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# Kuwait foils terror financing plot, 24-member cell busted

## 8 on the run as charity mask hid terror funding scheme



Ministry of Interior photos

Left: 24 arrested in terror finance bust. Right: Eight suspects remain at large.

**KUWAIT CITY, April 11, (KUNA):** The Kuwaiti Ministry of Interior announced on Saturday that a pre-emptive security operation has successfully thwarted a sophisticated plot aimed at undermining national security and financing terrorist organizations.

In a statement, the Ministry disclosed that the State Security Service dismantled an illicit cell comprised of 24 Kuwaiti nationals, including one individual whose citizenship was recently revoked. During the crackdown, security forces seized substantial liquid assets linked to these illicit operations.

The Ministry further identified eight fugitive Kuwaiti citizens, including another individual with revoked citizenship, as being deeply embedded in the cell's activities.

According to the statement, the cell's modus operandi involved soliciting funds under religious and charitable pretenses. These assets were systematically collected and stored in anticipation of being laundered and transferred abroad upon the direct instructions of foreign entities.

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# HISTORIC U.S.-IRAN DIRECT TALKS BEGIN IN PAKISTAN



### Opinion

**Ahmed Al-Jarallah**  
Editor-in-Chief, the Arab Times

## Gulf states should have been there

DESPITE the fact that the Gulf states have been at the center of the Iranian storm for 47 years, and although they have been subjected to many political, security, and terrorist attacks, they have chosen to deal with Iran in a wise manner based on the principles of good neighborliness. This approach adopted by the GCC states was not a sign of weakness, as Iran perceived it, despite the continued Iranian arrogance.

In the recent war, all of the Gulf states were among the primary targets of Iranian attacks, despite their refusal to allow their territories to be used for launching American strikes against Iran.

From the very first minutes, Iran began targeting GCC states. This attack exposed Iran's hostile intentions. I will not elaborate further on these intentions, which have become clear to everyone.

For the first time, the Gulf states are openly highlighting the damage caused by attacks from Iran and its proxies.

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# Kuwait skies stay locked, armed forces stay loaded

By Munif Naif

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff and Agencies

**KUWAIT CITY, April 11:** The Ministry of Interior on Saturday reassured the public that the airspace of the country was safe and secure in the last 24 hours.

Speaking in the media briefing on the latest developments held at the Government Communication Center, Director of the Public Relations and Security Media General Department at the ministry and its spokesperson Brigadier General Nasser Bouslaib confirmed that the Kuwait Armed Forces remains on high alert and in full coordination with other concerned bodies in dealing with any emergency.

He also expressed the pride and appreciation of the Kuwaiti people that enabled the state to perform its duties with utmost efficiency under the wise political leadership. Earlier, the ministry announced that its EOD teams responded to nine reports about falling shrapnel from defensive interception operations.

Bouslaib said the total number of reports received since the beginning of the aggression has reached 802.

He presented a visual overview of the field efforts exerted by the Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) teams to handle reports about falling shrapnel or unidentified objects.

EOD teams in continuous action

Defense statistics detail scale of aerial threats

He said the State agencies continue their work with a high degree of organization and readiness to monitor developments and ensure the security of the nation and the safety of its citizens.

He stressed that the security and military forces remain committed to their national responsibilities and continue to perform their duties with utmost efficiency and competence, determination and vigilance, in coordination with other concerned agencies.

He pointed out that "the security personnel — the vigilant eyes — continue to perform their duties with dedication and high level of alertness in various fields to maintain national security and guarantee the safety of everyone. They are always ready to immediately deal with any threat or field development under these exceptional circumstances, which require the highest levels of readiness and national solidarity."

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## Analysts condole Kuwait

**ISLAMABAD, April 11, (Agencies):** Pakistani diplomatic and defense analysts condoled on Saturday with the State of Kuwait over recent attacks, and expect a long-term or permanent ceasefire after the ongoing peace talks in Islamabad.

In a statement to KUNA at the stage of Islamabad Talks, Pakistan's former Ambassador to the United States and Permanent Representative to the United Nations Masood Khan said, "We condole with the people of Kuwait, the families of the victims and the State of Kuwait who have suffered due to attacks. We sympathize with the losses and condemn the attacks on Kuwait's refineries and other installations. I offer deepest sympathies with the government of Kuwait as they are our brothers."

He said that these peace talks being conducted here in Islamabad today are good news for Pakistan, Kuwait, Gulf states and to the whole world.

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Strong reserves, smart policy anchor economic stability

## Kuwait's financial shield strong, outmaneuvers crisis

By Marwa Al-Bahrawi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

**KUWAIT CITY, April 11:** At a time crises are accelerating and economic challenges are intensifying, the strength of nations is no longer measured by the scale of the pressures they face, but by their capacity to endure and quickly adapt to change.

Under such circumstances, Kuwait emerged as an economic model equipped with protective mechanisms and solid foundations of stability, supported by a set of measures it has adopted to efficiently navigate the current phase.

In a statement to Kuwait TV, economist Amer Al-Tamimi pointed out that the Kuwaiti economy is undergoing a notable transformation toward strengthening risk management and reinforcing financial stability, relying on strong financial reserves and balanced economic policies that sustain economic activity.

Al-Tamimi stated that over the past six weeks—amid the repercussions of the American-Iranian conflict—the gov-

ernment has managed the crisis with a high level of efficiency. He emphasized that services were not disrupted, proving the resilience of the economic structure of the country.

He added that the presence of a sovereign wealth fund, along with assets in the general reserve, enabled the country to meet its short-term obligations.

He explained that long-term challenges require accelerating the diversification of the economic base and income sources, as well as strengthening the role of the private sector. He believes that such steps will ease the burden on the government and open the door to privatizing a number of facilities and services to raise economic efficiency.

He said the Central Bank of Kuwait has implemented policies and precautionary measures aimed at maintaining

adequate liquidity levels in the market. "It has taken major decisions to facilitate lending and ease liquidity requirements, which has had a positive impact on banks and reduced their obligations," he elaborated.

He indicated that these measures may be expanded to include support for borrowers, whether through the rescheduling of payment obligations or the easing of financial burdens in the coming period to guarantee economic and social stability.

He clarified that this approach is not new, as the Central Bank adopted similar policies during the COVID-19 pandemic, offering full support to borrowers and small investors, which helped mitigate the economic fallout then.

He stressed that many countries resort to such policies during times of crisis, indicating that the current stage calls for achieving balance between supporting economic activity on one hand and preserving financial stability on the other hand, in order to ensure a more sustainable future.



Al-Tamimi

## Kuwait faces deficit test as \$1.072T SWF stands guard

By Najeh Bilal

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

**KUWAIT CITY, April 11:** The Future Generations Fund - Kuwait's sovereign wealth fund - ranks fifth globally with assets exceeding US\$1.072 trillion, according to a report by the Sovereign Wealth Fund Institute.

Following the implementation of the current budget, questions have arisen regarding coverage of the projected deficit of KD 9.8 billion, a 54.7 percent increase over the previous deficit. This increase is attributed to the regional war, which halted Kuwaiti oil exports.

In this context, economist Qais Al-Shatti, CEO of the Center for Future Foresight Consulting and Studies, stated that the regional war will inevitably lead to a decline in Kuwaiti oil revenues.

He noted that Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) declared force majeure due to the regional war and disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz, and subsequently reduced production.

Al-Shatti pointed to KPC's official statements indicating that a full return to normal production capacity (approximately 2.6 million barrels per day) will require three to four months after current circumstances subside.

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Al-Shatti



Markaz reports positive performance in 2025, driven by its investment philosophy, institutional expertise, and commitment to creating sustainable value for investors



Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait expands robotic process automation to enhance operational efficiency and customer experience



# 'Al-Seyassah' combines boldness, credibility

Prominent figures congratulate as newspaper marks 'versary

By Bassam Al-Qassas

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

**KUWAIT CITY, April 11: Arab and international diplomatic, military and economic figures greeted Al-Seyassah newspaper on the occasion of its 57th anniversary.**

Ambassadors, officials and business leaders affirmed that the newspaper plays a vital role in shaping Arab consciousness and promoting dialogue among peoples, solidifying its position as one of the prominent newspapers in the Gulf and the Arab world.

They pointed out that esteemed writer Ahmed Al-Jarallah, Dean of Kuwaiti Journalism and Editor-in-Chief of the newspaper, is the model of a professional journalist who combines boldness and credibility, supporting regional issues and strengthening Arab and international relations.

They emphasized that Al-Seyassah remains a platform for responsible discourse and a voice reflecting the spirit of Kuwait and its openness to the world.

Former Director of the Egyptian Moral Affairs Department Major General Dr. Samir Farag affirmed that Al-Seyassah is a moderate newspaper with a clear and straightforward approach, enjoying great respect and appreciation not only in Kuwait but also in Egypt.

He disclosed that he has known the newspaper and prominent writer, Al-Jarallah, for many years, indicating that his distinguished writings and unwavering support for Egypt made his name known in the Egyptian consciousness. He asserted that whenever Egyptians are asked about a Gulf journalist, they immediately mention Ahmed Al-Jarallah.

He added that Al-Seyassah is one of the important Arab newspapers, with profound impact on Egyptian society. He wished the newspaper continuous success in serving Kuwait, Egypt and the Arab world.

Nicaraguan Ambassador to Kuwait Mohammed Farara Lashtar praised Al-Seyassah, stressing that it is a genuine national journalistic experience that embodies courage in speaking the truth and steadfastness in its professional stance.

He pointed out that for decades, the newspaper has remained a platform for truth and a voice reflecting the issues of the nation and its citizens. He added that its founder, Al-Jarallah, played a pioneering role in establishing responsible journalism, affirming that Al-Seyassah has become a unique school of journalism in the Arab world.

Saud Al-Roumi, a veteran Kuwaiti diplomat, expressed his deep appreciation for Al-Jarallah, confirming his contribution to building a distinguished professional school of journalism in Kuwait and the Gulf region.

He explained that Al-Jarallah's writings consistently focus on patriotism and regional issues, and that diplomats witness credibility and clarity in his statements.

He said the newspaper has become a beacon of media knowledge, from which generations benefit, wishing it continuous success in serving Kuwait and the Islamic world.

Dr. Maksym Subkh, Ukrainian Ambassador to Kuwait, affirmed that Al-Seyassah is a long-established media institution that has maintained its professional standing for decades.

## Vision

He pointed out that Al-Jarallah's vision has contributed to consolidating the values of responsible and credible journalism. He said the newspaper plays a vital role in supporting national causes, raising public awareness, and keeping pace with regional and international developments. He wished for more progress and prosperity for the newspaper.

Greek Ambassador Ioannis Plotas congratulated the staff of the newspaper, praising its role in promoting media dialogue and openness between peoples.

He stressed that the career of Al-Jarallah reflects a journalistic experience based on professionalism and boldness, and that Al-Seyassah has become a model of responsible media, which supports stability and raises public awareness.

Ambassador of Tajikistan Zubaydullo Zubaydzoda stated that the newspaper is an important media platform for strengthening bridges of friendship and understanding between peoples.

He indicated that responsible journalism plays an important role in supporting cultural and diplomatic dialogue, and that Al-Seyassah has succeeded in presenting a balanced media discourse, which reflects moderation and openness.

Ambassador of the Central African Republic Marzouq Is-

san Daniel praised the historic role played by Al-Seyassah newspaper over the past 57 years, emphasizing that it has been and remains a platform for Arab thought and a true reflection of the pulse of the Kuwaiti street.

He said the newspaper balances professionalism and boldness and maintains its presence in the most difficult circumstances.

"This reflects the strength of the institution and the resilience of its leadership. Al-Jarallah presented a unique model in Arab journalism through his courage and boldness in addressing critical issues. Al-Seyassah does not only report the news, but also contributes to shaping political and cultural consciousness and an integral part of the intellectual landscape in Kuwait and the Gulf," he stressed.

He confirmed that the continuous success of the newspaper reflects the vastness of its experience and its ability to keep up with changes.

Dr. George A. Said-Zemit, Ambassador of Malta, stated "I would like to congratulate the founder and architect of the newspaper, Al-Jarallah, on this remarkable achievement in the history of Kuwaiti journalism. His unwavering dedication throughout these years to providing his readers with top-quality, first-rate journalism in this country is truly remarkable. I commend Al-Jarallah on his professionalism in seeking the truth about events not only in Kuwait but also beyond."

Ali Hassan, former Board Chairman and Editor-in-Chief of the Middle East News Agency, said "these days mark a cherished anniversary for every Arab intellectual: the birth of our esteemed newspaper, Al-Seyassah. Throughout its decades-long illustrious history, it has been serving as a haven for anyone seeking to follow local, regional and international events with credibility and high-level professionalism. One of its most memorable stances is its unwavering support for the glorious October victory and its backing of the peace initiative pursued by the late Egyptian President Anwar Sadat. It also exposed Saddam Hussein's crimes during his invasion of Kuwait and consistently championed the legitimate rights of the Arab world, most recently its strong condemnation of Iranian aggression against several Gulf states. A special salute to Al-Jarallah, whose insightful writings and opinions have always been, and will continue to be, among the finest to follow and read in our Arab press."

Sulaiman Jawda pointed out that "according to the new standards of the World Health Organization, whose founding anniversary we are celebrating these days (1948), Al-Seyassah newspaper, owned and edited by Al-Jarallah, remains a young, vibrant and strong newspaper. This is true in two senses: the first is the time frame of youth. The organization defines it as a stage that extends until 70, after which another stage of life begins. This certainly applies to humans,



Waleed Al-Mutairi



Saad Al-Shammari



Khaled Al-Shamroukh



Mohammad Al-Quraishi



Rashid Al-Hajri



Ali Hassan



Dr. Zubaydullo Zubaydzoda



Dr. Maksym Subkh

but I believe it also applies to things other than humans. If Al-Seyassah newspaper is considered something other than humans in this context, then I think its readers will find on its pages, website and online platforms everything that is young, vibrant and energetic. Here we move to the second sense, which relates to the professional journalistic aspect, not the robust and vigorous aspect associated with a particular stage of life. In the profession, those familiar with it know that Al-Seyassah holds a special place among Kuwaiti newspapers. They know that this position was earned through the long career of Al-Jarallah and his team, distinguished by their skill and ability to practice journalism."

Judge Ahmed Al-Mulaifi asserted that Al-Seyassah has beautiful and lasting impact on local, Arab and international affairs. "Therefore, it is fitting that today it receives encouraging messages, congratulations and blessings. The newspaper is known for its clear and consistent approach since its inception. It has remained unchanged, steadfast and unwavering. These are commendable stances that reinforce its credibility and stability. We thank those in charge of this great media institution for their steadfastness and wisdom in upholding the clarity of vision and perspective and in presenting diverse viewpoints. This approach fosters discussion with wisdom, eloquence and knowledge. We can only reiterate our thanks and praise to Al-Seyassah and its staff, especially Al-Jarallah," he added.

Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Retired Officers Association Major General Faisal Al-Jazzaf said the newspaper is one of the prominent media institutions that raised national awareness and strengthened the value of loyalty to Kuwait. He pointed out that the newspaper plays a crucial role in supporting national and Arab causes, and serves as a model of responsible media based

on credibility and courage.

He praised Al-Jarallah's career, which he considers a manifestation of the commitment to protect freedom of expression and serve the nation. He wished the newspaper continuous progress and success in serving Kuwait and Arab media.

Businessman Saad Sartib Al-Shammari pointed out that the 57th anniversary of the newspaper's publication is evidence that free speech can make history and raise public awareness.

He emphasized that the newspaper, led by Al-Jarallah, plays a vital role in supporting political dialogue and establishing moderate thought. He disclosed that Al-Jarallah presented a unique journalistic experience based on boldness and clarity, making Al-Seyassah one of the prominent newspapers in the region. He added that its long history and continuity prove the ability of the media institution to evolve.

He asserted that celebrating this occasion is not merely a

tribute to a long-established newspaper, but a celebration of the value of responsible journalism and its role in building societies. He wished the newspaper continuous success in its media journey.

Media figure Waleed Al-Mutairi congratulated Al-Seyassah newspaper on its 57th anniversary, praising its excellence in tackling various issues at the local, Arab and international levels.

He commended its tireless and distinguished pursuit of honesty, balanced reporting, breaking news, and freedom of expression within the atmosphere of freedom enjoyed by Kuwait.

He appreciated the tremendous efforts exerted by the newspaper in enriching the journalistic landscape and highlighting the media message with professionalism and efficiency, recalling its contributions and engagement with various issues. He then affirmed the role of Al-Jarallah in this brilliance.

Media consultant Khaled Al-Shamroukh stated that 57th anniversary celebration of the newspaper reaffirmed that it is not just a newspaper but an established media institution that has maintained an influential presence in the Kuwaiti and Arab journalistic landscapes for many decades.

Al-Shamroukh revealed that "since its inception, the newspaper has been conveying a clear message based on honesty, boldness and a commitment to highlight the issues concerning the nation and its citizens. It is a voice present at every juncture, witnessing transformations and shaping public opinion. It is not just a newspaper but a national platform that commands respect and it is highly regarded.

"Behind this media journey stood an exceptional leader, Al-Jarallah, whom I consider my media role model. He embodied the ideal of a steadfast journalist, a man of bold words and clear vision. He gave Al-Seyassah a distinctive identity based on transparency, clarity and uncompromising stances on the interests of Kuwait.

## Journalism

"Al-Jarallah believes that journalism is not just a profession but a national responsibility. His pen is ever-present in defending the country and its institutions, while serving as a critic striving for reform and progress. Under his leadership, Al-Seyassah continues to play its role as the real fourth state, keeping pace with events and influencing them.

"On this occasion, we recall a long history of dedication, professional sacrifices and courageous stances that cemented the newspaper's place in the hearts of its readers. We also value its role in supporting national causes, promoting unity, and raising awareness on various political and social issues.

"The anniversary of Al-Seyassah is not just a date, it is a milestone in renewing our commitment to convey the message and continue the journey with dedication and faith.

"Happy anniversary to Al-Seyassah newspaper, a free platform, and happy anniversary to Al-Jarallah, a great national media icon."

Businessman Fahad Al-Rish congratulated the Al-Seyassah family and Al-Jarallah, stressing that the newspaper is a model of influential professional media in Kuwait and the Gulf.

He pointed out that Al-Seyassah has succeeded in establishing credibility and building reader trust over its 57 years of publication, wishing it continuous progress and prosperity.

Businessman Saud Al-Dughhaishim expressed his congratulations to the Al-Seyassah newspaper family on the anniversary, praising their role in raising public awareness and promoting responsible media.

He affirmed that Al-Jarallah presented a pioneering journalistic experience that made Al-Seyassah one of the prominent newspapers in the Arab world, wishing it continuous success.

Businessman Rashid Al-Hajri praised the historic role the newspaper has been playing over the years, emphasizing that it has always been a platform for Arab thought and a true reflection of the pulse of the Kuwaiti street.

He pointed out that the newspaper has been balancing professionalism and courage for many years, maintaining its presence even under the most difficult circumstances. "This reflects the strength of the institution and the resilience of its leadership. Al-Jarallah presented a unique model in Arab journalism through his courage and boldness in tackling critical issues. The newspaper does not only report, because it also raises political and cultural awareness, becoming an integral part of the intellectual landscapes in Kuwait and the Gulf. Its continuous success reflects the vastness of its experience and its ability to keep pace with changes," he concluded.

## 'Build refrigeration facilities in Wafra, Abdali to store produce'

# Jarallah: Hi-tech vital to boost agri products, poultry, livestock

By Adnan Makkawi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

**KUWAIT CITY, April 11:** Farmer Mohammad Ali Al-Mutairi hosted a luncheon in honor of the Dean of Kuwaiti Journalism and Editor-in-Chief of Arab Times and Al-Seyassah newspapers Ahmed Al-Jarallah on Friday.

Ahmed Al-Jarallah and his companions were received by the former board member of the Kuwaiti Farmers Union Mohammad Ali Al-Mutairi, who thanked him for his moral and media support of Kuwaiti farmers through his articles on agriculture and farmers, as well as through the weekly agricultural page in Al-Seyassah daily.

During a tour of Al-Mutairi's farm and Al-Jarallah's farm in Wafra, accompanied by Mohammad Al-Mutairi and his son Abdullah, Al-Jarallah highlighted the importance of government support for productive Kuwaiti farmers to adopt modern agricultural technologies.

He affirmed that implementing modern agricultural technologies is the only way to increase and develop agricultural wealth across various sectors, including livestock, poultry, and fish farming.

Al-Jarallah explained that Kuwaiti farmers, especially given the current difficult circumstances in Kuwait, need greater government support to increase and develop their vital agricultural production, ensuring its continuity throughout most of the year.

Kuwaiti farmers need a postpone-



Editor-in-Chief of Arab Times and Al-Seyassah Ahmed Al-Jarallah, Mohammad Al-Mutairi and Ahmad Al-Aswad at the farm.

ment of their agricultural loan repayments to the Industrial Bank of Kuwait, on behalf of the Ministry of Finance. They need the liberalization of their produce prices, in line with the Ministry of Commerce and Industry's decision to protect consumers during crises.

Al-Jarallah expressed his interest in agricultural affairs, noting that he is a farm owner in Wafra and has been a producer for many years.

He said he has contacted several senior officials concerned with agricul-

ture, farmers, and food security, who have given him positive assurances regarding the postponement of agricultural loan repayments and the liberalization of Kuwaiti produce prices, similar to imported products.

The dialogue between the farmers of Wafra and Al-Jarallah was focused on the importance of utilizing Kuwait's winter rains, as well as the water discharged from desalination plants. Many Al-Wafra farmers are currently forced to rely on this water for irrigation due to increased groundwater salinity and insufficient pumping capacity of treated water.



Editor-in-Chief of Arab Times and Al-Seyassah Ahmed Al-Jarallah having a tour of a vegetable garden.

The attendees expressed their need for sufficient treated water for their farms, suggesting that excess water from desalination plants be directed to a large artificial lake where fish could be raised, or alternatively that the water be disposed of by channeling it into the Arabian Gulf.

The attendees also called for the development of Wafra's infrastructure, including roads and sewage systems, and for addressing the drainage of heavy rainwater, which exacerbates the problem of groundwater seepage in many Wafra farms. They stated that

this is a chronic issue that recurs annually, and that no permanent solution has yet been found.

Al-Jarallah emphasized the importance of allowing Kuwaiti farmers to allocate 20 percent to 30 percent of their farms for agritourism, and to build exhibition spaces equipped with facilities to market their produce at reasonable prices to visitors of agricultural areas, particularly Wafra and Abdali.

He suggested that the government collect additional fees from any farmer who wishes to operate their farm as

both a productive and touristic site.

Al-Jarallah stressed the importance of the government encouraging farmers to export their surplus produce, even if subsidized by the state, outside Kuwait.

Farmer Al-Mutairi, commenting on Ahmed Al-Jarallah's remarks, said Kuwaiti farmers could export tomatoes, for example, to Europe via national airlines, and that strawberries could be exported to countries near and far.

Farmers Nayef Al-Mutairat and Santan Al-Zoubi, along with journalists Saud Al-Farhan, Ahmed Al-Aswad, and Bassam Al-Qassas, participated in the discussion, which took place at Al-Mutairi's farm and later at Al-Jarallah's farm.

The attendees emphasized the importance of constructing refrigerated storage facilities in Wafra and Abdali agricultural areas to preserve surplus production of semi-strategic crops such as potatoes, onions, garlic, squash, and corn.

They also highlighted the importance of increasing cultivated areas for these crops and boosting government support for them, given their long shelf life and ability to be stored for weeks or even months.

The attendees unanimously agreed on the vital role these crops play in enhancing food security, in addition to other crops such as barley, blue sorghum, and alfalfa for animal feed, as well as the potential use of animal manure as soil fertilizer.

# Kuwait not withdrawing deposits from Central Bank of Egypt, says ambassador

By Bassam Al-Qassas

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

**KUWAIT CITY, April 11:** Kuwaiti Ambassador to the Arab Republic of Egypt Saqer Al-Ghanim affirmed the strength of Kuwaiti-Egyptian relations, while categorically denying reports on the withdrawal of Kuwaiti deposits from the Central Bank of Egypt.

In a televised interview on MBC Egypt recently, Al-Ghanim clarified that Kuwaiti deposits have been maintained within the Central Bank of Egypt for 13 years, serving as a pillar to support the stability of the Egyptian economy.

He emphasized that such critical matters should not be subject to discussion



Saqer Al-Ghanim

on social media, asserting that they are handled exclusively through official institutional channels.

He warned that many of those commenting on social media are based outside Egypt and Kuwait, pointing out that individuals proven to be spreading wrong information are subject to legal accountability in both countries.

He stressed that bilateral relations remain unaffected by digital activity, confirming that official and public ties are at the highest level of excellence.

He revealed that Kuwaiti deposits are renewed automatically, indicating that a study is currently underway to convert

these funds into Kuwaiti investments in Egypt -- a matter which remains under consideration by the economic authorities in both nations.

He added "the deposits in Egypt are intended to provide comprehensive support and our mutual solidarity is a given. Gulf-Egyptian relations, as well as Egyptian-Kuwaiti ties, continue to witness a period of distinguished stability and cooperation."

He expressed his deep appreciation to the Arab Republic of Egypt for its supportive stance towards the Gulf states since the beginning of the war, stressing that high-level communication between the two brotherly nations has been uninterrupted throughout the recent period. "We thank Egypt for its political support for us... Egypt called for calm, while supporting our Gulf brothers," he asserted.

# diwaniya ديوانية

A DIGEST OF PUBLIC OPINION

## War to shed light on foe, friend of the Gulf states

"The US President Donald Trump set a specific deadline for Iran to reach an agreement, threatening to 'make it live in hell' if it did not open the Strait of Hormuz to shipping," columnist **Ahmad Al-Dawas** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

"He had also hinted at possible strikes on bridges and power stations in Iran, and even suggested the possibility of destroying the country 'in one night.' Despite this escalating rhetoric, Trump also attempted to suggest a possible solution, expressing cautious optimism that there were 'rational leaders' within Iran negotiating



Ahmad Al-Dawas

"Suddenly, the president announced that, following Pakistani mediation, he had agreed to suspend bombing and attacks on Iran for two weeks, on the condition that Iran open the Strait of Hormuz. He stated that the United States had received a 10-point proposal from Iran, which was open for negotiation. He also informed Gulf states and Israel of his agreement. Israel accepted a ceasefire with Iran but refused to halt its operations against Hezbollah in Lebanon.

"A political analysis states, 'This war has revealed that some Arab states abandoned the Gulf states and remained silent, while large parts of the Arab and Islamic worlds observed the war from afar, with some secretly pleased to see the successful Gulf states come under pressure. It is likely that the countries of the region will now be able to distinguish more clearly between true and false friends. It has become evident who acted, who hesitated, who hid behind slogans, and who silently enjoyed the spectacle.'

"One might ask why Russia and China are not assisting Iran. These two countries blocked a UN Security Council resolution aimed at reopening the Strait of Hormuz, each acting in accordance with its own interests. China is relieved that American military power is preoccupied in the Middle East, as a depleted and overstretched U.S. military serves its interests in the Pacific region. Russia, meanwhile, is not dependent on Middle Eastern oil and gas and could potentially benefit from the situation. U.S. operations are consuming military resources, particularly interceptor missiles, and every THAAD, Patriot, or Tomahawk missile used against Iran is one less available for the battlefield in Ukraine.

"For decades, Iran has armed its proxies, fueled sectarian conflict, intimidated Arab governments, and undermined regional security. If this war were to end while the regime remained intact, organized, and capable of rebuilding, Tehran would likely do what it has often done before, which is to declare survival a victory, turn its resilience into propaganda, and return even more assertive than before. A weakened regime is not necessarily a reformed one; in some cases, it becomes more defensive and retaliatory.

