compared it to a homeowner's role in setting their sale price.

"If I was selling a house today, I'd be beholden to whatever the housing market is," De Haan said. "That's the same for gas station owners. Whatever the price of oil and gasoline are, they are a price taker, not maker."

Although the national average just passed \$4 a gallon, the price that drivers pay varies widely by state, city and station.

Taxes alone can create large gaps. California's gas taxes and fees totaled about 71 cents per gallon last year, compared with roughly 9 cents in Alaska.

Distance from refineries, the type of retailer, how much volume the location goes through and whether there are other fuel options nearby also play a role.

Gas stations near competitors may choose to price gasoline competitively on large outdoor signs to attract drivers, hoping they'll come inside and buy higher-margin items, said Neal Walters, a partner focused on energy at the global management consulting firm Kearney.

"It's one of the only retail locations where you don't have to go into the store to find out what you're paying," Walters said. While U.S. retailers sell hundreds of millions of gallons of gas a day nationwide, they typically won't see large gains when prices rise.

"The margins shrink when prices go up because it's harder for them to pass along the increases as quickly as they themselves get them," De Haan of GasBuddy said. When oil prices start to fall, retailers may recover some of those losses, particularly if there's uncertainty about future supply costs. Prices can rocket up but tend to drift down like a falling feather, said Garrett Golding, assistant vice president for energy programs at the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas.

Higher gas prices can also hurt sales inside the gas stations, if customers who are being squeezed at the pump spend less on other things.

"So it's not always the case that higher prices mean the service station owners are actually doing better," Golding said.

Most profits in the oil and gas supply chain are made upstream, he said, by companies that extract and refine crude oil. Still, Golding says they aren't necessarily celebrating; at some point, a significant spike in prices could start to hurt demand.

"It may be a good stretch of days or weeks for them," he said, "but they're also cautious of what it could portend."

Fear of escalation sends oil higher

Oil rises 7%, world shares fall after Trump says US will hit Iran hard & 'finish the job'

HONG KONG, April 2, (AP): Oil rose more than 7% and world shares fell after President Donald Trump said in his first national address since the Iran war began that the U.S. will continue to hit Iran very hard.

Trump also said in his Wednesday night speech that the United States will "finish the job" in Iran soon as "core strategic objectives are nearing completion" and military operations could wrap up soon.

"We are going to hit them extremely hard over the next two to three weeks. We're going to bring them back to the Stone Ages, where they belong," Trump said in his address.

Trump did not mention a looming deadline he set for Iran to open the Strait of Hormuz, the critical waterway for global oil and gas transport, after he threatened Iran earlier with U.S. attacks on its energy infrastructure if the strait was not reopened. He did not offer a clear path to end the supply disruptions that have sent energy prices soaring.

In early European trading, Britain's FTSE 100 was

down 0.2% to 10,342.28. France's CAC 40 was 0.8% lower at 7,917.81, and Germany's DAX lost 1.6% to 22,935.01.

Asian shares closed lower. Tokyo's Nikkei 225 was down 2.4% to 52,463.27 on Thursday. South Korea's Kospi lost 4.5% to 5,234.05, also after government data showed consumer prices in March rose 2.2% from a year earlier on soaring fuel costs.

Hong Kong's Hang Seng fell 0.7% to 25,116.53, the Shanghai Composite index was down 0.7% to 3,919.29.

Australia's S&P/ASX 200 dropped 1.1%, while Taiwan's Taix traded 1.8% lower.

U.S. futures were down. The future for the S&P 500 lost 1.1%, while that for the Dow Jones Industrial Average was down 0.9%.

Oil prices were sharply higher following Trump's remarks. Brent crude, the international standard, jumped 7.4% to \$108.69 per barrel. Benchmark U.S. crude rose 7.1% to \$107.24 a barrel.

"The market has shown disappointment because

the speech President Trump made was far less than what the market expected," said Takashi Hiroki, chief strategist at Monex in Tokyo. "There were no concrete details about the end of the hostilities with Iran."

"What the market wants is a clear outline for the ceasefire," he said.

Gold and silver prices fell. Gold's price was down 3.4% to \$4,648.20 per ounce, falling below the \$4,700 mark. Silver lost 6.2% to \$71.39 an ounce.

Renewed optimism on Wednesday for a possible end to the Iran war pushed world stocks higher, after Trump said late Tuesday the U.S. military could end its offensive in two to three weeks.

On Wednesday, the S&P 500 added 0.7% to 6,575.32. The Dow Jones Industrial Average rose 0.5% to 46,565.74, and the Nasdaq composite climbed 1.2% to 21,840.95.

In other dealings early Thursday, the U.S. dollar rose to 159.59 Japanese yen from 158.82 yen. The euro was trading at \$1.1530, down from \$1.1589.

Higher costs, delays, and uncertainty grip firms during war

Iran war disruptions squeeze US small businesses

NEW YORK, April 2, (AP): The Iran war is making life more difficult for small business owners across the country, who are grappling with shipping complications, higher costs and consumers tightening their grip on their wallets.

A shoe designer is struggling to import its shoes from Vietnam; a pistachio grower has millions of dollars worth of pistachio exports sitting in the water; a home landscaper in Kansas City is stockpiling fertilizer as prices skyrocket; and a Chicago electronics store owner is facing pain at the pump.

Small business owners say the severe supply chain disruptions during the pandemic were worse - but they fear that if the war stretches on for months, it might start to come close.

"The costs are rising, the routes are changing, and capacity is tightening. It's all happening at the same time, and that's a perfect storm for small businesses," said Brandon Fried, executive director of the Airfreighters Association, a trade group for U.S. companies that move cargo through the supply chain on all modes of transport.

The U.S. is the largest exporter of pistachios, followed by Iran, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

At Nichols Farms, in Hanford, California, a fourth-generation owned pistachio grower and processor, chief operating officer Jared Lorraine said exports make up about 50% of business. They ship to Europe, China and increasingly, the Middle East.

The effective closure of the Strait of Hormuz has made it impossible to deliver pistachios to several clients. When the war started, he estimates about \$5 million worth of pistachios left stranded in the water, unable to be delivered to customers in Saudi Arabia, Iran and the United Arab Emirates.

"While much of the public attention has been focused on oil, which is significant, really, the destruction of the food system is I think equally as serious," he said, adding 70% to 80% of food in the Middle East is imported.

When the U.S. bombed Iran on Feb. 28, Nichols Farms had about \$5



Top Class Lawn Care owner Jake Wilson dumps fertilizer into a hopper before applying it to a lawn Thursday, March 26, 2026, in Kansas City, Mo. (AP)

million pistachios on ships that got stranded, Lorraine said. They managed to reroute some of the pistachios: one batch was offloaded in Jeddah, in Saudi Arabia, to be trucked to the UAE. Another two loads were able to make it into a port in Oman after being reloaded into a smaller container in India that could make it into that port. But \$3.5 million still sits on the water.

"A lot of it has just been in limbo," Lorraine said. "It's literally been sitting idle for the last three weeks and we're just saying, OK, what do we do?"

Matthew Tran is the founder of Birchbury, a footwear brand based in Los Angeles that makes minimalist - also known as "barefoot" -- shoes. The company makes the shoes in Vietnam and ships to customers across the U.S., U.K., Australia and Canada.

Typically, Tran pays about \$3,500 per container shipped out of Vietnam. But that's doubled since the war started to about \$7,000 as shippers deal with rerouting and higher insurance costs. The lead time for shipping has increased by three to four weeks, too.

"It's kind of like a traffic jam," he said about the shipping time. "So even though it doesn't seem like it would directly affect me because

I'm going from Vietnam to America, it does affect me when there's more congestion."

He said supply chain disruption was worse during COVID, when everything came to a standstill. But he's worried about how long the war will last.

"They always say the wars are going to be short, but they're never short," he said. He worries about customers having less money for discretionary spending since gas prices have surged.

"Customers don't understand, but also their gas prices just went up, too, right?" he said. "People just don't want to spend money at the end of the day because they're like, 'Oh man, gas is up a lot.' Buying another new pair of shoes is secondary to being able to go places with your car."

Across the country, Jake Wilson owns Top Class Lawn Care in Kansas City, Missouri, taking care of nearly 400 lawns across the city. The closure of the Strait of Hormuz has upended the fertilizer business, since the Middle East supplies close to 30% of global exports of major fertilizers, according to the International Fertilizer Association.

Wilson started his business in 2011 and he's built strong relationships with his suppliers. A day or two af-

ter the Iran war started, two suppliers emailed him and told him to expect a spike in prices soon and suggested he make orders ahead of price increases.

Rising prices are a concern since about 70% of his customers lock in a price for a year of lawn care and prepay at the beginning of the year.

The last thing he wants to do, he said, is go back to customers in the middle of the year and say the price of fertilizer increased so he has to ask for more money.

"It's kind of on me to try to get out ahead of it, the best I can, so I could still try to be profitable while keeping prices where I quoted at the beginning of the year," he said.

He usually buys fertilizer four times a year, two or three months ahead of the time when he plans to use it, but he's currently trying to secure fertilizer all the way through the fall season and into the end of the year, effectively doubling his normal order.

"I don't want to wait till summer and go to my supplier and they either say, well, we don't have any product available or what we do have is now 60%, 70% more expensive than what it was quoted in early spring, or first of the year," he said.

Higher gas prices have an electronics store executive considering ending free shipping.

Abt Electronics in Chicago uses on average 25,000 gallons of diesel fuel and 30,000 gallons of gas fuel each month to run more than 650 delivery vans and trucks, according to Jon Abt, co-president of the retailer.

So with gas prices surging, Abt said he's concerned. Free shipping and free delivery with a minimum order of \$35 is a perk that he wants to keep.

"It's an eye-opening expense," Abt said. "It will affect the cost of making deliveries. This will also hit the shipping companies we use for out-of-state deliveries."

Abt said he hasn't received the fuel bill for March yet, but for now, he will absorb the cost and see how the market plays out and what competitors do.

He added, "We like delivering things for free, and I think customers expect it."

The Conversation

Why Iran targeted Amazon data centers and what that does - and doesn't - change about warfare

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



By Dennis Murphy, Georgia Institute of Technology

Before dawn on March 1, 2026, Iranian Shahed drones struck two Amazon Web Services data centers in the United Arab Emirates. A third commercial data center in Bahrain was hit, though it is less clear whether it was deliberately targeted. Iran has also indicated that it considers commercial data centers to be targets.

This is the first time that a country has deliberately targeted commercial data centers during wartime. Data centers have been targets of espionage and cyberattacks in the past, notably when Ukrainian hackers destroyed data stored in a Russian military-affiliated data center in 2024. This, however, was a physical attack. Drones damaged buildings.

Advances in artificial intelligence have increased the importance of data centers. The U.S. military, in particular, has made great use of AI systems for decision support in its attacks on Iran and Venezuela. Given how important data centers are, Iranian forces could be targeting the infrastructure Iran's leaders believe is supporting strikes on Iran.

It is not altogether clear that these particular data centers were used by the U.S. military. Instead, the attacks may have been part of a broader effort to punish the United Arab Emirates for its ties with the U.S.

In my experience as a Ph.D. candidate at Georgia Tech studying how technology drives changes in international security, I don't think the attacks signal any significant change in the nature of warfare. But they are forcing nations to recognize that data centers are targets of war - even if they don't directly support military operations.

The United States military is increasingly incorporating advanced AI capabilities into its decision support systems. From the operation to capture Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro to supporting military strikes against Iran, the U.S. has been using AI, especially Anthropic's Claude, for intelligence analysis and operational support.

AI is unlocking faster ways to carry out operations in war, but the AI tools the military often uses are not located on a plane or ship. When a service member uses Claude, the computing infrastructure that powers the model and its analysis usually goes to a secure Amazon Web Services cloud that hosts secret government data and software tools.

Commercial data centers are where the cloud lives. The next time you pull up Netflix and watch your favorite shows, you are likely streaming the programming from a data center, possibly AWS. When AWS data centers go down, outages affect all sorts of entertainment, news and government functions.

With AI as a driver of economic growth, data centers are key forms of infrastructure. They ensure that AI can continue to run, as well as much of the underlying internet that governments and industry rely on. When Iran attacked the UAE's data centers, it caused widespread disruption to the local banking system.

Commercial data centers enable most of the technology that runs the modern world, including AI systems. Disrupting them is key to disrupting the military and society of a country. Given that AWS provides and operates many of the commercial data centers where the cloud lives, it is likely that its data centers will continue to be targeted in conflict.

Researchers at Just Security noted on March 12, 2026, that the United States requires cloud-computing service providers to store government and military data within the U.S. or on Department of Defense bases: "Moving such data to Amazon data centers in the Gulf region would require spe-

cial authorization; we are unaware if that has been granted."

Nevertheless, Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps claimed the strikes were against data centers supporting "the enemy's" military and intelligence activities. And 10 days after the initial attack on the data centers, an Iranian news agency claimed that major tech company data centers and other physical assets in the region were considered "enemy technology infrastructure."

Instead of military reasons, Iran may well have targeted the UAE to rattle the global economy and garner attention. Given the prominence of the Gulf as a major recipient of U.S. technological investment, the attack may also have been a symbolic one aimed at the heart of U.S.-Gulf cooperation. AI infrastructure such as commercial data centers is a growing part of U.S. leadership in the region, and this war could jeopardize the future of AI infrastructure in the Gulf.

Though data centers are increasingly important for national security, the economy and society at large, it can be tempting to suggest these strikes represent a fundamental shift in the nature of war. While that is a possibility, it is important to remember that Iran launched thousands of missiles and drones at targets in the UAE. Though the vast majority were intercepted, the two that struck data centers are a small portion of the ones that got through to civilian targets in UAE territory, including strikes on airports and hotels.

The relative vulnerability of commercial data centers - they are large, relatively fragile and lack dedicated air defenses - suggests that the ones in the UAE may have been targets of opportunity or convenience. In other words, they were hit because they could be hit.

Nevertheless, it seems likely that as the use of AI tools and other cloud-based resources continues to grow in importance for countries around the world, commercial data centers will be targets in future conflicts. (AP)



Gas prices are displayed at a Chevron gas station, in downtown Los Angeles, Tuesday, March 31, 2026. (AP)

BUSINESS

Labor market shows resilience

US jobless aid filings fall to 202K as layoffs remain low despite uncertainty of Iran war

WASHINGTON, April 2, (AP): U.S. applications for unemployment benefits fell last week as layoffs remain sparse despite a softening labor market and rising energy costs due to the Iran war.

The number of Americans applying for jobless aid for the week ending March 28 fell by 9,000 to 202,000 from the previous week's 211,000, the Labor Department reported Thursday. That's fewer than the 212,000 new filings analysts surveyed by the data firm FactSet were expecting and within the range of the past several years.

Filings for unemployment benefits are considered representative of U.S. layoffs and are close to a real-time indicator of the health of the job market.

