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NATIONAL CARRIERS RELAUNCH SERVICES AFTER AIRSPACE REOPENING

Kuwait back airborne as flights regain momentum

Customs powers airport restart after prolonged shutdown

By Munif Naif

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff and Agencies

KUWAIT CITY, April 25: Kuwait Airways announced Saturday it will re-operate 35 flights from Kuwait International Airport (Terminal T4) to various destinations beginning Sunday.

Acting CEO Abdulwahab Al-Shatti told KUNA that the initial destinations include Beirut, Riyadh, London, Istanbul, Dhaka, Mumbai, Kochi, Colombo, Delhi, Manila, Cairo, Jeddah, and Trivandrum.

Al-Shatti added that Cairo flights will operate daily starting Sunday, while Beirut flights will operate twice a week on Mondays and Wednesdays starting April 27. Riyadh flights will operate on Tuesdays and Fridays starting April 28.

Jeddah flights will operate four times a week on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thurs-

days, and Saturdays starting April 28, and London flights will operate three times a week on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays starting April 28.

Colombo will have one weekly flight on Mondays starting April 27th, Istanbul on Wednesdays starting April 29th, and Delhi on Mondays starting April 28th.

Kochi will have three weekly flights on Mondays, Thursdays, and Saturdays starting April 27th, and Manila will have three weekly flights on Sundays,

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Opinion

Ahmed Al-Jarallah

Editor-in-Chief, the Arab Times

Syrian criminals stole Gulf citizens' money

THE arrest of Amjad Yousef, a criminal from the former Syrian regime, confirms the determination to achieve justice in the new Syria and proves that the new government is working diligently to achieve security and stability without any acts of revenge, but rather to make Syria great again.

This criminal did not act alone, but was part of a network that still exists and profited from looting, theft, and murder for 50 years, under a regime that resorted to systematic oppression to subjugate its people.

Therefore, liberating Syrians from the suffocating grip that has been on their chests for the past five decades, and which has turned their country into a private fiefdom ruled by criminals, is the only path for the Damascus government, which must show zero tolerance in this matter.

Significant steps have been taken in several areas, for which Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa and the new government deserve recognition. The government is working to uphold rights and hold wrongdoers accountable without compromise. However, this must be accompanied by additional steps to achieve a new Syria.

All those who have wronged the Syrian people must be arrested, especially those who exploited their proximity to criminal networks that oppressed people not only in Syria, but also in the Arabian Gulf states and throughout the world.

These individuals benefited from Interpol's inability to reach them in Syria. The former regime used such networks to suppress honorable opposition figures, extort Gulf businessmen, commit crimes against them inside Syria, fabricate charges, and

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Kuwait Towers frame a lively Saturday scene as cyclists pass by. Social gatherings, weddings, and theatrical performances have resumed, reflecting a renewed pulse of public life under prevailing stability. — See Page 4

Region condemns attack

Drone strikes hit Kuwait; Iraq orders probe, arrests

By Munif Naif

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, April 25: Official spokesperson of the Ministry of Defense Colonel Staff Saud Al-Atwan announced that two northern land borders in the country were attacked Friday by two drones loaded with explosives and guided by fiber optic cables launched from Iraq, resulting in material damage without causing injuries or casualties.

In a press statement, Al-Atwan disclosed that the concerned authorities immediately dealt with the incident.

He prayed to Almighty Allah to protect Kuwait and its people under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir and Supreme Commander of Kuwait Armed Forces Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah.

Meanwhile, Iraqi Interior Minister Abdul Amir Al-Shammari confirmed that Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani issued a directive that those involved in the attack on Kuwait must be identified and brought to justice.

A statement issued by the Iraqi Ministry of Interior, published by the Iraqi News Agency, revealed that Al-Shammari made a phone call to his Kuwaiti counterpart, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah, during which they discussed the attack that occurred Friday morning inside the Kuwaiti territory.

Al-Shammari expressed his utter denunciation of the aggression and sabotage, emphasizing that these acts harm the fraternal relations between Iraq and Kuwait and do not reflect the nature of the historical ties between the two countries.

He conveyed the instructions of Al-Sudani regarding the formation of a specialized investigative committee to determine the details of the incident, identify those involved and bring them to justice.

He added that during the phone call, both sides underscored the importance of concerted action to maintain the security and stability of the two countries and to intensify efforts aimed at preventing the recurrence of such incidents.

Moreover, the treacherous attack sparked a wave of anger throughout the Gulf and the Arab world.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia expressed condemnation of the attack. In an official statement, the Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs stressed that the Kingdom categorically rejects violation of State sovereignty and attempt to threaten regional security and stability. It stressed the need for the Iraqi government to responsibly deal with threats to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nations.

The Kingdom expressed its solidarity with the sisterly State of Kuwait, its government and its people, and reaffirmed its full support for all measures taken to preserve the sovereignty, security and stability of the country.

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) denounced the attack as well. Its Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that "this terrorist

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Economic strain mounts

Lebanon denies receiving \$1 billion IMF assistance

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Special Report

KUWAIT CITY, April 25: Despite the series of economic and financial reforms adopted by Lebanon last year, even before the start of the current war, the Israeli attacks have caused significant losses that have negatively impacted the Lebanese economy, in addition to the human toll.

In this regard, Lebanese Finance Minister Yassin Jaber denied in his recent statements that Lebanon had received \$1 billion from the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

He explained that during its spring meetings with the IMF and the World Bank, Lebanon received only moral support, without any material assistance to support the Lebanese economy in its current circumstances. The World Bank believes Lebanon, in its current situation, does not meet the conditions and criteria for financial support, and therefore, Lebanon has not yet reached an agreement on a co-operation program.

Regarding the cost of the destruction of Lebanese villages during the



Lebanese Finance Minister Yassin Jaber

current war, Minister Jaber said, "It is currently difficult to determine the cost of the destruction of Lebanese villages in the south, given the ongoing war, which has affected 55 villages and towns in southern Lebanon. Some villages, such as Bint Jbeil, Ben Leif, and others, have been completely destroyed. The cost of reconstruction after the war ends will be enormous."

He questioned whether it is possible

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Over 10,000 bottles of seized liquor destroyed

Kuwait arrests 12 in major drug crackdown

By Munif Naif

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, April 25: First Lieutenant Mohammad Al-Harbi from the Public Relations and Security Media General Department at the Ministry of

Interior announced that the Drug Control General Department (DCGD) in the Criminal Security Sector arrested 12 individuals of Asian and Arab origins in a series of security campaigns recently.

The apprehended suspects had a

huge quantity of illegal substances in their possession, including three kilograms of synthetic cannabinoids, 1.25 kilograms of crystal meth (methamphetamine), 1.1 kilograms of hashish,

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News watch

MUSCAT: GCC Statistical Center announced on Saturday that the average annual growth rate of the nursing staff reached 4.6 percent during the period 2014-2024, noting that the number of nurses reached 413,200 by the end of 2024.

In a report issued on nursing staff in the GCC countries, the center added that this growth reflects the continuous expansion of human resources within the region's healthcare system. The report noted an increase of about 150,000 nurses over the past decade, reflecting accelerated investment in healthcare staff to meet rising demand and improve quality of care.

The center said nurses make up about 30.3 percent of the GCC healthcare workforce, with 62.4 percent working in government facilities, highlighting strong reliance on the public sector for curative and preventive services. (KUNA)

US-Iran standoff continues as ceasefire mediation intensifies

ISLAMABAD, April 25, (AP): U.S. envoys are expected to travel to Pakistan on Saturday in a new bid to salvage ceasefire talks with Tehran, even as Iran's top diplomat arrived in Islamabad and ruled out direct negotiations with U.S. representatives.

The latest effort to broker a deal in Islamabad comes as an indefinite ceasefire has paused most fighting, but the economic fallout is still mounting with global energy shipments disrupted by the near closure of the Strait of Hormuz.

Officials have not specified when President Donald Trump's envoys Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner, who are expected to lead the U.S. negotiation team, are due to arrive. The White House declined to comment on Saturday.

On Saturday, Iran resumed commercial flights from Tehran's international airport for the first time since the conflict with the U.S. and Israel began about two months ago. Flights were scheduled to depart for Istanbul, Oman's capital of Muscat and the Saudi city of Madinah, according to Iran's state-run television. Iran partly reopened its airspace earlier this month due to the ceasefire.

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi meanwhile met with the Pakistani military's chief of staff and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif. Araghchi wrote on Telegram that they spoke about regional developments, including Iran's red lines for

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3 Wedding halls start receiving visitors April 26



8 Gulf Bank renews its strategic collaboration with Mastercard to boost customer experience and expand digital banking solutions



8 NBK wins Emplifi 'Fueling Your Growth' Award



Prayer Timings

Fajr	03:48	Asr	15:21
Sunrise	05:12	Maghrib	18:20
Zohr	11:46	Isha	19:42

High-end plans keep Kuwait food baskets full

Steady flow of poultry, fish, vegetables despite challenges

KUWAIT CITY, April 25, (KUNA): Kuwait has demonstrated high efficiency in managing food security amid current regional developments and their impacts on global supply chains.

This was achieved through continuous coordination between the government and production unions and ongoing support for vital sectors, maintaining stability in local market, and ensuring smooth and abundant availability of essential goods.

This cooperation between the government and production unions has proven to be a fundamental pillar in preserving the food system, supporting national products and achieving the highest possible level of self-sufficiency.

This unified effort enhanced Kuwait's ability to face crisis repercussions while continuing to secure various goods and strengthen local production.

The Kuwait Farmers Union boosted local agricultural output and supplied vegetables to markets, reducing reliance on imports, particularly amid disruptions in transport through the Strait of Hormuz.

The Kuwaiti Fishermen's Union secured marine protein by intensifying fishing and importing via alternative routes. Meanwhile, the Kuwaiti Dairy Producers Union maintained stable dairy production, while the Poultry Producers Union ensured availability of poultry and eggs.

Chairman of the Kuwaiti Farmers Union, Ahmad Al-Adwani, told KUNA that the union successfully supplied the local market with various agricultural products, particularly daily-consumed vegetables, despite supply chain disruptions.

He stated that Kuwaiti farmers managed to provide all products to the local market, in coordination with the Public Authority for Agriculture Affairs and Fish Resources and the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, with prices remaining reasonable.

He added that recent increases in some items were seasonal and natural during the transition from winter to summer, typically lasting 10 to 25 days, noting the union maintained market stability by distributing products to cooperative societies, which are closest to consumers.

He noted that although exporting countries such as Jordan, Syria, and Turkey halted exports due to transport issues or rising domestic prices, Kuwaiti farmers were able to fill the gap.

He also highlighted significant government support for the agricultural sector, including allocating markets for local products and subsidizing diesel. Additional



Abdullah Al-Sarheed



Ahmad Al-Adwani



Azarah Al-Hussaini

support included financial aid for registered products, provision of treated water, and electricity support-ensuring no outages despite the circumstances.

He confirmed that the agricultural sector faced only minor challenges that did not affect production or the flow of food supplies, noting that the situation remained stable even under the worst conditions.

Regarding future plans, he emphasized strengthening coordination between government entities, stating that the union is working to align support efforts to ensure the organization of local agricultural products and sustain food security.

For his part, the Chairman of the Kuwaiti Fishermen's Union, Abdullah Al-Sarheed, said the sector successfully met local fish demand and controlled prices despite challenges caused by war tensions, the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, and disrupted supply routes.

Compensate

Fishermen intensified efforts to compensate for supply shortages while continuing imports in coordination with government authorities, stabilizing the market and preventing price hikes.

He noted that some fish prices dropped significantly, with Zubaidi fish declining from about KD 25 per kilogram to between KD 5 and KD 9, depending on size.

He added that flight suspensions required alternative import routes, including shipping from Pakistan and India to the UAE, then transporting goods by land to Kuwait. He praised government cooperation in facilitating quick entry of shipments to maintain quality.

He confirmed that the market is currently stable, with adequate supply and prices within normal levels.

On food security, he said proposals included opening Kuwait Bay and Bubiyan Island to boost production and reduce reliance on imports, alongside more efficient diesel use. He added that future plans include fish farming projects under union supervision to enhance local production.

Meanwhile, Chairman of the Poultry Producers Union, Azarah Al-Hussaini, confirmed market stability and availability of poultry and eggs, noting no shortages despite regional conditions.

He pointed out that slight price increases were mainly due to consumer stockpiling driven by concern, which temporarily pressured supply, however strategic reserves are available and there is no real crisis-only minor price variations.

All poultry products are available, including live, chilled, and frozen chicken, as well as cuts and eggs, noting that local egg production exceeds 140 percent of market needs, creating a surplus, while poultry production covers 60-70 percent of demand.

He explained that full self-sufficiency is not reached due to consumer preferences, as some prefer imported products such as Brazilian or Ukrainian poultry, resulting in a mixed supply system.

He added that the poultry sector was partially affected by rising feed prices due to supply chain disruptions, but Kuwait managed this through regional cooperation via Gulf ports, especially Jeddah Port in Saudi Arabia.

He confirmed that the union implemented regulatory measures with government authorities to ensure fair distribution and prevent monopolistic practices.

Chairman of the Fresh Dairy Producers Union, Abdulhakim Al-Ahmad, stated that the dairy sector continued producing fresh milk during the crisis despite supply challenges, supported by about 50 farms along with national companies supporting the market.

He explained that the main challenge was disruptions in feed supply, which increased costs and affected continuity, especially with temporary halts in Gulf shipments. The union sourced alternatives from Saudi Arabia via land routes, with feed prices rising from about KD 90 per ton to around KD 150.

He added that total production is about 270 tons of fresh milk daily, covering 20-30 percent of market demand, which he described as limited given rising demand.

He stressed the need to strengthen strategic feed reserves for at least three months through coordination with authorities, along with continued government support and cooperation with the private sector to ensure stable dairy production and enhance food security during crises.



The hustle bustle of daily life in the corridors of heritage Souq Al-Mubarakiya, Kuwait City.



Landmark reflects Kuwait's pre-oil trade heritage

A cultural market ... stories of daily life

KUWAIT CITY, April 25 : The Arms Market ... is one of the oldest traditional markets within the historic Al-Mubarakiya Market in the heart of Kuwait City, reports Al-Rai daily.

It emerged as a commercial hub in the early 20th century, when the trade in military equipment and hunting weapons formed an important part of local community life.

The market was a destination for those wishing to purchase traditional light weapons such as hunting rifles, in addition to hunting supplies, maintenance equipment, and spare parts. Edged weapons such as swords, daggers, and others were also sold.

In this regard, historian Farhan Abdullah Al-Farhan explained, "The Arms Market originated in the early 20th century and began in the inner market. After the establishment of Al-Mubarakiya Market, its southern section was designated for the Arms Market, which remains to this day.

The market is considered one of the largest and

oldest in Kuwait, reflecting the commercial character that existed before the oil era, when traditional markets served as meeting points for merchants and citizens from various regions.

During the market's heyday, its shops were small and mostly run by families and merchants who had inherited the trade for generations. These shops offered traditional hunting weapons, magazines, and ammunition, in addition to leather goods such as saddlebags, as well as hunting and equestrian equipment, heritage items, and antique swords.

Over time, the goods offered in the market began to change, and the smell of gunpowder gradually gave way to incense and perfumes as these items became more widespread. However, some shops selling equestrian equipment and ornate metal tools remained. Over time, the number of shops selling coffee pots, teapots, oud and perfumes, hand-tailored bags, spices, and classic weapons (now sold only

with official licenses in accordance with state laws) also increased.

Among the most prominent arms dealers in Kuwait in the past were Ibrahim Saeed Al-Badawi, Ishaq Al-Hajri, and Ibrahim Al-Mufarraj. Weapons were smuggled from the Sultanate of Oman to Kuwait, as the British authorities had prohibited arms trading in Kuwait and the surrounding areas."

Al-Farhan pointed out that the Arms Market is an important part of Kuwait's cultural identity, as its alleyways preserve the memories of merchants and Gulf figures who visited it over the decades.

He affirmed that citizens and tourists alike used to visit it to explore an important chapter of Kuwait's trade history before the country's major economic transformation.

Al-Farhan highlighted that the market is not only seen as a place for buying and selling goods, but also as a cultural landmark that reflects stories of daily life in old Kuwait.

KU focuses on environment protection & sustainability

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

KUWAIT CITY, April 25: The Institutional Innovation Department, in collaboration with the Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences at the Faculty of Science in Kuwait University, held an online seminar via Microsoft Teams titled "Your Environmental Footprint on Your University Day."

The seminar was presented by faculty members from the Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences Dr. Abdullah Hussein, Dr. Noura Al-Sarawi, and Dr. Reem Al-Awadhi.

The seminar was held to mark Earth Day and as part of Kuwait University's sustainability strategy, aiming to raise awareness about the importance of environmentally friendly practices and promote environmental sustainability.

Dr. Abdullah Hussein presented an accessible explanation of the environmental footprint, illustrating a typical

day in the life of a university student.

He outlined the options available to students regarding their environmental footprint and posed several questions to deepen their understanding and broaden their knowledge of the carbon footprint. Dr. Noura Al-Sarawi focused on students' break time, the variety of student activities, and the evening after the academic day ends. She highlighted practical practices that enable students to adopt an environmentally friendly lifestyle.

Dr. Reem Al-Awadhi led an open discussion session, encouraging students to reflect on their daily choices. The session witnessed wide and enthusiastic participation from attendees from various colleges and departments, along with valuable contributions from fellow professors who enriched the discussion.

The seminar aimed to empower individuals to assess their personal footprint, thereby strengthening their role as active contributors to environmental sustainability.

Other Voices

Iran, the Bitcoin Inventor, and specialist Adam Back

By Ahmad alsarraf

Cathy Benhold, a writer for The New York Times, says her grandmother only uses cash for her needs and would have been in harmony with Satoshi Nakamoto, the legendary inventor of Bitcoin, whose true identity remains a mystery.

She noted that "Nakamoto" is a pseudonym, but who was he really? Many have attempted to uncover his identity, including her colleague John Carrero, an investigative journalist who claims to have identified the true creator of Bitcoin, an identity that has spawned others.

The first concept of digital currency was first introduced in a research paper published in an obscure corner of the Internet in 2008. Its author, identifying himself as Satoshi Nakamoto, described his idea for a decentralized electronic currency that would allow people to send money globally without fees and without the need for banks or government oversight.

Since then, public fascination with uncovering the identity of Bitcoin's creator has continued to grow.

After a short time, doubts began to emerge about the authenticity of the name. As Bitcoin's use expanded, John Carrero became increasingly interested in solving the mystery. He spent 12 years working on the case, arriving at a near-truth.

Bitcoin is used for legitimate purposes, such as providing a reliable store of value for people in countries with unstable currencies. However, due to the lack of oversight, it has also been used for illicit activities, including money laundering.

Some countries, including Iran, use Bitcoin to help circumvent sanctions. Because governments do not control the currency, and out of concern over potential legal repercussions from countries such as the United States, Bitcoin's creator chose to remain anonymous.

He did not want people to perceive Bitcoin as a typical company with a product and a CEO. Instead, he wanted it to be seen as a new kind of discovery, like digital gold, a newly created digital commodity. The absence of a known human founder reinforces this idea. Over



alsarraf

time, suspicion fell on the influential British computer scientist Adam Back.

However, no one has been able to substantiate these claims. When John Carrero analyzed Adam Back's writing and compared it to Nakamoto's, he noted several similarities, including what he believed was a consistent misuse of commas and periods, placing them incorrectly between words or omitting them where grammatical rules would require them. He even considered using artificial intelligence to replicate this writing style.

Back still denies it, but I am 95.5 percent certain it is the same person. I believe his denial is disingenuous, driven by a desire to maintain secrecy.

I must say that the Bitcoin community has taken on a near-cult-like dimension. They regard Satoshi Nakamoto as an inspirational figure and do not want to link him to any specific name or image. They want to continue viewing it as a non-hierarchical, decentralized, collective project - a cryptocurrency not controlled by any single entity. One of their favorite slogans is "We are all Satoshi."

Adam Back was a member of a privacy-focused, anarchist group in the 1990s that sought ways to break free from government control and censorship. They wanted a currency beyond government control, fearing that the increasing digitization of financial transactions would lead to every transaction being recorded electronically, and that governments would use these records to track individuals.