"Therefore, the objective must be clearly defined - to reduce the Iranian regime's capacity to threaten or pressure the Gulf states, support proxy networks, or destabilize regional and global economic security. Frankly, it is difficult to believe that a ceasefire agreement with Iran would be fully sustainable; the situation is likely to evolve in another direction."

**Also:**

"The problem of groundwater seeping to the surface of many farms in the Al-Wafra agricultural area, in the far south of Kuwait, is an ongoing issue," member of the Board of Directors of the Public Authority for Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources and the Kuwait Farmers Union **Hussein Ahmed Qabazard** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

"Although this problem is long-standing, worsening, and recurring every year, it has unfortunately not been resolved in a comprehensive way.

"The issue recently resurfaced in a more severe form following rainfall, as rainwater mixed with the seeping groundwater. This disrupted traffic and hindered movement on many roads and internal streets in Wafra agricultural area. I am highlighting this issue in the hope that the relevant authorities will develop a scientific and practical solution.

"Based on our experience with this problem, having cultivated and developed land in the Al-Wafra agricultural area for more than five decades, we have identified some of its causes, with the aim that they may contribute to a better understanding of how to solve it.

"Undoubtedly, mistakes were made in drilling wells on some farms to access water from the Dammam deep aquifer, driven by the need to obtain water suitable for irrigation. According to my information, the relevant authorities initially overlooked the drilling of hundreds of wells before later launching a campaign to fill in these illegal wells.

"However, were the wells filled in using proper technical methods? Were all the illegal wells filled in, or is a new campaign needed?

"Given the complexity of the problem, it is essential to establish a proper outlet for the highly saline water discharged from desalination plants distributed in many farms in Al-Wafra. This water should either be collected in a large reservoir in the center of the agricultural area or redirected through pipelines to the sea.

"It is essential to prevent this highly saline water from seeping into agricultural soil and increasing salinity levels. This poses a serious threat, and its ef-

fects are already becoming evident in agricultural areas.

"Groundwater salinity has increased. Even more concerning is that, in the past, it was necessary to drill to a depth of at least 14 meters to reach groundwater but now water is being found at just four meters, which is highly alarming.

"This indicates that the groundwater level is steadily rising and will eventually reach the surface, causing damage to crops.

"Some farmers have created lakes in the middle of their farms or near their boundaries to collect water from desalination plants, which have become essential for Kuwaiti farmers raising tilapia.

"However, this is neither a practical nor a scientific solution to the underlying problem of groundwater seepage.

"The danger is increasingly affecting Wafra farms, especially after winter rains and due to the rising salinity of the agricultural soil.

"Without suitable irrigation water and fertile soil, productive agriculture cannot be sustained.

"What is the way out of this situation, so that we do not lose the historic Wafra farms sooner or later?"

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"When tensions in the Arabian Gulf region had escalated, the continuity of education transformed from a neglected concern to a national priority," Social affairs researcher **Dr. Randa Diab Bahman** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

"Online learning should no longer be viewed as merely an emergency response, but as a sustainable and practical tool that ensures the continuity of education for students, regardless of circumstances.

"It is important to distinguish between emergency distance learning and structured e-learning, especially as the Ministry of Education reviews its contingency plans for students.

"Emergency online learning is temporary and interactive, whereas structured e-learning is carefully designed, reliable, and fully integrated into the education system. It is built to withstand disruptions and plays a vital role in preparing globally aware, technologically skilled learners.

"Kuwait already demonstrates a strong commitment to education through substantial funding. However, global reports indicate comparatively low levels of learning outcomes among the average Kuwaiti student.

"Government's investment in education exceeds global averages, with Kuwait's education budget reaching approximately six percent of its GDP in recent years. This reflects a clear national commitment and prioritization of education. The infrastructure is in place, and resources are available but the main challenge lies in translating this investment into modern delivery methods.

"At the same time, students in Kuwait experience frequent disruptions to their education throughout the academic year, placing the country among those with fewer school days compared to many international education systems, according to World Bank reports. These disruptions range from severe weather conditions, such as heavy rain and sandstorms, to regular religious and public holidays.

"The cumulative result is a system in which the continuity of learning often depends on students' physical presence in classrooms, which is not always guaranteed.

"I have previously warned against neglecting online learning and limiting its use to emergency situations only. We should have used this time to develop the foundations of a comprehensive digital learning environment.

"Despite significant investment, the integration of technology into Kuwaiti classrooms remains uneven. Access to electronic devices is still limited in many public schools, while most private institutions have made considerable progress in integrating digital learning into daily practice. Some private schools even require each student to have their own device.

"It is worth noting that access to appropriate devices and software is a major obstacle to effective online learning. Providing students with laptops or tablets and integrating their use into daily learning processes will enhance classroom instruction and better prepare them for any disruptions. It will also support the development of digital skills, independent thinking, and adaptability, which are essential in a rapidly evolving global economy.

"We have learned an important lesson from the COVID-19 pandemic, which is the necessity of having contingency plans. However, this alone is not sufficient, as all stakeholders must be adequately prepared to implement them.

"We will not be able to do this unless elements of online learning are continuously and systematically integrated into the curriculum in a structured and reliable manner. We cannot make any progress if we start from scratch every time.

"Kuwait has already demonstrated a strong commitment to providing education. The next step is to align this commitment with modern teaching methods. The goal is to integrate technology into daily learning to ensure effective responses to any disruptions to traditional education.

"This step reflects a broader global shift, as education systems in most countries are increasingly integrating digital tools as a core component of teaching and learning."

— Compiled by Simi K. Kutty

Call to participate in BRICS Forum

## Kuwait, China eye boost in industrial relations

By **Marwa Al-Bahrawi**

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, April 11: The acting Director General of the Public Authority for Industry (PAI) **Shamlan Al-Jahaidli** received the Economic and Commercial Counselor at the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Kuwait, **Hu Hanming**, to discuss ways to enhance cooperation between the two countries in the industrial sector.

The meeting was attended by the acting

Deputy Director of the Industrial Cities Sector, Engineer **Khaled Ibrahim Khater**, and several specialists.



Al-Jahaidli

The discussions during the meeting were focused on prospects for developing the bilateral partnership and exchanging expertise in the industrial sector to support Kuwait's industrial development.

The meeting aimed to achieve common interests between the two sides, particularly in light of efforts to strengthen economic integration and benefit from successful international experiences.

**Hanning** submitted a formal invitation to participate in the BRICS Forum on Partnership in the New Industrial Revolution 2026, scheduled to be held in the People's Republic of China, as part of efforts to strengthen international cooperation and exchange expertise in the fields of industry and modern technology.

### Drug sachets seized

## MoCI issues 10 citations in men salon campaign

KUWAIT CITY, April 11: The Commercial Control and Consumer Protection Department of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry conducted an inspection tour of several men's salons as part of its efforts to monitor commercial establishments' compliance with market regulations and decisions, reports **Al-Anba** daily.

The tour resulted in the issuance of 10 violation reports, including three violations related to expired beauty and shaving products, and seven violations for failure by some salons to comply with Ministerial Resolution No. 32/2026, which prohibits cash transactions for certain businesses.

The department confirmed that the necessary legal measures will be taken against the violators, emphasizing the continuation of inspection campaigns to regulate markets, protect consumers, and ensure that all establishments adhere to applicable regulations.

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**Drug sachets seized:** A man has been arrested in possession of 88 sachets suspected to contain narcotic substances, reports **Al-Anba** daily.

According to security sources, Public Security officers referred the suspect to the Public Security Department on suspicion of drug trafficking after monitoring his behavior and stopping him for further inspection. He appeared to be under the influence of drugs at the time of his arrest, and a search of his vehicle led to the discovery of a bag containing 88 sachets suspected of containing illegal narcotics.

The seized items were confiscated, and samples have been sent to the relevant authorities for laboratory testing to determine the exact nature of the substances. Legal procedures are underway in the case.

### Terror, lineage in focus

## Two circulars issued on decrees promulgation

By **Jaber Al-Humoud**

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, April 11: President of the Court of Cassation and Head of the Supreme Judicial Council Justice **Dr. Adel Bouresli** issued two judicial circulars related to the promulgation of Decree-Law No. 51 and 53/2026, concerning the establishment of specialized criminal courts for state security crimes and the regulation of procedures for lineage claims and name corrections.

In the first circular, Bouresli stated that, in implementation of the provisions of Decree-Law No. 51/2026 regarding the establishment of specialized criminal courts for internal and external state security crimes, as well as terrorism-related offenses, which came into force on March 30, it was decided that no appeals should be submitted to the Court of Cassation against rulings issued by Criminal Circuit No. 9 in the Court of Appeals, established pursuant to Administrative Decision No. 9/2026 issued on April 1, in accordance with Article Two of the law. Court clerks were instructed to strictly comply with the circular.

In the second circular, issued in relation to Decree-Law No. 53/2026 concerning the regulation of procedures for lineage and name correction claims, which came into force on April 7, Bouresli instructed the concerned courts to refer all pending cases related to the establishment or denial of indirect lineage, including the correction or modification of names and titles that were pending prior to the enactment of the law, to the Lineage and Name Correction Claims Committee established under Article Three of the law, in their current condition and without any fees.

The circular stipulated that appeals pending in courts concerning these claims must be referred to the same committee, stressing the importance of promptly taking these steps to ensure unified jurisdiction and the alignment of related judicial procedures.

## MPW project deadline extended to early May

By **Mohammad Ghanem**

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, April 11: The Ministry of Public Works announced that the deadline for submitting bids for the tender to supply, operate and maintain laboratory units at the Center for Testing, Quality Control and Research is May 5.

Sources told the newspaper that the Central Agency for Public Tenders (CAPT) approved the tender, which will be offered to classified companies.

Sources said the agency will open the bids and refer them to the relevant authority for review and preparation of a technical recommendation, paving the way for awarding the contract to the bidder that meets the specifications and requirements.

Sources revealed that the tender aims to develop the work system in the laboratories to support the ongoing modernization efforts and improve testing efficiency.

Sources pointed out that the center conducts tests and inspections to ensure the quality of materials used in construction projects.

Sources added that the responsibilities of the center include testing existing structures and the foundation soil for roads and buildings, covering projects of the ministry, other government entities, the private sector and citizens.

In addition, the ministry confirmed the provision of 24 high-efficiency vacuum and flusher equipment to the Maintenance Engineering Sector for clearing water and unclogging blockages in the stormwater and sewage networks.

It explained that the new equipment is part of efforts to ensure rapid response to complaints and their resolution to better serve the public.

# Kuwait deplores Saudi energy hit

1 dead, 7 hurt in Yanbu

KUWAIT CITY, April 11, (KUNA): The Ministry of Foreign Affairs voiced late Thursday Kuwait's strong condemnation and denunciation of the brutal Iranian attacks targeting the Saudi energy facilities that led to the killing of a Saudi citizen and the injury of several others.

In a statement, the ministry said that the flagrant criminal attacks are a blatant violation of all international law rules and a dangerous escalation occurring amid strenuous international endeavors to reach a truce, de-escalate tension and prevail stability in the region.

Kuwait's reiterates its full solidarity with, and support for, the sisterly Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to take all measures to protect its stability, security and assets, it noted.

The ministry also expressed Kuwait's sincere condolences to Saudi Arabia, its people and the family of the martyr, paying to Allah the Almighty to bestow mercy on his soul and wishing a rapid recovery to those wounded, the statement concluded.

Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Energy announced Thursday that some vital energy facilities have recently been subjected to multiple attacks, including oil and gas production facilities, transportation and refin-

ing infrastructure, petrochemical facilities, and the electricity sector in Riyadh, the Eastern Province and Yanbu Industrial City.

The attacks resulted in the death of a Saudi Electricity Company national and the injury of seven other citizens, Saudi Press Agency (SPA) reported, citing a ministry official.

The attacks also resulted in the disruption of several operational processes at key facilities within the energy system, it added.

The ministry noted that the assaults targeted one of the pumping stations on the vital East-West pipeline, leading to the loss of approximately 700,000 barrels per day in throughput, which is considered the main route for supplying global markets during this period.

It referred that the Manifa oil field production facility was targeted, reducing its output by about 300,000 barrels per day from its production capacity.

Meanwhile, the Khurais oil field had previously been targeted, causing a reduction of 300,000 barrels per day, bringing the total decrease in the Kingdom's production capacity to 600,000 barrels per day.

It noted that the attack also targeted main refining facilities including SATORP in Jubail, Ras Tanura and Riyadh refinery, thus affecting directly the exports of LPG.

It stressed that the continuation of such attacks could lead to supply shortages and slow the pace of recovery, which would negatively impact the security of supplies for beneficiary countries and contribute to increased volatility in oil markets.

## Shops violating rules get citations

By **Marwa Al-Bahrawi**

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, April 11: The Commercial Control and Consumer Protection Department at the Ministry of Commerce and Industry intensified its inspection campaign in commercial establishments over the weekend, resulting in the issuance of 113 violation citations and warnings.

The inspection team in Farwaniya Governorate visited several shops, during which they issued 30 violation citations for selling goods of unknown origin and prohibited items such as chewing tobacco, failure to affix labels to gold jewelry, and advertising

services that are not provided.

The team also issued 10 warnings—eight to shops operating without a license and two to grocery stores that did not comply with regulations on the sale of energy drinks.

The emergency teams in the Capital and Hawally governorates also carried out an inspection campaign that led to the issuance of 63 violation citations for failure to specify warranty periods for new and repaired spare parts, a warning was issued to a shop for non-compliance with regulations on the sale and distribution of energy drinks, and a violation citation against another shop for non-adherence to Ministerial Resolution No. 31/2026 that prohibits the sale and distribution of drones.

**Kuwait denounces Israeli strikes, reaffirms Lebanon support**

**UK strongly condemns attack on Kuwaiti Consulate in Basra**

LONDON, April 11, (KUNA): The United Kingdom expressed on Friday strong condemnation of the attack against the Kuwaiti Consulate in Basra, Iraq, saying that assaulting diplomatic missions was unacceptable.

Jocelyn Waller, the UK Government's Arabic Spokesperson for the Middle East and North Africa region, said in a statement that the protection of diplomatic missions and consulates was a basic duty under international law.

She indicated that the UK government welcomed the clear-cut condemnation

by the Iraqi government of the attack and the commitment to hold those behind it responsible.

The attack against the Kuwaiti consulate in Basra occurred on April seventh and drew wide condemnation from several Arab and foreign countries.

**Also:**

**KUWAIT CITY:** Kuwait on Thursday strongly condemned Israeli occupation's at-

tacks on **Lebanon.**

This came during a phone call between Foreign Minister Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and his Lebanese counterpart Youssef Rajji, where the Kuwaiti top diplomat reiterated his country's full solidarity with Lebanon, reaffirming that continuation of such attacks represent a dangerous escalation and a flagrant violation to Lebanon's sovereignty, safety and stability, read a ministry statement.

**MEWRE moves to strengthen grid control with 10 contracts**

Upgrades set to stabilize supply

**By Mohammad Ghanem**

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

**KUWAIT CITY, April 11: The plan of the Ministry of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy for the current fiscal year includes 10 contracts, listed by the Control and Monitoring Centers Sector and will be tendered through the Central Agency for Public Tenders (CAPT) in accordance**

**with Law No. 49/2016.**

These contracts aim to ensure the continuous operation of the sector and its departments and divisions, as well as to better perform their tasks, particularly controlling the electricity supply system, preparing and conducting various studies on the electricity supply system, daily monitoring of the Gulf Cooperation Council Interconnection Network, tracking malfunctions, coordinating with various sectors in the ministry and other essential tasks.

Sources cited three important con-

tracts included in the plan as follows: training national personnel to connect main substations to control and monitoring centers, supply and install a central electronic linking system for the data outputs of renewable energy projects, and modernization and maintenance of control and monitoring equipment at the centers.

Sources disclosed that the contracts cover the repair of faults and replacement of defective parts for communication equipment, data collection and analysis equipment, telephone system equipment, and equipment for supplying uninterruptible power (UPS) at the National Control Center.

On the other hand, the ministry on

Thursday referred a tender for repairing low-voltage underground cables and extending and splicing low-voltage cables for new consumers in the southern part of the Capital Governorate, at a cost of KD1.437 million, to the State Audit Bureau (SAB) for review, audit and oversight of the contract.

This contract will enable the ministry to connect electricity for new consumers in the southern part of the Capital Governorate who have constructed new buildings and properties in various residential sectors, particularly the private residences of citizens who applied for approvals from official bodies like the ministry and Kuwait Municipality in order to connect to the power grid.

**Contingency plans in place**

**Distance learning continues as MoE tracks security landscape**

**KUWAIT CITY, April 11:** The Ministry of Education is continuing to assess the current situation and its impact on the education system, particularly in light of recent regional developments, including the two-week ceasefire agreement between the United States and Iran, reports Al-Jarida daily.

According to informed sources, the ministry has not made any decision to resume in-person learning. Distance learning will remain in effect out of concern for the safety of both students and teachers.

The ministry officials are closely monitoring developments and holding meetings to discuss emerging issues related to education at all levels.

They explained that the current reliance on distance learning has not changed. Any decision to return to in-person classes would require full security stability in the region and would be coordinated with the relevant authorities. Such a decision will not be made hastily, as it necessitates careful study

and collaboration with security agencies to ensure the safety of students and teachers.

The ministry emphasized that it is closely monitoring regional developments in coordination with the relevant authorities, and decisions regarding the education system are made accordingly.

As of Wednesday, the ministry confirmed that distance learning will continue until regional conditions improve.

It noted that several contingency plans have been developed to address the current situation, primarily relying on distance learning platforms to ensure the continuity of education. Alternative plans are ready in case security conditions allow a return to in-person classes.

Following a recent meeting, relevant sectors were instructed to assess school facilities and remove any obstacles to ensure schools are fully prepared for reopening.

**KU to continue online learning system**

**By Abdulrahman Al-Shammari**

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

**KUWAIT CITY, April 11:** Kuwait University has confirmed the continuation of its online learning system, after receiving approval by the University Council.

The university emphasized that this decision reflects its commitment to ensuring the continuity of the educational process and preventing any disruption due to the current circumstances in Kuwait.

In an official circular addressed to the deans of colleges, the university

clarified that online learning regulations will be implemented for all courses, either fully or partially during the semester or any part thereof, starting from March 1, 2026, in the event that traditional in-person classes become impossible due to crises or emergencies.

It stressed the need for faculty and support staff to utilize digital learning tools, including recording lectures and uploading course materials to electronic systems.

This will contribute to documenting course content and enabling students to access it easily.

**Coptic Church of Egypt cancels Easter well-wishers reception**

**KUWAIT CITY, April 11:** Due to the current circumstances, the Coptic Orthodox Church of Egypt is declining to receive well-wishers for Easter this year, given the demands of the present situation

and the responsibilities it entails.

In a press statement, the church thanked the public for their love and kind sentiments, and prayed that God would protect Kuwait and grant it lasting security and peace.

**Banks adopt supportive stance**

**CBK moves to soften credit impact of regional conflict**

**KUWAIT CITY, April 11:** The Central Bank of Kuwait directed banks and finance companies to adopt a "positive" approach toward clients whose businesses have been affected by the repercussions of current geopolitical developments in the region. This regulatory step reflects a parallel effort to strengthen both the banking sector and the resilience of businesses, reports Al-Rai daily.

The Central Bank clarified that, to mitigate the impact of these developments on customers, banks and finance companies may take the necessary measures to address the needs of business owners and companies whose operations have been affected by the ongoing regional situation. This includes the option of postponing loan repayments for eligible clients who meet the basic criteria, primarily demonstrating that their businesses have been negatively impacted in accordance with approved regulations.

Such arrangements will be implemented within the framework of each bank's or company's established credit policies with its clients.

The Central Bank of Kuwait's emphasis on the importance of considering customers' circumstances under the current conditions, in order to achieve a balance between supporting affected clients and managing credit risks, follows the package of measures it adopted on March 26 to address the repercussions of current geopolitical developments and their impact on the economic situation. These measures included supervisory instructions and macroprudential policy tools, particularly regarding regulatory liquidity requirements and capital adequacy ratios.

The Central Bank called on banks and finance companies to obtain written consent from customers covered by this measure. This consent must include a statement outlining the financial impact of the postponement and the necessary procedures, along with updating relevant credit information

through the Kuwait Credit Information Network (Ci-Net).

Each bank and finance company will determine the scope of payment deferrals for customers whose businesses have been affected by current geopolitical developments. This information will be submitted in accordance with audited quarterly financial statements for the period ending June 30.

According to informed sources, banks and finance companies will deal "positively" with affected customers by allowing them to postpone payments, in line with each bank's or company's credit policy.

This step represents a more flexible credit approach for customers whose businesses have been impacted by the war. It is expected that the deferral period will not be counted towards the maximum repayment limits for affected customers who request it.

The sources said the postponement of loan installments for business owners affected by the ongoing war does not apply to loans and financing transactions for which banks and finance companies have already taken legal action, and which have become fully due due to the client's failure to meet their obligations prior to the decision.

Regarding the possibility of extending the decision to postpone loan installments for individual clients, similar to the measures taken for companies and business owners whose businesses have been affected by the war, the sources explained that the easing of regulatory restrictions is specifically aimed at clients whose businesses have been impacted by geopolitical developments. This takes into account the negative changes in the global, regional, and local business environment in recent weeks, including supply chain slowdowns and increased shipping, transportation, and insurance costs, which have exposed businesses to significant risks, unlike individuals who continue to receive their salaries without disruption.

**Egyptian Consulate to close April 13 for Sham El-Nessim**

**KUWAIT CITY, April 11:** The Consulate of the Arab Republic of Egypt in Kuwait announced that it will be closed on Monday, April 13, in observance of Sham El-Nessim. Work will resume on Tuesday, April 14, by prior appointment, which can be booked through the consulate's mobile application, reports

Al-Anba daily.

The consulate emphasized that it can be contacted through all its social media channels during this period and took the opportunity to express its sincere appreciation and respect to the Egyptian community in Kuwait.

**Cloud data center tender extended**

**KUWAIT CITY, April 11:** The Central Agency for Public Tenders (CAPT) announced the postponement of the deadline for submitting bids for the supply and installation of three 11/132 kV main substations, part of the cloud data centers project at various locations throughout Kuwait, along with all associated feeders and accessories. The new deadline is Tuesday, May 5, reports Al-Jarida daily.

This postponement aims to provide competing companies with additional time to complete their technical and financial studies, ensuring more accurate and competitive

bids that meet project requirements.

It reflects the commitment of the relevant authorities to achieving the highest levels of quality and efficiency in implementing these vital projects.

The Cloud Data Centers project is a strategic initiative aimed at enhancing the country's digital infrastructure and supporting the transition to e-services and cloud computing. This will contribute to improving government performance and developing services for citizens and residents, in line with the state's plans to strengthen its digital capabilities.



Weekdays (Saturday - Wednesday)	Price
One night stay in a Queen Bed Cabana for 2 persons with inclusive of Breakfast	BHD 53.361 / Net
One night stay in a Two Bedroom Chalet for 4 persons inclusive of Breakfast	BHD 119.173 / Net
Weekends (Thursday & Friday)	Price
One night stay in a Queen Bed Cabana for 2 persons with inclusive of Breakfast	BHD 61.000
One night stay in a Two Bedroom Chalet for 4 persons inclusive of Breakfast	BHD 136.198 / Net

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Continued from Page 1

**Gulf states**

The Gulf states must consider demanding compensation from Iran for these losses, in addition to compensation for indirect damages.

Undermining the economies of countries is not a trivial matter. Anyone examining the details of this situation can see that it appears systematic and aimed at weakening the Gulf states financially and economically.

The losses suffered by the Gulf states, in line with the global recession, will not be easily recovered and are likely to persist for years. The serious repercussions of Iranian actions are hindering the development cycles of Gulf states, with wider implications for the Arab world and the global economy.

There is no doubt that the Iranian regime, since 1979, has sought to weaken the Gulf states to its own level of poverty and underdevelopment. In fact, the Iranian regime sought to make the Gulf states subservient to it, similar to what it did in Lebanon since 1984, Iraq after 2003, and Yemen after the so-called Arab Spring.

The Iranian regime has adopted a policy based on inciting popular uprisings against governments, thereby undermining the strength of states and weakening their ability to resist, ultimately aiming to control their decisions.

Iranian plans have failed in the Gulf states due to the harmony between their people and leadership, in addition to maintaining excellent and stable relations with all countries of the world. These advantages have made the task difficult for the mullahs' regime, hence its severe and massive retaliation, particularly through the destruction of civilian facilities and economic infrastructure.

Iran must be held accountable for the damage it has inflicted on the Gulf states. The affected populations have the right to demand compensation, just as Germany paid reparations to all countries harmed by its actions after World War II. Japan also paid reparations to neighboring countries for losses incurred due to occupation or war.

The most recent example, which is still fresh in people's minds, is Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait in 1990. The United Nations mandated compensation for Kuwait, which Iraq continued to pay until very recently.

Today, American-Iranian talks have begun. The Gulf states should have been partners at the negotiating table to demand reparations and participate in shaping the future of relations with Iran after this aggression. Although this has not yet happened, it is not too late, especially given the continued Iranian aggression against the Gulf states.

It is crucial that the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states be present at the negotiating table, as they are the primary stakeholders in everything happening in Islamabad.

**Kuwait foils**

Investigations revealed a breach of public trust, as donors contributed, in good faith, under the impression that their funds were destined for legitimate banking channels and humanitarian causes.

However, the Ministry clarified that the accused diverted these resources toward illicit entities, fundamentally betraying the donors' intentions and violating the country's financial regulations.

The statement also detailed the cell's sophisticated financial engineering, noting the use of commercial and professional businesses as fronts for money laundering.

To evade the scrutiny of security and oversight agencies, the cell employed fragmented transfer methods, distributing funds among multiple couriers for land and air transport.

"Comprehensive legal measures have been initiated against the apprehended cell members, who have been referred to the competent authorities," the Ministry stated, adding that active investigations remain underway to identify and neutralize any remaining operatives.

Reiterating its stance on national stability, the Ministry of Interior vowed to maintain a policy of zero tolerance against any schemes targeting the nation's security or the exploitation of its territory to support terrorist entities.

**Kuwait skies**

In a related development, the Ministry of Defense recently released statistics about the brutal Iranian attacks on the country from Feb 28 until April 10.

The total number of attacks reached 1,221 -- 852 drones, 354 ballistic missiles and 15 cruise missiles.

The Kuwait Army, Ministry of Interior, Kuwait National Guard (KNG) and Kuwait Fire Force (KFF) responded to these attacks in a heroic and efficient manner.

Ministry of Defense spokesman Colonel Staff Saud Al-Atwan disclosed on Friday that the Armed Forces dealt with seven hostile drones that breached the Kuwaiti airspace over the past 24 hours as per the established procedures.

He said "the heinous Iranian aggression targeted several vital KNG installations, injuring a number of personnel who are currently undergoing treatment and are in stable condition. The attack caused enormous material damage. The EOD team at the Land Forces Engineering Unit responded to 14 reports."

He asserted that members of the Armed Forces continue to perform their national duty with high level of confidence and discipline, proving their commitment to protect the homeland and maintain national security and stability. He also affirmed that they are always ready to carry out their tasks with utmost efficiency.

Meanwhile, KNG Chief Sheikh

Mubarak Al-Hamoud Al-Sabah inspected the KNG site targeted Thursday by hostile drones to review the procedures implemented in dealing with the incident.

In a press statement, KNG revealed that during the visit, Sheikh Mubarak Al-Hamoud underscored the importance of raising the level of readiness and vigilance at all locations. He commended the efficiency of the KNG personnel and their rapid response to developments in order to protect vital installations and maintain national security.

He issued a directive to immediately repair the damaged site and restore its operations to ensure the continuity of work and the protection of vital installations.