A number of high-profile companies have cut jobs recently, including the software maker Oracle, which according to media reports cut thousands of workers this week.

Others that have recently announced job cuts include Morgan Stanley, Block, UPS and Amazon.

Weekly jobless aid applications have stabilized in a range mostly between 200,000 and 250,000 since the U.S. economy emerged from the pandemic recession. However, hiring began slowing about two years ago and tapered even further in 2025 due to President Donald Trump's erratic tariff rollouts, his purge of the federal workforce and the lingering effects of high interest rates meant to control inflation.

Employers added fewer than 200,000 jobs last year, compared with about 1.5 million in 2024, according to the data firm FactSet.

Last month, the Labor Department reported that U.S. employers unexpectedly cut 92,000 jobs in February, a sign that the labor market remains under strain.

Revisions also slashed 69,000 jobs from December and January payrolls, nudging the unemployment rate up to 4.4%.

The March jobs report is due out Friday.

The surprisingly weak employment picture in February adds to the economic uncertainty over the war with Iran, which has caused oil prices to surge more than 40% and saddled business and consumers with higher costs.

This comes at a time when inflation was already relatively high in the U.S.

The Commerce Department recently reported that the Fed's preferred inflation gauge rose 2.8% in January compared with a year earlier. That's above the Fed's 2% target and the latest sign that prices were persistently elevated even before the Iran war caused spikes in oil and gas costs.

That persistent inflation, combined with the uncertainties brought on by the conflict in the Middle East, led the Fed to leave its benchmark lending rate alone at its last meeting and raised doubts that a cut was coming anytime soon.

Central bank officials voted to raise the rate three times to close 2025 out of concern for a weakening job market.

The American labor market appears stuck in what economists call a "low-hire, low-fire" state that has kept the unemployment rate historically low, but has left those out of work struggling to find a new job.

The Labor Department's report Thursday showed that the four-week moving average of jobless claims, which evens out some of the weekly swings, declined by 3,000 to 207,750.

The total number of Americans filing for unemployment benefits for the previous week ending March 21 jumped by 25,000 to 1.84 million, the government said.

Airlines face \$400 million hit

JetBlue raises baggage fees as fuel costs soar

WASHINGTON, April 2, (AP): U.S. carrier JetBlue has raised its checked bag fees by as much as \$9 as the war in the Middle East disrupts global oil supplies and increases fuel prices.

The new fees took effect Monday. For most domestic economy passengers, the first checked bag now costs \$39, up from \$35. During peak travel times such as April spring breaks, major holidays and the summer, passengers will have to pay \$49 instead of \$40, the airline said.

The airline, which has its flagship terminal at New York's John F. Kennedy International Airport, said in an emailed statement to The Associated Press on Tuesday that charging more for optional services "used by select customers" would allow it to keep its airfares competitive.

"While we recognize that fee increases are never ideal, we take careful consideration to ensure these changes are implemented only when necessary," JetBlue said.

Airlines around the world are confronting soaring

operating expenses due to jet fuel prices that have jumped more than 85% since the Iran war began on Feb. 28. The conflict has curtailed ship traffic through the Strait of Hormuz, a key passageway for a fifth of the world's oil. Airspace closures in parts of the Middle East have added to the price pressure by forcing some airlines to take longer routes that burn more fuel.

A number of non-U.S. carriers already have added fuel surcharges or raised ticket prices in response.

Jet fuel is one of the airline industry's biggest expenses, typically accounting for about a quarter of operating costs. The average price for a gallon of jet fuel reached \$4.64 on Tuesday, up from \$2.50 the day before the conflict broke out, according to Argus Media. The energy market intelligence company's U.S. Jet Fuel Index tracks the average prices across major hubs, including Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles and New York.

Industry analysts expect U.S. airlines to pass some of their higher fuel costs on to travelers through add-

itions, such as checked bags and seat upgrades, since they don't typically have fuel surcharges. And once one airline raises fees, analysts say, others are likely to follow.

JetBlue also increased the charge to check a second bag from \$50 to \$59 for off-peak periods, and from \$60 to \$69 for periods of peak demand.

The carrier said some customers would still be able to check their first bag for free, including those who hold one of the airline's co-branded credit cards and loyalty program members who reach certain tiers. Most customers flying transatlantic routes will also continue to receive their first checked bag free.

Iran's determination to close off the Strait of Hormuz to ships from nations it considers unfriendly has caused crude oil prices to fluctuate wildly and in turn, driven up fuel prices. Earlier this month, the CEOs of Delta Airlines, American Airlines and United Airlines reported that higher jet fuel prices had already added about \$400 million in operating costs.

Strong PMI lift for Malaysia, though risks stay tilted down

Malaysia manufacturing rebounds, but Middle East tensions weigh on outlook

KUALA LUMPUR, April 2, (Xinhua): Economists cautioned on Thursday that rising costs linked to ongoing Middle East tensions could weigh on Malaysia's economic momentum, even as the manufacturing sector returned to expansion in March with the Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) climbing to its highest level in nearly four years.

The March rebound suggests February's weakness was largely seasonal. Activity has normalized and should extend into April, Kenanga Research said in a note.

However, the research house noted that the demand remains uneven with rising logistics, energy and raw material costs due to Middle East tensions, which will remain a key headwind and could limit the pace of recovery.

"Overall, manufacturing performance will hinge on whether demand can outpace rising costs," it said.

While maintaining Malaysia's 2026 gross domestic product (GDP) forecast at 4.5 percent, it noted the risk remains tilted to the downside given ongoing Middle East tensions that could disrupt global energy and transportation costs.

"Still, domestic demand and continued support from the electrical and electronics products (E&E) sector should underpin growth," it added.

While manufacturing activities could pick up in March as signaled by the higher PMI reading, MBSB Research also remained cautious that the near-term business outlook could be constrained by the oil and energy price shocks, elevated production costs and potentially weaker final demand.

While earlier data showed that Malaysia's industrial production (IPI) growth increased to 5.9 percent year on year in January, marking the fastest growth since October 2025, the research house expects a potentially moderate rate in Febru-

ary, tracking the slower export growth and lower PMI.

Meanwhile, TA Research said global conditions have become less favorable, with risks increasingly tilted to the downside amid rising external uncertainties, particularly from the ongoing Middle East conflict.

"As the second-largest contributor to Malaysia's GDP after services, the manufacturing sector remains closely monitored," said the research house, adding that although firms still expect demand to improve, confidence has been weighed down by geopolitical tensions.

The seasonally adjusted S&P Global Malaysia Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) rose into expansion territory in March, climbing to 50.7 from 49.3 in February.

The latest reading marks the fourth improvement in five survey periods and represents the strongest gain in the sector in nearly four years, underscoring a notable recovery in Malaysia's manufacturing activity, according to S&P Global Market Intelligence's statement on Wednesday.

While this is welcome news following the mild moderation observed midway through the first quarter, the data also highlights several concerning developments, many of which stem from the ongoing conflict in the Middle East, said economist Maryam Baluch with S&P Global Market Intelligence.

According to her, purchasing activity, delivery times, stock levels, and most importantly, price indicators are beginning to show how manufacturers are responding to the current situation.

"Confidence has already fallen to a seven-month low, suggesting that the coming months will bring these concerns further into focus," she added.

South Africa braces for sharp fuel price shock

JOHANNESBURG, April 2, (AP): South African motorists were on Tuesday headed to gas stations in large numbers in anticipation of record fuel hikes that will come into effect at midnight as the world continues to feel impacts of the Iran war that has affected global oil and fuel prices.

This is despite the country's Finance Minister Enoch Godongwana on Tuesday announcing a 3 rand (\$0.18) decrease per liter of fuel in an attempt to cushion against the price shock.

The 7.51 rand (\$0.44) price increase for diesel, the highest on record, and the 3.06 rand (\$0.18) for gasoline has already sent shock waves across the southern African nation.

By Tuesday evening, some gas stations in the east of Johannesburg were turning motorists away as they had run out of both diesel and gasoline.

At some stations, only gasoline was available and those seeking diesel were turned away. Some lines were visibly building up at some of the stations that still had fuel.

Godongwana said on Tuesday that the ongoing conflict in the Middle East had increased risks to global energy markets and placed pressure on domestic fuel prices.

The decreased fuel levy for the month of April, before South Africa announced adjusted fuel prices again in March, would cost the government 6 billion rand (more than \$351 million) in lost tax revenue.

The country has also been affected by operations and logistical delays in its fuel distribution as dozens of fuel stations ran dry and some fuel stations started rationing fuel purchases to customers, with some putting up restrictions of between 30 to 50 liters (8 to 13

gallons per car).

"Even after fuel levies were reduced, these are the largest increases in recent history and would be devastating for consumers," said Theuns Du Buisson, an economic researcher at the Solidarity Research Institute.

He said that the fuel increases, especially the record increase for diesel, would have a devastating result on the cost of logistics and transportation, with knock-on effects on inflation in coming months.

With a majority of South Africans using public transport, mainly minibus taxis and buses, the impact is likely to be felt mostly by low-income households, Du Buisson said.

On Tuesday, the bus service in the capital, Pretoria, was disrupted, because of fuel shortages at the city's bus depots, the municipality said.

Red Sea reroutes, Strait of Hormuz tensions strain African ports

Middle East conflict sends shockwaves across Africa's fuel & trade chains

NAIROBI, April 2, (Xinhua): On a bustling afternoon in Nairobi, the Kenyan capital, the Kibera minibus terminus is a cacophony of noise. Amid the pungent scent of fuel and the blare of horns, drivers complained about climbing operating costs.

The fallout from conflict in the Middle East, thousands of miles away, is rippling through price and cost channels across multiple African countries. It is being felt through rising household expenses, disrupted logistics and mounting trade costs.

Threat of "fuel droughts"

In Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia, long-distance bus driver Tasew Tesfaye dreads a particular sound, the hollow "click" of a fuel nozzle, signaling that a station has run dry yet again.

The energy squeeze linked to tensions in the Middle East has left many fuel stations across Africa facing "fuel droughts."

"With a single click, an entire day's livelihood goes down the drain," Tasew said. Without fuel, his vehicle cannot start. His family's sole source of income is at immediate risk.

Persistent shipping disruptions in the Red Sea, compounded by heightened tensions in the Strait of Hormuz, have contributed to a global rise in fuel prices.

In response, Ethiopian Finance Minister Ahmed Shide has urged citizens and major institutions to use fuel rationally and sparingly to weather a survival test affecting the entire nation.

"Triple price shock"

The impact of rising energy prices is increasingly evident at the macroeconomic level.

South African Reserve Bank Governor Lesetja Kganyago warned that if tensions in the Middle East persist, South Africa's inflation rate could climb above 5 percent.

Fuel shortages are also posing a growing challenge to the continent's food security.

Ralph Matheka, a senior expert at the Liechtenstein-based Geopolitical Intelligence Services, told Xinhua that diesel remains central to agricultural production. If the costs of fertilizer and food production rise alongside oil prices, consumers could face a "triple price shock," he said.

Logistical bottleneck

As conflicts in the Middle East drag on, many international cargo ships have been forced to reroute around Africa via the Cape of Good Hope.

This diversion adds roughly 3,500 to 4,000 nautical miles to voyages and extends transit times by 10 to 14 days. For shipping companies, this has become an unavoidable reality.

At South Africa's ports of Durban and Cape Town, the concentrated arrival of rerouted vessels has spiked workloads. However, port turnaround efficiency has failed to keep pace, hampered by aging equipment and limited operational capacity.

As a result, waiting times at anchorage have lengthened considerably, in some cases stretching to hundreds of hours. The resulting congestion has further driven up transport costs, placing additional strain on regional trade and logistics networks.

'Build America, Buy America' law slows affordable housing projects

It has a catchy name - Build America, Buy America - and the lauded goal of bringing manufacturing jobs back to the United States.

But the law has spurred a bottleneck for affordable housing.

Nearly everything from HVACs and lighting to sink hooks and ceiling fans in affordable housing projects that get federal dollars must be produced in the United States. But, developers say, numerous products do not, as they have long been imported from overseas markets with cheaper labor costs.

Although builders can apply for waivers, the process has been at a near standstill as the Department of Housing and Urban Development, which has had its staff slashed by the Trump administration, has only greenlit a handful of projects.

The waiver process has caused construction delays and hundreds of thousands of dollars in extra costs as the country faces an affordable housing crisis.

"They need to be treating this like the fire that it is," said Tyler Norod, president of Westbrook Development Corporation, which builds affordable housing in Maine.

"We've sort of resigned ourselves that we're just gonna build less units across the entire country during a housing crisis."

Diana Lene has been on affordable housing waitlists for the past five years. The 75-year-old loves living close to her daughter and grandchildren in Fargo, North Dakota, but her apartment is too expensive on her Social Security income.

"It's just maxing my budget down to pennies," she said. To save money, she avoids driving often and buys food on sale.

"I'm just trying to keep a roof over my head, but it's getting more and more difficult," Lene said. "I don't like to live in fear, and yet sometimes it jumps in there."

Lene is on a waitlist for one of nonprofit developer Beyond Shelter's apartments. CEO Dan Madler is building a 36-unit building for people like Lene, but he had to postpone lumber orders to verify they comply with the law and can't find ceiling fans made in America. He doesn't know when HUD will approve a waiver.

U.S. President Joe Biden signed the Build America, Buy America Act as part of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act in 2021, building on longstanding efforts to boost American manufacturing at a time when the U.S. economy was emerging from a pandemic-era recession. Known as BABA, it applies to infrastructure projects funded by federal agencies, not just affordable housing.

Denver developer Julie Hoebel says she has spent over \$60,000 just on a consultant to comb through websites and call suppliers to try to find American-made materials, not to mention the additional labor costs involved.

But the waivers she submitted to HUD in November for around 125 materials in an 85-unit building haven't been approved.

"If they take much longer then we'll come to a standstill," she said. HUD is taking at least six months to approve many waivers.

Even BABA advocates agree HUD must grant waivers more quickly and give the industry clearer instructions on how to prepare them, which they note other federal agencies are doing.

HUD did not address questions from The Associated Press about waiver approval delays developers say increase costs, as well as concerns about making the process more transparent. In a statement it said it's committed to "ensuring that federal spending supports America's industrial base" while "closely monitoring how compliance with these policies impact costs for builders."

Asked in January about whether the delays and cost increases mean affordable housing should be exempt from BABA rules, HUD Secretary Scott Turner said the agency was looking into the issue, but did not provide details. "We are looking at this ... with BABA as it pertains to HUD to provide flexibility to certain projects in certain places around our country," Turner said, adding that HUD is committed to assuring

developers get "the flexibility they need as it pertains to building."

The law itself isn't the problem, supporters say.

Unions representing the steel and manufacturing industries say taxpayer dollars should fund American-made materials and suppliers will adjust to meet demand for products that aren't available.

"You've got a system in place that leans heavily on using imported materials to make a better profit," said Scott Paul, president of the Alliance for American Manufacturing. "I don't know if that serves the public good."

