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'Preserving national unity a non-negotiable responsibility'



Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior

- We will not allow anyone to tamper with our national unity or harm all components of our social fabric.
- We will not tolerate practices that undermine the cohesion of society and threaten the security and stability of the nation.
- Anyone who transgresses the principles of national unity will face firm and deterrent legal measures without leniency.
- The stability of the nation is a duty that transcends all other considerations, and the security of Kuwait is a trust that we will not compromise in preserving it.
- Terrorist cells have revealed the involvement of citizens in organizations linked to foreign parties and groups.
- How can affiliation with foreign organizations with agendas threatening the security and stability of the nation be accepted?
- Security agencies will deal firmly with any ideology or organization that threatens the security of the country.
- Security personnel have achieved successes in thwarting terrorist attempts and protecting the nation.
- Since its inception, Kuwait has been founded on a firm national unity in which there is no place for sectarianism.
- According to the Constitution, we do not have political parties, we are united by citizenship, and the law is applied equally to all.
- Kuwait was founded on coexistence and solidarity among its citizens of all sects, forming a single national fabric.
- Our duty is to protect society from rumors and prevent the exploitation of circumstances to incite discord and undermine trust.

- The new Citizenship Law is needed for preserving and protecting national identity, and we will implement it in a firm and transparent manner.
- Manipulation and forgery in citizenship files have affected political life and discourse in Kuwait.
- At one point, we lacked dialogue and mutual respect in political discourse.
- We lived through a political phase based on political blackmail and the exchange of personal and sectarian interests.
- It is unreasonable for someone to become a Kuwaiti citizen after 22 years, simply because he sought naturalization through connections.
- Will Kuwaitis accept having a member of Parliament who forged his citizenship and then criticizes the government and the people?
- A former member of Parliament covered up cases of citizenship fraud within his family, disregarding his oath.
- A judge who forged citizenship issued rulings in the name of His Highness the Amir, and a deceased person had births added to his file.
- Kuwait is a state of law and established institutions based on justice and the rule of law.
- His Highness the Amir is keen on ensuring the application of the law in a way that guarantees no one is wronged.
- The state does not accept injustice and will not allow the infringement of individual rights under a leadership that believes in justice.
- Human trafficking crimes are a flagrant violation of human and legal values and harm the image of Kuwait.
- The state is resolutely committed to combating human trafficking, drying up its sources, and prosecuting those involved.

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KUWAIT BACKS MARITIME FREEDOM AMID RISING TENSIONS

Hormuz on edge, Kuwait on guard



The sun rises behind tankers anchored in the Strait of Hormuz off the coast of Qeshm Island, Iran, Saturday, April 18, 2026. (AP)

Iran shuts Hormuz again, fires on tankers



MoFA photo

Foreign Minister Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah during an international meeting on freedom of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz.

KUWAIT CITY, April 18, (Agencies): The Kuwaiti Army and Ministry of Interior underlined Friday the significance of concerted efforts to cement integration between military and security organs in a bid to fortify national security, stability and preparedness.

This came during a meeting held between Chief of the Army General Staff Lieut. Gen. Khaled Al-Shuraiaan and Undersecretary of the Ministry of Interior Maj. Gen. Abdulwahab Al-Wuhaib, said the ministry in a press release.

During the meeting, they also emphasized that it is essential for military and security agencies to maintain coordination and cooperation to address current security challenges and enhance performance efficiency, it added.

In related news, Major General Riyad Tawari, Assistant for Financial Affairs and Resource Management at the Kuwait National Guard, conducted an inspection visit to several sites under the responsibility of National Guard personnel, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

During the visit, Major General Tawari emphasized the importance of maintaining the highest levels of readiness and discipline, which enhances the ability of National

Guard units to support various ministries and state institutions, and to contribute to strengthening the security and stability of the country under its wise leadership.

He conveyed to the personnel the greetings and appreciation of the National Guard leadership, expressing its pride in the important national role played by National Guard personnel in securing vital sites in various locations and units. He also commended their high level of readiness and morale.

Meanwhile, Foreign Minister Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah reaffirmed Kuwait's firm position on the Strait of Hormuz as a natural international waterway governed by international law, particularly the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, which guarantees the right of transit passage.

In a statement on Friday, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said Sheikh Jarrah made the remarks while heading Kuwait's delegation, representing His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, at an international meeting on freedom of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz.

The meeting was co-chaired by French President Emmanuel Macron and UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer, with high-level participation from several countries and held via videoconference to discuss developments in the Strait.

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Social Affairs secures goods flow

Kuwait launches full-scale food security mobilization

By Fares Ghaleb
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff and Agencies

KUWAIT CITY, April 18: Kuwait intensified coordinated efforts across multiple tracks to strengthen food security and ensure supply sustainability following the early hours of the Iranian aggression on the country.

Government actions linked urgent needs with long-term stability, focusing on logistics, market regulation, and operational efficiency to secure supplies and maintain uninterrupted flow of goods.

Plans expanded strategic storage capacity, reinforced market over-

sight to stabilize prices and prevent monopolies, and ensured efficient management of entry points and supply chains.

Efforts integrated with production and supply measures, increasing food manufacturing capacity and distribution, alongside preparedness and relief initiatives equipping shelters with essential supplies.

Kuwait's actions aligned with Gulf cooperation to advance GCC food security initiatives adopted in November 2025, enhancing logistics flexibility and easing transit and customs procedures.

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Silk Road revival on agenda

Kuwait weighs 'strategic' shift away from Hormuz bottleneck

By Najeh Bilal

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, April 18: The initiative to bring commercial products to Kuwait via the Saudi port of "NEOM" during periods of heightened geopolitical crises has raised an issue no less important than food security, which is how to export Kuwaiti oil to Asian countries away from the Strait of Hormuz, in order to avoid geopolitical disruptions that could lead to its closure during times of conflict.

Is it now time to activate the Silk Road, which connects the world from China to Europe through the Gulf states?

In this context, two experts told the daily that the Saudi port of "Yanbu" is an important step in strengthening Kuwait's food security, especially during major crises such as the closure of the Strait of Hormuz. However, they stressed that it is not suitable for exporting oil to Asia. Therefore, they emphasized the need to expand pipeline networks to transport Kuwaiti oil to Gulf ports oriented toward Asia, away from the Strait of Hormuz.

In this regard, the former official at the Arab Shipping Company and oil expert, Hajjaj Boukhadour, expressed his support for any "Kuwaiti-Saudi" agreements to transport products via the Saudi port of NEOM, noting that this port will play a major role in securing Kuwait's food security under all geopolitical conditions.



Boukhadour



Al-Furaih

He explained that when he used to work at the Arab Shipping Company, the Kuwait Flour Mills Company requested, during the Iran-Iraq War, that its products such as cooking oils and wheat be transported through the port of Jeddah. Saudi Arabia immediately agreed to this due to the deep and longstanding ties between the two sister countries.

Transporting Kuwaiti oil involves arrangements that differ fundamentally from transporting commercial goods, particularly since the port of Yanbu is located on the Red Sea and oriented toward Europe, while most Kuwaiti oil is destined for Asian countries.

Boukhadour said it is better to transport Kuwaiti oil via pipelines to the UAE through Ajman, and then to the Arabian Sea in Oman, leading toward Asia.

He revealed that he had submitted a study during his tenure at the Arab Shipping Company outlining the necessity of establishing a Gulf pipeline network for transporting Gulf oil.

Boukhadour emphasized that the future global economy would be one based on waterways.

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Residency violators, reckless drivers caught in crackdown

By Munif Naif

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, April 18: Traffic officers arrested 30 individuals for violating the Residency and Labor laws, some of whom are subject to arrest warrants and absconding notices.

A security source told the newspaper that officers from the General Traffic Department in the Ministry of Interior, who were deployed in various governorates, apprehended 30 individuals for committing violations and they were referred to the

relevant authorities.

In addition, traffic police conducted traffic campaigns in the governorates, during which they arrested four motorists and referred them to the Traffic Police Station.

A security source revealed that the four motorists were apprehended for reckless driving within a 24-hour period.

The source indicated that the ongoing traffic and security campaigns are aimed at apprehending those who violate traffic regulations and other laws of the country.

News watch



8 Gulf Bank earns double accolade at Global Brands Awards 2026

9 MREF strengthens its investment strategy as Al Nada Tower achieves LEEDS Gold certification

KUWAIT CITY: Kuwait's Ministry of Foreign Affairs welcomed on Wednesday the ceasefire agreement by US President Donald Trump in Lebanon, praising efforts by Lebanese leaders to secure stability.

The ministry affirmed in a statement Kuwait's support for Lebanon in measures to consolidate state authority, limit arms to legitimate institutions, and preserve security and sovereignty, reiterating its firm stance in backing Lebanon's unity and territorial integrity. (KUNA)

GAZA: Eight Palestinians were martyred over the past 48 hours due to the continued Israeli occupation aggression on the Gaza Strip, local health authorities said on Saturday.

In its daily statistical report, the authorities said the toll included seven newly reported martyrs and one body retrieved, in addition to 24 injuries recorded during the same period.

It added that since the ceasefire took effect on October 11, the total number of martyrs reached 773 with 2,171 injuries and 761 bodies retrieved. (KUNA)

Indonesia passes ASEAN baton to Brunei amid cooperation push

By Fares Ghaleb

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, April 18: The Republic of Indonesia handed over the chairmanship of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Committee in Kuwait to the Sultanate of Brunei Darussalam, in an atmosphere of cooperation and partnership among member states.

The handover ceremony took place at the residence of Indonesian Ambassador to Kuwait Lena Maryana, with a number of ambassadors and Secretary General of the Asian Cooperation Dialogue Forum Ambassador Nasser Al-Mutairi in attendance.

In her speech on the occasion, Maryana asserted that her country's chairmanship of the committee was marked by stronger coordination and joint action among ASEAN diplomatic missions, as well as the expansion of its presence and engagement with the Kuwaiti society.

She also reviewed the important



Indonesian Ambassador to Kuwait Lena Maryana hands the ASEAN chairmanship to Ambassador of Brunei Darussalam to Kuwait Haji Sulaini Haji Said.

activities held during the Indonesian chairmanship, which began in October 2015. These activities include environmental initiatives in cooperation with the United Nations Human Settlements

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ASEAN ambassadors and members of the Diplomatic Corps pose for a group photo during the chairmanship handover ceremony in Kuwait, marking the transition from Indonesia to Brunei Darussalam.

Photos by Samer Shieqer



Prayer Timings

Fajr	03:56	Asr	15:22
Sunrise	05:19	Maghrib	18:16
Zohr	11:47	Isha	19:37

Kuwait reliable partner, key player in regional stability: UK Deputy PM

KUWAIT CITY, April 18. (KUNA): Kuwait is a reliable partner and a key player in regional stability, British Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Justice Lord Chancellor, David Lammy said on Thursday.

Speaking in a statement to KUNA, Lammy noted that the UK-Kuwait relations are long-standing and military cooperation remains at the heart of the two sides' ties.

Lammy added that his visit comes at an important time for both Kuwait and the Gulf region.

He stressed the importance of meetings with His Highness the Prime Minister and senior Kuwaiti officials that discussed the ways to enhance bilateral cooperation and address the current challenges.

The visit is part of a regional tour which includes the UK's partners in the Gulf, he said, noting that all these countries confirm their deep

appreciation to British military and defensive experience offered in this period.

He stressed that the "Rapid Sentry" system has tangibly contributed to intercepting missiles and preventing human and material losses, noting that this partnership is not limited to times of prosperity but extends to the times of hardship, reflecting the strength of relations between the two countries.

Lammy elaborated that he met with members of the UK air force in Kuwait and noted a high level of integration between British and Kuwaiti forces.

This shows "our" readiness to face these tough conditions, he said, affirming his country's continued support for Kuwait and the enhancement of its security and stability.

He underlined the need to keep pace with technological develop-



David Lammy



Qudsi Rasheed

ments, mainly the field of drones and modern defensive techniques that have emerged amid international conflicts, noting that the next period would witness further joint action to develop these capabilities.

Lammy expressed satisfaction with the ceasefire in the region and stressed the need to reach a permanent peace through negotiations.

It is imperative to restore navigation in the Strait of Hormuz, he said.

He emphasized that once a sustainable ceasefire is reached and the situation calms down, efforts will be made to renew and further deepen these partnerships in line with modern developments and innovations, in a way that enhances the security and stability of the region.

Lammy met with the British military mission, which has been playing training and advisory roles in Kuwait since 1992 and contributing to strengthening Kuwait's military potential.

Meanwhile, British Ambassador to Kuwait Qudsi Rasheed said Lammy's visit reflects the UK's strong interest in strengthening its partnership with Kuwait.

Speaking to KUNA in a similar statement, Rasheed said that "we" stood side by side during the difficult past weeks, as true friends do

in times of both prosperity and hardship, in a natural extension of a well-established and strong relationship that has brought together Kuwait and the United Kingdom for more than 125 years.

He underlined the deep-rooted relationship between Kuwait and the UK, particularly in regional security and defense, expressing hope for continued cooperation to support efforts that ensure freedom of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz and enhance the region's stability following the ceasefire.

This is the second visit by Lammy to Kuwait; the first was last July when he served as his country's foreign minister.

Lammy visited Oman last Wednesday as part of the British government's efforts to show its solidarity with regional partners in the Gulf during the crisis with Iran.

Kuwaitis united in adversity, prosperity

Total support, praise for leadership, security forces

By Najeh Bilal

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, April 18: Repercussions of the war that erupted on Feb 28 between the United States of America and Israel on one side and Iran on the other side continue to cast a shadow over Kuwait, other Gulf Arab states and the region in general despite the ceasefire.

This war revealed the extent of solidarity among the Kuwaiti people, who proved their patriotism, loyalty to their political leadership, and unwavering support for their Army.

The newspaper interviewed prominent figures who unveiled the true character of the Kuwaiti people, a character that shines in times of crises. They affirmed that Kuwait faced various challenges, which revealed the depth of its citizens' loyalty to the homeland and its wise leadership.

They pointed out that the repercussions of the recent war brought to mind the scenes of unity during the brutal Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, emphasizing that this national spirit is still present and deeply rooted in the Kuwaiti conscience.

They praised the efforts of the protectors of the nation -- members of the Kuwait Army and police -- in safeguarding lives and maintaining security for both the citizens and residents, stressing that the sacrifices of the martyrs are immortal, recorded in history in letters of gold.

Head of the Al-Hawajer tribe Sheikh Mohammad bin Shabaan asserted that the Kuwaiti people embody the values of authenticity and unity, proving their unity with their nation and political leadership in every crisis. He cited the Iraqi invasion, when Kuwaitis united,



Mohammad bin Shabaan



Faisal Al-Harbi



Faisal Al-Shamri



Abdullah Al-Gharib

formed resistance committees, and ensured the provision of basic necessities.

He added that the recent crisis reaffirmed this approach, as Kuwaitis showed their loyalty and support for the wise leadership, represented by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah, and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, while complying with official directives.

He pointed out that the sacrifices of the sons of Kuwait throughout various periods reflect their true character, stressing that the cohesion of the home front is the strongest weapon of the nation in overcoming challenges.

Attorney Faisal Al-Manna' Al-Shamri stated that the Kuwaiti people's love for their homeland is not surprising, as the hardships the country endured proved the resilience and determination of its citizens.

"They emerge during times of crises and challenges to form the first line of defense, offering sacrifices to protect Kuwait and its borders, not allowing an inch of its soil to be encroached upon by treacherous aggressors, whether

distant or nearby," he added.

He pointed out that this kind of unity is not a recent phenomenon, as it is a deeply rooted principle manifested in the unwavering support of the people for their legitimate leadership and their loyalty to the Al-Sabah Family, the family of benevolence, represented by His Highness the Amir and His Highness the Crown Prince.

"They stand united in times of prosperity and adversity. The Kuwaiti people are inherently loyal and honest -- characteristics that are demonstrated in times of crises," he stressed.

He pointed out that the history of Kuwait is replete with acts of heroism and sacrifice, a constant affirmation of the sentiment, "We are all for Kuwait and Kuwait is for us."

Economic advisor Abdullah Al-Gharib stressed that the Kuwaiti people, when facing difficult challenges, stand united to defend their homeland. He said this unity is a deeply rooted legacy passed from the first generation to the next generations.

He explained that the crises Kuwait has experienced, most recently the repercussions of the war between the

United States and Israel against Iran, proved the strong bond between the members of society, up to the point that this unity has become the secret to Kuwait's strength in facing challenges.

He added that the protectors of the nation from the Army and police efficiently played their role in defending the country as they faced dangers, not to mention their constant readiness and commitment to maintain national security and guarantee the safety of everyone living on this land.

Journalist Hamad Al-Marri stated that the Kuwaiti people, despite their political differences, remain united in times of hardship, standing shoulder to shoulder behind the political leadership, renewing their loyalty and commitment to defend the homeland.

Al-Marri recalled the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, which proved the unity of Kuwaitis from all walks of life. "They stood together against the occupier, undeterred by attempts at exploitation or division. This period embodied the authenticity of their national stance and solidified their sense of belonging," he asserted.

He added that the recent crisis reaffirmed this unity, as Kuwaitis stood shoulder to shoulder in facing challenges, thwarting attempts to sow doubt or discord, and remaining steadfast in their national unity to defend their country.

Economist and media expert Faisal Daham Al-Harbi said the major crises always reveal the depth of the Kuwaiti people's connection to their homeland. He pointed out that adversity sheds differences and highlights the solidarity between the leadership and the people.

He stated that recent events showed the high level of unity, particularly the dedication of the Kuwait Army and Kuwait National Guard personnel in performing their duty and making sacrifices in defense of the homeland.

"This was evident in the widespread public display of solidarity. This unity shows the true character of the Kuwaiti people and deserves recognition," he concluded.

MoSA increases staff presence to 50%: CSC

By Fares Ghaleb

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, April 18: Undersecretary of the Ministry of Social Affairs Dr. Khaled Al-Ajmi issued Administrative Circular No. 10/2026 on regulating the work of ministry employees under the current circumstances in the region.

According to the circular, the official working hours will be amended to require the presence of 50 percent of the total number of employees at their workplaces, based on the directive of the Civil Service Commission (CSC).

The circular clarified that 50 percent of the total workforce should be present at their workplaces, except those working in shifts.

At the end of the circular, Al-Ajmi stressed that the heads of organizational units and sectors must adhere to the decision to avoid legal repercussions.

Staff found 'unqualified' for job

MoH shuts medical center open on fake docs

By Marwa Al-Bahravi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, April 18: Based on the findings of the specialized technical committees in the Health Licensing Department, Minister of Health Dr. Ahmed Al-Awadhi issued a decision to close a medical center and refer it to the Medical Liability Authority, while also referring several of its employees to the relevant legal authorities.

The Ministry of Health explained that the inspection revealed a number of serious violations, most notably that the center was operating under the name of a seemingly licensed establishment, while its activities were in fact being conducted under the identity of another facility that had previously been closed for technical violations.

It was also found that employees'

identification cards contained incorrect professional credentials, which constitutes a violation of the regulations governing the standardization of professional identification and official correspondence.

It was also established that an individual was practicing medical activities and providing consultations to patients without obtaining a professional license, in addition to another person providing technical consultations under the title of "expert" without any approved regulatory status.

The inspections revealed significant errors in medical records. It was found that a number of patient files lacked documented medical diagnoses or clinical assessment data approved by a specialist physician. Contractual arrangements were also discovered with other healthcare facilities to perform hair transplant procedures without obtaining the necessary regulatory

approvals from the Health Licensing Department.

An online account was found to be used to promote the center's activities under a name different from its licensed and approved one, in violation of the regulations governing the advertising and marketing of healthcare services.

The Ministry of Health affirmed that these measures stem from its responsibility to protect patients and ensure adherence to the highest standards of safety and quality.

It emphasized that the law will be applied firmly and fairly, with zero tolerance for any violations that affect public health or undermine patient trust.

The ministry stressed that its monitoring and inspection teams are continuously operating in various healthcare facilities, and that it will pursue all legal measures against violators.

CPA amends fees to streamline output

By Marwa Al-Bahravi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, April 18: The Board of Directors of the Competition Protection Authority (CPA) issued Resolution No. 40/2026, amending the fees for several services that the authority provides.

This step aims to regulate procedures and enhance the efficiency of handling requests and files related to competitive practices in the market.

The resolution stipulates fees for six services -- submitting exemption requests, requests for prior consultation before

submitting economic concentration applications, objecting to economic concentration applications, submitting complaints related to practices that violate competition rules, view and obtain copies of documents related to violations referred to the Disciplinary Board, and appeals submitted to the same board regarding decisions issued against the applicant.

The Authority invites those wishing to view the details of the resolution and the fees for each service to visit its official website and click the 'Regulatory Decisions' section.

It affirmed that these amendments are aimed at developing the regulatory work environment and enhancing transparency and governance in dealing with competition issues.

'Don't ignore registering sold property'

Buyer wins case, sales deal valid, says court

By Jaber Al-Hamoud

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, April 18: In a case highlighting loopholes in unregistered real estate transactions, the Court of First Instance ruled in favor of a buyer, confirming the validity of a sales contract for a residential apartment.

This ruling followed a dispute arising from the seller's failure to officially transfer ownership of the property, despite signing a customary contract through the real estate company.

Case details revealed that the property owner sold an apartment under the customary contract that included a clause obligating the seller to register it under the plaintiff's name with the Land Registry.

Nevertheless, the seller failed to take the necessary steps to transfer ownership, prompting the plaintiff to take legal action. Attorney Jarrah Al-Malek, who represented the plaintiff, disclosed that the ruling affirmed the validity of the sales

contract based on its provisions on requiring the seller to register the property. He emphasized the importance of taking legal action to guarantee the rights of buyers in such cases.

He warned about the dangers of neglecting to register sold properties, especially in partial sales such as apartments, shops or land shares. He pointed out that many real estate companies or offices conclude contracts without completing official registration procedures, exposing buyers to serious legal risks.

He emphasized the need for buyers to resort to the courts if the seller refuses to register the property, ensuring their rights are secured before further disputes arise, especially if the property is mortgaged to a financial institution.

He stressed that failing to register the property in the buyer's name could allow banks or creditors to take legal action against the original owner in case of default, including selling the property at auction. He said this could lead to the loss of rights for buyers whose ownership is not officially documented.

Other Voices

When should you change footwear?

By Ahmad alsarraf

I walk an average of 10,000 steps daily, which is more than 3.5 million steps annually, equivalent to 2,600 kilometers. This is about the same as walking to the Saudi border and back 14 times.



alsarraf

Walking experts recommend changing your walking shoes every 700 to 800 kilometers.

However, my current pair of athletic shoes is over three years old, and I think they are still in like-new condition.

Perhaps this is because I often wear non-athletic shoes for running errands. So how do I know when to change my athletic shoes, whether for walking or running?

It is advisable to change athletic walking shoes when they lose their cushioning and support, in order to avoid injuries. A general guideline is to replace them every 480-800 km, or every 6 - 12 months depending on usage. Walking shoes are typically suitable for covering this distance before their cushioning begins to lose effectiveness, especially with regular use on hard surfaces.

The exact lifespan also depends on the user's weight and gait. Heavier individuals tend to wear out their shoes more quickly.

Therefore, it is important to inspect your shoes regularly, paying close attention to deep creases in the soles or any visible signs of wear. If you begin to experience pain in your feet or joints, or notice a clear difference in comfort compared to a new pair, it may be time to replace them. You can also have your shoes assessed at any athletic shoe store.

It is generally recommended to alternate between pairs of shoes to extend their lifespan and avoid wearing the same pair every day for walking. Good shoes are like car tires. They can lose their properties over time even without intensive use. The manufacturing date can usually be checked with the seller.

Many factors affect how quickly shoes wear out, including age, body weight, running surfaces, and even environmental conditions such as humidity and temperature. Using running shoes for the gym or daily errands also accelerates wear and tear.

Some shoes wear out faster than others. Modern "super" running shoes designed for racing often have thick layers of lightweight foam, which enhance performance but typically wear out faster than the foam used in regular training shoes.

Feeling comfortable in a pair of shoes does not necessarily mean they are still in optimal condition after long use. It may still be worth replacing them, as wear and tear reduces shock absorption and increases pressure on the feet. Some scientists believe this can increase the risk of injury. However, immediate replacement is not necessary in the absence of visible wear or pain.

Shoes can often be used longer, but it is important to remember that personal perception can be misleading, according to doctors. Trying on a new pair of shoes without necessarily buying them can often be a useful way to assess the difference.

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Bonus announced for 983 excellent workers

By Abdulrahman Al-Shammari

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, April 18: Director General of the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET) Dr. Hassan Al-Fajjam announced the disbursement of excellent performance bonuses for 2025 to 983 employees in recognition of their efforts and excellence.

Dr. Al-Fajjam clarified that the bonuses will be granted to 229 supervisory staff and 754 employees from various sectors who were selected according to performance assessment criteria for the 2025 fiscal year.

Revealing that the bonuses were disbursed on Thursday, April 16, he emphasized that this step comes in support of distinguished employees and to motivate them to continue their contributions.

Dr. Al-Fajjam praised the employees' efforts, which contributed to achieving PAAET's goals and maintaining efficient operations despite challenges.

He expressed his sincere gratitude and appreciation to all outstanding employees, and urged them to continue on this path and double their efforts.