He prayed to Almighty Allah to protect Kuwait and its people from all forms of harm under the wise leadership.

Moreover, Sheikh Mubarak Al-Hamoud visited the injured personnel at Jaber Al-Ahmad Hospital on Friday to check on their health condition.

During the visit, he reaffirmed the commitment of KNG to closely monitor the condition of all the injured and provide them with comprehensive medical care. He commended their courage and dedication in performing their national duty.

He added that the KNG personnel continue to carry out their duties with the highest level of efficiency and readiness to maintain national security and territorial integrity.

He prayed for the speedy recovery of the injured, and for Kuwait, its leadership and its people to be protected from all forms of harm.

Deputy KNG Chief Sheikh Faisal Al-Nawaf also visited the injured personnel to personally look into their health condition. He lauded their bravery and devotion in performing their national duty, emphasizing that their action proves the level of responsibility and loyalty of the KNG personnel in facing various challenges.

He was briefed by the medical staff regarding the condition of the injured and the treatment services provided to them, expressing his appreciation for the efforts exerted by the medical team and wished the injured speedy recovery and good health.

He stressed that KNG focuses on the well-being of its personnel, especially under such circumstances, confirming that their safety is the top priority. He implored Almighty Allah to protect Kuwait and its people from all forms of harm under its wise leadership.

KNG Undersecretary Lieutenant General Hamad Al-Barjas also visited the injured, during which he conveyed the message of the KNG leadership and their wishes for speedy recovery and good health for the injured.

He was also briefed on their health condition and the treatment services provided to them, confirming the commitment of KNG to continuously monitor their condition.

**Analysts condole**

"We express hope that these talks yield results and are optimistic that this temporary ceasefire becomes a long term or permanent ceasefire. If they manage to overcome their differences and come to an understanding today, the whole world will be the beneficiary," he added.

Vice Admiral of Pakistan Navy Muhammad Saleem, who is attending the Islamabad Talks as defense analyst, in a statement to KUNA condoling the losses incurred by Kuwait in the war said that Pakistan has strong ties with the State of Kuwait.

This peace initiative taken by Pakistan will benefit Gulf countries including the State of Kuwait, he said adding that Pakistan has emerged as a mediator in these peace talks due to its position of having strong and good ties with all the stakeholders and involved countries.

Meanwhile, the United States and Iran began historic face-to-face negotiations Saturday in Pakistan, days after a fragile, two-week ceasefire was announced, as the war that has killed thousands of people and shaken global markets entered its seventh week.

The White House confirmed the direct nature of the talks, a rare instance of high-level engagement, and said they were ongoing as of 10 p.m. local time. Later, there was no sign of talks having ended as midnight passed.

Meanwhile, the U.S. military said two destroyers transited the Iran-gripped Strait of Hormuz ahead of mine-clearing work, a first since the war began. Iran's state media, however, said the joint military command denied that.

The U.S. delegation led by Vice President JD Vance and the Iranian one led by Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf discussed with Pakistan how to advance the ceasefire already threatened by deep disagreements and Israel's continued attacks against the Iranian-backed Hezbollah in Lebanon, whose health ministry said the death toll has surpassed 2,000.

Since the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, the most direct U.S. contact had been in 2013 when President Barack Obama called newly elected President Hassan Rouhani to discuss Iran's nuclear program. The most recent highest-level meetings were between Secretary of State John Kerry and counterpart Mohammad Javad Zarif during negotiations over the program.

Now talks feature Vance, a reluctant defender of the war who has little diplomatic experience and warned Iran not to "try and play us," and Qalibaf, a former commander with Iran's powerful Revolutionary Guard who has issued some of Iran's most fiery statements since fighting began.

Iran's state-run news agency said the three-party talks began after Iranian conditions, including a reduction in Israe-

li strikes on southern Lebanon, were met. Iran's delegation told state television it had presented "red lines" in meetings with Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, including compensation for damage caused by U.S.-Israeli strikes that launched the war on Feb. 28 and releasing Iran's frozen assets.

The war has killed at least 3,000 people in Iran, 2,020 in Lebanon, 23 in Israel and more than a dozen in Gulf Arab states, and caused lasting damage to infrastructure in half a dozen Middle Eastern countries.

**Kuwait faces**

He emphasized the need to avoid relying on the sovereign wealth fund's returns as much as possible.

Al-Shatti explained that while the fund's returns can provide immediate liquidity, they carry three long-term strategic risks.

The first risk is that the fund is a strategic reserve for future generations, and depleting it weakens its ability to generate sustainable investment returns that exceed the cost of borrowing in the long run.

The second risk is that drawing from it sends a negative signal to international markets regarding the sustainability of financial management and could affect Kuwait's credit rating.

The third risk is that the sovereign wealth fund's reserves should be preserved as much as possible in light of ongoing geopolitical tensions, serving as a buffer against potentially larger crises.

Al-Shatti highlighted the importance of pursuing domestic financing solutions that rely on highly solvent national institutions with strong central control, such as local banks, KPC, and the Public Institution for Social Security (PIFSS), which holds assets valued at approximately \$134 billion.

Al-Shatti stated that these solutions not only cover the deficit but also provide mutual benefits to these institutions and strengthen the domestic economic cycle.

He identified seven innovative solutions to cover the budget deficit.

He explained that the first proposal is financing through highly solvent national institutions, including local banks with strong liquidity. The Central Bank of Kuwait has issued stimulus packages that allow for increased financing through the issuance of short-term and medium-term government bonds or Islamic sukuk, which banks purchase directly on a "mutual benefit" basis.

The second proposal is to allocate a portion of the PIFSS portfolio toward purchasing government bonds or "mutual benefit" sukuk, especially since the country has enacted a public

debt and borrowing law that guarantees stable returns for pension funds.

The amendments to the relevant laws help maintain the sustainability of social benefits and reduce reliance on volatile foreign investments.

The third solution involves KPC and its subsidiaries maintaining cash flows and inventories, despite the temporary decline in production. These could be used to provide bridge financing or to purchase "mutual benefit" government debt instruments, thereby enhancing coordination between the oil sector and the state's public finances. This step would provide KPC with additional returns that support its production diversification and sustainability plans.

These three solutions would represent a mechanism for transforming the deficit into a positive internal cycle, preserving liquidity within the Kuwaiti economy and reducing financing costs compared to external borrowing.

The fourth solution involves issuing "National Rescue Sukuk" or "National Resilience Bonds": short-term (6-18 months) Islamic bonds specifically targeted at national institutions, with incentives such as tax exemptions or simplified digital marketing.

The fifth solution involves expanding public-private partnerships (PPPs) by allocating a portion of capital spending (which constitutes approximately 11.8 percent of the budget, around 3.1 billion dinars) for PPP models for financing infrastructure and renewable energy projects.

The sixth solution involves activating smart privatization (pre-IPO), which is offering shares of successful and profitable companies in certain sectors such as oil, telecommunications, or services for pre-public subscription before their official listing on the stock exchange.

This would provide substantial sums to the public treasury without selling off entire companies, stimulate the local financial market, and give citizens a direct investment opportunity.

The seventh solution involves establishing a joint national investment fund between KPC, banks, and PIFSS, focusing on vital sectors such as logistics and technology, backed by government guarantees.

Al-Shatti emphasized the importance of rationalization, which must be structural and intelligent so as not to negatively affect salaries or essential services.

He identified three aspects that can contribute to rationalization:

- Eliminating waste in government procurement and avoiding overvalued tenders
- Restructuring untargeted subsidies
- Reducing administrative duplication and unproductive spending.



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Leavitt defends US president's rhetoric as effective

## Dems grow bolder on talk about removing Trump from office after Iran threats

WASHINGTON, April 11, (AP): US President Donald Trump's threats to wipe out Iran, "a whole civilization," ended the restraint that Democrats have mostly practiced when it comes to questions of removing him from office in his second term.

By the dozens, Democrats came out to say that Trump should no longer serve in the White House, either through the impeachment process or the 25th Amendment, which allows the vice president and the Cabinet to declare that a president is no longer able to perform the job.

While Trump eventually pulled back on his threat and agreed to a two-week ceasefire with Iran, the episode highlighted the growing demands for Democrats to oppose the Republican president in the strongest possible terms. Calls about Iran flooded into congressional offices, lawmakers said.

The breadth of the Democratic pushback underscored the gravity of Trump's apocalyptic threat to a country of more than 91 million people. It also served to raise the domestic political stakes for a conflict that is far from over. The Trump administration faces mounting calls to testify about the war and justify its demands for hundreds of billions of dollars in new military spending.

"A commander in chief who is truly in control would have never gotten into this colossal mess to begin with," said Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer at a news conference Wednesday in New York.

In the near term, both Schumer and House Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries are shying away from impeachment, instead pushing Republicans to join them and pass legislation that would force Trump from office by congressional approval before carrying out any more attacks on Iran. Any attempt to remove Trump from office is doomed to fail so long as Republicans control Congress.

House Democrats plan to use a brief session of the House on Thursday to call for the quick passage of the war powers legislation, but Republican leadership is expected to quash that attempt.



US Sen Chuck Schumer, D-NY, and Rep Hakeem Jeffries, D-NY, attend an event marking the installation of a plaque commemorating Jan 6 at the US Capitol on March 25 in Washington. (AP)

"We will continue to unleash maximum pressure on Republicans to put patriotic duty over party loyalty and join Democrats in stopping the mad-

ness," Jeffries said in a letter to Democratic members Wednesday.

At the White House, press secretary Karoline Leavitt defended Trump's

rhetoric as effective.

"I think it was a very, very strong threat from the president of the United States that led the Iranian regime to cave to their knees and ask for a ceasefire and agree to reopening the Strait of Hormuz," she said at a White House press briefing.

As they press their case against Trump, Democrats are responding to the worries of their own base and constituents. Congressional offices were bombarded with phone calls and emails this week, largely from people alarmed by the president's rhetoric.

In the House, the office of Rep. Suzan DelBene, D-Wash., received a "ton" of calls and emails Monday and Tuesday, mostly about Iran but also about impeaching Trump or removing him by deploying the 25th Amendment, said one aide who was not authorized to discuss the internal office situation and insisted on anonymity.

When her district staffers in the state office took a break Tuesday, they returned to 75 voicemails on Iran an hour

later, the aide said.

"My office phones have not stopped ringing," said Rep. Maxine Dexter, D-Ore., at a press conference in Portland, urging House colleagues to immediately return to Washington.

Dexter's office received more calls on Tuesday, 257, than it has ever received in a 24-hour period since the first-term lawmaker's team began keeping track.

The groundswell appeared to be organic, rather than an orchestrated campaign to pressure lawmakers to act.

While outside groups have been circulating some discussion points, including the legal details around invoking the 25th Amendment, there has not been an organized effort to flood the congressional offices with a strategic message, said one Democratic strategist familiar with the situation who insisted on anonymity to discuss the private conversations.

It was simply the "horror" of what Trump was saying, the strategist said, and the scale of the president's threats, that appeared to have sparked the mobilization.

Question remains: Why now?

### Melania Trump denies ties to Epstein

WASHINGTON, April 11, (AP): US First Lady **Melania Trump's** seemingly out-of-the-blue statement denying affiliation with Jeffrey Epstein left people still wondering Friday what prompted the public declaration at a time when the case had receded from the spotlight.

Reading prepared remarks at the White House on Thursday, Melania Trump said she and her attorneys were fighting back against "unfounded and baseless lies" in regards to her connections to the late financier, a convicted offender who leveraged connections to the rich, powerful and famous to recruit his victims and cover up his crimes.

"The lies linking me with the disgraceful Jeffrey Epstein need to end today," she said. "The individuals lying about me are devoid of ethical standards, humility and respect. I do not object to their ignorance, but rather I reject their mean-spirited at-

tempts to defame my reputation."

The first lady didn't take questions from the press after her statement, leaving many with questions: It's unclear.

The message came as her husband, President Donald Trump, and his administration had finally seemed to move past more than a year of controversy surrounding Epstein, especially as the Iran war had become all-consuming in Washington.

The first lady's comments almost assuredly will serve to push the story back into the political spotlight even as the president urged the public and media to move on from the case.

Melania Trump seemingly referenced a brief email from 2002 with the sender and recipient blacked out. It begins, "Dear G!" and ends "Love, Melania," and compliments the recipient on a magazine article about "JE."

"I know you are very busy flying all over the world," it says. "How was Palm Beach? I cannot wait to go down. Give me a call when you are back in NY."

That email was sent the same month that a New York Magazine article was published about Epstein in which Trump called him a "terrific guy."



Trump

### Mamdani brings unique star power to NY governance

'I am thinking about it,' Harris says of 2028 presidential bid

NEW YORK, April 11, (AP): After chants of "run again!" filled the room, former Vice President Kamala Harris told African American activists on Friday that she's actively considering another presidential bid.

"I might. I am thinking about it," Harris told Rev. Al Sharpton after he asked directly whether she was going to run for president in 2028.

Harris' comments came during the National Action Network's annual convention, where more than a half-dozen potential candidates appeared this week, hoping to make inroads among Black voters - who comprise one of Democrats' most powerful blocs.

The Democrats' next presidential primary season won't begin in earnest until after November's midterm elections, but this week's conference showcased a collection of Democrats already jockeying for position in what promises to be a crowded competition.

For now, at least, there is no clear early favorite. But there did appear to be a favorite at Sharpton's conference.

Harris, the nation's first Black female vice president and the Democrats' presidential nominee in 2024, earned the only standing ovation and the largest crowd of any other 2028



Kamala Harris, former US vice president and 2024 presidential candidate, speaks during the National Action Network (NAN) Convention in New York on April 10. (AP)

prospect this week.

Sharpton noted that Harris earned more votes in her losing 2024 campaign than even former Democratic Presidents Barack Obama and Bill Clinton.

"Whatever she decides to do, she made a point in history," Sharpton said.

Harris has raised the possibility of another presidential bid before in the 15 months since she left office. She also recently launched a political action committee and began to travel across the United States to support Democrats, especially across the South.

Still, some in the party have shift-

ed their focus to a new generation of Democratic leaders given Harris' struggle in the last presidential contest.

The convention lineup this week featured Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro, former Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker, Maryland Gov. Wes Moore, Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear, Rep. Ro Khanna of California, and Arizona Sens. Mark Kelly and Ruben Gallego.

Also:

**NEW YORK:** In his first 100 days in office, New York City Mayor **Zohran Mamdani** has governed with a star power unusual in politics.

Crowds of supporters show up to his news conferences. Basic municipal services have been infused with newfound excitement. Celebrities help him promote his agenda.

In the process, he's been able to notch a few notable early wins. And he's reached a détente, at least for now, with President **Donald Trump**, a mercurial leader with an affinity for celebrities.

But as Mamdani, a Democrat, marks an early milestone in his mayoralty, it remains to be seen whether he'll be able to leverage his fame into achieving the progressive policy proposals that propelled him to office.

### 2 dead in warehouse blast

## Russian strikes kill two in Ukraine

KYIV, Ukraine, April 11, (Agencies): Russian drone strikes killed at least two people in the Ukrainian city of Odesa overnight into Saturday, local authorities reported, ahead of a proposed ceasefire for Orthodox Easter.

A further two people were wounded in the attack on the Black Sea port city, when drones hit a residential area, damaging apartment buildings, houses and a kindergarten.

According to the Ukrainian Air Force, Russia targeted Ukraine with 160 drones overnight, of which 133 were shot down or intercepted, hours before a proposed Easter ceasefire was due to come into force.

Russia's Defense Ministry said 99 Ukrainian drones were shot down overnight across Russia and occupied Crimea.

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Thursday declared a 32-hour ceasefire over the Orthodox Easter weekend, ordering Russian forces to halt hostilities from 4 pm Saturday until the end of Sunday.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Friday Ukraine is ready to mirror any ceasefire steps, having earlier proposed to Russia a pause in attacks on each other's energy infrastructure over the Orthodox Easter holiday.

Previous ceasefire attempts have had little impact, with both sides accusing each other of violations.



A local man stands in front of a residential building which was heavily damaged after a Russian strike in Odesa, Ukraine on April 6. (AP)

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov on Friday described Putin's move as a "humanitarian" gesture, but said Moscow remains focused on a comprehensive settlement based on its longstanding demands - a key sticking point that has prevented the two sides from reaching an agreement.

A possible prisoner exchange over the Easter holiday has also been discussed.

Russia's human rights ombuds-

woman Tatyana Moskalkova said last week that both sides were working on exchanges of prisoners.

Periodic prisoner exchanges have been one of the few positive outcomes of otherwise fruitless monthslong US-brokered negotiations between Moscow and Kyiv. The talks have delivered no progress on key issues preventing an end to Russia's invasion of its neighbor, now in its fifth year.

Meanwhile, one civilian was killed following a drone attack in Russia's Volgograd region, regional authorities said Friday.

Governor of Volgograd Oblast Andrei Bocharov said a resident died from shrapnel wounds after a drone hit a community in the city of Volzhsky.

Also:

**MOSCOW:** Two people were killed and 14 others injured in an explosion at warehouse facilities in **Vladikavkaz**, the capital of Russia's North Ossetia-Alania Republic, local authorities said Friday.

Four of the injured are in critical condition, head of the republic **Sergei Menyailo** said.

The blast occurred at facilities where pyrotechnics were reportedly stored, local media reported.

An emergency response team has been set up at the site, and an investigation is underway, local authorities said.



People hold up their lit phones during an anti-government concert featuring dozens of the country's most popular performers in Budapest, Hungary on April 10. (AP)

### Tens of thousands rally at megaconcert to vote out Hungary's PM

Two days before Hungary's closely-watched elections, over 100,000 people filled a sprawling square and adjacent avenues in the capital for a concert featuring dozens of the country's most popular performers - a call to action for citizens to cast their ballots on Sunday and vote out the government of Prime

Minister Viktor Orbán.

Over 50 bands, all performers who have used their music to express dissent against Orbán's nationalist-populist government, played one song each during the seven-hour, "system-breaking" concert on Friday.

The crowd, largely made up of

young people, frequently broke into anti-government chants, including "Ruszkik hazai!" or "Russians go home!" It was a refrain from Hungary's 1956 anti-Soviet revolution that has taken on renewed significance as Orbán has forged increasingly close relations with Moscow. (AP)

### Europe

**British authorities charge boat pilot:** A Sudanese man alleged to have piloted a boat connected to the deaths of four migrants trying to cross the English Channel has been charged under a new British immigration law, authorities said Saturday.

Alnoor Mohamed Ali, 27, was charged late Friday with endangering another during a journey by sea to the U.K., the National Crime Agency said.

The new law allows Britain to extend the reach of its criminal jurisdiction to crack down on migrants making the dangerous crossing.

The two men and two women died Thursday in strong currents while trying to board the boat Ali allegedly piloted off the coast of Calais.

French authorities rescued 38 others from the waters. Ali and another 73 migrants then continued on to England, where he was arrested.

The incident occurred at Equihen Beach in Calais as the migrants tried to wade out to what authorities call a "taxi-boat," typically a small motorized inflatable that picks up people along large stretches of the northern French coast.

The tactic has become more popular with smugglers as police on the beaches try to thwart crossings by puncturing the rafts that groups of migrants have to inflate and carry to the water. (AP)

**Belarus detains 52 at architectural firm:** Belarusian authorities detained more than 50 employees of an architectural firm in the country's largest single raid this year, human rights activists said Friday, as part of what they described as a new escalation of repression under



Policemen stand guard after a migrant taxi-boat accident, in Equihen-Plage, northern France on April 9.

President Alexander Lukashenko.

Security forces searched the Minsk offices of ZRO-BIM Architects on Thursday and detained 52 people on suspicion of disloyalty, including the firm's founder, Andrei Makouski, according to the Viasna human rights center.

Authorities had demanded the private firm hire a full-time "ideologist" to monitor its staff, the group said. On the eve of his detention, Makouski posted on social media that the studio had received a letter from authorities making the demand.

"The situation in Belarus is deteriorating, and we see that even suspicions of disloyalty are enough to trigger the largest single roundup of creative people this year," Pavel Sapelka, a lawyer with Viasna, told The Associated Press. "This is a new practice for the authorities: first arresting people, hacking their phones and computers, and only then bringing charges." (AP)

## Pope amplifies criticism of Iran war

ROME, April 11, (AP): Pope Leo XIV amplified his condemnation of the US-Israeli war with Iran on Friday, saying that "God does not bless any conflict" and certainly doesn't side with those who drop bombs.

Leo spoke during a gathering of top bishops of the Chaldean Catholic Church in Iraq, an Eastern Rite Catholic church whose clerics are in Rome to elect a new patriarch.

Leo said they were signs of hope "in a world marked by senseless and inhuman violence".

He told them that no cause can justify the spilling of innocent blood, and he urged them "to proclaim clearly that God does not bless any conflict; to cry out to the world that whoever is a disciple of Christ, the Prince of Peace, never stands on the side of those who yesterday wielded the sword and today drop bombs."

To drive the message home, the Vatican posted the quote on Leo's official @Pontifex handle on X.

Leaders have used religion to justify their actions in the war. US officials and especially Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth have invoked their Christian faith to justify the conflict and cast the



Pope Leo XIV arrives for his weekly general audience in St. Peter's Square, at the Vatican on April 8. (AP)

US as a Christian nation trying to vanquish its foes.

After issuing muted appeals for peace and dialogue during the first weeks of the conflict, Leo stepped up his criticism of the Trump administration starting on Palm Sunday, when he

said God doesn't listen to the prayers of those who make war.

This week, he said President Donald Trump's threat to annihilate Iranian civilization was "truly unacceptable" and called for dialogue to prevail.

## INTERNATIONAL



Cambodia's King Norodom Sihamoni greets from a vehicle after the King presided over the country's 72nd Independence Day ceremony at the Independence Monument in Phnom Penh Cambodia, Nov 9, 2025. (AP)

## Cambodia's King Sihamoni diagnosed with prostate cancer

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia, April 11, (AP): Cambodia's King Norodom Sihamoni announced Friday that he has prostate cancer and will be undergoing treatment for it in China, where he was diagnosed with the disease.

In a statement he posted on his Facebook account and carried by Cambodia's state news agency AKP, the 72-year-old constitutional monarch said he was diagnosed with the cancer during a medical examination at a state hospital in Beijing. He and his mother, Queen Mother Norodom Monineath,

traveled there at the end of February for their routine checkups.

Sihamoni's message did not mention how serious his condition is. Prostate cancer is usually treatable if detected at an early stage. According to the American Cancer Society, about one in eight men will be diagnosed with prostate cancer during their lifetimes.

Sihamoni's father, King Norodom Sihanouk, who also received Chinese medical care, was diagnosed with prostate cancer as early as 1993, but lived until 2012, when he died at age 89 in Beijing.



Xi Jinping, General Secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, meets with a delegation of the Chinese Kuomintang (KMT) party led by its Chairwoman Cheng Li-wun in Beijing, capital of China on April 10. (Xinhua)

## Xi meets KMT leader Cheng Li-wun in Beijing

Xi Jinping, General Secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, on Friday morning met with Cheng Li-wun, Chairwoman of the Chinese Kuomintang (KMT) party, in Beijing.

Invited by the CPC Central Committee and Xi, Cheng is the first KMT chairperson to have led a delegation to the Chinese mainland in the past decade. The delegation had visited Jiangsu Province and Shanghai before coming to Beijing.

Xi said this meeting between the CPC and KMT leaders after 10 years is of great significance for developing relations between the two parties and across the Taiwan Strait.

Xi stressed that no matter how the international landscape and the situation across the Taiwan Strait may evolve, the overarching trend toward the great rejuvenation

of the Chinese nation will not change, and the prevailing momentum for the Chinese on both sides of the Strait to come together will not change.

He added that people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait hope for peace and tranquility, improved cross-strait relations, and better lives. "This is a responsibility that the CPC and the KMT cannot shirk, and also a driving force for the two parties to work together," Xi said.

Xi expressed the willingness to work with all political parties in Taiwan, including the KMT, as well as groups and people from all sectors, to strengthen exchanges and dialogue, promote peace across the Taiwan Strait, improve the well-being of the people and advance national rejuvenation, on the basis of the common political foundation of adhering to the 1992 Consensus and opposing "Taiwan independence." (Xinhua)

## Myanmar army chief sworn in as prez

BANGKOK, April 11, (AP): Min Aung Hlaing, who as Myanmar's military commander had led the Southeast Asian nation with an iron fist since seizing power from Aung San Suu Kyi's civilian government in 2021, was sworn in as an elected president on Friday.

His inauguration came after a general election judged by UN experts and rights groups to be neither free nor fair, with Suu Kyi's popular National League for Democracy party among many not taking part. He faces the major challenge of ending the civil war that began when Suu Kyi's ouster from power met with armed resistance.

The transition back to a nominally democratic government is widely seen as an effort to keep the army in power behind a facade of civilian rule.

Min Aung Hlaing's ascent to the presidency follows a tradition of military strongmen installing themselves as the nation's top leader and seeking to legitimize their rule through unfair elections.

He will be serving a five-year term after his April 3 election by parliament.

Twenty-eight of the 30 new cabinet members, also sworn in on Friday, are current or former generals, lawmakers from the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party, or members of the previous military government.

The pro-military bloc holds nearly 90% of the seats in the two-chamber legislature. "Myanmar is back on the path to democracy and moving toward a better future," Min Aung Hlaing, 69, said in a speech after being sworn in.

## Pyongyang, Beijing agree to deepen cooperation

# N.Korean leader Kim backs China's push for 'multipolar world' in talks with FM

SEOUL, South Korea, April 11, (AP): North Korean leader Kim Jong Un voiced support for China's push to build a "multipolar world" and called for deeper ties between the traditional allies during a meeting with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, state media said Saturday.

During the meeting Friday, Kim said his government will fully support Chinese efforts to achieve territorial integrity based on its "one-China principle," a reference to Beijing's official position that Taiwan is an inalienable part of China's territory, according to North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency.

Kim also outlined North Korea's position on unspecified regional and international issues of "mutual concern" and said sustained development of ties between the two countries has become more crucial in the current geopolitical environment, KCNA said.

Wang, on a two-day trip to North Korea, said the countries' relations were entering a "new phase" following a summit last year between Kim and Chinese President Xi Jinping.

Embracing the ideas of a "new Cold War" and a "multipolarized world," Kim has sought to break out of international isolation and push a more assertive foreign policy by expanding ties with governments locked in confrontations with the United States.

While Russia has been Kim's top foreign policy priority in recent years, sending thousands of troops and large weapons shipments to support its war against Ukraine, he has also been cozying up to China, the North's traditional main ally and economic lifeline.

Kim joined Russian President Vladimir Putin at a World War II ceremony in Beijing in September and held his first summit with Xi Jinping in six years, moves that supported his efforts to portray North Korea as



In this photo provided by the North Korean government, leader Kim Jong Un, (right), meets Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi in Pyongyang, North Korea on April 10. (AP)

part of a united front against Washington.

North Korea and China last month resumed direct flight and passenger train services, which had been suspended since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

Wang arrived in Pyongyang on Thursday in his first visit to North Korea in seven years. He earlier met with North Korean Foreign Minister Choe Sun Hui and discussed ways to facilitate further cooperation and exchanges and holding "in-depth" talks on international issues, state media from both countries said.

The state media outlets did not mention whether Wang and North Korean officials discussed issues related to the US or the ongoing war in the Middle East.

Wang's trip to North Korea came before US President Donald Trump travels to Beijing for a rescheduled summit with Xi Jinping in May. Some South Korean officials have expressed hope the Trump-Xi meeting could provide a diplomatic opening with Pyongyang.

Kim has suspended all meaningful dialogue with the US and South Korea since the collapse of his diplomacy with Trump in 2019 during the American president's first term. Kim has since taken a hard-line stance toward South Korea, which he now defines as his "most hostile" adversary, and rejected US offers to resume talks, calling on Washington to drop its demand for North Korea's denuclearization as a precondition.