Jennifer Schwartz, director of tax and housing advocacy at the National Council of State Housing Agencies, said there's no national data on how much BABA is increasing costs. But the waiver process is "failing," she said, because requirements were put in place before assessment of domestic manufacturing capacity.

It won't be as challenging for suppliers to produce more raw materials in the U.S., but it will take time for manufactured products - such as appliances and elevators - to become available, said Kaitlyn Snyder, managing director of the National Housing and Rehabilitation Association, an affordable housing industry group.

"I don't know that it economically, financially makes sense for people to be producing door hinges," Snyder said. "We are an advanced country and we've outsourced a lot of that stuff."

The housing bill that passed the Senate in March did not require HUD to address problems with implementing BABA.

"The process isn't working for affordable housing," said Jessie Handforth Kome, who spent nearly 40 years working at HUD until 2024. "People want to comply, but it's unclear how to."

Vermont-based Developer Jessica Neubelt estimates she spent an additional \$150,000 just to verify iron and steel she used in a project was American-made. She's just as frustrated over the hundreds of hours that takes, which, she said, could be spent on another project.

"I would like every member of Congress to sit in on a construction meeting," Neubelt said. "The amount of detail that goes into figuring out if a specific thing is compliant or not is enormous."

U.S. Rep. Mike Flood, a Nebraska Republican, has advocated to exempt some HUD funding from BABA.

"Owning a home is the American dream, but it's out of reach in a very big way and anything that adds cost to that isn't allowing hardworking Americans to achieve the dream," Flood told the AP.

Roy Houseman, legislative director at United Steelworkers, said complaints about cost increases are overblown.

"A lot of developers seem to have tried to throw things in and make statutory changes to policies that have been in place for basically five years now instead of making a good-faith effort to really push HUD," Houseman said.

Union leaders note the law offers some leeway.

Developers can get exemptions for an American-made product if it increases the project's overall cost by more than 25%. A very small percentage of a project's total material cost is also exempt. But most developers say that percentage isn't enough to cover all items not made in the U.S.

Some developers are looking for ways to avoid federal funds altogether. But that is challenging. Even though federal dollars often make up a small portion of funding for affordable housing projects, that sliver can make or break whether there's enough money to build them.

Kentucky developer Scott McReynolds says that instead of applying for a federal grant to build 20 to 30 affordable homes, he plans to build two four-unit projects, small enough so that they aren't subject to BABA.

American-made materials are especially hard to find near the rural areas McReynolds serves.

"It's a nightmare," he said. (AP)

Thorstein Andreassen, a spokesperson for the Danish bunker supplier Monjasa, said that rerouting trends began as early as 2023, when security conditions in the Red Sea deteriorated. The company has since seen a notable increase in bunker fuel demand, with another surge recorded during recent U.S. and Israeli strikes on Iran.

Quest for resilience

Skyrocketing freight costs and high imported fuel bills are placing growing pressure on foreign exchange reserves across Africa, contributing to heightened inflation risks.

At the local level, many small businesses are struggling to stay afloat as they absorb the impact of these broader economic pressures.

These external shocks lay bare Africa's structural vulnerabilities. Limited domestic energy processing capacity and heavy reliance on global supply chains have left several countries particularly exposed.

Patrick Lumumba, a Kenyan scholar and former director of the Kenya Anti-Corruption Commission, highlighted a persistent paradox: despite abundant natural resources, Africa continues to "export crude oil while importing refined products," leaving it vulnerable to global disruptions.

As uncertainties in the Gulf region persist, strengthening economic resilience is becoming increasingly critical.

Advancing the African Continental Free Trade Area, expanding local refining capacity and investing in renewable energy are seen as key steps toward reducing external dependence and enhancing long-term stability, Lumumba said.

Shakespearean drama with modern corporate twist

Jittery and edgy Ahmed takes 'Hamlet' for a spin

LOS ANGELES, April 2, (AP): "To be, or not to be," Hamlet says in his best-known speech - questioning the value of life itself and, more immediately, his own.

But surely, these words have rarely if ever been uttered with such an apparent death wish as when Riz Ahmed, our latest troubled prince, hurtles down a motorway in his BMW, gathering speed with each iamb.

Talk about "shuffling off this mortal coil" - his hands are off the wheel, and he's in the wrong lane! His eventual demise, in director Aneil Karia's new "Hamlet," seems perilously premature - until he wisely stops the car. Because, as we know, there are many deaths to come before Hamlet's.

Every screen adaptation has had to wrestle with where to place, physically, this most famous of speeches. Laurence Olivier intoned the words near a literal, cresting "sea of troubles." Kenneth Branagh stared into a mirror. Ethan Hawke notably did it in a Blockbuster aisle - his angst relatable to anyone who has trouble deciding on a movie.

But Ahmed's version seems particularly apt for the actor's considerable talents, and is one of the more compelling moments of a pared-down, engaging if spotty rendering of the world's most famous play. Jittery, tense, fast-talking and always on edge, this is a Hamlet, above all, in a rush.

He also inevitably recalls a Hamlet-like character who recently graced our small screens: Kendall Roy in "Succession."

The setting, indeed, is so "Succession"-like, it hardly seems an accident. The film, adapted by Michael Lesslie, takes place in modern-day corporate London, centered on a wealthy real estate family in the South Asian community.

The name of the family biz? No, not Roy. It's Elsinore, of course. We open with death, naturally. "Elsinore Property CEO Dead at 77," the headlines blare. Every Hamlet wrestles with grief and anger, but Ahmed, in an absorbing performance that starts with wide-eyed intensity and moves on from there, seems already near a breaking point as he mourns his father.

Indeed, his instability makes us wonder if venal Claudius (an excellent Art Malik) is really a murderer - or if Hamlet is imagining it. But we don't have much time to reflect. Hamlet's mother Gertrude, a queenlike corporate wife (Sheeba Chaddha, poignant) is about to marry Claudius. Hamlet, of course, finds this appalling - even before he meets his father's ghost.

That crucial scene takes place on a bleak rooftop (most scenes are at night, or if in daytime, still dark). "I am your father's spirit," says the ghost, asking Hamlet to avenge him. It's not quite obvious why this corporate Claudius killed his brother - was it a mere power struggle? Relatively short shrift is given also to a social-justice theme involving a tent city of people evicted from Elsinore property.

Another omission concerns Ophelia's role. The character, played here by Morfydd Clark, has never had it easy, but surely she deserved something akin to the mad scene she has in the play.

Like Clark, all the supporting characters are well cast. The Shakespeare veteran Timothy Spall, especially, is an entertaining Polonius, and he sure gets the bloodiest death. Joe Alwyn, as Laertes, eventually gets a lot more action than he did as Agnes Shakespeare's brother in "Hamnet."

It's not long before Hamlet, plotting revenge while pacing the lush lawns of the family estate, realizes: "The play's the thing, wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king." And indeed, the play is the thing wherein the film catches our attention - a full-on dance performance with glittering costumes and high drama (choreography credit goes to Akram Khan). Another visual highlight is a street procession, with groom Claudius riding a white horse



This image released by Vertical Entertainment shows Sheeba Chaddha, left, and Art Malik in a scene from 'Hamlet.' (AP)

and bearing a ceremonial sword.

It's mid-wedding when Hamlet decides to take the spin in his car and his most famous words come tumbling out. Ahmed has said he interprets the "to be or not to be" speech as not so much about questioning life, but more as an exhortation to fight injustice. The actor-rapper has also noted that a drama teacher helped him see the similarities between rap and Shakespearean verse.

In any case, as in every "Hamlet," when blood starts flowing, it flows fast. The final confrontation plays out cleverly here in a family dining room - not

with the traditional swords, but certainly with poison.

We all know what happens. At least Kendall stayed alive at the end of "Succession" - although in his depleted, defeated state, as he stared at the water, one can imagine what he, too, might have been thinking: "To be, or not to be?"

"Hamlet," a Vertical Entertainment release, opens April 10 and has been rated R by the Motion Picture Association for "some bloody violence, suicide, brief drug use and language." Running time: 114 minutes. Two and a half stars out of four.



This image shows Sheeba Chaddha in a scene from 'Hamlet.' (AP)



Riz Ahmed in a scene from 'Hamlet.' (AP)



Riz Ahmed, (left), and Art Malik in a scene from 'Hamlet.' (AP)

Film

A light, playful story with threads of family drama

'Mario Galaxy Movie' levels up the magic

By Lindsey Bahr

There are some things you might expect, even count on, in a Super Mario Galaxy movie. The introduction of the celestial Princess Rosalina? Check. A scene of her reading bedtime stories to her adorable, glowing star children Lumas? Check. A wild revenge scenario that takes Princess Peach, Mario, Luigi and Toad away from the Mushroom Kingdom and into space, where intergalactic travel requires little more than a well-placed launch star that will hurtle anyone safely through cosmos and into the cozy, self-contained gravitational pulls of nearby planets? This one might depend on how familiar you are with the game itself, first released in 2007, but let's say check anyway.

"The Super Mario Galaxy Movie," which opened in theaters Wednesday, has some real surprises (Easter eggs, if you will), both consequential and not. One of those, the introduction of Mario's Nintendo peer Star Fox, has already been teased. But for me, the most unexpected and delightful discovery is that Bowser (voiced once more by Jack Black) and his neglected son Bowser Jr. (Benny Safdie) are painters. The elder uses the brush as a kind of therapy as he works through his demons while in loose captivity, still shrunken down to the size of a toy as we left him in "The Super Mario Bros. Movie," in Princess Peach's castle. The younger, so inconsequential that he's neither seen nor mentioned in the first film, paints to destroy and win his father's love by taking over the galaxy - a plan that Bowser would, on his rare night off from conquering, read to Bowser Jr. before bedtime. Absent though he might have been for most



This image released by Universal Pictures shows, (from left), Luigi, voiced by Charlie Day, Mario, voiced by Chris Pratt, Yoshi, voiced by Donald Glover, and Princess Peach, voiced by Anya Taylor-Joy, in a scene from 'The Super Mario Galaxy Movie.' (AP)

of Bowser Jr.'s childhood, when he was there, he really went all out with puppetry and showmanship.

This isn't the only family drama imbued into "The Super Mario Galaxy Movie" - Peach (Anya Taylor-Joy) is also wondering about her origins. But thankfully Mario (Chris Pratt) and Luigi (Charlie Day) are spared any such soul-searching. They're just along for the ride. Mario creator Shigeru Miyamoto and Illumination founder Chris Meledandri, as producers, seem committed to keeping things light and playful even while beholden to advancing some kind of coherent, moderately compelling story where there wasn't one previously.

On a certain level, everyone, including returning directors Aaron Horvath and Michael Jelenic and screenwriter Matthew Fogel, under-

stands that the many people likely to come out to see a Super Mario movie probably aren't interested in extensive backstories, meaningful character arcs or real-world grittiness. The joy of video games like Super Mario Galaxy is simple and pure: The viewer is transported to a colorful fantasy where space isn't scary - it's inviting, shimmering and full of wonder. No one wants to see Yoshi get stabbed (which, yes, really happened in the 1993 movie). They just want to hang out in the Gateway Galaxy, or feel the real stakes of a rotating fire bar.

The film adds a slew of new voice actors to the mix, like Brie Larson as Rosalina (sounding, perhaps, a little too much like Taylor-Joy's Peach) and Donald Glover as Yoshi, a chaotic and enjoyable addition to the gang. As in the games, he's sure to be a fan favorite. It's also not

completely committed to the worlds of the Galaxy games, as some super fans have already noted and critiqued, which seems excessively strict and unimaginative for this kind of source material. There is one particularly inventive sequence that blends a rendering of Mario in his original 2D 8-bit form, blurry pixels and all, with the 3D beauty of the more modern iterations.

There is, of course, something inherently cynical about "The Super Mario Galaxy Movie," which is that on a certain level it exists primarily to make more money off these characters, through the games, the merchandise and the inevitable theme park rides. This film is also very high on the otherworldly success of its predecessor. The Lumas are obsessed with the stories of the heroic plumber brothers. The Toads are too. One even wears Mario pajamas and carries around a Mario toy, inviting some inevitable questions about how or why these things were made and where one might buy them. Bowser Jr. also has a bedroom full of villain toys, and bedsheets to match.

I'm not so cheerless as to suggest that the merch is not part of the fun of video-game or toy-based movies for its younger audiences. But when inserted into the fabric of the movie itself, into the storylines, it's distracting, taking you out of the escape of this wondrous dream world and back into the realities of late-stage capitalism.

"The Super Mario Galaxy Movie," a Universal Pictures release in theaters Wednesday, is rated PG by the Motion Picture Association for "rude humor, mild violence and action." Running time: 98 minutes. Two and a half stars out of four. (AP)

Variety

NEW YORK: Megan Thee Stallion was rushed to the hospital after "feeling very ill" while onstage on Broadway in "Moulin Rouge! The Musical." She later took to social media to explain she had been "pushing myself past my limits lately."

An understudy stepped in Tuesday night for the rapper and the show continued. According to her spokesperson, doctors identified extreme exhaustion, dehydration, vasoconstriction and low metabolic levels as the cause of her symptoms. She was discharged and was resting.

The Grammy Award-winning rapper wrote on Instagram that she would take off Wednesday's matinee and evening performances to rest and recuperate. "I'll be right back on that stage Thursday, stronger, clearer, and ready to give you 100% the way you deserve," she wrote.

"Last night was a real wake-up call for me. I've been pushing myself past my limits lately, running on empty, and my body finally said enough. It honestly scared me. I thought I was gonna faint on stage. I really tried to push through my performance but I just couldn't," she wrote.

Megan Thee Stallion made her Broadway debut last week as nightclub impresario Harold Zidler in the show at the Al Hirschfeld Theatre, and was expected to conclude her run on May 17. (AP)

BEDFORD, N.H.: "Bob's Burgers" voice actor and comedian Eugene Mirman suffered serious injuries after crashing his car into a toll plaza and being pulled from the fiery wreckage by a state trooper assigned to protect the governor of New Hampshire.

The crash happened just before noon Tuesday when a northbound electric vehicle struck the Bedford Toll Plaza and caught fire, New Hampshire State Police said. Republican Gov. Kelly Ayotte and her security detail came upon the crash soon after, and a trooper and two others pulled Mirman from the burning car through a window, said State Police Col. Mark Hall. The governor, who left her vehicle and retrieved a fire extinguisher, was not in any danger, he said.

"Eugene was in a very scary car accident," Mirman's agent Jay Glassner confirmed in a statement Wednesday. "He wants to thank the bystanders, state police, first responders and hospital staff who saved him. He is grateful to be on the mend. At this time, we kindly ask for privacy for Eugene and his family as he focuses on recovering from his injuries." (AP)

NASHVILLE, Tenn.: The Army pilots who hovered two helicopters near Kid Rock's Tennessee home during a training run while he clapped and saluted had their suspension lifted, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said Tuesday.