Gulf needs new post-war strategy ... unity in ranks

"SINCE the first moment of the Iranian missile and drone attacks on the Arabian Gulf states, as well as those launched by Iraqi factions loyal to Iran, the Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) have proven, without a doubt, that they control all aspects of Iraq and have huge influence over decision-making in Baghdad," Kuwaiti journalist **Salem Al-Wawan** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

"This means that future engagement with Iraq must be approached with extreme caution. What matters most is the post-war phase and how the Gulf states will respond to the new realities, especially since the threat has now reached them directly, resulting in human losses and damage to economic interests.



Salem Al-Wawan

"Today, the world is more convinced than ever that the Iranian regime and its proxies in the Arab world pose a challenge that threatens global security and destabilizes the Middle East.

"Therefore, what is required today is a shift in Gulf strategy and a commitment to unifying ranks with sincere intent.

"It is extremely important to consider opening an alternative waterway for the passage of commercial ships and oil tankers, so that the Strait of Hormuz does not remain an obstacle for our countries. A unified Gulf military force should be established to defend the sovereignty of the Gulf states and deter any aggression. A clear political strategy and framework for international relations must also be developed with both Iran and Iraq.

"The establishment of a Gulf Union is an urgent step, requiring unified decision-making in international forums.

"On the other hand, it is time for the Gulf states to withdraw from the Arab League, or to relocate to one of the Gulf states. Efforts should be made to strengthen the Gulf states' position, safeguard their interests with all countries of the world, unify their political discourse, and reassess foreign aid to countries that have not condemned the aggression of the Iranian regime and its proxies against the Gulf states.

"In conclusion, the Gulf states must be strong and influential actors in international decision-making."

Also:

"The regional scene can no longer be dealt with through traditional interpretations or handled with temporary reactions. The recent escalation in the region is not a passing event, but rather an extension of a state of strategic fluidity that is reshaping the balance of power and compelling Gulf states to redefine their position and role," Kuwaiti writer **Yusef Rashid Al-Hajri** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

"Experience has shown that merely pursuing a policy of 'containment' is no longer sufficient, and failing to prepare for turbulence is no longer a safe option.

"The world around us is changing rapidly. Those who do not seize the initiative will, sooner or later, find themselves in the position of recipients of results rather than being active players.

"In my previous article, 'Beyond the Strait of Hormuz: How Can the Gulf Protect Itself?', I focused on the tools of protection and means of fortification, a necessary stage in light of direct threats.

"The current stage requires a qualitative shift... from a concept of defense to a concept of influence, and from merely reaction to adopting a proactive strategy.

"Gulf security is no longer just a military or defensive matter, but it has become an integrated system in which politics, economics, media, and technology intersect.

"Therefore, the first step towards re-drawing the rules of the game begins with adopting the concept of proactive security, which not only monitors threats but also works to thwart them before they materialize, through high-level intelligence coordination and effective defense integration among the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states.

"Unifying Gulf decision-making during times of crisis has become a strategic imperative.

"The challenges facing the region are transnational, and any fragmented response creates vulnerabilities that can be exploited.

"A unified Gulf voice, when issued at the right time, is capable of shaping new equations rather than merely adapting to crises.

"Economic power is one of the most important tools of influence. The Gulf states possess the resources and capabilities that qualify them to be pivotal players in the global economy, not merely passive recipients of its fluctuations.

"Utilizing this power strategically, whether through diversifying partnerships or redirecting investments, grants the Gulf a wider margin in regional and international decision-making. Equally important is managing the media scene with strategic awareness.

"Wars are no longer fought only on the battlefield, but also in the minds of people. Having a clear narrative and a unified media discourse is an integral

part of a comprehensive security system.

"The next phase allows no room for hesitation or passive neutrality. The Gulf must either be an active player in the balance of power or an arena where the interests of others intersect.

"The difference between these two scenarios lies not in the magnitude of the challenges, but in the nature of the decision.

"The Gulf today faces a historic opportunity not only to protect itself but also to redefine its role as a pillar of stability, a balancing force, and a decision-maker. If this opportunity is properly utilized, it will move the Gulf states from a position of concern to one of influence.

"The real danger lies not in the threats themselves, but in merely reacting to them."



"Iran, like North Korea, sought to acquire the nuclear bomb and imposed a tyrannical regime on its people, thus impoverishing them. The result was that the country became one of the poorest in the world, while its leadership focused on directing national resources toward military power, even at the expense of widespread poverty and hunger among its people," columnist **Ahmad Al-Dawas** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

"Prisons were filled with thousands of political prisoners, and at one point, during periods of famine, it is said that the same leader issued extreme directives to his starving people to kill and eat dogs.

"Here lies the difference between enlightened and reckless leadership. There is a vast distinction between North Korea and South Korea, which prioritized economic development, resulting in a per capita income 52 times higher than that of North Korea.

"South Korea also invested in education and human capital development, becoming a developed nation among industrialized countries. Meanwhile, North Korea pursued a foolish and arrogant policy, suppressing its citizens and allocating the nation's resources toward military supremacy.

"Is this life?"

"The situation in Iran is similar in some ways. It is a country rich in natural resources, yet its people suffer from poverty, while a small group of clerics and lawbreakers enjoy immense wealth.

"The country is currently ruled by a group that invests its vast resources in building an widespread terrorist network throughout the region, extending into Syria, Lebanon, Gaza, the Sahel region, and Sudan. In doing so, they have not only oppressed the Iranian people but have also deprived them of the opportunity to live with dignity.

"There is an Iranian sense of inferiority regarding the development of the Gulf states, particularly in terms of quality of life. This leads many Iranians to ask - why are the Gulf states progressing while we lag behind, even though Iran is a large country with oil? The answer, in their view, is clear - the Gulf states have succeeded because they invest in serving their citizens, while the Iranians have failed because oil revenues are spent on weapons and militias.

"Furthermore, why has Iran not learned from the Danish-Swedish experience?"



Al-Dawas

"Over time, Denmark realized the extent of its losses and that its military and political approach had been flawed. It ultimately became in Denmark's best interest to reconcile with Sweden. Relations between nations should not be based on a 'win-lose' approach, but rather on a 'win-win' principle. Indeed, both countries have since prospered.

"Iran has failed to learn from history and lacks effective economic advisors to guide government policy. It would have been far better for Iran to reconcile with Arab countries, which have historically been peaceful nations, and to encourage Gulf, European, and American investment to develop its tourism, agriculture, and industrial sectors. This would have created job opportunities for millions of Iranians, raised their standard of living, and lifted them out of poverty.

"Today, power lies not in military might, but in economic strength. This point has been made repeatedly, yet Iran has squandered opportunities, and its situation has deteriorated significantly.

"It has interfered in the affairs of several Arab countries, contributing to destruction and significant loss of life. Not content with this, it has launched missiles and drones at peaceful Gulf states, which, despite suffering material and human losses, have maintained a policy of restraint. This is undoubtedly a noble approach in international relations, one that should not be forgotten, now or in the future."

— Compiled by Simi K. Kutty

Insufficient evidence: lawyer

Citizen acquitted in fraud, forgery lawsuit

By **Jaber Al-Hamoud**
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, April 18: The Misdemeanor Circuit of the Court of First Instance acquitted a Kuwaiti citizen of charges of fraud, deception, and forgery of a private agreement due to insufficient evidence and the court's doubts regarding the validity of the accusations against him.

The Public Prosecution had previously accused the citizen of defraud-

ing the victim of KD 35,000 by convincing him to purchase electrical devices. The charges also included issuing a bank cheque bearing a forged signature.



Al-Qattan

Lawyer **Abdulmohsen Al-Qattan** presented the defendant's defense, pointing to the lack of evidence proving

any sale or agreement between the two parties, in addition to the absence of any documents in the case file supporting the plaintiff's claims.

The court stated that the acquittal was issued after it was established that there was no conclusive evidence to support the plaintiff's claims. It added that the investigations did not yield any new evidence, and that the defendant consistently denied the charges from the beginning of the investigation.

State bodies unity urged

Roadmap to achieve SDGs: Al-Omar

KUWAIT CITY, April 18, (KUNA): Deputy Director General of the General Administration of Customs for Ports & Customs Investigation Affairs **Saleh Al-Omar** stressed late Thursday the importance of strengthening coordination and integration among government agencies and expanding cooperation with relevant international and regional organizations, in support of achieving sustainable development goals (SDGs).



Al-Omar

Al-Omar made this statement after chairing a meeting of the Committee for Monitoring the Improvement of the Business Environment and Enhancing Competitiveness (Cross-Border Trade Indicator), in the attendance of some

representatives of relevant government entities involved in customs clearance procedures, the administration said in a statement.

Al-Omar underlined the necessity of preparing an integrated roadmap that sets out the priorities of legislative and procedural proposals in a way that contributes to improving the efficiency of government services and enhancing the country's competitiveness - each within its respective mandate - and in accordance with the applicable regulations and procedures.

The meeting reflects the great attention paid by the Cabinet to improving business environment, a key pillar for achieving the country's development objectives, particularly in diversifying sources of income and developing various economic and investment sectors for a sustainable economy based on technological innovation and digital transformation in government services, according to the statement.

This also aims at strengthening the reform process in line with the principles of good governance.

The meeting also focused on pursuing the proposed recommendations and measures listed on the national agenda for the improvement of business environment.

Mol bans docus direct delivery

KUWAIT CITY, April 18: The Director General of the General Department of Residency Affairs, Brigadier General **Mazyad Al-Mutairi**, issued an administrative circular prohibiting the direct acceptance of official documents and judgments issued by the Sentences Enforcement Department of the Ministry of Justice, pertaining to lawsuits filed against the Ministry of Interior concerning residency matters, reports **Al-Anba** daily.

The circular explained that this decision

is aimed at ensuring the smooth and efficient operation of the department, serving the public interest, and guaranteeing the integrity of legal procedures.

According to the new instructions, applicants must be directed to the General Department of Legal Affairs, and then to the Central Department of Residency Systems and Entry and Exit Procedures, as these are the two entities authorized to review and legally examine such judgments.

News in Brief

Crane driver held after fatal hit-&-run mishap

By **Munif Naif**
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff and Agencies

KUWAIT CITY, April 18: Traffic officers detained two young men for driving carelessly and endangering the lives of others.

According to a security source, the officers spotted the two men driving recklessly and immediately apprehended them and took them to the traffic detention center for legal action.

The source added that traffic campaigns are ongoing throughout the country.



Crane driver held: A 1997-born Asian expatriate has been detained by order of an investigator from Al-Qashaniya Police Station to determine his possible involvement in a hit-and-run incident that resulted in the death of another Asian expatriate, born in 1996, reports **Al-Anba** daily.

According to security sources, when the Ministry of Interior received a report of a traffic accident at a company site in Rawdatain, security personnel rushed to the location and discovered that a worker had been run over by a crane. The investigator was notified and he visited the scene to examine the incident.

A traffic case was registered, and the Criminal Investigation Department was assigned to determine whether any criminal suspicion is involved.



Asian kills himself?: The Ministry of Interior has launched an investigation into the circumstances surrounding the death of an Asian expatriate in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh, reports **Al-Anba** daily.

According to security sources, the ministry's Operations Room had received a report of a death at a residence in the Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh area. A patrol from the local police station was immediately dispatched to the scene to investigate. Upon arrival, it was confirmed that the expatriate had died by hanging.

The initial discovery was made by a Syrian national, along with another resident of the same accommodation, who reported the incident after finding the body inside the apartment.



KFF photo

The Fire Brigade at the site.

No casualties in Wafra desert waste dump fire

KUWAIT CITY, April 18: Fire broke out in tree branches and agricultural waste in the Al-Wafra desert on Friday evening, reports **Al-Seyassah** daily.

The Kuwait Fire Force (KFF) stated in a post on its X account that the fire was extinguished and no casualties were reported.

46 violations in Shuwaikh campaign against garages

KUWAIT CITY, April 18: The Commercial Control and Consumer Protection Department at the Ministry of Commerce and Industry conducted an inspection campaign targeting garages in the Shuwaikh Industrial Area, reports **Al-Seyassah** daily.

The campaign resulted in the issuance of 46 citations for various violations, in addition to the closure of a warehouse selling used car tires.

In a statement issued on its X account on Friday, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry explained that the campaign was carried out under the directives of the Minister of Commerce and Industry **Osama Boodai**. The violations included failure to display warranty schedules and the repair of vehicles without authorization from the General Traffic Department.

An immediate closure was implemented for the warehouse selling used tires, and the necessary legal measures were taken against the violators. The Public Relations Department at Kuwait Municipality announced that the Audit and Municipal Services Monitoring Department in Jahra Governorate conducted a field inspection of health licenses for commercial establishments and advertising permits, reports **Al-Seyassah** daily.

The campaign was aimed to ensure compliance with regulations governing shops and advertisements in various areas. It resulted in the issuance of 23 citations for various violations, including non-compliance with shop regulations, advertising requirements, and the occupation of spaces without obtaining the relevant permits.

Mughal Mahal
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Google tools drive digital transformation push

Education Ministry launches AI training for technical guidance leaders

KUWAIT CITY, April 18: Assistant Undersecretary for Educational Affairs at the Ministry of Education Eng. Hamad Al-Hamad inaugurated the training workshop for academic technical guidance directors -- a move aimed at boosting the institutional capacity of the ministry for digital transformation.

In a press statement, the ministry disclosed that the General Directorate of Technical Guidance, Research and Curricula, through its Computer Technical Guidance Department, organized the workshop. This is considered a significant step in realizing the vision of the country for sustainable professional

development in the educational sector.

The intensive workshop, entitled "Google Applications of Artificial Intelligence in Administration and Education," was held at the Office of the Undersecretary.

Director of the General Directorate of Technical Guidance, Research and Curricula Mohammad Al-Otaibi said the workshop is an integral part of a multifaceted strategy designed to modernize work mechanisms and enhance the educational field's readiness to keep pace with rapid global advancements in artificial intelligence.

Al-Otaibi stated that the



MoE photo
Officials and technical supervisors attend a Ministry of Education workshop on AI-powered Google applications.

workshop included a comprehensive review of sophisticated Google AI-powered tools and mechanisms for using them to

improve performance efficiency, support decision-making, and develop teaching and assessment methodologies in line with global trends in digital education.

He added the main objective of the workshop is to promote a high level of technical literacy among officials in the educational sector, so they can take advantage of modern technologies to improve the quality of academic outputs and achieve seamless synergy between administrative and educational functions.

Computer Technical Supervisors Abeer Ismail (Hawally Educational District) and Ghadeer

Al-Foudari (Ahmadi Educational District), along with Social Studies Technical Supervisor Abdulrahman Al-Jumah (Capital Educational District) and English Language Technical Supervisor Mubarak Al-Randi conducted the workshop.

They presented an in-depth analysis of Google applications in the field of artificial intelligence like Gemini and NotebookLM and its Studio tools, while providing training on using prompts, creating content using artificial intelligence, and its role in supporting educational and administrative work to improve performance and educational practices.

MEWRE secures conditional nod for GCC power imports

KD283m deal to meet peak demand

By Mohammad Ghanem
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, April 18: The Ministry of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy has obtained conditional approval from the State Audit Bureau (SAB) to sign a contract for electricity import through the Gulf Cooperation Council Interconnection Authority (GCCIA) from May 2026 until 2027 at a cost of KD283,286,317.

As per the contract, the GCCIA will supply the national grid with the agreed amount of electricity monthly to meet the increased demand during the summer months.

The ministry imports electricity to compensate for the production shortfall until the new power plants are built. The tendering and implementation procedures for these new plants are currently being finalized.

The most important of these projects is the Subiya power plant with a capacity of 900 megawatts, for which the ministry has made remarkable progress in cooperation with the Central Agency for Public

Tenders (CAPT).

Other projects include the second and third phases of North Zour power plant (2,700 megawatts), three phases of Khairan power plant (5,400 megawatts) and Nuwaiseeb power plant (7,200 megawatts).

On the other hand, the Water Operation and Maintenance Sector at the ministry intends to tender three contracts through CAPT during the current fiscal year.

These contracts are for repairing damages and emergency breaks, supplying and installing new connections, calculating water loss in water network extension pipes, and maintenance of their accessories in the southern, northern and central regions.

Top universities under strict attendance rules

MoHE adds new US, UK study programs

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

KUWAIT CITY, April 18: Director of the National Bureau for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education Dr. Jassim Al-Ali issued two decisions regarding the addition of academic programs and degrees to the list of recommended higher education institutions outside Kuwait.

Stanford University.

It stipulates that studies must be conducted on a regular attendance basis and that the program must follow the traditional educational system.

Students are required to complete the specified study period to obtain the degree, in accordance with the regulations in the State of Kuwait.

In the second decision, the master program in education at the University of Nottingham in the United Kingdom was added to the list of approved programs, with the same regu-

lations on study and attendance requirements.

The two decisions stressed the need to comply with all regulations on enrollment in educational institutions outside Kuwait.

Academic degrees must also meet the accreditation requirements specified by the Ministry of Higher Education, ensuring the quality of educational outcomes and their alignment with labor market needs.

The bureau confirmed that these decisions are effective immediately upon issuance, superseding any conflicting previous decisions. It urged those wishing to study abroad to follow the official updates and abide by the regulations.



Dr. Al-Ali



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Selected candidates to sign 2-year contracts

MoSA set to conduct public draw for cooperative supervisory posts

By Fares Ghaleb
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, April 18: Undersecretary of the Ministry of Social Affairs Khaled Al-Ajmi announced that the lottery for applicants to supervisory positions in cooperatives whose scores were tied in the tests and personal interviews will be held at 11:00 am on Tuesday.

According to Al-Ajmi, the lottery will be conducted publicly to ensure



Al-Ajmi

the highest level of transparency and impartiality in all stages of the appointment process for supervisory positions.

He disclosed that the concerned committee interviewed a total of 147 applicants who passed the tests, indicating that those who got high scores in the tests or interviews without any competitor will start working immediately.

He stated that the contract period between the employee and the cooperative will be two years, affirming the contracts will be signed starting next week.

He added the results for the remaining applicants, who will be selected through lottery, will be announced on the official social media accounts of the ministry.

Info Ministry calls for credibility

7 media firms face legal action

KUWAIT CITY, April 18: The Ministry of Information announced on Thursday that it has referred seven media establishments to the relevant authorities for violating applicable laws and regulations, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

In a press statement, the ministry affirmed that these measures stem from its responsibility to ensure adherence to professional standards that guarantee the integrity of media content, preserve societal values, and maintain public order.

The violations included publishing inaccurate information and circulating news without verifying official and reliable sources.

The ministry highlighted its keenness to take the necessary legal action against any media outlet found to be in violation of relevant laws and regulations.

It emphasized its commitment to enforcing the law with full transparency and fairness to all, without exception.

The ministry also urged all media institutions to exercise accuracy and credibility in all published and circulated material, to adhere to professional standards, and to rely on official sources in order to safeguard the public interest and enhance the credibility of national media and its social responsibility.

Power grid set for major overhaul

CAPT greenlights tender to replace transformers at Salmiya substation

KUWAIT CITY, April 18: The Central Agency for Public Tenders (CAPT) has approved a tender for the replacement of four transformers at the Salmiya "W" substation, as part of the Ministry of Electricity and Water's ongoing efforts to upgrade its infrastructure and keep pace with urban expansion, reports Al-Jarida daily.

CAPT approved the ministry's request to replace the transformers as part of plans to enhance operational efficiency in the densely populated Salmiya area.

The tender is part of the ministry's efforts to develop the electricity network and meet rising demand, particularly during peak summer periods, driven by population growth, urban development, and increased power consumption.

The project involves replacing four transformers with newer, more efficient units to reduce the risk of unexpected

outages and improve electricity supply quality and grid stability in Salmiya and surrounding areas.

The work has been classified as a priority emergency project by the ministry, given its importance in ensuring service continuity and strengthening the readiness of the electrical network to meet future demand.

The tender is expected to attract competition among companies specializing in energy and infrastructure, as the ministry seeks to select the most suitable technical and financial offer to ensure implementation according to the highest standards within a defined timeframe.

The Ministry of Electricity and Water continues to carry out a series of development projects and routine maintenance works in various governorates, aiming to enhance grid efficiency and improve service quality.

Continued from Page 1

Hormuz on

In his virtual address, the Kuwaiti top diplomat commended the efforts of France, the UK, and international partners in ensuring a safe environment for maritime navigation through the Strait, in line with shared global economic interests, including restoring supply chains and securing energy and food supplies.

He reiterated Kuwait's rejection of any unilateral measures or attempts to impose a new reality that contravenes international legal frameworks governing the Strait.

Sheikh Jarrah stressed the need to pursue parallel tracks to intensify diplomatic efforts to ensure the freedom, security, and safety of maritime navigation, alongside ensuring Iran's compliance with UN Security Council Resolution 2817 and full adherence to international law and the 1982 UNCLOS.

The standoff over the Strait of Hormuz quickly escalated again Saturday as Iran reversed its reopening of the crucial waterway and fired on ships attempting to pass, in retaliation after the United States pressed ahead with its blockade choking off Iranian ports.

Confusion over the strait, through which roughly one-fifth of the world's oil passes, threatened to deepen the energy crisis roiling the global economy and push the two countries toward renewed conflict. The ceasefire between them is due to run out by mid-next week, and Pakistani mediators were working to put together a new round of direct negotiations to keep the truce going.

Iran's joint military command said Saturday that "control of the Strait of Hormuz has returned to its previous state ... under strict management and control of the armed forces." It warned that it would continue to block transit through the strait as long as the U.S. blockade of Iranian ports remained in effect.

Revolutionary Guard gunboats on Saturday opened fire on a tanker transiting the strait and an unknown projectile hit a container vessel, damaging some of the containers, the British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations center said without identifying the vessels. TankerTrackers.com reported that two Indian-flagged vessels were forced to turn around after being fired on by Iran, including a supertanker carrying Iraqi oil.

The renewed escalation resulted from attempts by both sides to maintain leverage amid negotiations over an ultimate deal to end the war and address Iran's nuclear program.

For the United States, the blockade is a key tool to keep up pressure on Iran, short of resuming bombardment. By cutting off much of Iran's exports and imports, it could strangle an already crippled economy.

For Iran, closure of the strait - imposed after the U.S. and Israel launched their surprise war on the country on Feb. 28 -

has proven to be perhaps its most powerful weapon in the confrontation, causing oil prices to spike, threatening the world economy and inflicting political pain on Trump.

On Friday, Iran announced the reopening of the strait to commercial vessels after a 10-day truce was sealed between Israel and the Iranian-backed Hezbollah militant group in Lebanon. The reopening triggered a fall in oil prices. Iran's closure of the strait since has triggered an energy crisis that has roiled the global economy.

U.S. President Donald Trump, however, said that even with the reopening, the American blockade "will remain in full force" until Tehran reaches a deal with the U.S. Trump imposed the blockade, halting all shipping to and from Iranian ports as the ceasefire between Iran and the U.S. was announced last week to keep pressure on Iran to make a deal in Pakistan-brokered talks to end almost seven weeks of war.

His comments triggered immediate outcry from Iranian officials, calling the blockade a violation that would prompt a re-closure of the strait.

"Americans are risking the international community, risking the global economy through these, I can say, miscalculations," referring to the blockade, Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Saeed Khatibzadeh told the Associated Press on Saturday.

"Everybody must understand to what extent American side is risking the whole ceasefire package," he said, speaking after a diplomatic forum in Antalya, Turkey.

Ebrahim Azizi, head of the Iranian parliament's National Security Commission, said that the strait was "returning to the status quo," which he had earlier described as ships requiring Iranian naval authorization and toll payment before transiting.

A data firm, Kpler, said movement through the strait remained confined to corridors requiring Iran's approval.

U.S. forces have sent 21 ships back to Iran since the blockade began on Monday, U.S. Central Command said on X.

The renewed standoff over the strait came hours after Pakistani Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar told the forum in Antalya that his country's diplomats were working to "bridge" differences between the U.S. and Iran.

Pakistani officials were fanning out for talks with senior players. Its army chief met senior Iranian officials in Tehran while its prime minister held talks in Antalya with Turkey's president and Qatar's emir. Pakistan is expected to host a second round of negotiations between Iran and the U.S. early next week.

But Khatibzadeh said the Iranians were not ready for a new round of face-to-face talks with the U.S. because the Americans "have not abandoned their maximalist position."

He also said Iran will not hand over its stock of 970 pounds (440 kilograms) of enriched uranium to the United States,

calling the idea "a non-starter." Khatibzadeh did not address other proposals for what to do with the material, saying only, "we are ready to address any concerns."

On Friday, Trump said the U.S. will go into Iran and "get all the nuclear dust," referring to the enriched uranium, which is believed to be buried under nuclear sites badly damaged by U.S. military strikes last year.

Kuwait weighs

Boukhadour noted that Kuwait is a key partner in the SUMED pipeline, but the issue is that SUMED primarily transports oil to Europe and America.

He said the current war crisis would contribute to reviving the Silk Road to prevent any future crises that might disrupt Kuwaiti and Gulf oil exports or food supplies.

Boukhadour explained that the Silk Road has two main routes - the northern route, which passes through Iraq and Central Asian countries such as Azerbaijan, then to Turkey, leading to Northern Europe, and the southern route which passes through Iran, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Syria.

Although this route is overland, oil pipelines can run alongside it or through other land transport methods.