The foreign ministers of North Korea and China agreed to further deepen cooperation and exchanges between their countries and had an "in-depth exchange" on international issues, the countries' state media outlets reported Friday.

Wang flew to Pyongyang on Thursday in his first visit to North Korea in seven years.

The relationship between North Korea and China has often been described as being "as close as lips and teeth," but their ties have been questioned in recent years.



Rescuers search the site where a boat carrying pilgrims capsized in the Yamuna river in Vrindavan, India on April 10. (AP)

## Tourist boat capsizes in India, killing at least 10

An overcrowded tourist boat capsized in the Yamuna river in northern India on Friday, leaving at least 10 people dead, officials said.

The accident occurred near the temple town of Vrindavan, a major pilgrimage site in Uttar Pradesh state.

Officials said the privately operated boat, which had a capacity of about 15 passengers, was carrying around 25 people when it overturned midstream. Preliminary findings indicated strong winds caused the vessel to sway before it struck a pontoon bridge and capsized.

Senior administrative officer Chandraprakash Singh said 15 people were rescued, four of them in critical

condition. The dead were all from India and included six women, he said.

Officials said most passengers were not wearing life jackets and that the boat appeared poorly maintained. The operator fled the scene after the accident, they said.

The tourists were part of a larger group of about 150 people visiting the area, officials said.

Boating accidents are common in India, where many vessels are overcrowded and have inadequate safety equipment.

In 2023, a tourist boat capsized in southern India, killing at least 22 people. (AP)

## Cuban leader Díaz-Canel says will not step down in first interview with NBC

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico, April 11, (AP): Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel told NBC News' Meet the Press that he would not step down in his first interview with a US network, a portion of which was broadcast Thursday.

In a nearly five-minute clip that is part of a longer interview scheduled to air on Sunday, journalist Kristen Welker asked Díaz-Canel if he would be "willing to step down if it meant saving Cuba."

Before answering, Díaz-Canel asked if she had ever posed that question to any other president in the world: "Is that a question from you, or is that coming from the State Department of the US government?"

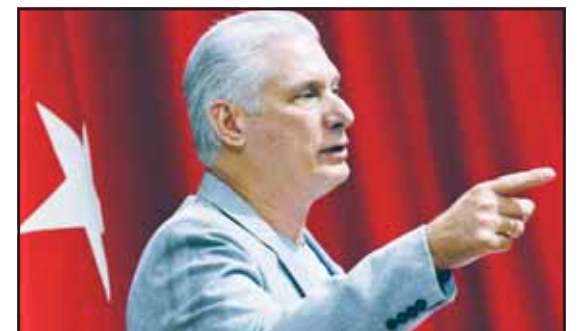
Díaz-Canel added: "In Cuba, the people who are in leadership position are not elected by the U.S. government, and they don't have a mandate from the US government. We have a free sovereign state."

He said he became president not out of a "personal ambition or corporate ambition or even a party ambition," but because of a mandate by the people.

"If the Cuban people understand that I am not fit for office, that I have no reason to be here, then I should not be holding this position of president, I will respond to them," he said. The interview comes as tensions between Cuba and the U.S. remain high despite both sides acknowledging talks, although no details have been shared.

Díaz-Canel accused the US government of implementing a "hostile policy" against Cuba and said it has "no moral to demand anything from Cuba."

He said the US should recognize how much the policies have cost the Cuban people "and how much they have de-



Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel delivers a welcome speech to participants of the 'Nuestra America, or Our America' Convoy at the Convention Palace in Havana, Cuba, on March 20. (AP)

prived the American people from a normal relationship with the Cuban people."

Díaz-Canel noted that Cuba is interested in engaging in dialogue and discussing any topic without conditions, "not demanding changes from our political system as we are not demanding change from the American system, about which we have a number of doubts."

Cuba blames a US energy blockade for its deepening woes, with a lack of petroleum affecting the island's health system, public transportation and the production of goods and services.

## Trinidad's prime minister escalates feud with Caribbean neighbors over US policy

GEORGETOWN, Guyana, April 11, (AP): Trinidad's ongoing row with its Caribbean neighbors over U.S. policy toward international drug trafficking and Venezuela boiled over into a full-scale verbal war Friday, with the prime minister demanding the exit of CARICOM's secretary-general after her term ends in August.

Regional tensions among members of CARICOM, a 15-member regional trade bloc, spiked late last year when governments denounced US military action in the South Caribbean and the build-up of an unusually large American force near Venezuela intended to capture then-President Nicolás Maduro.

Regional neighbors previously called for the Caribbean to remain a "zone of peace," but Trinidad and Tobago's Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar dismissed the label as "zone of peace fakery," throwing her support behind US military strikes and the Trump administration's broader campaign against international drug trafficking and organized crime.

She has now turned her focus to CARICOM's general operations, demanding that Secretary-General Carla Barnett step down once her five-year term concludes in late August.

Since winning Trinidad's general election one year ago, the prime minister has used her platform to push for Barnett's removal, reminding leaders that Trinidad pays around 22% of CARICOM's annual budget, around \$20 million.

Persad-Bissessar has repeatedly expressed her administration's deep dissatisfaction with the bloc's current operations, saying she remains puzzled why the region aligned with Venezuela and Maduro rather than supporting the US position.



Trinidad and Tobago Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar stands at the State Department in Washington on Sept 30, 2025. (AP)

"Caricom has chosen to support the Maduro narco-government through the fake zone of peace narrative," she said in a statement in late 2025 as the US was preparing for action against Maduro and as governments complained about the alleged illegality of the deadly boat strikes.

Her relentless monthslong campaign against the bloc and its chief executive had forced Friday's emergency meeting to discuss Barnett's reappointment.

## Djibouti President Guelleh re-elected for sixth term

MOGADISHU, Somalia, April 11, (AP): Djibouti President Ismail Omar Guelleh was re-elected for a sixth term after official results showed him winning 97.81% of the vote in Friday's election.

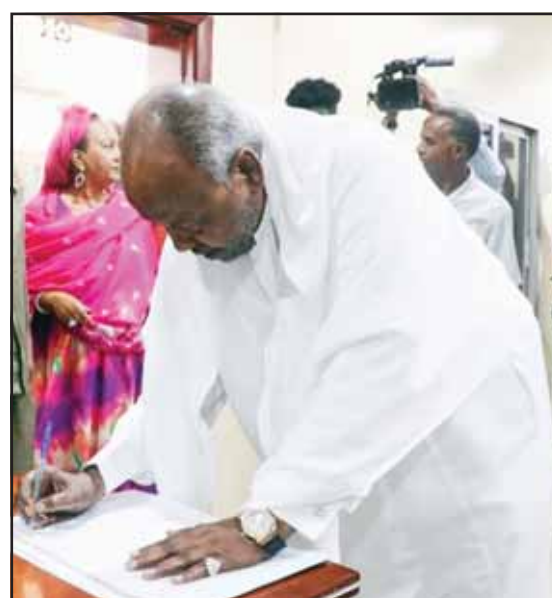
Guelleh, 78, has ruled the small Horn of Africa nation of about 1 million for more than two decades. Last year, the country's lawmakers scrapped presidential age limits.

Election officials said the vote was peaceful. At the presidential palace, supporters on Saturday celebrated and offered congratulations.

Guelleh faced a single challenger, Mohamed Farah Samatar, a former ruling party member, in a race analysts say offered little genuine competition. Opposition groups frequently boycott elections, citing restrictions on political freedoms.

Guelleh succeeded his uncle, former President Hassan Gouled Aptidon, in 1999, extending a family-led system that has shaped the country's politics for decades.

Djibouti hosts multiple foreign military bases, including those of the U.S., China, France and Japan, underscoring its strategic importance along a key global shipping route linking the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. Revenues from these arrangements, along with port services for neighboring Ethiopia, underpin the economy.



Djibouti's incumbent President Ismail Omar Guelleh registers to vote at the City Hall polling station during the presidential election in Mouloud, Djibouti on April 10. (AP)

## Oil barrel price down \$1.41 to \$101.03

KUWAIT CITY, April 11, (KUNA): The Kuwaiti oil price went down USD 1.41 to reach USD 101.3 per barrel (pb) on Friday, compared with USD 102.44 pb the previous day, said the Kuwait Petro-

leum Corporation (KPC) on Saturday. In international markets, Brent crude oil price went down by 72 cents to USD 95.20 pb, and West Texas crude dropped USD 1.30 USD 96.57 pb.

# Business

Annual General Assembly approves 8% cash dividend

## Markaz reports positive performance in 2025, driven by its investment philosophy, institutional expertise, and commitment to creating sustainable value for investors

KUWAIT CITY, April 11: Kuwait Financial Centre "Markaz" held its Ordinary Annual General Assembly meeting on Wednesday, April 8, 2026, with an attendance rate of 72.7%. The assembly approved all items on the agenda, including the Board of Directors' recommendation to distribute cash dividends of 8% of the nominal share value, or 8 fils per share.

In 2025, Markaz recorded total revenues of KD 28.59 million, representing an increase of 41%, compared to KD 20.31 million in 2024. Net profit attributable to shareholders reached KD 10.82 million in 2025, compared to KD 4.46 million in the previous year. Assets under management increased by 8% to reach KD 1.52 billion as of December 31, 2025.

Mr. Diraar Yusuf Alghanim, Chairman, said: "2025 presented both challenges and opportunities, and was a good year for Markaz in terms of performance. This was driven by Markaz's long-standing investment philosophy, deep institutional experience, and enduring commitment to creating sustainable value for investors. In 2025, Markaz received five awards from prestigious institutions, including EMEA Finance, Euromoney, and MEED, in recognition of its leadership in asset management, investment banking, and advisory services. These awards reflect Markaz's position as a trusted regional institution, recognized for delivering integrated investment solutions and institutional strength in a competitive financial services environment."

The Chairman added: "During 2025, the Kuwait equity market emerged as one of the strongest performers in the GCC, ranking second after Oman and delivering a return of 21%. This performance was supported by positive earnings, particularly in the banking sector, future growth expectations resulting from newly enacted laws, including the real estate development and mortgage laws, as well as rising foreign investor participation. Interest rate cuts by the Central Bank of Kuwait, progress in reforms, and the implementation of Kuwait Vision 2035 also supported market sentiment throughout the year."

### Strategic Initiatives

The Chairman stated: "Drawing on more than five decades of experience and innovation, Markaz continues to strengthen its core business lines across asset management, investment banking, and real estate as part of its growth strategy. Markaz also continues to broaden its investment product offering, enabling investors to access global opportunities across public and private asset classes. Among these initiatives is the launch of the Private Real Assets Strategy for qualified and professional investors. During 2025, Markaz continued to enhance its digital platforms, improving operational quality, efficiency, and client experience. Furthermore, sustainability principles remain integral to Markaz values and during the year, Markaz further strengthened its corporate social responsibility initiatives, reinforcing its commitment to lasting community impact in Kuwait and beyond."



Markaz's Ordinary Annual General Assembly.

### Outlook

Mr. Alghanim commented: "Before the current geopolitical conflict in the Middle East, the IMF expected the GCC economies' real GDP to grow by 4.3% in 2026, driven by a 5.9% expansion in oil GDP and 3.6% growth in non-oil sectors. However, the escalation of geopolitical risks since the 28th of February has introduced significant uncertainty. Brent crude oil prices have surged. Regional stock markets witnessed mixed performance. Earnings growth forecasts are moderating. Although GCC banks remain resilient with stable asset quality and limited funding outflows, S&P Global anticipates some weakening in financial performance as conflict-related impacts deepen.

Overall, while the GCC region has sufficient capital buffers and is supported by sovereign wealth funds, the duration and intensity of geopolitical tensions will ultimately determine the scale of the impact on GCC economies and markets. Easing geopolitical tensions in the region will be important for restoring investor confidence and, therefore, potentially having a positive impact on the market outlook. Government initiatives by GCC central banks infuse support to the banking system and help stabilize the negative impact of the conflict on key financial institutions.

Markaz maintains a cautiously optimistic outlook on GCC equity markets in the near term, with a bias toward hedging strategies amid elevated geopolitical uncertainty

and heightened market volatility. Over the medium term, the outlook turns more constructive and selective, underpinned by strong macroeconomic fundamentals, sustained strength in oil prices, and continued investment-driven growth across the region. A diversified portfolio with prudent risk management should be the goal to navigate the uncertainty.

Markaz remains committed to disciplined investing to support clients in achieving their long-term goals. Looking ahead, Markaz is well positioned to capitalize on rapidly evolving investment opportunities in private credit and other alternative assets, while integrating digital applications and artificial intelligence to enhance client experience and operational efficiency. Markaz will also continue expanding its international real estate activities with a focus on high-quality assets in the United States and Europe through prudent structuring and active asset management. Markaz will continue to build on its well-established leadership position in regional wealth creation and strengthen its role as a trusted adviser to institutional and corporate clients."

### Business Strategy

Mr. Ali Khalil, Chief Executive Officer, stated that Markaz's strategy is centered on high-quality client engagement, expanding its range of investment solutions, exploring selected regional expansion opportunities, and continuously streamlining and digitizing its internal operations. One of the major milestones in 2025 was ex-

panding Markaz's presence in the Saudi Arabian market from real estate investments to licensed activities, where the Company received initial regulatory approvals. This presence will enhance Markaz's origination capabilities and broaden its regional distribution reach. With established presence in the United States and Europe, its growing international footprint strengthens its ability to scale differentiated real estate opportunities and alternative investment solutions while maintaining the disciplined execution that defines Markaz.

He added: "The wealth management platform continued to evolve to meet the needs of institutional clients, high-net-worth individuals, and family offices, with a focus on long-term capital growth. By expanding collaborations with international investment managers, Markaz enhanced client access to a wide range of investment strategies. Continued product innovation reflects Markaz's commitment to offering investment solutions that balance risk and return in line with anticipated market developments."

Mr. Khalil mentioned: "Markaz's investment banking platform continues to serve corporate clients across debt and equity capital markets, as well as advising on balance sheet restructuring, mergers and acquisitions. Markaz reinforces its position as a creative advisor for executing complex investment banking mandates. A key strategic initiative for Markaz is to lead and invest in build-operate-transfer (BOT) projects in Kuwait. In 2025, Markaz was awarded its first regional BOT real estate project involving the development and operation of a commercial property in Kuwait. Markaz also strengthened its commitment to digital transformation as technology continues to reshape the financial services sector. Key initiatives implemented during the year included integrating existing systems, developing and expanding the data warehouse, and streamlining operations to enhance collaboration and accelerate decision-making. Markaz's state-of-the-art CRM system will further elevate client experience and engagement."

He explained: "Markaz remains committed to investing in its people to sustain leadership in a changing business environment. The company continues to foster a supportive workplace through initiatives that promote employee well-being, professional development, and flexible work practices. A strong focus on diversity and inclusion also encourages broader perspectives and supports innovation. These efforts strengthen the company's talent base and support sustainable institutional performance through ongoing learning, leadership development, and capability-building initiatives."

Mr. Khalil concluded: "Markaz will continue to strengthen resilience and respond to changing market conditions while deploying capital with discipline across economic cycles. Innovation, operational excellence in execution, and prudent risk-adjusted decision-making remain at the core of Markaz's business strategy. By maintaining a client-first approach and investing in capabilities that deepen insight and improve efficiency, Markaz aims to create sustainable value and support balanced long-term growth for all investors."

## Kuwait's Most Valuable Banking Brand, ranked among the world's top 150

National Bank of Kuwait reinforces its leadership as Kuwait's Most Valuable Banking Brand, exceeding \$2 bln in brand value

KUWAIT CITY, April 11: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) achieved a new milestone, reinforcing its position as one of the leading banking brands regionally and globally, as the brand maintained its standing as the most valuable and strongest banking brand in Kuwait, according to Brand Finance 2026 annual report.

NBK's brand value recorded a notable increase of 28.2%, reaching USD 2.22 billion in 2026, an absolute increase of USD 490 million compared to the previous year, marking the largest absolute gain among its peers, and positioning it as the first Kuwaiti bank to surpass the USD 2 billion brand value milestone.

This exceptional growth enabled the Bank to maintain its position among the Top 10 most valuable banking brands in the Middle East, underscoring the strength of its financial performance, strategic resilience, and continued leadership across regional and global markets.

Brand Finance's valuation methodology is based on rigorous criteria, including scale of operations, geographic presence, global and regional reputation, as well as brand strength and intellectual property assessment.

### Among the Region's Leading Banking Brands

NBK's brand value growth significantly outpaced the regional average of 21%, enabling the Bank to maintain its position as the 10th most valuable banking brand in the Middle East for the second consecutive year. Despite intense regional competition, NBK's brand continues to demonstrate strength, stability, and sustained momentum.



NBK Headquarters

■ NBK outperforms regional growth averages with a 28.2% increase in brand value

■ Top 10 ranking for NBK among banking brands in the Middle East for the second consecutive year

■ The Bank continues to lead in brand strength in Kuwait for the 15th Consecutive Year

■ Ranks 145th globally among the top 500 banking brands worldwide

### Global Recognition

Globally, NBK ranked among the Top 150 banking brands worldwide, climbing 9 places to 145th in the Banking 500 ranking. This advancement reflects the Bank's strong and consistent financial performance, disciplined execution of its long-term strategy, and its well-established reputation for trust, reliability, and innovation.

### Local Leadership

At the domestic level, NBK continues to lead the banking sector, retaining its position as the most valuable banking brand in Kuwait for the eleventh consecutive year. This sustained leadership reflects strong customer trust, market influence, and a continued commitment to delivering exceptional banking experiences.

## US, China follow Kuwait in Oman FDI

Kuwait tops Arab FDI in Oman at \$3.5 bln

MUSCAT, April 11, (KUNA): Omani data showed Kuwait ranked first among Arab countries and third globally in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in Oman by end of 2025.

The National Center for Statistics and Information said Kuwaiti investments reached OMR 1.36 billion (about USD 3.5 billion) by the fourth quarter of 2025.

The United Kingdom ranked first globally with 52 percent of total FDI at OMR 16.4 billion (approx. USD 43 billion), followed by the United States with OMR 8.5 billion (approx. USD 22 billion).

China ranked fourth with, followed by Qatar, the UAE, and Bahrain, then the Netherlands, Switzerland, and India.

Total FDI in Oman grew 8.1 percent to OMR 31.4 billion (about USD 81.5 billion) by end-2025 compared to 2024.

Oil and gas extraction accounted for 80.9 percent of total FDI, followed by manufacturing, financial intermediation, real estate, and business activities.

Transport, storage, communications, electricity, water, trade, hotels, restaurants, and construction sectors followed.

## Other Voices

Fuel squeeze lifts airfare, freight costs

## Gulf shutdown hits aviation, shipping

By Kamel Al-Harami  
Independent Oil Analyst

The two petroleum products that the world is coming to face shortages in are jet fuel for aircraft and marine fuel oil for shipping. Both products are mainly used for transportation and are expected to become scarce in the coming weeks if the Arabian Gulf remains closed, with no clear indication of reopening soon.

With the supply of more than eight million barrels disrupted, global markets are experiencing tightness and shortages in refined products. No other oil-producing region can fully replace the transportation fuels produced by Gulf states, as their refineries are largely geared toward export to Europe and the Far East. This is leading to a global increase in product prices, with no immediate relief for transportation, particularly aviation and shipping. As a result, flight cancellations are increasing, and aviation fuel prices have surged by more than \$200 per ton. This is contributing to inflation and rising costs for goods, especially food and household items.

With the Strait of Hormuz remaining closed since the end of February, now reaching its 40th day, there is growing concern and stockpiling of essential goods, particularly food, amid fears of an unknown situation and the threat of escalation of the war between the United States, Israel, and Iran. Meanwhile, the Arabian Gulf states are in the middle in observing developments while seeking to maintain peace, security, and stability in the region.

With Gulf refineries shut and no confirmed timeline for resumption, shortages in the main transportation fuel sector are expected to persist. This will limit

global flights, with airports in the Gulf effectively closed, reducing face-to-face meetings and leading to a contraction in trading activities with short-term economic impacts. Most importantly, air travel ticket prices are expected to rise significantly, along with overbooked flights. This could also result in overcrowding at Gulf airports.

For Arab Gulf refineries, it may take between three to four months to restart operations and return to full service capacity, restoring transportation fuel output to meet peak airline demand. This is necessary to accommodate rising consumer travel needs and the expected surge in mobility ahead of the peak summer travel season, when more than 40 percent of the population typically travels during the summer holidays. This places additional pressure on aviation fuel availability during the summer peak.

In Kuwait, there is still uncertainty regarding the timeline for the full resumption of oil operations. One refinery requires maintenance and repairs, while the other two refineries are expected to return to full capacity once conditions stabilize.

The closure of the Strait of Hormuz is a violation of international maritime law and it should remain open, free, and without interference from any country, as has traditionally been the case. It should not be subject to any fees or tariffs. The sooner the strait is reopened, the better for global oil consumers, helping ease inflation and reduce food prices and the cost of goods internationally.

Let us hope for the quick reopening of oil facilities and the resumption of crude oil, gas production, and exports. The loss of income and revenue from more than 40 days of complete shutdown is significant. It is necessary to restore oil income and production activities. From crude oil production to finished products, the added value is higher than the crude price.

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# Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait expands robotic process automation to enhance operational efficiency and customer experience

KUWAIT CITY, April 11: Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) has announced the launch of the second phase of its Robotic Process Automation (RPA) program, following the successful automation of core processes during the first phase across key business sectors. This expansion represents a significant milestone in ABK's comprehensive digital transformation journey and reinforces the bank's commitment to leveraging advanced technologies to enhance operational efficiency and customer experience.

The second phase builds on the solid foundation established during the initial rollout, which focused on automating essential processes across multiple business functions. By extending the scope of RPA, ABK continues to reduce manual effort, minimize operational errors, and accelerate processing times. These improvements directly translate into faster, more reliable banking services that align with evolving customer expectations and support the bank's long term growth objectives.

With the expansion of RPA in this phase, ABK is streamlining high volume, rules based, and repetitive tasks that traditionally require significant manual intervention. Automation enables transactions and service requests to be processed with greater speed, consistency, and accuracy, while ensuring adherence to predefined rules and procedures. As a result, customers benefit from shorter processing times, improved service continuity, and a more dependable experience across a wide range of banking services.

Commenting on the achievement, Khalil Al Qattan, Head of Digital Transformation and Innovation at ABK, highlighted the positive impact of automation on both customers and employees.

"With automation, we can deliver faster responses, greater accuracy, and a more seamless banking experience," he said. "Internally, automation fosters a technology driven environment that enhances productivity, reduces operational burdens, and allows our employees to focus on delivering innovative



Khalil Al Qattan, Chief Digital Transformation & Innovation Officer

#### Khalil Al Qattan:

■ This expansion enables a smoother banking experience and boosts productivity



Salem Al Sarraf, Chief Information Officer

#### Salem Al Sarraf:

■ Our advanced digital infrastructure enables secure and scalable automation



Mohammad Al Bloushi GM of Operations at ABK

#### Mohammed Al Bloushi:

■ This initiative reflects our commitment to operational excellence and digital transformation

and exceptional services rather than routine manual tasks."

From an operational perspective, the expansion reflects ABK's strategic focus on efficiency and value creation. Mohammed Al Bloushi, General Manager of Operations, emphasized that RPA is a key enabler of operational excellence across the bank.

"The second phase of our RPA program reflects ABK's steadfast commitment to operational excellence and digital transformation," he stated. "By automating repetitive processes, we empower our teams to focus on activities that create real value for our customers and for the bank. This approach enhances performance, supports better decision making, and strengthens our ability to meet service demands effectively."

Underlying the successful expansion of automation is a robust and forward looking technology foundation. Salem Al Sarraf, General Manager - Information Technology, highlighted the critical role of infrastructure readiness in supporting scalable automation.

"The expansion of our automation program is built on a modern and flex-

ible digital infrastructure that ensures the highest levels of security, reliability, and performance," he explained. "This readiness enables the bank to scale automation safely and effectively, while maximizing the value of advanced technologies across our operations."

The expansion of the RPA program forms a core pillar of ABK's broader automation strategy, which is designed to support scalability, agility, and efficiency as customer expectations and service volumes continue to grow. By embedding automation within its operational framework, the bank enhances its ability to respond quickly to change, maintain service quality, and support sustainable growth in a dynamic banking environment.

Beyond efficiency gains, automation also contributes to stronger governance and operational control by standardizing process execution and reducing dependency on manual handling in sensitive workflows. This supports consistency, transparency, and risk awareness within its operations. From a customer perspective, the expanded use of automation helps deliver a more seamless and responsive banking experience. Faster turnaround times, reduced delays, and improved service availability across channels all contribute to higher satisfaction and trust. As digital banking continues to evolve, such capabilities are increasingly essential in meeting customer expectations for speed, convenience, and reliability.

This achievement underscores ABK's strategic use of automation to enhance productivity, elevate operational efficiency, and transform customer experiences. It lays the foundation for a fully digital, future ready banking environment and reinforces Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait's leadership in technological advancement within Kuwait's financial sector. Through continued investment in innovation and digital capabilities, ABK remains well positioned to navigate industry changes and deliver long term value to its customers and stakeholders.

## Higher flight costs keep travelers home

# Travelers face higher costs and fewer flight options as jet fuel prices swing

WASHINGTON, April 11, (AP): A new reality is setting in for travelers worldwide: rising fares and fees, fewer flight options and difficult decisions about whether a trip is worth the cost.

The culprit is volatile oil and jet fuel prices, which have spiked sharply since the war in the Middle East began and fighting near the Strait of Hormuz created a choke-point for global oil supplies.

"Volatility is the real story here," said Shye Gilad, a former airline captain who now teaches at Georgetown University's business school. "Right now, the airlines are trying to make bets on what they think will happen in the future."

Airlines are responding cautiously, trimming schedules and adjusting prices in ways that experts say will ripple unevenly across the market but ultimately affect nearly every type of traveler.

Budget airlines and the customers who rely on them are likely to feel the pinch first and most acutely, experts say, but even travelers in premium cabins won't escape the higher prices and less convenient schedules.

Oil prices have swung wildly in recent weeks, briefly topping \$119 a barrel at one point, plunging Wednesday below \$95 on news of a two-week ceasefire that temporarily reopened the Strait of Hormuz, and then climbing back toward \$100 on Thursday as uncertainty over the fragile deal grew. Iran again closed the key artery for global oil shipments in response to Israeli strikes Wednesday in Lebanon.

"When prices move quickly in both directions, it's very hard for airlines to make predictions," Gilad said.

In other words, even when oil prices drop, travelers may not see relief right away.

"At this level of fuel, it's hard to call anything temporary," Delta Air Lines CEO Ed Bastian told reporters this week after the Atlanta-based carrier raised its checked baggage fees.

Bastian said Wednesday as Delta kicked off the earnings season for U.S. airlines that the higher fuel prices are expected to add \$2 billion in operating expenses in the second quarter alone. United Airlines CEO Scott Kirby said in a recent memo to staff that if fuel prices stay elevated, it could add \$11 billion in annual costs.

"For perspective," Kirby wrote, "in United's best year ever, we made less than \$5B."

According to the International Air Transport Association, the average global jet fuel price rose to \$209 per barrel last week, up from roughly \$99 at the end of February when the war started. Travelers from the U.S. to Hong Kong and New Delhi are paying the price.

U.S. carriers are embedding the higher operating costs into ticket prices and add-on fees. Delta, United, American Airlines, Southwest Airlines and JetBlue have all increased checked baggage fees.

Both United and American are also moving beyond add-ons to adjust pricing. United said last week it is bringing the "pay for what you



Federal Express and UPS cargo planes are parked at Hollywood Burbank Airport in Burbank, California, Friday, April 10, 2026. (AP)

want" approach already standard in economy to its premium cabins, turning perks like advanced seat selection and fully refundable tickets into optional extras.