"No punishment. No investigation. Carry on, patriots," Hegseth said in a social media post. Earlier, a US Army spokesperson said the crews of the two AH-64 Apache helicopters from the 101st Combat Aviation Brigade at Fort Campbell were suspended from flying, pending an investigation into their actions. The suspension was a discretionary - but not unusual - step when an investigation is underway, Maj. Montrell Russell said in statement.

The Army would review whether the flight complied with FAA regulations and aviation safety protocol, Russell said in the statement, which he emailed fewer than three hours before Hegseth's social media post. The Army takes "allegations of unauthorized or unsafe flight operations very seriously and is committed to enforcing standards and holding personnel accountable," the statement said.

Asked about Hegseth's announcement, Deputy Pentagon Press Secretary Joel Valdez said he had nothing to add to the secretary's social media post. An Army spokesperson didn't immediately respond to a request for comment. (AP)

Tips to spot AI-generated content in a digital world

Int'l Fact-Checking Day: Refresh your AI-spotting skills

NEW YORK, April 2, (AP): AI-generated content is everywhere these days, making it increasingly difficult to separate fact from fiction, particularly when it comes to breaking news.

Look no further than the Iran war. Since the US and Israel attacked Iran on Feb. 28, researchers have identified an unprecedented number of false and misleading images that were generated using artificial intelligence and have reached countless people around the world. Among them, fake footage of bombings that never happened, images of soldiers who were supposedly captured and propaganda videos created by Iran that depict President Donald Trump and others as a blocky, Lego-like miniatures.

Today, the 10th annual International Fact-Checking Day, provides a good opportunity to look at these evolving challenges.

Misinformation created with AI is being shared with unprecedented speed from an endless number of sources. From the outset of the Iran war, accounts from all sides of the conflict promoted such content.

The Institute for Strategic Dialogue, which tracks disinformation and online extremism, has been exam-

ining social media posts around the Iran war. Among their findings was a group of X accounts that regularly post AI-generated content and collectively gained more than one billion views since the conflict began. This was done by roughly two dozen accounts, many of which had blue check verification.

Here are some tips for distinguishing AI-generated content from reality in an online world where that continues to get harder.

Look for visual cues

When AI-generated images first began spreading widely online, there were often obvious tells that could identify them as fabricated. Perhaps a person had too few - or too many - fingers or their voice was out of sync with their mouth. Text may have been nonsensical. Objects were frequently distorted or missing key components. As the technology continues to evolve, these clues aren't as common as they once were, but it's still worth looking for them. Watch for inconsistencies such as a car that is in a video one moment and gone the next or actions that aren't possible according to the laws of physics. Some images may also be overly polished or have an unnatural sheen.

Seek out a source

AI-generated images get shared over and over again. One way to determine their authenticity (or lack thereof) is to hunt for their origin. Using a reverse image search is a simple way to do this. If you're looking at a video, take a screenshot first. This can lead to a social media account that specifically generates AI content, an older image that is being misrepresented, or something entirely unexpected.

Listen to the experts

Look for multiple verified sources that can help authenticate the image. For example, that can mean a fact-check from a reputable media outlet, a statement from a public figure, or a social media post from a misinformation expert. These sources may have more advanced techniques for identifying AI-generated content or access to information about the image that is not accessible by the general public.

Make use of technology

There are many AI detection tools that can be a helpful place to start. But be wary, as they are not always correct in their assessments. Images that have

been generated or altered with AI using Google's Gemini app include an invisible digital watermarking tool called SynthID, which the app can detect. Other AI creation tools have added visible watermarks to content they generate. They are often easy to remove though, meaning the absence of such a watermark is not proof that an image is genuine.

Slow down

Sometimes it's just about going back to basics. Stop, take a breath and don't immediately share something you don't know is real. Bad actors are often counting on the fact that people let their emotions and existing viewpoints guide their reactions to content. Looking at the comments may provide clues about whether the image you're looking at is real or not. Another user might have noticed something you didn't or been able to find the original source. Ultimately though, it's not always possible to determine with 100% accuracy whether an image is AI-generated so remain alert to the possibility it might not be real.

See something that looks false or misleading? Email us at FactCheck@ap.org.

Technology

From garage startup to tech giant

Apple's 50-year odyssey has redefined tech

CUPERTINO, Calif., April 2, (AP): A scrawny hippie and a nerdy engineer who became prank-playing friends vowed to change the world when they founded a Silicon Valley startup on April Fools' Day 50 years ago and then - no joke - pulled it off.

The improbable odyssey began April 1, 1976, when a then-shaggy Steve Jobs and his gadget-tinkering friend Steve Wozniak signed a two-page partnership document that created Apple Computer Co.

Jobs, a 21-year-old college dropout, and Wozniak, a 25-year-old Hewlett-Packard employee, each received a 45% stake in Apple, with the remaining 10% going to their 41-year-old adviser, Ron Wayne.

The company got off to such a shaky start while trying to build a personal computer in the Los Altos, California, home of Jobs' parents that Wayne relinquished his stake for \$2,300. It proved to be a \$370 billion mistake, based on how much his holdings would have grown now that Apple boasts a \$3.7 trillion market value.

But Apple nearly toppled before building its current empire.

After casting aside Jobs in a bitter 1985 breakup, the tech firm engineered a surprise deal that brought back its exiled cofounder in 1997. After reluctantly agreeing to be a temporary adviser, Jobs took over as CEO and masterminded an innovation factory that churned out the iPod, the iPhone and the iPad in a decade-long burst of feverish creativity.

Here's a look at Apple's odyssey so far:

Although it was founded in 1976, Apple didn't enjoy its first smash success until June 1977, with the release of the Apple II computer priced at \$1,298 (about \$7,000 now, adjusted for inflation).

With its sales booming, Apple went public in late 1980 at \$22 per share, which translates into 10 cents per share after adjusting for stock splits. That means \$2,200 spent to purchase 100 shares at the IPO price would be worth more than \$5.5 million today.

Apple's next big thing came at Apple's annual shareholders meeting on Jan. 24, 1984, when Jobs read the opening lines of the Bob Dylan song, "The Times They Are A-Changin'" and unveiled the first Macintosh - a machine that introduced the computer mouse and a graphical interface to the public.

That coming out party came two days after Apple teased the Macintosh computer with a 60-second commercial directed by Ridley Scott that evoked George Orwell's "1984" novel during that year's Super Bowl. The ad created such a huge buzz that it's widely credited for turning Super Bowl commercials into an art form and part of the cultural zeitgeist.

Despite its breakthrough features, the Macintosh (named after an engineer's favorite kind of apple) cost \$2,500 (equal to nearly \$7,900 today) - one of the reasons that it didn't sell as well as anticipated.

The letdown resulted in layoffs and other cost-cutting by Apple CEO John Sculley, a former PepsiCo executive whom Jobs had personally helped recruit to the company in 1983. A year after the Macintosh's release, the on-close relationship between Sculley and Jobs had disintegrated into a power struggle. Apple's board sided with Sculley, prompting Jobs to resign in



Steve Jobs, (left), chairman of Apple Computers, John Sculley, (center), president and CEO, and Steve Wozniak, co-founder of Apple, unveil the new Apple IIc computer in San Francisco, Calif., April 24, 1984. (AP)



The former home of Steve Jobs' parents house in Los Altos, Calif., is shown on March 21, 2026. (AP)



This July 16, 2010 photo, shows Apple's Tim Cook, (left), and Steve Jobs, (right), during a meeting at Apple in Cupertino, Calif. (AP)



Apple CEO Steve Jobs holds up an Apple iPhone at the MacWorld Conference, Jan. 9, 2007, in San Francisco. (AP)

September 1985 with a feeling of betrayal that cut so deep that he sold all but one share of his Apple stock.

After Jobs left, Apple produced popular versions of the Mac with Sculley at the helm.

But Apple's sleekly designed computers couldn't slow the sales momentum of more lower-priced PCs that ran on Microsoft software, whose brazen tactics of replicating the Mac's graphical interface

triggered a seven-year legal battle that ended with a 1994 U.S. Supreme Court decision that shot down Apple's copyright claims.

Before that setback, Apple fired Sculley in mid-1993 and replaced him with Michael Spindler, who lasted until early 1996, when he too was ousted amid the company's mounting losses.

In desperation, Apple plucked its next CEO from its own board, Gil Amelio, who had engineered a turnaround at computer chipmaker National Semiconductor.

Almost all of Amelio's moves didn't pay off except one - a surprising \$428 million deal for an operating system made by NeXT, a computer startup that Jobs launched after he left Apple.

Jobs wanted to only spend a few months advising Amelio during 1997, insisting he wanted to focus on his family when he wasn't busy as CEO of Pixar, the computer animation studio he bought from "Star Wars" director George Lucas for \$5 million in 1986.

But those plans changed in July 1997, when Apple fired Amelio, setting the stage for Jobs to orchestrate a stunning turnaround.

By August 1997, Jobs had made peace with his longtime rival, Microsoft founder Bill Gates, and had worked out a deal that included a \$150 million cash infusion from the Windows maker. The money paved the way for Jobs to introduce a new lineup of candy-colored, translucent computers dubbed the "iMac." The "i" prefac-

ing the Mac heralded a new five-point creed consisting of "internet, individual, instruct, inform, and inspire."

Jobs introduced the first iPod in October 2001, a music storage device that initially could hold up to 1,000 songs. Apple would sell 450 million of the devices in different designs while all but killing the CD format and setting the stage for the age of music streaming.

In what would become his crowning achievement, Jobs walked onto a stage in San Francisco on Jan. 9, 2007, and informed a crowd that he was about to show them three breakthroughs: an iPod with touch-screen controls, a revolutionary cellphone and an internet communicator. Then came his bombshell revelation: "These are not three separate devices. This is one device! And we are calling it the iPhone."

More than 3 billion iPhones have been sold since then, and the device still accounts for more than half of Apple's annual revenue of \$416 billion, nearly 15 years after Jobs died of cancer. Apple's ongoing dependence on the iPhone stems in part from the company's inability to create another mesmerizing product under the leadership of Jobs' hand-picked successor, Tim Cook.

Even so, Apple is worth 10 times more than its \$350 billion market value at the time Jobs died - proof that Cook has been a worthy caregiver of a legacy left behind by a visionary who embraced an advertising campaign celebrating "the ones who see things differently."

'Label AI content'

'AI slop' on YouTube harms kids: experts

NEW YORK, April 2, (AP): Advocacy groups and experts condemned YouTube for serving up low-quality artificial intelligence-generated videos to its most vulnerable audience: children.

In a letter to YouTube CEO Neal Mohan and Sundar Pichai, the CEO of YouTube's parent company Google, children's advocacy group Fairplay expresses "serious concern" about the spread of AI-generated videos on both YouTube and YouTube Kids. The letter, which was sent on Wednesday morning, was signed by more than 200 organizations and individual experts such as child psychiatrists and educators.

"This 'AI slop' harms children's development by distorting their sense of reality, overwhelming their learning processes and hijacking their attention, thereby extending time online and displacing offline activities necessary for their healthy development," the letter reads. "These harms are particularly acute for young children." The letter calls on YouTube to clearly label all AI-generated content and ban any AI-generated content on YouTube Kids. They also propose barring AI-generated videos from being recommended to users under 18 and implementing an option for parents to turn off AI-generated content even if their child searches for it.

The letter is signed by 135 organizations including the American Federation of Teachers and the American Counseling Association, and around 100 individual experts like "The Anxious Generation" author Jonathan Haidt. The letter is part of a larger campaign from Fairplay that also includes a petition.

Much of this AI-generated content is fast-paced with bright colors, lively music and clickbait titles that work to grab the attention of young viewers, the letter outlines. There has been a growing movement online against AI-generated content, particularly when it looks or feels low quality or leans into the meaninglessness of "brainrot."

Spokesperson Boot Bullwinkle said in a statement that YouTube has "high standards for the content in YouTube Kids, including limiting AI-generated content in the app to a small set of high-quality channels."

Transparency

"We also provide parents the option to block channels. Across YouTube, we prioritize transparency when it comes to AI content, labeling content from our own AI tools, and requiring creators to disclose realistic AI content," Bullwinkle said. "We're always evolving our approach to stay current as the ecosystem evolves."

YouTube's current policy regarding AI-generated content requires creators to disclose when content that's "realistic" is made with altered or synthetic media, including generative AI. Creators are not required to disclose when generative AI is used to create content that is clearly unrealistic, including animated videos and those with special effects.

YouTube said it is actively working on developing labels for YouTube Kids.

In its letter, Fairplay argues that voluntary disclosure policy and what it sees as an "extremely limited" definition of altered and synthetic content mean kids still see a flood of AI-generated videos that are not labeled as such. They also argue that many children who watch YouTube videos are not yet able to read or to comprehend something like an AI disclosure. That leaves children "to fend for themselves or their parents to play whack-a-mole," the letter reads.

Fairplay's campaign comes shortly after Google's AI Futures Fund invested \$1 million into Animaj, an AI animation studio that makes videos for kids and draws in staggeringly high viewership numbers, according to Bloomberg.

The campaign follows a landmark verdict in a social media addiction trial in which a California jury found that YouTube designed its platform to hook young users without concern for their well-being. Meta was also found liable on the same counts as YouTube in the same case.

"Pushing AI slop onto young children is just another testament to how YouTube and YouTube Kids are designed to maximize children's time online - including babies. AI slop hypnotizes young children, making it hard for them to get off their screens and move onto essential activities like play, sleep and social interaction," said Rachel Franz, the director of Fairplay's Young Children Thrive Offline program, in a statement. "What's more, YouTube's algorithm makes it impossible for kids to avoid AI slop."

Earlier this year, YouTube head Mohan listed out "managing AI slop" as one of the company's priorities for 2026. In a January blog post, he wrote that the company was "actively building on our established systems that have been very successful in combatting spam and clickbait, and reducing the spread of low quality, repetitive content."



The icons for the YouTube Kids and YouTube apps are displayed on a smartphone in New York on April 25, 2018. (AP)



Apple Computer Inc. co-founder and current adviser Steve Jobs, (background left), stands at a podium as Bill Gates, chief executive of Microsoft Corp., appears on a video screen as he addresses the MacWorld convention praising the new alliance between Apple and Microsoft Wednesday, Aug. 6, 1997, in Boston. (AP)

'100% safety in blood and medical injections ensured'

Delivering on WHO vision Taiwan moves to end hepatitis C

By Dr. Chung-Liang Shih

Minister of Health and Welfare, Taiwan

For decades, hepatitis C has been recognized as a major global public health challenge, with an estimated 58 million people living with chronic hepatitis C infection worldwide. Although no vaccine currently exists, hepatitis C is now curable with highly effective direct acting antiviral (DAA) therapies delivered through treatment courses of 8-12 weeks. Therefore, the World Health Organization (WHO) launched the Glasgow Declaration on Viral Hepatitis in 2015, setting ambitious goals to eliminate viral hepatitis as a public health threat by 2030.