They hence pursued the creation of what they described as "electronic money," a digital form of cash that cannot be traced.

Carrero believes that Satoshi or Back mined 1.1 million bitcoins in the first 16 months of the project. He believes that, at today's prices, they possess a fortune estimated at around \$82 billion.

Carrero said he met Back several times, and that he is the opposite of the stereotypical cryptocurrency man. He is quiet, introverted, has shaggy gray hair, and seems like a computer scientist, and is a pleasant conversationalist. He had publications in the 1990s about the necessity of working under a pseudonym to avoid government suspicion. This seems to be someone who had been planning this for a long time.

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Acknowledgments totaling KD2 mln annulled by court

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

KUWAIT CITY, April 25: The Court of Cassation issued a final ruling invalidating two debt acknowledgments totaling two million dinars, in a case filed by a woman to challenge the validity of a debt claim made by her ex-husband.

According to the case file, the plaintiff, represented by her lawyer Inam Haidar, filed a lawsuit requesting a stay of execution on one of the debt acknowledgments and the referral of the dispute to an expert to determine whether she had actually received the funds mentioned in the acknowledgments. She stated that she was coerced into signing them under threat and during marital disputes, without receiving any actual amounts.



Inam Haidar

During the proceedings, Lawyer Inam Haidar stressed that the acknowledgments had no legal basis and were therefore invalid as they were issued under duress. She presented documents and evidence supporting her defense and maintained that there was no proof her client had received any funds, nor could the defendant prove the source of those funds.

On the other hand, the defendant maintained the validity of one of the acknowledgments, claiming he had given the money to the plaintiff for investment through her brother. However, his statements regarding the source of the funds and the method of delivery were contradictory, weakening his position before the court.

The court explained in its ruling that the two acknowledgments lacked a legitimate cause and that the documents contained no evidence proving the plaintiff's receipt of the funds.

Furthermore, the court highlighted the contradictions and illogical nature of the defendant's statements, emphasizing that an obliga-

tion without a valid cause is void according to Article 176 of the Civil Code.

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Multiple rulings issued: The Ninth Circuit of the Court of Appeals, specializing in State Security crimes (both domestic and external) and terrorism offenses, presided over by Judge Abdullah Al-Sanea, with Judges Meshal Al-Mutawa and Saud Al-Mutairi as members, issued a series of rulings in several cases.

The court upheld the acquittal of Salem Al-Tawil on charges of insulting Algeria in connection with a video circulated on social media regarding the number of martyrs, based on a complaint filed by the Algerian Embassy.

The court also sentenced two brothers to five years in prison each after convicting them of joining and financing the banned organization Hizb ut-Tahrir, in addition to insulting Jordan and Egypt on social media.

In another case, the court sentenced Salman Al-Khaldi to five years in prison after convicting him of offending the Amir, publicly defaming the Amir, and insulting the rulers of Gulf states and the head of the Central System for Remediating the Status of Illegal Residents. The court overturned the Criminal Court's ruling that had sentenced him to 15 years in prison.

The court upheld a fine of KD 2,000 against an Instagram news service administrator and ordered the permanent blocking of the site for operating outside the scope of its license from the Ministry of Information and misusing telecommunications. The court upheld the acquittal of the defendant on the remaining charges.

The court also upheld a three-year prison sentence and a KD 10,000 fine for a citizen found guilty of illegally accessing the Ministry of Defense's automated systems and viewing classified military data and information while serving in the National Military Service.

The court upheld the acquittal of the defendant on charges of harming national security and obtaining, disclosing, or selling military secrets to foreign websites.

Drug peddling networks targeting Kuwait busted

KUWAIT CITY, April 25: Lebanese authorities successfully dismantled two organized drug trafficking networks operating across the border and targeting Kuwait, in a security operation resulting from intelligence cooperation with Kuwaiti authorities, reports Al-Rai daily.

Lebanese Interior Minister Ahmad Hajjar said, "Lebanon will never allow itself to be a platform for exporting any kind of harm to our Arab brothers, or a launching pad for any activity that threatens their security and stability. This operation constitutes a clear message that the Lebanese state is working resolutely to protect Lebanese society from this dangerous scourge. It will not tolerate any party that seeks to harm Lebanon's relations with its Arab neighbors." The Lebanese Internal Security Forces Directorate General explained that investigations began after the arrest of a man for drug use and public disorder. It was revealed that he was the mastermind behind a transnational drug trafficking ring operating within Kuwait. He used the alias "The Devil" to manage the network from within Lebanon via electronic applications, with the assistance of several dealers of various nationalities residing in Kuwait.

Security forces were able to identify members of the network and arrest several of them, including those involved in receiving money transfers generated from drug trafficking. The network supplied approximately 200 drug users within Kuwait. As a result of intelligence cooperation with the Criminal Security Bureau at Kuwait's Embassy in Lebanon, investigations conducted by the Central Drug Enforcement Bureau revealed another cross-border network operating in the same manner. This network is headed by a person nicknamed "Abu Hussein" whose identity has been established. He is of Palestinian nationality and heads a network that distributes drugs to approximately 1,500 people within Kuwait, operating from Lebanon in collaboration with accomplices in Kuwait.

Coordination is underway with the Kuwaiti authorities to apprehend all those involved.

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82 warnings issued: The Engineering Audit and Follow-up Department in Jahra Municipality carried out its sixth field inspection campaign in Jahra Industrial as part of Kuwait Municipality's ongoing efforts to monitor construction activities, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

In an official statement, the Public Relations Department at Kuwait Municipality announced that the campaign, conducted by engineers and supervisors, focused on detecting building violations and ensuring compliance with regulations and standards governing various property uses, including residential, industrial, commercial, agricultural, investment, and craft sectors.

During the inspection, 82 warnings were issued for multiple violations, including the use of properties as bachelor accommodations and encroachments on state-owned land.

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A DIGEST OF PUBLIC OPINION

Iranians long for change in fragmented hierarchy

"THE Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) was established in 1979 during the Islamic Revolution to protect the ruling clerical system and consolidate the new religious regime. Over time, it accumulated extensive power, and gained control of the country's economy, security, culture, society, and politics," columnist **Ahmad Al-Dawas** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

"From a relatively small militia, it now controls more than half of the Iranian economy, wields huge influence in government ministries, and comprises approximately one million members stationed throughout Iran and the region.

"Following the US-Israeli war against Iran, which began on February 28, the Iranian leadership structure suffered a devastating blow. Several high-ranking officials were removed from their posts, and Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei has not appeared in public, despite statements being issued in his name. President Masoud Pezeshkian's public profile has also diminished considerably, and the IRGC has emerged as the most influential actor, and is ruling the country.

"However, the IRGC is not a monolithic entity; rather, it comprises factions and currents, each with its own political stance. For example, there are figures such as Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, a military figure and Speaker of Parliament, and Mohammad Bagher Zolghadr, a member of the Supreme National Security Council.

"There is also a hardline faction that seeks to control local affairs to ensure the regime's survival and takes a hard line on foreign policy.

"These divisions are reflected in official Iranian discourse, which has become increasingly contradictory. While there are indications of a willingness to negotiate with the United States, there are also hardline positions rejecting any rapprochement with Washington. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs appears to operate in one direction, while other entities act in another. This reflects an absence of a unified decision-making process in Iran, as if there were an internal struggle over determining the country's policies.

"In this context, the power struggle intertwines with external challenges, creating a highly complex environment. The lack of clear leadership, the multiplicity of decision-making centers, and the escalating competition between factions all make it difficult to predict the course of events. Iran is experiencing a complex transitional phase, and the question remains - who truly governs Iran?

"Iran is reported to have lost a significant portion of its missile launch sites, weapons production facilities, and 90 percent of its naval assets. The war also resulted in the deaths of hundreds of Iranian leaders, including Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, and caused damage estimated at over \$270 billion, plunging the country into a severe economic crisis exacerbated by a US naval blockade.

"The war also caused significant turmoil in global markets and a surge in oil prices. Despite the failure of negotiations hosted by Pakistan, most US reports indicate that the door to negotiations remains open and that another round of talks is possible. President Trump has stated on several occasions that the war is "almost over" and that Iran is "begging" for an agreement.

"Iran is suffering enormous losses and successive hardships, and the country lacks clear leadership. Yet it continues to threaten to "open new fronts" and to use its influence over regional proxies if its demands are not met.

"We must ask - what has Iran gained so far? It has weakened internally, its people have suffered, it has attacked Gulf states with drones and missiles, and activated its terrorist cells to undermine the security of Gulf countries. As a result, it has lost their friendship and finds itself facing an adversary that, in its view, has revealed its true nature.

"According to studies, millions of Iranians see the weakening of the regime as a long-awaited turning point. They do not want war, rather, they desire an end to a system that has deprived them of dignity, freedom, and the most basic necessities for a decent life."

Also:

"Kuwait is our homeland, our pride, and our identity. On its land we live, enjoying its bounty, and within it we feel safe and secure. Every citizen has rights they receive and duties they bear," researcher in history and the biographies of rulers **Abdullah Abbas Buwair** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

"When we fall short in our work or neglect it, we fall short in our duties toward our beloved homeland.

"Kuwait is a democratic state based on a system of institutions, and it is bound by international agreements that guarantee human rights. It is our duty to respect the rights of others, because preserving the rights of others ensures that we enjoy our own rights.

"We must love for others what we love for ourselves.

"The Kuwait we dream of, and for which we wish prosperity, cannot be realized through wishes alone, but through action, belonging, sacrifice, and cultivating a spirit of free and strong citizenship, along with support for its political leadership.

"Kuwait is a wellspring of goodness and generosity. It is a land of glory and the heritage of our forefathers.

"The late Amir His Highness Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad (May God have mercy on him) said on the first anniversary of Kuwait's liberation, "Kuwaiti democracy is not imported; rather, it is deeply rooted in the hearts of Kuwaitis."

"Citizenship means patriotism. Citizenship can be divided into two categories - the first is true, genuine citizenship, which includes belonging to the homeland, loyalty to it, pride in it, and contributing to its development and progress. The second is inauthentic citizenship, which is superficial and pretentious, based on empty affiliation and the repetition of false slogans that may serve to undermine stability in Kuwait.

"Loyalty to the homeland is not demonstrated by chanting false and misleading slogans, but by serving the nation and elevating its status, whether inside or outside Kuwait.

"Our land is precious to us, just as it was to our ancestors, who sacrificed everything dear and valuable to raise its standing and advance its progress.

"The late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad (May God have mercy on him) said, "We all begin with Kuwait and return to it. It is eternal while we are mortal. Our homeland is a trust placed upon our shoulders, and no one but us will shape its future. This goal is achieved through national unity, affection, harmony, cooperation, building bridges of trust and brotherhood, and rejecting fanaticism, partisanship, and empty rhetoric."

"Above all, we must consider our duties toward our homeland. Defending the homeland is a sacred duty that expresses our love, loyalty, and belonging. Love for and faith in the homeland follows faith in God Almighty, and it is a duty incumbent upon every citizen."

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"We believe that countries are measured by several criteria to assess their level of civilization in all sectors. These criteria are scientific, developed by specialized and credible institutes, and follow established research methodologies," Doctor of Law and Kuwaiti Lawyer **Dr. Nayef Al-Adwani** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

"They use tools such as questionnaires, personal interviews, and analysis of previous studies.

"These criteria also include scientific comparisons of countries at specific historical periods. Among these measures is the quality of life provided to citizens, as well as citizens' perceptions of the level and efficiency of these services in relation to the taxes they pay, and their sense of pride in this quality as a benchmark of civilization compared to other nations.

"Measuring quality of life includes the level of education, its accessibility, and academic outcomes; the standard of medical services, their geographic distribution, and the speed of response by medical teams in rescue, ambulance, and treatment; as well as the cost of these services and their availability free of charge.

"These measures also include the sense of security, low crime rates, and firm deterrence of lawbreakers. This extends to the transparency, integrity, and fairness of the judicial system, ensuring access to legal defense and allowing human rights organizations to monitor trial proceedings.

"Similarly, attention is given to the quality of transportation, public roads, and infrastructure, including sewage systems and green spaces within cities for recreation. It also includes the state's provision of food subsidies to citizens and the sense of care and appreciation citizens feel both locally and internationally through the application of these standards in Kuwait.

"The state has provided its citizens with most of these services either free of charge or at minimal cost. Education is free at all levels, and healthcare is available free of charge to citizens and residents, with facilities and services maintained at a high standard. Public roads are among the best, with ongoing efforts to ensure their maintenance and upkeep.

"The state also provides food subsidies to all, regardless of income. Markets offer a wide range of goods and services and are regulated to prevent price manipulation, speculation, or exploitation during crises. Freedom of trade is guaranteed within the framework of applicable laws and regulations.

"Citizens enjoy freedom of expression within the bounds of the law, without infringing on the rights of others or violating societal norms and values. Freedom of movement and travel is guaranteed, and the privacy and confidentiality of individuals are respected. The environment is clean, with a high level of public hygiene and continuous attention to its maintenance.

"Prices are relatively low, the standard of living is high, and family incomes are improving. Kuwait's commitment to high-quality services is reflected in the government's ability to maintain these standards during various challenges, including the current crisis and the blatant aggression by the Iranian regime against its resources and infrastructure."

— Compiled by Simi K. Kutty



Ahmad Al-Dawas

Wedding halls start receiving visitors April 26



Minister of Social Affairs, Family and Childhood Affairs, Dr. Amthal Al-Huwaila talks to the management during her trip to the wedding halls.



KUNA photos

By Fares Ghaleb

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff and Agencies

KUWAIT CITY, April 25: The Ministry of Social Affairs announced on Friday, April 24, the resumption of weddings and celebrations in its wedding halls, based on a statement issued by the Ministry of Interior.

In a circular, the ministry clarified that the resumption of weddings and celebrations will be limited to wedding halls that meet the requirements of the Kuwait Fire Force (KFF) and those that have been properly maintained. Bookings for wedding halls will resume through the "Munasebat" (event) program and the Sahel application, via the Ministry of Social Affairs' services, specifically the hall booking service.

The ministry confirmed that the circular will take effect starting Sunday, April 26.

Meanwhile, earlier, the Minister of Social Affairs, Family and Childhood Affairs, Dr. Amthal Al-Huwaila inspected some of the ministry's wedding halls on Thursday as part of efforts aiming to assess readiness and preparedness.

The halls started receiving visitors on Friday after precautionary suspension due to the current circumstances in the country and the region.

During a tour, Al-Huwaila affirmed the importance of abiding by the highest standards of quality and safety and full readiness to receive visitors of the wedding halls so as to ensure creating a safe environment with integrated services.

She underlined continued field tours and periodical review of these halls to ensure sustainable readiness and raise service offered to make beneficiaries satisfied.

She said that this tour comes in implementation of the directives of the political leadership and the instructions of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Sabah.

The minister stressed the need to ensure readiness of public facilities and boost the efficiency of services provided in a way that meets citizens' needs and reflects the standard of services in this vital sector.

Al-Huwaila reviewed the technical and service preparations inside the wedding halls, including air conditioning systems, lighting, and general maintenance, as well as hospitality facilities.

MoI roll out strategy to enhance 'output'

KUWAIT CITY, April 25, (KUNA): Undersecretary of the Ministry of Interior (MoI) Maj. Gen. **Abdulwahab Al-Wuhaib** affirmed Thursday that the ministry is moving forward with building an integrated technological system that will help raise the level of readiness and enhance the efficiency of security performance.

This will be achieved by expanding and developing electronic services in line with users' needs, contributing to simplifying procedures and accelerating the completion of transactions according to the highest standards of quality and efficiency, the Ministry said in a news statement.

Accompanied by assistant undersecretary for security affairs Maj. Gen. Ali Al-Adwani and some officials, Al-Wuhaib paid an inspection tour to the General Department of Information Systems, in line with the ministry's eagerness to review workflow and raise constitutional performance level.

Advanced technological solutions provided by the department represent a fundamental pillar in supporting security decision-makers, he said, noting that digital transformation is a necessity by the demands of modern security work amid the rapid development of technologies and systems.

He stressed the need for continuation of action in a team-work spirit for further development in a manner that shows the advanced image of the ministry.

Al-Wuhaib also listened to a detailed briefing from specialists on the key approved electronic systems and the mechanisms for developing digital infrastructure.

It also covered current and future technological projects aimed at supporting security system, speeding up procedures and enhancing institutional performance efficiency.

Factory raid nets tons of rotten fish and shrimps

By Marwa Al-Bahravi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, April 25: The Public Authority for Food and Nutrition (PAFN) conducted a joint inspection campaign that resulted in the seizure of a factory located in Ashairji, which was promoting unsafe food products in violation of health regulations.

PAFN noted that the campaign led to the confiscation of 28,900 kilograms of spoiled fish, along with quantities of frozen shrimp that had been thawed and sold as fresh.

It stated that legal action has been taken against the violators, and emphasized that inspection campaigns will continue in order to protect consumer health and ensure food safety.

Man missing with cash in 'business offer' deal

KUWAIT CITY, April 25: An Arab expatriate has filed a complaint at a police station accusing a relative of defrauding him after receiving payment for a business arrangement, reports **Al-Anba** daily.

According to the complainant, the relative had agreed to assist him in opening a business in exchange for KD 1,000. However, after the agreement was concluded and the amount was paid, the relative allegedly disappeared and switched off his mobile phone.

Investigations have been launched to determine the circumstances of the incident.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry disclosed that the Capital Governorate inspection team conducted a field campaign targeting several garages in Shuwaikh Industrial, which led to the discovery of a warehouse engaged in collecting, cleaning, and reselling used vehicle tires, reports **Al-Seyassah** daily.

The ministry stated that the warehouse was closed, 1,170 used tires were confiscated, and the necessary legal measures were taken against those responsible.

36, 540 kg of 'unfit' food destroyed in PAFN raids

KUWAIT CITY, April 25: The Public Authority for Food and Nutrition (PAFN) confirmed that its Mubarak Al-Kabeer Governorate Inspection Center intensified its inspection campaigns in the months of March and April, during which 192 establishments were inspected, 27 violations were issued, five written pledges were obtained, and four complaints were received, reports **Al-Seyassah** daily.

In a press release issued on Friday, PAFN revealed that 36,540 kilograms of 'unfit food' were destroyed and legal action was taken against the violators.

It emphasized its continued efforts to protect consumer health and ensure food safety.

1-legged dealer in cop custody

No let-up on drug traffickers

By Munif Naif

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff and Agencies

KUWAIT CITY, April 25: **Farwaniya police dealt another blow to drug dealers, when they arrested a disabled man with one leg for selling Lyrica pills in the area.**

A security source told the newspaper that the man attempted to elicit sympathy, claiming he was not carrying any contraband. However, the officers' keen observation exposed his scheme. He was referred to the concerned authorities, along with the confiscated drugs.

The source said the Farwaniya security personnel noticed the suspicious behavior of the man while patrolling the area. The officers found out that he was selling Lyrica pills packed in small bags.

The source added that a precautionary search led to the discovery of an undisclosed quantity of narcotic pills and cash in 1- possession of the suspect.

The source emphasized that security forces do not tolerate anyone proven to be involved in drug trafficking or distribution, affirming the continuation of daily security campaigns to apprehend criminals, regardless of their methods of concealment or disguise.

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All savings 'stolen': A 1998-born Syrian expatriate filed a report at Rabiya Police Station, accusing a Syrian national, a Kuwaiti citizen, and a Turkish national of defrauding him of KD 18,000, and refusing to pay the agreed-upon profits, return the principal amount, or deliver vehicles he had purchased through down payments, reports **Al-Anba** daily.

The complainant explained, "I was defrauded by the first defendant, who is my neighbor born in 1988, along with a Turkish national born in 1991, and a Kuwaiti national born in 1969. The first defendant and I had developed a close friendship. He told me he was a businessman with various projects and investments, and had persistently pressured me to invest in a mobile taxi rental business.

He asked me to go to his office, where the owner was present. The owner informed me that they were partners and had a contract, which they showed me. We agreed that I would invest KD 18,000, with a monthly profit of KD 1,500, in exchange for purchasing seven taxis.