American announced Thursday that passengers in basic economy will have to pay extra to pick their seat beginning May 18, including elite-tier loyalty members. And later this year, basic economy passengers without elite status or an eligible co-branded credit card will be assigned to boarding Group 7, while those with higher status will still board earlier even when purchasing the lowest fare.

Hong Kong's Cathay Pacific recently bumped fuel surcharges by roughly 34% across all routes, while Air India on Monday added up to \$280 in fees to some flights. Emirates, Lufthansa and KLM have also adjusted fees or fares to keep pace with the price volatility.

Experts say flexibility and careful planning can help offset these costs. Fare-tracking sites can alert travelers to price changes and help them compare multiple options in one place. Booking early and checking nearby airports can lock in better prices, while refundable tickets make it easier to cancel and rebook if fares drop. Traveling light with just a carry-on can also help avoid the rising bag fees.

For business travelers, the costs are already shaping their decisions. Bill Moorehouse, a solutions director who flies for work every four to six weeks, said the uncertainty may keep him closer to home for now.

"When you have business trips and you have a carefully coordinated schedule, you don't want unknowns and disruptions. And right now, it just feels like it's more likely that things could go wrong and throw your trip off course," the Cupertino, California, resident said.

Richard Groberg, an investment banker from Las Vegas who visits clients around the U.S., said he plans to book as early as possible to lock in the best fares.

"There's sometimes no substitute for in-person meetings and building relationships," he said. "As travel becomes more expensive, that becomes a tougher decision to make those investments."

Even family visits are on his mind. Groberg's brother hopes he'll stop in Vermont next time he's in New York for work, but Groberg

admits, "I start thinking maybe I should drive instead because this is getting so expensive."

Airlines, meanwhile, are also adjusting how much they fly.

BNP Paribas estimates that global schedules for April have been cut roughly 5% compared with earlier plans. Most reductions are in the Middle East, the global investment bank said, though smaller cuts were also emerging in Europe, Asia and North America.

United Airlines is cutting about 5% of its planned flights in the near term, trimming less profitable routes and suspending some international service temporarily rather than "burning cash" on trips that can't absorb the more expensive fuel costs. The airline's CEO said the cuts will target redeye flights and routes on historically slower travel days such as Tuesday, Wednesday and Saturday.

Delta is scrapping plans to add more flights and seats in June, leaving about 3.5% fewer seats than originally planned.

These moves show why major carriers are better positioned to weather the spike in fuel prices than budget carriers, whose "no frills" model leaves them with less flexibility. Bigger airlines can lean on dynamic pricing, sell more seats at higher fares or swap in larger planes on certain routes, letting them cut flights without losing overall capacity.

"Leisure travelers and budget conscious travelers are going to absolutely feel it first because it may make the difference between going and not going," Gilad said.

It's already made the difference for Anna Del Vecchio. The 36-year-old Seattle resident has made it an annual springtime tradition to visit family in Philadelphia before flying to Paris to see friends she's known since she was a teenager.

Her credit card points typically cover the roundtrip flight, but ticket prices now hover around \$1,400 - about double what she has paid in past years.

"It wasn't even scratching the surface for the flight this time," she said, "so I decided to delay the trip."

But if airfare tops \$1,500, she might not be able to make a journey she hasn't missed in years.

"It might be the kind of thing where it just ends up being that I have to travel less."

## Kuwait, Doha routes awaiting approvals

# EgyptAir resumes select Gulf flights

CAIRO, April 11, (KUNA): EgyptAir announced Friday the gradual resumption of some of its flights to Sharjah, Dubai, and Riyadh, with one daily flight, and to Abu Dhabi, Dammam, and Amman, with two daily flights.

The company said in a press re-

lease that this comes in light of the evolving situation in the region and in coordination with relevant civil aviation authorities in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries.

The company also announced that, starting Tuesday, April 14, 2026, it will operate one daily flight to both

Irbil and Baghdad in Iraq.

As for destinations to Kuwait, Doha, Bahrain, and Beirut, the necessary permits are being obtained from relevant authorities, and customers will be notified of the new schedules, the press release pointed out.

## Commission plans tax cuts on electricity

# Dombrovskis: Energy crisis strains finances amid Middle East conflict

BRUSSELS, April 11, (KUNA): European Commissioner for Economy Valdis Dombrovskis said Thursday that recent developments in energy prices and the conflict in the Middle East were increasing pressure on the public finances of European Union member states.

Speaking during a dialogue before the Economic and Monetary Affairs Committee of the European Parliament, Dombrovskis stressed the need to adhere to key principles when designing national policies to mitigate the impact of rising prices.

He noted that the war in the Middle East has triggered one of the largest supply-chain disruptions in the history of the global energy market. He explained that attacks on the Strait of Hormuz and the targeting of energy infrastructure have led to a significant surge in energy prices and created wide-ranging repercussions for the global economy.

He added that the full impact of the crisis will depend on the duration, scope and intensity of the conflict, noting that the announcement of a temporary two-week ceasefire has helped calm markets somewhat, with

Brent crude prices falling below one hundred dollars per barrel.

Dombrovskis explained that member states should allow automatic stabilisers to operate in order to cushion the impact of the crisis on citizens and companies, and ensure that any additional support is temporary and targeted, without increasing demand for oil and gas at a time when savings are required.

He stressed that the European Union's key priority is a structural transition towards a more electrified economy, which would permanently shield the bloc from volatility in fossil fuel prices and supply conditions.

Dombrovskis warned that the European economy still faces the risk of a stagflationary shock, where slower growth coincides with higher inflation.

He noted that EU economic growth this year could be around zero point two to zero point four percentage points lower than previously projected under a short-lived supply disruption scenario, with inflation potentially rising by about one percentage point.

He added that if supply disruptions

prove more substantial or long-lasting, growth could fall by up to zero point four to zero point six percentage points, while inflation could increase by one point one to one point five percentage points in both 2026 and 2027.

In this context, the Commissioner said the European Commission is preparing a set of measures to address higher energy prices, including reducing taxes on electricity and ensuring they remain lower than those imposed on fossil fuels, as well as improving the productivity of electricity grids and modernising the emissions trading system to reduce price volatility.

He also stressed that the implementation of the EU's new economic governance framework helps strike a balance between financing new and urgent priorities while preserving the sustainability of public debt in member states. He added that the Commission will provide an updated assessment of budgetary developments for all member states as part of the European Semester Spring Package for 2026, expected to be issued in June.

## Geopolitical tensions weigh on development

# UN warns of wider rich-poor gap

UNITED NATIONS, April 11, (AP): The gap between rich and poor nations is growing even wider as actions agreed to by many countries last year, including overhauling the major global financial institutions, remain unfulfilled promises, a U.N. report concludes.

The report assessing the blueprint adopted in Seville, Spain, last June to narrow the gap and achieve U.N. development goals for 2030 was issued ahead of next week's spring meetings in Washington of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, the main global financial institutions promoting economic growth.

The managing director of the IMF, Kristalina Georgieva, said it had been prepared to upgrade global growth, but the Iran war has now darkened the outlook for the world economy.

Li Junhua, the U.N. undersecretary-general for economic and social affairs, said the geopolitical tensions were compounding the struggles of developing countries to attract financing. "This is an extremely perilous time for international cooperation, as geopolitical considerations are increasingly shaping economic relations and financial policies," he said.

The report pointed to rising trade barriers and repeated climate-related shocks as also adding to the growing gap.

At last year's conference in Seville, the leaders of many of the world's nations, but not the United States, unanimously adopted the Seville Commitment, which was aimed at closing the \$4 trillion

annual financing gap for development. It called for scaling up investments in developing countries and reforming the international financial architecture, including the World Bank and IMF.

U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres has repeatedly called for major changes to the two institutions, saying the IMF has benefited rich countries instead of poor ones, and the World Bank has failed in its mission, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, which left dozens of countries deeply indebted. His criticisms echo those of outside critics who cite frustration in developing countries with the U.S. and its European allies dominating decision-making at financial institutions.

The U.N. report on implementing the Seville Commitment said it represents "the best hope" to close the widening financial gap.

But in 2025, Li said 25 countries decreased their development assistance to poorer countries, leading to a 23% overall drop from 2024, the largest annual contraction on record. The biggest decline - 59% - was from the United States, he said.

Based on preliminary data, Li said, a further decline of 5.8% is expected in 2026.

The report said tariffs - including those imposed by the Trump administration - have had a major impact on developing countries. Average tariffs on exports from the world's poorest nations surged from 9% to 28% in 2025, the report said, and for developing countries, excluding China, average tariffs increased from 2% to 19%.

AAW expands Joe & The Juice network

Joe & The Juice opens at Hessah Hub in Hessa Al Mubarak District with drive-thru service



Joe & The Juice adds 20th+ Kuwait location.

KUWAIT CITY, April 11: Ali Abdulwahab Al Mutawa Light Food, a subsidiary of Ali Abdulwahab Al Mutawa Commercial Company (AAW), announced the opening of a new Joe & The Juice store at Hessah Hub in Hessa Al Mubarak District, further expanding the brand's presence within one of Kuwait's newest lifestyle destinations.

This opening marks a strategic step in Joe & The Juice's continued growth across Kuwait, reinforcing its commitment to bringing its global lifestyle concept closer to modern residential hubs and evolving lifestyle destinations.

The new store features Joe & The Juice's signature contemporary design, with indoor and outdoor seating suited for social gatherings, casual meetings, and everyday visits. Customers can enjoy a wide selection of fresh juices,

shakes, sandwiches, and coffee in a high-energy, design-led environment. Located in Hessah Hub, the branch is positioned to serve residents and visitors alike, offering a convenient, everyday experience within the district's modern setting, with the addition of a drive-thru service for customers on the go.

The Hessah Hub location joins a growing network of Joe & The Juice stores across Kuwait, including Al Jahra Complex, Argania Complex in Shuwaikh, Argan Square in Salmiya, The Walk Mall in Ardiya, Al Andalus Complex in Hawally, The Warehouse in South Sabahiya, Sahara Golf Resort next to the Hunting and Equestrian Club, GUST campus in West Mishref, Al Khiran Mall, Arraya Centre in Kuwait City, Kuwait International Airport Terminal 1 - Arrivals, Murouj near the Hunting and Equestrian Club, Vibes Complex in Abu Al Hasaniya, Bnaider Resort, 360 Mall, Mishref, and Al Shaheed Park.

US inflation jumps to 3.3% on gas price surge

Fed faces new inflation headache from oil shock

WASHINGTON, April 11, (AP): The largest monthly jump in gas prices in six decades caused a sharp spike in inflation last month, creating major challenges for the inflation-fighters at the Federal Reserve and heightening already substantial political hurdles for the White House.

Consumer prices rose 3.3% in March from a year earlier, the Labor Department said Friday, up sharply from just 2.4% in February and the biggest yearly increase since May 2024. On a monthly basis, prices rose 0.9% in March from February, the largest such increase in nearly four years.

It's the first read on inflation to capture the effects of the Iran war. The surge in gas prices will stretch the budgets of lower- and middle-income households as it erodes their incomes, making it harder to afford other necessities such as food and rent.

Excluding volatile food and energy, core prices rose 2.6% in March from a year earlier, up from 2.5% in February. And last month core prices rose a modest 0.2%, suggesting that rising gas prices haven't yet spread to many other categories.

A big question for now is how long the oil and gas price shock lasts and whether it will lead to a broader, long-lasting inflation boost, similar to what occurred in the spring of 2022 after Russia invaded Ukraine. For now, economists say that it is unlikely the U.S. will see a widespread increase similar to a few years ago, when inflation topped 9%.

Still, how the war and its impact on inflation will play out in the coming months remains highly uncertain. Despite a tenuous cease fire, little has changed in the Strait of Hormuz, a bottle neck where millions of barrels of oil typically pass daily.

"It's painful in the near term," said Michael Pearce, chief U.S. economist at Oxford Economics. "It's going to get more painful in April," when further gas price increases will lift inflation higher.

But Pearce said the impact may be short-lived than after the pandemic: "I think the conditions are much more like a short, sharp shock than what we saw in 2022."

Industries that depend on oil and gas are paying more, particularly airlines, which have passed on those higher costs to travelers. Fares jumped 2.7% just last month and are 14.9% higher than a year ago. Many delivery services, including UPS and FedEx, have already announced fuel surcharges that have raised shipping costs for businesses and households.

Grocery prices slipped 0.2% last month and are up just 1.9% from a year earlier, yet economists believe they will move higher in the coming months as diesel fuel prices surge. Most food is shipped by truck.

More expensive fuel is "contributing to rising production costs across the food supply chain and could put upward pressure on grocery prices going forward," said Andy Harig, a vice president at the grocery trade group FMI-The Food Industry Association. "As energy prices increase,



Chuck Byrd puts away a fuel nozzle after filling two tanks for a truck at a gas station on Tuesday, April 7, 2026, in Aurora, Ore. (AP)

the costs associated with producing and delivering food also rise."

Clothing costs rose 1% in March from the previous month and are up 3.4% from a year earlier. Used car prices, however, fell 0.4% last month and down 3.2% from a year earlier.

The gas price shock stemming from the Iran war has shifted inflation's trajectory, from a slow, gradual decline to a sharp increase further away from the Fed's 2% target. As a result, the central bank will almost certainly postpone any cut in interest rates for months. Many Fed officials will look past the increase in headline inflation, however, and focus on core prices, which are likely to rise more slowly.

If Americans cut back on spending elsewhere in response to more expensive gas, the economy could slow and unemployment may rise.

Consumer sentiment plunged to a record low in April, according to a survey released Friday by the University of Michigan, largely because of the Iran war and concerns over higher gas prices. Their Index of Consumer Sentiment fell to 47.6, from 53.3 in March.

"Many consumers blame the Iran conflict for unfavorable changes to the economy," said Joanne Hsu, the university's director of consumer surveys.

High prices had angered American voters before the war and the spike in prices for oil and everything that entails, from the pump to the grocery store, could make it more difficult for the president's party to hold on to seats in both the House and the Senate in this year's midterms.

Polling by the Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research last month found that about six in 10 Republicans are at least "somewhat" concerned about affording gas in the next few months.

Kyle LaFond, the founder of American

Provenance, a small manufacturer of personal care products near Madison, Wisconsin, said his shipping costs have already risen between 30% and 40%.

The increases follow tariffs that were also a significant expense, because the company imports coconut oil, shea butter, cocoa butter, and other ingredients. LaFond said he absorbed tariff costs for months, but finally threw in the towel last September and raised prices by 20% to 30% across the board, the first price hike from the company since 2021.

Now, LaFond feels like it's a repeat of the tariff experience. He is trying to avoid raising prices again, but it depends on how long the fuel price spike lasts. If it continues until early summer, he may have to raise prices again.

"I'd really hate to do that because that would be two years of consecutive price increases, which for us, we've never done that before," he said "But for the business to survive, then that might be necessary."

Gas prices averaged \$4.15 a gallon nationwide Friday, up from \$2.98 on the day before the war began and a hike of nearly 40%, according to motor club AAA.

Inflation reached a peak of 9.1% in June 2022, as COVID-19 snarled supply chains and several rounds of stimulus checks pushed up consumer demand. Prices soared for groceries, furniture, restaurant meals and many other goods and services.

This time, economists say the job market and consumer spending are weaker, and there are no large government stimulus checks being issued to spur demand.

"That's where this really differs, is that we aren't seeing anywhere near the strength of demand," Alan Detmeister, an economist at UBS, said. In 2021 and 2022, income growth "was increasing really strongly. We aren't seeing that now," he added.

Caracas regulates gold, diamond extraction

Venezuela approves mining law to lure investors

CARACAS, April 11, (AP): Venezuelan lawmakers on Thursday approved a bill to regulate the country's mining as it seeks to attract leery foreign investors to a once-private industry that has long been exploited by criminal groups with ties to the government.

It is the latest legislative initiative by acting President Delcy Rodríguez since the self-proclaimed socialist government that has ruled Venezuela for 26 years came under pressure from the Trump administration in January, when the U.S. military deposed then-President Nicolás Maduro.

The lengthy bill will now undergo a review by the country's high court to determine if it is constitutional.

The bill regulates mineral rights, establishes small, medium and large-scale mining categories, and allows for independent arbitration of disputes, which foreign investors view as key to guard against the government seizing their assets. It also bans the president, vice president, ministers, governors and others from holding mining titles.

The bill is a "vehicle for the construction of future prosperity" and an "instrument that protects" mining workers across the country, National Assembly president Jorge Rodríguez told lawmakers after the measure was approved.

The approval came a day after the acting president asked public and private sector workers, whose wages have long not allowed them to afford basic necessities, for patience as her government works to improve the country's economy. She promised them a wage increase on May 1 but did not disclose the amount.

On Thursday, as workers protested for better wages in the capital, Caracas, Delcy Rodríguez arrived in Grenada on her first official international

trip as acting president.

Two decades ago, many foreign firms in the mining and oil sectors saw their assets seized by the Venezuelan government. However, as crucial oil revenues plummeted, Maduro's government in 2016 designated more than 10% of Venezuela's territory as a mining development zone stretching across the central area of the country.

Since then, mining operations for gold, diamonds, copper and other minerals have proliferated. Many of these sites are informal, unlicensed mines operating under brutal conditions and the presence of criminal groups.

Homicides, human trafficking, fuel smuggling and other crimes are commonplace in mining areas, but ordinary Venezuelans continue to flock there in hopes of getting rich quick and escaping poverty.

Officials and members of the military take cuts from the illegal mining revenue in exchange for allowing the operation of mines.

"The mining and subsequent sale of gold has proven to be a lucrative financial scheme for some well-connected Venezuelans and senior officers within the National Bolivarian Armed Forces, which profits from charging criminal organizations for access and inputs, such as fuel," the U.S. State Department reported to Congress last year.

"The estimated market value of gold mined in Venezuela is difficult to confirm, but well-respected sources estimate that it averaged \$2.2 billion annually over the past five years."

The newly approved bill sets royalties and taxes and caps mining concessions at 30 years, with the possibility of renewal. It also establishes prison penalties for those who participate in illegal activities and those who cause environmental damages, and allows for the seizure of illegally obtained minerals.

States challenge 10% global import tax

Trump tariffs face new court fight

NEW YORK, April 11, (AP): The centerpiece of President Donald Trump's economic policy - sweeping taxes on global imports - is under legal assault again.

The U.S. Court of International Trade, a specialized court in New York, heard oral arguments Friday in an attempt to overturn the temporary tariffs Trump turned to after the Supreme Court in February struck down his preferred choice - even bigger, even more sweeping tariffs.

In his first attempt to impose global tariffs, the president last year invoked the 1977 International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA), using the law to declare America's longstanding trade deficit a national emergency and to impose double-digit worldwide taxes on imports to combat it. He interpreted the law broadly to justify tariffs of whatever size he wanted, whenever he wanted to impose them, on whatever country he wanted to target.

The Supreme Court struck those tariffs down on Feb. 20, saying IEEPA did not authorize the use of tariffs to counter national emergencies.

But Trump had alternatives to IEEPA. The quickest option was Section 122 of the Trade Act of 1974, which allows the president to impose global tariffs of up to 15% for 150 days, after which congressional approval is needed to extend them. After his defeat at the Supreme Court, Trump quickly announced 10% Section 122 tariffs. He said he'd raise them to the maximum 15% but hasn't yet done so. The tariffs are scheduled to expire July 24.

Two dozen states and some businesses quickly challenged the new tariffs in court. Friday's hearing lasted more than three hours as a three-judge panel tried to assess a provision that had never been used before to impose tariffs and to analyze congressional decisionmaking from more than a half century ago.

The judges intensely questioned lawyers for both the plaintiffs and the government about what certain terms mean including what precisely the term "balance-of-payments deficits" meant when it was used in the Trade Act of 1974 and what it means today.

"I think the judges asked tough questions of all sides and were genuinely trying to find out what Congress meant when it passed section 122," said Jef-

frey Schwab, senior counsel and director of litigation for Liberty Justice Center, which represents some of the plaintiffs.

"I would be stunned if the challengers prevail," said trade lawyer Ryan Majerus, a partner at King & Spalding law firm and a former U.S. trade official.

The trade court's judges, he said, are likely to defer to the president and allow the Section 122 tariffs to stay, considering that they will expire in three and a half months anyway. "I just don't see them sticking their neck out on this one, given how temporarily it's in place and how much discretion these courts give to the president," he said.

Section 122 is aimed at what it calls "fundamental international payments problems." At issue is whether that wording covers trade deficits, the gap between what the U.S. sells other countries and what it buys from them.

The provision arose from the financial crises that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s when the U.S. dollar was tied to gold. Other countries were dumping dollars in exchange for gold at a set rate, risking a collapse of the U.S. currency and chaos in financial markets. But the dollar is no longer linked to gold, so critics say Section 122 is obsolete.

Awkwardly for Trump, his own Justice Department argued in a court filing last year that the president had needed to invoke IEEPA because Section 122 did "not have any obvious application" in fighting trade deficits, which it called "conceptually distinct" from payments problems.

Awkwardly for the plaintiffs challenging his use of the temporary tariffs, the trade court itself wrote last year in its own decision striking down IEEPA tariffs that Trump didn't need them because Section 122 was available to counter trade deficits.

Last May, the trade court issued a decision striking down Trump's IEEPA tariffs about two weeks after hearing oral arguments in the case. Attorney General Dan Rayfield of Oregon, one of the states challenging Trump's latest tariffs, is eager for another speedy ruling. "We are hopeful to get a result sooner than later," he said. "When the president continues to do an unlawful action and take money out of the pockets of Americans, we want a response as quickly as we can from the courts."

War bets spark insider fears

Polymarket faces Capitol scrutiny

NEW YORK, April 11, (AP): Calls are increasing inside Congress for investigations into the prediction market platform Polymarket after the latest instance where groups of anonymous traders made strategic, well-timed bets on a major geopolitical event hours before it occurred.

On Wednesday, The Associated Press reported that at least 50 brand new accounts on Polymarket placed substantial bets on a U.S.-Iran ceasefire in the hours, even minutes, before President Donald Trump announced the ceasefire late Tuesday on social media. These were the sole bets made on Polymarket through these accounts.

In January, an anonymous Polymarket user made a \$400,000 profit by betting that Venezuelan leader Nicolás Maduro would be out of office, hours before Maduro was captured. In the hours before the start of the Iran war, another account made roughly \$550,000 in a series of trades effectively betting that the U.S. would strike Iran and that Ayatollah Ali Khamenei would be removed from office.

Such prescient wagers have raised eyebrows - and accusations that prediction markets are ripe for insider trading. And the issue goes beyond these three geopolitical events, according to at least one report. Researchers at Harvard University released a paper last month where, using public blockchain data, they estimated that \$143 million in profits have been made on Polymarket by individuals who potentially had insider information about events ranging from Taylor Swift's engagement to the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize last year.

Rep. Ritchie Torres, D-N.Y. who sits on the House Financial Services Committee as well as the subcommittee on digital assets and financial technology, sent a letter Thursday to the Commodity Futures Trading Commission

demanding the regulator review and investigate these well-timed trades. The CFTC regulates the derivatives markets, which includes prediction markets.

"This pattern raises serious concerns that certain market participants may have had access to material nonpublic information regarding a market-moving geopolitical event," Torres wrote. The letter was shared exclusively with The AP.

"What is the statistical likelihood that of anyone other than an insider trader placing a winning bet 12 minutes before a market-moving presidential announcement," Torres said in an interview with AP. "There are two answers: God, or an insider trader. And something tells me that God is not placing bets around Donald Trump's posts on Truth Social."

Prediction market platforms like Kalshi and Polymarket allow their users to bet on everything from whether it will rain in Phoenix, Arizona next week to whether the Federal Reserve will raise or lower interest rates.

At this time, U.S. residents have limited access to Polymarket, which was banned from the U.S. in 2022. The company has moved to reenter the country by acquiring a CFTC-licensed exchange and clearinghouse, giving it a legal pathway to start offering contracts domestically. The company has begun a limited rollout in the U.S.

Polymarket also operates a separate, crypto-based platform offshore that remains outside U.S. jurisdiction. That platform accounts for most of its activity.

Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Connecticut, sent a letter to Polymarket on Thursday demanding the company explain why it continues to allow trades on war and violence as well as whether the company is making any efforts to keep insiders from trading on the platform.

## Big-name int'l auteurs dominate festival line-up

# Films by Almodovar, Pawlikowski, Hamaguchi lead Cannes slate

CANNES, April 11, (AP) — New films by Polish filmmaker Pawel Pawlikowski, Japanese writer-director Ryusuke Hamaguchi and Spain's Pedro Almodovar will premiere at the 79th Cannes Film Festival next month.

Organizers for the South of France festival, which runs May 12-23, laid out a lineup heavy on big-name international auteurs at a news conference Thursday in Paris.

Cannes' most sought-after slots are in its competition lineup. This year, 21 films will vie for the Palme d'Or. That includes "Fatherland," a Cold War drama starring Sandra Hüller by Pawlikowski ("Ida," "Cold War"); "All of a Sudden," the French language debut for Hamaguchi ("Drive My Car"); and Almodovar's "Bitter Christmas," which has already opened in Spain.

Cannes is so far light on Hollywood releases and American filmmakers. One exception in competition is Ira Sachs' "The Man I Love," a New York tale starring Rami Malek set during the 1980s AIDS crisis. In the Un Certain Regard sidebar, Jane Schoenbrun will unveil their follow-up to 2014's "I Saw the TV Glow"; "Teenage Sex and Death at



Cannes Film Festival President Iris Knobloch, right, and Cannes Film Festival delegate-general Thierry Fremaux pose after a press conference to announce the International Cannes Film Festival line-up for the upcoming 79th edition, Thursday, April 9, in Paris. (AP)

Camp Miasma," about the making of a slasher movie. It stars Hannah Einbinder and Gillian Anderson.

A number of former Palme winners are in the mix. That includes Roma-

nian auteur Cristian Mungiu's Norway-set "Fjord," starring the recently Oscar-nominated Renate Reinsve and Sebastian Stan. Mungiu's "4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days" won the Palme

in 2007.

Also returning is Japanese director Hirokazu Kore-eda, whose 2018 drama "Shoplifters" won the Palme. He'll debut the sci-fi "Sheep in the Box," about a grieving couple in the near future who bring home a humanoid boy as their son.

The specialty distributor Neon has already boarded "Fjord," "Sheep in the Box" and "All of a Sudden," giving it a chance to extend its historic record of six Palme winners in a row. Last year, the Neon release "It Was Just an Accident," by Iranian filmmaker Jafar Panahi, won the Palme.

Neon is also behind an out of competition selection in "Her Private Hell" by Nicolas Winding Refn, the "Drive" filmmaker. A thriller starring Sophie Thatcher and Charles Melton, it's Refn's first feature film since 2016's "The Neon Demon."

The Russian filmmaker Andrey Zvyagintsev is also back in the Cannes competition lineup with "Minotaur." Zvyagintsev's last two films, "Loveless" and "Leviathan," both debuted at Cannes and went on to land Oscar nominations.

Other competition entries include films by Asghar Farhadi ("Parallel Stories"), Lukas Dhont ("Coward") and Lazlo Nemes ("Moulin").

Thierry Fremaux, Cannes' artistic director, announced the selections in a news conference alongside festival president Iris Knobloch. Fremaux said that 2,541 feature films were submitted for inclusion. Fremaux estimated that Thursday's announcement encompassed 95% of the selection, so a handful more films will be announced in the coming weeks.

"In this moment, bringing together films and artists from around the world is not a luxury, it's a necessity," Knobloch said. "Because when the world darkens, we lose our bearings. Showcasing films from all horizons is not a trivial act. It is defending what is most precious to humanity, its ability to dream and think freely."