He highlighted that Azerbaijan transports its oil from fields in the Caspian Sea via a pipeline to the Turkish port of Ceyhan, a strategic energy artery 1,768 km long on the Mediterranean Sea.

Boukhadour emphasized that neither the United States nor Iran has the right to impose fees on tankers passing through the Strait of Hormuz, as this would violate international maritime agreements, with the exception of the Suez Canal and the Panama Canal, since the former is owned by Egypt and the latter by Panama.

Meanwhile, food security consultant and expert Mohammed Al-Furaih believes that establishing a Kuwaiti oil pipeline to the Saudi port of NEOM has become a crucial necessity for enhancing food security in Kuwait.

He suggested connecting Kuwait by rail directly to the port of NEOM to transport goods arriving in Kuwait as quickly as possible.

He explained that exporting Kuwaiti oil and its derivatives could also be carried out through Saudi Arabia via the King Fahd Industrial Port near Dhahran. This port transports oil and petrochemical products to the Red Sea and then to the Mediterranean Sea via the Suez Canal.

There are other ports that can be relied upon for transporting Kuwaiti oil, such as the port of Khor Fakkan on the Indian Ocean, which is capable of accommodating giant oil tankers. This port has enormous storage capacity for oil and its derivatives, as well as the ability to store large quantities of other commodities.

Kuwait launches

Exceptional measures included government coverage of additional import costs to guarantee continued supply of essential goods during emergencies.

Strict regulations require supported companies to maintain local prices and prohibit re-export without ministerial approval.

A comprehensive monitoring system ensures transparency, from electronic applications to field audits and record inspections.

Authorities also fixed food prices and banned exports, while emergency teams intensified market inspections and verified stock levels and supply flows.

Operationally, agencies ensured continuity at ports, activated emergency committees, and implemented precautionary measures to strengthen maritime infrastructure.

Border crossings maintained smooth truck movement, prioritizing food and medical shipments with ongoing digital coordination. Air cargo routes were adjusted, shifting to land transport via GCC and neighboring countries.

Official data showed clearance of 417 tons of medicines, 103,775 tons of food, and 24,400 tons of vegetables between February 28 and March 21.

Procedures were eased under Article 28 to expedite food shipment clearance without compromising safety standards.

Production and supply efforts supported cooperatives, expanding distribution centers and logistics capacity, including transport fleets and workforce increases.

Flexible supply mechanisms were introduced, enhancing coordination with national food producers and enabling resource sharing among cooperatives.

Kuwait Flour Mills and Bakeries Company more than doubled bread production to meet rising demand, with capacity to increase further if needed.

Its distribution network covers around 3,000 daily outlets nationwide, including cooperatives, shops, restaurants, and delivery services. Kuwait Airways operated special flights to transport fresh food supplies, supporting market availability.

Livestock imports continued to ensure stability, alongside activation of emergency plans with relevant authorities.

Shelters and evacuation centers were equipped as integrated units with ample food, medical, and logistical supplies.

Senior officials conducted inspection tours covering cooperatives, control centers, food companies, markets, and border facilities to assess readiness.

Logistically, the government held extensive meetings to enhance infrastructure, allocate land for strategic storage, and improve supply management.

Discussions focused on transitioning from immediate response to structural reinforcement, accelerating land allocation and boosting stock management efficiency.

Broad participation by ministers and

officials underscored commitment to unified coordination and sustainable food security under all conditions.

Authorities also urged consumers to avoid stockpiling to prevent waste and undue pressure on the food system amid high preparedness levels.

Meanwhile, the acting Assistant Undersecretary for Administrative, Financial, and Cooperative Affairs at the Ministry of Social Affairs Dr. Sayed Issa revealed details of the field efforts and precautionary measures implemented since the beginning of the crisis.

During an interview with Kuwait TV recently, Dr. Issa explained that since the start of the attacks on Kuwait, the ministry's approved emergency plans have been activated. Six working groups have been deployed in all the governorates, in addition to a supplies team coordinating with the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, a produce sector team, and a main team working in coordination with the boards of directors of cooperative societies and the Union of Consumer Cooperative Societies.

The Ministry of Social Affairs' Control Center was established prior to the crisis and includes several systems for monitoring the ministry's automated systems and security networks, along with the activation of cybersecurity mechanisms and an integrated system for monitoring cooperative societies in terms of administration, finance, and inventory.

In coordination with the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, more than 1,400 surveillance cameras have been installed in cooperative societies and supply branches, distributed across more than 191 locations.

These technologies contributed, from the very beginning of the events, to the rapid dissemination of information and the monitoring of shopper behavior in the early days, which helped in making immediate decisions to preserve food and consumer goods.

Dr. Issa affirmed that all goods are available in cooperative societies and markets, indicating that the strategic reserve currently includes 14 essential items distributed between those available in the supply centers of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and others in cooperative societies, such as canned goods (tuna), water, biscuits, batteries, candles, and various types of legumes. These items were identified by the Food Security Committee.

He explained that the ministry is working to ensure a strategic reserve sufficient for at least six months. Most cooperative societies have achieved this target according to their storage capacity. Coordination has been established with cooperative societies to expand the construction of additional storage facilities.

There is integration and cooperation between the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, in addition to the role of merchants and suppliers.

Dr. Al-Issa affirmed that accumulated

experience and past practices have contributed to accurately estimating available quantities, emphasizing that the supply situation remains reassuring.

He explained that information security is ensured through contracts with specialized companies. The ministry's systems and servers have been fully fortified through advanced security networks. No cyberattacks have been recorded so far, despite some attempts that were successfully thwarted by the security systems.

Since the beginning of the crisis, observations and shortcomings have been identified both within the cooperative societies and within the ministry. Efforts have been made to address them immediately.

Dr. Issa stated that the emergency plans have proven effective but require continuous development, especially given that the current situation is unprecedented.

He expressed his gratitude to charitable organizations for their role during these exceptional circumstances, explaining that the ministry oversees the shelters.

Dr. Issa clarified that 95 schools have been designated as shelters, with each site equipped to accommodate approximately 400 people, in cooperation with cooperative societies that have provided the necessary supplies for each center.

Indonesia passes

Programme (UN-Habitat), cultural events such as the 'ASEAN Winter Market', and diplomatic and sporting gatherings aimed at strengthening people-to-people and institutional ties.

She said several programs were postponed due to logistical circumstances, the holy month of Ramadan and regional developments, hoping that they will be completed under the chairmanship of Brunei.

She affirmed confidence in the ability of Brunei to lead the committee to more successes, indicating she fully supports the new chairmanship.

On the other hand, Ambassador of Brunei Darussalam to Kuwait Haji Sulaini Haji Said expressed appreciation for the efforts of Indonesia, praising what he described as "distinguished leadership" of Maryana over the past months.

He disclosed that his chairmanship of the committee is based on the concept of the 'ASEAN family', emphasizing the importance of maintaining momentum and strengthening cooperation among member states through official activities, as well as social and cultural events.

He added that the committee will continue to strengthen ties with the State of Kuwait, support joint initiatives, and promote the 'ASEAN approach', which is based on consultation and cooperation.

He then confirmed his commitment to make sure that the next phase is "productive, smooth and rich in achievements," stressing his eagerness to work with all members and dialogue partners.



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Authority critical to disrupting terrorist plots, cyber intrusions: officials

US Senate extends surveillance powers until April 30 after chaotic votes in House

WASHINGTON, April 18, (AP) — The US Senate approved a short-term renewal until April 30 of a controversial surveillance program used by US spy agencies, following a chaotic, post-midnight scramble in the House to keep the authority from expiring in a matter of days.

The measure cleared the Senate by voice vote Friday, without a formal roll call — the same way it was approved hours earlier in the House — as Congress raced to meet a Monday deadline and send it to President Donald Trump for his signature.

Senate Majority Leader John Thune gave a nod to the political difficulty ahead as they assess options when the temporary extension expires at the end of the month. “We’ll be preparing accordingly,” the South Dakota Republican said.

It’s all setting up another showdown, in a matter of weeks, as Congress dives into the surveillance tool that pits Americans’ privacy rights against what US officials have long said is a uniquely effective program for the security of the country.

The stopgap came after House Re-

publican leaders hurriedly unveiled an ambitious five-year extension late Thursday with revisions to appease skeptics of the surveillance program — a sharp pivot from the clean 18-month renewal Trump and GOP leaders had pushed all week. But both those Republican bills collapsed, failing to advance, forcing leaders to pivot.

Early Friday, Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., a longtime critic of the surveillance system, stalled further action in the Senate as he pressed for changes.

Wyden said he has never seen this level of support on both sides of the political aisle — and in both chambers of Congress — for real revisions to the surveillance tool, although he did not stand in the way of a short-term extension, for now.

“It’s not making a choice between security and liberty. That’s garbage,” Wyden said. “We’re going to show that the two aren’t mutually exclusive.”

Trump, House Speaker Mike Johnson and the White House had spent the week trying to line up support for an 18-month renewal of the spy tool with no changes. But holdouts held firm, forcing a late-night scramble.



US Speaker of the House Mike Johnson, R-La., and fellow Republicans celebrate GOP tax policies at an event outside the Capitol in Washington on April 15. (AP)

GOP leaders in the House rushed lawmakers back into session late Thursday for a series of back-to-back votes that fell apart before pivoting to a stopgap to keep the program from ex-

piring Monday.

First, they came out with a new plan that would have extended the program for five years, with revisions. Among the changes were new provisions to

ensure that only FBI attorneys could authorize queries on U.S. people, and to require the Office of the Director of National Intelligence to review such cases, said Rep. Austin Scott, R-Ga., during the debate.

That plan also would enhance criminal penalties on those who unlawfully conduct such inquiries or disclose the surveillance information, Scott said. It provides a way for members of Congress and certain staff to access the proceedings of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance court, which handles such requests.

But the final product, a 14-page amendment, did not go far enough for some holdouts in either party.

GOP leaders then tried to salvage a shorter 18-month renewal that Trump had demanded and Johnson had previously backed. It failed as well, with some 20 Republicans joining most Democrats in blocking its advance.

Shortly after 2 a.m., they quickly agreed to the 10-day extension.

“We were very close tonight,” Johnson said after the late-night action.

But Democrats assailed the middle-of-the-night voting as amateur hour.

“Are you kidding me? Who the hell is running this place?” said Rep. Jim McGovern, D-Mass., during a fiery floor debate.

Tennessee Rep. Andy Ogles, a member of the House Freedom Caucus that helped stall votes throughout the week, said the outcome was predictable after the procedural votes fell short.

“We warned them that this was gonna happen,” Ogles said. “Unfortunately, here we are at 2 in the morning.”

At the center of the standoff is Section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, which permits the CIA, National Security Agency, FBI and other agencies to collect and analyze vast amounts of overseas communications without a warrant. In doing so, they can incidentally sweep up communications involving Americans who interact with foreign targets.

US officials say the authority is critical to disrupting terrorist plots, cyber intrusions and foreign espionage.

Extending the program is a recurring fight, as lawmakers weigh civil liberties concerns against intelligence officials’ warnings about national security risks.

UK’s Starmer rejects calls to resign over Mandelson appointment

LONDON, April 18, (AP) — British Prime Minister Keir Starmer on Friday resisted demands he resign over revelations that his scandal-tainted pick for UK ambassador to Washington was appointed despite failing security checks.

Starmer says he was not informed that the Foreign Office had overruled the recommendation of security officials in early 2025 not to give Peter Mandelson the job. Many considered Mandelson a risky appointment because of his past friendship with convicted offender Jeffrey Epstein and alleged business links to Russia and China.

Starmer said he was “absolutely furious” that he had been kept in the dark, calling it “staggering” and “unforgivable.” He said he would “set out all the relevant facts in true transparency” to Parliament on Monday.

The top Foreign Office civil servant, Olly Robbins, took the fall for the decision and resigned.

The prime minister’s job has been endangered by his fateful decision to appoint Mandelson, a trade expert and elder statesman of the governing Labour Party, as envoy to the Trump administration. It was a calculated risk that backfired spectacularly, and could bring down the prime minister.

Opposition politicians expressed disbelief that Starmer could have been unaware Mandelson had failed security vetting. Starmer said he only found out on Tuesday of this week.

Darren Jones, the chief secretary to the prime minister, said Friday that “the recommendation was to not appoint Peter Mandelson to the role,” and



Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer leaves 10 Downing Street to attend the weekly session of Prime Minister's Questions in Parliament in London on April 15. (AP)

that the Foreign Office ignored it. He said that was “astonishing,” but within the rules.

He said no government minister had been told of the security assessment. People familiar with the process said that is standard practice because of the sensitive personal information involved.

Jones said the checks, carried out by a department known as UK Security Vetting, “go through financial, personal, religious and other types of background information, and that is why it is kept extremely private on a portal

that only a few people have access to.”

Opposition Conservative Party leader Kemi Badenoch said claims the prime minister didn’t know were “completely preposterous.”

“This story does not stack up. The prime minister is taking us for fools,” she told the BBC. “All roads lead to a resignation.”

Ed Davey, the leader of the centrist Liberal Democrats, said Starmer “must go” if he misled Parliament and lied to the British public. The Lib Dems asked the prime minister’s ethics adviser to investigate whether Starmer broke the government code of conduct by misleading Parliament.

Starmer has repeatedly insisted that “due process” was followed in the appointment, which was announced in December 2024. Mandelson took up the Washington post in February 2025, after undergoing security vetting.

Mandelson’s expertise as a former European Union trade chief was considered a major asset in trying to persuade the Trump administration not to slap heavy tariffs on British goods, and seemed to pay off when the countries struck a trade deal in May 2025.

But documents released by the government in March, after being forced to by Parliament, showed Starmer ignored red flags raised by his staff about the appointment. He was warned that Mandelson’s friendship with Epstein, who died in prison in 2019, exposed the government to “reputational risk.”

Starmer fired Mandelson in September 2025 after evidence emerged that he had lied about the extent of his links to Epstein.

ICE acting director Lyons to resign at end of May, say federal officials

WASHINGTON, April 18, (AP) — US Immigration and Customs Enforcement acting director Todd Lyons, a key executor of President Donald Trump’s mass deportations agenda, will resign at the end of May, federal officials announced.

Homeland Security Secretary Markwayne Mullin announced Lyons’ departure, calling him a great leader of ICE who helped to make American communities safer. Mullin said Lyons’ last day will be May 31.

“We wish him luck on his next opportunity in the private sector,” Mullin said in a statement. The Department of Homeland Security did not immediately respond to an email from The Associated Press asking why he is resigning.

Lyons, who was named acting director in March 2025, led the agency at the center of President Donald Trump’s plans to reshape immigration to the US. Under his leadership, the agency was granted a massive infusion of cash through Congress, which it used to expand hiring and detention capabilities, and it ramped up arrests to meet demand from the administration.

ICE was also central to a series of high-profile immigration enforcement operations in American cities, including Chicago and Minneapolis, a deployment that ended after backlash erupted over the deaths of two American protesters at the hands of federal immigration officers.

Stephen Miller, the president’s deputy chief of staff and the main architect of his immigration policy, called Lyons a “dedicated leader.”

“His courageous work at ICE has



Todd Lyons, acting director of the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), speaks during a television interview at the White House on Nov 3, 2025 in Washington. (AP)

saved countless thousands of American lives and helped deliver safety and tranquility to millions of Americans,” Miller said in a statement.

White House spokesperson Abigail Jackson described Lyons in a post on X as “an American patriot who made our country safer.”

It’s not clear who might replace Lyons. But whoever does will take over an agency flush with cash while still a flashpoint for controversy. ICE is at the center of a battle in Congress, with Democratic lawmakers demanding restraints on immigration officers before agreeing to restore routine funding for DHS.

On Thursday, Lyons, along with two

other top immigration officials, appeared before a House subcommittee to argue for his agency’s budget and faced continued scrutiny from lawmakers of ICE’s actions.

Lyons’ departure also comes as DHS is under new leadership after Trump fired former Secretary Kristi Noem, who led the department through the administration’s major immigration policy changes.

Mullin, who took over as secretary last month, is likely to continue to advance the president’s agenda but has struck a softer tone on some of the administration’s most contentious policies.

Sri Lanka sent home 238 Iranian sailors, say officials

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka, April 18, (AP) — Sri Lanka has sent home 238 Iranian sailors, including 32 who survived a U.S. torpedo attack that sank their ship in the Indian Ocean, officials said Friday.

A US submarine sank the IRIS Dena on March 4 while the ship was returning home after taking part in a naval exercise on invitation from India. The Sri Lankan navy recovered 87 bodies and 32 were hospitalized. A second Iranian ship was brought to a southern Sri Lankan port after its crew reported technical problems.

Defense Ministry spokesman Brig. Franklin Joseph said Friday that everyone except for a few crew members from the second ship had been repatriated earlier this week.

The Iranian ship has been anchored in the eastern port of Trincomalee and no decision has been taken on what should be done with it.

“I think it (Sri Lanka) has proven its policy posture not only in words but also in deeds,” said H.M.G.S. Palihakkara, a retired former foreign secretary



Two Iranian sailors, (center), who were rescued from IRIS Dena warship by Sri Lanka's navy are escorted to a Judicial Medical Officer from the National Hospital, in Galle, Sri Lanka on March 5. (AP)

who also served as Sri Lanka’s permanent representative to the United Nations.

India Parliament blocks PM’s bid to redraw voting boundaries alongside seat quota for women

NEW DELHI, April 18, (Agencies) — A bill to reserve a third of seats for women lawmakers failed to pass in the lower house of India’s Parliament on Friday, along with a separate, linked proposal to expand the national legislature by redrawing voting boundaries.

The measure was seen as one of the most significant changes to India’s political system since independence from British colonial rule in 1947, but fell short after two days of debate involving both government and opposition lawmakers. It sought to mandate implementation of 33% representation for women in Parliament and state legislatures, a move aimed at increasing female participation in a system where women remain underrepresented.

However, the quota was tied to a contentious plan to redraw voting boundaries across India, which became a major sticking point. While there was broad cross-party support for increasing women’s representa-



A security officer takes photograph of Indian women lawmakers as they pose outside Parliament House before the start of the debate on a landmark bill to reserve one-third of seats for women, in New Delhi, India on April 16. (AP)

tion, opposition parties warned that redrawing voting boundaries and expanding the size of Parliament could shift the political balance in favor of Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s rul-

ing Bharatiya Janata Party.

Both bills were introduced by Modi’s government during a three-day special session of Parliament that began Thursday and required approval

by two-thirds of lawmakers. The legislation tied to the women’s quota fell short of that threshold, and the government later withdrew the delimitation proposal.

The delimitation exercise, if passed, would have increased the number of seats in the lower house from 543 to about 850 by the time of the next parliamentary elections due in 2029.

Also:

NEW DELHI: Two passenger trains mowed down five people in India’s northern state of Uttar Pradesh, confirmed the local police on Thursday.

The incident occurred in the state’s Prayagraj district on Wednesday night.

According to the police, a passenger train ran over a person and immediately came to a halt. As some passengers disembarked onto the tracks following the incident, a second passenger train approached at high speed and fatally struck at least four people.

Pope urges Africa’s youth to resist dual temptations of migration and corruption

DOUALA, Cameroon, April 18, (AP) — Pope Leo XIV called Saturday for “structures of solidarity” to help those on the margins as he wrapped up his visit to Cameroon and headed to Angola on the third leg of his four-nation African odyssey.

Leo celebrated Mass at the Yaounde Airport for thousands of people, including President Paul Biya — at 93 the world’s oldest leader. The jostling, joyful atmosphere underscored the joy the third pope to visit Cameroon has brought the former French colony, where around a third of the population is Catholic.

Some people who struggled to walk were brought to the Mass in wheelbarrows pushed by family members.

In his visit to Cameroon, Leo urged Cameroon’s young people on Friday to resist the temptation to migrate and instead work for the common good at home, as he called for morally upright citizens to combat corruption plaguing many African countries. In his homily Saturday, delivered in French, Leo said the respect for human dignity was a cornerstone of every society.



Pope Leo XIV arrives to celebrate Mass at Yaounde Ville Airport, Cameroon on April 18, 2026 on the sixth day of his 11-day pastoral visit to Africa. (AP)

“For this reason, every community has the obligation to create and sustain structures of solidarity and mutual aid in which, when faced with crises — be they social, political, medical or economic — everyone can give and receive assistance according to their own ca-

capacity and needs,” he said.

After the Mass, Leo was to fly to Luanda, the capital of the southwestern African nation, where he was to meet with President Joao Lourenco and deliver his first speech before Angolan government authorities.

Africa

Sassou N’Guesso sworn in as Congo prez:

Denis Sassou N’Guesso was sworn in Thursday to a new five-year term as the Republic of Congo’s president in a ceremony in a packed stadium.

The inauguration took place in Kintélé, a town north of the capital city of Brazzaville.

Sassou N’Guesso was reelected in March with 94.8% of the vote, extending his 42-year rule over the oil-rich Central African country. He ran against six relatively unknown candidates.

In his inaugural speech, he said he would not “betray the people who mobilized to honor him and reaffirm their support.”

The Central African country is struggling with a sky-high debt-to-GDP ratio — which measures a country’s debt compared to its economic output — according to the World Bank, and climbing youth unemployment. (AP)

Gunmen attack passenger bus in Nigeria:

Gunmen attacked a passenger bus in Nigeria’s Benue state, abducting some students on their way to university examinations, officials said.

The students and other passengers were abducted Thursday along the Otukpo-Makurdi highway, Benue Gov. Hyacinth Alia said in a statement.

The governor did not specify how many were taken, but local media said 14 passengers were on board.

“The targeting of innocent citizens, particularly students on their way to sit for examinations, is unacceptable and stands against every norm of humanity and civil order,” Alia said. (AP)

New diplomatic push

US, Cuba officials meet in Havana

WASHINGTON, April 18, (AP) — An American delegation recently met with Cuban government officials in the island nation, marking a renewed diplomatic push even as US President Donald Trump has threatened to intervene and Cuba’s leader said this week that his country is prepared to fight if that should happen.

A senior State Department official met with the grandson of retired Cuban leader Raúl Castro last week during the trip, according to a department official, who was not authorized to comment publicly and spoke Friday on condition of anonymity to discuss the sensitive matter.

The official did not say who from the US met with Raúl Guillermo Rodríguez Castro, whose grandfather is believed to play an influential role in the Cuban government despite not holding an official post. A second US official said Secretary of State Marco Rubio was not part of the delegation that visited Havana.

US officials have previously said Rubio, the son of Cuban immigrants and a longtime Cuba hawk, met the younger Castro in the Caribbean island nation of St. Kitts and Nevis in February.



Castro

Oil price rises 49 cents to \$102.03 pb

KUWAIT CITY, April 18, (KUNA): The price of Kuwaiti oil rose by 49 cents to reach USD 102.03 per barrel in trading on Thursday, compared to USD 101.54 per barrel in the previous session, according to the Kuwait Petro-

leum Corporation (KPC) on Friday.

In global markets, Brent crude rose by USD 4.46 to reach USD 99.39 pb, while US West Texas Intermediate increased by USD 3.4 to reach USD 94.69 pb.

Other Voices

Ceasefire enhances oil flow, markets stabilize

By Kamel Al-Harami
Independent Oil Analyst

As soon as Iran announced the opening of the Strait of Hormuz in the Arabian Gulf, oil prices fell sharply, with all oil indicators settling in double digits, bringing oil markets and global commercial activity closer to normal levels.



Al-Harami

Although the opening is said to be for the duration of a ceasefire period, it is viewed as a positive sign that the ceasefire may last and that the threat of war has eased, with hopes for lasting stability. The expectation is for a return to normal conditions without any more threats or retaliations.

At the local level, schools are expected to reopen, allowing children to return to their classrooms, reconnect with classmates and friends, and resume learning with their teachers. Parents, in turn, will be relieved to hand back the responsibility of education to schools after more than 40 days at home. The return to school is expected to be filled with renewed energy and optimism.

The Friday announcements of the ceasefire came during Western working hours, allowing businesspeople to carry out transactions in a more relaxed and positive atmosphere, free from uncertainty or concern about the coming days. Business activity has now returned to normal.

Airline companies are reportedly relieved to witness the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz, which helped restore normality and ensured that oil, fish products, and gas can

once again be exported from the Arabian Gulf without disruption. It also eased concerns over panic buying of jet fuel, flight cancellations, or workforce reductions that could have led to higher operational costs and layoffs.

As jet fuel represents only about ten percent of a barrel of crude oil, any disruption could have caused panic for the airline industry due to potential global shortages of jet oil. The impact would have been felt particularly in developing countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. At the same time, China and Thailand halted re-exporting fuels, while Vietnam and Pakistan reduced short-distance domestic flights, focusing more on long-haul routes.

Now, with Friday's announcements, things are expected to return to normal, though it will take time. Oil prices are likely to remain strong as the airline industry works to replenish and rebuild its stocks. This means demand is expected to stay strong, supporting oil prices until airlines restore their jet fuel stock. Some companies may also opt to store additional jet fuel as a buffer against future uncertainty.

Fortunately, the threat of war and the risk of closures have eased. Otherwise, with the summer approaching, the airline industry could have faced major challenges, with some companies potentially at risk of bankruptcy amid fuel shortages and rising travel costs. Ticket prices have already increased by more than 17 percent, and such increases are not expected to ease quickly.

Fortunately, the Strait of Hormuz is not closed, and oil prices are expected to ease from their highs of around \$100 per barrel or more.