I told my neighbor that the amount I was investing was all I owned. He assured me that my rights were protected and that if the company owner failed to pay the profits, he would personally cover them.

Initially paid KD 11,500 through several bank transfers and also in cash. After receiving the full amount, the defendants began stalling and evading payment of the agreed profits. They refused to return my money or deliver the cars".

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KUNA photos

The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) in Kuwait and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries is organizing a symbolic tree-planting initiative in the diplomatic area. Inset: Diplomats join children in a tree-planting activity.

Earth Day event promotes green diplomacy

UN-Habitat leads diplomatic tree-planting drive

By Fares Ghaleb

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, April 25: The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) for Kuwait and other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries organized a symbolic afforestation event in the diplomatic district in order to promote environmental diplomacy and support national initiatives to expand green areas and mitigate desertification.

Several heads of missions and members of the diplomatic corps attended the event, which coincided with Earth Day on April 22. The embassies of Turkiye, Malaysia, Russia, United Arab Emirates (UAE) and India participated in the event, during which they planted Arfaj -- the national flower of Kuwait, along with a variety of native plants, as an expression of international solidarity with the environmental vision of the country and its efforts to maintain urban sustainability.

Head of UN-Habitat mission in Kuwait and

other GCC countries Dr. Amira Al-Hassan stated that the selection of Arfaj for the project has deep national and environmental significance, as it symbolizes resilience and adaptation to the desert environment.

She pointed out that the participation of diplomatic missions serves as a model of international cooperation in addressing climate change and improving the quality of life in cities.

She explained that this event is part of the efforts of UN-Habitat to highlight the environmental efforts of Kuwait and its projects aimed at combating desertification, increasing green spaces, and raising public awareness on the importance of protecting the environment.

She added that transforming urban areas into greener areas is a symbolic and practical step towards supporting the 'Green Kuwait' vision and promoting the idea that environmental protection is a shared responsibility, which transcends borders.

Meanwhile, Turkish Ambassador to Kuwait Tuba Sönmez affirmed that the participation of

her country in such an initiative proves its commitment to protect the environment and support Kuwait in the expansion of its green spaces and improve the quality of its urban environment.

She considers the project an opportunity to strengthen the bilateral partnership between Turkiye and Kuwait in various fields. She stated that participating in the initiative affirms the bonds of brotherhood and friendship between Turkiye and Kuwait.

She added that the act of planting native plants transcends its environmental nature, conveying a shared humanitarian message that environmental protection is a collective responsibility shouldered by nations and communities.

She indicated that desert plants, such as Arfaj, serves as a powerful lesson on resilience and adaptability, as they continue to thrive in harsh conditions.

She added that communities can learn such a valuable lesson while overcoming environmental and climatic challenges.

'Kuwaiti Baiza' revival seen as economic bet

Investment tool or symbolic move?

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

KUWAIT CITY, April 25: The idea of reviving the 'Kuwaiti Baiza' (Pice) as a gold currency has resurfaced in the midst of intensification of efforts to diversify income sources and lessen dependence on oil.

This is not just seen as an extension of an ancient monetary tradition, but as an economic project with promising opportunities and complex challenges.

Experts believe that the shift towards producing a local gold currency opens the door to reshaping a portion of Kuwait's gold market by shifting the focus from traditional jewelry to savings instruments. This could revitalize related sectors, such as jewelry making, packaging and distribution, and create opportunities for small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

However, experts confirmed to the newspaper that this approach is challenging in terms of the ability of the local product to gain consumer trust and compete with established gold currencies like the lira and pound.

Furthermore, challenges related to pricing, liquidity and regulation make the transformation of the 'Kuwaiti Baiza' from an ambitious idea into a popular savings tool a very difficult undertaking.

Gold expert Alamdar Mousawi stated that reviving the 'Kuwaiti Baiza' as a gold coin is not merely a heritage initiative, as it is a vital economic project. He emphasized that its success will not be achieved simply by minting the coin, since it depends on three major factors -- trust, pricing and regulation.

He explained that launching the 'baiza' will lead to new demand for gold, but this demand is different from the traditional demand associated with jewelry. He pointed out that it is a shift towards savings, which could revitalize bullion and coin shops, as well as goldsmith workshops, if manufacturing is done locally, in addition to packaging and certification companies. He was quick to add though that this shift could lead to redistribution within the sector, along with the decline in demand for traditional jewelry in favor of savings instruments.

He confirmed that the project could generate jobs and revitalize small industries, provided there is an integrated production chain of coin minting, design with Kuwaiti identity, secure packaging that includes certificates and serial numbers, and efficient distribution channels. He stressed that localizing these stages will increase the economic impact, but relying on imports will limit local viability.

On the possibility that the 'baiza' will become a popular savings tool, he clarified that the idea is feasible, but its success hinges on its ability to compete with existing products. "This requires offering low manufacturing costs, high liquidity to ensure easy buying and selling, widespread distribution, and trust in the local market," he elaborated.

He added that regional expansion remains a bigger challenge due to the existence of trusted gold coins. He said competition necessitates building a strong marketing identity linked to the commercial history of Kuwait, along with official or semi-official certification and high quality in terms of purity and weight.

He disclosed that the challenges include high costs, fluctuating gold prices, weak liquidity in the absence of sufficient demand, and the need for a strict regulatory framework to guarantee the accuracy of purity and weight and prevent manipulation.

He believes the 'Kuwaiti Baiza' could become an effective savings tool and partial driver of the gold sector and even a local economic brand with potential for expansion if presented as a smart, low-cost and highly reliable investment product. "If it is presented in a traditional manner without addressing these challenges, it will remain an attractive idea in theory without any impact," he added.

In contrast, another gold expert, Mohammad Hattab, disclosed that the 'Kuwaiti Baiza' falls under the gold jewelry category, which is already circulating in the market like rings, bracelets and other pieces, stressing that it can replace any gold item in terms of use and acquisition.

Hattab explained that the 'baiza' (small gold coin) is not different from other gold products, remaining within the realm of individual savings or adornment, not a financial instrument with an impact on macroeconomy or the national currency. He pointed out that despite its circulation and widespread use among consumers, it neither supports the currency nor create a significant economic shift. He said its impact is limited to buying and selling within the gold sector only, not extending to other sectors.

He added that discussions on the economic role of local gold coins must be realistic, indicating that the true value of gold, whether in the form of the 'baiza' or others, is still tied to its global price, not to its being a local product or its heritage character.

He asserted that the introduction of the 'Kuwaiti baiza' may have a symbolic or marketing dimension, but it is simply another gold product in the market, subject to the same rules and factors governing other gold items.



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Photo by Rezk Tawfiq

Families and beachgoers enjoy a sunny coastal day as Kuwait's skyline rises in the background, marking the return of vibrant seaside activity.

Coasts come alive again

Kuwait's seas reopen after 55-day suspension of maritime activities

By Munif Naif

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, April 25: Beaches are beginning to regain their usual vibrancy, with the return of fishing and pleasure boats to create a maritime scene that feed the passion of Kuwaitis for the sea and their historical connection to it.

Following the ban imposed in early March as a precautionary measure during the exceptional circumstances that the country witnessed, the recent announcement of the Ministry of Interior on the resumption of such activities revived the coastlines and beaches with intensified presence of Coast Guard vessels.

The Coast Guard General Department at the ministry stated that fishing and pleasure boats are now permitted to sail during the day, from 6:00 am to 6:00 pm, starting Friday.

Within the first few hours of the implementation of the decision, the beaches witnessed a remarkable turnout of citizens and residents. Children's laughter returned and many resumed swimming and other water activities

traditionally associated with the warmer season. Jet skis returned to their designated areas, while small boats and motorboats reappeared, restoring the familiar weekend atmosphere at the beaches.

Coast Guard vessels are patrolling territorial waters from 6:00 am to 6:00 pm to enforce the new regulations and provide security for sea users.

Sea enthusiasts expressed their satisfaction with the new regulations, praising the role of the Coast Guard in organizing maritime traffic and providing support whenever needed. Many of them expressed their eagerness to return to the sea after a hiatus of 55 days, emphasizing that the sea is a primary destination for many families and lovers of marine activities.

Coast Guard Director General Brigadier General Sheikh Mubarak Ali Al-Yousef Al-Sabah confirmed that this decision was made after assessing the current situation and ensuring balance between allowing sea enthusiasts to pursue their activities and maintaining the safety and security of maritime navigation in the country.

Indian community plants 461 trees to promote sustainability and environmental awareness

Tree-planting initiative marks 'Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam' campaign in Salmiya Garden

KUWAIT CITY, April 25: The Embassy of India in Kuwait, in collaboration with the Dawoodi Bohra Community of Kuwait, organized a tree planting event under the "Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam" campaign at Salmiya this morning. H.E. Mrs. Paramita Tripathi, accompanied by Mr. Abi Tameem Husamuddin, Chief Representative in Kuwait of His Holiness Syedna Mufaddal Saifuddin, leader of the Dawoodi Bohra Community, more than 100 members of the Dawoodi Bohra Community, Mr. Abdullah Murtaji, Director in the Office of the Governor of Hawally, and Mr. Hasan Dashti, Chief of Public Security of Hawally, planted 450 Kaf Maryam saplings and 11 Acacia Galetia trees at Salmiya Garden. The event was also a part of Project Rise, a global initiative by the Dawoodi Bohra community to create a resilient, sustainable and prosperous society.

The 'Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam' campaign, a unique initiative combining environmental responsibility with a heart-felt tribute to mothers, was launched on the occasion of World Environment Day on 5 June 2024 by Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi. Since then, the campaign has been undertaken in countries across the world, including Kuwait.

Speaking on the occasion, Ambassador Tripathi appreciated the initiative of the Dawoodi Bohra Community and underscored the importance of community-led efforts in promoting environmental protection and sustain-



Photos during the tree-planting initiative at Salmiya Garden, Kuwait, organized by the Dawoodi Bohra Community of Kuwait in collaboration with the Embassy of India in Kuwait under the 'Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam' campaign, in the presence of H.E. Mrs. Paramita Tripathi, promoting environmental awareness and community engagement.



able urban spaces. It was noted that such initiatives contribute to the local environment and strengthen the bonds between the Indian community and the wider society in Kuwait. She commended the Dawoodi Bohra Community for its contributions to both India and Kuwait, and for enriching the social fabric

of both countries. Ambassador Tripathi also announced the Embassy's initiative to institutionalise efforts to undertake the 'Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam' campaign in Kuwait.

On the sidelines of the event, the Ambassador met and was briefed by representatives of Happy Threads, a so-

cial initiative focused on empowering women through sustainable livelihoods and handcrafted products. The initiative works with thousands of women, enabling them to build skills, achieve financial independence, and contribute to environmentally responsible production practices.

Salmiya Garden occupies an important place in the daily life of the large Indian community in Kuwait. As a widely used public space for families and residents, the tree planting drive holds both environmental and social significance, while spreading the message of sustainability and civic respon-

sibility. The Embassy of India in Kuwait commends the efforts of the Dawoodi Bohra Community in Kuwait and encourages collaboration with Indian community associations and local partners in promoting sustainability and environmental awareness in Kuwait.

Continued from Page 1

Kuwait back

Wednesdays, and Fridays starting tomorrow.

Dhaka will have four weekly flights on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays, and Sundays starting April 27th, and Mumbai will have two weekly flights on Tuesdays and Thursdays starting April 28th. Trivandrum will also have flights on Mondays and Fridays starting April 27th.

Al-Shatti added other destination schedules will be announced after official approvals, adding that Kuwait Airways is fully prepared to operate efficiently and flexibly while maintaining continuity, safety, and quality standards.

He thanked Kuwait Civil Aviation President Sheikh Humoud Mubarak Al-Sabah for his support, and praised Kuwait Airways employees for their dedication and professionalism during recent operations from Dammam Airport in Saudi Arabia.

Al-Shatti also praised pilots on World Pilots' Day (April 26), commending Kuwait Airways pilots for their professionalism, discipline, and commitment, which ensure flight safety and uphold high standards of efficiency, safety, and quality.

Kuwait Airways' announcement came after the Public Authority for Civil Aviation declared the reopening of airspace at the airport last Thursday, following a "temporary and precautionary" closure since February 28 due to the regional situation and the Iranian attacks on Kuwait.

Meanwhile, Kuwait's Jazeera Airways announced on Friday it will re-operate 38 flights from T5 at Kuwait International Airport to numerous destinations.

The Kuwaiti carrier's announcement came just one day after the Public Authority for Civil Aviation had declared the resumption of flights, ending a "temporary and precautionary hiatus" since February 28 in the aftermath of the heinous Iranian aggressions on Kuwait.

Chief Executive Officer Barathan Pasupathi told KUNA that the initial destinations include Jeddah, Riyadh, Amman, Beirut, Damascus, Mumbai, Cairo, Kochi, New Delhi and Istanbul.

He noted that the airline will operate daily trips to Cairo and Mumbai, flights to Jeddah on Monday and Thursday and Riyadh on Wednesday and Friday.

In addition, there will be three flights to Amman on Monday, Tuesday and Saturday, four trips to Damascus on Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, two to Beirut on Friday and Sunday, four to New Delhi on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Saturday, three to Kochi on Wednesday and Thursday and Saturday and four to Istanbul on Monday, Tuesday, Friday and Sunday.

As part of the ongoing preparations to enhance operational readiness and improve efficiency at airports, the Deputy Director General for Ports, Search, and Customs Investigation Affairs at the General Administration of Customs (GAC), Saleh Al-Omar, conducted an

inspection tour of T4 terminal at Kuwait International Airport to review the final preparations before the resumption of operations.

The tour included monitoring the readiness of customs facilities, ensuring the integration of approved systems and procedures, and observing workflow and the smooth movement of passengers and goods to guarantee the highest standards of accuracy and speed.

During the tour, Al-Omar received a detailed briefing from field officials on operational plans and coordination mechanisms among relevant entities within the airport.

He emphasized the importance of adhering to customs procedures and implementing best international practices in inspection and monitoring.

Al-Omar affirmed that this visit is part of a comprehensive plan aimed at enhancing the efficiency of customs operations at all ports of entry.

He stressed the necessity of complete readiness and intensified efforts to ensure a smooth and secure operational launch that supports travel and trade and reflects the advanced state of the customs system.

Kuwait International Airport will resume flight operations gradually starting Sunday, following a precautionary suspension imposed on February 28 amid regional security developments and Iranian drone attacks targeting key facilities.

The airport sustained damage following multiple drone attacks by Iran that targeted Terminal 1, the under-construction Terminal 2, radar systems, the new control tower, and fuel storage facilities, resulting in material losses and minor injuries.

Initial flights operated by Kuwait Airways and Jazeera Airways will depart from Terminals T4 and T5 respectively, signaling the phased restoration of air traffic.

The Public Authority for Civil Aviation (PACA) implemented a series of technical and operational measures in coordination with international organizations to ensure the highest standards of safety and security.

The precautionary closure of Kuwaiti airspace prevented casualties, while the Kuwaiti Armed Forces intercepted several drones before reaching their intended targets.

Hours after the PACA announced a temporary and precautionary suspension of air traffic at Kuwait International Airport, a drone targeted T1 terminal, causing minor injuries among the workers and limited structural damage withing the building.

A subsequent drone attack targeted the Terminal 2 project, causing significant material damage without reported injuries, prompting the immediate activation of emergency response plans.

Flights were diverted to alternative airports, while authorities secured the site and began assessing the extent of the damage, confirming full control over the situation.

His Highness the Prime Minister

Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah visited the airport shortly after the incidents, accompanied by PACA President Sheikh Humoud Mubarak Al-Humoud Al-Sabah, to review response measures and recovery plans.

The Prime Minister commended efforts and coordination among relevant authorities and stressed the importance of maintaining responsibility and readiness during that time.

On March 8, a third drone strike targeted fuel tanks operated by the Kuwait Aviation Fueling Company (KAFCO), triggering a major fire that was contained by firefighting teams, with damage limited to material losses.

Further inspection visits were conducted on March 11, during which the Prime Minister reviewed operational procedures, safety systems, and emergency preparedness measures at the PACA headquarters and fuel storage areas.

Additional drone attacks were recorded on March 12 and March 14, targeting airport facilities and radar systems, causing operational disruptions that required urgent technical intervention and system reinforcement.

On March 17, Minister of Health Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadhi visited an injured security personnel member who sustained injuries while on duty at the airport.

On March 22, the Civil Aviation Authority submitted an official complaint to the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), documenting violations affecting Kuwait's airspace sovereignty and civil aviation infrastructure, and the repercussions of the attacks that caused disruption of air traffic, suspension of flights, material losses, and endangering the safety of passengers and facilities.

Three days later, another drone strike targeted a fuel tank, causing a large fire that resulted in significant material damage but no casualties. Emergency response teams continued efforts to contain fires, secure affected areas, and assess damages as part of coordinated national response operations.

On March 26, the Minister of Defense, Sheikh Abdullah Ali Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, inspected Kuwait International Airport as part of the field follow-up on the impact of Iranian attacks on the fuel tanks, praising the firefighters' efforts in controlling the fire that erupted in the tanks.

First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah inspected the site of the fuel tank fire at Kuwait International Airport to review the progress and measures taken to control it.

He emphasized strengthening preventive measures and enhancing coordination among concerned entities to ensure safety at vital facilities.

On the same day, Kuwait's Ministry of Foreign Affairs summoned Iran's Ambassador to Kuwait, Mohammad Toutouchi, for the third time and delivered a formal memo of protest condemning Iran's continued attacks.

His Highness the Prime Minister

Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah later revisited the airport to review firefighting operations and assess damage to fuel storage facilities.

During the visit, the Prime Minister conveyed the greetings of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, and their appreciation for frontline personnel valiant efforts and dedication to serving Kuwait.

On March 28, firefighting teams, supported by the army, National Guard, and oil sector units, brought a major fuel fire under control after 58 hours of continuous operations. That same day, another drone attack caused significant damage to radar systems, creating operational challenges that required immediate rehabilitation efforts.

On April 1, an additional strike targeted fuel storage facility, resulting in a large fire and extensive material damage, with no reported casualties.

Following the unjustified attacks, the ICAO's Council condemned the violations against the GCC countries and Jordan, and considered targeting civil aviation a violation of international law, and threatens the safety of global air navigation, calling for an immediate halt to these acts.

Despite ongoing threats on Kuwait's International Airport and its vital facilities, Kuwait's Army successfully intercepted and neutralized multiple drones before reaching its targets.

On April 15, PACA President Sheikh Humoud Al-Sabah met with European Union ambassadors to discuss the airports' development following the Iranian attacks, the impact on the aviation sector and explore cooperation opportunities.

In continued government follow-up, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah conducted an inspection visit last Sunday, reviewing airport readiness, including arrival and departure halls and technical support systems.

He stressed the need for full coordination to ensure operational readiness in line with approved plans, praising national personnel for their efforts in restoring normal operations.

On Thursday, PACA President Sheikh Humoud Al-Sabah announced the reopening of Kuwaiti airspace, confirming that operations will resume under a phased and carefully structured plan.

He stated that initial operations will cover selected destinations based on operational priorities, with continuous evaluation before expanding to full capacity as repairs are completed.

Lebanon denies

for Lebanon to bear such a high cost alone, especially since the Lebanese economy is still suffering from the repercussions of the 1967 war, which was further devastated by Israeli attacks in 2004, revealing that the World Bank estimated the direct and indirect

costs at approximately \$14 billion, in addition to addressing the issue of Eurobonds.

Minister Jaber highlighted that a survey conducted by the World Bank in cooperation with the Research Center to assess the extent of damage to villages estimated the cost of the first three weeks of the war at approximately \$1.5 billion.

He said although the World Bank refused to provide financial support to Lebanon at present, it agreed to reschedule previous loans due to the emergency situation caused by the war.

Minister Jaber explained that Lebanon discussed with the World Bank the possibility of redirecting a portion of its previous loans to support social safety nets, in addition to allocating a \$250 million loan and another loan from the AFP to rebuild bridges destroyed during the war. Lebanon has not received any financial support to assist displaced families, unlike during the 2014 war, especially considering that humanitarian aid at that time reached \$700 million. Lebanon was unable to raise the \$300 million needed in the UN appeal for aid.