Cannes is coming off a 2025 festival that produced a number of Oscar contenders, including two best-picture nominees in Joachim Tier's "Sentimental Value" and Kleber Mendonça Filho's "The Secret Agent." This year's Cannes appears well positioned

to continue the festival's stature as the global launching pad of many of the year's best international films, some of which are bound to show up at next year's Oscars.

But Hollywood studios appear to be a no-show. Fremaux has said not to expect red carpet premieres like "Top Gun: Maverick" or "Mission: Impossible - The Final Reckoning" - both of which made splashy premieres in recent years. This year, Cannes announced ahead of the Paris news conference that John Travolta's directorial debut "Propeller One-Way Night Coach" will debut in the Cannes Premiere section.

"The United States will be present, but the studios will be a bit less so," Fremaux said. "It's important to know that when studios are less present at Cannes, it means they are generally less present with the type of cinema that used to allow them to thrive."

Two prominent American directors will debut documentaries in special screenings: Steven Soderbergh with "John Lennon: The Last Interview" and Ron Howard with "Avedon," about the photographer Richard Avedon.



Japan's Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi, (third left), poses with members of British rock band Deep Purple, Don Airey, (left), Ian Paice, (second left), Ian Gillan, (fourth left), Roger Glover, (second right) and Simon McBrideat, (right), during their meeting at the Prime Minister's Office in Tokyo, Friday, April 10. (AP)

## Japanese PM thrilled by Deep Purple's visit to her office

Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi took a short - and happy - break on Friday as she hosted legendary British rock band Deep Purple in Tokyo as a longtime admirer.

"Welcome to Japan ... Uh-oh, I can't believe Deep Purple are here," Takaichi said as she walked into a guest room at the Prime Minister's Office with open arms and all smiles to welcome the band members. "I have always admired Deep Purple."

"You're my god," Takaichi told drummer Ian Paice,

presenting him with a set of Japanese-made TAMA drumsticks she had signed. "You're a drummer, we are friends," Paice told her.

Takaichi is a hard rock and heavy metal music fan and was an avid drummer in her college days.

The prime minister explained her history as a Deep Purple superfan for more than half a century. At elementary school, she was already listening to "Machine Head," the band's 1972 album featuring top hits like "Highway Star" and "Smoke on the Water." (AP)

## Television

### Cast's success story thrills show creator

# 'Euphoria' returns, the drama that sparked a generation of dazzling stars

LOS ANGELES, April 11, (AP) — Few TV shows have served as a launchpad for an array of new talent quite like "Euphoria," which returns for a third season Sunday on HBO Max.

Premiering in 2019, this is the series that showcased the rising careers of Zendaya, Jacob Elordi and Sydney Sweeney - all of whom have since become bona fide stars.

The dark suburban teen drama has also featured more established figures like Colman Domingo, who has received two best actor Oscar nominations in the last few years, and the late Eric Dane. And it's given visibility and recognition to other actors: Hunter Schafer, Alexa Demie, Maude Apatow and Barbie Ferreira. Angus Cloud, another of its breakout performers, died in 2023.

Series creator Sam Levinson says it's a thrill to see many cast members thriving.

"The thing is when you're casting, every person that walks in, you're hoping this is the person, this is going to be the character," he told The Associated Press at the season premiere. "And sometimes when they do, they walk in, they have the talent, they've got the passion, the enthusiasm for it, and they inspire you."

"To see them working with such incredible filmmakers like (Christopher) Nolan and (Guillermo) del Toro ... it's just exciting."

Here's a look at how some of the "Euphoria" stars got their starts - and how they've been keeping busy since we last saw their characters four years ago.

### Zendaya (Rue Bennett)

She soared, quite literally, as a trapeze artist in "The Greatest Showman" in 2017, two years before "Euphoria" premiered.

But Zendaya has soared far higher in the seven years since she first played Rue Bennett.

The actor began as a Disney Channel star and went on to play MJ in "Spider-Man" movies opposite her eventual partner, Tom Holland. She won her first Emmy in 2020 for "Euphoria" - the youngest to win for lead actress in a drama. The following year, she became the youngest two-time winner.

Then came the "Dune" movies, the sexy, tennis-themed "Challengers" - and more "Spider-Man."

She's currently appearing in "The Drama," a controversial film in which she and Robert Pattinson play a couple whose impending nuptials are thrown into chaos following a dark revelation.

There were mixed reviews for the movie, but not for her fashion choices: She teased the movie's bridal theme on carpets around the world by wearing something old, then something new, then something borrowed - and a spectacular, feathered Schiaparelli couture ball gown that was, yes, blue.

### Jacob Elordi (Nate Jacobs)

Launched by "The Kissing Booth" and shortly thereafter "Euphoria," Elordi has become nothing less than a monster star - and an Oscar nominee, as the Creature in del Toro's "Frankenstein."

But before that, his achievements were already pretty, well, monstrous. In 2023, Elordi channeled a magnetic Elvis Presley in Sofia Coppola's biopic "Priscilla." Then, he made waves - are there waves in a bathtub? - with his memorably rakish appearance as golden-boy rich kid Felix in Emerald Fennell's salty "Saltburn."

Other major roles followed, including another TV series, "The Narrow Road to the Deep North," playing a medical officer forced to work on the Thai-Burma railway during World War II. And then, Fennell's recent "Wuthering Heights," where in a smoldering turn as Heathcliff, he somehow managed to pick up co-star Margot Robbie by her corset strings.

### Sydney Sweeney (Cassie Howard)

Before her breakout "Euphoria" role, for which she earned an Emmy



This image released by HBO shows Zendaya from the series 'Euphoria.' (AP)



This image released by HBO shows Sydney Sweeney from the series 'Euphoria.' (AP)



This image released by HBO shows Maude Apatow from the series 'Euphoria.' (AP)

### Hunter Schafer (Jules Vaughn)

Schafer started her career as an activist and model, and made her acting debut with "Euphoria." She followed up in 2023 as Tigris Snow in "The Hunger Games: The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes."

The following year she appeared in both the science-fiction horror film "Cuckoo" and Yorgos Lanthimos' "Kinds of Kindness."

This year, she appears in the yet-to-be-released "Blade Runner 2099" opposite Michelle Yeoh, and later this month in psychological thriller "Mother Mary," with Anne Hathaway and Michaela Coel.

### Maude Apatow (Lexi Howard)

The daughter of Judd Apatow appeared in her father's "Knocked Up," "Funny People," "This is 40" and later, "The King of Staten Island." She also appeared in the TV series "Girls."

Later movies included "One People" (2016), "The House of Tomorrow" (2017) and "Assassination Nation" (2018) - the last written and directed by Levinson, who then cast her in "Euphoria."

Apatow's feature directorial debut, "Poetic License," stars her mother, Leslie Mann, and is awaiting release.

## Variety

**NEW YORK:** The rapper Offset has been released from the hospital after being shot earlier this week outside a Florida casino, a spokesperson said Friday.

Offset, one-third of the influential hip-hop trio Migos, was shot Monday night following a fight at the Seminole Hard Rock in Hollywood, just north of Miami.

On Tuesday, a spokesperson for Offset confirmed that the rapper was in stable condition, but his exact condition was unknown. Police said the injuries were not life-threatening.

"Offset has been released from the hospital and he is up and walking," a representative for Offset said on Friday. "We're incredibly grateful to the doctors, nurses, and the entire hospital staff who took such great care of him."

The rapper shared his own statement on social media Friday, writing, "Thank you to everyone who's checked in on me and showed me love! I'm good...but I'm planning to be better! I'm focused on my family, my recovery, and getting back to the music...realizing that life is made up of quiet wins and loud losses..."

"Life's a gamble and I'm still playing to win," he concluded. Earlier this week, officers detained two people. The rapper Lil Tjay, born Tione Jayden Merritt, was arrested in connection with the altercation that occurred before the shooting, the Seminole Police Department in Florida said.



Offset

He was charged with disorderly conduct and operating a vehicle without a valid license.

The second person detained at the scene has not been charged and investigators were working to identify others involved, police said in a statement Tuesday.

Offset, born Kiari Kendrell Cephus, launched his career with Migos, one of the most popular hip-hop groups of all time. The Atlanta trio is celebrated for their rapid-fire triplet flow, an often-imitated delivery that changed the trajectory of trap. (AP)

**NEW YORK:** A jury finished its first day of deliberations Friday without reaching a verdict in an antitrust case pitting 34 states against the concert giant Live Nation Entertainment.

The states argue in the civil case that the company and its ticketing arm, Ticketmaster, are monopolizing the industry and driving up prices to see live music.

Live Nation contends there is more competition than ever and the company plays fair amid a US booming concert business.

Soon after starting deliberations, the jury in Manhattan federal court told the judge it wanted to review certain testimony given at the five-week trial. It later asked to see additional trial testimony, including from music industry experts. Deliberations resume Monday.

The states carried on with their case after the federal government settled last month.

The Justice Department said it had won important concessions from Live Nation, particularly in the sale of tickets at dozens of the company's amphitheaters.

A lawyer for the states said in closing arguments on Thursday that Live Nation controls 86% of the market for concerts and 73% of the overall market when sports events are included. (AP)

# Bruno Mars crowned 'new king of Las Vegas'

LAS VEGAS, April 11, (AP) — Riding down the Las Vegas Strip in a pink low-rider with two showgirls at his side, Bruno Mars was declared the "new king of Las Vegas" on Friday.

The city honored Mars, who has become one of Sin City's iconic per-

formers, with a parade and naming a street "Bruno Mars Drive." Officials declared Friday "Bruno Mars Day" for Mars, who is kicking off his global Romantic Tour in Las Vegas at Allegiant Stadium.

"It's such a privilege, and I want to thank

you guys from the bottom of my heart for giving me this today," Mars said to a large crowd on the Las Vegas Strip.

Mars joins a select few who have a Las Vegas street in their name - Elvis and Rat Pack singers Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin and Sammy Davis Jr.

Bill Hornbuckle, CEO and president of MGM Resorts International, said Mars has shown he has the "legacy and legs" to perform in Las Vegas years from now.

The singer has played on Las Vegas stages for more than 15 years, with over 140 shows during his residency between 2016 and 2025. Two years ago, he opened The Pinky Ring, a cocktail lounge and nightclub at the Bellagio.

"I love this city so much," Mars said.

The singer pledged to donate \$1 million to the Las Vegas Children's Hospital, with MGM Grand, his partner, matching his donation. The celebration ended with a brief performance by him and his band "The Hooligans," a taste of what fans can expect at Allegiant Stadium later that night.



Bruno Mars performs on Bruno Mars Day on Friday, April 10, in Las Vegas. (AP)

Singer proves she's more than a one-hit wonder

# Make way for Langley's 'Dandelion,' a new era of old-soul country

NEW YORK, April 11, (AP): A few years ago, Ella Langley emerged a saving grace for modern country music because she dared to look backward. "You Look Like You Love Me," her award-winning, inescapable 2024 hit with Riley Green, pulled from another era - all pedal steel and spoken-word choruses, the same night out told from different perspectives. It put her on the map six years after the release of her debut single.

A song that big can be a curse - or at the very least, an obstacle - for a new performer, because they become tasked with eclipsing their own success, bypassing the curse of a one-hit wonder. But the Alabama singer-songwriter has done so with ease. And her sophomore album, "Dandelion" out Friday, co-produced by Langley, Mi-

randa Lambert and Ben West, only further proves her chops.

Lead single "Choosin' Texas" may be her "You Look Like You Love Me" of the current moment, a rare No. 1 hit on the all-genre Billboard Hot 100 for a female country artist and a radio mainstay that challenges the country industry's reputation for failing to support its women artists. (If that's not enough to sway the non-believers, maybe this is: As of this writing, "Choosin' Texas" has spent five weeks at the top, the longest run from a song by a female artist that also hit No. 1 on the country charts. Whose record did she best? Taylor Swift, of course.) Langley and her earworms, it seems, are too big to fail.

It's not just "Choosin' Texas," though it



This cover image released by SAWGOD/Columbia shows 'Dandelion' by Ella Langley. (AP)

is a standout. "Dandelion" plays to Langley's old soul strengths. The album opens with "Froggy Went A Courtin'," the centuries-old folk song and nursery rhyme, before leading to a few tracks worthy of their own myth-making: The homesick title track "Dandelion," the credits-closing "Low Lights," the sweet dual harmonies with ERNEST on "Loving Life Again," and so on.

The strongest moments display Langley's Southern swagger and simultaneous fondness for melancholy: "Choosin' Texas," of course, but also the power chords of "I Gotta Quit" and the undeniable stomper "It Wasn't God Who Made Honky Tonk Angels," a reference to the pioneering singer Kitty Wells' 1952 song of the same name. Wells is largely viewed as the first

female country music superstar and first to top the country charts. Between that nod, and Langley's work with Lambert, the young singer does more than just tip her hat to those who paved the way. She venerates them.

In the modern era, where country music is full of retro traditionalists - typically male artists, like Zach Top's playful George Strait worship - Langley brings the past to her present, melding wistful insights with contemporary acuity. She's not a revisionist, but a nostalgist, one who sees the value in using old tools to tell new stories. Wisdom and insecurity sit next to one another in her songs; so does a bottle of Jack Daniel's and a tall drink of water on the bar stool to her right. And isn't that what country music is all about?

Variety

**LONDON:** A charity co-founded by Prince Harry in Africa to honor his late mother, Princess Diana, has sued him for defamation after he stepped down as a patron last year.

Sentebale, which supports young people living with HIV in Botswana and Lesotho, filed suit last month in London's High Court, according to court records viewed Friday. Online filings show Harry and his friend, Mark Dyer, a former trustee at the charity, are being sued for either libel or slander. No documents were available.

"The charity seeks the court's intervention, protection, and restitution following a coordinated adverse media campaign conducted since March 2025 that has caused operational disruption and reputational harm to the charity, its leadership, and its strategic partners," Sentebale said Friday in a statement on its website.

A spokesperson for Harry and Dyer said the pair "categorically reject these offensive and damaging claims." (AP)

**NEW YORK:** The Tony Awards have turned to a singer with a reputation for a high-energy, physical live show to be the next telecast host - Pink.

The three-time Grammy Award winner will make her debut as MC for the awards on June 7 at its familiar home of Radio City Music Hall.

"It is the honor of an entire lifetime to host a night celebrating the literal hardest working people in showbiz," Pink said in a statement. "Broadway has shaped my life and how I put my own shows together - it is a community that is supportive, and inclusive, and full of talent and love. These people give magic every single day, and I cannot wait to celebrate them with the entire world."

While Pink hasn't yet made an appearance on Broadway, she has had 15 Top 10 hits on the Billboard Hot 100, including four No. 1s - like "Raise Your Glass" and "Just Give Me a Reason" - and is known for her acrobatic, ceiling-swinging live sets. (AP)

**ROYAL OAK, Mich.:** Gene Simmons visited Detroit Rock City on Thursday to celebrate the grand opening of a restaurant co-founded by him and his Kiss bandmate, Paul Stanley.

"Everybody talks about Detroit, we owe our stuff to Detroit - first city that appreciated the band that I'm in," Simmons said before cutting the ribbon at the new Rock & Brews in Royal Oak, Michigan.

Since opening their first location in Southern California in 2010, Simmons and Stanley have opened Rock & Brews in states from Washington to Florida.

"Our CEO is here, because he wants to go back in the kitchen and even bring it up a notch," Simmons said in an interview. "You don't want to keep the same old, same old. We got to kick it up, because people deserve the best. You wanted the best, you got the best - the hottest food in town." (AP)

**KABUL:** A two-day exhibition featuring books and artworks was held in northern Afghanistan's Parwan province, aimed at encouraging reading and showcasing the talent of young artists, local media Tolo news reported on Thursday.

The event displayed a diverse collection of books, paintings, and other creative works produced by emerging artists and writers from the region. Organized to foster public engagement with literature and the arts, the exhibition also served as a platform to support and inspire Afghanistan's youth, the report said. (Xinhua)

**NEW YORK:** Hall of Famer Sue Bird watched the WNBA on NBC growing up and now she'll be part of the network's broadcasts of the league.

The four-time WNBA champion will be a studio analyst and also host a series of feature stories on NBC and Peacock throughout the league's 30th season which begins on May 8.

"I've been circling broadcasting for a long time now," Bird told The Associated Press in a phone interview Wednesday. "Given NBC's history and legacy and where the WNBA is now, I am excited to be part of it." (AP)

Music



K-pop group BTS perform during 'BTS The Comeback Live Arirang' concert in central Seoul, South Korea, March 21, 2026. (AP)

BTS returns to global stage, with China notably missing

## Why China remains closed to K-pop wave

BEIJING, April 11, (AP): As mega K-pop group BTS returns to the stage after a hiatus of more than three years, one major market is conspicuously missing from its 12-month world tour: China.

The omission of one of the group's biggest fan bases comes as no surprise. In fact, just the opposite would have been huge news. China has blocked most South Korean entertainment since 2016 under an unofficial ban that also restricts movies and the country's popular TV dramas. For some Chinese, that means flying to Seoul to see their favorite groups perform - as many were expected to do for three shows opening the tour this week and weekend.

China has long used trade restrictions in geopolitical disputes. The trigger for the entertainment ban was a South Korean decision to allow the United States to deploy an anti-missile system on its soil. What sets the ban apart is how long it has lasted, something analysts attribute to government concern about the massive popularity of Korean music and videos. China is a robust defender of its own cultural products.

Rumblings that the ban could be eased - an expectation South Korean President Lee Jae Myung has publicly voiced as he and Chinese leader Xi Jinping seek to improve ties - have thrust it back into the news.

China's use of economic pressure signals the government's resolve, clarifies what it considers unacceptable and reinforces nationalism at home, said Seung-Youn Oh, a Bryn Mawr College professor who is writing a book on China's use of informal economic sanctions.

"From China's perspective, these actions go beyond symbolism," she said in a written response to questions. "They are strategic tools to shape the international environment."

Many K-pop groups have non-Korean members, and they have been allowed to perform in China. Pop-up stores selling K-pop merchandise attract lines of fans and require advance reservations during peak hours.

For video, the growth of streaming means dramas are accessible to an extent - though the latest ones may be



Tian Xin, a BTS fan from Gansu province, China, poses for a photo with handheld fans featuring Jung Kook, ahead of BTS's comeback concert near Gwanghwamun Square in Seoul, South Korea, Saturday, March 21, 2026. (AP)

pirated versions. A check of four major Chinese platforms found a limited selection of about 50 dramas, and all at least four years old.

The ban does not apply in Macao and Hong Kong - where the BTS tour lands in 2027 - because both are special regions in China with their own governments and laws.

"I'm already really grateful that they can perform in places like Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan," said Tian Xin, who was in Seoul last month for a free comeback concert ahead of the tour. "The rest is a matter of national policy. Of course, I still hope they can come closer to us - fans always want that."

The missile defense system, known by the acronym THAAD, is aimed at the North Korean threat, but China said its radar could be reconfigured to peer into its territory. Though the U.S. operates the system, it was South Korea's decision to allow the deployment that angered China.

Besides the entertainment ban, China also drove out a South Korean supermarket chain. The THAAD system remains - though recent security camera

footage and other images have sparked speculation that the U.S. may have shipped some of the interceptor missiles to the Mideast for the war against Iran.

At first, China welcomed the "Korean Wave" as a cultural import compatible with its political system and a substitute for Western pop culture, the Korea Creative Content Agency, a government group, said in a report earlier this year. But the surging popularity of Korean music and dramas in the 2010s turned it into something that, the report said, needed to be controlled.

"The Chinese government had never experienced anything like that before," said Dong-ha Kim, a professor at the Busan University of Foreign Studies.

"While the dispute over THAAD happened to coincide with that period, Beijing's fundamental concern goes deeper," he said. "It cannot allow foreign culture to shape the thinking of its young people, especially when its government has no control over the content."

The government banned effeminate-looking men from TV in 2021, a look that Chinese pop stars likely picked up from South Korean and Japanese per-

formers. China also wants to develop its own pop culture as a form of soft power. Think the Labubu doll craze and the food and drinks chains.

"China wants cultural governance - to grow its own music industry," said Hyunji Lee, a financial analyst who covers the entertainment sector. "If K-pop floods back in, there's a direct conflict."

China, though, has never acknowledged that a prohibition exists.

"China has never imposed any so-called bans on the Republic of Korea," Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said in 2022. Another spokesperson, Lin Jian, said last September that China has no objection to "healthy and beneficial" cultural exchange with South Korea.

Hopes for lifting the ban rose after Lee and Xi met twice. During Lee's visit to China in January, the two governments signed an agreement to expand cultural and content exchange - but only gradually, and starting with just soccer and the traditional board game called go.

Xi quoted two Chinese idioms, according to the South Korean side: "Three feet of ice does not form in a single day" and "Fruit falls only when it ripens." They suggest that any opening will take time and happen when the conditions are right.

On Chinese social media, some people said that K-pop - with its suggestive dance moves - is not appropriate for children. Others warned that Korean entertainment could overwhelm the domestic industry. Fans looked forward to performances in China that would save them from red-eye flights and the cost of hotel stays abroad.

Yu Sang, a fan and event organizer, flew to Seoul five times last year for K-pop events and organized one for "KPop Demon Hunters" at a shopping mall in Beijing on New Year's Eve.

"The fans in China are incredibly devoted," she said. "If you go to the Arctic, I'll go to the Arctic with you."

The ban has reshaped how South Korean entertainment companies see the Chinese market.

"We was playin' everything, everything that was funky," he said. He later added that what set his parties apart was that "other DJs would play their great records for fifteen, twenty minutes. We was changing ours every minute or two. I couldn't have no break-beat go longer than a minute or two."

At that time, Bambaataa said in previous interviews that he was able to leverage his affiliation with the local street gang the Black Spades in order to form a group he called the Zulu Nation, a nod to a South African ethnic group that he drew inspiration from. His slogan eventually became known as "peace, love, unity and having fun," and he said that he sought to use hip-hop's ballooning popularity to resolve local gang conflicts.

Later, Bambaataa changed the name to the Universal Zulu Nation to signal the inclusion of "all people from the planet earth."

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Obituary

Culture shaper

### Hip-hop pioneer Bambaataa dies

LOS ANGELES, April 11, (AP): Afrika Bambaataa, a man widely considered one of the main pioneers of hip-hop, died in Pennsylvania of prostate cancer on Thursday, according to his lawyer. He was 68.

Bambaataa's sudden death was met with an outpouring of condolences from friends, family and fans across the world, who paid tribute to his profound and unmistakable impact on one of the world's most popular and politically influential music genres. But others have said that his impact was overshadowed in recent years after numerous men who knew Bambaataa when they were boys accused him of sexual abuse.



Bambaataa

The rapper and producer is best known for breakthrough tracks like 1982's "Planet Rock" and for founding the Universal Zulu Nation art collective.

"Hip Hop will never be the same without him -- but everything hip hop is today, it is because of him. His spirit lives in every beat, every cypher and every corner of this globe he touched," his talent agent, Naf Management Entertainment, wrote in an emailed statement on Tuesday.

Bambaataa was Lance Taylor born in 1957 in the South Bronx, and he came of age at a time when the New York City neighborhood was rapidly deteriorating after intensifying segregation and years of economic neglect. By the 1970s and 1980s, landlords were burning apartment buildings to collect insurance money instead of investing in repairs, leaving low-income mostly Puerto Rican and Black families without socioeconomic opportunity.

Bambaataa had Jamaican and Barbadian heritage, and he was raised in a low-income public housing complex by his mother, according to an interview he gave Frank Broughton in 1998. He was exposed to music at an early age through his mother's vinyl record collection.

The ability to repurpose and mix old hits became one of his signatures at the parties he began to throw in community centers across the neighborhood in the early 1970s, Bambaataa said in the interview. He was deeply inspired by the work of Kool Herc, who is often deemed the father of hip-hop.

Bambaataa and the parties where he DJ'ed swelled in popularity during the decade and well into the 1980s, when he released a series of electro tracks that helped shape the burgeoning hip-hop and electro-funk music movements. He also was one of the first DJs to use beat breaks, incorporating the iconic Roland TR-808 drum machine.

"We was playin' everything, everything that was funky," he said. He later added that what set his parties apart was that "other DJs would play their great records for fifteen, twenty minutes. We was changing ours every minute or two. I couldn't have no break-beat go longer than a minute or two."

At that time, Bambaataa said in previous interviews that he was able to leverage his affiliation with the local street gang the Black Spades in order to form a group he called the Zulu Nation, a nod to a South African ethnic group that he drew inspiration from. His slogan eventually became known as "peace, love, unity and having fun," and he said that he sought to use hip-hop's ballooning popularity to resolve local gang conflicts.

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## Greece plans a total social media ban for kids under 15

ATHENS, Greece, April 11, (AP): Greece became the latest European Union country to unveil plans for a total social media ban for kids 15 and under in a move the country's prime minister said aims to pressure the 27-member bloc into formalizing EU-wide age restrictions.

The new law will target social media platforms that enable the user to create profiles, interact with others and share content, such as Facebook, Instagram and TikTok.

Once the legislation is enacted, social media platforms will be responsible for verifying the ages of all users in the country to exclude those who are 15 years or under. Authorities say the state's role will be limited to ensuring that social media platforms comply with the new law and will take action in case of

any reported violations. Violations will be reported to the authorities of the country in which the social media platform is based or to the EU's executive arm. Penalties include fines of up to 6% of a company's global turnover, daily fines until compliance or restrictions on operations.

In a video posted on social media on Wednesday, Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis took his message directly to kids, saying that the ban is for their own good because parents and young people themselves have confided in him that endless hours on social media platforms induce, stress, anxiety and sleeplessness.

"Now I'm certain that many young ones will be angry. If I was at your age, perhaps I'd feel the same way too. But our role, my role isn't always to be

pleasant," Mitsotakis said. "If something makes us feel more anxious or worse, lesser than who we really are, then it's perhaps best that we put a stop to it."

The Greek prime minister said the new law isn't intended to keep young people away from technology but to protect them from the "addictive design of certain platforms and their profit model that's grounded in how long you spend in front of a mobile phone screen that denies you your innocence and freedom."

Mitsotakis said the new law is expected to be introduced this summer and put in effect on the first day of the new year.

Greece is following the example of France which earlier this year instituted its own social media ban on kids 15 and under.

## Experts call for shift away from fossil fuels

## Iran war spotlights petrochemicals, a climate change driver

BOGOTA, Colombia, April 11, (AP): The Iran war has exposed deep vulnerability in the global economy: dependence not just on oil, gas and coal for fuel, but on petrochemicals that underpin everything from food production to plastic packaging.

As disruptions ripple through energy markets, the war is highlighting how fossil fuels are embedded far beyond transport and electricity. In the short-run, the widespread reliance will lead to higher prices for myriad products, while long-term the pollution that comes from petrochemicals will exacerbate climate change.

A two-week cease fire announced late Tuesday is a hopeful sign that the war, and energy disruptions, will abate. But no matter when it finally ends, for many environmentalists to energy experts, ultimately the war is a stark sign that the status quo needs to change.

"We cannot continue relying on fossil fuels neither for energy nor for material," said Delphine Lévi Alvarès, global petrochemicals campaign manager at the Center for International Environmental Law. "We cannot continue relying on fossil fuels for absolutely everything around us."

Petrochemicals are expected to be a central topic of discussion in Santa Marta, a northern coastal city in Colombia, where governments will gather from April 24-29 for an international conference on transitioning away from fossil fuels. Experts say discussions will center on reducing demand because the sector is a major driver of future fossil fuel use. Indeed, environmentalists have long argued that fossil fuel companies, realizing that electric vehicles and green tech-

nologies like solar threaten their industries, see petrochemicals as a place for their products.

Petrochemicals are primarily made from oil and gas and used to manufacture a wide range of everyday products, from plastic packaging and synthetic clothing to fertilizers, paints and medical equipment. Unlike fuels that are burned for energy, petrochemicals are turned into materials, making them a less visible but still deeply engrained in daily life.