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IMF warns Middle East conflict poses global economic threat

WASHINGTON, April 18, (KUNA): The International Monetary Fund (IMF) International Monetary and Financial Committee (IMFC) warned Friday the global economy has been tested by repeated shocks over the past few years from wars and conflicts, including the new one in the Middle East.

In a statement issued at the end of its 53rd meeting, chaired by Saudi Minister for Finance Mohammad Al-Jadaan, the IMFC said that the global economy has remained resilient over the past few years despite repeated shocks, including from wars and conflicts.

It added that the conflict in the Middle East is a major new global shock, whose economic impact will depend on its duration, intensity, and geographical expansion. However, it is already clear from the infrastructure damage and transport disruptions thus far that it poses a serious threat to the global economy, despite notable efforts to sustain the flow of energy, including through the redirection of transport routes to enhance supply security.

It underlined that the priority is to reinforce macroeconomic and financial stability, while enabling strong and broad-based growth, through timely, adaptable, and credible policies, effective policy

coordination and multilateral cooperation.

Central banks remain strongly committed to maintaining price stability in line with their respective mandates. Central bank independence and clear communication remain essential for policy credibility and keeping inflation expectations anchored, it added.

It also stressed its support for countries in their efforts to promote stability and growth, including through sound macroeconomic policies, domestic resource mobilization, and better governance, with specific attention to low-income and vulnerable countries, including fragile and conflict-affected states and small developing states, especially where debt and financing pressures are mounting.

The IMFC noted that it would remain committed to further improving debt restructuring processes, including under the Common Framework, building on the progress already achieved, and advancing the work at the Global Sovereign Debt Roundtable (GSDR) to ensure debt restructurings are delivered in a predictable, timely, orderly, and coordinated manner.

The committee revealed that its next meeting is expected to be held in October 2026 in Bangkok, Thailand.

'Granting 30-day reprieve'

US extends sanctions pause on Russian oil amid Iran war

WASHINGTON, April 18, (AP): The U.S. Treasury Department on Friday extended its pause on sanctions on Russian oil shipments to ease shortages from the Iran war, days after Secretary Scott Bessent ruled out such a move.

The so-called general license means U.S. sanctions will not apply for 30 days on deliveries of Russian oil that has been loaded on tankers as of Friday. It extended a similar 30-day license issued in March for Russian oil that had been loaded by March 11. The ex-

tension underscores how the fall-out from the Iran war has boosted Moscow's ability to profit from its energy exports, which had been restrained since the invasion of Ukraine.

Speaking at the White House on Wednesday, Bessent ruled out extending the license. "We will not be renewing the general license on Russian oil, and we will not be renewing the general license on Iranian oil," he said. The administration did not immediately explain the reversal.

Business

Digital excellence, social impact lift Gulf Bank to global recognition

Gulf Bank earns double accolade at Global Brands Awards 2026

KUWAIT CITY, April 18: Gulf Bank has further strengthened its position as a leading financial institution by receiving two distinguished accolades in the fields of Digital Banking Innovation and Financial Services with Community Impact as part of the Global Brands Magazine Awards 2026. These awards are among the most recognized international distinctions that evaluate banking performance and financial innovation on a global scale.

The Bank was recognized for Digital Banking Innovation in appreciation of its continued progress in digital transformation and the advancement of modern banking channels. Gulf Bank has successfully delivered an enhanced banking experience through its mobile applications for both individual and corporate customers, offering a wide range of digital banking services that enable customers to manage their accounts and complete their transactions with ease, speed, and security around the clock.

The Bank has also introduced Gulf Points, one of the most distinctive rewards programmes in the banking sector, designed to provide customers with greater flexibility and value. Through the programme, customers can redeem their points in multiple ways, including converting them into cash, sending them as gifts to friends, or using them to book flights, hotels, and car rentals. Customers can also benefit from the Online Store available through the Bank's application, which represents the first shopping platform of its kind within the Kuwaiti banking sector, allowing purchases to be made directly using the Gulf Points. This further enhances the customer experience and adds meaningful value to Gulf Bank's digital banking services.

In the area of Financial Services with Community Impact, the Bank received recognition for its efforts in developing banking products and services that support greater financial in-



clusion and serve different segments of society. Among the most notable of these initiatives is the launch of the neo account for children, which aims to promote financial literacy among younger generations and encourage saving and money management through a modern approach aligned with ongoing digital transformation.

Gulf Bank has also continued to develop its branch network in line with the highest standards of environmental and social sustainability, while responding to the needs of all customers. Updated branches now feature enhanced facilities and advanced technological services that cater to a wide range of customer segments, including persons with disabilities, through more accessible design and simplified banking services that help ensure a more inclusive and seamless banking experience.

These two awards reflect Gulf Bank's suc-

cessful strategy in combining digital innovation with meaningful community impact. They also underline the Bank's ability to respond to the rapid changes shaping the banking sector while continuing to provide innovative financial solutions that enhance the customer experience and support economic and social development in Kuwait.

Global Brands Magazine, headquartered in the United Kingdom, is one of the leading international publications specializing in the evaluation of prominent global brands. Each year, the magazine recognizes companies and institutions across various sectors based on detailed analysis of performance, innovation, customer experience, and social responsibility. Its awards are widely respected for the integrity of their assessment process and the breadth of their geographic and sector coverage.

Banking sector still dominates bourse despite outflows

Foreign investment in Kuwait banks falls in Q1

KUWAIT CIT, April 18, (KUNA): Foreign investment in the banking sector in Kuwait bourse dropped to KD 4.868 billion (USD 14.896 billion) at end of Q1 2026, compared with KD 5.182 billion (USD 15.856 billion) at end of 2025, a 15.37 percent of the sector's capital value.

According to a report published by AlShall Consulting Company on Saturday, Kuwait's banking sector is the main contributor in the bourse's capital value with 61.5 percent.

It is also the main attractor of indirect foreign investment and the highest in liquidity, acquiring 38.1 percent of total liquidity in the first three months of 2026.

It added that the banking sector index dropped by four percent, affected by a decrease in foreign contribution in seven banks out of nine enlisted in Kuwait's stock market at the end of 2025 and end of Q1 2026.

The highest foreign investment was recorded in the National Bank of Ku-

wait (NBK) by KD 2.129 billion (USD 6.514 billion), while it was KD 2.097 billion (USD 6.416 billion) in Kuwait Finance House (KFH), KD 201.2 million (615.6 million) in Boubyan Bank, KD 161.3 million (USD 493.5 million) in the Gulf Bank of Kuwait and KD 129.7 million (USD 396.8 million) in Warba Bank.

This means that foreign relative ownership in NBK is 26.56 percent of capital value, followed by KFH at 14.10 percent, Gulf Bank comes third in relative ownership at 12.28 percent and fourth in relative ownership, while Kuwait International Bank (KIB) comes fourth in 11.45 percent in relative ownership and seventh in absolute ownership, the report said.

The highest relative rise in ownership was at Al-Ahli Bank with 0.53 points or about 7.44 percent at end of 2025 to reach 7.97 percent, while the highest relative drop in foreign ownership was recorded in Burgan Bank by 1.22 points or 4.86 percent to stand at 3.64 percent, it noted.

From oil shock to atom: Countries rethink energy mix

Iran war sparks global nuclear push

NAIROBI, April 18, (AP): The Iran war's global energy shock is causing some nations in Africa and Asia to boost nuclear power generation and spurring atomic energy plans in non-nuclear countries on both continents.

Asia, where most of the Middle Eastern oil and natural gas was headed, was hit first and hardest by disruptions to shipping routes carrying those fuels - swiftly followed by Africa. The U.S. and Europe are also feeling the pinch as the conflict drives up energy costs.

African and Asian nations with nuclear plants are increasing their output as they scramble for short-term energy supplies, while non-nuclear countries are accelerating long-term nuclear plans to safeguard against future fossil fuel shocks.

Nuclear power isn't a quick fix for the current energy crisis. Developing atomic energy can take decades, especially for nuclear newcomers. But long-term commitments to nuclear power made now will likely lock it in to countries' future energy mixes, said Joshua Kurlantzick of the Council on Foreign Relations.

In Asia, the Iran war is pushing South Korea to increase nuclear power generation, while Taiwan is debating restarting mothballed reactors. In Africa, future plans to build reactors have taken on urgency, with Kenya, Rwanda and South Africa affirming their support.

Nuclear power takes advantage of the energy released when the nucleus of an atom, such as uranium, splits in a process called fission. Unlike fossil fuels, this doesn't release climate change-causing carbon dioxide. But it creates potentially dangerous radioactive waste, one reason many countries are cautious about nuclear power.

The war has accelerated a global "nuclear renaissance," said Rachel Bronson of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, as countries seek an out from the risks of fossil fuel markets.

There are 31 countries that use nuclear power, which provides about 10% of global electricity, according to the International Atomic Energy Agency, which says another 40 nations are either considering the technology or preparing to build a plant.

In Asia, where energy triage efforts range from increased coal use to purchases of Russian crude oil, countries with nuclear plants are seeking to get more out of their existing reactors.

South Korea is increasing generation at its nuclear plants and speeding up maintenance at five offline reactors, with restarts planned in May. Taiwan and Japan are reversing policies that shuttered nuclear sites following the 2011 Fukushima nuclear meltdown, triggered when an earthquake and tsunami disabled the power supply that cooled the reactors.

Taiwan is considering the years-long process

of restarting two reactors because of the current crisis, which will require meticulous inspections, safety checks and control system verifications.

In Japan, since the start of the war, Prime Minister Takaichi Sanae has signed a \$40 billion reactor deal with the U.S., a nuclear fuel recycling agreement with France and promised Indonesia nuclear cooperation. Japan restarted the world's largest nuclear plant, the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa site, in January.

Renewables, like solar and wind, make more sense for energy affordability and security, according to Michio Miyamoto of the U.S.-based Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis.

While the Iran war is also driving consumer and government interest in renewable energy globally and in Japan, historically high electricity costs combined with the current crisis is swinging Japanese public opinion toward acceptance of nuclear power, she said.

In South Asia, Bangladesh is racing to turn on new reactors built by Russia's state-owned nuclear corporation Rosatom. Dhaka hopes they will supply the national grid with 300 megawatts by this summer, relieving some pressure from current gas shortfalls.

Meanwhile, Vietnam signed a deal with Moscow in March for two Russian-designed reactors.

The Philippines, which recently declared a national energy emergency, is also considering reviving a nuclear plant built in the aftermath of the 1973 oil crisis but was never turned on.

"I hope we learned our lesson," said Alvie Asuncion-Astronom of the Philippine Nuclear Research Institute. The Iran war is "providing a needed push for nuclear."

Soaring energy prices and power shortages in Africa, triggered by the Iran war, is leading to public calls for nuclear cooperation and reinvigorated interest in long-term nuclear energy plans, which are underway in more than 20 of the 54 African countries.

With Africa seen as an atomic energy growth market, nuclear nations - including the U.S., Russia, China, France and South Korea - are pitching advanced technology such as small modular reactors, or SMRs, as a solution to energy shortages.

These modular reactors are a cheaper, more compact alternative to large-scale plants.

Proponents tout them as a faster option, but projects can still take years. Kenya, for instance, plans to bring a small modular reactor online in 2034 after starting the first phase in 2009.

Last month, Justus Wabuyabo of Kenya's Nuclear Power and Energy Agency, said "nuclear energy is no longer a distant aspiration for African countries; it is a strategic necessity."

During a March summit convened by the

U.N.'s nuclear watchdog agency, Rwandan President Paul Kagame said Africa will be "one of the most important global markets" for the smaller reactors in the years ahead.

Smaller reactors, which can offer scalable, low-emitting base load power, are considered a solution to Africa's rising electricity demand, weak grids and over reliance on imported diesel.

Similarly, Loyiso Tyabashe of the South African Nuclear Energy Corporation, said SMRs could "fulfill our strategic objective of positioning South Africa at the forefront of advanced nuclear technologies."

South Africa, which has the continent's only existing nuclear plants, wants nuclear to go from making around 5% of its energy mix now to 16% by 2040.

The energy disruptions come as competition for influence in Africa intensifies between Washington and Moscow.

Russia's Rosatom is building Egypt's first reactor and has cooperation agreements with Ethiopia, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Tanzania and Niger, spanning major projects, research centers, uranium processing facilities and training programs.

While only Kenya and Ghana have joined an American-led modular reactor initiative, Washington is trying to catch up.

The U.S. and South Korea sponsored a nuclear conference in Nairobi last month. Ryan Taugher of the U.S. State Department said Washington is working with African nations to rapidly develop secure and safe civil nuclear reactors.

Ghana, which aims to begin building a nuclear plant in 2027, is in the market for foreign suppliers.

Risks like meltdowns and mismanaged waste remain, even as interest builds. Nuclear energy could also be a step toward building nuclear bombs.

Ayumi Fukakusa, of the advocacy group Friends of the Earth Japan, said "nuclear is very risky" and will keep countries reliant on imported fuels such as enriched uranium.

Given that nuclear sectors take years to develop, governments should stay focused on building out renewables for long-term energy security, said Rex Amancio of the Global Renewables Alliance.

Bronson, with the atomic scientists group, also said nuclear plants are vulnerable during conflicts, citing recent instances where reactors were specifically targeted during the Iran war and the Russia-Ukraine War.

"All of this comes into the mix of how we think about energy security," she said. "Countries are now weighing those kinds of risks against the other risks, which Asia and Africa are seeing first and foremost, about what happens when gas and oil stops."

First residential building in Kuwait to receive LEED v4.1 certification for Operations and Maintenance

MREF strengthens its investment strategy as Al Nada Tower achieves LEEDS Gold certification

Existing Buildings under a planning approach grounded in global best practices

KUWAIT CITY, April 18: Kuwait Financial Centre “Markaz” announced that Al Nada Tower has achieved LEED Gold certification in Q1-2026 under the LEED v4.1 Operations and Maintenance: Existing Buildings rating system, becoming the first residential building in the State of Kuwait to receive this prestigious international certification. The certification was granted following the successful completion of the assessment process and formal approval, reflecting Markaz’s systematic approach, rooted in internationally recognized standards, to asset management and sustainable operational excellence.

Al Nada Tower is owned by Markaz Real Estate Fund (MREF), a Shariah-compliant, income generating open-ended fund offering investors the potential for property appreciation in addition to cash yield from rental income that is distributed on a monthly basis. Since its establishment in 2002 up to December 2025, the fund has delivered IRR of 7.7%. MREF targets a monthly distribution that is equivalent to an annualized 4-5% return. The most recent recognition MREF has obtained is the MEED Excellence in Real Estate Investment in MENA in 2025.

The LEED Gold certification was awarded following an independent evaluation process that assessed operational performance, resource efficiency, indoor environmental quality, and the continuous improvement of operations and maintenance practices, based on a technical review conducted by accredited independent entities. This milestone reflects Markaz’s commitment to translating sustainability principles into tangible operational standards that go beyond symbolic goals to become an integral part of asset performance strategies and long-term value enhancement.

Al Nada Tower’s LEED Gold certification reflects Markaz’s approach to establishing well-structured operational frameworks focused on protecting asset quality, maintaining opera-

tional efficiency, and strengthening the long-term readiness of its real estate portfolio in response to evolving market dynamics and rising sustainability and performance expectations.

Commenting on the achievement, Mr. Abdullatif W. Al-Nusif, Managing Director – Wealth Management and Business Development at Markaz, said: “Al Nada Tower’s LEED Gold certification represents tangible evidence of how sustainability is embedded within our long-term investment strategy. This achievement reflects Markaz’s disciplined approach to asset management, supported by measurable operational efficiency, stronger asset resilience, lower operating costs, and the delivery of sustainable environmental and financial value. It also reinforces the tower’s position in the residential market and sets a benchmark that can serve as a foundation for developing the rest of our portfolio in line with global best practices.”

Mr. Milad A. Elia, Executive Vice President – Real Estate Investment, Middle East and North Africa at Markaz, added: “Al Nada Tower’s LEED Gold certification strengthens Markaz’s position as a responsible real estate investor guided by long-term planning and reflects its commitment to applying sustainability standards and operational excellence within an integrated framework for sustainable value creation. This achievement also contributes to enhancing the quality and resilience of the real estate portfolio, reinforcing investor confidence, and improving the residential environment through greater operational efficiency and higher living standards aligned with interna-



tionally recognized benchmarks.”

LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) is one of the world’s most widely used green building rating systems. The LEED v4.1 Operations and Maintenance: Existing Buildings framework focuses on measuring and improving the operational performance of buildings through verifiable performance indicators, enhancing efficiency and reducing environmental

Important information

■ Fund Manager: Kuwait Financial Centre K.P.S.C. “Markaz”, Kuwait City, Mirqab, Al Sour Street, Al Shaya Tower, Floor 8, Tel: +965 2224 8000, P.O. Box 23444, Safat 13095, State of Kuwait

■ Fund Administrative Board Members: Ghazi Al-Osaimi, Milad Elia, Khaled Al-Mubarak, Abdulrahman Sulaiman Al Sanad

■ To obtain a copy of the Articles of Association, Prospectus, and the Fund’s financial reports, please visit: www.markaz.com

Disclaimer

This announcement has been prepared for promotional purposes and has been approved by Kuwait Financial Centre “Markaz”. No material information relating to the investment referred to herein has been omitted. Investments in the Fund may be exposed to risks arising from changes in market conditions. There is no guarantee or assurance that the investment will generate any returns.

Accordingly, potential investors should conduct their own analysis and research, and consult their financial, legal, tax, audit and other professional advisers when making investment decisions or considering any strategy discussed in this content. Investors should also understand that such an investment carries a high degree of risk, including the risk of losing the principal invested, and that distribution levels cannot be predicted or guaranteed.

Past performance is not necessarily indicative of, and does not necessarily predict, future performance. The Fund’s net asset value is variable and may decrease or increase. Please review the subscription prospectus and all Fund documents to understand the risk factors associated with this investment, as well as the investment methodology and operations, before investing in the Fund.

‘Pump relief lags’

Strait reopening sparks oil slide

NEW YORK, April 18, (AP): After U.S. President Donald Trump and Iran’s foreign minister said the Strait of Hormuz was fully open to commercial vessels after almost seven weeks of war, oil prices plunged 10% and the stock market rallied Friday.

Motorists, hoping for relief at the pump, wondered how quickly gasoline prices might fall once oil tankers stuck in the Persian Gulf were moving again. A gallon of regular gasoline cost \$4.08 on average in the U.S. Friday, which was 37% more than before U.S. and Israel attacked Iran but down a few cents from a week ago.

But when gas prices spike, they don’t typically drop as quickly as the cost of crude. Even if Iran keeps the waterway open in the face of a U.S. blockade of its vessels, it still could take months for fuel prices to return to levels resembling those enjoyed before the war began Feb. 28, energy experts said.

The slow speed at which oil tankers travel from ports to refineries, lingering security concerns, traffic in the strait and damage to energy infrastructure in the Middle East are all playing a role in the elevated price of gasoline.

“The historical observation is that gasoline prices rise quickly but fall slowly, regardless of the particular causes of the increase,” said Mark Barteau, a professor in the department of chemical engineering at Texas A&M University.

“In this case, one has to take into account the time it takes for the steps that have to happen once tankers sail through the straits - for example, sailing time to refineries on other continents, time to ramp up refinery operations, and time to transport some refined products by tanker to the continent where they will be used,” Barteau said. “There is also tendency to hedge bets because of doubts about whether and how quickly that restoration might occur, and whether further disruptions are possible along the way.”

Nevertheless, some energy analysts were optimistic that gas prices would gradually decline.

Gasoline prices were already falling slightly after last week’s announcement of a two-week ceasefire between the U.S. and Iran, according to motor club federation AAA.

Following the Strait of Hormuz announcement, oil prices fell by \$10 to \$12 per barrel, which generally translates into a decrease of 25 or 30 cents per gallon of gas, said Michael Lynch, distinguished fellow at Energy Policy Research Foundation, a non-partisan research institution focused on energy and economics.

“That doesn’t happen overnight, but within a week or two, we could be down 50 cents a gallon easily, if this holds,” Lynch said. “And part of it is, there’s a lot of tankers ready to go. And if they all come out, then that balances the market very quickly.”

In the wake of Friday’s news, “every state will start seeing gas price decreases accelerate at a pace of probably 1 to 3 cents a gallon for every day or two,” said Patrick De Haan, head of petroleum analysis at GasBuddy, in a webcast. “And that could continue for at least a couple of weeks.”

DeHaan estimated that the national average for a gallon of regular gas could reach \$3.45 to \$3.65 by Memorial Day. But he acknowledged that returning to lower prices could take a while.

“It might take until later this year or early next year to really fully normalize and for some of these surcharges and impacts to re-

verse and disappear,” De Haan said.

If an agreement to end the war is reached, it could take at least four months for shipping through the Strait of Hormuz to go back to normal, said Patrick Penfield, professor of supply chain practice at Syracuse University.

“Right now, you still have potential mines that have to be removed or detonated, you have over 150 tankers that have been anchored in and around the strait, which is causing a traffic jam, and we still have shipping rates that are still high because of lack of shipping capacity and war rate insurance,” he said.

The leaders of France and the U.K. welcomed word of the strait’s reopening but said they would keep pushing for a way to permanently restore freedom of navigation for vessels that rely on the narrow passage off Iran’s coast, through which about one-fifth of the world’s oil typically travels.

Ship owners would have to be convinced to trust the Americans and Iranians, “and that seems like it’s a hard hill to climb,” Lynch, of the Energy Policy Research Foundation, said. “I certainly wouldn’t want to do it. I wouldn’t wanna be the first ship through or even the first five ships through, but somebody will do it. There’s a lot of money on the table and somebody’s going to grab it.”

If the Iranians are cooperating, the mines should not be a problem, because Iran has a sense of where the mines are, Lynch said.

“Now, that raises the issue, are the Iranians going to cooperate, or what do they want to cooperate?” he asked. “Are they going to demand a couple-million dollars a ship, as is talked about? Or is Trump going to say ‘that’s not acceptable,’ and then what’s the next step after that?”

If the strait remains open, and ships loaded with oil leave the Persian Gulf, it could take weeks for those heavy, slow-moving ships to reach their destinations.

“People think that once the strait opens, it’s fine. We’re done. It’ll be better really fast,” said Richard Joswick, global head of near-term oil analysis at S&P Global Energy. “If you open the strait today to get a ship and bring it around and take it to Europe and run a refinery, turn it into products, you’re talking 10 weeks of a lag time here. It will be two to three months before things can start to get back to normal after the straight re-opens.”

Many oil production facilities were damaged in the Middle East, including refineries in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait and oil tanker terminals in the United Arab Emirates and Iran. Some repairs has been made, but damage remains.

In addition, some countries slowed down or halted production during the war, because without the ability to ship crude through the Strait of Hormuz, their ships and storage tanks filled up with stranded oil.

“It’s not a light switch. Everyone’s impatient and saying, ‘Go, go go,’” De Haan said. “But it will take time to get these flows of oil through the Middle East fired back up again.”

Once an oil well is turned off, the pressure within the well could change, and it can take time to restart the flow. But that might not be a problem in some Middle East oil fields, where production can be resumed quickly, Lynch said.

“The Saudis have done that a bunch of times. They ramp up by 2 or 3 million barrels a day, almost overnight, and there’s no problem with the wells that have been shut in for months and sometimes years,” Lynch said.

Industry shifts to new liquidity regime

NBK Wealth: Private equity’s liquidity moment

Private equity has evolved from a niche institutional strategy into a core allocation for most investors. Over the past two decades, attractive returns, diversification benefits and access to operational value creation beyond public markets have driven sustained investor demand.

Post the Global Financial Crisis, low-interest rates and strong equity market performance accelerated the growth of Private Equity and as of 2025, global private equity assets under management reached approximately \$9.8 trillion.

The Private Equity Liquidity Model

Unlike public equities, private equity cash flows depend not on trading activity but on exit events such as initial public offerings (IPOs), strategic sales, or sponsor-to-sponsor transactions. Historically, stable exit markets enabled funds to distribute capital while simultaneously raising successor vehicles, creating a self-reinforcing cycle of capital that supported industry growth.

The Private Equity Liquidity Shock

The private equity industry has historically distributed 21% of AUM annually on average. This dynamic changed materially in 2022. Rapid global interest rate increases compressed valuation multiples and raised financing costs and market volatility. This resulted in widening valuation gap between buyers and sellers and exit activity declined sharply. Industry distributions fell to approximately 10% of AUM in 2023, activity has started to recover but remains below historical norms.

Implications – Need for Liquidity

Due to the reduced distributions, investors received less capital than expected, limiting their ability to recommit to new funds. Combined with ongoing capital calls many investors became overallocated to the asset class. This has contributed to slower fundraising activity and more selective allocation decisions among investors. Because the private equity model depends on continuous capital recycling, weaker distribution environments create structural pressure on both investors and fund managers to improve portfolio flexibility and restore cash flow generation.