Despite the surplus achieved by the State Treasury last year, even before the war, due to improved tax collection and the fight against tax and customs evasion, the war led to a decline in public treasury revenues of approximately 40 percent in March.

He highlighted that the continuation of the war in Lebanon will inevitably increase pressure on the balance of payments. Nevertheless, Minister Jaber affirmed the stability of the exchange rate in the medium-term and short-term, given the measures Lebanon is taking to combat money laundering and the financing of terrorism through the mechanisms adopted by the Central Bank of Lebanon for selling Lebanese pounds for dollars, or through private banks.

He stressed that Lebanon is making significant efforts to reduce the size of its cash-based economy.

Minister Jaber revealed that he is coordinating on a daily basis with Salim Khalil and Lebanese banks that are working with the Central Bank of Lebanon to regulate the sale of Lebanese lira against the US dollar and to maintain financial stability.

He expressed regret that the current war continues at a time when Lebanon is trying to address the issue of returning depositors' funds.

The minister also expressed his gratitude to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for its efforts to stop the war in Lebanon and maintain civil peace.

He also praised the American role in stopping the war and reaching the current truce.

In conclusion, Minister Jaber emphasized the need to support the Lebanese Army so that it can carry out its assigned tasks, noting that the success of the ceasefire will remain contingent on the commitment of both parties.

US-Iran

negotiations. Araghchi didn't offer further details, but said Tehran would continue engaging with Pakistan's mediation efforts "until a result is achieved."

Islamabad, where weeklong security restrictions have disrupted daily life in the capital, was in near-lockdown early Saturday ahead of the expected talks. Residents struggled to commute even short distances due to the now routine checkpoints, road closures and diversions.

The usually busy arteries leading to the airport and the heavily fortified Red Zone were largely deserted Saturday, with movement tightly restricted. Security forces - including troops, paramilitary commandos and police - maintained a strong presence at key intersections, especially near the airport, while helicopters circled overhead.

Pakistan has been trying to get U.S. and Iranian officials back to the table since Trump this week announced an indefinite extension of the ceasefire, honoring Islamabad's request for more diplomatic outreach.

The White House said Friday that Trump was sending Witkoff and Kushner to meet with Araghchi. But shortly after Iran's top diplomat arrived in Islamabad, his ministry said any talks would be indirect and that Pakistani officials would convey messages between the two sides.

Araghchi and Trump's envoys held hours of indirect talks in Geneva on Feb. 27 over Tehran's nuclear program, but walked away without a deal. The next day, Israel and the United States started the war against Iran.

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt told Fox News on Friday that Witkoff and Kushner and would "hear the Iranians out."

Kuwait arrests

nine grams of heroin, 2,000 Captagon tablets, 650 Lyrica pills and other drugs.

Furthermore, Al-Harbi confirmed that the Criminal Investigation General Department supervised the disposal of 10,598 bottles of liquor confiscated in 2024 and 2025. He said this is in line with the strategy of the ministry to eradicate intoxicants and narcotics to protect the society. He added that the disposal operation was carried out as per the law and in coordination with other concerned agencies.

In another development, Al-Harbi revealed that the Jabra Security Directorate conducted a campaign at the camel stables, leading to the discovery of the sale of expired food items. Legal measures were taken against those involved.

He also affirmed the arrest of a person who trespassed into a nature reserve to graze camels - a violation of bylaws and regulations, hence, legal action was taken against him.

Syrian criminals

forcibly seize their money and assets with the assistance of influential figures in the former Syrian regime.

The hand of transitional justice, which the Damascus government is pursuing, must reach these criminals so that matters can be set right.

Failure to rescue people from these gangs does not serve the Gulf and Arab investment movement in Syria, which urgently needs every effort to rebuild, allow people to benefit from their country's resources, and emerge from the tunnel of successive crises they have endured for 50 years.

Some of these criminals purchased citizenship in certain countries and fled there after the fall of the Assad regime. They also took advantage of lax security measures in Lebanon under the previous administration. Some settled in Lebanon after allegedly offering bribes and gifts to officials to turn a blind eye.

However, with the start of a new era in Lebanon and the stricter stance taken by President Joseph Aoun and Prime Minister Nawaf Salam, these

individuals came under pursuit and subsequently fled to some African countries.

It is essential to return these individuals to Damascus through Interpol and bring them to justice.

Many of their names are on the "Red Notice" list, meaning they are subject to arrest and extradition to their countries of origin. Any delay in implementing these measures undermines confidence in the current government's commitment to achieving justice and could lead to countries reconsidering or reducing aid to Syria.

Transitional justice cannot become a comprehensive and achievable process without a clear mechanism to address the legacy of gross human rights violations committed by the Assad regime.

This requires uncovering the truth, holding perpetrators accountable, and preventing them from benefiting from assets they stole from the people. Genocide is not limited to killing people; it also extends to stealing their rights and money. These criminals have caused severe harm in Syria. I would like to reiterate my appre-

ciation for Syrian President Ahmad al-Sharaa, his government, and the National Security forces. Their efforts have helped alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people, especially with the arrest of Amjad Yousef, known as the "Butcher of the Tadamon neighborhood."

Until justice is fully served, we look forward to the arrest of all the thieves who stole the money and assets of Syrians and Gulf businesses.

Drone strikes

attack is a violation of the sovereignty of Kuwait and a threat to its security and stability."

The ministry affirmed the UAE's full solidarity with the State of Kuwait and support for all measures taken to maintain the security and stability of the latter.

The Kingdom of Bahrain condemned the heinous attack, considering it a serious threat to regional security and stability and a grave violation of international law.

The Bahraini Ministry of Foreign

Affairs confirmed in a statement the full solidarity of the Kingdom with the sisterly State of Kuwait and its support for all measures taken by Kuwait to preserve its security and stability and to safeguard its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

It stressed the need for Iraq to immediately take measures to hold accountable all those involved in the aggression and to ensure such acts are not repeated, as well as the importance of strengthening regional and international cooperation to deal with terrorist threats in order to maintain security and stability in the region.

The State of Qatar condemned the attack, considering it a blatant violation of the sovereignty of another country and a serious threat to the security and stability of the region.

The Qatari Ministry of Foreign Affairs emphasized in a statement the need for Iraq to assume its responsibilities to prevent the recurrence of such attacks, affirming the full solidarity of Qatar with the State of Kuwait and its support for all measures taken by Kuwait to preserve its sovereignty and security.

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INTERNATIONAL



Mississippi Supreme Court justices, right, listen to arguments in Jackson, Miss on July 6, 2023. (AP)

California to weigh tighter restrictions on voter registration, say state officials

LOS ANGELES, April 25, (AP): A proposal that would require California to verify proof of citizenship when a person registers to vote - and require voters to provide identification at polling places - will appear on the November ballot, state officials announced Friday.

The announcement comes amid a national debate over election security and what type of requirements voters should face to show they are qualified to cast a ballot. In Congress, Republicans are pushing a strict proof-of-citizenship proposal for residents to vote, encouraged by President Donald Trump. The California plan - also backed by Republicans - is being pitched as a common sense idea to strengthen confidence in voting in a vast state with more than 23 million people registered to cast a ballot. State officials said its backers submitted sufficient petition signatures to qualify for the November ballot. "We already show ID for everyday activities like flying, opening a bank account and picking up prescription medications. Thirty-six other states and many coun-

tries around the world already use voter ID," said state Sen. Tony Strickland, a Republican from Huntington Beach.

"Californians deserve secure, transparent elections," added Strickland, a proponent of the proposal.

If approved in November in the heavily Democratic state, other provisions would require those who vote through popular mail-in ballots would have to give the last four digits of a government-issued ID, such as a Social Security number. California is among 14 states and the District of Columbia that do not require voters to show some form of identification at the polls or to register to vote.

While California at times has faced questions from critics about the legitimacy of its vote tallies, research shows voter fraud in the country is rare. Voting by noncitizens has occurred, but reviews of state cases have shown it to be uncommon and typically a mistake rather than an intentional effort to sway an election.

Also:

JACKSON, Miss.: Mississippi Gov

Tate Reeves on Friday announced he will call a special session for judicial redistricting once the US Supreme Court rules on a Voting Rights Act case that has broad implications for minority representation throughout the country.

During oral arguments last fall, the Supreme Court appeared poised to strike down Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act, which has been used to counter racially discriminatory election practices. A decision in the case, *Louisiana v. Callias*, is expected before the court's term ends in June.

Overturning Section 2 would give state legislatures and local governments the opportunity to redraw maps while preventing minority voters from challenging ones that dilute their influence.

A decision wiping out a pillar of the 1965 Voting Rights Act could help Republicans gain seats in the US House by eliminating Democratic-leaning districts that are majority Black or Latino, especially in the South. Most of those red-draws would not happen in time for this year's midterm elections.

Highway Patrol rescues some trapped residents

Violent tornado tears thru Oklahoma town, damages 40 homes but sparing lives

ENID, Okla, April 25, (AP): Raeann Hunt scrambled to her cellar as a tornado bore down on her Oklahoma community.

"It is headed right for us," she recalled thinking, as she peeked outside, unable to contain her curiosity.

Huddled inside the dark 8-by-8 foot (2.44-by-2.44 meters) concrete shelter with her husband, brother-in-law and a neighbor, she heard roaring, metal slapping on the door and glass breaking.

Afterward, they emerged unscathed, but found the windows smashed out of the one-story brick home in Enid and the roof badly damaged.

The scene was repeated Thursday night across the city of about 50,000 people about 85 miles north of Oklahoma City as the EF-4 tornado hit. It was on the ground for 9 miles (14.48 kilometers), packing winds of 170 to 175 mph and measuring 500 yards across at its widest, said Rick Smith, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service.

For those 30 to 40 minutes, at least 40 homes were damaged, some blown off their foundations. But no one was killed and only minor injuries were

reported.

"People around here have a plan," Hunt explained, noting that residents of this tornado-alley state are trained to either take shelter in a room near the center of their home or get underground.

Basements aren't common in Oklahoma because of the red clay soil and elevated water tables that make it difficult and expensive to install them, but many homes - like Hunt's - have storm cellars or safe rooms with reinforced concrete walls where people can take cover.

People here also know to flip on the TV and set up weather alerts on their phones - particularly in the springtime, when the risk of violent twisters is highest.

"Especially in Oklahoma, we have great meteorologists," said Justin Hunt of Enid, who described the storm's aftermath as a "disaster."

Commercial buildings just south of the city were turned into a pile of twisted metal, splintered wood and insulation by powerful winds that pushed the buildings completely off the concrete foundations.

The tornado knocked down utility



A family looks through debris of their home on April 24, 2026, in the Grayridge neighborhood that was damaged by a tornado Thursday in Enid, Okla. (AP)

poles and left power lines wrapped with huge chunks of debris. A home had part of its metal roof torn off and trees were left stripped of bark and limbs. At another home, a section of one wall had peeled away to reveal the

interior of the home with some furniture still in place.

"Usually when we come to a neighborhood that's been hit this bad, there's one or two deaths," Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt said during a news confer-

ence Friday. "We're just so thankful there wasn't a loss of life."

Police and fire departments and the Oklahoma Highway Patrol conducted multiple home searches, rescuing some trapped residents, Enid Mayor David Mason said Friday.

"Supplies have poured in already," Mason posted online. "This is who Enid is in challenging moments - we continue to show up for one another."

Dave Lamerton of Enid spent Friday morning salvaging what was left of his son Joseph's woodworking shop just south of the city, along with some family members and a group of volunteers who traveled from Kansas to help with cleanup.

"The tornado just swung right through here and just hit us directly," Lamerton said, pointing to a giant mess of splintered wood beams, furniture, debris and heavy machinery that was pushed into a massive pile at the edge of the building's foundation. "We've got stuff on the property we can't even find."

One striking image from Thursday's storms shows a tornado in the Enid area with a dark clouds of debris extending in V-shape on either side. That

is typical of higher-end tornadoes, according to Mark Fox, the meteorologist in charge of the National Weather Service's office in Norman.

It has such a violent motion as winds pick up dirt, debris and things like parts of people's houses.

"If you start seeing things like this, you know it's a violent tornado," he said.

Neighboring counties also reported some flooded roads and barn damage. The National Weather Service was sending two crews out Friday to do damage surveys related to six potential tornadoes in the Enid and Braman areas of north-central Oklahoma, meteorologist John Pike said.

Fences and some equipment were knocked down at nearby Vance Air Force Base, about 80 miles (129 kilometers) north of Oklahoma City. The base was closed until further notice "due to ongoing power and water restoration efforts," it posted online Friday.

Everyone assigned to the base has been accounted for and no injuries were reported, 71st Flying Training Wing Public Affairs Chief Ashley D. Hendricks said in an email Friday.

King Charles III to follow mother's lead in celebrating US-UK bonds

LONDON, April 25, (AP): The challenge for King Charles III when he embarks on next week's state visit to the US is, as always, to live up to his mother's example.

The late Queen Elizabeth II wowed Congress in 1991 with a speech that celebrated the shared democratic traditions of Britain and the United States, quoted Abraham Lincoln, Franklin D. Roosevelt and Ralph Waldo Emerson, and highlighted the deep bonds between the two nations.

Those themes will also be at the top of Charles' agenda as he celebrates America's 250th birthday and seeks to calm tensions surrounding Prime Minister Keir Starmer's refusal to support US President Donald Trump's war against Iran, said Douglas Brinkley, a presidential historian at Rice University in Texas.

"We've got to always make the distinction that there's a difference between the government of the U.K. and the kings and queens of Great Britain, who are really always coming to try to put (on) a good face," Brinkley told The Associated Press. "Politics come and go, prime ministers, presidents, come and go, but there's something deeper about the special relationship between the United States and the UK."

Beneath the pomp and pageantry of Charles' four-day trip to Washington, New York and Virginia beginning Monday is a carefully choreographed



US President Donald Trump and Britain's King Charles III review the Guard of Honour after the arrival at Windsor Castle in Windsor, England on Sept 17, 2025. (AP)

diplomatic event staged, like all royal visits, at the request of the British government. Starmer resisted pressure to cancel it after Trump belittled the British military's sacrifices in Afghanistan and criticized him personally for failing to back the U.S. in Iran.

Despite those tensions, Trump has continued to speak warmly about Charles.

"History has shown that President Trump really tries to be impressive whenever he's dealing with British royalty," Brinkley said. "And I'm sure

it'll be the same this time around."

Ever since 1939, when King George VI became the first British monarch to set foot on the soil of the country's former colony, there's been a special sort of excitement whenever the royals come to the United States.

Take that first visit, which took place as World War II loomed over Europe. The royals toured the east coast and attended a "picnic" at Roosevelt's private home in Hyde Park, New York. "King tries hot dog and asks for more," declared the New York Times.

But the big moment was when the royals traveled to Mount Vernon to lay a wreath at the tomb of George Washington, America's first president. It showed respect at a time of isolationism.

"People could see the handwriting on the wall and know that it was going to be important for the United States and Britain to stay strong for fighting against Hitler," said Barbara Perry, a presidential scholar at the University of Virginia's Miller Center.

But bonding over sausages had broader benefits, helping the royals build links to the general public as well as its leadership. After war broke out in September 1939, Queen Elizabeth, the wife of George VI and mother of the future Elizabeth II, wrote to first lady Eleanor Roosevelt to say how moved she'd been by letters from Americans who enclosed small sums for British forces.



Rescue workers clear the rubble of a residential building destroyed by a Russian strike, in Dnipro, Ukraine on April 25. (AP)

Russian attacks kill 5 and wound more than 40 in Ukraine; 1 dead in Belgorod

KYIV, Ukraine, April 25, (Agencies): Russian drone and missile strikes on the Ukrainian city of Dnipro killed at least five people and wounded 46, local authorities said Saturday.

The bodies of four people were found in the ruins of a house destroyed in overnight attacks, Dnipropetrovsk regional head Oleksandr Hanzha said.

"The Russians have been hitting Dnipro and other cities and communities practically all night," Hanzha wrote on Telegram of the attacks, which caused fires to break out across Dnipro and partially destroyed several apartment buildings, businesses and a private house, wounding 27 people.

Another person was killed in a separate Russian attack on Dnipro Saturday afternoon, according to Hanzha, in the same residential area hit by the overnight strikes. A further seven people were wounded.

To the southwest, two people were wounded in overnight drone attacks on the Odesa region. Residential buildings, port infrastructure and cars were damaged in the south of the region, regional head Oleh Kiper said Saturday.

In Russia, a woman was killed and a man was seriously wounded by a Ukrainian drone strike in the border region of Belgorod, local officials said.

Following the overnight attacks, Romania's defense ministry said Saturday that drone fragments were found



Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, (right), and European Council President Antonio Costa stand for the family photo of the EU Summit in Ayia Napa, Cyprus, on April 23. (AP)

in a residential area of the southeastern city of Galati, near the NATO member's border with Ukraine. No casualties were reported.

Romania has confirmed drone fragments on its territory on multiple occasions.

The overnight attacks followed a prisoner swap Friday, in which Russia and Ukraine exchanged 193 service members.

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

While meeting with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev on Saturday, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Ukraine is open to continuing peace talks with Russia in Azerbaijan.

"We have already held such talks - in Turkey and with our American partners in Switzerland," he said. "We are also ready for upcoming negotiations in Azerbaijan, if Russia is ready for diplomacy."

Meanwhile, Russia's military activities in the Arctic region are exclusively defensive and pose no threat to any country, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Grushko said on Friday.

He said Russia is prepared to use all available means, including military forces if necessary, to protect its interests in the region, given the current geopolitical climate.

Grushko's remarks followed statements by Russian President Vladimir Putin, who said on Thursday that the Arctic holds strategic importance for Russia's economic development and national security.

Sánchez sidesteps Spain-US dispute at NATO

NICOSIA, Cyprus, April 25, (AP): Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez on Friday declined to be drawn into a dispute with the United States over reports that the Pentagon is weighing whether to punish members of NATO that fail to support American operations in the Iran war.

Among those in the firing line is Spain, which has refused to allow US forces involved in the war to use bases on its territory or airspace. Spain says that US-Israeli actions in the Iran war contravene international law.

France and the UK also have refused to give US forces free rein to use their territory for the bombing campaign.

The Pentagon is reported to be mulling whether to suspend Spain from NATO, according to an unidentified U.S. official referring to a Defense Department email, and quoted by Reuters. A senior U.S. defense official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations, did not dispute the accuracy of the reporting.

"Well, we do not work with emails," Sánchez told reporters at a European Union summit in Cyprus. "We work with official documents and positions taken, in this case, by the government of the United States."

"The position of the government of Spain is clear: absolute collaboration with the allies, but always within the framework of international legality," he said.

Pentagon press secretary Kingsley Wilson claimed that NATO allies "were not there for us" and added in her statement that the Pentagon "will ensure that the President has credible options to ensure that our allies are no longer a paper tiger and instead do their part."

The administration of US President Donald Trump has routinely floated plans or ideas that are neither acted upon



Spain's Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez attends the EU Summit in Nicosia, Cyprus on April 24. (AP)

nor become policy.

The email also suggested reassessing US support for the United Kingdom's claim to the Falkland Islands, near Argentina, which are also known as Islas Malvinas.

Dave Pares, a spokesman for Prime Minister Keir Starmer, said the UK position on the islands is "longstanding and it's unchanged: Sovereignty rests with the UK, and the islanders' right to self-determination is paramount."

Pares noted "the Falkland Islands have previously voted overwhelmingly in favor of remaining a UK overseas territory."

NATO operates by consensus, and all 32 member countries must agree for it to act.

Cambodian senator sanctioned

United States launches sweeping crackdown on Southeast Asia cyberscams

BANGKOK, April 25, (AP): US officials have announced a sweeping crackdown on Southeast Asian cyberscam operations as part of what U.S. Attorney Jeanine Pirro characterized Friday as a "new theater of war" launched by the Trump administration against Chinese transnational organized crime.

The crackdown, led by a U.S. government Scam Center Strike Force, includes the Treasury Department's sanctioning of a prominent lawmaker and 28 other people and companies accused of operating from Cambodia. Criminal charges also were filed against two Chinese nationals involved in a similar operation in Myanmar.