Much of the global petrochemical industry is concentrated in the Persian Gulf region of the Middle East, including major producers of fertilizers and the chemicals used to make plastics. Petrochemicals already account for a significant share of global oil use and are expanding rapidly, even as some countries cut fuel use in power and transport.

Fredric Bauer, a senior lecturer at Lund University in Sweden who studies industrial transformation in chemicals and plastics, said the sector is increasingly central to the fossil fuel system.

"Petrochemicals are not just a sort of byproduct or something that happens on the side," Bauer said.

He said that petrochemicals account for 15%-16% of oil demand and are among the fastest-growing uses, with new industrial facilities increasingly designed to maximize chemical production rather than fuels.

For consumers, that demand is largely invisible. Petrochemicals are built into everyday products such as plastics, fertilizers and synthetic materials, making their role in the economy easy to overlook.

Beyond fuel markets, disruptions to oil and gas flows can

quickly ripple through industries that rely on petrochemical inputs - particularly agriculture, which depends heavily on fossil fuel-based fertilizers.

Bauer said that the Middle East plays a key role not only in exporting oil and gas, but also in supplying petrochemical feedstocks and fertilizers such as ammonia and urea. Any disruption during planting seasons can cascade into global food systems.

"It's not just a disruption in the global trade of oil," he said. "It's also a disruption in the global trade of chemicals."

That, he warned, can translate into higher food prices and broader economic strain.

Trisia Farrelly, an environmental anthropologist at the Cawthron Institute in New Zealand, said that the crisis underscores how exposed global systems remain after decades of dependence on fossil fuels.

"For me, this is like another COVID wake-up call," she said, pointing to risks for food security and livelihoods tied to rising costs and supply disruptions.

She said that agriculture is one of the hardest sectors to transition away from petrochemicals, given its reliance on fertilizers, pesticides, plastics and fuel.

While reducing petrochemicals could significantly cut fossil fuel dependence, experts say there is no single solution.

Farrelly said that cutting petrochemical use - particularly in plastics - would "certainly" reduce reliance on fossil fuels. But she cautioned against assuming that alternatives like bio-based plastics can simply replace them.

"We need to be regulating out nonessential plastics," she

said, arguing that reducing demand is essential alongside any material substitution.

International negotiations on plastics pollution in recent years have failed to reach an agreement, in large part because major oil producing countries have balked at any attempt to put a limit on the production of plastics.

Bio-based plastics are generally more expensive to produce than conventional plastics made with fossil fuels and chemicals, limiting their adoption at scale, according to the European Commission Joint Research Center, the European Union's science and knowledge service. They currently account for about 0.5% of global plastics production, the center said.

Farrelly said that shifting to alternatives without proper safeguards risks creating new environmental and social problems, particularly if it drives land use change or increases demand for agricultural inputs.

Bauer said that the same applies across the sector. Renewable energies like solar, wind and geothermal can reduce greenhouse gas emissions from production, but replacing fossil-based feedstocks is far more difficult. Recycling can help, he said, but only alongside reductions in overall consumption.

Lévi Alvarès said that reducing reliance on petrochemicals will also require changes in consumption, pointing to steps such as using fewer heavily packaged goods, supporting local food systems and connecting more directly with farmers and producers that rely less on synthetic fertilizers and pesticides.

## Hope for new therapies

## 'Eyeball microbes' may help treat eye diseases

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

By Tony St. Leger

University of Pittsburgh

You may be familiar with the idea that your gut and skin are home to a collection of microbes - fungi, bacteria and viruses - that are vital for keeping you healthy. But did you know that your eyes also host a unique menagerie of microbes? Together, they're called the eye microbiome. When these microbes are out of balance - too many or too few of certain types - eye diseases may emerge.

With a study showing bacteria live on the surface of the eye and stimulate protective immunity, scientists are beginning to discover the microbial factors that can be exploited to create innovative therapies for a range of eye disorders like Dry Eye Disease, Sjogren's Syndrome and corneal scarring. One day it may be possible to engineer bacteria to treat eye diseases in humans.

I'm an immunologist studying how the eye prevents infection. I became interested in this field because humans get only two eyes, and understanding how bacteria affect immunity may be the key to avoiding up to 1 million visits to the doctor for eye infections and save US\$174 million per year in the US alone.

When discussing the microbiome, most scientists usually think of the gut, and deservedly so; researchers think one colon can harbor more than 10 trillion bacteria. That being said, more attention is now being focused on the impact microbiomes have at other sites, including the skin, and areas with very few bacteria, like the lungs, vagina and eyes.

For the last decade, the role of the microbiome in ocular health was controversial. Scientists believed that healthy eyes lacked an organized microbiome. Studies showed that bacteria from the air, hands or eyelid margins could be present on the eye; however, many believed these microbes were simply killed or washed away by the continual flow of tears.

Only recently have scientists concluded that the eye does, indeed, harbor a "core" microbiome that appears dependent on age, geographic region, ethnicity, contact lens wear and state of disease. The "core" is limited to four genera of bacteria: *Staphylococcus*, *Diphtheroids*, *Propionibacteria* and *Streptococci*. In addition to these bacteria, torque teno virus, implicated in some intraocular diseases, also counts as a member of the core microbiome as it is present on the surface of the eye of 65% of healthy individuals.

This suggests that doctors should think more deeply about the risks and benefits to the microbiome when prescribing antibiotics. The antibiotics may kill bacteria that are providing a benefit to the eye.

In a recent study spanning more than a decade and including more than over 340,000 patients in the US, the authors found that antibiotics were used to treat 60% of acute conjunctivitis (pink eye)

cases. But viral infections are the most likely causes of pink eye, and not treatable with antibiotics. More striking, even cases caused by bacteria often resolve in 7-10 days without intervention. It is well known that excessive or inappropriate antibiotic use can disrupt the microbiome, leading to infection, autoimmunity and even cancer.

Within the past decade, studies assessing the eye microbiome and disease have boomed. They've generated an immense amount of data, but most of it is correlative. This means that certain bacteria have been linked to certain diseases, like Sjogren's Syndrome or bacterial keratitis. However, whether these bacteria are causing these diseases is still unknown.

During my time at the National Eye Institute, I used mice to identify whether bacteria at the surface of the eye could stimulate an immune response to protect the eye from blinding pathogens like the bacterium *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*.

In 2016, ocular immunologist Rachel Caspi at the National Eye Institute and I hypothesized that protective bacteria were living near or on the eye. Indeed, we found a resident bacterium, *Corynebacterium mastitidis* (C. mast), that stimulates immune cells to produce and release antimicrobial factors that kill harmful microbes into the tears.

Through a series of experiments, the Caspi lab was able to show for the first time a causal relationship between C. mast and a protective immune response. Whenever C. mast was present on the eye surface, mice were more resistant to two pathogens known to cause blindness: *Candida albicans* and *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*.

Now, in my lab, we would like to exploit this relationship between C. mast and ocular immunity to develop novel therapies to prevent infection and possibly target more widespread diseases like Dry Eye Disease.

The first step toward developing such therapies is figuring out how bacteria colonize the eye. For this, my lab is collaborating with the Campbell Laboratory at the University of Pittsburgh, which houses one of the most extensive collections of human ocular bacteria in the country. With our unique experimental setup with mice and advanced genetic analyses, we can use this microbial library to begin to identify specific factors required for the microbes to colonize the surface of the eye.

Then, with ophthalmologists and optometrists in the UPMC Eye Center, we are beginning to analyze the immune signatures within the eyes of healthy and diseased patients. Here, our hope is to use this technology as a new diagnostic tool to target the microbes causing disease rather than immediately treating infections with broad spectrum antibiotics that kill the good microbes too.

Finally, one of our loftier goals is to genetically engineer eye-colonizing bacteria to act as long-term delivery vehicles to the surface of the eye. In the gut, genetically modified bacteria have been shown to alleviate diseases like colitis. (AP)



In this image from video provided by NASA, the Artemis II Orion capsule splashes down in the Pacific Ocean, on Friday, April 10. (AP)

## Mission sets stage for NASA moon landing

## Artemis II's historic lunar journey ends with dramatic splashdown

HOUSTON, April 11, (AP): Artemis II's astronauts closed out humanity's first lunar voyage in more than half a century with a Pacific splashdown on Friday, blazing new records near the moon with grace and joy.

It was a dramatic grand finale to a mission that revealed not only swaths of the lunar far side never seen before by human eyes, but a total solar eclipse and a parade of planets, most notably our own shimmering Earth against the endless black void of space.

With their flight now complete, the four astronauts have set NASA up for a moon landing by another crew in just two years and a full-blown moon base within the decade.

The triumphant moon-farers - commander Reid Wiseman, pilot Victor Glover, Christina Koch and Canada's Jeremy Hansen - emerged from their bobbing capsule into the sunlight off the coast of San Diego.

In a scene reminiscent of NASA's Apollo moonshots of yesteryear, military helicopters hoisted the astronauts one by one from an inflatable raft docked to the capsule, hauling them aboard for the short trip to the Navy's awaiting recovery ship, the USS John P. Murtha.

"These were the ambassadors from humanity to the stars that we sent out there right now, and I can't imagine a better crew," NASA Administrator Jared Isaacman said from the recovery ship.

NASA's Mission Control erupted in celebration, with hundreds pouring in from the back support rooms. "We did it," NASA's Lori Glaze rejoiced at a news conference. "Welcome to our moonshot."

Their Orion capsule, dubbed Integrity, made the entire plunge on automatic pilot. The lunar cruiser hit the atmosphere traveling Mach 33 - or 33 times the speed of sound - a blistering blur not seen since the 1960s and 1970s Apollo.

The tension in Mission Control mounted as the capsule became engulfed in red-hot plasma during peak heating and entered a planned communication blackout. All eyes were on the capsule's life-protecting heat shield that had to withstand thousands of degrees during reentry.

Watching the drama unfold nearly 2,000 miles (3,200 kilometers) away, the astronauts' families huddled in Mission



In this photo provided by NASA, its astronauts Victor Glover, Artemis II pilot, (left), and Christina Koch, Artemis II mission specialist, sit on a Navy MH-60 Seahawk on the flight deck of USS John P. Murtha after they and fellow crewmates were extracted from their Orion spacecraft after splashdown, Friday, April 10, in the Pacific Ocean off the coast of California. (AP)

Control's viewing room, cheering when the capsule emerged from its six-minute blackout and again at splashdown.

The last time NASA and the Defense Department teamed up for a lunar crew's reentry was Apollo 17 in 1972. Artemis II came screaming back at 36,174 feet (11,026 meters) per second - or 24,664 mph (39,693 kph) - just shy of the record before slowing to a 19 mph (30 kph) splashdown.

Until Artemis II, NASA's fresh-from-the-moon homecomings starred only white male pilots. Intent on reflecting changes in society, NASA chose a diverse, multinational crew for its lunar comeback.

Koch became the first woman to fly to the moon, Glover the first Black astronaut and Hansen the first non-US citizen, bursting Canada with pride. They laughed, cried and hugged all the way there and back, striving to take the entire world along with them.

Launched from Florida on April 1, the astronauts racked up one win after another as they deftly navigated NASA's long-awaited lunar comeback, the first major step in establishing a sustainable moon base.

Artemis II didn't land on the moon or even orbit it. But it broke Apollo 13's distance record and marked the farthest

that humans have ever journeyed from Earth when the crew reached 252,756 miles (406,771 kilometers). Then in the mission's most heart-tugging scene, the teary astronauts asked permission to name a pair of craters after their moonship and Wiseman's late wife, Carroll.

During Monday's record-breaking flyby, they documented scenes of the moon's far side never seen before by the human eye along with a total solar eclipse. The eclipse, in particular, "just blew all of us away," Glover said.

Their sense of wonder and love awed everyone, as did their breathtaking pictures of the moon and Earth. The Artemis II crew channeled Apollo 8's first lunar explorers with Earthset, showing our Blue Marble setting behind the gray moon. It was reminiscent of Apollo 8's famous Earthrise shot from 1968.

Born a decade after Apollo, Isaacman greeted the astronauts with hugs as they headed from the helicopters to the ship's medical bay for routine checks. They walked by themselves, refusing the wheelchairs offered them.

"We are back in the business of sending astronauts to the moon, bringing them back safely and to set up for a series more," Isaacman said. "This is just the beginning."

## Skepticism seen

## Vaccine panel rules up alarm

WASHINGTON, April 11, (Agencies): The Trump administration has updated the charter of a key federal vaccine advisory committee in ways that may increase the voices of anti-vaccine activists, the latest in a series of moves that critics say are undermining confidence in life-saving shots.

The changes published Thursday come after a recent legal defeat that has at least temporarily halted meetings of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, which for decades has recommended how best to use the nation's vaccines.

Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr., a longtime vaccine skeptic, ousted all the members of that committee soon after becoming the nation's top health official and replaced them with his own picks.

The revamped panel then declined to recommend COVID-19 vaccines even for high-risk populations and voted to stop recommending most newborn hepatitis B shots. Separately, under Kennedy, the administration also narrowed the childhood vaccine schedule.

The American Academy of Pediatrics and other health groups sued to block those steps and last month a federal judge agreed. The administration has indicated it planned to appeal but has not yet done so.

The committee, known as ACIP, advises the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which typically follows its recommendations. Those recommendations, in turn, have long guided state vaccine requirements for schools and whether health insurance covers the shots. Its charter - essentially governing rules - is routinely renewed every two years with little fanfare.

The new charter broadens qualifications for panel members that would allow the inclusion of Kennedy allies. While ACIP has long focused on vaccine safety, the updated charter also echoes wording of vaccine critics about focusing on possible harms, such as studying "gaps in vaccine safety research" and considering "cumulative effects" of shots, which are considered settled science. It would also have the panel consider other countries' vaccination schedules.

The changes reflect "a continued effort to do more of the same things to undermine ACIP, undermine vaccine policy" and public confidence, said Richard H. Hughes IV, an attorney representing the AAP.

## ALSO:

**MOSCOW:** A total of 375 cases of acute intestinal infection have been registered in Murom district of Russia's Vladimir region, local authorities said Friday.

The regional government said the cases include 188 children and 187 adults. Among them, 32 children and 38 adults have been hospitalized, all in moderate condition, while over 200 people are receiving outpatient treatment.

Russia's consumer safety watchdog is investigating the cause of the outbreak, including testing water samples, said Nelly Zinovieva, acting minister of health of the region.

## Fossil is actually a nautilus relative

## Scientists say world's oldest octopus fossil isn't an octopus after all

LONDON, April 11, (AP): A 300-million-year-old tentacled sea creature has lost its crown as the world's oldest octopus, after scientists found evidence that it's not an octopus at all.

Newly published research concludes that fossilized remains listed by Guinness World Records as the earliest known octopus belong instead to a relative of a nautilus, a cephalopod with both tentacles and a shell.

University of Reading zoologist Thomas Clements, the lead researcher behind the new findings, said the fossil, *Pohlsepia mazonensis*, has long been the subject of scientific debate.

"It's a very difficult fossil to interpret," he said. "To look at it, it kind of just looks like a white mush."

"If you look at it and you are a cephalopod researcher and you're interested in everything octopus, it does superficially

look a lot like a deep-water octopus."

The creature, a blob about the size of a human hand, was found in the Mazon Creek area of Illinois, about 50 miles southwest of Chicago, that is rich in fossils from a period before dinosaurs walked the Earth.

Its identification by paleontologists as an octopus in 2000 upended ideas about the evolution of the eight-tentacled cephalopods, suggesting they emerged much earlier than previously thought. The next oldest-known octopus fossil is only about 90 million years old.

"It's a huge gap," Clements said. "And so that big gap got researchers sort of questioning, 'Is this thing actually an octopus?'"

To solve the mystery of the "weird blob," Clements and his team used a synchrotron - which uses fast-moving elec-

trons to create beams of light brighter than the sun - to look inside the fossil rock. They found a ribbon of teeth known as a radula that is common to all mollusks, including nautilus and octopuses. Each row had 11 teeth. Octopuses have either seven or nine.

"This has too many teeth, so it can't be an octopus," Clements said. "And that's how we realize that the world's oldest octopus is actually a fossil nautilus, not an octopus."

The teeth matched those of a fossil nautilus called *Paleocadmus pohl* that had been found in the same area. Clements said the mistaken identification may have happened because the creature decomposed and lost its telltale shell before it was fossilized, complicating identification.

As a result of the findings published this week in the journal *Proceedings of the Royal Society B*, Guinness World Rec-

ords said it will no longer list *Pohlsepia mazonensis* as the earliest known octopus.

Managing Editor Adam Millward said the scientists had made "a fascinating discovery."

"We will be resting the original 'oldest octopus fossil' title and look forward to reviewing this new evidence," he said.

*Pohlsepia mazonensis* is named for its discoverer James Pohl, and is in the collection of the Field Museum in Chicago.

Clements said the museum should not be disappointed by the new evidence, which means it now has "the oldest soft tissue nautilus in the world."

"The Field Museum has a small collection of these ancient nautilus, which I think as a cephalopod worker is probably the best thing ever," he said.

# Hawks seal playoff berth and Southeast Division title

Lakers rout Suns to clinch home-court advantage in 1st round

**ATLANTA, April 11, (AP):** CJ McCollum scored 29 points and the Atlanta Hawks used a big third quarter to blow out the Cleveland Cavaliers 124-102 on Friday night, clinching a playoff spot and the Southeast Division title.

The Hawks had not won the Southeast Division since 2021, when they ultimately advanced to the Eastern Conference finals. They have been in the play-in tournament the last four seasons.

James Harden scored 20 points for the Cavs, who are locked into the No. 4 seed in the East. Jaylon Tyson returned from a 10-game absence to start and had 15 points.

## Lakers 101, Suns 73

In Los Angeles, LeBron James had 28 points, 12 assists and six rebounds, and the short-handed Los Angeles Lakers clinched home-court advantage in the first round of the playoffs with their victory over the Phoenix Suns.

Luke Kennard scored 19 points and Rui Hachimura added 13 for the Lakers, who will be either the third or fourth seed in the Western Conference despite finishing the regular season without injured stars Luka Dončić and Austin Reaves.

Los Angeles (52-29) is one game behind third-place Denver (53-28) with one game left, but LA holds the tiebreaker over the Nuggets.

The Lakers won their second straight and their 15th in 19 games with a vintage performance from the 41-year-old James, who showed no weariness on the second night of a back-to-back set in which he scored 54 points on 63.6% shooting (21 for 33).

James also recorded the 12,000th assist of his career in the first half, becoming only the fourth NBA player to reach the milestone.

## Celtics 144, Pelicans 118

In Boston, Sam Hauser had 24 points on eight 3-pointers, and the Boston Celtics tied the franchise and NBA record with 29 3s on their way to clinching the Eastern Conference's No. 2 playoff seed with a win over the New Orleans Pelicans.

Jaylen Brown added 23 points in 29 minutes, sitting out the entire fourth quarter. Payton Pritchard finished with 21 points and 10 assists for Boston, which clinched the Atlantic Division.

The Celtics' 29 3s equal their total from Oct. 22, 2024 against the Knicks. The Memphis Grizzlies (April 6 vs. Cleveland) and Milwaukee Bucks (Dec. 29, 2020 at Miami)



Miami Heat forward Jaime Jaquez Jr. (11) handles the ball as Washington Wizards guard Sharife Cooper (13) defends during the second half of an NBA basketball game in Washington. (AP)

also share the record.

## Magic 127, Bulls 103

In Chicago, Franz Wagner scored 25 points, Jamal Cain added 20 and the Orlando Magic remained in the running to avoid the play-in tournament by beating the Chicago Bulls.

Orlando's fifth straight win, combined with Toronto's loss to New York, moved the Magic (45-36) into a tie with the Raptors for sixth place in the Eastern Conference with one game remaining.

Paolo Banchero chipped in with 14 points, nine rebounds and seven assists. Jalen Suggs scored all 12 of his points and hit four 3-pointers in the third quarter, helping the Magic break open the game.

## Knicks 112, Raptors 95

In New York, Jalen Brunson scored 29 points, Karl-Anthony Towns finished with 22 points and 10 rebounds, and the New York Knicks clinched the No. 3 seed in the Eastern Conference with their 13th consecutive victory over the Toronto Raptors.

The Knicks improved to 53-28

with the victory in what could be a preview of a first-round playoff series. New York lost its chance to climb to No. 2 when Boston beat the lottery-bound New Orleans Pelicans, while Toronto (45-36) is currently sixth in the East after having its two-game winning streak snapped.

Brunson shot 12 for 18 from the field while Towns was just as effective, shooting 8 for 12 for the Knicks, who extended their winning streak to five games.

## Timberwolves 136, Rockets 132

In Houston, Anthony Edwards had 22 points, with a key 3-pointer late, Terrence Shannon Jr. scored 23 points off the bench and the Minnesota Timberwolves snapped the Houston Rockets' eight-game winning streak.

Amen Thompson had a career-high 41 points and Kevin Durant added 33 for the Rockets, who have clinched a playoff berth but are still playing for postseason seeding. The Timberwolves are also heading for the playoffs with the sixth seed in the Western

Conference.

Minnesota led by 10 with about four minutes left before Houston used an 8-2 run, with four points from Alperen Sengun, to cut the lead to 132-128 with about a minute to go.

## Spurs 139, Mavericks 120

In San Antonio, Victor Wembanyama had 40 points and 13 rebounds in his 65th game to become eligible for NBA awards, and the San Antonio Spurs beat the Dallas Mavericks.

De'Aaron Fox had 18 points and 10 assists and Keldon Johnson had 17 points for San Antonio.

Rookie Cooper Flagg had 33 points, six rebounds and five assists for Dallas, which has lost 11 of 13.

After opening the season with a 40-point game against Dallas, Wembanyama reached 40 for the fifth time in what could be his regular-season finale.

The NBA requires a minimum of 65 games played to be eligible for season-long awards and Wembanyama got there in San Antonio's penultimate game.

## Sixers 105, Pacers 94

In Indianapolis, Tyrese Maxey scored 32 points, Paul George had 21 and the Philadelphia 76ers beat the Indiana Pacers to snap a three-game skid.

VJ Edgecombe scored 16 points, Kelly Oubre Jr. had 15 and Andre Drummond had 16 rebounds and 10 points for the Sixers (44-37), who maintained their eighth-place position in the Eastern Conference with one game remaining.

A year after they made it to Game 7 of the NBA Finals, Pacers (19-62) ensured they will finish with the second-worst record in the league.

Jarace Walker led Indiana with 17 points, followed by Quenton Jackson with 16 and Ethan Thompson with 15. Micah Potter had 13 points and 10 rebounds.

## Pistons 118, Hornets 100

In Charlotte, Jalen Duren had 20 points, Duncan Robinson scored 19 and the Detroit Pistons beat Charlotte, locking the Hornets into the play-in tournament.

Already assured of the top seed in the Eastern Conference, the Pistons played their regular starters against the Hornets.

Cade Cunningham scored 14 points, Ronald Holland II had 13 and Ausar Thompson added 12 for Detroit, which is one win shy of its first 60-win season in 20 years with one regular-season game remaining. Duren also had a game-high nine rebounds.

## Trail Blazers 116, Clippers 97

In Portland, Deni Avdija scored 35 points, Donovan Clingan had 18 points and 13 rebounds, and the Portland Trail Blazers beat the Los Angeles Clippers to take the inside track for the eighth seed in the Western Conference.

If Portland beats the Sacramento Kings on Sunday, the Blazers will secure their spot in the 7-8 play-in game on Tuesday in Phoenix against the Suns.

Robert Williams III had 13 points and 10 rebounds as Portland outbounded the Clippers 46-35 and won the turnover battle despite leading the league in turnovers.

## Kings 124, Warriors 118

In Sacramento, Devin Carter scored a career-high 29 points and the Sacramento Kings missed an opportunity to improve their draft position by beating the Golden State Warriors.

The Kings remained tied with Utah for the fourth-worst record in the NBA this season, matching a win by the Jazz earlier in the night.

Maxime Raynaud added 23 points for Sacramento in the final home game of the season.

## Bucks 125, Nets 108

In Milwaukee, AJ Green made 11 3-pointers to set the Milwaukee Bucks' single-game record and scored a career-high 35 points in victory over the Brooklyn Nets.

Green shot 11 of 16 from 3-point range to break the record of 10 3-pointers that Ray Allen and Damian Lillard had shared. Green now has 227 3-pointers as he chases the franchise single-season record of 229, set by Allen in 2001-02.

## Heat 140, Wizards 117

In Washington, The Washington Wizards clinched the worst record in the NBA with loss to the Miami Heat.

Washington (17-64) has lost nine in a row and 25 of its last 26 to tumble to the bottom of the standings.

The Wizards became the first NBA team to lose 64 games in three consecutive seasons. The Vancouver Grizzlies lost at least 63 games in each of their first three seasons from 1995-96 to 1997-98, while the Process-era Philadelphia 76ers matched that futility from 2013-14 to 2015-16.

## Kudus' injury setback a blow to Spurs and Ghana

# Neymar still in Brazil World Cup frame

RIO DE JANEIRO, April 11, (Agencies): Neymar could still be a part of Brazil's squad for the 2026 FIFA World Cup despite ongoing concerns about his fitness, according to national team assistant coach Davide Ancelotti.

Neymar, Brazil's all-time leading scorer with 79 goals in 128 international matches, has made just six appearances for Santos this year after undergoing arthroscopic surgery on his left knee in December.

He has not played for Brazil since suffering a ruptured anterior cruciate ligament in a World Cup qualifier against Uruguay in October 2023, an injury that left him sidelined for more than a year.

But Davide, the son of Brazil head coach Carlo, said the 34-year-old had time to regain full fitness before the tournament begins on June 11.

"Of course, he is the top scorer of the national team and he has a chance," Davide said. "He has time to do his best and try to get into the list." Davide said Brazil's World Cup squad would likely be announced on May 18, almost two weeks before FIFA's official deadline.

That would give Neymar 11 club games to convince Brazil's coaching staff that he is ready for the tournament in the United States, Mexico and Canada. "In the end, it is the manager's decision and he has time to take it," Davide said. Brazil will begin its World Cup campaign against Morocco on June 13 before facing Haiti on June 19 and Scotland on June 24 in Group C.

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Ghana international Mohammed Kudus' hopes for a return from a quad injury before the World Cup have taken a hit with Tottenham confirming the forward might need surgery. The 25-year-old Kudus had been expected to miss three months after getting injured in early January during Tottenham's 1-1 draw with Sunderland - as Ghana coach Otto Addo watched. The team confirmed that Kudus "suf-

fered a setback in his return from injury."

Kudus joined Spurs last summer from West Ham for a reported fee of 55 million pounds (\$75 million). He's scored three goals in 26 total appearances this season.

On Friday, new Spurs manager Roberto De Zerbi said he had considered Kudus "a crucial player, especially for the position, but we have to look forward anyway." Relegation-threatened Tottenham visits Sunderland on Sunday.

At the World Cup, Ghana plays its opening Group L game against Panama on June 17 in Toronto. The Black Stars then face England on June 23 in Foxborough before playing Croatia on June 27 in Philadelphia.

At the 2022 edition in Qatar, Kudus scored twice in Ghana's 3-2 win over South Korea. It was Ghana's only victory as it finished last in its group.

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Italy Under-21 coach Silvio Baldini will take charge of the senior national team for next month's friendly internationals. The appointment of Baldini as interim coach was announced on Friday, 10 days after Italy again failed to qualify for the World Cup.

Italy's penalty shootout loss to Bosnia-Herzegovina - which meant the four-time champion will miss a third consecutive World Cup - led to the resignations of Italian soccer federation president Gabriele Gravina and coach Gennaro Gattuso. The 67-year-old Baldini will step up for the matches against Luxembourg on June 3 and Greece four days later. Both are away matches.