In line with the WHO's Guidance for Country Validation of Viral Hepatitis Elimination and Path to Elimination, Taiwan has reached the Gold Tier programmatic targets under the WHO Path to Elimination (PTE) framework for hepatitis C. This progress has been driven by the government's po-

litical will and the systematic integration of hepatitis prevention, screening, diagnosis, and treatment into a universal health-care system.

Through Taiwan's Adult Preventive Healthcare Services for hepatitis B and C, as well as the National Health Insurance program for DAA reimbursement, hepatitis C screening and treatment are widely available, thereby reducing financial and structural barriers to care. As of June 2025, an estimated 90.2% of individuals with chronic hepatitis C have been diagnosed, and 92.6% of those diagnosed have received DAA treatment, exceeding the WHO PTE Gold Tier benchmarks.

Prevention and patient safety remain indispensable components of hepatitis C elimination. Taiwan maintains 100% screening of donated blood and 100% safe medical injection practices. Comprehensive harm reduction programs are also provided to ensure wide access to sterile injecting equipment for people who inject drugs (PWID), with more than 150

syringes distributed per person. These measures are essential for reducing new infections and safeguarding elimination gains over time.

Consistent with the WHO and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) principle of Leave No One Behind, Taiwan has focused on populations facing higher risks and greater barriers to care. High screening coverage and treatment rates have been achieved among people living with HIV, patients with end-stage renal disease, individuals receiving opioid agonist therapy, and prisoners in correctional facilities. These outcomes reflect the equity of our healthcare systems and reflect the WHO's core principle.

Over the past two decades, Taiwan has observed a substantial decline in liver cancer incidence and mortality, trends closely linked to long-standing hepatitis prevention and treatment policies. The achievements presented in the Taiwan Hepatitis C Elimination Report are the re-

sult of close cross-sectoral collaboration among central and local governments, public health authorities, clinical providers, and civil society organizations. Taiwan's success is also rooted in the government's political will, supported by robust surveillance systems and transparent data reporting.

As the global target toward the 2030 viral hepatitis elimination goals, the "Taiwan Model" offers clear evidence that elimination is achievable when science, political will, and equity converge. The Taiwan Hepatitis C Elimination Report has been submitted to the WHO Western Pacific Regional Office (WPRO) for validation under the PTE Gold Tier for hepatitis C elimination. We look forward to the recognition of Taiwan's demonstrated leadership and contributions in advancing hepatitis C elimination. Taiwan remains committed to working with the international community and sharing our experience to help accelerate global progress toward a world free from hepatitis C.



This satellite image provided by Vantor shows NASA's Artemis II moon rocket at Kennedy Space Center's Launch Pad 39-B before launch on Wednesday, April 1, in Cape Canaveral, Fla. (AP)

Thousands witness dawn of new era

Artemis II crew heads to moon in NASA's first lunar trip in decades

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla., April 2, (AP) — Four astronauts embarked on a high-stakes flight around the moon Wednesday, humanity's first lunar voyage in more than half a century and the thrilling leadoff in NASA's push toward a landing in two years.

Carrying three Americans and one Canadian, the 32-story rocket rose from NASA's Kennedy Space Center where tens of thousands gathered to witness the dawn of this new era. Crowds also jammed the surrounding roads and beaches, reminiscent of the Apollo moonshots in the 1960s and '70s. It is NASA's biggest step yet toward establishing a permanent lunar presence.

"On this historic mission, you take with you the heart of this Artemis team, the daring spirit of the American people and our partners across the globe, and the hopes and dreams of a new generation," launch director Charlie Blackwell-Thompson told the crew right before liftoff. "Good luck, God-speed Artemis II. Let's go."

Artemis II set sail from the same Florida launch site that sent Apollo's explorers to the moon so long ago. The handful still alive cheered this next generation's grand adventure as the Space Launch System rocket thundered into the early evening sky, a nearly full moon beckoning some 248,000 miles (400,000 kilometers) away.

Five minutes into the flight, Commander Reid Wiseman saw the team's target: "We have a beautiful moonrise, we're headed right at it," he said from the capsule. On board with him are pilot Victor Glover, Christina Koch and Canada's Jeremy Hansen. It is the most diverse lunar crew ever with the first woman, person of color and non-U.S. citizen riding in NASA's new Orion capsule.

Business

"NASA is back in the business of sending astronauts to the moon," NASA Administrator Jared Isaacman told reporters following liftoff, calling the half-century hiatus a brief intermission.

Tensions were high earlier in the day as hydrogen fuel started flowing into the rocket. Dangerous hydrogen leaks erupted during a countdown test earlier this year, forcing a lengthy flight delay.

To NASA's relief, no significant hydrogen leaks occurred. The launch team loaded more than 700,000 gallons of fuel (2.6 million liters) into the 32-story Space Launch System rocket on the pad, a smooth operation that set the stage for the Artemis II crew to board.

Then NASA had to overcome a flurry of last-minute technical issues - bad battery sensors and an inability to get commands through to the rocket's flight termination system. In both cases, the issues were quickly resolved, allowing the launch to proceed.

The astronauts will stick close to home for the first 25 hours of their 10-day test flight, checking out the capsule in orbit around Earth before firing the main engine that will propel them to the moon.

They won't pause for a stopover or orbit the moon like Apollo 8's first lunar visitors did so famously on Christmas Eve 1968, reading from Genesis. But they stand to become the most distant humans ever when their capsule zooms past the moon and continues another 4,000 miles (6,400 kilometers) beyond, before making a U-turn and tearing straight home to a splashdown in the Pacific.

Once settled in a high orbit around Earth, the astronauts assumed manual



Spectators look on from the A. Max Brewer Bridge as NASA's Artemis II moon rocket lifts off Wednesday, April 1, as seen from Titusville, Fla. (AP)

control and practiced steering their capsule around the rocket's detached upper stage, venturing as close as 33 feet (10 meters). NASA wants to know how Orion handles in case the self-flying feature fails and the pilots need to take control.

Peering

During Monday's lunar flyby, the moon will appear to be the size of a basketball held at arm's length. The astronauts will take turns peering through Orion's windows with cameras. If the lighting is right, they should see features never before viewed through human eyes. They'll also catch snippets of a total solar eclipse, donning eclipse glasses as the moon briefly blocks the sun from their perspective and the corona is revealed.

All of NASA's moon plans - a surge in launches over the next several years leading to a sustainable moon base for astronauts assisted by robotic rovers and drones - hinge on Artemis II going well.

It's been more than three years since Artemis I, the only other time NASA's SLS rocket and Orion capsule have soared. With no one aboard, the Artemis I capsule lacked life-support equipment and other crew essentials like a water dispenser and toilet.

These systems are now making their space debut on Artemis II, ratcheting up the risk. That's why NASA is waiting a full day before committing Wiseman and his crew to a four-day trip to the moon and four-day journey back.

The capsule's toilet is already acting up. Koch informed Mission Control that it shut down seconds after she activated it. Mission Control advised her to use a handheld bag-and-funnel system for now - CCU, short for Collapsible Contingency Urinal - while engineers pondered how to deal with the so-called lunar loo.

"There's always been a lot riding on this mission," NASA's Lori Glaze said ahead of launch. But the teams are even more "energized" now that the space agency is finally accelerating the lunar launch pace and laser-focusing on surface operations - seismic changes recently announced by Isaacman.

With half the world's population not yet born when NASA's 12 moonwalkers left their boot prints in the gray lunar dust, Artemis offers a fresh beginning, NASA's science mission chief Nicky Fox said earlier this week.

"There are a lot of people who don't remember Apollo. There are generations who weren't alive when Apollo launched. This is their Apollo," said Fox, who was 4 when Apollo 17

closed out the era.

NASA is in it for the long haul this time. Unlike Apollo, which focused on fast flags and footprints in a breakneck race against the Soviet Union, Artemis is striving for a sustainable moon base elaborate enough to satisfy even the most hard-core science fiction fans. But make no mistake: Isaacman and the Trump Administration want the next boot prints to be made by Americans, not the Chinese.

Until Isaacman's program make-over, Artemis III was crawling toward a moon landing no sooner than 2029. The billionaire spacewalker slid in a new Artemis III for 2027 so astronauts could practice docking their Orion capsule with a lunar lander in orbit around Earth. Astronauts' momentous landing near the moon's south pole shifted to Artemis IV in 2028 - two years before an anticipated Chinese crew's arrival.

Like Apollo 13 - astronauts' only moon landing miss - Artemis II will use a free-return, lunar flyby trajectory to get home with gravity's tug and a minimum of gas. The gravity of both the moon and Earth will provide much if not most of the oomph to keep Orion on its out-and-back, figure-eight loop.

Danger

The danger is right up there for Artemis II. NASA has refused to release its risk assessment for the mission. Managers contend it's better than 50-50 - the usual odds for a new rocket - but how much more is murky.

The SLS rocket leaked flammable hydrogen fuel during ground tests, a recurring problem that engineers still do not completely understand. The hydrogen leaks and unrelated helium blockages stalled the flight for two months, coming on top of years of vexing delays and cost overruns. Both problems also thwarted Artemis I, whose capsule returned with excessive heat shield damage. To NASA's relief, Wednesday's countdown was leak-free.

Beating the Soviet Union to the moon made the huge risks acceptable for Apollo, said Charlie Duke, one of only four surviving moonwalkers.

"I'm cheering you on," Duke said in a note to Wiseman and his crew before their flight.

During a weekend news conference, Koch stressed how humanity's path to Mars goes through the moon, the proving ground for hopes beyond.

"It is our strong hope that this mission is the start of an era where everyone, every person on Earth, can look at the moon and think of it as also a destination," she said.

Industrial tech brings new hope to health-care

To fix patient's irregular heartbeat, doctors first tested its digital 'twin'

WASHINGTON, April 2, (AP) — Scientists created virtual replicas of patients' diseased hearts so precise that blocking a dangerous irregular heartbeat in these digital "twins" showed doctors how to better treat the real thing.

One of the first clinical trials of these custom models suggests it might improve care for ventricular tachycardia, a notoriously difficult-to-treat arrhythmia that is a major cause of sudden cardiac arrest, blamed for about 300,000 US deaths a year.

The study, by researchers at Johns Hopkins University, was a small first step. The Food and Drug Administration allowed the digital twin technology to guide treatment for just 10 patients, and much larger studies will be needed.

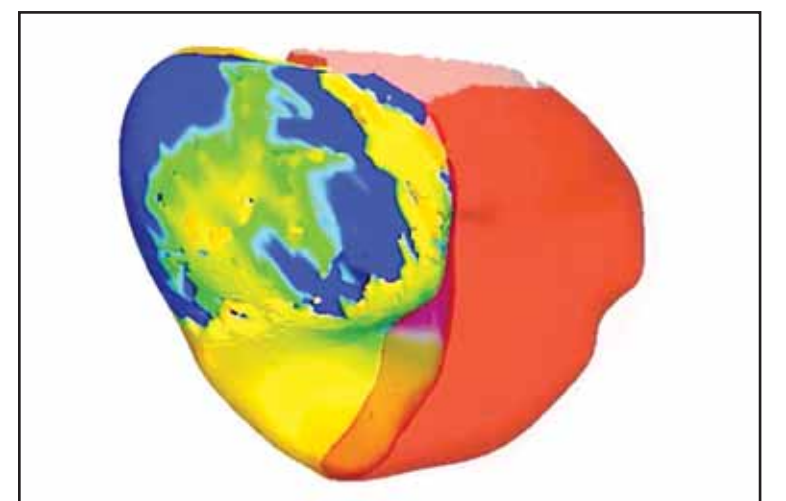
But the results reported Wednesday in the *New England Journal of Medicine* come as doctors increasingly are exploring how a technology long used in aerospace and other industries might be harnessed for better health, too.

Dr. Jeffrey Goldberger, a heart specialist at the University of Miami who wasn't involved with the study, experimented with more rudimentary iterations 15 years ago and praised the new findings. "This is what we envisioned," he said.

Doctors have long used 3D models, both physical and computer-generated ones, to simulate disease and practice techniques. But Hopkins biomedical engineer Natalia Trayanova said true digital twins predict how a real organ can react to different treatments. Her lab is pioneering colorful interactive models developed with an advanced MRI scan and other data from each patient.

"We treat the twin before we treat the patient," Trayanova said. "Did it work? And if it did, are there new things that arise" that will require more or different care?

The heart's electrical system powers our heartbeat. Ventricular tachycardia is a super-fast heartbeat triggered when an electrical wave short-circuits in the organ's bottom chambers, the ventricles, and prevents them from pumping blood out



This image from video provided by Johns Hopkins University in March 2026 shows a digital twin of a heart belonging to a patient with an irregular heartbeat being used to simulate treatment approaches. (AP)

to the body.

"You see this heart that is basically quivering," Trayanova said.

Medication can help but the main treatment is ablation, when doctors thread catheters to the heart to burn misfiring tissue. But it's a bit trial-and-error, as patients spend hours under anesthesia while doctors determine where to aim. Repeat ablations are common, and many patients have an implanted defibrillator as backup.

Enter Trayanova's digital twins of patients' ventricles. Colors swirl on a computer screen - blue, green, yellow and orange - showing how the heart's electrical wave moves across the chamber's healthy areas before getting stuck on damaged tissue. It's trapped in a circular motion that she compares to the swirl of a hurricane.

"It allows me to recreate the functioning of the patient's organ and then predict what is the best way to ablate," she said.

The technology locates a dysfunctional region where the electrical wave repeatedly hits. Virtually ablating it will show if that solves the problem or if another arrhythmia forms that also will need zapping. "Then we

poke it again," she explained.

Trayanova's team created customized ablation targets for each of the 10 study participants. Cardiologists transferred them to a mapping system they use as a guide and aimed just at those targets instead of hunting their own.

More than a year later, eight patients had no arrhythmias while two experienced only a single brief episode while they were healing - better than the treatment's typical 60% success rate, said Dr. Jonathan Chrispin, a Hopkins cardiologist and the study's lead author. All but two also stopped their anti-arrhythmia medicine.

More importantly, cardiologists may burn away less tissue by targeting "specifically the areas that we think are critically important," Chrispin said. "We could potentially make these procedures shorter, safer, more effective."

The Hopkins team hopes to study the digital twin approach in a larger study with other hospitals, and has begun a trial using it to treat a more common type of irregular heartbeat called atrial fibrillation. Other researchers are studying digital twins for cancer care.

'Speedy nod'

FDA OKs Lilly obesity drug

NEW YORK, April 2, (AP) — Federal regulators on Wednesday approved Eli Lilly's new weight-loss pill, a second daily oral medication to treat obesity and other weight-related conditions.

The Food and Drug Administration granted expedited approval to orforglipron, a GLP-1 drug that works like widely used injectable medications to mimic a natural hormone that controls appetite and feelings of fullness.