Private Equity Secondaries

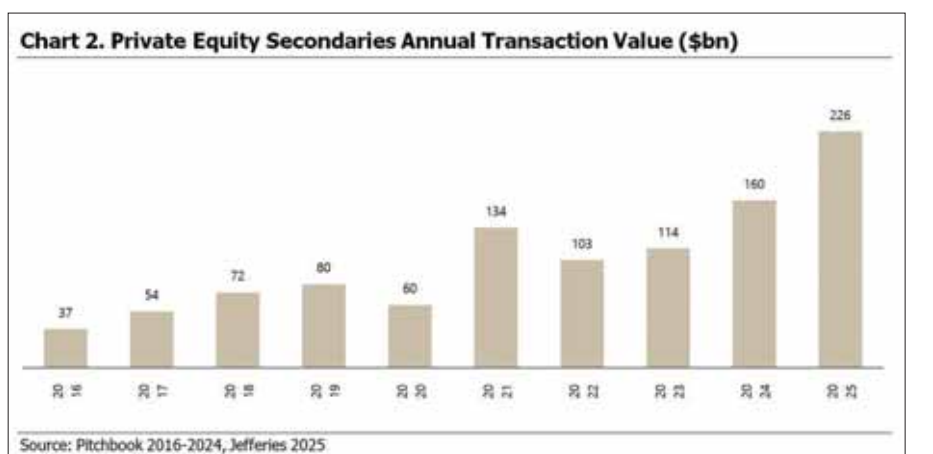
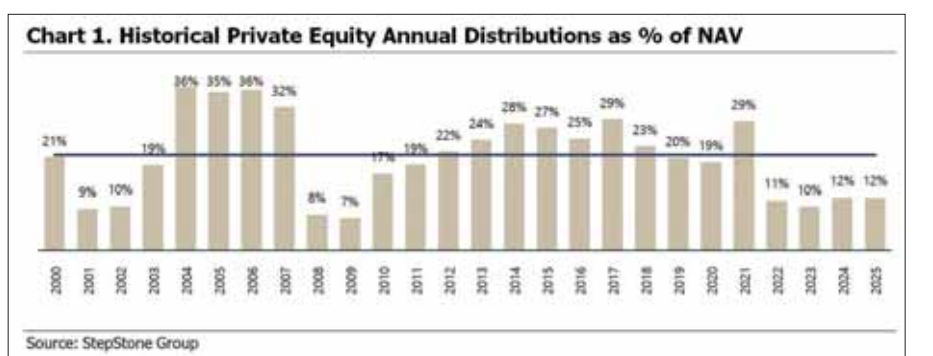
Against this backdrop, the private equity secondaries market has emerged as a key mechanism supporting liquidity within the asset class. Secondary transactions allow investors to transfer existing fund interests or company exposures without requiring underlying exits. Institutional investors utilize secondaries to rebalance allocations, while fund managers employ continuation vehicles to provide liquidity options to investors and extend ownership of high-performing assets in a slower exit environment.

For buyers, secondaries offer access to more mature assets with greater cash flow visibility and shorter duration risk compared with traditional primary market commitments. As private markets adjust to a new distribution environment, secondaries have evolved as a liquidity solution and an investment strategy positioned to benefit from the private equity market’s ongoing transition.

The New Private Equity Liquidity Regime

The recent slowdown in private equity distributions may represent more than a cyclical interruption and the industry may be transitioning toward a new liquidity regime shaped by longer holding periods and greater reliance on alternative exit pathways.

With this evolving landscape, secondary markets, continuation vehicles and alternative realization strategies are likely to play a more permanent role in maintaining capital mobility across private equity portfolios. The industry’s “liquidity moment” therefore reflects not



only a response to recent market conditions, but a broader maturation of private markets.

The shift in private equity liquidity dynamics carries important implications for private wealth investors. The recent slowdown in distributions highlights that liquidity management is becoming an increasingly central consideration in private market portfolio construction.

For high-net-worth investors and family offices, pacing commitments across vintages, strategies and liquidity profiles is increasingly important as realization timelines have become less predictable. In response, semi-liquid private market structures have gained traction within the wealth segment. These structures aim to balance long-term private market exposure with periodic subscription and redemption mechanisms, offering greater flexibility compared with traditional closed-end funds. For private wealth portfolios, success increasingly depends not only on manager selection and return expectations, but also on liquidity planning aligned with investors’ broader financial objectives.

Key Takeaways

■ Private equity has matured into a core component of diversified portfolios, with AUM of ~\$9.8 trillion as of 2025.

■ Liquidity dynamics have shifted. Distributions have fallen sharply from historical averages, driven by reduced exit activity.

■ Slower Distributions combined with ongoing capital calls have resulted in overallocations, highlighting investors’ need for liquidity.

■ Secondaries and continuation vehicles are now structural tools for investors to manage liquidity.

■ Semi-liquid structures expand wealth access complementing secondaries while balancing long-term exposure with portfolio cash flow needs.

■ Strategic portfolio planning is critical and in this “liquidity moment”, success depends on manager selection as well as liquidity planning.

Disclaimer

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Kuwait Airways resumes Dhaka flights via Dammam

KUWAIT, April 18, (KUNA): Kuwait Airways announced on Friday the resumption of its commercial flights to and from Dhaka via Dammam International Airport in Saudi Arabia, operating two weekly flights starting April 24.

Acting CEO Abdulwahab Al-Shatti said the relaunch reflects Dhaka’s importance to passengers, noting ongoing plans to expand destinations, as part of routes recently operated via Dammam including London, Cairo, Istanbul, Lahore, Amman, Mumbai, Delhi and others.

He added that the airline currently operates 14 destinations and continues restoring routes amid rising demand, while maintaining efficient operations to ensure smooth travel movement and enhance connectivity for passengers.

Al-Shatti noted Kuwait Airways has introduced visa application services to Saudi Arabia for residents subject to prior booking, affirming coordination with relevant authorities to ensure optimal operations and prioritize passenger and crew safety.

For Al-Hassad and Al-Rabeh accounts

KFH announces winners of the postponed monthly draws for Q1

KUWAIT CITY, April 18: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) announced the winners of the postponed monthly draws for the Al-Hassad and Al-Rabeh accounts for Q1 2026. Through these accounts, KFH continues to reward its customers, with Al-Hassad offering total annual prizes of KD 3 million, while Al-Rabeh grants KD 1,000 to 30 winners each month, underscoring KFH's commitment to strengthening customer trust and rewarding loyalty.

KFH conducted 6 previously postponed draws, awarding 93 winners with cash prizes amounting to KD 390,000. The prize distribution was as follows:

■ Al-Hassad Account: 3 draws were held, announcing 3 winners who received KD 100,000 each.

■ Al-Rabeh Account: 3 draws were held, crowning 90 winners with KD

1,000 each. Deputy General Manager Products at KFH, **Nehal Al-Musallam** said that the Al-Hassad account's new campaign brings significant prizes, with the grand prize totaling KD 1.5 million, in addition to a semi-annual prize of KD 500,000 and a monthly prize of KD 100,000.

She added that this campaign has been running since January this year, in conjunction with the resumed draws campaigns on investment accounts which are conducted in coordination with independent auditors to ensure high levels of integrity and transparency.

KFH is interested in developing the benefits of the Al-Hassad account, which is one of the prominent banking products KFH offers thanks to the remarkable demand this product has



achieved and the trust it has gained from customers over the past years.

Al-Hassad grants customers increasing winning chances. Each customer has one chance for every KD 50. This opportunity increases when the customer retains his/her account balance for longer period, in order to be eligible for the KFH Millionaire title.

Meanwhile Al-Rabeh account is a salary account. To qualify for the Al-Rabeh account draw, customers must deposit three salaries during the three months preceding the draw date, while maintaining a minimum balance of KD 50 at the end of each of those months. The account qualifies customers for monthly draws of KD 1,000 awarded to 30 winners.

KFH is committed to providing top-tier banking products that meet the aspirations of customers and provide

them with distinguished opportunities to win cash prizes, increasing the demand of the account as a savings and investment option. Al-Hassad account is based on the Wakala investment principle. On such a basis, the Bank invests the entire account balance at an expected profit rate agreed upon in advance with the customer. The account also offers draw campaign and prizes which are featured on monthly, semi-annual and annual basis.

Customers can open Al-Hassad account to benefit from the grand draws program, adding that customers can open the account through KFH branches, KFHOnline and ATMs. They can benefit from the opportunities, including chances to win valuable prizes in upcoming draws, alongside a wide range of banking products and services designed to enhance their overall banking experience.

Performance driven by restructuring, efficiency, and stronger capital structure

ACICO Group's annual general meeting approves 2025 results, affirms continued progress on restructuring and growth priorities

KUWAIT CITY, April 18: ACICO Group K.S.C.P. held its Annual General Meeting for the financial year ended 31 December 2025 on Thursday, 16 April 2026, chaired by Mr. Emad Abdullah Al-Essa, Chairman of the Board, with a shareholder attendance rate of 74.7%.

During the meeting, the General Assembly approved all items on the agenda, including the Board of Directors' report, the auditor's report, and the audited financial statements for the financial year ended 31 December 2025, in addition to the corporate governance report, the audit committee report, Board remuneration, and the appointment of the auditor for the financial year ending 31 December 2026, in accordance with the approved agenda.

In 2025, the Group recorded a net profit of KWD 2.9 million, compared to a net loss of KWD 11.2 million in 2024, reflecting continued progress in the implementation of its restructuring and transformation plan, which was launched to restore profitability, strengthen financial sustainability, and improve operational efficiency across the Group's business segments.

Operating revenues increased to KWD 75.6 million in 2025, compared to KWD 66.6 million in 2024, representing growth of 14%, reflecting improved operating performance and continued momentum across the Group's core activities.

Across its construction and building materials operations, ACICO delivered strong growth during 2025, supported by improved execution, stronger demand, and better utilisation across key business lines. The Contracting division recorded the strongest growth momentum within the Group, with revenue doubling year-on-year, reflecting the Group's increasing strategic focus on this segment and the business's ability to translate market opportunities into tangible results.

As part of its financial restructuring efforts, ACICO continued during 2025 to take tangible steps to strengthen its capital structure and reduce indebtedness, recording gains from loan settlements of KWD 9.7 million. These measures also contributed to reducing the Group's on-balance-sheet debt by KWD 69.4 million, further strengthening its financial position and improving its capital structure.

Total equity increased to KWD 29.7 million in 2025, compared to KWD 27.8 million in 2024, while total liabilities declined to KWD 211.4 million, reflecting continued progress in deleveraging and improving the balance sheet structure. Finance costs also decreased from KWD 15.5 million to KWD 7.3 million, reflecting improved funding efficiency and lower financing burdens. Total assets stood at KWD 241 million at year-end, compared to KWD 315 million as at 31 December 2024, primarily due to debt settlements, the strategic reorganisation of certain assets, and the disposal of



ACICO Group's annual general meeting.

selected assets as part of the ongoing restructuring programme.

Operationally, 2025 reflected continued momentum across ACICO's integrated industrial and construction platform. Within its manufacturing operations, the Group continued to support projects in Kuwait through its specialised products and industrial solutions, while further enhancing production efficiency and strengthening operating capabilities in line with market requirements.

The year also witnessed a number of operational improvements and capacity enhancement initiatives across several facilities, including the expansion of hollowcore production capacity within the precast segment, and the development of storage facilities to support smoother operations and better utilisation of production capacity. In parallel, ACICO achieved important quality milestones, with its AAC production facilities in Kuwait and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia obtaining the Kuwait Quality Mark, making the Group the first AAC producer in the GCC to receive this certification.

Within its contracting and construction operations, ACICO continued to expand its project portfolio during the year and strengthen its presence across housing and infrastructure-related projects. Execution also remained active, supported by stronger collaboration with contractors and project developers, contributing to continued business growth across the construction segment.

Supporting these activities, ACICO continued to benefit from its integrated operating model, which combines manufacturing capabilities, construc-

tion expertise, and internal logistics coordination within a unified platform. During the year, the Group also implemented several initiatives aimed at enhancing fleet efficiency, upgrading selected equipment, and improving maintenance standards, contributing to stronger operational coordination, improved efficiency, and lower operating costs.

Commenting on the year's results, Mr. Emad Abdullah Al-Essa, Chairman of ACICO Group, said: "ACICO Group's performance in 2025 reflects continued progress in executing our strategic priorities, most notably financial restructuring, enhancing operational efficiency, and reinforcing a more sustainable and market-aligned business model. The year's results also demonstrate tangible momentum across our core business segments, supported by stronger operating coordination, improved production efficiency, and continued execution across housing and infrastructure-related projects."

He added: "As we move into the next phase, ACICO remains focused on preserving financial discipline, strengthening operational reliability, enhancing production and execution capabilities, and pursuing selective growth opportunities aligned with demand across Kuwait and the wider GCC. Our integrated business model continues to provide a strong platform to support housing and infrastructure development efficiently and consistently, while reinforcing ACICO's position as a trusted industrial and construction partner."

As part of its efforts to support homeowners and enhance customer experience, ACICO also expanded its

partnerships during 2025 with a number of local banks, including National Bank of Kuwait, Kuwait Finance House, and Warba Bank, to provide financing solutions and related benefits that support customers throughout the home-building journey, from planning through execution and delivery.

The end of 2025 also marked the election of a new Board of Directors, signalling the beginning of a new phase built on stronger foundations for growth and development. The new Board has commenced its mandate with a vision focused on enhancing operational efficiency, developing production capacity, increasing market share through new projects, and reviewing the Group's strategic plan for the coming years to ensure alignment with national development priorities and sustainable value creation for shareholders.

The Group confirmed that its priorities for the next phase will centre on continuing restructuring initiatives, reinforcing financial discipline, strengthening the balance sheet, improving working capital efficiency, enhancing operational performance across manufacturing, logistics, and construction activities, and pursuing measured growth opportunities in support of sustainable and balanced long-term value creation.

In closing, Mr. Al-Essa expressed his appreciation to the Group's shareholders for their continued trust and support, and extended his gratitude to the Board of Directors, executive management, and employees for their efforts and commitment, which have contributed to advancing ACICO's transformation and laying stronger foundations for the next stage.

Highlighting affordability push

Trump courts Las Vegas voters with tax-cut pitch

LAS VEGAS, April 18, (AP) — President Donald Trump is betting that the tax cuts he signed into law last year will resonate with voters in Las Vegas, where he highlighted his tax breaks for tipped workers in an appeal targeted at this year's midterm elections.

Workers who earn tips and overtime are seeing bigger returns this tax season, but those savings and others resulting from the "One Big Beautiful Bill Act" that Trump signed last year have been eaten away by higher gas prices driven by the Iran war.

The president recalled in his remarks how a woman in Las Vegas gave him the idea to make tips tax-free, a move that he said is now helping "thousands of Nevada waiters and waitresses, casino dealers, bartenders, bellmen, barbers, caddies."

"Every single American at every income level has more money in their pockets this week because of the Republican tax policies," Trump said. "And we got to win the midterms. If we don't, these policies are going to be taken away from you."

The president's rare trip out West comes as Trump faces growing political pressure to wrap up the war and focus on a message that helps his party as they try to defend their congressional majorities in November's elections. Trump insisted before departing from the White House for Las Vegas that gas prices were "not very high" compared with what he thought they would be because of the Iran war.

On Friday, Trump will hold an event in Phoenix with conservative political group Turning Point USA. But his first stop is in Las Vegas where he will hold a roundtable with several police officers who have benefited from new tax breaks on overtime, along with a barber and a casino pit supervisor, who got to claim the new tax breaks on tips.

The Treasury Department said Wednesday that the average tax refund this year has been over \$3,400, up about \$340 from a year ago.

In Las Vegas, the entertainment industry has been the city's financial lifeblood and many workers depend on gratuities from visitors.

But it's also a city of commuters, including the tipped workers who drive to their jobs at glitzy casinos. Gasoline is averaging \$5 a gallon in Las Vegas, up 28% from a year ago, according to AAA.

Nicholas Delaney, an airline attendant who lives in the Las Vegas suburb of Henderson and said he did not vote for the president in 2024, said he thinks Trump is doing a "terrible" job when it comes to the cost of living. He thought the tax break for tips was a good policy, but is concerned about the cost of groceries and gas.

"I gotta spend over \$100 for a full tank of gas, 13 gallons? Crazy," Delaney said.

Paula Goodman, a bartender in a Henderson casino, said the cost of living is her biggest concern right now, adding that she spends more than \$400 a week on groceries for her family.

But Goodman, who voted for the president, said she thought he is "doing a pretty good damn job," and doesn't blame him for high gas prices, which she portrayed as just a fluctuation. As a bartender, she said she personally appreciated the tax savings on tips she brings home.

"Every little penny nowadays is, like, huge," she said. "You've seen diesel, right? \$6.11."

The White House said Trump is focused on tax cuts, deregulation and boosting U.S. energy production to drive down prices, and describes high gas prices as a temporary disruption from the war in Iran.

"Tens of millions of Americans are benefiting this tax season from

the president's signature provisions" in the tax law, said White House spokesman Kush Desai, saying that shows "how the administration hasn't lost focus on delivering on our affordability agenda at home."

Even so, the conflict has made things less affordable. The Bank of America Institute looked at its deposit and spending data and in a Tuesday analysis concluded that "the average increase in tax refunds could cover the average increase in gasoline spending for at least five months."

Kathy Bostjancic, chief economist at Nationwide, the insurance and financial services company, said last week in an analysis that "the steep rise in gasoline prices looks likely to completely offset the increased tax funds windfall with households," stressing that the money back would likely prevent a sharper drop in consumer spending.

Trump's economic message focusing on the tax breaks has also been drowned out this week by distractions from the president himself, who angered even some of his own supporters when he got into a public fight with the pope and posted a now-deleted image on social media depicting himself as Jesus.

GOP strategist Ron Bonjean said among Republicans, "the frustration and concern is growing every week about whether or not we will be able to hold onto the House this November."

It takes a lot of repetition for a message like promoting the tax bill to break through to voters, but Trump's tendency to drift into other subjects can dilute that, Bonjean said. Trump, who has at times dismissed affordability concerns as "a hoax," and "con job" from Democrats, has to acknowledge the economic realities people are facing now if he wants to help his party this November, Bonjean said.

"He absolutely has to talk about his plan to bring down high gasoline costs, or else he's lost his own message. It won't be credible just to talk about no taxes on tips," Bonjean said.

While the president has said he thinks the war with Iran will end soon, a deal to resolve it has not yet emerged, with the U.S. and Iran still proffering stances that are far apart.

Trump on Sunday said in a Fox News Channel interview that gas prices "could be the same or maybe a little bit higher" by the November midterms.

By Wednesday, in another Fox News interview, Trump walked back that comment. "I think they'll be much lower" before the election, on the assumption the war will be long over.

"When that's settled, gas prices are going to go down tremendously," Trump said.

Hours later at the White House, Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent was less rosy, predicting that gas prices will fall sometime this summer, depending on how the negotiations with Iran go.

"I'm optimistic that sometime between June 20th and September 20th, that we can have \$3 gas again," Bessent told reporters.

Joe Spica, a Democratic candidate for the state legislature and a steward of The Culinary Workers Union, which represents about 60,000 hospitality workers in Las Vegas and Reno, said Las Vegas workers are feeling belt-tightening that is happening all over, because that means fewer visitors to Las Vegas, and fewer tips for workers.

"Something has to change, and it has to change fast," Spica, a bellman at the Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas, said at a news conference Thursday organized by the union and the Nevada Democratic Party.

"The policies of this administration are hurting Las Vegas," he said.

Mythos model sparks national security concerns

White House meets Anthropic over new AI model

WASHINGTON, April 18, (AP) — White House chief of staff Susie Wiles on Friday sounded out Anthropic CEO Dario Amodei about the artificial intelligence company's new Mythos model, which has attracted attention from the federal government for how it could transform national security and the economy.

A White House official, who requested anonymity to discuss the meeting ahead of time, said the administration is engaging with advanced AI labs about their models and the security of software. The official stressed that any new technology that might be used by the federal government would require a technical period for evaluation.

The White House said afterward that the meeting was productive and constructive, as opportunities for collaboration were discussed as well as the goal of balancing innovation and safety.

Anthropic said in a statement that Amodei's meeting included senior administration officials and explored how the San Francisco-based company and the "U.S. government can work together on key shared priorities such as cybersecurity, America's lead in the AI race, and AI safety." The company said it was "looking forward to continuing these discussions."

The meeting came after tensions had run hot be-

tween the Trump administration and the safety-conscious Anthropic, which has sought to put guardrails on the development of AI to minimize any potential risks and maximize its economic and national security benefits for the U.S.

President Donald Trump tried to stop all federal agencies from using Anthropic's chatbot Claude over the company's contract dispute with the Pentagon, with Trump saying in a February social media post that the administration "will not do business with them again!" When Trump was asked Friday while in Arizona if Anthropic had a meeting at the White House, the president said he had "no idea."

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth also sought to declare Anthropic a supply chain risk, an unprecedented move against a U.S. company that Anthropic has challenged in two federal courts. The company said it wanted assurance the Pentagon would not use its technology in fully autonomous weapons and the surveillance of Americans. Hegseth said the company must allow for any uses the Pentagon deemed lawful.

U.S. District Judge Rita Lin issued a ruling in March that blocked the enforcement of Trump's social media directive ordering all federal agencies to stop using Anthropic products.

Anthropic has said the new Mythos model it an-

nounced on April 7 is so "strikingly capable" that it is limiting its use to select customers because of its ability to surpass human cybersecurity experts in finding and exploiting computer vulnerabilities.

And while some industry experts have questioned whether Anthropic's claims of too-powerful AI technology were a marketing ploy, even some of the company's sharpest critics have suggested that Mythos might represent a further advancement in AI.

One influential Anthropic critic, David Sacks, who was the White House's AI and crypto czar, said people should "take this seriously."

"Anytime Anthropic is scaring people, you have to ask, 'Is this a tactic? Is this part of their Chicken Little routine? Or is it real?'" Sacks said on the "All-In" podcast he co-hosts with other tech investors. "With cyber, I actually would give them credit in this case and say this is more on the real side."

Sacks said: "It just makes sense that as the coding models become more and more capable, they are more capable at finding bugs. That means they're more capable at finding vulnerabilities. That means they're more capable at stringing together multiple vulnerabilities and creating an exploit."

The model's potential benefits, as well as its risks, have also attracted attention outside the U.S.



Natalie Portman appears at the photocall for the film 'Arco' at the 78th International Film Festival, Cannes, Southern France, on May 16, 2025. (AP)

Natalie Portman expecting her third child, first with Destable

LOS ANGELES, April 18, (AP) — Natalie Portman is expecting her third child at age 44.

The actor told Harper's Bazaar she is "very grateful" to be welcoming a child with partner Tanguy Destable, 45, a French electronic music producer known by his stage name, Tepr.

"Tanguy and I are very excited," she told the outlet. "I'm just very grateful. I know it's such a privilege and a miracle."

The actor shares two older children, son Aleph, 14, and daughter Amalia, 9, with ex-husband Benjamin Millepied. Portman and Millepied divorced in 2024.

A publicist for Portman, Keleigh Morgan, confirmed news of the pregnancy but did not give further details.

Portman has spoken about how she grew up the child of a fertility doctor.

"I grew up hearing about how hard it is to get pregnant," she told Harper's Bazaar. "I have so many people I love who've had such a hard time with it that I want to be respectful around that as well. It's such a beautiful, joyous thing, and it's also not an easy thing."

Country songwriting giant behind generations of hits

Don Schlitz, songwriter of 'The Gambler,' dies at 73

NEW YORK, April 18, (AP) — Don Schlitz, the storied country music songwriter known for such hits as "The Gambler," "On the Other Hand" and "Forever and Ever, Amen," died Thursday at a Nashville hospital. He was 73.

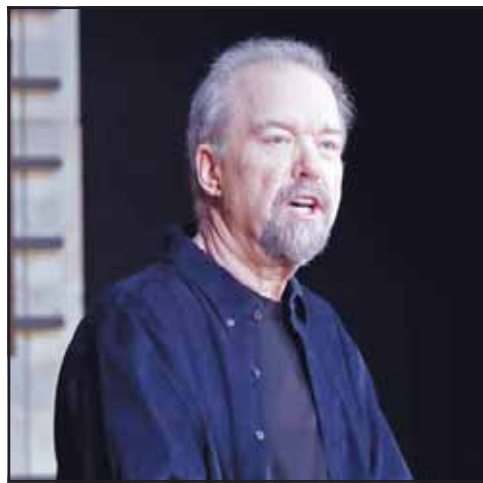
The cause of death was not immediately known. A press release from the Grand Ole Opry described it as a sudden illness.

The two-time Grammy Award winner was inducted into the Songwriters Hall of Fame, the Nashville Songwriters Hall of Fame and the Country Music Hall of Fame. "I will never be able to believe that I deserve this, unless I receive it as a representative of my family, my mentors, my collaborators, my promoters and my friends," Schlitz said in 2017, when he learned of the Country Music Hall of Fame honor. "That's the only way I can deal with this."

Schlitz made his Grand Ole Opry debut in 2017 and was later inducted in 2022. He is the only non-artist to receive the honor in the Opry's 100 years. The historic venue's Saturday night show was to be dedicated in his honor.

He was named ASCAP Country Songwriter of the Year for four consecutive years, from 1988 through 1991. He also wrote music and lyrics for "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer," the 1999 Broadway musical.

Schlitz's songs are widely considered some of the most unwavering in country music, and have been recorded by such hitmakers as Kenny Rogers ("The Gambler," "The Greatest"), Randy Travis ("On the Other Hand," "Forever and Ever, Amen"), The Judds ("I Know Where I'm



Songwriter Don Schlitz speaks at a news conference announcing him as an inductee into the Country Music Hall of Fame, in Nashville, Tenn., on April 5, 2017. (AP)

and certified five times platinum by the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA), opened doors for country music in the '70s, a track that was not only a huge genre hit but also a pop crossover one.