A new permanent coach will most likely be decided after Gravina's replacement is appointed, with elections called for June 22. Napoli coach Antonio Conte, who already led Italy at the European Championship a decade ago, is favored to return. Others being mentioned are Roberto Mancini, Simone Inzaghi and Massimiliano Allegri.



In this file photo, Tottenham's Mohammed Kudus, left, and Villarreal's Tajon Buchanan fight for the ball during the Champions League soccer match between Tottenham and Villarreal in London. (AP)

## Paris FC ends Monaco seven-game winning streak

# Greenwood turns provider as Marseille beats bottom club Metz to halt shaky run

MARSEILLE, France, April 11, (AP): Mason Greenwood provided two assists as Marseille bounced back from consecutive Ligue 1 defeats to overcome bottom side Metz 3-1.

Habib Beye's men came into the game having lost to Monaco and Lille by the same 2-1 scoreline and they were determined not to lose a second straight home match for the first time since November 2024.

Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang got them going after 13 minutes when he took Greenwood's pass and fired home to round off a quick counterattack.

Greenwood's assist allowed Igor Paixão to chip over the goalkeeper and make it 2-0 three minutes into the second half. But a minute later Georgiy Tsitaishvili pulled a goal back for the visitor.

However, Metz rarely threatened again and Hamed Junior Traore completed the scoring in stoppage time for 3-1 and to lift Marseille above Lille and into third place.

Metz remained on the bottom of the 1 table and almost certain to be relegated.

Paris FC scored three times in the first 24 minutes to pave the way towards a statement 4-1 victory over Monaco and end its seven-game winning run.

Jonathan Ikone got a brace, either side of a goal from Italian Ciro Immobile, and put the home side in the



Mason Greenwood

driving seat.

Monaco pulled a goal back shortly before halftime through Folarin Balogun but Paris substitute Luca Koleosho added the fourth after 71 minutes and extend the club's sterling run under Antoine Kombouaré, the coach appointed in late February.

The capital side has gone six matches unbeaten since he took over, taking 12 points from a possible 18 in the process.

The result lifted it above Angers and into 12th place in Ligue 1.

It was a chastening defeat for Mo-

naco, for which Paul Pogba appeared as a second half substitute for the first time since December.

Lyon coach Paulo Fonseca is demanding more from the teenage Brazil forward.

The 19-year-old Endrick made a great start with Lyon after joining on a six-month loan from Real Madrid but his form has faded during his team's recent slide.

He was ineffective in a 0-0 draw at Angers in Ligue 1 last weekend as sixth-placed Lyon's winless run reached nine games overall.

"I am not satisfied with how Endrick is playing," Fonseca said. "I'm not here to break players but I expect more from a player like Endrick, and I think he has the obligation to do more."

A few days earlier, however, Endrick made a strong impact as substitute for Brazil, winning a penalty and setting up the third goal in a 3-1 win over Croatia in a friendly in Orlando, Florida.

"He said he was a bit tired from the journey (back from Orlando)," Fonseca said. "But I think he has the responsibility to do more."

Endrick has six goals in 15 games overall. Goals have dried up for Lyon as well, with only three in the past six games heading into Sunday's home match with Lorient.

## Best of the Rest

**Belgrano beats Aldosivi:** Lucas Zelaryan scored in the first half to earn 10-man Belgrano a 1-0 home win over Aldosivi in Argentina's Apertura tournament.

Zelaryan put his side ahead in the 28th minute by firing in after a scramble inside the 18-yard box.

The host was reduced to 10 men in the 51st minute when Emiliano Rigoni was shown a straight red card for violent conduct.

The visitor had several chances to equalize in the second half but was denied by a series of fine saves from goalkeeper Thiago Cardozo.

Belgrano is now fourth in the 15-team Group B with 22 points, 16 ahead of 14th-placed Aldosivi. (Xinhua)

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**Spalletti confirms new 2-year contract:** Juventus coach Luciano Spalletti has signed a new two-year contract with the Serie A club after a largely encouraging six months in charge. Spalletti told his players first ahead of training, with Juventus publishing a video of the announcement on its social media channels.

"I considered it most important, first of all, to tell you this fact, that we decided to extend this contract for another two years," Spalletti said. "I want you to know first before it gets

out. I'm telling you today.

"Naturally, we have challenges ahead of us, but I'm convinced that together with you, they will become great challenges because I will face them with your attitude and your strength, as you have always done." Spalletti was hired back at the end of October to replace Igor Tudor, who was fired following three straight losses and an eight-match winless run.

Juventus announced at the time that it had signed Spalletti to an eight-month contract, which Italian media reported would be automatically renewed for two years if the club qualified for the Champions League. (AP)

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**Griner to sign with Connecticut Sun:** Brittney Griner is finalizing a deal to join the Connecticut Sun, according to a person familiar with the negotiations.

The 10-time All-Star spent last season with the Atlanta Dream after playing the first 11 years of her career for Phoenix, which drafted her No. 1 in 2013.

The 35-year-old Griner is from Houston and the Connecticut franchise is moving there in 2027.

The 6-foot-9 forward won a WNBA title in 2014 with Phoenix and was the league's leading scorer in 2017 and 2019. She was the defensive player of the year in 2014 and 2015. Griner also helped the United States win gold in each of the past three Olympics. (AP)

## Another breathtaking innings by the youngster

## Suryavanshi and Jurel blitz Bengaluru to keep Rajasthan unbeaten

GUWAHATI, India, April 11, (AP): Another breathtaking innings by 15-year-old Vaibhav Suryavanshi led unbeaten Rajasthan Royals to comfortably overhaul titleholder Royal Challengers Bengaluru in the Indian Premier League.

Bengaluru recovered from 125-7 in the 14th over to set a decent target of 202.

But Suryavanshi's 78, including another 15-ball half-century, and Dhruv Jurel's unbeaten 81 off 43 balls drove Rajasthan to 202-4 and a six-wicket victory with two overs to spare.

Suryavanshi rocketed the chase with 70 in a stand of 108 off 37 balls with Jurel. They were a season-best 97-1 after the powerplay.

Bengaluru threw test bowlers Josh Hazlewood and Bhuvneshwar Kumar at Suryavanshi and the kid tore them apart. He got off the mark with a boundary by squeezing a yorker back past Kumar, and welcomed Hazlewood's first ball of the season with a six over deep backward point. Hazlewood's second over was tagged by Suryavanshi for 4-4-4-6.

"We just cannot believe how someone can hit it like that," Jurel said. "We think we can not hit like that. He is a great talent."

The youngster smashed seven sixes and eight boundaries at a strike rate of 300 in his second fifty of the young season.

"I try to play the ball and not the bowler, and play my game," Suryavanshi said. "My dad, my coaches ... they keep telling me that the journey is long and to focus on my process and my game, without diverting my mind."

By the time he was caught at long on, and the crowd rose to applaud his spectacular effort, the chase was as good as over at 129-2 in the ninth over. Jurel combined with Ravindra Jadeja to finish the inevitable. Jurel's second fifty this season included three sixes and eight boundaries.

Rajasthan topped the table with four wins from four games while Bengaluru was third with a game in hand.

Rain forced the start to be delayed for more than an hour, and Bengaluru was reduced to 61-3 in the powerplay.

As wickets fell to Jofra Archer and Ravi Bishnoi, Virat Kohli kept the strike rate up and captain Rajat Patidar top-scored with 63 off 40 balls. But when Bengaluru slipped to 125-7, Venkatesh Iyer was brought in as an impact substitute and it paid off as 76 runs were plundered off the last six overs.

Iyer's quickfire 29 off 15 balls helped Bengaluru reach 201-8.

"The way we started in the powerplay, to get to 200 is a positive sign for us," Patidar said. "The way their batters, especially Vaibhav, batted in the powerplay, it made the difference."



Rajasthan Royals' Vaibhav Sooryavanshi plays a shot during the Indian Premier League cricket match between Royal Challengers Bengaluru and Rajasthan Royals in Guwahati, India. (AP)

## Jude returns, Madrid frailties exposed again in Girona draw



Real Madrid's Arda Guler, left, fights for the ball with Girona's Azzedine Ounahi during a Spanish La Liga soccer match between Real Madrid and Girona in Madrid, Spain. (AP)

## Malen hat trick gives Roma comfortable win over struggler Pisa

MADRID, April 11, (AP): Jude Bellingham's first start since Feb. 1 was not enough to spark a Real Madrid revival as they drew with Girona 1-1 and missed a chance to put pressure on La Liga leader Barcelona.

Bellingham was withdrawn after 10 minutes in a game against Rayo Vallecano and subsequently missed nine club matches, including the twin victories over Manchester City that took Real Madrid into the Champions League quarterfinals.

He made three substitute appearances in Madrid's previous three games but started against Girona in a fixture the home side needed to win to cut into Barcelona's seven-point lead.

Instead, Madrid ended the night ruing missed opportunities.

Federico Valverde put Madrid 1-0 up six minutes into the second half when the Girona goalkeeper allowed his long-range shot to squirm through his hands. But visiting Gi-



Pisa's Simone Canestrelli, left, and Roma's Neil El Aynaoui fight for the ball during a Serie A soccer match between Roma and Pisa in Rome, Italy. (AP)

rona wasted no time in levelling the scores after French midfielder Thomas Lemar rifled home from outside the box.

Bellingham bowed out moments later but neither his replacement Arda Guler nor any of Alvaro Arbeloa's other four changes were able to bring Madrid and the 70,000 fans present the three points they cov-

eted.

As so often this season, Madrid was unable to convert pressure into chances and it was suspect at the back once again.

The result was hot on the heels of 2-1 losses to Mallorca in La Liga and at home to Bayern Munich in the first leg of the Champions League quarterfinal.

Girona remained in 12th place.

In Rome, Donyell Malen scored a hat trick as Roma beat Pisa 3-0 and inflicted a seventh defeat in eight games on Serie A's bottom club.

A marauding Malen cut a swathe through the Pisa defense after only three minutes to drive home the opener and he doubled Roma's lead with a second from point-blank range two minutes before the break.

His third, seven minutes into the second half, came courtesy of a lovely through ball from Matias Soule that Malen dispatched with aplomb.

The Dutch striker has been a standout performer since joining Roma on loan from Aston Villa in January. Friday's goals took his tally for the half season to 10 in 12 league games.

The result was nevertheless just the second win in eight games for Roma which, during that poor spell, was knocked out of the Europa League and beaten 5-2 by Serie A leader Inter Milan.

Pisa has yet to win away from home all season and this defeat left it rock bottom, behind Verona on goal difference.

## Kazma cut ties with Lamkel

By Khaled Al-Enezi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, April 11: Kazma has officially terminated the contract of Cameroonian forward Didier Lamkel after the player left Kuwait and returned to his country in March. The club also ended its agreements with Algerian Idris Chaabi and Jordanian Yousef Abu Jazar as part of a squad reshuffle.

"The Orange" opted to retain Sudanese-Australian Amer Abdullah, despite his temporary return home, while Yemeni player Nasser Mohammadow continues to train with the team in Kuwait.

The move comes in light of the suspension of sporting activity since early March due to ongoing regional developments. Kazma is already out of contention for both the Amir Cup and the Crown Prince Cup, while it sits second in the Zain Premier League standings, 12 points behind leader Kuwait Club, with nine rounds remaining.

In a related development, the Kuwait Football Association informed Kazma that Lamkel is ineligible to participate in official matches following a ruling by FIFA over unpaid dues owed to a former club.



Cameroonian forward Didier Lamkel.

The ban will remain in place until the outstanding amount is fully settled, for a maximum period of six months. Lamkel had joined Kazma in January on a short-term deal running for five months, replacing Beninese striker Samson Akinyoola, who was sidelined by a long-term injury.

## Best of the Rest

**Germany dominates 50m rifle 3 positions:** Germany secured both gold and silver medals in the women's 50m rifle 3 positions at the ISSF World Cup in Granada, Spain on Friday, while Chinese shooters failed to reach the podium.

Anna Janssen claimed the title with a total of 362.9 points, setting a new world record under the updated competition rules. Her compatriot Nele Stark finished second with 361.5 points, while Switzerland's Emely Jaeggi took bronze.

China fielded Wang Zifei, Han Jiayu and Zhou Manman in the event. Zhou, competing in her first World Cup, impressed in qualification by topping the standings with 594 points and eventually finished seventh. Wang and Han both scored 588, missing the final by a single point.

The ongoing ISSF World Cup in Granada, which runs from April 5 to 13, continues on Saturday with the women's 10m air pistol and men's 25m rapid fire pistol finals. (Xinhua)

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**UC Santa Barbara to join WCC:** UC Santa Barbara will join the West Coast Conference for the 2027-28 season, increasing the membership in the league to 12 teams.

The West Coast Conference Presidents' Council approved the admission of UC Santa Barbara on Friday, following recent decisions to add Denver and UC San Diego.

Denver will begin play in the league next season with the two California schools following the following year.

WCC powerhouse Gonzaga is leaving the conference at the end of this school year to join the Pac-12 but the new additions will give the league 12 schools for the first time.

"This is a monumental moment for the West Coast Conference as we grow our membership to 12 institutions for the first time in our history and enhance our national profile with the addition of UC Santa Barbara," WCC commissioner Stu Jackson said in a statement.

UC Santa Barbara will compete in the West Coast Conference in 13 sports, including men's basketball, women's basketball, men's soccer, women's soccer, women's volleyball, baseball, softball, men's cross country, women's cross country, men's tennis, women's tennis, men's golf and men's water polo.

The WCC had three schools make the NCAA men's basketball tournament this season, with Saint Mary's and Santa Clara joining Gonzaga in March Madness. This is the seventh straight tournament that the league got multiple bids. (AP)

## Guardiola would 'love' Silva to stay but has no clue if he will

## Enzo remains out of lineup despite apology

LONDON, April 11, (AP): Enzo Fernandez's immediate future at Chelsea remains up in the air.

The Argentina midfielder apologized for saying he wants to live in Madrid, but Chelsea manager Liam Rosenior confirmed Friday the player's internal two-game ban stands and that Fernandez still has "a few hurdles" to overcome.

The 25-year-old Fernandez sat out Chelsea's 7-0 win over Port Vale in the FA Cup quarterfinals last weekend and will be kept out of Sunday's Premier League game against Manchester City at Stamford Bridge.

"He won't play on Sunday but, hopefully, after that, he'll be a massive part of the group moving forward," Rosenior said at a press conference.

"There's still a few hurdles that need to be overcome that I won't go into, but at the same time I want every player really, really focused now on a huge run-in."

The World Cup-winning playmaker was disciplined for saying on a podcast that he would like to live in Madrid - amid speculation of a move to Real Madrid.

"He's apologized to me, he's apologized to the club, and we'll deal with that after a massive

game on Sunday," said Rosenior, who was hired in January. "I'm not questioning Enzo's character, I'm not questioning who he is as a person. I believe people make mistakes. You can't overstep the punishment for the mistake."

Rosenior continued: "We've made a sanction, we made a decision, I made a decision. What I want for Enzo is for him to go on here and have an outstanding career."

Chelsea is in sixth place and fighting for a Champions League spot with seven games left in the season.

"Football is a team sport, it's not about individuals," Rosenior said. "There are certain values and cultures that I believe in, that this club believes that makes the team stronger if you get that right."

Fernandez joined Chelsea from Benfica for a then-British record fee of 107 million pounds (\$143 million) in early 2023.

Manchester City coach Pep Guardiola would "love" Bernardo Silva to stay at the club but has no idea whether the midfielder will sign a new contract.

Silva's contract expires at the end of the season and assistant coach Pep Lijnders recently

hinted that Silva may not sign a new contract. The 31-year-old attacking midfielder has been linked with a move to Spanish giant Barcelona and Juventus in Serie A.

"He has been an incredible signing for us, incredible. I love this club and I would love if he could stay and finish his career here but I do not know," Guardiola said Friday at a pre-match news conference ahead of Sunday's Premier League game at Chelsea. "He will decide what he will decide. It is his decision." Trouble is, Guardiola has no idea when that decision will come.

"I'm so grumpy with Bernardo because a month ago I said 'if you take a decision I have to be the first to (know)' and he didn't say anything to me yet," Guardiola said. "I don't know if he has already decided. I said, jokingly, 'tell me, I deserve (to know)' but he didn't tell me, so I don't know what's going on."

Silva has been one of City's best signings since joining from Monaco nine years ago. His quick feet, vision and eye for goal immediately won the fans over. Silva recently played his 450th game for the club and has scored 76 goals. He has made over 100 appearances for Portugal.

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British Billy Jean Cup tennis players Harriet Dart, Katie Swan, Anne Keothavong, Mika Stojanovic and Jodie Anna Burrage celebrate, Saturday, April 11, 2026, after defeating Australia in Melbourne. (AP)

# Sports

## Bournemouth strikes blow to Arsenal's title hopes

West Ham sends Spurs into drop zone

**LONDON, April 11, (AP): Arsenal's Premier League title bid was hit by a stunning 2-1 loss to Bournemouth at home on Saturday.**

The league leader blew the chance to move 12 points clear of second-place Manchester City after losing for the third time in four games in all competitions.

Alex Scott struck a 74th-minute winner at the Emirates to pile pressure on Arsenal ahead of next week's top-of-the-table clash at City.

Mikel Arteta's team has played two more games than City, which could close the gap to six points if it



Bournemouth's Eli Junior Kroupi celebrates scoring during the English Premier League soccer match between Arsenal and Bournemouth, in London. (AP)

beats Chelsea on Sunday at Stamford Bridge.

Arsenal's form appears to be slipping at a crucial point of the season. Defeats to City in the English League Cup final and second-division Southampton in the FA Cup ended its pursuit of a quadruple of trophies.

It won 1-0 in the Champions League against Sporting Lisbon on Tuesday, but the latest loss will only heighten tension in the race for the title after three straight years of finishing runner-up in England's top flight.

Bournemouth went ahead inside 17 minutes through Junior Kroupi's close-range goal. Viktor Gyokeres leveled the score from the penalty spot in the 35th, but Arsenal struggled to create openings and Scott sealed the victory that potentially blew the title race open.

Bournemouth has now won in back-to-back seasons at Arsenal and set new club record run of 12 games unbeaten in the Premier League.

West Ham beat fellow strugglers Wolverhampton Wanderers 4-0 and dropped Tottenham into the Premier League drop zone for the first time this season.

Spurs were two points behind the Hammers before heading to Sunderland on Sunday.

Valentin Castellanos scored twice in three minutes midway through the second half after Konstantinos Mavropanos put the Hammers 1-0 up with a header just before halftime.

Konstantinos completed the scoring seven minutes from time with an acrobatic volley from a corner kick.

Wolves remained at the bottom of the league and was almost certain to be relegated.

Neither side excelled in a forgettable first half but West Ham went in a goal



Arsenal's Leandro Trossard in action in front of Bournemouth's Adrien Truffert during the Premier League soccer match between Arsenal and Bournemouth in London, England. (AP)

to the good when Mavropanos nodded home a cross from Jarrod Bowen.

Castellanos made it two after 66 minutes thanks to a deliciously cheeky assist from Pablo and then the same player added a third three

minutes later with a low shot that may have been aided by a slight deflection.

Konstantinos' fourth was the icing on the cake for the home side that celebrated its first league win in over

a month.

"We are extremely happy," Hammers coach Nuno Espirito Santo said. "All of us deserve an evening like this, especially our fans. London Stadium was amazing; it was bouncing with en-

ergy even in the hard parts when the game was tough.

"I realize there is still a lot of work to be done yet. We made a big step today, which was important for us, but nothing has changed."

### Wolfsburg slides toward relegation

Leverkusen edges Dortmund to boost top-4 push



Leverkusen's goalkeeper Mark Flekken catches the ball as he challenges with Dortmund's Ramy Bensebaini during the German Bundesliga soccer match between Borussia Dortmund and Bayer Leverkusen in Dortmund, Germany. (AP)

**BERLIN, April 11, (AP):** Bayer Leverkusen defeated second-placed Borussia Dortmund 1-0 to end Dortmund's four-game winning run and dealt Bayern a warning before they meet in the semifinals of the German Cup on April 22.

There were whistles for Dortmund defender Nico Schlotterbeck before and during the match after his contract extension was announced on Friday. Dortmund fans were apparently upset that the negotiations took so long and about a tabloid report the new deal includes a release clause effective this summer for Bayern and Real Madrid.

Dortmund started well and had more possession but a loss of when Robert Andrich poned on a loose pass from Ramy Bensebaini to Fabio Silva led to the only goal in the 42nd minute. The Leverkusen defender let fly inside the left post from around 25 meters.

It was enough for Leverkusen to move to fifth, a point behind Stuttgart in the last Champions League qualification spot. Stuttgart hosts Hamburger SV on Sunday.

Yan Diomande scored late for Leipzig to beat Borussia Mönchengladbach 1-0 to ensure it will finish the weekend among the top four.

Leipzig moved three points above Stuttgart, which it was ahead of on goal difference.

Wolfsburg appears heading toward the second division after losing at home to Eintracht Frankfurt 2-1.

Oscar Höjlund and Arnaud Kalimuendo scored in the first half for the visitors to deal Wolfsburg its third straight loss and stretch its winless run to 12 games.

Wolfsburg, which has been in the Bundesliga since 1997, remained second to last, six points from safety and potentially seven when Cologne hosts Werder Bremen on Sunday.

Last-placed Heidenheim boosted its faint hopes of survival with a 3-1 home win over Union Berlin.

Hoffenheim allowed two early goals and fought back to draw at Augsburg 2-2 in a blow to hopes of a Bundesliga place in the Champions League.

On a five-game winless streak, Hoffenheim remained in fifth place, two points behind Leipzig and Stuttgart. The top four are guaranteed a lucrative spot in the Champions League.

Augsburg started the match in 11th place and without a win in five but it was 2-0 up after 14 minutes thanks to goals from Alexis Claude-Maurice and Michael Gregoritsch.

However, Czech defender Robin Hranáč cut the deficit for Hoffenheim 10 minutes before halftime and Bazoumana Toure sealed the comeback three minutes before the break when he fired in from the tightest of angles.

Augsburg should have won but Claude-Maurice skied a penalty kick with five minutes remaining.

Arya brought up his 50 off only 16 balls with four sixes and another five fours, hitting Harshal Patel for 21 runs in the sixth over - it was the second quickest IPL half-century for Punjab.

Singh also scored 50 off 24 balls, hitting four sixes.

Left-arm wrist spinner Shivang Kumar (3-33) then got a double breakthrough - Arya was caught at deep midwicket in the seventh over, and then two overs later, Singh was out caught at long off. Punjab was pegged down to 117-2 in 8.5 overs.

Hyderabad had finished with 219-6 in 20 overs with Abhishek Sharma scoring 74 off 28 balls, with five fours and eight sixes. It was the Sunrisers' third loss in four games.

Chasing 220, Arya and Singh started on a hectic note - the opening duo scored 93 runs in the six powerplay overs. They hit 50 off 21 balls, and the next 50 off only 18 balls.

Earlier, Hyderabad's Sharma smashed 50 off only 18 balls with five sixes. Travis Head also got off to a good start, scoring 38 off 23, as the Hyderabad opening duo scored 105 runs in the powerplay.

The two teams together hit 16 sixes in two power plays - an IPL record for a single game. Surprisingly, Shashank Singh was brought on to bowl medium-pace in the ninth over and picked 2-20 in three overs, accounting for both openers in the space of three balls.

### Kuwait Club continues camp in Dammam

## Al-Qadsia steps up preparations in Doha ahead of Al-Rayyan clash

By Hassan Mosa

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

**DOHA, April 11:** Al-Qadsia has begun its preparations in Doha with intensive double training sessions at Qatar University, as it gears up for a crucial clash against Al-Rayyan in the semifinals of the GCC Champions League.

The Kuwaiti side arrived in the Qatari capital via Saudi Arabia and immediately launched its camp, training on Pitch No. 1 at Qatar University. The match is scheduled for April 19 at Ahmad bin Ali Stadium, which will also host the final on April 23.

In the other semifinal, Al-Shabab will face Zakho, with both winners advancing to the final showdown.

Al-Qadsia's departure was delayed due to visa issues affecting several members of the technical staff and foreign players, shortening the team's preparation window. As a result, the coaching staff, led by Nabil Maaloul, has requested just one friendly match



Al-Qadsia players intensify training in Doha.

during the camp.

Maaloul is aiming to evaluate the squad's readiness ahead of the high-stakes encounter, although the team

will be without several key players. Bader Al-Mutawa, Talal Al-Fadhel, and Khaled Ibrahim are unavailable due to work commitments, while Abdulaziz Wadi is sidelined through injury. There are also doubts over the availability of Mubarak Al-Fanaini, while Bahraini international Mahdi Humaidan is expected to join the squad shortly.

Meanwhile, Kuwait Club is maintaining its preparations in Dammam, Saudi Arabia, with two daily training sessions ahead of its quarterfinal clash against Oman's Al-Shabab in the AFC Challenge League on April 19.

The team recently secured a convincing 6-1 victory over Saudi side Al-Taraji in a friendly match, boosting confidence within the squad.

Club officials are currently working to arrange a second friendly before the team departs for Kyrgyzstan next Tuesday, where the technical staff will finalize their lineup and tactical approach for the upcoming encounter.

## Punjab chases down 220 against Hyderabad

**CHANDIGARH, India, April 11, (AP):** Shreyas Iyer hit five sixes in scoring 69 not out off 33 balls as Punjab Kings beat Sunrisers Hyderabad by six wickets in the Indian Premier League on Saturday.

Punjab registered its second-highest successful chase in the IPL, finishing with 223-4 in 18.5 overs, with openers Priyansh Arya (57) and Prabhsimran Singh (51) also scoring quick-fire half-centuries. Skipper Iyer then took center stage as Punjab won for a third time in four games.

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Chasing 220, Arya and Singh started on a hectic note - the opening duo scored 93 runs in the six powerplay overs. They hit 50 off 21 balls, and the next 50 off only 18 balls.

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Singh also scored 50 off 24 balls, hitting four sixes.

Left-arm wrist spinner Shivang Kumar (3-33) then got a double breakthrough - Arya was caught at deep midwicket in the seventh over, and then two overs later, Singh was out caught at long off. Punjab was pegged down to 117-2 in 8.5 overs.



Punjab Kings' Prabhsimran Singh plays a shot during the Indian Premier League cricket match between Punjab Kings and Sunrisers Hyderabad in New Chandigarh, India. (AP)

Kumar struck for a third time as Cooper Connelly was out caught for 11 as it became 128-3 in 10.2 overs.

Iyer took charge of the innings thereafter, adding 69 off 35 balls with impact substitute Nehal Wadhwa.

The skipper did most of the heavy lifting in that partnership - he scored 54 off 21 balls therein, also reaching 50 off only 24 balls with four sixes.

He stayed unbeaten until the end as Punjab crossed the finish line with seven balls to spare.

### Best of the Rest

**Britain into Billie Jean King Cup finals:** Britain advanced to the Billie Jean King Cup finals when doubles pair Harriet Dart and Jodie Burrage beat Australia's Storm Hunter and Ellen Perez 6-3, 6-4 to clinch the teams' best-of-five matchup Saturday.

The visitors had built a 2-0 lead Friday when 17-year-old Mika Stojanovic beat Talia Gibson 7-6 (4), 7-5, and Dart topped Kimberly Birrell 4-6, 6-3, 6-3 in singles matches at John Cain Arena. (AP)

**I Am Maximus wins 2nd Grand National:** I am Maximus won the Grand National for the second time in three years at Aintree racecourse on Saturday.

The 10-year-old, which won the showpiece race in 2024 and was runner-up last year, was a 9-2 favorite and ridden by jockey Paul Townend. It finished ahead of Iroko, Jordans, Johnnywho and High Class Hero.

For trainer Willie Mullins it was a third straight win in the race and fourth in total, while owner J.P. McManus has now won a record four Grand Nationals. (AP)

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