The drug, which will be branded as Founday, is expected to begin shipping Monday. The company said people with insurance may be able to get the drug starting at \$25 per month with a Lilly discount card. Prices for people paying cash will range between \$149 per month to \$349 per month, depending on the dose.

The new pill joins drugmaker Novo Nordisk's oral Wegovy pill, which has spurred more than 600,000 prescriptions in the United States since it was approved in December.

'Affordable care'

US bipartisan bill revives bid to lower insulin costs

NEW YORK, April 2, (AP) — Two-year-old Bain Brandon has Type 1 diabetes and needs insulin to live. But even with health insurance, the price tag isn't cheap.

A one-month supply of insulin vials and a three-month supply of backup pens for the Mississippi toddler cost his parents \$194 last week, according to his mom, 29-year-old Marlee Brandon. They can afford it right now - but she worries about the future.

"One day, Bain will be an adult, and he won't be able to be on our insurance anymore," she said. "I feel like a lot of people don't realize how much and how expensive it is."

A bipartisan group of senators is aiming to relieve that cost burden with the INSULIN Act, a bill to cap the cost of the lifesaving drug at \$35 per month for Americans with private insurance plans. The bill, introduced last week by Sens. Jeanne Shaheen, D-Maine, Raphael Warnock, D-Ga., Susan Collins, R-Maine, and John Kennedy, R-La., would also start a pilot program to provide more affordable insulin to uninsured Americans in 10 states. A somewhat similar bill passed in 2022, as part of the Biden-era Inflation Re-

duction Act, a sweeping package from Democrats that successfully capped the drug at \$35 per month for older adults on Medicare.

The legislation, the latest in a long effort by some lawmakers of both parties to rein in the price of insulin, faces many hurdles, including concerns about the cost and other competing congressional priorities. Still, with Trump in the White House and Congress now controlled by his Republican Party, it creates an opportunity for a rare bipartisan victory on health care cost as a concern for voters of both parties.

About 8.1 million people in the US use insulin, according to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. That includes more than 2 million who have Type 1 diabetes and will die without regular access to insulin. The drug also helps control glucose levels for people with other types of diabetes.

But the price of insulin can vary widely. While some people with private insurance pay zero or very little, others pay hundreds of dollars each month on top of other costs for their diabetes, like pumps, blood glucose sensors and other supplies.

CDC pauses dozens of lab tests amid review

NEW YORK, April 2, (AP) — The federal government's disease-tracking agency has paused its diagnostic testing for rabies, monkeypox and a number of other infectious diseases.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention this week posted a list of more than two dozen types of testing that have become unavailable.

This is not the first time the CDC has paused some of its lab testing. But it is pausing more kinds of tests than ever before, and it is not totally clear why, said Scott Becker, chief executive officer of the Association of Public Health Laboratories.

A government spokesman called the pause temporary and attributed it to "a routine review to uphold our commitment to high quality laboratory testing."

"We anticipate some of these tests will be available through CDC labs again in the coming weeks. In the meantime, CDC stands ready to support our state and local partners to access the public health testing they need," said Andrew Nixon of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, which oversees the CDC.

CDC's laboratory operations were faulted during the COVID-19 pan-

demic, and they were the subject of a subsequent work group's review. The agency has been evaluating its testing since 2024, Becker said.

But there can be other reasons for taking tests offline, including staffing issues, he noted.

The pausing of lab testing comes in the wake of the dramatic downsizing of the CDC in the last year through layoffs, retirements, resignations and the nonrenewal of temporary appointments. Staffing fell by 20% to 25%, according to different estimates, and was felt across the agency - including in the laboratories.

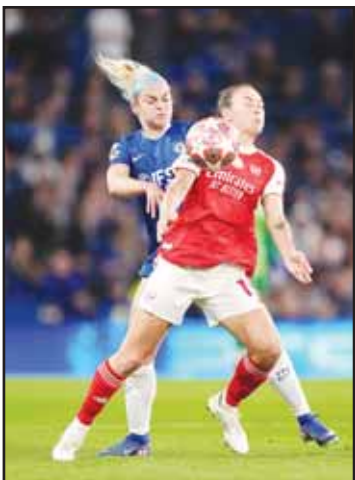
Arsenal fend off Chelsea to reach semifinals

Bayern advances in Women's CL

LONDON, April 2, (AP): Defending champion Arsenal advanced to the Women's Champions League semifinals despite a 1-0 loss to Chelsea in a London derby.

With a 3-1 home victory in the first leg of the quarterfinal last week, Arsenal reached the last four on a 3-2 aggregate score.

Sjoeke Nüsken scored for Chelsea



Arsenal's Caitlin Foord, right, and Chelsea's Ellie Carpenter battle for the ball during the Women's Champions League quarterfinal second leg soccer match between Chelsea and Arsenal in London. (AP)

from close range in the fourth minute of stoppage time at Stamford Bridge.

In the dramatic last few minutes, Veerle Buurman hit the post for Chelsea and Arsenal goalkeeper Daphne van Domselaar saved a goal-bound header by Nüsken.

Chelsea coach Sonia Bompastor received a red card in the dying seconds of the match.

The home team was pressuring Arsenal from the start with forward Sam Kerr particularly posing a threat. Kerr missed the first leg because she was playing for Australia at the Asian Cup. Earlier, Bayern Munich rallied with two late goals in three minutes to beat Manchester United 2-1 and advance to the semifinals on a 5-3 aggregate score.

Glóidís Viggósdóttir started the rally in the 81st with a header after a corner kick, and Linda Dallmann fired from inside the area after another corner to send Bayern to its first semifinal since 2021.

Making its debut in the quarterfinals, United traveled to Germany after losing to Bayern Munich 3-2 in the opening leg at Old Trafford.

The visitors dominated the first half with Melvine Malard putting them up 1-0 after 11 minutes. The France forward used a blunder by Bayern goalkeeper Ena Mahmutovic to score into an empty net, and equalize the aggregate score at 3-3.

The German powerhouse applied pressure in the second half, but Manchester's defense led by American goalkeeper Phallon Tullis-Joyce held firm until Viggósdóttir struck.



Bayern's Glodis Viggosdottir, centre rear, scores her sides first goal during the Women's Champions League quarterfinal second leg soccer match between Bayern Munich and Manchester United in Munich, Germany. (AP)

'Issue taken seriously'

Post-mortem reveals CTE in NZ rugby player Christie

WELLINGTON, New Zealand, April 2, (AP): A New Zealand professional rugby player who died by suspected suicide last year had advanced chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE), a brain abnormality linked to repeated concussions, according to a post-mortem examination.

The diagnosis was announced Thursday by Coroner Ian Telford, who is conducting a preliminary hearing into the death of Shane Christie who died in August aged 39.

CTE is a disease which causes progressive damage to brain tissue and has been known to cause mood swings, impulsive behavior and depression, among other symptoms. It can only be diagnosed after death.

Christie was a former New Zealand Maori representative who believed he was suffering from CTE and campaigned for greater understanding of the condition after the death of his friend and fellow rugby professional Billy Guyton, also by suspected suicide.

The abnormality has also been linked to deaths in the National Football League and in other sports such as hockey and soccer.

Friends and family of Christie said he wanted his diagnosis made public to raise awareness of CTE for players suffering its symptoms.

Christie, who played Super Rugby for the Crusaders and Highlanders in New Zealand, retired from rugby in 2018 after suffering the effects of repeated concussions.

The coroner said pathologist Dr. Clinton Turner had confirmed "the diagnosis of chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE), which he characterizes as 'high stage.'" Turner works at the University of Auckland "brain bank" to which Guyton and Christie had donated their brains.

The coroner said the diagnosis was the pathologist's opinion and that the cause of Christie's death would be determined by the coronial process.

The chief executive of New Zealand Rugby, Steve Lancaster told New Zealand media his organization recognizes "an association between repeated head impacts and CTE and takes this issue seriously."

"New Zealand Rugby acknowledges the CTE pathology results for Shane Christie confirmed by The Neurological Foundation Human Brain Bank. We also acknowledge and respect the role of the coroner to determine the nature of any inquiry they may hold examining the cause and circumstances of Shane's passing," Lancaster said.

"We share the concerns about the potential long-term effects of repeated head knocks in rugby and support the need for ongoing research into this."



Highlanders player Shane Christie, center, gets into space during the Round 16 Super Rugby match between the Queensland Reds and the Highlanders at Suncorp Stadium in Brisbane, Australia. (AP)

Fluminense eases past Corinthians

RIO DE JANEIRO, April 2, (Xinhua): Fluminense continued its impressive start to Brazil's Serie A season with a 3-1 home victory over 10-man Corinthians.

The hosts opened the scoring in the 20th minute when Colombian forward Kevin Serna forced a turnover and released John Kennedy, who rounded goalkeeper Kauê before rolling the ball into an empty net.

Hercules doubled his side's advantage just before halftime with a clinical finish from 12 yards after Serna's shot rebounded off the far post.

Corinthians was reduced to 10 men early in the second half after midfielder Allan Rodrigues was shown a second yellow card for unruly conduct.

Fluminense was in cruise control and Argentine forward Rodrigo Castillo made it 3-0 with an angled finish after Matheus Martinelli's cross from the right wing. Andre

then pulled a goal back for the visitors by pouncing on a loose ball and rifling a low effort past goalkeeper Fabio.

The result at Rio de Janeiro's Maracana Stadium leaves Fluminense second in the 20-team standings with 19 points, trailing Palmeiras on goal difference. Corinthians is 11th, nine points further back.

Elsewhere, former Manchester United defender Alex Telles scored a first-half penalty as Botafogo edged to a 3-2 home win over Mirassol.

Arthur Cabral and Junior Santos were on target for the hosts while Shaylon and Igor Formiga scored for Mirassol.

In other Brazilian top-flight fixtures on Wednesday, Vasco da Gama drew 1-1 at Coritiba, Bahia cruised to a 3-0 home win over Athletico Paranaense, Cruzeiro romped to a 3-0 home win over Vitoria and Sao Paulo drew 1-1 at Internacional.

Dortmund heads to Stuttgart needing points to keep pace with leader

It's World Cup audition time in the Bundesliga as Bayern 'nears' title

MUNICH, April 2, (AP): It's crunch time for a host of Bundesliga players with ambitions of playing at the World Cup.

Bayern Munich 18-year-old midfielder Lennart Karl is fighting to keep his spot for Germany. Deniz Undav's scoring streak for Stuttgart has put pressure on coach Julian Nagelsmann to take him to the U.S. in June, and Alejandro Grimaldo's form for Bayer Leverkusen could help him earn a spot for Spain.

Oh, and there's still a title to be won. Bayern comes back into action after the international break with a vast 11-point lead over Borussia Dortmund. If Bayern wins its next two games and Dortmund loses both, the title could be Bayern's as soon as April 11.

Dortmund heads to Stuttgart needing points to keep pace with Bayern. Stuttgart's third, chasing Champions League qualification, and with a host of players chasing World Cup spots for Germany like Undav, Angelo Stiller, Jamie Lewelling and Chris Führich. Dortmund's Carney Chukwuemeka's just made his Austria debut, too.

The tasks for Bayern at Freiburg on Saturday: Take care of business and avoid any more injuries ahead of next week's Champions League quarterfinal against Real Madrid.

Eintracht Frankfurt's World Cup hopefuls have a lot to aim for, even if



Lennart Karl of Germany and Derrick Kohn of Ghana challenge for the ball during an international friendly soccer match between Germany and Ghana in Stuttgart, Germany. (AP)

the team doesn't in seventh place with a big gap to the European places. Hosting Cologne on Sunday is a chance to impress for players like Japan winger Ritsu Doan, who captained his country against England, Germany defender Nathaniel Brown and Belgium center back Arthur Theate.

Undav is a hot topic in Germany after scoring seven goals in Stuttgart's

last six Bundesliga games and the winning goal in Germany's friendly win over Ghana on Monday. He's the second-highest scorer in the league but Nagelsmann still sees him as a bench option despite the up-and-down Germany form of Newcastle's Nick Woltemade.

The uncertain fitness of Jamal Musiala has opened up space for youngster

Karl to impress for Bayern, and now for Germany, too. He combined well with Florian Wirtz on debut in last week's 4-3 win over Switzerland. Bayern teammate Serge Gnabry's stock for Germany is also rising.

Grimaldo played the full 90 minutes of Spain's 0-0 draw with Egypt and the Leverkusen left back returns to his club to push for Champions League qualification. That starts with hosting relegation-threatened Wolfsburg on Saturday.

He's not confirmed out just yet but the "minor issue" that ruled Harry Kane out of England's friendly loss to Japan could be a concern for Bayern coach Vincent Kompany.

Bayern's goalkeeping situation remains a concern, too. Manuel Neuer has been working his way back to fitness after not playing since March 6 and stand-in Jonas Urbig had a setback when a knee injury forced him out of Germany's squad.

It's the first game of a new era at Dortmund after Ole Book replaced Sebastian Kehl as sporting director. The future of defender Nico Schlotterbeck, who has a year left on his contract, is as unclear as ever.

The Easter holidays in Germany mean a tweak to the Bundesliga schedule. Instead of the usual Friday game, there are seven on Saturday and two on Sunday.

PSG hosts Toulouse, Lens faces tricky trip to Lille

Monaco mounting Champs League challenge in Ligue 1

PARIS, April 2, (AP): Monaco was unstoppable in Ligue 1 before the international break and now a Champions League spot is within reach.

The Principality side has swept its last six matches and is on a nine-match unbeaten run ahead of Sunday's reception of third-placed Marseille. Victory would see Monaco move level on points with its southern rival in the French standings.

This is quite the turnaround for Sébastien Pocognoli's players, who trailed Marseille by 14 points at the end of January.

Pocognoli guided Union Saint-Gilloise to the Belgian league title last season and initially struggled to adapt on the Riviera. His attacking approach, intense pressing and astute substitutions are, however, finally paying off.

Add to that Folarin Balogun's excellent recent form - seven goals in his last seven matches in all competitions - and sixth-placed Monaco is a strong contender for a top-three Champions League spot. The fourth-placed team goes through qualifying.

"Several teams are ahead of us, so we are in pursuit, applying pressure from our underdog position,"

Pocognoli said. "This is a consequence of the difficult spell we endured from November through to January. We aim to claw our way up a few more spots in the standings before the season concludes."

It's a close fight at the top of the standings between defending champion Paris Saint-Germain and second-placed Lens. With seven rounds left, PSG has a one-point lead with one match in hand.

PSG hosts Toulouse on Friday and Lens facing a tricky trip to its northern neighbor Lille on Saturday. Lens was infuriated by a decision last week from the French league to postpone its April 11 game with PSG and questioned sporting equity. The league took the decision to allow PSG better preparation for its Champions League quarterfinal against Liverpool.