The initiative includes a warrant to seize and shut down a major online recruitment channel on the Telegram messaging app and freezing hundreds of millions of dollars in illicit assets. Pirro said in a virtual press conference connecting her from Washington to journalists in Asia.

Cybercrime has flourished in Southeast Asia in recent years, particularly in Cambodia and Myanmar, with illegal operations making mammoth profits from victims around the world, according to United Nations experts and other analysts. Americans lost nearly \$21 billion to cyber-enabled crimes and online scams in 2025 alone, according to the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

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

The Scam Center Strike Force comprises Pirro's US Attorney's Office for the District of Columbia, the Department of Justice's Criminal Division, the FBI and the US Secret Service.

The most prominent target of the crackdown is Kok An, a Cambodian senator and prominent businessman described by the Treasury Department as a "scam



A Thai soldier inspects a workstation inside a scam center in O'Smath, Cambodia on Feb 2. (AP)

center kingpin."

The department's Office of Foreign Assets Control announced sanctions against Kok An and associates for their roles in a network that has allegedly defrauded

US citizens of millions of dollars. They include blocking Kok An's assets in the United States and prohibiting US entities from doing business with him.

The Associated Press was unable to contact Kok An or any of his representatives for comment.

"His Excellency Kok An is a Cambodian Senator and he was elected by elections, and as a senator he has parliamentary immunity," said Chea Thyryth, a Cambodian Senate spokesperson, who added that only the US side could speak clearly about the sanctions.

Kok An is at least the second Cambodian senator to be sanctioned by the US. In 2024, Washington acted against another top tycoon, Ly Yong Phat, who also was accused of being connected with forced labor, human trafficking and lucrative online scams.

Pirro said the latest crackdown was set in motion in November when FBI agents sent to Thailand accessed copious evidence seized from an abandoned scam center in Myanmar, including more than 8,000 phones and 1,500 computers.

That led to charges of wire fraud conspiracy against two Chinese nationals, Huang Xing Shan and Jiang Wen Jie, who were managers of the compound before seeking to reestablish their operations in Cambodia. They are being held by Thai authorities for immigration violations and the US is seeking their extradition, Pirro said.

Cambodian lawmakers unanimously adopted a new law in March targeting online scam operations with up to life in prison, following a government pledge to shut down the centers by the end of April.

In January, Cambodia extradited to China another alleged scam kingpin, Chen Zhi, the founder of business and banking conglomerate Prince Holding Group, even though US authorities had sought custody after indicting him last year for allegedly running a huge scam operation.

South Korea seeks 30-year jail term for Yoon for drone flights over Pyongyang

SEOUL, South Korea, April 25, (AP): South Korean prosecutors Friday requested a 30-year prison term for ousted President Yoon Suk Yeol over allegations that he deliberately tried to escalate tensions with North Korea in 2024 by ordering drone flights over Pyongyang as he sought to create justifiable conditions for martial law at home.

Yoon is charged with benefiting an adversary and abusing his powers, which are among a long list of indictments against the conservative former leader over his short-lived imposition of martial law in South Korea in December 2024.

The request came in the closing stages of a trial at the Seoul Central District Court, where a team of investigators led by special prosecutor Cho Eun-suk said that Yoon and his top defense officials were responsible for alleged drone infiltrations into North Korea, about two months before he im-

posed martial law, while portraying the liberals as North Korea-sympathizing, "anti-state" forces.

Yoon's legal team said in a statement to reporters that he never ordered the alleged drone flights over North Korea's capital, Pyongyang, or retroactively approved such action, and said that prosecutors are failing to back their "speculation and delusion" with evidence.

In February, the court sentenced Yoon to life in prison after finding him guilty of the more serious rebellion charge. That verdict was appealed both by Yoon and prosecutors, who had sought a death sentence.

Cho's team said in a statement Friday that Yoon tried to create a warlike situation between the Koreans while plotting an authoritarian push to remove his political opponents and "monopolize and extend his power." Prosecutors are seeking a 25-year prison term for Yoon's former defense minister, Kim Yong Hyun, a key confidant

who helped plan and mobilize forces for the martial law declaration.

North Korea accused Seoul of flying drones over Pyongyang to drop propaganda leaflets three times in October 2024. Kim initially made a vague denial, but Seoul's Defense Ministry later switched to saying it couldn't confirm whether or not the claims were true. Tensions with North Korea rose sharply at the time.

Yoon proceeded with his late night martial law declaration on Dec. 3, 2024, delivering a televised address in which he criticized liberals over a range of issues, but largely over their impeachments of his top officials and cuts to his government's budget bill.

The decree lasted about six hours until a quorum of lawmakers broke through a blockade of heavily armed soldiers and police Yoon had deployed to the National Assembly. They then voted to overturn it, forcing his Cabinet to lift the measure.



Moon Hyung-bae, (center), acting chief justice of South Korea's Constitutional Court, speaks during the final ruling of South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol's impeachment at the Constitutional Court on April 4, 2025 in Seoul, South Korea. (AP)

Colombia's leader visits Venezuela for key talks with acting president

CARACAS, Venezuela, April 25, (AP): Venezuela's acting president, Delcy Rodríguez, on Friday welcomed Colombian President Gustavo Petro at the Miraflores presidential palace in Caracas, their first meeting since the US military seized former Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and his wife from their home in January.

The leaders were expected to discuss an extensive bilateral agenda, including migration, defense, border security, industrial cooperation and trade.

Petro and Rodríguez were expected to meet last month at their shared border, but their respective governments abruptly canceled the meeting citing "force majeure," which they did not explain, and simply said it would take place at a later time.

Ahead of Friday's meeting, Petro announced that his delegation, which includes top military and police officials, will tackle border security with Rodríguez.

The focus remains on the Catatumbo region, where rival armed groups fight for territorial control and Petro stressed the necessity of "close collaboration on intelligence," warning that without it, "bombs land in the wrong places ... and end up killing civilians."

Colombia-Venezuela ties have



Colombian President Gustavo Petro, (back center left), and Venezuela's acting President Delcy Rodríguez, (back center right), watch as Venezuelan Foreign Minister Yvan Gil, front right, and Colombian Foreign Minister Rosa Villavicencio sign a document at Miraflores Palace in Caracas, Venezuela on April 24. (AP)

long been on the rocks. Petro did not recognize Maduro as Venezuela's legitimate president in the wake of the contested July 2024 elections that triggered protests, which sparked widespread repression. Still, he maintained diplomatic ties with Caracas.

Colombia's government has said that the Petro-Rodríguez meeting on Friday aims to "contribute to a resolution of Venezuela's political

crisis."

However, it's unclear how this can be achieved.

Ronal Rodríguez Durán, a researcher at the Venezuela Observatory at the Universidad del Rosario, said Petro's leverage is limited regarding any potential mediation, given that his term ends in August. Future ties with Venezuela will likely also be influenced by who takes power next in Colombia.

Tunisia suspends one of Africa's oldest rights group as crackdown widens

TUNIS, Tunisia, April 25, (AP): Authorities in Tunisia have ordered a one-month suspension of the Tunisian League for Human Rights, one of the oldest rights groups in Africa and the Arab world and part of the National Dialogue Quartet awarded the 2015 Nobel Peace Prize, in the latest move raising concerns over a widening crackdown on civil society.

The league confirmed the suspension in a statement late Friday, warning that the decision amounted to "a serious and arbitrary violation of freedom of association" and "a direct assault" on one of Tunisia's key democratic gains.

President Kais Saied has often cited foreign funding, which rights groups sometimes rely on, as a threat to Tunisia, using it to fuel a populist narrative and accuse his political opponents and social justice activists of being foreign agents and stirring unrest at home.

"This measure cannot be seen in isolation from a broader context in the country marked by increasing systematic pressure on civil society and independent voices," the group said, adding that it would challenge what it called an unjust decision in court while continuing to defend victims of rights violations without discrimination.

The suspension follows a series of similar measures targeting rights groups in the North African country, where courts last year ordered multiple prominent NGOs to halt activities for a month, including organizations focused on migrants' and women's rights.



Tunisian President Kais Saied attends a signing ceremony in Beijing on May 31, 2024. (AP)

The decision comes as journalist Zied El-Heni was placed under 48-hour detention over a Facebook post, amid a broader pattern of arrests and legal pressure targeting critics.

Mohamed Yassine Jlassi, a former president of the Tunisian journalists union SNJT, told The Associated Press on the sidelines of a protest in Tunis on Friday that hundreds of people are being detained over speech-related charges, including social media posts.

"Repression has come to affect everyone. Journalism has become a crime, civil society work has become a crime, political opposition has been criminalized," he said.

"People now increasingly find themselves facing arbitrary prosecutions without the bare minimum

guarantees of a fair trial."

Meanwhile, the investigative outlet Inkyfada faces a court hearing on May 11, as authorities pursue the dissolution of Al Khatt, the association that publishes it.

The group said in a statement that it disputes the legal basis of the case and says the claims cited by the government have not been examined by Tunisian courts since 2024.

These developments add to growing concerns among rights advocates over restrictions on independent media, civil society and any dissenting voices under Saied, who has consolidated power since 2021 and has increasingly targeted groups he repeatedly accuses of receiving foreign funding to stir unrest and destabilize Tunisia's national interests.

Gunfire, blasts rock Mali as attackers hit capital and other cities: residents

BAMAKO, Mali, April 25, (AP): Gunmen attacked several locations in Mali's capital and other cities early Saturday in a possible coordinated assault, residents and authorities said.

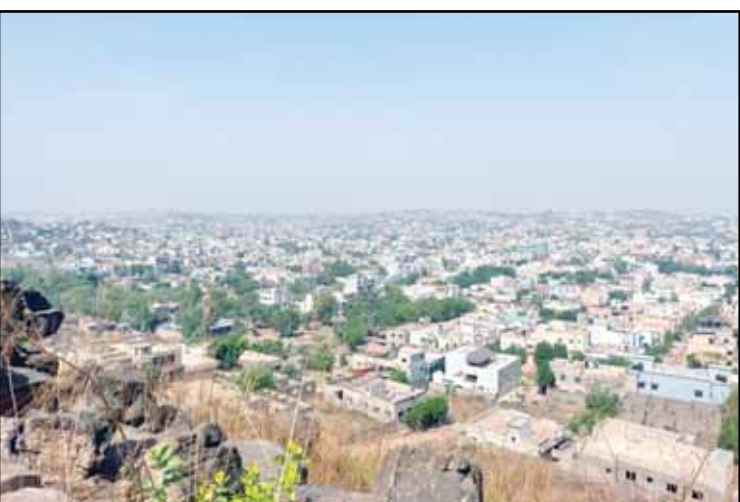
Mali's army said in a statement "unidentified armed terrorist groups targeted certain locations and barracks in the capital." It added that soldiers were "currently engaged in eliminating the attackers."

Mali has been plagued by insurgencies fought by affiliates of al-Qaeda and the Islamic State group, as well as a separatist rebellion in the north.

An Associated Press journalist in Bamako heard sustained heavy weapons and automatic rifle gunfire coming from Modibo Keita International Airport, around 15 kilometers (9 miles) from the city center, and saw a helicopter over nearby neighborhoods. The airport is adjacent to an air base used by Mali's air force. A resident living near the airport also reported gunfire and three helicopters patrolling overhead.

Residents in other cities in Mali reported gunfire and blasts on Saturday morning, suggesting a possible coordinated attack by armed groups.

Gunmen entered the northeastern city of Kidal, taking control of some neighborhoods and leading to gunfire exchanges with the army, a former mayor of Kidal told AP over the phone. He spoke on condition of anonymity out of fear for his safety.



An aerial view of Bamako, Mali on April 25. (AP)

The Azawad separatist movement has been fighting for years to create the state of Azawad in northern Mali. They once drove security forces from the region, before a 2015 peace deal that has since collapsed paved the way for some ex-rebels to be integrated into the Malian military.

Mohamed Elmaouloud Ramadan, a spokesperson for the Azawad Liberation Front, said on Facebook his forces had taken control of several areas of Kidal and Gao, another northeastern city. The AP could not independently

verify his claim.

A resident of Gao said gunfire and explosions started in the early hours of Saturday and could still be heard in the late morning.

"The force of the explosions is making the doors and windows of my house shake. I'm scared out of my wits," the resident told AP by phone. He spoke on condition of anonymity because of concerns for his safety. The resident said the gunfire came from the army camp and the airport, which are right next to each other.

Police in Peru raid home of former election chief

LIMA, Peru, April 25, (AP): Police in Peru raided the homes Friday of the now-resigned elections chief and five other officials in an investigation into a ballot shortage and other irregularities in the first round of the presidential election on April 12.

Agents and prosecutors also raided the home of the legal representative of Galaga, a private company responsible for transporting election ballots to voting centers, anti-corruption police said on social media. Agents gathered mobile phones, documents and other evidence in the raids, police said.

Piero Corvetto resigned as the elections agency chief on Tuesday to take responsibility for the election shortcomings, and said in a letter to authorities that he was stepping down to "generate more confidence" in the runoff vote on June 7.

But Corvetto denied any wrongdoing. Corvetto's lawyer, Ricardo Sánchez, told a local radio station that Judge Manuel Chuyo had ordered the raid but rejected a prosecutorial request to take his client into custody.

The April 12 election had to be extended for an additional day after the agency failed to deliver voting materials to more than a dozen centers in Lima, a problem that prevented more than 52,000 people from casting their ballots on time.

The incident sparked criticism, most notably from the ultra-conservative candidate Rafael López Aliaga who claimed, without providing evidence, that an "electoral fraud unique in the world" occurred in Peru, while labeling Corvetto a "criminal" and vowing to pursue him "until he dies."



Police conduct a raid on the home of former National Office of Electoral Processes chief Piero Corvetto, who resigned after the April 12 general election, in Lima, Peru, on April 24. (AP)

Oil price rises \$2.07 to \$107.37 pb

KUWAIT CITY, April 25, (KUNA): The price of Kuwaiti oil rose by USD 2.07 to reach USD 107.37 per barrel in trading on Friday, compared to USD 105.30 per barrel in the previous session, according to the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC)

on Saturday.

In global markets, Brent crude rose by 26 cents to reach USD 105.33 pb, while US West Texas Intermediate decreased by USD 1.45 to reach USD 94.40 pb.

Business

Gulf Bank renews its strategic collaboration with Mastercard to boost customer experience and expand digital banking solutions



Sami Mahfouz and Dimitrios Dosis



A group photo of Gulf Bank and Mastercard officials after signing the agreement.

KUWAIT CITY, April 25: As part of its continued commitment to placing customers at the heart of its operations and delivering banking solutions designed to be secure, convenient, and innovative, Gulf Bank has announced the renewal of its long-term strategic collaboration with Mastercard. This renewed agreement reflects the Bank's ongoing efforts to enhance service quality, improve digital accessibility, and respond proactively to the evolving expectations of customers across all segments.

The renewal reinforces Gulf Bank's customer-first strategy, which focuses on providing seamless banking experiences, personalized financial solutions, and reliable digital platforms that enable customers to manage their finances with ease and confidence. Through this collaboration, the Bank aims to further strengthen its ability to offer fast, secure, and user-friendly payment services that support customers' daily transactions and long-term financial needs.

Under the renewed agreement, Mastercard will continue to provide Gulf Bank with advanced payment technologies, innovative digital solutions, and global expertise in the payments ecosystem. These solutions are designed to help enhance transaction security, expand contactless and mobile payment services, and introduce new features that improve convenience, transparency, and reliability for customers.

The agreement also includes comprehensive consultancy services, specialized training programs, and technical support, ensuring that Gulf Bank employees are equipped with the knowledge and tools needed to serve customers efficiently and respond effectively to their needs. This integrated approach reflects both parties' commitment to building a responsive, future-ready banking environment centered on trust, service excellence, and continuous improvement.

The agreement was signed in the presence of Gulf Bank's Acting Chief Executive Officer, Sami Mahfouz; Acting Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Faisal AlAdsani; Mr. Mohammed Taqi, Assistant General Manager of Consumer Bank-

Sami Mahfouz:

- Our priority is to deliver seamless, secure, and innovative banking experiences that simplify our customers' everyday lives

Dimitrios Dosis:

- We remain committed to empowering Gulf Bank customers through world-class payment technologies

ing; President of Mastercard for Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and Africa, Dr. Dimitrios Dosis; and Mastercard Country Manager for Qatar and Kuwait, Erdem Çakar. The signing ceremony reflects the strategic importance of the partnership and its direct impact on enhancing customer services and digital capabilities.

Commenting on the renewal, Mr. Sami Mahfouz emphasized that the agreement represents a key step in strengthening Gulf Bank's relationship with its customers and delivering meaningful value at every stage of their banking journey.

He stated: "At Gulf Bank, our customers are at the center of everything we do. This collaboration with Mastercard enables us to continuously enhance our products and services, helping ensure our customers enjoy secure, seamless, and innovative banking experiences that meet their evolving lifestyles and financial aspirations."

Mr. Mahfouz added: "Through this collaboration, we are able to introduce advanced digital solutions, expand our payment offerings, and improve the reliability of our platforms. Our five-year strategic roadmap is focused on making banking simpler, faster, and more accessible, while maintaining strong standards

of security and service quality."

He further noted that the longstanding cooperation between Gulf Bank and Mastercard has resulted in the successful launch of several customer-focused card and payment solutions that have been widely adopted and positively received. These initiatives have contributed to higher customer satisfaction, stronger engagement, and greater confidence in the Bank's digital services.

For his part, Dr. Dimitrios Dosis reaffirmed Mastercard's commitment to supporting Gulf Bank's customer-centric vision and growth strategy.

He stated: "We are pleased to deepen our relationship with Gulf Bank and work together to deliver innovative payment solutions that enhance everyday banking experiences. Through Mastercard's global technologies, data-driven insights, and cybersecurity capabilities, we aim to support greater convenience, speed, and peace of mind for Gulf Bank customers."

Dr. Dosis added: "Our collaboration reflects a shared commitment to putting customers first, promoting digital adoption, and building a secure and inclusive payments ecosystem. We are proud to support Gulf Bank's ambition to become the Bank of the Future in Kuwait and contribute to the realization of Kuwait Vision 2035."

The renewed collaboration represents a strategic platform for developing customer-driven innovations that address changing financial behaviors and preferences. It enables Gulf Bank to continue expanding its range of digital and payment solutions while maintaining a strong focus on service reliability, data protection, and personalized engagement.

Through this collaboration, Gulf Bank reaffirms its role as a trusted financial partner dedicated to supporting its customers' personal and professional goals. By continuously investing in technology, talent, and partnerships, the Bank remains committed to delivering long-term value, strengthening customer relationships, and contributing positively to the advancement of Kuwait's banking sector.

Other Voices

Russian crude gains amid supply crunch

By Kamel Al-Harami
Independent Oil Analyst

WITH a shortage of oil supply from the Arabian Gulf, oil prices are reaching high levels. Russian Urals crude oil is trading at \$120 a barrel, while Gulf crude oil is trading at \$110 a barrel, about \$10 lower than Russian crude.

Despite this, Gulf oil is not moving in large volumes, resulting in a higher premium for Russian crude. As a result, Gulf states are not benefiting significantly from the current high oil prices. At the same time, some Gulf countries are facing a shortage of liquid income, which would extend to 50 days in the coming period.

It is a fact of life and a sad reality. Fortunately, Gulf states have sufficient cash reserves in their central banks to compensate for the loss of oil revenues. It is hoped that this situation will not last long. However, all Gulf states have strong financial reserves and future generation funds, which are not expected to be used unless necessary.

On the other hand, the main beneficiary is Russian crude oil, which has maximized its sales and is reaching peak levels, with volumes of around 13 million barrels. Most of this is going to India and the Far East, replacing Arab Gulf crude oil exports. We hope this situation will not last, so that Gulf exports of crude, refined products, and gas can resume and restore state cash flow in all Gulf producing countries.

Arabian Gulf producing countries are entering the third month without crude oil sales, as well as petroleum products, with most

refineries either closed or operating at minimal capacity, while the Strait of Hormuz remains closed.

Iran is also affected, as it is unable to export oil and is not receiving revenue. It is facing various sanctions that are causing it to fall behind its regional neighbors. While it maintains its own foreign policy and independence, questions remain about recent military actions in the region.