As Rogers said when he inducted Schlitz into the Songwriters Hall of Fame in 2012, "Don doesn't just write songs. He writes careers."

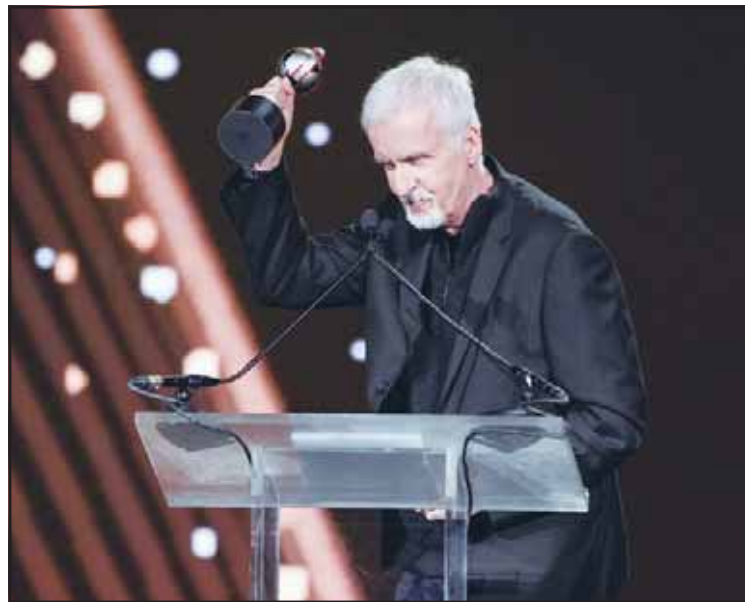
"We are heartbroken by the news of the passing of Don Schlitz. Don loved his family, his home state of North Carolina, and above all, songs and songwriters. He carried that love into every room, every stage and every lyric he ever wrote," Sarah Trahern, Country Music Association CEO, wrote in a statement Friday. "Not long ago, we shared a dinner, and as we were leaving, Don picked up a guitar and began to play. That is how I will always remember him, smiling and with a guitar in his hand. His legacy lives on through his music and the many artists and writers he inspired. He will be deeply missed."

"Don Schlitz's place as a songwriting great would be secure had he never written 'The Gambler' or had he only written 'The Gambler,'" Kyle Young, CEO of the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, wrote in a statement Friday. "Nashville was richer for his presence and is lesser for his absence."

Schlitz is survived by his wife Stacey, daughter Cory Dixon and her husband Matt Dixon, son Pete Schlitz and his wife Christian Webb Schlitz, grandchildren Roman, Gia, Isla and Lilah, brother Brad Schlitz and sister Kathy Hinkle.



Zoey Deutch (left) accepts the CinemaCon Vanguard Award, James Cameron (center) accepts the Cinema United Spirit of the Industry Award and Catherine Laga'aia (right) accepts the Rising Star of 2026 Award during the Big Screen Achievement Awards during CinemaCon on Thursday, April 16, 2026, at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas. (AP)



LaKeith Stanfield accepts the Star of the Year Award. (AP)



Adam Scott accepts the Award of Excellence in Acting.



Queen Latifah accepts the Cultural Impact in Film Award.

CinemaCon

Marvel unites Avengers and X-Men for the first time

Disney brings blockbuster spectacle to CinemaCon

LAS VEGAS, April 18, (AP) — The Walt Disney Co. staged a blockbuster-sized presentation for theater owners Thursday at CinemaCon, showing the opening to the new Star Wars film and new footage from "Avengers: Doomsday," featuring the return of Chris Evans as Captain America.

Robert Downey Jr. was there to introduce the trailer for the film, which brings together the Avengers and the X-Men together in a Marvel Studios film for the first time.

"What I want to do is give away like 30,000 spoilers right now," Downey said.

He's returning to the franchise not as Iron Man, but as the main antagonist Victor Von Doom, or Doctor Doom.

Kevin Feige said they'll be re-releasing "Avengers: Endgame" in September in the lead up to "Doomsday," which, he said, "picks up where 'Endgame' left off." It opens on Dec. 18.

"I think we might have nailed it," Downey said.

Evans said he'd only come back if there was a good reason, and Doctor Doom was a good reason.

"The Mandalorian and Grogu" director Jon Favreau showed the audience the opening of the first Star Wars movie in seven years. The film, which opens on May 22, begins with a title card saying the Galactic Empire has fallen and ex-warlords remain scattered throughout and, in the Outer Rim, the Mandalorian and Grogu hunt them down.

The sequence shows one man, and child, battle against one such ex-warlord, with a big fight on a snowy cliff as they attempt to take down what looks like AT-AT walk-



Left: Cast member Robert Downey Jr., (from left), director Anthony Russo, and director Joe Russo of the upcoming film 'Avengers: Doomsday,' speak during the Walt Disney Studios presentation. Right: Tom Hanks, left, and Tim Allen, cast members of the upcoming film 'Toy Story 5,' speak during the Walt Disney Studios presentation at CinemaCon on Thursday, April 16, at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas. (AP)



ers. Later, Sigourney Weaver's character scolds the bounty hunter for his messy job, which left the target dead and them with no new information.

She also proposes a new mission, which would put him back in the orbit of the Hutts, with Jabba's heir Rotta the Hutt (Jeremy Allen White). "Star Wars" made me fall in love with movies," Favreau said. "I hope that our excitement and love and joy of Star Wars translates to a new generation of fans."

He said that there are over 49 minutes of sequences filmed for large format screens.

Tom Hanks and Tim Allen made an appearance on behalf of "Toy Story 5," in what is apparently their first time ever at CinemaCon. The two actors joked about seeing footage of them voicing Woody and Buzz for the original film, which came out in 1995, and saying they look like their

grandkids.

Hanks said one of his iconic lines, "you are a toy" and Allen responded with one of his, "you are a sad, strange little man."

They also showed a new scene showing Woody's arrival back to Bonnie's house after his adventures with Bo Peep. The film opens on June 19.

Dwane Johnson helped close out the presentation to promote the live-action "Moana," in which he reprises his role as Maui.

He said his character was inspired by his grandfather, holding up a picture of him on his phone, describing him as charismatic with a "wicked sense of humor" and a "one of a kind spirit." He also loved to sing. Frank Sinatra's "My Way," he said, was a favorite.

The new Moana, Catherine Laga'aia, also appeared on stage

with Johnson.

"I grew up watching 'Moana' with my family," she said. "I can't believe I had this experience."

Disney releases dominated the box office in 2025 with nearly \$2.5 billion in domestic ticket sales and \$6.6 billion globally with hits like "Lilo & Stitch."

"Zootopia 2" and "Avatar: Fire and Ash." A box office driver for many years, it's fitting that Disney is closing CinemaCon.

Already this year, Disney has boosted the box office with its original Pixar hit "Hoppers," which has made over \$355 million globally to date. Kicking off the summer movie season, which begins the first weekend in May, is not a Marvel movie, however. It's a legacy sequel from their 20th Century Studios: "The Devil Wears Prada 2." Gird your loins.

Disney's impact on the exhibition industry cannot be understated. Last year its releases made up over 27.5% of the annual domestic box office alone. The studio also has a 60-day exclusive theatrical window, the most robust in Hollywood.

The Walt Disney Co. is facing its own challenges too. On Tuesday, the company began mass layoffs in its ranks, expected to total around 1,000 with some of the cuts coming from the movie studio and its marketing department.

Orson Welles once said, "if you want a happy ending, that depends, of course, on where you stop your story." And, so, for an exhibition industry that operates on small margins, and with the box office still down around 20% from its pre-pandemic norms, Disney is about as close as the conference can get to going out on a high note.

Variety

LOS ANGELES: Rapper Tory Lanez has sued the California prison system, saying he never should have been housed with a fellow inmate who stabbed him 16 times last year.

Lanez, 33, whose legal name is Daystar Peterson, filed the federal lawsuit seeking \$100 million in damages on Tuesday against the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation and the warden and guards at the prison in Tehachapi where he was being held. The suit says he was stabbed 16 times in the back, torso, head and face in an "unprovoked life-threatening attack" by inmate Santino Casio, who used a homemade "shank." Lanez had a collapsed lung and had to be airlifted to a hospital, it says.

Lanez is serving a 10-year sentence for shooting hip-hop

star Megan Thee Stallion in the feet after a dramatic and high-profile 2022 trial in Los Angeles.

Prison officials say he was attacked May 12, 2025, by Casio, who is serving a life sentence for second-degree murder and first-degree attempted murder. Casio had another 2008 conviction for assault by a prisoner with a deadly weapon and another in 2018 for manufacturing a deadly weapon.

"The choice to house Casio with Peterson was known or should have been a known danger," the lawsuit says. It alleges that correctional officers' response was slow, and no special meas-

ures like flash grenades or smoke bombs were used to stop Casio. It says the institution housed the men together despite the rapper's "high-profile celebrity status," which made him a target. There is no record of Casio being charged in the assault. An attorney who represented him previously did not respond to messages seeking comment at the time.

Lanez was transferred to another prison, the California Men's Colony, in San Luis Obispo County.

The lawsuit also says the defendants unlawfully seized his songbooks with unpublished lyrics that are of great future commercial value and refused to return them. In response to a request for comment, Department of Corrections spokesperson Ike Dodson said the agency does not comment on pending litigation.

The lawsuit was first reported by TMZ. Lanez was convicted of three felonies in December 2022: assault with a

semiautomatic firearm; having a loaded, unregistered firearm in a vehicle; and discharging a firearm with gross negligence.

A California court rejected his appeal in November.

Megan, whose legal name is Megan Pete, testified at trial that in July 2020, after they left a party at Kylie Jenner's Hollywood Hills home, Lanez fired the gun at the back of her feet and shouted for her to dance as she walked away from an SUV in which they had been riding.

She had bullet fragments surgically removed from both feet. It was not until months after the incident that she publicly identified Lanez as the person who fired the gun.

The 32-year-old Canadian Lanez began releasing mixtapes in 2009 and saw a steady rise in popularity, moving on to major label albums, two of which reached the top 10 on Billboard's charts. (AP)



Lanez

Gemini helps Google catch 99% of violating ads

AI fuels scammers, but Google is using it as a tool to fight back

NEW YORK, April 18, (AP) - From an advertisement for an herbal remedy that promises to cure all to a video featuring a voice that sounds just like a movie star, you've surely encountered spam and scam advertisements online. And they have likely been created with artificial intelligence.

The accessibility of generative AI tools has exacerbated the perennial issue of online spam and scams that's persisted since the advent of the internet. And while creators of such content have access to this ever-evolving technology, tech giants are also honing their internal AI systems to fight the deluge.

"It's not that this is a new problem. It is an old problem, supercharged," said Nate Elliott, a principal analyst at Emarketer. "The biggest difference is the speed and the scale that AI offers both the good actors and the bad actors."

The FBI's recent Internet Crime Report detailed receiving more than 22,000 complaints reporting AI-related scams last year, with the total losses associated with those complaints exceeding \$893 million.

Google released its annual ads safety report Thursday, ac-

knowledging that scammers are increasingly trying to run sophisticated, malicious ads but emphasizing that its AI-powered tools are strong defenders.

Google's generative AI technology known as Gemini was able to catch over 99% of policy-violating ads before they ever reached an audience last year.

In 2025, the company blocked or removed more than 8.3 billion ads, including 602 million ads with policy violations that are most closely associated with scams. That's up from a total of 5.1 billion ads blocked or removed in 2024. About 24.9 million advertiser accounts were suspended last year, more than 4 million of those for scam-related activity.

Google has long been a dominant force in the digital advertising world. The company saw more than \$200 billion in net worldwide ad revenues last year according to data from Emarketer, but the research firm predicts Meta will outperform Google in 2026.

Google said it has a team of thousands of people working to create and enforce its advertising policies at scale. Keerat Sharma, Google's vice president and general manager of ads

privacy and safety, said the advancement of generative AI as a part of Google's defense system has led to more powerful results in combating problematic content.

Gemini now allows the team to analyze hundreds of billions of signals - including account age, behavioral cues and campaign patterns - to better understand the "nuance of what an advertiser's intent actually is," Sharma said. This means they're able to largely determine legitimacy or whether an advertiser's intent could be malicious. Reaching that nuance has also helped keep real businesses' ads online, with the report detailing that incorrect advertiser suspensions were reduced by 80% last year.

Gemini has also helped with speed, Sharma said. Analyzing the digital assets in an ad used to take anywhere from a few seconds to minutes or even longer, but now, Sharma said that can happen in milliseconds. That "allows us to stop things right at the front door," he said. Google also relies on several other defense mechanisms, like an expansive advertiser verification program, that work together to fortify protections.

The kind of content that Google is aiming to block and remove is vast and varied. Bad ads could take shape as "all the forms of spam and scam that have always existed, just people are able to produce them faster and at higher volume," Elliott said.

A Google spokesperson said the company doesn't report the number of AI-generated ads it blocks or removes because its enforcement isn't based on how an ad was created, but rather which policies it violates. The spokesperson noted that many AI-generated ads come from legitimate businesses and comply with Google's policies.

Experts who spoke with The Associated Press said the push and pull between AI-powered scams and AI-powered defense mechanisms will endure as the technology advances.

"We're already close, but it's going to be heading even more to (where) it's just AI versus AI," said Matt Seitz, the director of the AI Hub at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. "The volume of this problem is so large that it can't be managed directly through humans."

Variety

LONDON: For the skinny British musician, it was an unassuming trip to visit his sister's family in September 1963 in Benton, Illinois.

He went camping. He jammed with local musicians. He drank root beer delivered on roller skates. He shopped for records. He bought a guitar. Then he went home.

The next time people in Benton saw George Harrison, it was with 73 million others who tuned in to watch his band, The Beatles, make their US debut on "The Ed Sullivan Show" about four months later. The British Invasion, which changed popular music and American culture, was underway.

Now, the house where Harrison and his brother Peter stayed in Benton, 100 miles (160 kilometers) southeast of St. Louis, is for sale.

You'll forgive Beatles fans if they're worried about its future.

In 1995, the house at 113 M C A n n Street had a date with the wrecking ball. Activists, including Harrison's sister, Louise Harrison Caldwell,

who had moved away in the late 1960s, stepped in to save it.

Previously known for hosting the state's last public hanging in 1928, Benton, population 6,700, was built on Southern Illinois' rich veins of coal. Louise Caldwell moved to town when her husband, a mining engineer, got a job in what was then a thriving industry.

The house they chose is a five-bedroom bungalow built in 1935 with a brick facade across its wide front porch.

In the mid-1990s, a state agency bought the house from a subsequent owner with plans to flatten it for parking. Mega-fan Robert Bartel of Springfield, a Beatles author and documentarian, alerted the media and Fab Four loyalists.

Local investors repurchased it from the state and opened the Hard Day's Nite Bed and Breakfast, featuring the couch Harrison traded guitar licks on and stacks of other loaned Beatles memorabilia, including a bevy from Bartel.

The bed-and-breakfast closed in 2010. Benton resident Grady Adams has since operated it as regular bed-and-bath apartments but now wants to sell, listing it for \$105,000. Brian Calcaterra, Benton's director of economic development, suggested the city draft an ordinance to protect the house from demolition by a new owner, but Benton Mayor Lee Messersmith said the city council has not discussed the matter. (AP)

NEW YORK: Opening statements are set for Tuesday in Harvey Weinstein's third trial on a New York rape charge.

Four days of jury selection wrapped up Friday in the case against the former Hollywood powerbroker turned #MeToo pariah. A jury of seven men and five women will be tasked with deciding whether he raped a woman in a Manhattan hotel in 2013.

Weinstein has pleaded not guilty. The trial is expected to take up to four weeks.

At 73, the Oscar-winning former movie producer has spent much of the last decade fighting sexual assault cases in New York and Los Angeles.

He was convicted in both cities, but his initial 2020 New York conviction was overturned. Then jurors at a retrial last year deadlocked on the rape charge, while reaching a mixed verdict on sexual assault charges pertaining to two other women.

Weinstein denies all the allegations and has appealed his various convictions. He has been behind bars for six years to date. (AP)

Beijing Film Festival



Left: Juliette Binoche, (center) poses for photos with other members of the jury she heads at the 16th Beijing International Film Festival. Right: The cast and crew of the movie 'Crossing' arrive for the red carpet of the 16th Beijing International Film Festival held in Beijing, Thursday, April 16. (AP)



(Left photo): Zhou Jieqiong, (left) and Liu Yu; (right photo) Zhu Luoning (left) and Zhou Haoqi arrive for the red carpet of the 16th Beijing International Film Festival held in Beijing, Thursday, April 16. (AP)



People

Teen's death

D4vd arrested over 'murder'

LOS ANGELES, April 18, (AP) - Singer D4vd has been arrested on suspicion of killing a 14-year-old girl whose decomposed body was found seven months ago in his apparently abandoned Tesla, authorities said Thursday. D4vd's lawyers declared his innocence.

Los Angeles police said in a brief statement that homicide detectives arrested the 21-year-old Houston-born alt-pop singer,

whose legal name is David Burke, on suspicion of murder in the investigation of the killing of Celeste Rivas Hernandez.

Defense attorneys Blair Berk, Marilyn Bednarski and Regina Peter responded in an email: "Let us be clear - the actual evidence in this case will show that David Burke did not murder Celeste Rivas Hernandez and he was not the cause of her death."

Police said investigators would present a case to prosecutors at the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office on Monday. The office said in its own statement that it is aware of the arrest and its Major Crimes Division will review the case to determine whether there is enough evidence to file charges.

"There has been no indictment returned by any grand jury in this case and no criminal complaint filed. David has only been detained under suspicion. We will vigorously defend David's innocence," the defense lawyers added.

It was their first public statement on the case. Authorities did not publicly name Burke as a suspect until his arrest. He was being held in jail without bail.

The singer had been under investigation by an LA County grand jury looking into the death of Rivas Hernandez. The probe was officially secret, but its existence - and the designation of D4vd as its target - was revealed on Feb. 25 when his mother, father and brother filed an objection in a Texas court to subpoenas demanding they testify.

The long-dead body of Rivas Hernandez was found in a Tesla towed from the Hollywood Hills on Sept. 8, a day after she would have turned 15. She was a 13-year-old seventh grader when her family reported her missing in 2024 from her hometown of Lake Elsinore, about 70 miles (112 kilometers) southeast of Los Angeles. Authorities give her age as 14 when she was killed in court documents.

The 2023 Tesla Model Y was registered in the singer's name at the Texas address of his subpoenaed family members, according to court filings from prosecutors. It had been towed from an upscale neighborhood in the Hollywood Hills where it had been sitting, seemingly abandoned.

Police investigators searching the Tesla in a tow yard found a cadaver bag "covered with insects and a strong odor of decay," court documents said, and "detectives partially unzipped the bag and observed a decomposed head and torso."

Investigators from the Los Angeles County Medical Examiner's Office removed the bag and "discovered the arms and legs had been severed from the body," according to court documents.



D4vd

'Becoming Chinese' trend takes over global social media

Viral meme shows China's soft power here

BANGKOK, April 18, (AP) - Have you "become Chinese"?

In recent months, 20-somethings around the world have taken over social media with posts enjoining about how they're embracing Chinese ways of life. Videos proclaiming users are "Chinamazing," or "in a very Chinese time of their lives" - namely by drinking hot water with boiled goji berries, eating dumplings or wearing slippers in the house, or flying to China and gushing about its modern infrastructure - are racking up millions of views.

Along with its economic and geopolitical rise, China's government has tried for years to push its soft power on the global stage. But those official efforts never came close to the success the "becoming Chinese" meme is enjoying now.

Even senior Chinese diplomats have noted the trend. Xie Feng, the Chinese ambassador to the US, referenced the internet craze recently as he promoted a new visa-free transit policy and urged more Americans to "experience for yourselves a real, dynamic and panoramic China."

The TikTok trend is the latest example of how Chinese products and consumables are enjoying a cultural cachet they've never had before globally. From movies to music, Labubu toys and even ordinary habits like drinking hot water, Chinese things are now seen by many as cool.

"China is gaining real soft power, and you can see it most clearly in how Chinese culture and 'Chineseness' are becoming familiar, repeatable, and globally consumable in everyday life," said Shaoyu Yuan, a professor at the New York University School of Professional Studies' Center for Global Affairs.

"That legitimacy," Yuan said, "is earned through taste, utility, and entertainment."

That soft power rise is enabled by China's development in many industries: From manufacturing, where it holds a record \$1.2 trillion trade surplus with the rest of the world, to social media, where it developed the addictive algorithms that made TikTok, to its own consumer culture, where homegrown names compete head to head with global brands.

Sherry Zhu, a 23-year-old from New Jersey, posted a couple of videos last year joking about how if you liked noodles and hotpot and wore slippers at home you were Chinese. One of her videos was shared almost a million times in December, and other TikTokers quickly caught on with the "becoming Chinese" meme.

But the trend has also raised thornier questions. For many Chinese people who have long faced discrimination in the West, the internet's fascination with Chinese culture seems to be the latest form of cultural appropriation.

"Appreciation does not erase the racism that many Chinese people grew up with," said Elise Zeng, 28, from Brooklyn, New York. A video she posted critiquing the social media phenomenon was liked by more than 36,000 people.

She recalls how during the COVID-19 pandemic she was afraid for her parents stepping out of the house because they heard about people getting attacked just walking down the street. At the time, many Asians reported being assaulted or verbally abused by people who blamed East Asians for the spread of the virus.

"Those experiences don't just disappear because Chinese culture is suddenly cool and trendy," she said. Zhu acknowledged that she, too, has experienced bullying based on her identity, but said she was proud of her Chinese heritage. "I believe that visibility and cultural sharing can reduce misunderstanding over time," she said.

The meme is riding on a broader embrace of Chinese popular culture that's been building globally.

The frenzy over Labubus, the fuzzy ugly-cute dolls carried by the likes of Rihanna and other top celebrities, reached a peak last spring and summer, bringing a 300% rise in annual profit for Chinese parent company PopMart.

Several other cultural exports with more distinctly Chinese attributes have also found global success. On TikTok, the Chinese rapper known as Skaii isyourgod or "Lanlao" has gained fans around the world - even though he raps in Cantonese and with a thick regional accent, which many people in China wouldn't understand either.

But that didn't matter. Skaii isyourgod's single

"Blueprint Supreme" went viral last summer in China and abroad, amassing billions of views on TikTok globally.

Last year "Ne Zha 2," the animated blockbuster about a young god from a popular Chinese children's tale, became the highest grossing animated film of all time even before its release in North America.

Another success, the big budget video game "Black Myth: Wukong," was similarly based on a story familiar to many Chinese kids about an adventurous monkey hero. The game broke the record for most-played single-player game on Steam when 2.4 million people played it simultaneously after its release.

More recently, Chinese digital maps like Amap have gone viral on social media over standard ones like Apple or Google for their level of detail, such as the ability to inform users if they will be in the shade versus the sun.

Xi has long pushed for his government to promote Chinese soft power abroad, calling on officials to "tell China's story well" since 2013.

They have attempted to do so with ambitious projects like the multibillion-dollar Belt and Road initiative - a plan to build Chinese-funded infrastructure across the world - and investing in hundreds of Confucius Institutes.

But many Confucius Institutes, meant to be Beijing-funded centers teaching Chinese language and culture, have shut down in the West over concerns they were fronts for spying and propaganda, while the Belt and Road Initiative has been criticized as a debt trap by Western countries.

China's ascending hard power has been well documented. It is the dominant manufacturer in the green energy sector, most visibly with its electric vehicles, but also across solar energy. It has the world's second-largest military, behind the U.S. It is a manufacturing powerhouse, and its exports have swept the world.

Soft power, in contrast, is harder to quantify - or manufacture. China's government has been eager to capitalize on the latest social media trend and throw state support behind cultural moments after they've broken out.

'Solitary Gourmet' quietly grows into 11-season phenomenon

Star of Japanese hit series hopes to share its joy of eating

TOKYO, April 18, (AP) - Japanese TV program "The Solitary Gourmet" quietly started in a late-night slot 14 years ago featuring a suit-clad, middle-aged man's joy of solitary dining at a local eatery after finishing a day's work.

Yutaka Matsushige, the actor who plays main character Goro Inogashira, expected the show to end quietly in a short time. It didn't. "Kodoku no Gurume," the show's title in Japanese, steadily gained popularity across Japan and beyond and just began its 11th season this month.

Based on a popular comic by writer Masayuki Kusumi and artist Jiro Taniguchi,

"The Solitary Gourmet" last year became a film directed and written by Matsushige, who also stars in the big screen version.

"The drama is about a man just eating food," Matsushige said during a news conference in Tokyo on Thursday marking the start of the latest season. "But the simple notion of 'delicious' can go beyond the differences of language or ethnicity, something everyone can easily relate to."

The show has become a phenomenon across Asia and Matsushige has acquired a huge fan base in South Korea, Taiwan and China. After filming the movie in Japan, South Korea and Paris, he hopes to share the

drama with people around the world.

Each episode starts with Inogashira visiting a client, such as a downtown mom-and-pop store. When he finishes working, he suddenly feels hungry and looks for a local restaurant. His eating scenes are documentary style, with his inner monologue describing his happiness and sense of freedom in searching out and finding places that appeal to him and serve good food.