Maghnes Aklouché scored and was decisive for Monaco before the international break. He built on the momentum during France's short tour in the United States. The creative midfielder played 10 minutes during France's 2-1 win against Brazil and started in the 3-1 defeat of Colombia. Aklouché also impressed with his tactical decisions and an assist to Marcus Thuram.

Best of the Rest

Ireland's Croke Park to host friendly: Croke Park will host a club soccer game for the first time when Manchester United faces Leeds in a preseason friendly at Ireland's largest stadium on Aug. 12.

The 82,300-capacity Dublin stadium is the home of the Gaelic Athletic Association and for many years staged only Gaelic games.

Croke Park last hosted a soccer game in November 2009 when Ireland lost to France 1-0 in the first leg of a World Cup playoff that erupted in controversy during the second leg because of Thierry Henry's handball in the lead-up to William Gallas' decisive extra-time goal.

That match was at Croke Park because rugby's Lansdowne Road was being redeveloped into Aviva Stadium. Croke Park opened its doors to rugby for the first time in that period.

Last year, the Pittsburgh Steelers and Minnesota Vikings played at Croke Park - the first time an NFL regular-season game was held in Ireland. The Steelers and Chicago Bears also played a preseason game there in 1997.

A venue deeply rooted in Irish culture, Croke Park also hosted a non-title bout between Muhammad Ali

and Alvin "Blue" Lewis in July 1972. (AP)

Gotze signs extension at Frankfurt: Mario Gotze has signed a two-year contract extension with Eintracht Frankfurt, committing his future to the Eagles until June 2028.

The 33-year-old, who joined Frankfurt from PSV Eindhoven ahead of the 2022-23 season, has grown into a leading figure within the squad. One of six team captains, the 2014 World Cup winner has made 148 appearances across all competitions, scoring 12 goals and providing 18 assists while logging more than 10,200 minutes on the pitch.

Gotze has also remained a regular presence this season, featuring in 26 matches in the Bundesliga, UEFA Champions League and DFB-Pokal. Under new head coach Albert Riera, he has made four appearances from a possible seven while continuing to offer experience in a relatively young squad.

"Eintracht Frankfurt means a great deal to me," Gotze said. "I've been here for almost four years and have had a fantastic time so far." "I know that a football career is finite. That makes me appreciate every moment on the pitch and in the stadium even more. The joy I get from football and from this club convinced me to extend my contract." Sporting director Markus Krosche underlined the midfielder's influ-

ence, describing him as "a very important player and an equally important personality for the team and the club." He added that Gotze has "experienced almost everything in his professional career" and now shares that knowledge with younger players. (Xinhua)

Botafogo close to hiring coach Carvalho: Botafogo is close to appointing Portugal's Franclim Carvalho as its new head coach, according to widespread media reports in Brazil.

Carvalho is expected to arrive in Rio de Janeiro on Thursday to sign a contract that runs until December 2027, newspaper O Globo said on Wednesday.

The 39-year-old is well known to Botafogo, having worked as an assistant coach to Artur Jorge in 2024, when the Rio de Janeiro club won both the Copa Libertadores and Brazilian Serie A titles.

Carvalho's only experience as a first-team manager was with the now-defunct Portuguese side Belenses SAD in 2022. Botafogo has been searching for a new head coach since parting ways with Argentine Martin Anselmi in March.

The three-time Brazilian top-flight champion has endured a difficult start to the South American season, having failed to progress beyond the Copa Libertadores qualifying phase and losing five of its first seven Brazilian Serie A matches. (Xinhua)

Glitch hampers sales reopening

FIFA raises top ticket price for World Cup final to \$10,990

WASHINGTON, April 2, (AP): FIFA raised its top ticket price for the World Cup final to \$10,990 during the glitch-hampered reopening of sales Wednesday after the 48-team field for this year's tournament was finalized.

The price had been \$8,680 when FIFA sold tickets after the tournament draw in December.

FIFA's category 2 tickets for the July 19 game at MetLife Stadium in East Rutherford, New Jersey, were \$7,380, up from \$5,575, and category 3 cost \$5,785, an increase \$4,185.

Tickets were listed for 17 of the 72 group-stage matches by Wednesday night and none of the knockout stage games.

Soccer's governing body is using dynamic pricing for the tournament, which will be played in 11 U.S. cities plus three in Mexico and two in Canada.

Only \$2,735 tickets, the highest-priced seats, were available by evening for the U.S. opener on June 12 against Paraguay at SoFi Stadium in Ingle-

wood, California, and the price was unchanged from December. No tickets were listed for the Americans' June 19 game against Australia at Seattle or their June 25 match against Turkey at Inglewood.

Only \$2,985 seats were available by Wednesday evening for the tournament opener between Mexico and Saudi Arabia on June 11 in Mexico City, up from \$2,355 in December. And only \$2,240 tickets were available for Canada's first game on June 12 against Bosnia-Herzegovina in Toronto, an increase from \$2,170.

Soccer's governing body did not announce which games and price categories were available, leaving potential ticket buyers to search themselves on a FIFA ticketing site that often took hours to enter.

Some people who clicked on what FIFA called its "last-minute sales phase" when sales opened at 11 a.m. EDT were directed into a queue for "PMA late qualifier supporters sales phase," aimed for a segment of fans

for the six nations who earned berths on Tuesday.

FIFA did not have an explanation for why the link misdirection occurred but said around noon that the links were working properly.

FIFA also said that not all remaining tickets were being put on sale for the 104 games to be played in the U.S., Mexico and Canada from June 11 to July 19 and that additional tickets will be released on a rolling basis.

This was the fifth phase of ticket sales following a Visa presale draw from Sept. 10-19, an early ticket draw from Oct. 27-31, a random selection draw from Dec. 11 to Jan. 13 and an unscheduled 48-hour availability in late February.

FIFA said this phase, which will remain open through the tournament, marked the first time a specific seat location could be purchased rather than a request for a ticket in a category.

For the month-long sales phase after the Dec. 5 draw, tickets were priced

at \$140 to \$8,680. After complaints, FIFA said \$60 tickets would be made available to each participating national federation for their most loyal supporters, an amount likely to be 400-700 per team for each match.

"The employment of dynamic ticket pricing for the 2026 FWC starkly contrasts with FIFA's core mission to promote the accessible and inclusive promotion and development of soccer globally," 69 Democratic members of Congress wrote in a March 10 letter to FIFA President Gianni Infantino. "Despite host cities' cooperation in bringing the vision of the largest, most global World Cup in history to fruition, the consequences of dynamic pricing will make the 2026 FWC the most financially exclusionary and inaccessible to date."

FIFA also has its own resale market, collecting 15% from both the buyer and seller.

Bosnia-Herzegovina, Congo, the Czech Republic, Iraq, Sweden and Turkey completed the World Cup

field. Fans of teams eliminated Tuesday could attempt to resell tickets they already had purchased, nations that include Italy, Poland, Denmark, Jamaica and Bolivia.

Infantino claimed in January that the amount of ticket requests FIFA had received was the equivalent of "the request for 1,000 years of World Cups at once."

"This is unique," he said at the time. "It's incredible."

It was unclear if many of those requests were for seats in the lowest-price categories.

Fan groups have voiced concern over the soaring costs for resold tickets and one filed a formal complaint to the European Commission last month.

Infantino defended FIFA's cut of resale, saying the governing body was engaged in a legal commercial activity under U.S. law. Some European countries have laws which can restrict resale by requiring tickets to be sold for face value or only by authorized partners of the event organizers.



FIFA World Cup trophy.

Delhi survives batting collapse



Delhi Capitals' Sameer Rizvi plays a shot during the Indian Premier League cricket match between Lucknow Super Giants and Delhi Capitals in Lucknow, India. (AP)

Rizvi anchors Capitals to 6-wicket win over Lucknow

LUCKNOW, India, April 2, (AP): Impact player substitute Sameer Rizvi struck a half-century as Delhi Capitals overcame a top-order order collapse and beat Lucknow Super Giants by six wickets in its opening game of the Indian Premier League.

Rizvi anchored Delhi to 145-4 in 17.1 overs with an unbeaten 70 off 47 balls after coming in for Thangarasu Natarajan in the fourth over.

Lucknow had earlier collapsed to 141 all in 18.4 overs after Delhi skipper Axar Patel won the toss on a wicket where fast bowlers found plenty of swing with the new ball.

Delhi ran into early trouble in the chase when it collapsed to 26-4 in the fifth over before Rizvi and Tristan Stubbs (39 not out) of South Africa featured in a match-winning 119-run stand.

"Playing at home, you know the conditions and that helped as my state

league takes place here," Rizvi said. "Stubbs said 'respect the conditions' (and) once we were set, we knew we could play our natural game."

Lokesh Rahul got dismissed on Mohammad Shami's first ball when he holed out at deep point while going for an extravagant inside shot over the cover, and pace bowler



Lucknow Super Giants' Anrich Nortje bowls a delivery during the Indian Premier League cricket match between Lucknow Super Giants and Delhi Capitals in Lucknow, India. (AP)

Mohsin Khan found the outside edge of Nitish Rana's bat.

Fast bowler Prince Yadav then picked up the wickets of Sri Lankan Pathum Nissanka, who skied a mistimed pull to diving wicketkeeper Rishabh Pant, and clean bowled Patel of the next ball before Rizvi and Stubbs revived the chase.

Rizvi was the aggressor of the two, hitting four sixes and five boundaries while Stubbs' 32-ball knock featured three fours and a six.

Earlier, Lucknow struggled from the onset against the pace of Mukesh Kumar (0-17) in the power play while Lungi Ngidi (3-27) and Natarajan (3-29) intelligently varied their pace.

Pant promoted himself as an opener but was run-out in the third over when Kumar couldn't hold onto a sharp return catch of Mitchell Marsh, but the ball deflected onto the stumps at the non-striker's end with Pant out of crease.

"Best way to recover from my dismissal is to ignore it as you can't control it," Pant said. "The way we batted, we couldn't get a partnership for long ... there was enough help with the new ball, but you can't put pressure on the opposition with 140." Marsh made 35 off 28 before he holed out to mid-off against Kuldeep Yadav's (2-31) googly in the 10th over. Ngidi, bowling round the wicket, baffled experienced Nicholas Pooran with a dipping slower ball as the West Indian left-hander tried to flick but missed the line completely and was clean bowled for run-a-ball 8.

'Difficult to pick 26 from 35, 40 players'

US players on WC roster bubble have soccer's ultimate Fear Of Missing Out

ATLANTA, April 2, (AP): Now comes the wait, soccer's ultimate FOMO.

American players across the United States and Europe will count down the eight weeks until coach Mauricio Pochettino picks his 26 World Cup players.

Those bypassed won't get a phone call.

"It's going to be painful," Pochettino said. "In that process, always you create links, no, emotional links, but it's going to be difficult to pick 26 from 35, 40 players."

Twenty-four players were used during the 5-2 loss to Belgium and 2-0 defeat to Portugal in the last two friendlies before Pochettino announces his roster on May 26 at an event in New York. A total of 38 players have appeared in the last eight matches dating to September.

Twelve players appear to be locks if healthy: goalkeepers Matt Freese and Matt Turner; right back Sergio Dest; central defenders Tim Ream and Chris Richards; left back Antonee Robinson; midfielders Tyler Adams, Weston McKennie and Malik Tillman; attackers Christian Pulisic and Timothy Weah; and forward Folarin Balogun.

About two dozen others are possible: goalkeepers Chris Brady, Patrick Schulte and Jonathan Klinsmann; central defenders Mark McKenzie, Miles Robinson and Auston Trusty; outside backs Max Arfsten, Alex Freeman, Joe Scally and John Tolkin; midfielders Brenden Aaronson, Sebastian Berhalter, Johnny Cardoso, Diego Luna, Jack McGlynn, Aiden Morris, Gio Reyna, Cristian Roldan and Tanner Tessmann; and forwards Patrick Agyemang, Ricardo Pepi, Haji Wright and Alejandro Zendejas.

Players will be concentrating on their club careers and as May 26 approaches will try not to dwell on their World Cup chances.

"Hopefully that time when with Celtic we're playing (the Scottish) Cup final. That's the only thing I'll be focusing on," defender Trusty said.

Failure to win the CONCACAF Gold Cup and pro-visiting team crowds in the U.S. amped up anxiety among fans and the former-player pundit class throughout the summer, but ending the year with a five-game unbeaten streak boosted belief.

This month's losses sent skepticism soaring.

"I think we're heading in the right direction. I think obviously it's hard to say that we're where we want to be with results like this, but I think that we take a lot of positives away from the games that we played," McKennie said. "We see that we can keep up. I think we just need to figure out how to be able to stay in the game if we don't finish chances that we have early on."

Pulisic hasn't scored in a career-high eight straight national team games and also is scoreless in 12 matches for AC Milan since Dec. 28.

"He just needs one to go in, get back on that wave," U.S. career scoring co-leader Clint Dempsey said. "Everybody goes through a little bit of a slump."

Pochettino cautioned that U.S. players are not as good as some American fans think they are, pointing to the latest results.

"We are USA and we are competing against Belgium, Portugal," he said. "I think for sure Belgium and Portugal have in the top 100 players few or some players playing in that top 100. I think we don't have."

Portugal coach Roberto Martinez cautioned not to overanalyze the friendlies.



Team USA poses for a photo before an international friendly soccer match against team Portugal in Atlanta. (AP)

Belgian faces possible first-team freeze

Napoli threatens after Lukaku skips training, likely missing Milan clash

MILAN, April 2, (AP): Romelu Lukaku has been the focus at Napoli this week. Just not in a good way.

Lukaku failed to turn up to training on Tuesday and the club issued a hardline statement that it may take "appropriate disciplinary action" against the forward. That includes freezing him out of the first team.

Whatever happens, Lukaku is unlikely to be available for Monday's crucial Serie A match against AC Milan - a head-to-head battle for second place.

For his part, Lukaku - who missed the first half of the season with a serious thigh injury - insists he stayed in Belgium for medical reasons after national team doctors detected a muscular problem that had not been diagnosed by Napoli, but had kept him on the bench for the club's previous two matches.

"As it is the second problem I have had since I returned at the beginning of November, I chose to do the rehabilitation in Belgium," Lukaku added in a social media post. "I could never turn my back on Napoli, ever."

"There is nothing I want more than to play and win with my team... but right now I have to make sure I'm 100% clinically, because recently I haven't been and this has also had a mental im-

pact ... but in the end I'll make it and I'll help Napoli and the national team achieve their goals when I'm called upon. It's everything I want."

Lukaku went to Belgium to join the national



In this file photo, Napoli's Romelu Lukaku reacts after an injury during a friendly soccer match between Napoli and Olympiakos at the Teofilo Patini Stadium in Castel Di Sangro, Italy. (AP)

team but was forced to pull out of the squad and did not travel to the United States for the friendly matches against the U.S. and Mexico.

Napoli and Belgium teammate Kevin De Bruyne could try and ease the tension between Lukaku and Napoli.