Why must it attack us militarily, when we have done nothing to harm Iran and have always maintained a friendly relationship with it? We have never caused Iran any harm, nor do we wish any harm to it. However, it should respect our views and continue to uphold the cordial relationship.

Oil prices will remain high as long as Iran threatens and maintains an aggressive policy toward its neighbors. At the same time, Iran is also harming itself by taking a negative stance toward its neighbors' foreign policies and by closing the Strait of Hormuz, which is causing a shortage in global oil supply. This is leading to higher inflation, which ultimately also affects Iran itself.

It is time for calm and for pursuing friendly policies with its neighbors rather than causing harm. The closure of the Strait of Hormuz has backfired, leading to boycotts affecting multiple ports.

What has Iran gained from pursuing an aggressive foreign policy toward its neighboring countries? It has contributed to higher oil prices without itself benefiting, as it is unable to export due to the closure of the strait and the resulting impact on its ports.

Meanwhile, other oil suppliers outside the Gulf are benefiting significantly, selling crude oil at around \$120 per barrel, while Gulf producers are barely able to sell volumes at these favorable prices.

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Reinforcing leadership in digital transformation & customer experience

NBK wins Emplifi 'Fueling Your Growth' Award

KUWAIT CITY, April 25: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) announced that it has won the "Fueling Your Growth" Award as part of the 2026 Emplifi Excellence Awards, one of the leading global awards recognizing institutions at the forefront of customer engagement and data intelligence.

NBK's recognition by Emplifi, a global leader in social media marketing and digital engagement management, reflects its success in the strategic deployment of advanced digital solutions, transforming customer engagement data and insights derived from social media platforms into impactful tools that support business growth, strengthen market presence, and enhance customer retention.

This recognition also reflects NBK's commitment to developing an integrated customer experience model centered on unifying communication and service channels, while leveraging AI-driven insights, social intelligence, and data analytics to deliver a seamless and effective banking experience across all digital touchpoints.

The "Fueling Your Growth" Award by Emplifi is granted to institutions that demonstrate a clear ability to accelerate business growth through the integrated use of the platform's solutions in customer engagement analytics, digital campaign performance measurement, operational efficiency enhancement, and the seamless integration of marketing and customer service channels.

The annual Emplifi Excellence Awards aim to highlight brands and institutions that adopt



Abdul-Mohsen Al-Rushaid, Senior Vice President and Head of Digital Communications at the National Bank of Kuwait, receives the award.

- NBK has successfully transformed customer engagement data and insights derived from social media platforms into actionable tools that support business growth
- The Bank remains committed to developing an integrated customer experience model centered on unifying communication and service channels, while leveraging artificial intelligence and data analytics

best practices in leveraging digital solutions to achieve outstanding performance in customer engagement, innovation, and operational efficiency. Winners are selected by a judging panel comprising Emplifi executives alongside leading international industry experts.

According to findings from Forrester's Global Total Experience Index, companies that successfully deliver on their brand promise through consistent experiences across all customer touchpoints are better positioned to outperform competitors, achieving revenue growth of up to 3.5x, while significantly enhancing customer loyalty and retention. These insights underscore the importance of adopting a unified experience strategy that integrates social media, e-commerce, and customer service as a key driver of business success.

NBK's recognition with the "Fueling Your Growth" Award from Emplifi marks a new addition to the Bank's distinguished track record of international accolades, reaffirming its position as a leading financial institution in adopting global best practices in digital transformation and customer experience. This achievement supports the Bank's long-term strategy and reinforces its pivotal role in advancing the banking sector in Kuwait and the wider region.

For more information on the winners of the 2026 Emplifi Excellence Awards, please visit the following link:
The Emplifi Excellence Awards 2026 | Press Release

Adjusting operations with Park & Fly system

Jazeera resumes T5 operations with new routes

KUWAIT CITY, April 25: Jazeera Airways, Kuwait's leading low-cost carrier, announced further updates to its operations from Jazeera Terminal 5 (T5) at Kuwait International Airport. With operations from T5 commencing on Sunday, 26 April, Jazeera has added direct flights to Riyadh and Jeddah further strengthening regional connectivity and expanding options for passengers traveling within the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Jazeera now offers a total of 10 routes direct from Kuwait including Amman, Beirut, Mumbai, Cairo, Kochi, Delhi and Istanbul. All other flights will continue to operate via Dammam with departures and arrivals at Kuwait International Fairgrounds, Hall No. 8 in Mishref. As part of ongoing operational adjustments, flights to Dubai will also continue to operate via Dammam.

To support smooth passenger processing during this phased resumption, Jazeera Airways has introduced a revised check-in process for flights out of T5. Passengers traveling from T5 will arrive at Jazeera's Park & Fly building, from where they will be transported by bus directly to T5 for check-in and departures. This measure is designed to ensure efficient flow and maintain a seamless travel experience within the current operat-



Jazeera Airways flies from T5.

- New direct destinations from T5 to include Jeddah, Riyadh and Damascus
- Amman, Beirut, Mumbai, Cairo, Kochi, Delhi and Istanbul also flying from T5
- Departures drop-off at Jazeera Park & Fly with transfers to T5 for check-in
- Bookings open, flights commencing 26 April
- Other flights will continue to operate via Dammam from Kuwait International Fairgrounds, Hall No. 8 in Mishref

ing constraints at T5. Barathan Pasupathi, Chief Execu-

tive Officer of Jazeera Airways, said: "We are excited to start flying from

our home base in Kuwait. Following our return to T5, we have reintroduced Riyadh, Jeddah and Damascus and will continue to steadily expand direct connectivity from Kuwait to restore key links for our customers. With a clear focus on people before profits, we will continue to adapt our operations to the current environment under the guidance of Kuwait DGCA and other local authorities. Whether through direct services from Kuwait or via our established base in Dammam, our focus remains on ensuring reliability, safety, and convenience for our passengers.

The introduction of Park & Fly with transfers to T5 for departing passengers is part of these efforts, allowing us to manage capacity effectively while delivering a smooth and coordinated travel experience."

As the airport operations and direct flights from Kuwait resume, passengers are advised to check their flight details and departure instructions in advance and arrive early to ensure all necessary processes and procedures are completed in time for the scheduled departures.

Flights bookings can be made from the Jazeera Airways website: jazeeraairways.com, Jazeera app or Call Center at 177 (Kuwait) or +965 2205 4944 (international).

Bursa Kuwait firms trade above book value: Al-Shall

KUWAIT CITY, April 25, (KUNA): A specialized report by Al-Shall Consulting revealed that a significant portion of companies listed on Boursa Kuwait are trading above their book value, highlighting notable valuation disparities across the market.

According to the report, 35 listed companies – representing 25.2% of the

total – are trading at more than double their book value. Meanwhile, 53 companies (38.1%) are priced between 1% and 99% above book value. Overall, 88 companies, or 63.3% of listed firms, are trading above their book value based on full-year 2025 financials and closing prices at the end of March 2026.

Antonio Costa backs strategy

EU seeks alternatives as Iran war chokes oil flows

NICOSIA, April 25, (AP): A painful fuel crunch and soaring oil and gas prices triggered by the Iran war have nudged the European Union to look hard into funding alternative energy routes in the Middle East to circumvent hot spots like the Strait of Hormuz.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said Friday that the EU is ready to work with Arabian Gulf countries for new projects conveying energy to global markets that wouldn't be held hostage to war or geopolitical strife.

"The events of the past month have taught us a hard lesson," von der Leyen told a news conference at the end of an informal meeting of EU leaders in the capital of Cyprus. "Our security is not just related, it is intrinsically linked. A threat to a merchant vessel in the Strait of Hormuz is a threat to a factory, for example, in Belgium."

The EU executive called for ramping up defense ties and promoted the bloc's maritime security mission in the Red Sea as a possible naval security option in the Persian Gulf, but focused her public remarks on European support for repairing and building Middle East energy sites.

"We are also ready to team up with the Gulf countries to diversify export infrastructure away from solely the bottleneck of the Hormuz Strait," she said, also offering to help repair Gulf energy infrastructure damaged in the war.

A fifth of the world's oil and gas normally passes through the Strait of Hormuz, but the war has largely closed the waterway, spiking fuel prices.

Early Friday, Brent crude was up 98 cents at \$100.33 a barrel. U.S. benchmark crude picked up 81 cents to \$96.66 per barrel.

Von der Leyen repeated that as a result of the oil and gas price hikes, the 27-nation bloc's energy bill in the last 43 days skyrocketed by 25 billion euros (\$29.3 billion.)

Neither she nor European Council President Antonio Costa offered precise details on which projects are being considered or when they'll move forward. But von der Leyen referred to the India-Middle-East-Europe Economic Corridor between the EU and the world's largest democracy.

Von der Leyen said a summit between the EU and the Gulf Cooperation Council scheduled for later this

year will give both sides the opportunity to explore such projects.

The rotating EU presidency is currently held by Cyprus, an island nation adjacent to Lebanon, Syria, Israel and Turkey. Cyprus President Nikos Christodoulides has sought to bring the bloc closer to countries in the Middle East to shore up their economies and bolster their security.

That focus was underscored by his guests at the EU leaders informal summit: Syrian President Ahmad al-Sharaa, Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah El Sissi, Lebanese President Joseph Aoun, Jordan's Crown Prince Hussein and GCC Secretary-General Jassem Mohamed AlBudaivi.

"We know that Europe needs Syria as much as Syria needs Europe," Al-Sharaa said, while Aoun called on EU support for rebuilding his war-ravaged country.

Costa praised Aoun for banning the military activities of Hezbollah that he called "an existential threat" to Lebanon, pledging to assist the country in disarming the militant group.

Costa said that "the European Union is not part of the conflict, but we will be part of this solution."

Human rights groups blasted EU leaders for not increasing pressure on Israel over its military campaigns in the Middle East.

EU leaders including German Chancellor Friedrich Merz said they would not lift sanctions on Iran until a wide array of issues were resolved, including ending its missile program and support for proxies within the region.

"It's too early to talk about relief of any kind of sanctions," said Costa.

Cyprus itself came under attack early in the war when a Shahed drone fired from Lebanon on March 2 damaged an aircraft hangar at a British military base on the island's southern coast. Greece, France, Italy, Spain and the Netherlands dispatched warships with anti-drone capabilities to defend the island.

That has spurred renewed interest in a clause in the EU's foundational treaties about mutual assistance if a member nation is attacked.

Christodoulides said the EU leaders had agreed to start creating a formal mechanism for such responses because they agreed that "ad hoc arrangements" are unreliable.

Donald Trump imposes sanctions on Chinese refinery over Iranian oil trade

Treasury targets 'shadow fleet' moving Iranian oil to China

WASHINGTON, April 25, (AP): President Donald Trump's administration is placing economic sanctions on a major China-based oil refinery and roughly 40 shipping companies and tankers involved in transporting Iranian oil.

The move, announced Friday and first reported by The Associated Press, makes good on Trump's threat to impose secondary sanctions on companies and countries that do business with Iran. It's also part of his Republican administration's overall ramped-up campaign to cut off Iran's key source of revenue - its oil exports.

Concurrently, the U.S. this month imposed a physical blockade on the Strait of Hormuz, the Persian Gulf waterway that is crucial to global energy supplies.

The sanctions, which cut off the companies from the U.S. financial system and penalize anyone who does business with them, come just a few weeks before President Donald Trump and China's Xi Jinping are due to meet in China.

Included in Friday's sanctions is Hengli Petrochemical's facility in the port city of Dalian, which has a processing capacity of roughly 400,000 barrels of crude oil per day, making

it one of the biggest independent refineries in China.

The Treasury Department says Hengli has received Iranian crude oil shipments since 2023 and has generated hundreds of millions of dollars in revenue for the Iranian military.

The advocacy group United Against Nuclear Iran said in February 2025 that Hengli is one of dozens of Chinese purchasers of Iranian oil.

China is the biggest buyer of Iranian oil, importing 80% to 90% of Iranian oil before the U.S.-Israeli war with Iran broke out, though the crude - transported by a shadow fleet of vessels - often has its origin obscured but arrives in China as oil from countries such as Malaysia. Smaller refineries, known as teapot refineries, typically are the buyers of Iranian oil.

Iran has previously said that its demands for ending the war include the lifting of sanctions.

Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said Friday that his agency "will continue to constrict the network of vessels, intermediaries and buyers Iran relies on to move its oil to global markets."

Earlier this month, Bessent's department sent a letter to financial institutions in China, Hong Kong, the UAE and Oman threatening to levy secondary sanctions for doing business with Iran and accusing those countries of allowing Iranian illicit activities to flow through their financial institutions.

Bessent said during a White House press briefing on April 15 that the administration has told countries "that if you are buying Iranian oil, that if Iranian money is sitting in your banks, we are now willing to apply secondary sanctions, which is a very stern measure."

The sanctions come as the global energy trade is in turmoil as war around the Persian Gulf chokes off oil and natural gas shipments, causing prices to soar.

Treasury has tried to quell the impact of rising oil prices issuing temporary sanctions waivers on Russia oil and a one-time waiver on Iranian oil already at sea.

The AP was making efforts to contact Chinese officials for comment on the sanctions.

China has disagreed with previous U.S. sanctions, but its major companies and banks still comply with U.S. sanctions because they are more exposed to the U.S.-dominated financial system.

After the U.S. earlier this month sanctioned a Chinese refinery accused of buying Iranian oil, Liu Pengyu, a spokesperson for China's embassy in Washington, said the use of the sanctions "undermines international trade order and rules, disrupts normal economic and trade exchanges, and infringes upon the legitimate rights and interests of Chinese companies and individuals."

NOPE act aims to tighten Russia sanctions

Bipartisan bill targets Trump move on Russia oil

WASHINGTON, April 25, (KUNA): A group of US senators from both parties have reportedly introduced a bill pushing back on an earlier decision by President Donald Trump to ease the sanctions on Russia's oil shipments without congressional approval.

The bipartisan bill "No Oil Profits for Enemies (NOPE) Act," championed by Senators Ruben Gallego (D-Ariz.) and Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa), aims to restore congressional oversight of over sanctions on Russia, The Hill reported on Friday.

The decision of Trump's administration to ease the sanctions was meant to boost global oil supplies to ease the pressure put on oil prices by Iran's threats to strike cargo ships traveling through the Strait of Hormuz, through which 20 percent of the world's oil supply moves to market.

"By easing sanctions on Russia, Donald Trump is bankrolling [Russian President Vladimir] Putin's war in Ukraine and helping Iran target American troops in the Middle East," The Hill quoted Gallego as saying in a statement.

"This is a betrayal of our servicemembers, our allies, democracy, and everything we have stood for as a country."

"By restoring and strengthening congressional oversight on Russia sanctions, this bill would make sure the US stands on the side of democracy, stops recklessly bankrolling our adversaries, and keeps the pressure on Russia to end its illegal war," he added.

The Treasury Department has issued licenses for tankers loaded with Russian oil to deliver their goods without facing US sanctions, according to the report.

On his part, Grassley said in a similar statement, "Putin's unprovoked, violent invasion of Ukraine is the largest land war in Europe since World War II."

"As the United States works to promote peace and end the bloodshed, it's important that any effort to ease sanctions on Putin and his cronies be reviewed by Congress to ensure accountability," he added.

The legislation would strengthen the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA), which was enacted during Trump's first term and requires the president to submit a report to Congress before changing foreign policy toward Russia, triggering a 30-day review period.



SHONEEZ GROUP Celebrates Official Handover of Renault Trucks Fleet to the Ministry of Public Works

Shoneez Group proudly announces the successful delivery and official handover of 24 Renault Trucks C380 units, equipped with state-of-the-art vacuum and jetting tankers, to the Ministry of Public Works, marking a key milestone in the execution of this strategic public-sector project.

The handover was formalized during an official ceremony attended by senior representatives from the Ministry of Public Works, Shoneez Group, and was honored by the presence of the French Ambassador to the State of Kuwait, underscoring the strength of bilateral cooperation and the global stature of the Renault Trucks brand.

This delivery reflects the Ministry of Public Works' continued commitment to investing in high-quality, efficient, and sustainable solutions, while reinforcing Shoneez Group's position as a trusted partner in delivering complex vehicle solutions for the public sector.

"The successful handover of these units represents the realization of our commitment to excellence and partnership with the Ministry of Public Works," said Wael Al-Talli, General Manager of Shoneez Group. "We are proud to see these vehicles officially delivered and ready to support vital public services, and we value the trust placed in our team and in the Renault Trucks brand."

Leandro Negro, Head of Renault Trucks Middle East, commented: "This handover is a strong demonstration of how Renault Trucks solutions effectively support the needs of public-sector operations. We are pleased to see these vehicles now in service and to continue our close collaboration with Shoneez Group and the Ministry of Public Works."

The French Ambassador to the State of Kuwait, Mr. Olivier Gauvin welcomed the occasion and commented:



French Ambassador, Mr. Olivier Gauvin receiving an honorary shield from Mr. Wael Al-Talli



Undersecretary of the Ministry of Public Works, Mr. Eid Al-Rashidi receiving an honorary shield from Mr. Wael Al-Talli and Mr. Mohammed Samer Allahham

"This handover ceremony reflects the strong and longstanding collaboration between France and the State of Kuwait, built on mutual trust and shared commitment to development. I was particularly pleased to drive one of the

Renault Trucks today, my first time driving a truck, which truly highlighted the quality, comfort, and advanced engineering of these vehicles. It is a strong example of French industrial expertise contributing meaningfully

to Kuwait's public infrastructure and national priorities."

Mr. Eid Al-Rashidi, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Public Works, expressed his



Eid Al-Rashidi, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Public Works; Olivier Gauvin, French Ambassador to the State of Kuwait; and Wael Al-Talli, CEO of Shoneez Group, during the official handover ceremony of the Renault Trucks fleet, attended by senior representatives from the Ministry, French Embassy, Shoneez Group, and Renault Trucks

appreciation to His Excellency the Ambassador for his presence and patronage of the ceremony. He also extended his thanks to Shoneez Group for the successful execution of this contract, which represents significant support to the Ministry's maintenance sector. He expressed his aspiration to further strengthen cooperation and expand the Ministry's fleet, while commending the high quality of the trucks delivered.

Mohammed Samer Allahham, Executive Director of Shoneez Group, reaffirmed the company's commitment to supporting the Ministry's efforts to enhance operational efficiency through comprehensive aftersales services. This is reflected in a fully integrated maintenance program, including spare parts coverage for five years, ensuring optimal performance of the trucks and equipment.

Designed to meet the demanding operational requirements of public infrastructure services, the Renault Trucks C380 units are recognized for their durability, performance, and intelligent engineering. Supported by Shoneez Group's robust local aftermarket and service capabilities, the fleet is set to deliver high uptime, operational efficiency, and long-term reliability for the Ministry's operations.

This achievement marks a significant milestone in our journey and is a testament to the Ministry's confidence in the global image of the Renault Trucks brand.

Shoneez Group and Renault Trucks eagerly look forward to contributing to national infrastructure development.

Key figures:

- 9,450 employees worldwide / 4 production sites in France
- 1,500 sales and service points worldwide.
- 55,000 vehicles sold in 2025

Emphasizing leadership in delivering innovative global financial & investment solutions

KFH Capital named the Best Investment Bank & the Best Debt Capital Markets Bank in Middle East by Global Finance magazine

KUWAIT CITY, April 25: KFH Capital, the investment arm of Kuwait Finance House (KFH) Group has won two prestigious awards from Global Finance magazine in the 27th annual World's Best Investment Banks. The company bagged the Best Investment Bank in the Middle East and the Best Debt Capital Markets Bank in the Middle East awards for the year 2026.

The accolades are in recognition of KFH Capital's pioneering position and leadership in providing innovative and integrated investment solutions. This has helped the company to emerge as the preferred choice for investors, distinguished by its capacity to provide investment opportunities with high value and quality and are tailored to the market needs where the company operates.

Global Finance, with input from financial experts, used a series of criteria to score and select winners based on a comprehensive assessment method and a specialized algorithm. These criteria include market share, deal volume and size, service and advisory quality, structuring capabilities, and efforts to address market conditions. Additionally, the evaluation considered innovation, pricing, post-IPO market performance of issuances, and the company's reputation within the capital markets.