"To me, eating is about telling a story," Matsushige said, adding that his job as an actor is to show the story behind the eatery, highlighting the dishes and how they taste. "What I intend to do in this drama

is to show the audience to watch, imagine and enjoy."

At a time of global friction, the simple act of eating can help understanding between countries, said Matsushige, who is developing ideas for future projects outside Japan.

Asked who would be a good candidate to play his character in a Hollywood remake, Matsushige suggested Nicolas Cage based on his appearance, which he said is closer to the original manga comic than his.

Joking with the audience, he added, "George Clooney could also be a good candidate."



Yutaka Matsushige, a Japanese actor, speaks during a news conference on a popular TV drama where he stars, in Tokyo, Thursday, April 16. (AP)

Ads for GLP-1 drugs are flooding the internet

How to know if GLP-1 drugs sold online are safe to buy

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



By Sujith Ramachandran and Liang-Yuan (Claire) Lin
University of Mississippi

If you watched the Super Bowl in 2026, you likely saw Serena Williams share her weight loss journey on GLP-1 medications in a commercial.

Like millions of others around the US, if you've ever considered taking one of these drugs, you probably went online to learn more about where you can get them and how much they cost.

Online searches for GLP-1 medications like Ozempic and Wegovy have risen dramatically since 2022. Advertisements like Williams' Super Bowl commercial both reflect and help drive that growing demand.

More and more advertisements for weight loss medications are appearing in people's daily lives. These ads can be appealing, intrusive, confusing or even misleading, and have sparked widespread concerns about inappropriate use and adverse events. But the high cost of GLP-1 medications, combined with the lack of adequate coverage by insurance plans, has helped fuel a booming online market for cheaper alternatives.

As health services researchers studying prescription medication safety, we are highly concerned about the risks of online advertisements selling alternative versions of GLP-1 weight loss medications.

As of April 2026, the most popular GLP-1 medications approved by the Food and Drug Administration include semaglutide, sold under the brand names Wegovy, Ozempic and Rybelsus; tirzepatide, sold as Mounjaro or Zepbound; and orforglipron, sold as Founday.

These brand-name medications have undergone rigorous clinical trials and extensive FDA evaluation, including review of clinical data, manufacturing processes and facility inspections, to ensure safety, quality and effectiveness.



The injectable drug Ozempic in Houston on July 1, 2023. (AP)

Many of the GLP-1 drugs advertised on the internet are not the FDA-approved medications but rather "compounded" GLP-1 products made in compounding pharmacies. They contain the same active ingredient - semaglutide, tirzepatide or orforglipron - but add minor but clinically important modifications such as using a different salt form, adding different inactive ingredients and varying drug concentrations or dosages. In addition, they may be often produced and stored under inconsistent quality standards.

Compounding pharmacies are intended to create personalized versions of FDA-approved medications to meet unique patient needs that cannot be met through the mass-produced brand-name medications. However, there is no evidence to suggest that the modifications being made to GLP-1 medications sold by compounding pharmacies meet those criteria. Instead, companies are using compounding pharmacies to bypass the FDA-approved manufacturers and generate profit.

In February 2026, the FDA released a report alerting patients and providers about the risks of compounded GLP-1 medications.

The report notes the presence of counterfeit Ozempic, the

use of non-FDA-approved ingredients such as retatrutide or cagrilintide, and products bypassing regulations by being labeled as "not for human consumption."

As of July 2024 - the most recently issued report - the FDA had received over 1,000 reports of adverse events related to compounded semaglutide and compounded tirzepatide. These include gastrointestinal effects like nausea, vomiting and abdominal pain, as well as fainting, headache, migraine, dehydration, acute pancreatitis and gallstones. These effects occur because drug concentrations in compounded medications can vary significantly, leading to serious dosing errors.

First, if you or someone you know is considering GLP-1 medications for weight management, it's important to know that leading medical organizations have specific recommendations for the use of these drugs. For instance, the American Diabetes Association only recommends the use of GLP-1 drugs for weight loss for those with a body mass index, or BMI, of at least 30, or among those with a BMI of 27 or greater if they have at least one other condition such as type 2 diabetes, hypertension or high cholesterol. People with a BMI below 27 need further clinical evaluation to determine if a GLP-1 medication is appropriate for them.

If you and your doctor determine that it is appropriate to seek GLP-1 medications for weight management, it is important to avoid compounded versions of GLP-1 drugs unless your health care provider specifically recommends them.

But identifying which GLP-1 medications are compounded can be challenging. It is important to carefully examine how the medication is labeled on the website.

Websites selling compounded versions of GLP-1 drugs are not allowed to use the FDA-approved brand names of products like Ozempic, Wegovy and Zepbound.

If a product description includes spelling errors or terms such as "compounded," "generic version" or "same active ingredient as [brand name]," it often indicates that the product is a compounded formulation. When in doubt, try contacting the online retailer and ask if the product is a compounded drug.

If you decide to obtain GLP-1 medications online, it is

important to choose reliable and transparent sources. The manufacturers of several FDA-approved GLP-1 medications provide official online platforms such as Novocare and LillyDirect.

These allow people to get medication information and transparent pricing and to get the drugs delivered to them at home or to pick them up at a pharmacy. When possible, using these official sources can reduce the risk of encountering misleading advertisements or unverified products.

Online retailers that offer GLP-1 drugs without requiring a prescription or medical evaluation are illegal and unsafe. Advertising the ease of getting a prescription or only requiring an online form to obtain a prescription is a red flag. As a rule of thumb, patients should always begin their treatment by consulting with their local primary care provider who can evaluate their complete medical history.

It is also important to verify whether the pharmacy associated with the website is properly licensed and compliant with regulatory standards, since many online sellers rely on compounding pharmacies that are based outside the U.S. or are not appropriately licensed. Therefore, patients should check whether the pharmacy that will ship their medication has a physical address and a telephone number based in the US.

Patients should verify whether the pharmacy is registered on the official FDA database of approved compounded pharmacies and licensed as per the board of pharmacy of the state where the pharmacy is physically located.

Using pharmacies that are not registered or licensed is highly unsafe and can result in serious adverse effects. If the online retailer does not clearly disclose which pharmacy they are using, you should contact the retailer to confirm this information.

Finally, even after you receive your medications, you will need to carefully review the product and its label. This can help determine whether the medication being offered corresponds to an FDA-approved product or a compounded formulation. Products that arrive without proper packaging, labeling or an expiration date, or have a foreign language on the packaging, may be unsafe or unverified products. (AP)

Obesity and diet linked to rising cancer risk in youth

Colon cancer deaths higher among less educated

NEW YORK, April 18, (AP) - The worrisome rise in colorectal cancer deaths in younger adults is concentrated in people with less education, suggesting socioeconomic factors could be driving the escalation, according to a new study.

Celebrity deaths - including Chadwick Boseman in 2020 and James Van Der Beek earlier this year - have highlighted the increase in colorectal cancer deaths among younger adults, but the new paper was called the first to parse which people are most affected by the alarming rise.

The researchers found that over the last 30 years, the rise in colorectal cancer deaths in young adults occurred almost entirely among people without a four-year college degree.

Of course, getting a college degree doesn't protect you from getting colon cancer. Rather, experts say it's a marker for other issues: People without degrees tend to earn less money, have poorer diets, exercise less and get less medical care.

It's not totally unexpected that the death risk is concentrated in the less advantaged, but the paper published Thursday in JAMA Oncology is the first national study to actually show the connection, said Dr. Paolo Boffetta, a researcher at Stony Brook Cancer Center in New York who wasn't involved in the work.

American Cancer Society researchers used government data



Health care workers look out a window at NY Presbyterian and Mount Sinai, March 16, 2021, in New York. (AP)

on more than 101,000 younger adults, ages 25 to 49, who died of colorectal cancer from 1994 through 2023.

Overall, the colorectal cancer death rate rose from about 3 per 100,000 in that age group to about 4 per 100,000. But for people who only made it through high school, the rate rose from 4 to 5.2 per 100,000, while the rate for people with at least a bachelor's degrees did not change from 2.7 per 100,000.

Ahmedin Jemal, the study's first author, said the findings underscore

the need for public awareness about colorectal cancer and for younger adults to heed screening recommendations. Symptoms can include blood in stool or rectal bleeding; changes in bowel habits, such as diarrhea, constipation or narrowing of stool that lasts more than a few days; unintended weight loss; and cramps or abdominal pain.

The American Cancer Society estimates that more than 158,000 cases of colorectal cancer will be diagnosed in the US this year. Overall, it's the nation's second leading cancer killer, behind lung cancer,

and is expected to claim more than 55,000 in 2026.

The number of deaths for adults younger than 50 is around 7% of the total - about 3,900. Earlier this year, cancer society researchers reported that colorectal cancer mortality in Americans under 50 had increased by 1.1% a year since 2005, making it now the deadliest cancer in that age group.

Scientists don't know what's behind that increase. But they note risk factors include obesity, lack of physical activity, a diet high in red or processed meat and low in fruits and vegetables, and a family history of colorectal cancer. The American Cancer Society changed its screening guidelines in 2021, lowering the age US adults should start getting screened from 50 to 45.

Why did the researchers behind Thursday's study look at education level and not other factors?

Death certificates don't detail how much money a person had, or most other aspects of their life. But they do note how much schooling someone completed. And other research has found that data often aligns with statistics about income, health insurance, physical activity and chronic disease. So education serves as a proxy, but can't speak to other factors, like whether the person had health insurance.

"The focus on education is really (due to) something which was available in the data," Boffetta observed.

Lyrid meteor shower is visible now

This year's Lyrid meteor shower is getting a boost thanks to a dim crescent moon. Skywatchers could see 10 to 20 shooting stars per hour soar across the spring sky, according to NASA, when the fiery display peaks Tuesday night into Wednesday morning.

The show will be visible across the globe, but views will be best in the Northern Hemisphere. And there's no risk of the crescent moon photobombing the Lyrid shower. It'll set before the fun starts.

Meteor showers happen when the Earth plows through debris trails left behind by space rocks. Those stray bits get hot as they enter the atmosphere, producing fiery streaks that are also known as shooting stars.

Contrary to the name, most meteor showers are actually debris from comets. The Lyrids are the leftovers from an icy ball called comet Thatcher.

"We only get to see the actual comet once every 415 years. But we pass through the grains that have been left in its wake every year around the same time," said Maria Valdes, who studies meteorites and works at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. (AP)

'It's a murder weapon'

Deadly carfentanil rises as fentanyl alternative

NEW YORK, April 18, (AP) - Nearly two decades after drug addiction sent him to rehab as a teenager, 36-year-old Michael Nalewaja had settled into a quiet life in Alaska where he worked as an electrician.

That all came crashing down days before Thanksgiving 2025, when he and a mutual friend unknowingly took a lethal cocktail of fentanyl and carfentanil they may have mistaken for cocaine.

"I heard the word 'autopsy' and I literally just collapsed to the floor," his mother, Kelley Nalewaja said, recalling the call she received from his wife. "Even if somebody had been there prepared with Narcan - even if somebody had called 911 in time - he was not going to survive."

Carfentanil, a weapons-grade chemical that authorities say is 10,000 times more potent than morphine and 100 times stronger than fentanyl, has seen a dramatic resurgence across the US, killing hundreds of unsuspecting drug users.

The rise coincides with a recent crackdown by the Chinese government on the sale of precursors used to make fentanyl. Those regulations are likely prompting traffickers in Mexico to use carfentanil to boost the potency of a weakened version of fentanyl, according to U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration intelligence bulletins reviewed by The Associated Press.

The surge of a drug so deadly that less than a poppy seed-sized amount can kill a person comes as fentanyl seizures and overall drug overdose deaths continue a multiyear decline.

"You're talking about not even a grain of salt that could be potentially lethal," said Frank Tarentino, the DEA's chief of operations for its northeast region, which stretches from Maine to Virginia. "This presents an extremely frightening proposition for substance abuse dependent people who seek opioids on the street today."

A decade ago, carfentanil exploded into the North American drug supply, causing hundreds of unsuspecting drug users to overdose, only to see a major dip after China banned it, closing a key regulatory loophole in the U.S.

But the situation has shifted dramatically in recent years.

In 2025, DEA labs identified carfentanil 1,400 times in U.S. drug seizures, compared with 145 in 2023 and only 54 in 2022, according to DEA records viewed by AP.

Traffickers in Mexico may be experimenting with producing carfentanil themselves, authorities say, while others could be procuring it from China-based vendors skirting the country's regulations by spamming online forums in other countries with ads for the drug.

Complicating matters for the cartels are the extreme dangers associated with manufacturing carfentanil, Tarentino said.

"You can't just dabble in this," he said. "This is not some mad scientist on Reddit you're going to get to go out to a rudimentary laboratory in Mexico to make carfentanil."

US overdose deaths have fallen for more than two years - the longest drop in decades. Experts point to several possible explanations, including the overdose-reversing drug naloxone being more widely available and the expansion of addiction treatment. Some have also tied it to the regulatory changes the US has pressed for in China.

Experts say that even multiple high doses of naloxone might not be enough to reverse an overdose when carfentanil is involved.

Fentanyl seizures, along with several other illicit drugs, have also dipped. U.S. Customs and Border Protection reported that fentanyl seizures plunged to about 12,000 pounds (5,443 kilograms) in 2025 - less than half the amount seized in 2023.

But even as fentanyl numbers fall, it remains a major focus of the DEA. Just recently, the agency's proposed budget included a \$362 million increase centered on cartel-driven fentanyl trafficking.

As she grieves her son, an adept salesman full of charisma who had recently gotten a national award by the electrical union, she's pushing for major legislative and judicial changes so others don't go through what she did because of a drug she said was never meant for humans.

"It's not an OD; it's not an overdose," she said. "It's a murder weapon."

Mpox kills 9

Measles deaths rise in Bangladesh

DHAKA, April 18, (Xinhua) - Bangladesh recorded 1,191 new suspected measles cases and six more deaths in the past 24 hours as of Thursday morning, the country's health authority said.

According to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), the latest suspected measles-related cases and deaths occurred between 8 a.m. on Wednesday and 8 a.m. on Thursday.

The latest figures bring the total number of suspected cases to 20,352 and the death toll to 172 since the outbreak began last month.

DGHS data compiled between March 15 and April 16 shows 3,065 laboratory-confirmed measles cases and 34 confirmed deaths over that period.

Monkeypox: At least nine people have died of monkeypox in Pakistan's southern Sindh province, where 25 cases have been confirmed so far this year, the provincial health department said on Tuesday.

According to official figures, a total of 122 suspected cases have been reported, indicating continued transmission of the virus in different parts of the province.

Health authorities said Khairpur district remains the worst-affected area with 18 confirmed cases, followed by Sukkur with three and Karachi with four cases.

Officials said the situation is being closely monitored, urging the public to seek immediate medical attention in case of symptoms and follow precautionary measures to limit transmission.

Crew recalls 'glorious' yet risky space voyage

Artemis II astronauts praise moonship performance, especially heat shield

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla., April 18, (AP) - The Artemis II astronauts who ignited a lunar renaissance gave high marks Thursday to their moonship, especially the heat shield, for its performance during reentry.

In their first news conference since returning to Earth, the three Americans and one Canadian said their lunar flyby puts NASA in a much better position for a moon landing by a crew in two years and an eventual moon base. They spoke from NASA's Johnson Space Center in Houston, their home base.

Commander Reid Wiseman later told The Associated Press that he's been so busy since getting back that he hasn't had time to gaze up at the moon, let alone Carroll Crater, the name suggested by the crew for a bright lunar crater in honor of his late wife. They shared two daughters whose anxieties and fears over their father's journey ended with his safe splashdown late last week.

"Being 252,000 miles away from home was the most majestic, gorgeous thing that human eyes will ever witness," he said in an interview with the AP. But hurtling back through the atmosphere at 39 times the speed of sound, "that is scary and that is risky." That's why he yearned for home midway through his flight. "You just want to hold your kids and you just want them to know that you're safe."

Wiseman, pilot Victor Glover, Christina Koch and Canada's Jeremy Hansen launched to the moon from Florida on April 1, NASA's first lunar crew in more than a half-century and by far the most diverse.

They became the most distant travelers ever - breaking Apollo 13's record - as they whipped around the lunar far side, illuminated enough to reveal features never viewed before by the human eye. The sight of a total lunar eclipse added to the wonderment.



NASA's Artemis II crew - NASA astronauts Reid Wiseman, Victor Glover, and Christina Koch, and Canadian Space Agency (CSA) astronaut Jeremy Hansen pose for a photo during a press conference on Thursday, April 16, in Houston. (AP)

Their Orion capsule, which they named Integrity, parachuted into the Pacific last Friday to close out the nearly 10-day voyage. Artemis II's Houston homecoming the next day coincided with the 56th anniversary of the launch of Apollo 13.

Wiseman said he and Glover "maybe saw two moments of a touch of char loss" to the heat shield as Integrity plunged through the fastest, hottest part of reentry. Once aboard the recovery ship, they peered at the bottom of the capsule as best they could, leaning over to view any signs of damage. They spotted a little loss of charred material on the shoulder, where the heat shield meets the capsule.

"For four humans just looking at the heat shield, it looked wonderful to us. It looked great, and that ride in was really amazing," Wiseman said.

He cautioned that detailed analyses still need to be conducted. "We are go-

ing to fine-tooth comb every single, not even every molecule, probably every atom on this heat shield," he said.

The heat shield on the first Artemis test flight in 2022 - with no one aboard - came back so pockmarked and gouged that it pushed Artemis II back by months if not years. Instead of redoing it, NASA opted to change the capsule's entry path to minimize heating. Future capsules will sport a new design.

As the parachutes released right before splashdown, Glover said he felt like he was in freefall - like diving backward off a skyscraper. "That's what it felt like for five seconds," he said, adding when the ride smoothed out: "It was glorious."

Since their return, the four astronauts have endured round after round of medical testing to check their balance, vision, muscle strength and coordination, and overall health.

SPORTS

Green drops 36 as Suns clamp down on Warriors, Curry

Magic rout Hornets

PHOENIX, April 18, (AP): Jalen Green scored 36 points, Devin Booker added 20 and the Phoenix Suns locked down Stephen Curry and the Golden State Warriors, winning 111-96 in the NBA's play-in tournament.

The Suns took the No. 8 seed in the Western Conference playoffs and will face the defending NBA champion Oklahoma City Thunder on Sunday in Game 1. The Warriors' season is over.

Green shot 14 of 20 from the field, including 8 of 14 on 3-pointers. Jordan Goodwin scored 19 points, had nine rebounds and was a menace on defense with six steals.

Booker and Golden State's Draymond Green were both assessed two technical fouls late in the fourth quarter after exchanging words multiple times and were ejected.

The 38-year-old Curry couldn't get many clean looks and finished with 17 points on 4-of-16 shooting. Brandin Podziemski led the Warriors

with 23 points.

Phoenix led by five at the break and built a 69-53 advantage with 5:12 left in third after a fast-break layup by Royce O'Neale. It was 85-72 with 10:12 remaining.

There was reason to believe the lead wasn't safe. Phoenix blew an 11-point, fourth-quarter lead in a loss to Portland on Tuesday night, while Golden State clawed back from a 13-point fourth-quarter hole to beat the Los Angeles Clippers on Wednesday night, which led to the winner-take-all matchup Friday.

The Warriors looked as if they might have another comeback brewing - Curry hit a 3-pointer that cut the margin to 85-78 with 9:30 left - but the Suns responded with the next seven points.

The Suns avoided becoming the first team to lose both play-in tournament games on their home floor. The current format was established in 2021.

Golden State's Kristaps Porzingis played through right ankle soreness, the result of an injury Wednesday against the Clippers. The 7-foot-3 center played just 15 minutes and finished with 11 points.

Paolo Banchero scored 25 points and the Orlando Magic rolled to a 35-point first-half lead, taking full control on the way to a 121-90 rout of Charlotte Hornets in a play-in tournament elimination game.

The Magic earned the No. 8 seed in the Eastern Conference playoffs. Their reward is a matchup with top-seeded Detroit, a best-of-seven that begins Sunday on the Pistons' home floor.

The Magic were physical from the outset, and the Hornets were never in the game. Franz Wagner had 18 points for the Magic, along with seven rebounds and six assists.

Wendell Carter Jr. finished with 16 points on 6-for-7 shooting, while Desmond Bane scored 13 and Jalen Suggs added 12 for the Magic.

Orlando led by 31 at halftime, the



Golden State Warriors guard Stephen Curry (30) drives for a layup as Phoenix Suns forward Oso Ighodaro (11) defends during the first half of their NBA play-in tournament game at Mortgage Matchup Center in Phoenix, Ariz. (AP)

biggest midpoint lead in the play-in tournament's seven-year history. It has been utilized in this format - four teams qualifying from each conference, playing to decide the final two playoff spots on each half of the bracket - since 2021.

LaMelo Ball - who the NBA said should have been ejected from Tuesday's season-extending win over

Miami for an uncalled flagrant foul against Bam Adebayo -- led the Hornets with 23 points, 21 of them coming in the third quarter.

But the game was long decided at that point. Orlando raced out to a 27-10 lead, stretched it to 68-33 late in the first half, and the Hornets never even got within 20 points the rest of the way.

Miles Bridges, who has played more games than any other active player without a playoff appearance, scored 15 for the Hornets. Brandon Miller scored 14 and Kon Knueppel added 11.

The Hornets, who have now missed the playoffs in 10 straight seasons, were outrebounded 49-34 and shot only 34%. Orlando shot 50%.

The Magic were eliminated in the first round of the playoffs in each of the last two postseasons and have not won a playoff round since 2010. But they went 2-2 against the Pistons this season.

The Hornets, who beat the Magic in their last three regular-season games, have not been in the playoffs since 2016. It's the longest active drought in the NBA.



Orlando Magic center Wendell Carter Jr. grabs an offensive rebound against the Charlotte Hornets during the first half of an NBA play-in tournament basketball game in Orlando, Fla. (AP)

Selectors name 4 uncapped players for series

Sarfraz to coach Pakistan test team

ISLAMABAD, April 18, (AP): Former Pakistan captain Sarfraz Ahmed was named as head coach of the Pakistan test team as selectors named four uncapped players on Saturday for next month's two-test series in Bangladesh.

Sarfraz, who won the Champions Trophy in 2017, retired from international cricket last month. The Pakistan Cricket Board also appointed former test batter Asad Shafiq as the new batting coach while Umar Gul will be bowling coach.

Left-handed batter Shan Masood will continue to lead the test team with Babar Azam, Mohammad Rizwan and Imam-ul-Haq the other experienced batters in the side.

Abdullah Fazal, Amad Butt, Azan Awais and Mohammad Ghazi Ghorri are the four uncapped players in the test team.

Fazal and Awais are both left-handed batters and have been rewarded after impressing the selectors in domestic cricket. Butt, who made his first-class debut in 2015, is a seasoned all-rounder and carries over a decade of playing in domestic cricket.

The first test will be played in Dhaka from May 8-12 with Sylhet hosting the second test from May 16-20. The series is part of World Test Championship where Pakistan stands at No. 5 after drawing the home test series against South Africa 1-1 last October.

Bangladesh lost its opening WTC series in Sri Lanka 1-0 and is eighth in nine-team event.

Pakistan squad: Shan Masood (captain), Abdullah Fazal, Amad Butt, Azan Awais, Babar Azam, Hasan Ali, Imam-ul-Haq, Khuram Shahzad, Mohammad Abbas, Mohammad Rizwan, Muhammad Ghazi Ghorri, Noman Ali, Sajid Khan, Salman Ali Agha, Saud Shakeel and Shaheen Shah Afridi.

New Zealand's fast bowlers were clinical in high humidity in a 26-run victory against Bangladesh in the opening game of the three-match ODI series. Nathan Smith undermined Bangladesh's chase early then Blair Tuckner triggered a collapse as Bangladesh was bowled out for 221 in 48.3 overs.



In this file photo, Pakistan's Sarfraz Ahmed celebrates after scoring fifty during the first day of first test cricket match between Pakistan and New Zealand, in Karachi, Pakistan. (AP)

Bangladesh was on track at 194-5 in the 44th over when Tickner took four wickets for five runs, starting with getting captain Mehidy Hasan Miraz to nick behind on 6.

New Zealand chose to bat first and posted a challenging 247-8 on a slow pitch, riding a patient 68 from opener Henry Nicholls and a brisk 59 from Dean Foxcroft, who was the player of the match.

"We thought 240 (247) is pretty chaseable so we had to bowl well," Foxcroft said. "It's not an easy place to come here and win games. It was extremely hot and we're not used to it. It's winter in New Zealand now."

Nicholls added 73 runs with Will Young (30), defying a superb spell by pacer Shoriful Islam.

Shoriful, who was playing his first ODI since December 2024 after replacing the injured Mustafizur Rahman, claimed 2-27 in 10 overs.

New Zealand's pace attack then unsettled the Bangladesh batters.

Smith produced the initial blow, dismissing Tanzid Hasan Tamim and Najmul Hossain Shanto in consecutive deliveries. Tickner ended with 4-40, claiming all four wickets in his last four overs. Smith wrapped up the Bangladesh innings with the wicket of Towhid Hridoy for 55 to finish with 3-45.

Capitals go fourth on six points

Miller gets it right this time in final over as Delhi beats Bengaluru by 6 wickets

BENGALURU, India, April 18, (AP): David Miller made no mistake this time with his 22 runs in 10 balls taking Delhi Capitals to a six-wicket victory against Royal Challengers Bengaluru in the Indian Premier League on Saturday.