De Bruyne said after Wednesday's draw against Mexico, "Once I get back to the club, I will be more up to date. I will try to help, if necessary."

Milan is in second place, just a point above third-placed Napoli.

The Rossoneri are six points behind league leader Inter Milan, which itself faces a tough matchup against Champions League-chasing Roma on Sunday.

Roma is level with fifth-placed Juventus, three points behind Como and the final Champions League berth.

Juventus hosts Genoa on Monday, shortly after Como visits Udinese.

Italy players will have to swiftly recover from the disappointment of failing to qualify for a third straight World Cup.

Inter defender Alessandro Bastoni has become the face of the latest catastrophe after his red card during the defeat to Bosnia and Herzegovina in the World Cup playoffs on Tuesday.

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In this file photo, Liverpool's Mohamed Salah warms up during the Premier League soccer match between Liverpool and Tottenham in Liverpool, England. (AP)

Sports

Chelsea hosts third-tier Port Vale

Salah's farewell begins as Liverpool faces Man City in FA Cup

LIVERPOOL, England, April 2, (AP) — Mohamed Salah's long goodbye to Liverpool begins on Saturday in the quarterfinals of the FA Cup, the competition which represents his best chance of a trophy in his final year at Anfield.

The Egypt winger announced last week that he will be leaving Liverpool at the end of the season after nine years at a club where he has broken scoring records and established himself as one of the world's best players.

Salah potentially has 15 games left in the famous red shirt: Seven in the Premier League as well as three in the FA Cup and five in the Champions League, should Liverpool reach the final in both of those competitions.

That won't be easy. In the Champions League, defending champion Paris Saint-Germain is up next in the two-leg quarterfinals and it's pretty much as tough in the FA Cup, with Liverpool handed an away match at Manchester City.

Salah, who has 255 goals in 435 appearances for Liverpool, missed the Reds' last game before the international break - a 2-1 loss at Brighton in the league - with a muscle injury but has told manager Arne Slot he should be healthy enough to return this weekend.

"He just does so much for his body for such a long time that he recovers so fast," Slot said on Wednesday. "So, he will train with the team again tomorrow and if everything works well then he's available to be with us at City."

The 33-year-old Salah was left out of the Liverpool team for four straight games at the end of 2025 in what appeared to be a breakdown in his relationship with Slot and the club.

Since returning from the Africa Cup of Nations, Salah virtually has been an ever-present in the lineup, seemingly winning the Dutch coach round.

City, meanwhile, is seeking a domestic cup double after beating Arsenal in the English League Cup final on March

22. Pep Guardiola's team is also chasing Arsenal in the Premier League, which takes a break this weekend to give the FA Cup its own space in the calendar.

The other FA Cup quarterfinals take place across Saturday and Sunday.

After City-Liverpool in the early kickoff on Saturday, Chelsea hosts third-tier Port Vale - the lowest-ranked team left in the competition - before Arsenal visits second-tier Southampton.

On Sunday, West Ham hosts Leeds in an all-Premier League matchup.

Manchester City midfielder Phil Foden has less than two months to persuade England coach Thomas Thomas he is worthy of a place in the World Cup squad.

Foden started both of England's recent friendly games - a draw with Uruguay and a loss to Japan - but failed to impress either in the No. 10 role or as a "false nine," prompt-

ing Tuchel to say it's "not a guarantee" that Foden will be at the World Cup.

Foden was English soccer's player of the year in the 2023-24 season but has not maintained his top form and has rarely started for City in recent months.

Arsenal's team sheet for the Southampton game will be heavily scrutinized, given 10 players missed games for their national team over the international break because of various issues.

Eberechi Eze, Jurrien Timber and Martin Odegaard already had injuries that caused them to miss the League Cup final, before Piero Hincapie, Bukayo Saka, Declan Rice, William Saliba, Gabriel Magalhaes and Leandro Trossard all pulled out of international duty.

England's Noni Madueke and Spain's Martin Zubimendi missed the second games for their respective countries after reporting injuries.

Decision likely leads to ouster of Gattuso

Italy soccer president resigns after Azzurri miss 3rd straight World Cup

ROME, April 2, (AP) — Italy's soccer federation president resigned amid political pressure on Thursday, two days after the Azzurri failed to qualify for a third consecutive World Cup.

Gabriele Gravina's decision will likely lead to the ouster of Italy coach Gennaro Gattuso, too.

Italy Sports Minister Andrea Abodi called for a change in the country's soccer leadership after Gravina oversaw two sets of disappointing World Cup qualifiers.

"It's evident to everyone that Italian soccer needs to be overhauled," Abodi said on Wednesday, "and that process needs to start with new leadership at the FIGC (federation)."

Italy's chances of reaching this year's tournament in North America ended on Tuesday after a penalty shootout loss to Bosnia and Herzegovina in a qualifying playoff.

Gravina took charge of the federation in 2018 replacing Carlo Tavecchio, who also stepped down after Italy failed to reach that year's World Cup.

The defeat to Bosnia added more misery for four-time champion Italy after being eliminated by Sweden and North Macedonia, respectively, in the qualifying playoffs for the last two World Cups.

Italy's World Cup struggles go back all the way to 2010 and 2014 when it failed to advance from its group on both occasions.

The Azzurri's last World Cup knockout match was in 2006 when they won the title by beating France in the final after a penalty shootout.

Gravina did oversee Italy's European Championship trophy in 2021.

An election was called for June 22 to elect a new FIGC president.

Gattuso took over from the fired Luciano Spalletti in June with the squad already in crisis mode following a defeat at Norway in its opening qualifier.

The Azzurri then went on a six-match winning streak before losing again to Norway in November to finish second in their group and end up in the playoffs again.

Among those being mentioned to replace Gattuso are Roberto Mancini, Simone Inzaghi, Antonio Conte and Massimiliano Allegri.

Mancini coached Italy to the European Championship title in 2021 then failed to get the Azzurri to the next year's World Cup before bolting to take over Saudi Arabia's national team.

Inzaghi coached Inter Milan to the Serie A title in 2024 and now manages Saudi club Al-Hilal.

Conte coached Italy at the 2016 European Championship and is currently at Napoli.

Allegri is at AC Milan. Gravina is also Aleksander Ceferin's top vice president at UEFA.

UEFA statutes require that executive committee members are also senior FA officials but Gravina could stay in the UEFA role as a lame duck as long as the FIGC's new leadership doesn't demand his removal.

Gravina was re-elected last year by UEFA so he has three more years in his current term.

Wembanyama dominates Warriors as Spurs stay hot in top seed race



Washington Wizards guard Bub Carrington (7) blocks the shot of Philadelphia 76ers guard VJ Edgecombe during the second half of an NBA basketball game in Washington. (AP)

Madrid visits relegation-threatened Mallorca

Barcelona and Atletico clash in La Liga before Champions League quarterfinal

MADRID, April 2, (AP) — Barcelona and Atletico Madrid square off in La Liga this weekend in a preview of their series in the Champions League quarterfinals.

It will be the first of three games between Barcelona and Atletico in 10 days. The Spanish rivals will face each other five times in less than two months. They also met in the semifinals of the Copa del Rey in February and March when Atletico advanced to the final 4-3 on aggregate.

The Champions League games will be on Wednesday in Barcelona and on April 14 in Madrid. Barcelona is looking to make it to the Champions League semifinals for the second season in a row and Atletico is seeking to get back to the last four for the first time since 2017.

Saturday's league matchup will see Barcelona trying to remain at least four points ahead of Real Madrid at the top, while Atletico - which trails Barcelona by 16 points - will seek to get back into third place past Villarreal. Atletico sits one point behind Villarreal.

Real Madrid visits relegation-threatened Mallorca earlier on Saturday. Real beat Atletico 3-2 at home in the

teams' last game before the international break.

Real Betis on Saturday hosts Espanyol, which has yet to win in 12 games this year.

Sevilla fired coach Matias Almeyda before the international break and visits its last-placed Oviedo on Sunday. Sevilla has won only one of its last eight matches.

Barcelona will face Atletico without forward Raphinha, who will be out for about five weeks after injuring his right hamstring while playing for Brazil in a friendly against France.

Raphinha scored twice in Barcelona's 7-2 rout of Newcastle in the second leg of the Champions League round of 16 and is set to miss both matches against Atletico in the last eight.

Real Madrid forwards Kylian Mbappé and Vinicius Júnior faced each other in the Brazil-France friendly during the break. Mbappé, La Liga's scoring leader, netted once in France's 2-1 win over Brazil, a result that helped send the French squad back to first place in the FIFA rankings.

Vinicius couldn't find the net and was criticized by many for his lackluster performance for Brazil. He scored twice for Madrid against Atletico in the derby before the break.

Barcelona star Lamine Yamal is coming off a tough match for Spain after Spanish fans repeatedly chanted anti-Muslim chants during the friendly against Egypt on Tuesday in Barcelona.

Yamal, who is Muslim, came out with a statement on Wednesday saying the fan chants at RCDE Stadium were disrespectful and intolerable. He said it didn't matter that the chants were not directed at him personally.

"I understand that not all fans are like that, but to those who chant these things: Using a religion as a taunt on the field makes you look ignorant and racist," he wrote on Instagram. "Football is for enjoying and cheering, not for disrespecting people for who they are or what they believe."

SAN FRANCISCO, April 2, (AP): Victor Wembanyama scored 41 points for the second straight game, grabbed 18 rebounds and blocked three shots and the San Antonio Spurs ran away from the injury-plagued Golden State Warriors for a 127-113 victory that extended their winning streak to 10.

Wembanyama had 10 of his team's initial 14 points just 3:36 into the game and San Antonio jumped ahead 17-3. He finished 16 for 22 from the field in his fourth 40-point performance of the season. The Spurs (58-18) won for the 15th time in their last 16 contests as they chase the first-place and idle Thunder (60-16) in the race for the top seed in the Western Conference.

With 54.9 seconds left in the first quarter, San Antonio's De'Aaron Fox took a shot to the face and exited briefly. He finished with 11 points - one of seven Spurs in double figures.

Celtics 147, Heat 129

In Miami, Jaylen Brown scored 43 points, Jayson Tatum had his first triple-double of the season and the Boston Celtics rode the strength of a record-setting first quarter to beat the Miami Heat.

Tatum finished with 25 points, 18 rebounds and 11 assists for Boston, which scored 53 points in the first quarter - a franchise record that tied the second-highest total for an opening quarter in NBA history. Sam Hauser added 23 for the Celtics, who are 31-0 when scoring at least 117 points this season and are 10-1 in

their last 11 games following a loss.

The Celtics led by as many as 27, then saw the lead trimmed to as little as nine early in the fourth quarter. Boston (51-25) holds the No. 2 spot in the Eastern Conference race, four games behind No. 1 Detroit.

Nuggets 130, Jazz 117

In Salt Lake City, Jamal Murray made 10 3-pointers - including a half-court heave that beat the first-quarter buzzer - and scored 37 points to lead the Denver Nuggets to a victory over the Utah Jazz.

Nikola Jokic had 17 rebounds, 15 points, and 12 assists for his fifth triple-double in six games to help the Nuggets earn their seventh straight victory. Cam Johnson added 19 points, eight rebounds and six assists. Christian Braun had 18 points and six rebounds.

Bryce Sensabaugh led Utah with 28 points, including six 3-pointers, and six rebounds. Kyle Filipowski added 25 points and 12 rebounds for the Jazz, who dropped their seventh straight and are 3-19 in their last 22 games. Kennedy Chandler had 16 points and six assists off the bench.

Knicks 130, Grizzlies 119

In Memphis, OG Anunoby had 25 points and 13 rebounds, Karl-Anthony Towns had 20 points, 11 rebounds and 11 assists for his fourth triple-double of the season, and the New York Knicks beat the Memphis Grizzlies.

Mikal Bridges added 24 points as New York snapped a three-game losing streak. GG Jackson led Memphis with 20 points, Olivier-Maxence Prosper added 17 and Cedric Coward finished with 15 points.

The Knicks sit in third place in the Eastern Conference, a game and a half ahead of the Cavaliers, who were idle.

Rockets 119, Bucks 113

In Houston, Reed Sheppard scored 27 points on a

career-high nine 3-pointers, Alperen Sengun added 25 points and the Houston Rockets beat the short-handed Milwaukee Bucks for their fourth straight victory.

Kevin Durant finished with 19 points and nine assists. Amen Thompson had 18 points, nine rebounds and six assists and Jabari Smith Jr. scored 12 points for the Rockets. They shot 47% from the field, going 18 of 42 on 3-pointers.

Kings 123, Raptors 115

In Toronto, DeMar DeRozan scored 14 of his 28 points in the fourth quarter. Precious Achiuwa had 28 points and a season-high 19 rebounds and the Sacramento Kings beat the Toronto Raptors.

DeRozan reached 26,688 career points, moving him past Dominique Wilkins (26,668) into 17th place on the NBA's all-time list.

76ers 153, Wizards 131

In Washington, Paul George scored a season-high 39 points and the Philadelphia 76ers overcame Joel Embiid's absence because of an illness in a victory over the Washington Wizards.

George played his fourth game following a 25-game suspension for violating the NBA's anti-drug rules. He was 15 of 22 from the field, made 6 of 12 3-pointers and had six assists and five rebounds.

Hawks 130, Magic 101

In Orlando, Nickeil Alexander-Walker scored 32 points, Jalen Johnson added 18 points and 14 rebounds, and the Atlanta Hawks routed the Orlando Magic for their 17th victory in their last 19 games.

Dyson Daniels had 15 points and 13 rebounds for the Hawks, who shot 51% for the game and had a 52-36 rebound advantage. Johnson came two assists short of his 14th triple-double of the season.

Celtics drop record 53-point first quarter in rout of Heat



In this file photo, Atletico Madrid's Giuliano Simeone controls the ball during the Spanish La Liga soccer match between Real Madrid and Atletico Madrid in Madrid, Spain. (AP)

Iraq coach Arnold: We will surprise the world

MEXICO CITY, April 2: Iraq national team coach Graham Arnold says his squad won't fear football powerhouses at the 2026 World Cup, aiming to deliver standout performances and surprise the world.

Facing France, Norway, and Senegal, Arnold says his team will compete with a winning mindset. "Iraq has nothing to



Iraq national team coach Graham Arnold addresses the media after the World Cup qualification.

lose. Playing against stars like Kylian Mbappé and Erling Haaland is an honor, but we'll aim for victory and to shock the world," he added.

Arnold highlighted the historic nature of Iraq's qualification after a 2-1 playoff win over Bolivia, marking their first World Cup appearance in 40 years. Having led Australia to the

Round of 16 in 2022, Arnold brings experience and confidence to the Iraqi squad. He stressed that qualifying is a major opportunity for players to shine on the global stage and bring pride to Iraqi fans.

Iraq will compete in Group 9 from June 11 to July 19 in North America, alongside France, Senegal, and Norway.