The awards underscore the company's strong standing both locally and regionally, in addition to its solid performance and strategy. This recognition serves as a motivation to maintain the company's success and continue delivering innovative financial and investment solutions.

KFH Capital highlighted the significance of maintaining the track record of excellence, marked by the company's outstanding investment offerings, especially in Sukuk structuring and issuance, which has evolved into a globally recognized instrument across international markets.

KFH Capital will continue its efforts to extend financing solutions for corporates and governments through Shariah-compliant financial products. The company will also cater its investment services to retail customers with the



aim of generating the best returns.

The company reaffirmed its commitment to operational excellence and efficient resource management, noting that investing in human capital is essential for achieving balanced growth. The company also stressed the importance of capitalizing on market trends and investment products to enhance corporate capacity and manage risk. By prioritizing professional performance, the company can achieve top-tier financial results and solidify its position in the market.

It is worth noting that KFH Capital has a strong presence in investment funds. The company offers a wide range of Shariah-compliant investment

funds, tailored to the needs of different investment goals and segments. These offerings include equities, fixed income markets and alternative investments, supported by experienced teams with solid investment approach that relies on deep analysis, risk management and sustainable value.

KFH Capital's position in asset management is further cemented by its position as a trusted partner in investment solutions. This is achieved through delivering highly managed portfolios to institutions and high-net-worth clients according to strategies that align clients' investment objectives and risk appetites, contributing to stable returns over the medium and long term.

Additionally, the company offers a comprehensive suite of brokerage services across local, regional, and international markets, supported by a robust operational infrastructure. This enables clients to efficiently access investment opportunities and execute transactions with high levels of efficiency and flexibility, enhancing their ability to make well-informed and timely investment decisions.

Meanwhile, Global Finance Founder and Editorial Director, Joseph D. Giarraputo, stated: "The 2026 World's Best Investment Bank honorees are the organizations that best serve their clients by pairing trusted advice and global reach with innovation and disciplined execution, while setting the standard for excellence, resilience, and leadership across the global investment banking landscape."

About Global Finance

Founded in 1987 and headquartered in New York, Global Finance has a circulation of approximately 50,000 readers across 185 countries, territories, and districts. Its audience includes senior corporate and financial decision-makers at multinational companies and financial institutions. The magazine's website, GFMag.com, offers in-depth analysis and commentary drawn from nearly four decades of experience in international financial markets.

Donald Trump backs Kevin Warsh for Fed Chair, rate cuts uncertain

Rising inflation, strong jobs data weigh on rate cut outlook

WASHINGTON, April 25, (AP): President Donald Trump has made it clear he expects his choice for Federal Reserve chair to quickly cut interest rates once he takes office. Yet Americans shouldn't pencil in lower borrowing costs for mortgages, auto loans, or business loans just yet.

The odds of Kevin Warsh becoming chair by the time Jerome Powell's term ends May 15 shot higher Friday when U.S. Attorney for Washington, D.C., Jeanine Pirro, said she would drop her probe into Powell over his testimony last summer about the Fed's costly building renovations.

But should he be confirmed, Warsh will still face several hurdles to reducing rates, including rising gas prices that are pushing up inflation, questions about his political independence, and 11 other Fed policymakers who have a vote on the decision, with most of them not ready to cut.

At a Senate hearing Tuesday, Warsh pledged to be independent from White House pressure, but said relatively little about the direction he would take rates. While economists say he was likely just being cautious, he missed a chance to lay out an argument for rate cuts.

"Warsh's stated outlook is much more consistent with an extended hold than additional cuts," Aditya Bhawe, head of U.S. economics at BofA Securities, wrote in a client note.

Trump, meanwhile, has kept up the pressure. When asked last week on Fox Business whether he still expects interest rates to decline, Trump said, "when Kevin gets in, I do ... interest rates should be much lower."

Here's what you need to know about Warsh and what he will face as next Fed chair:

Warsh, who was a member of the Fed's governing board from 2006 to 2011, regularly argued for rate cuts last year as he sought Trump's nomination to replace Powell. But since being named in late January, he has kept quiet, and hasn't made any public comments since the Iran war started Feb. 28.



Kevin Warsh testifies during his nomination hearing to be a member and chairman of the Federal Reserve Board of Governors before the Senate Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs Committee on Capitol Hill, in Washington Tuesday, April 21, 2026. (AP)

The war has pushed up oil and gas prices, which caused inflation to spike to a two-year high of 3.3% in March, above the Fed's target of 2%. The Fed typically keeps its short-term rate - currently at about 3.6% - elevated to combat inflation, or even raises it.

The Fed reduces its rate to spur more spending and hiring, and earlier this year several Fed officials worried that a slowdown in job gains demonstrated that the rate was too high. But in recent weeks there are signs the job market may be stabilizing, possibly undercutting the need for a rate reduction.

Christopher Waller, a Fed governor who voted in favor of a rate cut in January, last week expressed concerns that rising inflation could mean the Fed would have to stand pat. He also suggested that with the unemployment rate a still-low 4.3%, rate cuts might not be necessary.

And Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said last week that if the Fed wanted "to wait for some clarity" before cutting rates, "I understand that," a statement widely seen as providing some cover for Warsh to keep rates unchanged for at least a few months.

For now, Wall Street investors see little chance for a rate cut until October 2027, according to futures pricing.

Certainly, if inflation cools in the coming months and unemployment

worsens, more Fed officials could end up supporting a rate cut. The economy has been volatile for the past year, at times looking healthy and other times anemic.

Another challenge for Warsh is that he will be just one of 12 voters on the Fed's rate-setting committee, which meets eight times a year to decide on where to set its overnight interest rate. Most have indicated in recent speeches or votes that they are reluctant to lower borrowing costs with inflation as high as it is. The committee voted 11-1 to keep rates unchanged in March.

Next week, at a meeting likely to be Powell's last, the committee is widely expected to keep rates where they are.

Stephen Miran, a governor Trump appointed last September, was the only official to vote for a rate cut in March and has voted to cut rates at every meeting he has attended. But Warsh will replace Miran. Another governor Trump named in his first term, Michelle Bowman, has also occasionally dissented in favor of a rate cut.

But there is a larger faction on the committee that wants the Fed to start considering the possibility of hiking rates, rather than cutting them, at upcoming meetings, according to minutes of their March gathering.

Members of the Fed's board typically seek to support the chair, former Fed officials say. But rarely can a chair single-handedly and quickly

swing an entire committee in his or her direction.

Jon Faust, an economist at Johns Hopkins and former adviser to Powell, said that the last time a chair was able to achieve something close to that was in the late 1990s, when then-chair Alan Greenspan famously persuaded the rest of the committee that rising productivity from the Internet would prevent inflation from taking off, and so the Fed didn't need to raise rates.

Yet that was after Greenspan had been chair for several years and had built support on the committee, Faust said.

"Warsh comes in with essentially none of the gravitas that Greenspan had," Faust said. "Instead, Warsh comes in with the baggage that Trump has really loaded on him. It's not Warsh's fault, but Trump has led to legitimate questions about whether he'll act independently."

One way to establish independence would be for Warsh to not cut rates right away, economists have said.

In his remarks at Tuesday's hearing, Warsh acknowledged that "we have a short window to try to bring inflation back down to where it should be," which some economists said sounded more like an argument for rate hikes, rather than cuts.

Warsh also said that the job market is essentially at what the Fed considers "maximum employment," or the lowest the unemployment rate can go before it starts to push up inflation. That also suggests the Fed doesn't need to cut to boost hiring.

Before being nominated, Warsh had often argued that artificial intelligence would accelerate growth and make the economy more efficient. Similar to the Internet, he often said, it would allow the Fed to reduce interest rates without worrying about inflation.

At his hearing, Warsh repeated his claim about AI, but added, "we don't know that, we can't bank on that," which struck many economists as a step back from his previous stance.

Warsh's views "didn't have a lot of clarity going in," Claudia Sahn, chief economist at New Century Advisers and a former Fed economist, said. "And then he muddied the waters. There were so few specifics."

US soldier accused of using classified data for \$400k bet

RALEIGH, April 25, (AP): A U.S. special forces soldier was granted bond Friday on charges that he used classified information about the mission to capture Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro to win more than \$400,000 on the prediction market Polymarket, a federal magistrate said Friday.

The magistrate in North Carolina who authorized Gannon Ken Van Dyke's release told him to report to a New York federal courthouse by Tuesday to continue his case there.

Bearded with arm tattoos, Van Dyke said little during the nearly hourlong hearing, during which he was appointed a federal public defender who declined to comment afterward. The \$250,000 unsecured bond did not require Van Dyke to put up any money.

Federal prosecutors say Van Dyke used his access to classified information about the operation to capture Maduro in January to win money on Polymarket, one of the largest prediction markets. The sites allow people to trade on almost anything - from the Super Bowl to U.S. elections and even the winners of the TV reality shows.

Van Dyke, who is stationed at Fort Bragg near Fayetteville, North Carolina, was charged Thursday with the unlawful use of confidential government information for personal gain, theft of nonpublic government information, commodities fraud, wire fraud and making an unlawful monetary transaction.

He could face up to 10 years on four of the criminal counts, and up to 20 years on a fifth, the government said Friday. A publicly listed phone number listed for Van Dyke isn't in service.

Van Dyke, 38, was involved for about a month in the planning and execution of capturing Maduro, according to the New York federal prosecutor's office. He signed non-disclosure agreements promising to not divulge "any classified or sensitive information" related to the operations, but prosecutors say he used what he knew to make a series of bets related to Maduro being out of power by Jan. 31.

"This involved a U.S. soldier who allegedly took advantage of his position to profit off of a righteous military operation," FBI Director Kash Patel said in a social media post.

Polymarket CEO Shayne Coplan said in a post on X that the company flagged the suspicious activity, turned it over to the government and cooperated with the investigation.

"Every trade is public, perma-

nent, and auditable," Coplan wrote. "Bad actors leave a trail."

Massive profits from well-timed bets aroused public attention days after the raid in Venezuela and brought bipartisan calls for stricter regulation of the markets.

The sudden rise of these markets has led to growing scrutiny by Congress and state governments. Some lawmakers alarmed by highly specific, well-timed trades on the U.S. and Israel's war against Iran and wagers on President Donald Trump's next moves have pushed for guardrails against insider trading.

The Trump administration has been supportive of the industry's expansion. The president's eldest son is an adviser for both Polymarket and its main competitor, Kalshi, and is a Polymarket investor. Trump's social media platform, Truth Social, is launching its own prediction market called Truth Predict.

Van Dyke moved into a home in Fayetteville just weeks ago, said Larry Duncan, one of his new neighbors.

"I introduced myself. I asked if he needed any assistance," said Duncan, who once served in the Marines. "I said, 'You look like special forces.' He just smiled. I worked on a contract at Fort Bragg. I know how those people carry themselves. He was tatted up, quiet, kind of secretive."

The Commodity Futures Trading Commission, the federal agency that regulates prediction markets, announced Thursday that it had filed a parallel complaint against Van Dyke.

That complaint alleges that Van Dyke moved \$35,000 from his personal bank account into a cryptocurrency exchange account on Dec. 26 - a little over a week before U.S. forces flew into Caracas and seized Maduro.

Van Dyke made a series of bets on when Maduro might be removed from power, according to the complaint. He placed those bets between Dec. 30 and Jan. 2, with the vast majority occurring the night of Jan. 2 - just hours before the first missiles struck Caracas.

The bets resulted in "more than \$404,000 of profits," the complaint says.

"The defendant was entrusted with confidential information about U.S. operations and yet took action that endangered U.S. national security and put the lives of American service members in harm's way," said Michael Selig, the commission's chairman.

New pharma deal targets lower costs for patients

Trump unveils deal with Regeneron to lower drug prices as part of most-favored-nation initiative

WASHINGTON, April 25, (AP): President Donald Trump on Thursday announced a deal with drugmaker Regeneron to lower the cost of its pharmaceutical products as part of the White House's signature drug pricing initiative.

The deal involves Regeneron lowering the prices of all its current and future drugs on Medicaid, according to Trump. It also involves selling a cholesterol drug called Praluent for \$225 on the White House's discounted drug website TrumpRx, according to the agreement first outlined by NOTUS and confirmed in a White House fact sheet.

The deal comes as the Trump administration has been touting efforts to provide economic relief ahead of November's midterm elections, with Americans saying high costs for health care, gas, groceries and other basic needs are straining their budgets.

It's one of many so-called most-favored-nation deals the Trump administration has made with drug companies to bring U.S. pharmaceutical prices to the same level as other developed nations. Last July, Trump publicly sent letters to executives at 17 major pharmaceutical companies about the issue. Regeneron is the final one of those companies to strike a deal with his administration.

Speaking at the White House on Thursday to announce the deal, Trump touted the discounts on drugs and said, "It should be front page news." He said voters in this November's midterm elections should reward his party because of the agreements with drugmakers.

"We should win the midterms, but it doesn't work that way, unfortunately," Trump said.

Trump also has a notable history with the drugmaker. During his first term in 2020, when he was hospitalized with COVID-19, he was given a dose of a drug that Regeneron was testing to supply antibodies in order to help his immune system.

After he was released, Trump posted a video of himself standing outside the White House in which he repeatedly lavished praise on Regeneron.

As part of the new deal, Regeneron has also committed to spending \$27 billion in research, development and manufacturing in the U.S., according to the White House fact sheet. Trump's deals have historically offered companies relief from his tariffs if they make such commitments.

Regeneron also announced Thursday that Otarmeni, its new gene therapy for a rare form of congenital hearing loss, had been approved by the Food and Drug Administration and would be made available to clinically eligible individuals in the U.S. at no charge. The therapy received expedited approval from the FDA under the agency's so-called Commissioner's National Priority Voucher program.

The program, which was not authorized by Congress, has been under scrutiny from Democrats in Congress for months. House and Senate lawmakers have noted that FDA vouchers have repeatedly

gone to companies that agree to pricing concessions sought by the White House.

Even as Trump and his Department of Health and Human Services have touted his drug-pricing deals as transformative, the details of the agreements have so far not been made public.

Pressed by members of Congress to share the contracts this week, Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. said his team would share whatever details it could that didn't include proprietary information or trade secrets. Trump and Kennedy have urged Congress to codify the deals into law.

The deals have occasionally run into roadblocks. A centerpiece of the agreements with weight-loss drugmakers Eli Lilly and Novo Nordisk fell apart earlier this week when Medicare delayed implementation of a program for insurers to cover the GLP-1 drugs.

Drug prices for patients in the U.S. can depend on a number of factors, including the competition a treatment faces and insurance coverage. Most people have coverage through work, the individual insurance market or government programs like Medicaid and Medicare, which shield them from much of the cost.

Patients on Medicaid, the state and federally funded program for people with low incomes, already pay a nominal co-payment of a few dollars to fill their prescriptions, but lower prices could help state budgets that fund the programs.

Jake shares first account of Rob and Michele Reiner killings

Jake Reiner describes 'living nightmare' of losing his parents

LOS ANGELES, April 25, (AP): Jake Reiner, the older son of Rob and Michele Reiner, says learning his parents were killed and living in the aftermath has been "too devastating to comprehend."

In a post on Substack on Friday, Jake Reiner shares his sweetest memories of the beloved Hollywood director and the photographer and philanthropist who was his wife for 36 years. And he describes the horror of losing them when they were stabbed to death on Dec. 14 in the Los Angeles home he grew up in. It is his first detailed public account of his experience. He had previously only issued brief joint statements with his sister.

"Nothing can prepare you for what it feels like to lose both parents instantly at the same time," Jake Reiner writes. "It's too devastating to comprehend. I still wake up every morning having to convince myself that, no, it's not a dream. This truly is my living nightmare."



Rob Reiner, (from left), Michele Singer Reiner, Romy Reiner, Nick Reiner, Maria Giffillan, and Jake Reiner arrive at the premiere of 'Spinal Tap II: The End Continues' on Sept. 9, 2025, at The Egyptian Theatre Hollywood in Los Angeles. (AP)

The long post makes only two fleeting mentions of his younger brother Nick Reiner, who has been

charged with killing their parents, and he does not use Nick's name. "Sure, any loss of a parent is

devastating, but nothing compares to losing both of them at the same time and, on top of that, having your brother be at the center of it," Jake Reiner writes toward the end of the post.

He also says, switching to the present tense, that the "love they have for me, my brother, and my sister is truly unconditional."

Jake Reiner writes that he was at a memorial service for one of his best friends when he got the news.

"I received a call from my sister Romy telling me our father was dead," he says. "Minutes later, she called back telling me our mother was also dead."

He says his parents "were robbed of so many things that day" and that it "simultaneously breaks my heart and enrages me."

He writes that he cannot stop thinking of how frightened they must have been in their final moments.

But much of the piece invokes fond memories.

"The way my dad presented himself in the public eye was exactly the beautiful person he was at home," Jake Reiner writes. "He was authentic, passionate, and his sense of humor has always been my sense of humor."

The two especially connected over baseball.

"We loved the Dodgers more than anything," he writes. "We went to so many damn games."

He calls his mother "the engine, the backbone, and the heart of our entire family. And not just our immediate family. She was the reason behind why we spent time with our extended family too."

"My mom was really funny and constantly complained about how nobody in the family thought she was," he writes.

Rob and Michele Reiner had three children together: Jake, Nick and Romy. Rob Reiner was also father to Tracy, a daughter with his previous wife, Penny Marshall.

Jake Reiner writes that Romy, who was the first family member at the scene of the killings, will tell her own story when the time is right.

Nick Reiner has pleaded not guilty to two counts of murder. His next court appearance will be at a pretrial hearing Wednesday. Authorities have said nothing about possible motives and have withheld most details about the deaths.

Rob Reiner was a prolific director whose work included some of the most memorable and endlessly watchable movies of the 1980s and '90s. Friends and colleagues, including Billy Crystal, paid him an extended tribute at this year's Oscars.

His credits included "This Is Spinal Tap," "Stand By Me," "A Few Good Men" and "When Harry Met Sally..." during the production of which he met photographer Michele Singer. They wed soon after and were married for 36 years.

Moving but sometimes cloying

Tourette's tale 'I Swear' soars on superb acting

LOS ANGELES, April 25, (AP): Perhaps the saddest thing about "I Swear," the moving if also occasionally cloying film about Tourette's activist John Davidson, is that a movie aimed at forging understanding ended up unwittingly causing division and horror - at a ceremony where it was being celebrated.

At the same British Academy Film Awards ceremony in February where Robert Aramayo, the absolutely terrific actor who plays Davidson, was a surprise best actor winner, Davidson's involuntary racial slur hurled at presenters Michael B. Jordan and Delroy Lindo was more shocking than any moment in the film. (Also shocking: The slur was initially kept in the broadcast, with the BBC and BAFTA later apologizing.)

But the reaction was educational, proving one of the key tenets of Kirk Jones' film, only now releasing in the US. Some called Davidson a racist online, not understanding how Tourette's works - some with the syndrome experience coprolalia, a vocal tic that causes people to say vile things they don't mean. As Davidson himself says in the movie: "The problem isn't Tourette's - the problem is that people don't know enough about Tourette's."

"I Swear" begins Davidson's story with a similar, but much less harmful, incident. The Scottish activist, after years of struggle, is being honored in 2019 by Queen Elizabeth II for his work. He expresses fear that he'll say something he regrets, and indeed, in the audience before he gets to the monarch, he shouts out: "... the Queen!"

We then go back to 1983 in Scotland, where young Davidson (Scott Ellis Watson, also superb), as a schoolboy, is beginning to suffer the disturbing symptoms of Tourette's, a nervous system disorder known for repetitive movements and tics, both motor and vocal. The boy, a promising goalkeeper in football, is soon the subject of ridicule from students and adults alike.

That includes at home, where his mother (an affecting Shirley Henderson, not given enough to do) cannot cope with the changes and his father, even weaker, abandons the family. Nobody understands what's happening.

We move ahead 13 years, with Davidson (Aramayo now), in his 20s, trying to make his way in the world. He's lucky to meet his friend's mother, Dottie Achenbach (Maxine Peake), a mental health nurse who becomes his guardian angel and surrogate parent. When he apologizes for calling her a vile name, of course involuntarily, she admonishes him - for his apology.