Tristan Stubbs scored 60 not out off 47 balls and Lokesh Rahul hit 57 off 34 to spearhead the chase and Delhi finished with 179-4 in 19.5 overs in a thrilling finish at M. Chinnaswamy Stadium.

Miller had misjudged a final-over finish against Gujarat Titans earlier in April, but the undefeated South African made amends against Bengaluru.

With 15 needed off the last over, Miller hit two sixes and a four to take Delhi home with a ball to spare.

"I was disappointed the other night, but to get myself back in that position and get over the line, feels really good," Miller said.

Phil Salt's 63 off 38 balls had earlier helped Bengaluru to a below par 175-8, which resulted in his team's second loss of the season in five games. Bengaluru is second in the standings with eight points. Delhi is now fourth on six points with three wins in five games.

Put into bat, Bengaluru reached 52 off 31 balls for the first wicket. It was a rare low score for Virat Kohli by his high standards - he made 19 off 13 balls.

Impact player Devdutt Padikkal (18) put on 47 off 29 balls with Salt, who scored his second half-century of the season and hit four fours and three sixes.

Delhi changed the game's momentum with a double blow halfway through the innings. Axar Patel (2-18 in three overs) dismissed Padikkal, while Kuldeep Yadav claimed Salt's wicket in the 11th over.

Tim David (26 off 17) provided some resistance but Delhi's bowling stayed strong. Yadav finished with 2-32 and Lungi Ngidi took 2-39 in



Delhi Capitals' captain Axar Patel plays a shot during the Indian Premier League cricket match between Royal Challengers Bengaluru and Delhi Capitals in Bengaluru, India. (AP)

four overs.

In reply, Delhi lost Pathum Nissanka cheaply - out lbw to Bhuvneshwar Kumar for one.

Impact player Karun Nair (5) was also out caught off Kumar. The former India pacer took three early wickets and struck twice in the third over. Hard-hitting Sameer Rizvi was caught behind for two as Delhi dropped to 18-3 in 2.5 overs.

Rahul and Stubbs resisted with 69 off 44 balls for the fourth wicket. Playing on his home ground, Rahul led Delhi's recovery with a second half-century of the season.

Krunal Pandya got the breakthrough when Rahul was caught by Kohli at the

boundary in the 11th over.

Stubbs added another 47 off 34 with Patel, who scored 26 off 19 balls before retiring hurt with cramps.

Stubbs anchored the innings but Miller still had to take his team to victory, smashing 6-6-4 in the last over.

Shubman Gill prevented Kolkata Knight Riders from their first win in the Indian Premier League and Gujarat Titans.

Gill's fluent 86 off 50 balls anchored Gujarat's chase to 181-5 with two balls remaining.

Kolkata's million-dollar signing Cameron Green finally revived his struggling batting form with a knock of 79 off 55 balls but the Australia all-

rounder wasn't supported and Kolkata was bowled out for 180 on the final ball.

Kolkata has lost five of six, and the sixth was a rain out.

Captain Gill and Sai Sudharsan (22) set up Gujarat's third successive win with a rollicking opening stand of 57 off five overs.

Sudharsan fell to Sunil Narine in the last over of power play but Jos Buttler (25) smashed two sixes and two fours and kept pushing the scoring rate.

Gill was hardly troubled by pace or spin and completed his half-century in 27 balls. He hit eight boundaries and four sixes and looked good for a century at home.

Peacock and Lubenda complete the podium

Gout wins 100m title in Australian but misses national record

BRISBANE, Australia, April 18, (AP): Talented sprinter Gout Gout waved to the crowd over the final few meters on Saturday while winning the Australian junior 100-meter race in 10.21 seconds.

He had to recover from a less than perfect start and he was second after 50 meters. But he forced his way through the field to beat Zavier Peacock (10.35) and Uwezo Lubenda (10.37).

The 18-year-old Gout missed out on his goal of breaking the 10-second mark. He had earlier cruised into the final with a time of 10.44 seconds in his semifinal, sprinting into a strong headwind at his home track in Brisbane.

On Friday, Gout qualified fastest for the 100 final. His weekend times were not quick enough to lower Patrick Johnson's national open record for the 100 of 9.93, set in Japan in 2003.

The win came less than a week after setting an under-20 world record time in the 200 that was faster than Usain Bolt's best at that age. Last Sunday, Gout ran his 200-me-



Gout Gout, right, waves while winning the junior 100-meter race at the Australian Athletics Junior Championship in Brisbane. (AP)

ter final at the open national titles in 19.67 seconds, taking 0.02 off Erriyon Knighton's world under-20 mark of 19.69 set at Eugene, Oregon in 2022.

Knighton also ran a 19.49 in 2022, which World Athletics says is the fastest time ever by an under-20 athlete despite it not being ratified as a world under-20 record.

Gout's time last week placed him above sprinting great Bolt at No. 2 in the all-time under-20 list.

It was the first time that Gout had gone under the 20-second mark officially, after a wind-assisted 19.84 last season, and is the leading time in the world this year. Gout previously had the quickest time by a 16-year-old, setting an Australian record of 20.06 in 2024.

Last Sunday's mark in Sydney put him ahead of eight-time Olympic champion Bolt's time of 19.93 in 2004. Bolt was 17 when setting what was then a world junior record and never bettered that time as a teenager.

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'GR Corolla was built to deliver a pure driving experience – responsive, engaging, and fun'

ALSAYER & Toyota introduce the motorsport-inspired GR Corolla



Top and above: View of the Motorsport-inspired Toyota GR Corolla interior and exterior.

KUWAIT CITY, April 18: The long-awaited GR Corolla is finally hitting Kuwait roads. Developed directly under the renowned Toyota GAZOO Racing team and its philosophy of "building ever-better cars through motorsports," this performance-focused hot hatch draws on extensive rally and circuit testing to deliver exceptional power, control, and driving excitement.

Motorsport heritage lies at the core of the GR Corolla's development, from the powertrain and aerodynamics to the driver-focused cockpit. Building on engineering insights gained through competition and professional driver feedback, this relentless cycle of challenge and improvement has shaped a vehicle that responds precisely to driver inputs. Tuned for the heat and diverse driving conditions, it offers confidence and excitement on winding routes, city streets, and the track.

Akio Toyoda (Morizo), Toyota Chairman and Master Driver, said: "As with every GR vehicle, the GR Corolla reflects our commitment to motorsport and the belief that the best cars are made on the track. The GR Corolla was built to deliver a pure driving experience – responsive, engaging, and fun."

At the heart of the GR Corolla is a 1.6-liter G16E-GTS turbocharged three-cylinder Dynamic Force Engine (sport), also found in Toyota's World Rally Championship-inspired models. Engineered to deliver high output from a lightweight, compact package, it produces 296 HP at 6,500 rpm and 400 Nm of torque between 3,250 and 4,600 rpm. Refined through extensive track testing, the engine delivers powerful mid-range acceleration for corner exits while withstanding prolonged high-stress operation.

This power is channeled through the GR-FOUR active torque-split all-wheel drive system, which continuously optimizes torque distribution to all four wheels for maximum traction and a direct handling feel. Customers can choose between a six-speed manual transmission for an engaging, driver-focused experience or the eight-speed GR-DAT (GAZOO Racing Direct Automatic Transmission), calibrated for responsive, high-performance driving.

Complementing the drivetrain, the GR Corolla features a fine-tuned chassis with MacPherson strut suspension at the front and double wishbone suspension at the rear. The exterior design of the GR Corolla is the direct result of motorsport-driven

engineering. Cooling and aerodynamics are enhanced through an airflow system that increases downforce, reduces drag, and maintains stability under demanding driving conditions. A sub-radiator positioned toward the front of the vehicle helps improve engine cooling efficiency, while enlarged front grille openings draw air more effectively into the cooling system, which includes brake ducts, a radiator, and an intercooler.

Optimized bumper and grille shapes guide airflow from the front to the sides of the vehicle, while functional hood, front bumper, and fender ducts work together to support handling stability. On models equipped with the GR-DAT automatic transmission, cooling is further supported by an air-cooled transmission fluid cooler working alongside a water-cooled transmission fluid warmer and cooler to maintain optimal operating temperatures.

Inside the cabin, the GR Corolla offers a driver-centric environment, with a layout that creates a strong sense of connection between driver and vehicle. Purposeful controls, supportive sports seating, and an 8-inch high-definition Display Audio system provide clear visibility of navigation and vehicle information.

The GR Corolla also features 60/40 split-folding rear seats that enable flexible cargo configurations. The rear seats can be folded forward to expand luggage space for family outings and shopping trips, while a single seat can be lowered to accommodate long, narrow items. For larger loads, both rear seats can be folded down to create a wider, more versatile cargo area, ensuring the GR Corolla delivers everyday usability no matter how many passengers are on board.

Safety remains a core pillar of the GR lineup. The GR Corolla is equipped with Toyota Safety Sense, a comprehensive suite of safety and driver-assistance technologies designed to support confident driving in all conditions. This includes a Pre-Collision System (PCS), Dynamic Radar Cruise Control (DRCC), Lane Tracing Assist (LTA), and Lane Departure Alert (LDA). An Automatic High Beam (AHB) system further enhances nighttime visibility. Additional safety and driver-assistance technologies include a Blind Spot Monitor (BSM) and Safe Exit Assist (SEA), which help improve awareness of surrounding vehicles when driving and exiting the car.

On models equipped with the eight-speed GR-DAT automatic transmission, the

- Motorsport-bred engineering prioritizes power, driver response, and control
- WRC-inspired 1.6-liter G16E-GTS turbo engine produces 296 HP and 400 Nm of torque
- GR-FOUR all-wheel drive system provides exceptional traction and control
- Enhanced cooling and aerodynamics refined through track testing
- Driver-focused interior balances performance with everyday usability
- Bold exterior color options including Platinum White Pearl Mica, Precious Black, and Emotional Red

GR Corolla includes a Parking Support Brake system for static objects in front and rear of the vehicle, as well as a Parking Support Brake function for moving vehicles at the rear. For six-speed manual transmission models, low-speed maneuvering and parking are supported by Clearance Sonar and Back Sonar. Both models also include a Back Monitor for improved rear visibility.

The GR Corolla comes in four striking exterior colors: Precious Metal, Platinum White Pearl Mica, Emotional Red, and Precious Black. Inside, customers can choose between Black or Black & Red interior themes, reinforcing the car's sporty, performance-focused identity.

The introduction of the GR Corolla strengthens Toyota's GR lineup in the Middle East and reflects the region's growing passion for competition-bred engineering. Nobuyuki Takemura, Chief Representative of the Toyota Middle East Representative office, Toyota Motor Corporation, said: "The Middle East has a growing passion for performance and motorsport culture. The GR Corolla brings Toyota GAZOO Racing's engineering philosophy to a compact, highly capable platform that delivers excitement on every drive."

Kuwait wins bronze at FEI junior championships



The Kuwaiti riders celebrate with the national flag on the podium.

DOHA, April 18, (KUNA): Kuwait's junior equestrian team secured a podium finish, claiming third place in the team finals of the International Equestrian Federation (FEI) Group 7 Championships.

Competing at the prestigious Al Shaqab Longines Arena in Doha, the Kuwaiti riders delivered a composed performance on a demanding technical course, confirming their status among the region's top emerging talents.

The United Arab Emirates claimed the gold medal, while Saudi Arabia finished second. Kuwait's third-place result came through the efforts of Mohammad Al-Mulaifi, Ghazi Al-Faleej, and Moudhi Al-Jabri.

Team coach Ali Al-Kharafi praised the riders in remarks to KUNA, highlighting the high level of competition and the strong international participation. He described the result as an im-

portant boost for the team as they look to build momentum in upcoming regional and international events.

Al-Kharafi also thanked supporters and expressed confidence ahead of the individual competitions scheduled for Saturday.

The four-day championship, which began on Wednesday, features more than 100 riders from across the region competing for total prize money of €318,000 (approximately \$375,000).

Back pain ends Viktor Axelsen's 2028 Olympic dream

COPENHAGEN, Denmark, April 18, (AP): Reigning two-time Olympic badminton champion Viktor Axelsen had designs on making it to the 2028 Los Angeles Games.

His doctors thought otherwise. They told Axelsen, who was in constant back pain, that he risked more surgery if he tried to maintain the levels he's used to.

The 32-year-old Dane finally listened to his body and one of badminton's greatest retired this week.

"Due to my recurrent back issues, I am no longer able to compete and train at the highest level," he posted on Instagram. "Accepting this situation has been incredibly difficult.

But I have now reached a point where my body won't allow me to continue."

Axelsen was told he was too tall to be an elite player, and at 6-foot-2 (1.88 meters) he easily stood out. But he was the first European to win the boys singles at the world junior championships in 2010.

His breakthrough year among the elite was 2016: He helped Denmark win its only Thomas Cup team title, which dates to 1949; defeated the great Lin Dan for the bronze medal at the Rio de Janeiro Olympics; and won his first tour title at the World Superseries Finals.

Until then, he'd lost his five previ-

ous Superseries finals. He was transformed after his first win. In the next 42 finals, he lost just seven.

Axelsen won the Olympic gold medals in 2021 and 2024 - the latter on painkillers - without dropping a game. He won two world championships and two All Englands, and became the first man to win every Super 1000 singles title.

Thai rival Kunlavut Vitidsarn, who lost to Axelsen in the finals of the 2022 worlds and 2024 Olympics paid tribute: "Thank you for every battle we shared. You pushed me to be better every single time. Wishing you all the best in your next chapter."

Axelsen's attention to detail made him move base from Denmark to Dubai to reduce travel time to Asia. He also became fluent in Mandarin for insights into Chinese opponents and culture and to better connect with badminton's biggest fanbase.

His last tournament was in October. He underwent endoscopic surgery, tried multiple injections and new training methods and treatments to try and be pain-free, to no avail.

He said he retired reluctantly but with gratitude: "I have accomplished everything I once dreamed of, and more."

Oly medalists Miura, Kihara retire

TOKYO, April 18, (AP): Riku Miura and Yuichi Kihara announced their retirement from figure skating, two months after winning the Olympic gold medal with a record-breaking skate.

Miura and Kihara, known to fans as "RikuRyu," leave the skating world at their peak after surging from fifth place to first at the Milan Cortina Olympics with a world-record free skate that more than made up for earlier errors.

They became the first Japanese pair to win Olympic gold, a breakthrough in a country whose figure skating passion had until then largely focused on the individual events.

"While our competitive careers are coming to an end, we truly feel that we gave it our all, and have no regrets. We are proud of everything we went through, and feel we gained so much along the way," they posted on Instagram.

"The two of us will now take on new challenges so that we can bring wider recognition to pair skating in Japan. We hope that we can count on you to follow us on our journey."

The 24-year-old Miura and 33-year-old Kihara's announcement came on the same day that they met Japan's Emperor Naruhito and Empress Masako at a spring garden party at the Akasaka Palace's imperial garden in Tokyo.

Based out of Canada with coach Bruno Marcotte, Miura and Kihara won the world title in 2023 and 2025, and two Olympic team event silver medals for Japan.

The Milan Cortina Olympic free skate was the last competitive performance for Miura and Kihara, who skipped last month's world championships, where Minerva Fabienne Hase and Nikita Volodin won pairs gold for Germany.

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Fulham's Emile Smith Rowe, right, and Brentford's Keane Lewis-Potter battle for the ball during the English Premier League soccer match between Brentford and Fulham in Brentford, England. (AP)

Sports

Eta makes history as Bayern edges closer to title

Second-placed Dortmund falls

BERLIN, April 18, (AP): Marie-Louise Eta has made history as the first female coach in the Bundesliga, but her Union Berlin team failed to live up to the occasion on Saturday with a 2-1 defeat to Wolfsburg.

She has four more games to ensure Union stays in the top division before she takes over Union's women's team for next season.

Patrick Wimmer and Dzenan Pejčinović scored early in each half for the visitors to end their 12-game run without a win and revive their hopes of escaping relegation. Wolfsburg remains second to last but it's just two points behind St. Pauli in the relegation playoff place with four rounds remaining.

Union ultimately paid the price for a lack of efficiency after creating the better chances and finishing strongly. Oliver Burke's goal in the 85th minute was too late for the Köpenick-based team.

Union, which has only won two games in 2026, fired Steffan Baum-

gart after last weekend's loss at Heidenheim and finds itself just six points above the relegation zone.

Eta previously made history in 2023 as the first female assistant coach in the men's Bundesliga, also at Union, and has been coaching the under-19 men's team at the club.

Andrej Kramarić scored two penalties for Hoffenheim in a 2-1 win over second-placed Borussia Dortmund. That opens the way for Bayern Munich to seal the title at home against Stuttgart on Sunday.

Bayern, which has five games remaining compared to Dortmund's four, leads by 12 points and needs just one more point to be sure of finishing top.

Werder Bremen boosted its survival hopes with a 3-1 win at home against Hamburger SV in their northern derby. Bremen moved level with the visitors on 31 points, five points above St. Pauli.

Midtable Augsburg defeated Bayer Leverkusen 2-1 away and dented the home team's hopes of Champions League qualification.

Meanwhile, Karol Mets scored his

first Bundesliga goal and conceded a penalty with seven minutes left as St. Pauli drew with visiting Cologne 1-1 and missed the chance to snap a six-game winless streak.

St. Pauli had the best of the chances but was beset again by a familiar failing in the final third that has made it the league's lowest scoring club.

It wasn't until the 69th minute that Mets put it ahead with a header. The Hamburg side was close to a vital win to avoid relegation until Mets felled Jakub Kaminski inside the box in the 83rd minute and the penalty kick saw Luca Waldschmidt sent the goalkeeper the wrong way.

St. Pauli stayed third from last in the relegation playoff spot. It was two points behind Werder Bremen.

Nevertheless, the Hamburg club did move five points clear of second-to-last Wolfsburg, which is struggling to avoid relegation for the first time since 1997.

The bottom two go down automatically and the third-from-bottom club goes into a relegation playoff.

Cologne, whose striker Ragnar Ache was forced off with a thigh injury, climbed one spot into 12th.



Dortmund's Maximilian Beier, left, and Hoffenheim's Ozan Kabak battle for the ball during their German Bundesliga soccer match in Sinsheim, Germany. (AP)

Kuwait Club battles Al Shabab for Challenge League semifinal spot

By Hassan Mosa

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

BISHKEK, Kyrgyzstan, April 18: Kuwait Club will face Oman's Al Shabab today at 12:00 noon at Dolon Omurzakov Stadium in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, in the AFC Challenge League quarterfinals.

In the other quarterfinal, Lebanon's Al Ansar meet Kyrgyz side Muras United at 6:00 p.m. at the same venue, with both winners advancing to the semifinals next Wednesday.

Kuwait Club concluded its preparations with a training camp in Dammam, Saudi Arabia, where it played two friendlies—beating Al Taraji 6-1 before drawing 1-1 with Al Fateh.

Despite missing Sami Al Sanea, Fahd Hamoud, and Ahmed Al Zanki, coach Nebojša Jovović has strong squad depth to compensate. The team's foreign contingent includes Yassine Al Khennissi, Mohammed Marhoon, Arsène Zola, Mehdi Barahma, and Idrissa Doumbia.

Kuwait Club relies on key players such as Ahmed Al Dhafiri, Fahd Al Hajri, Saud Al Houshan, Khaled Al Rashidi, Yousef Nasser, Mohammed Daham, Reda Hani, Amr Abdul Fattah, Ali Hussein,



Kuwait Club players hit the training pitch ahead of crucial clash.

and Faisal Zaid.

Kuwait Club advanced to the quarterfinals after topping Group B with seven points, defeating Al Ansar 3-2, drawing 1-1 with Al Seeb, and beating Bashundhara Kings 2-0.

Domestically, the team sits comfortably at the top of the league table, 12 points clear, but the long break in domestic action since

March has raised concerns over match sharpness despite its strong continental pedigree as three-time AFC Cup champion.

Al Shabab, meanwhile, enters the match in high confidence after topping Group A with a perfect record, winning all three matches and positioning itself as a strong contender for its first continental title.

Gulf Champions League final spot on the line

Qadsia faces tough test against Al Rayyan

By Hassan Mosa

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

DOHA, April 18: Qadsia will look to overcome challenging circumstances when it meets Qatar's Al Rayyan tonight at 8:00 p.m. at Ahmed bin Ali Stadium in Doha, in the semi-final of the Gulf Champions League, with hopes of reaching the final for a second straight season.

In the other semi-final, Iraq's Zakho takes on Saudi Arabia's Al Shabab at 5:00 p.m. at Khalifa International Stadium, with both winners advancing to Thursday's final in Doha.

Qadsia arrives at the decisive stage amid difficult conditions, most notably the suspension of sporting activity in Kuwait since early March. After Doha was confirmed as the venue for the remaining matches, the club rushed to complete travel visa procedures, which took time and delayed their preparation and travel.

The Kuwaiti side will also be missing several key players, including Bader Al-Mutawa, Khaled Ibrahim, and Talal Al-Fadhel due to work commitments, alongside Abdulaziz Wadi and Mubarak Al-Faneeni, forcing the technical staff to find solutions after a long break from competitive action.

Despite the setbacks, Qadsia is banking on its experience in the com-



Qadsia players intensify training for the showdown.

petition after finishing the group stage with 10 points and securing qualification with a crucial final-round win. It is determined to avoid a repeat of last season, when it lost the title to Iraq's Duhok.

The team has been preparing in Doha, where it played a single friendly that ended in a goalless draw against Al Bidda. Tunisian

coach Nabil Maaloul used the match to fine-tune tactics and assess readiness ahead of the semi-final.

Meanwhile, Al Rayyan enters the clash with strong momentum, boosted by home advantage, vocal support, and recent success after winning the QSL Cup. It also topped its group unbeaten with 12 points.

Kuwait handball team withdraws from Gulf Games amid preparation concerns

By Khaled Al-Enezi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, April 18: Kuwait Handball Federation Secretary-General Qaed Al-Adwani confirmed that the federation has officially addressed the Kuwait Olympic Committee regarding the withdrawal of the national team from the upcoming Gulf Games "Doha 2026," set to take place in the Qatari capital on May 14.

Al-Adwani said the decision request was driven by insufficient preparation time and the suspension of training for nearly two months due to current regional circumstances, which have significantly impacted the team's readiness.

He noted that the final decision now rests with the Kuwait Olympic Committee, which will determine whether to approve the withdrawal or proceed with participation.

"The current situation, along with the halt of sporting activity since late February and the interruption of training sessions, led the federation to request withdrawal due to the inability to properly prepare the team in such a short period," Al-Adwani explained.

He added that participating without adequate preparation could increase

the risk of player injuries, which the federation is keen to avoid, especially with major upcoming competitions on the calendar, including the 20th

Asian Games in Nagoya, Japan, from September 19 to October 4, as well as the World Handball Championship in Germany next January.

Al-Adwani emphasized that player safety remains the federation's top priority in all international competitions.



A file photo of players battling for the ball.

Coventry returns to Premier League after hard-fought draw at Blackburn

BLACKBURN, England, April 18, (AP): Coventry City clinched a return to the Premier League for the first time since 2001 after drawing at Blackburn Rovers 1-1 in the Championship.

Frank Lampard's men were second best for much of the game but one point was enough to secure a historic return to the top tier. Blackburn winger Ryōya Morishita put the home side ahead after 54 minutes but Bobby Thomas equalized six minutes from time to the delight of the visiting fans.

The result put Coventry 11 points clear of second-placed Ipswich Town and 13 ahead of third-placed Millwall.

The top two go up automatically, while the teams from third to sixth take part in a playoff to see which other club will join them.

Lampard's side has looked a good bet for promotion for the entire season with what is both the best attack and the stingiest defense.

It was in the top flight for 34 years from 1967-2001 but its only major trophy was the FA Cup in 1987.

The result left Blackburn in 16th, three places and five points above the relegation zone.

Meanwhile, Brentford failed to boost its unlikely Champions League qualification hopes by drawing a fifth straight game in the Premier League, this time 0-0 at home to Fulham on Saturday.

Brentford could have climbed above Chelsea, which plays Manchester United later, and into sixth place with a

win but missed a slew of chances.

Top scorer Igor Thiago hit the goal frame, Keane Lewis-Potter blazed a glorious chance over and Fulham goalkeeper Bernd Leno made a stunning last-minute save from Dango Ouattara.

Seventh-placed Brentford still remains in outside contention for a finish in the Champions League positions as the top five will qualify for the Champions League.

Former Brentford manager Thomas Frank was in the stands. It was his first visit to his old club since being fired by Tottenham in February.

For Pep Guardiola, it's cut and dried.

"Obviously if we lose, yes it's over," the Manchester City manager said about Sunday's Premier League title showdown with Arsenal.

Sitting six points behind Arsenal with a game in hand, Guardiola acknowledged there were no more second chances for his players.

Reflecting on a title race when City has been the chaser, Guardiola said he felt after a seven-day span in early January when his team drew with Sunderland, Chelsea and Brighton in consecutive games that City had "missed the chance" to catch Arsenal.

He felt similar at the start of March when City drew back-to-back games with relegation contenders Nottingham Forest and West Ham. "We said, 'Uh, it's run away (from us),' " Guardiola said Friday. "But it's never over until it's over, and we are still here."