In a world where onlookers scurry away from him - or far worse - another guardian angel appears in the form of Tommy (Peter Mullan) a community center worker who hires Davidson as a handyman. This despite a rocky job interview in which Davidson yells: "I'm a pedophile!" Tommy endures Davidson's bad tea, verbal tics, even sudden punches to the nether regions.

Life, though, is unrelenting - at one point Davidson is badly beaten by friends of a woman he called "Slut!" in the streets. It is Tommy who finally suggests that Davidson must help educate the world. "I don't think Tourette's is the problem," Tommy says.

And so, Davidson begins his activist work, bringing together Tourette's families for weekends of mutual understanding, an uplifting new chapter that will result in documentaries and a bestselling memoir. "I Swear" - at a perhaps overlong run time of two hours - is full of warmth and even humor, with Davidson occasionally laughing at himself and inviting us to join in.

Except. "I Swear" cannot pretend - and boy, we do sense it wants to - that Davidson's life is a linear struggle toward the world's understanding of Tourette's. Not after the film's deeply depressing BAFTA epilogue.

In any case, we finally see the real Davidson, in footage, meeting the real queen. And once he gets face to face with her, to our great relief, the moment goes smoothly.

"I Swear," a Sony Pictures Classics release, has been rated R by the Motion Picture Association "for language throughout and some violence." Running time: 120 minutes. Three stars out of four.



This image released by Sony Pictures Classics shows Robert Aramayo in a scene from 'I Swear.' (AP)



Shirley Henderson, (left), Maxine Peake in a scene from 'I Swear.' (AP)

Variety

LOS ANGELES: Actor and filmmaker Maggie Gyllenhaal will preside over the main competition jury for the 83rd Venice International Film Festival later this year. Festival organizers announced the selection Thursday.

Gyllenhaal, who most recently directed "The Bride!", brought her directorial debut "The Lost Daughter" to the festival in 2021. Her adaptation of Elena Ferrante's novel, starring Jessie Buckley, Olivia Colman and Dakota Johnson, won the festival's screenplay award that year.

"Maggie Gyllenhaal embodies an artistic path of uncommon consistency, constructed over time with intelligence and courage," festival director Alberto Barbera said in a statement.

"Having her as the president of our jury means being able to rely on an authoritative and independent voice." The jury, which will eventually be filled out with others in the international film community, is responsible for watching all the competition titles and assigning prizes, including the Golden Lion. Last year, Jim Jarmusch's "Father Mother Sister Brother" was awarded the top prize by the

Alexander Payne-led jury over the likes of Park Chan-wook's "No Other Choice."



Gyllenhaal

Yorgos Lanthimos's "Bugonia" and Guillermo del Toro's "Frankenstein."

"Venice has always supported truthful, singular voices and I am honored to play a part in continuing that brave and necessary tradition," Gyllenhaal said in a statement. "I will not be standing in judgement, but in curiosity, admiration and excitement." (AP)

NEW YORK: Michael Tilson Thomas, a leading American conductor for a half-century who headed orchestras in Buffalo, Miami, London and San Francisco while also composing, died Wednesday. He was 81.

Tilson Thomas had surgery for a brain tumor in 2021 and resumed his career, then said in February 2025 the tumor had returned. He conducted his final concert with the San Francisco

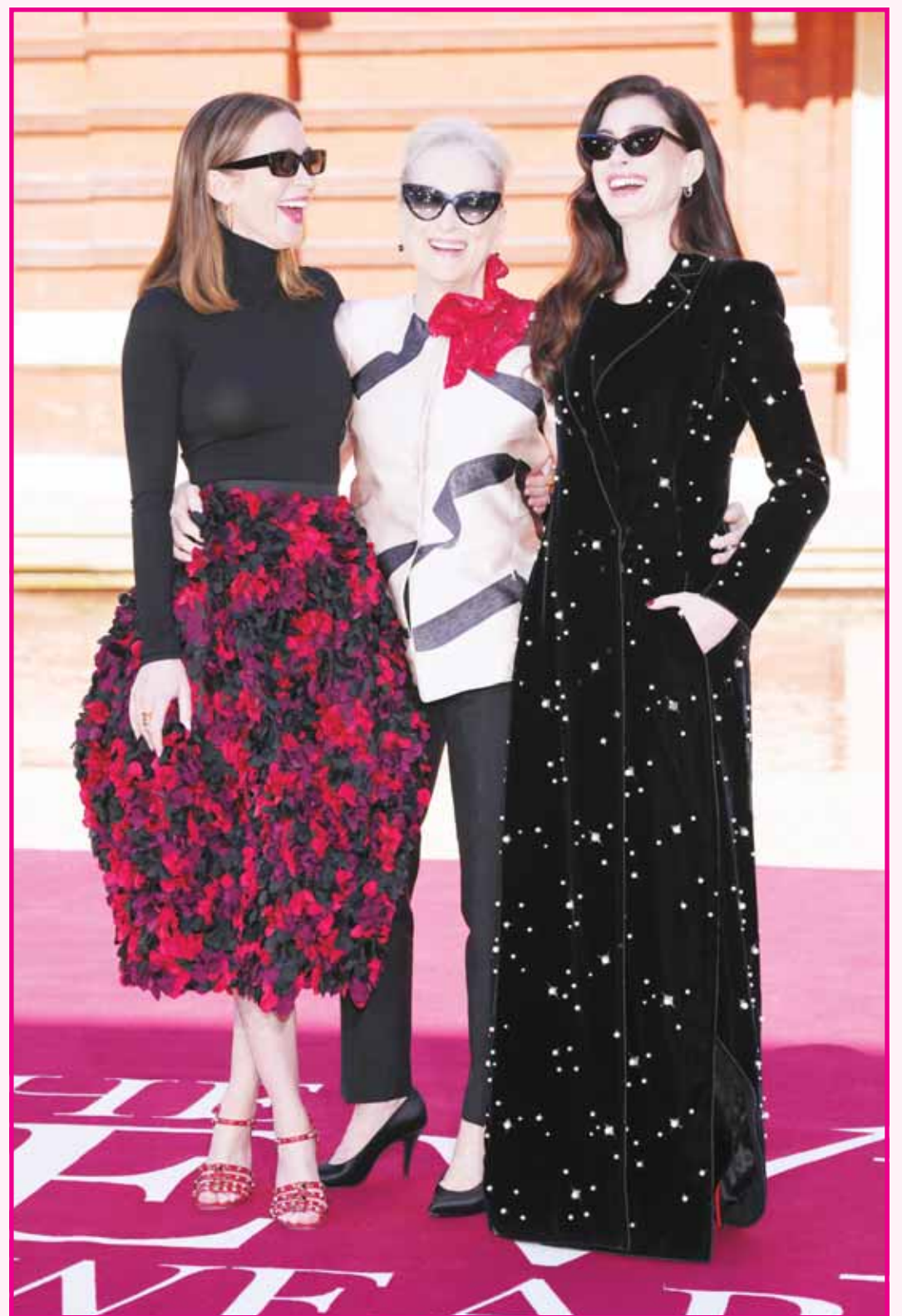
Symphony in April 2025 and died at his home in San Francisco, spokesperson Connie Shuman said.

Tilson Thomas received 39 Grammy Award nominations, winning 12, and was among the Kennedy Center Honors recipients in 2019. "It's meant to have various intriguing and alluring, questioning things that you hear on first hearing," he said of classical music during a 2004 interview with The Associated Press. "But by its very nature it's holding a lot of other secrets or a lot of other perspectives much closer to its chest, which only with repeated hearing you start realizing are there."

Tilson Thomas was born in Los Angeles on Dec. 21, 1944, to a family steeped in the arts. His father, Ted, was a producer at New York's Mercury Theater Company, then worked in Los Angeles in the movie and television industry. His mother, Roberta, headed research for Columbia Pictures. His grandparents, Bessie and Boris Thomashefsky, were pioneers in American Yiddish theater.

He played piano at a young age and attended the University of Southern California. By the time he received a degree in 1967, he had worked with Pierre Boulez, Aaron Copland, Igor Stravinsky and Karlheinz Stockhausen. (AP)

Film



Emily Blunt, (from left), Meryl Streep and Anne Hathaway pose for photographers at the photo call for the film 'The Devil Wears Prada 2' in London, Friday, April 24. (AP)

Bad Bunny holds No. 2 spot

Swift tops Spotify's most streamed list

NEW YORK, April 25, (AP): It's her, hi! Taylor Swift has topped Spotify's first ever list of the most streamed artists of all time, published Thursday morning.

She's followed by Puerto Rican superstar Bad Bunny. That comes as no surprise: In 2025 the artist born Benito Antonio Martinez Ocasio was named the streaming giant's most played artist of the year for a fourth time, dethroning Swift.

It's a been bit of a cat-and-mouse game for the two: She claimed the top spot the previous two years; he did the same from 2020 to 2023.

Drake is Spotify's third most streamed artist of all time, followed by The Weeknd, Ariana Grande, Ed Sheeran, Justin Bieber, Billie Eilish, Eminem, Kanye West, Travis Scott, BTS, Post Malone, Bruno Mars, J Balvin, Rihanna, Coldplay, Kendrick Lamar, Future and Juice WRLD in that order.

Spotify did not provide insight into its data collection methodology when asked about it by The Associated Press.

In addition to naming its most streamed artists globally, Spotify compiled its most streamed albums, songs, podcasts and audiobooks to celebrate its 20th anniversary.

Streaming accounts for most of the money generated by the music industry - 82% in the United States, according to the Recording Industry Association of America.



Taylor Swift performs at Wembley Stadium as part of her Eras Tour on June 21, 2024, in London. (AP)

Spotify, a Sweden-based company founded in April 2006, is the largest platform of all. It accounts for over 31% of the total market share, with a reported 751 million users and 290 million subscribers in more than 184 markets.

Spotify's most streamed albums of all time:

1. Bad Bunny's "Un Verano Sin Ti";
2. The Weeknd's "Starboy";
3. Ed Sheeran's "+" (Deluxe);
4. Olivia Rodrigo's "SOUR";
5. The Weeknd's "After Hours";
6. SZA's "SOS";
7. Post Malone's "Hollywood's Bleeding";
8. Taylor Swift's "Lover";
9. Arctic

Monkeys' "AM"; 10. Billie Eilish's "When We All Fall Asleep, Where Do We Go?"; 11. Dua Lipa's "Future Nostalgia"; 12. Post Malone's "Beerbongs & Bentleys"; 13. XXXTENTACION's "?"; 14. Karol G's "Mañana Será Bonito (Bichota Season)"; 15. Bad Bunny's "YHLQMDLG"; 16. Bruno Mars' "Doo-Wops & Hoolligans"; 17. Drake's "Views"; 18. Taylor Swift's "Midnights"; 19. Drake's "Scorpion" and 20. The Weeknd's "Beauty Behind the Madness."

Spotify's most streamed songs of all time:

1. The Weeknd's "Blinding Lights";
2. Ed Sheeran's "Shape of You";
3. The Neighbourhood's "Sweater Weather";
4. The Weeknd ft. Daft Punk's "Starboy";
5. Harry Styles' "As It Was";
6. Lewis Capaldi's "Someone You Loved";
7. Post Malone and Swae Lee's "Sunflower - Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Vers";
8. Drake ft. Wizkid and Kyla's "One Dance";
9. Ed Sheeran's "Perfect";
10. The Kid LAROI and Justin Bieber's "Stay";
11. Imagine Dragons' "Believer";
12. Arctic Monkeys' "I Wanna Be Yours";
13. Glass Animals' "Heat Waves";
14. Billie Eilish and Khalid's "Lovely";
15. Coldplay's "Yellow";
16. Lord Huron's "The Night We Met";
17. The Chainsmokers ft. Halsey's "Closer";
18. Billie Eilish's "Birds of a Feather";
19. Vance Joy's "Riptide";
20. Lady Gaga and Bruno Mars' "Die With A Smile"

New novel features first female lead in full-length work

Japan's Haruki Murakami returns with 'Tale of Kaho' after 3 years

TOKYO, April 25, (AP): A new book by Haruki Murakami will mark the first time a full-length novel by the Japanese author features a female main character and her pursuit of finding a way out of a bizarre world.

"The Tale of KAHO," which is scheduled to be released July 3 in print and digital formats, centers on a 26-year-old picture book author named Kaho.

The new novel is Murakami's first in three years. His previous novel, "The City and Its Uncertain Walls," is a story of a male protagonist searching for love,



Japanese author Haruki Murakami attends a meeting with Norway's Crown Princess Mette-Marit during the Norwegian Literature Festival in Lillehammer, Norway, Thursday, June 5, 2025. (AP)

loss and the boundaries between real and subconscious worlds.

Kaho is the first lone, woman protagonist featured in a full-length novel by Murakami, Shinchosha Publishing Co. said Thursday in a statement.

Initially, the novel started as a short story titled, "Kaho," which Murakami rehearsed at a book reading event two years ago at Waseda University, his alma mater in Tokyo, with Mieko Kawakami, a renowned female author and fan of his work. The story was published in the June 2024 edition of the monthly Shin-

cho magazine.

The character Kaho, who has average looks and intelligence, is a curious person. One day she dines with a man who tells her, "I've never seen one as ugly as you." Not outraged but baffled, curious Kaho tries to find out his hidden message.

Soon she starts encountering bizarre things in her life.

"I must find the way out of this world," a brief promotional teaser released by the publisher says. "Murakami world is in full force."

Murakami has since released three subsequent "Kaho" series stories in Shincho magazine, most recently in the March edition. They include "The Ant-eater of Musashi-sakai," "Kaho and the Termite Queen" and "Kaho and the Motorcycle Man, and Scarlett Johansson."

The English version of the first piece, translated by Philip Gabriel, was published in The New Yorker magazine in 2024.

Murakami brings the four parts together and gives them new life in the 352-page new novel, the publisher said.

Music



Jon Batiste performs during the first weekend of the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival on Friday, April 24, at Fair Grounds Race Course in New Orleans. (AP)

'Lyrics misuse denies rap music the status of art'

Rap lyrics used to send man to death row

NEW YORK, April 25, (AP): When he was 19, James Broadnax jotted down rap lyrics, thoughts and even job leads in a notebook that would become evidence at his capital murder trial.

Prosecutors selected lyrics with alleged references to gang affiliation and shootings to convince jurors that instead of life in prison, Broadnax, who is Black, should be put to death after his conviction - a move his lawyers argue biased the almost all-white jury.

Broadnax isn't the only defendant or even the only person on Texas' death row whose rap lyrics have been introduced to a jury. Rap lyrics have featured in hundreds of court cases in more than 40 states over the past 50 years, though judges often exclude other forms of creative expression from being used as evidence, researchers have found. Treating rap lyrics as diary entries minimizes their artistic value while playing on negative racial stereotypes to influence jurors, experts say.

"It denies rap music the status of art. It is characterized as autobiography," said Erik Nielson, co-author of the book "Rap on Trial." "It really does speak to underlying assumptions that some people have about young men of color - and that's almost exclusively who this practice targets - that they aren't sophisticated enough to engage in various literary devices. That there isn't metaphor here."

Rap lyrics are commonly used in racketeering or gang-related cases. Prosecutors try to establish the defendant's involvement in an underlying crime by introducing lyrics as evidence, Nielson said. If someone is charged with a shooting, for example, prosecutors look for lyrics that mention a shooting.

"If the lyrics were written before the alleged crime, the prosecutors will say this is evidence of motive," Nielson said. "If they're written afterward, they're characterized as a straight-up confession."

Broadnax and his cousin were charged with murder for the 2008 shooting deaths of two men outside a suburban Dallas music studio. After more than a decade on death row, he is scheduled to be executed April 30.

In their pending appeal asking the U.S. Supreme Court to halt Broadnax's execution, his attorneys argue that a judge should have considered the potential for racial bias and instructed the jury that his lyrics should not be viewed as autobiographical.

"The emphasis on the rap lyrics was a key element in this racially charged narrative," Broad-

nax's attorneys wrote. "Worse, the record in this case confirms that the jury delivered a death sentence based on the racial stereotypes invoked by the rap lyrics."

Kemba, a rapper featured in the documentary "As We Speak: Rap Music on Trial," told The Associated Press that introducing rap lyrics is particularly effective with juries because of innate prejudices - and because prosecutors want convictions.

"There's a lot of people that don't see rap or Black music as artistic expression," he said. "And when you're in a court case, there's already an assumption that you've done something (wrong)."

The defendants in these cases are "almost exclusively young men of color, often with very limited resources," and many can't afford a private attorney, Nielson said.

But some high-profile rappers have had their songs introduced in court, like Young Thug, whose lyrics were used as evidence at his trial on gang and racketeering charges. He pleaded guilty to those charges and was released from custody in 2024.

Expression

"The criminalization and the targeting of hip-hop has been going on for all 50 years of the culture," said Nielson, who noted the use of rap lyrics in court ramped up in the early 1990s.

The monitoring of Black artistic expression dates back to the antebellum South, he said, though that intensified as rap music became more critical of power structures, like N.W.A.'s 1989 song "F--- the Police," which condemns police brutality.

In 2022, The New York Times' Jaeah Lee looked for non-rap examples of lyrics used at trial from 1950 onward and found only four. Three cases were thrown out and one led to a conviction that was overturned. In that same time period, Nielson found roughly 700 examples of rap lyrics used in court cases, including lyrics that someone rapped but didn't even write.

Another study conducted by University of Nevada assistant professor Adam Dunbar examined stereotypes of rap. He presented people with lyrics, saying they were from rap, country or metal music. When it came to rap, respondents overwhelmingly considered the lyrics to be autobiographical.

"But if they're given the same lyrics and told that those are country or heavy metal lyrics, they say, 'No, it's just art,'" said J.M. Harper, director of "As We Speak."

Some rappers have begun directly attesting to the fictional nature of their music. The year before he was fatally stabbed in 2021, Drakeo the Ruler released the song "Fictional" from behind bars because his lyrics were being treated as nonfiction. In 2023, 21 Savage described his raps as "fiction as hell."

"There's no doubt in my mind that they are doing this for fear of prosecution," Nielson said.

A number of A-list rappers, including Travis Scott, T.I. and Killer Mike, have filed briefs at the Supreme Court in support of Broadnax, cautioning against considering rap lyrics autobiographical.

Prosecutors in the case said Texas law allows evidence relevant to a defendant's reputation at sentencing and contend the court shouldn't consider the argument against the lyrics because Broadnax failed to raise concerns in previous appeals. State courts have ruled against other appeals by Broadnax's attorneys.

"At the end of the day, the most important thing is not the prosecutors," rapper LL Cool J told the AP in 2024, adding that judges should better block rap lyrics from trials. "The question is: Why is it even admissible?"

Lucius T. Outlaw III, a professor at Howard University School of Law who filed the amicus brief on behalf of Nielson and Killer Mike, said judges enforce rules of evidence specific to each state.

One judge might view rap lyrics as relevant; another may disagree. "I might worry about triggering 'anti-rap, which is anti-Black, bias,'" he said, "where another judge will say, 'I don't see that prejudice.'"

"Guidelines about what is relevant when it comes to artistic expression and what is overly prejudicial is so needed," he said.

Jeff Bellin, a professor at Vanderbilt Law School, said current rules tell judges to exclude evidence if it has low value as proof and a danger of creating bias.

"The safeguard should be judges, but they are often not aware of the social issues, or the context, when it comes to rap lyrics," he said.

Bellin said legislating around the issue is difficult because lawmakers don't want to create rules that would exclude evidence truly relevant to any case. In the past five years, at least 27 bills have been introduced federally and in a half-dozen states to limit the use of a defendant's creative expressions, including rap lyrics, in criminal proceedings, according to an AP analysis using the bill-tracking software Plural.

health care cost inflation, writers were able to secure a contract that returns our Health Fund to a sustainable path and builds on gains from the 2023 strike," WGA West President Michele Mulrone said in a statement.

Guild leaders said the deal also includes minimum pay hikes, especially for comedy and variety writers, with more money in residuals for the re-airing of their work.

MACAO: The Macao Special Administrative Region (SAR) government launched a reading campaign week with an opening ceremony held on Thursday at the Macao Cultural Center.

Jointly organized by the SAR government's cultural affairs bureau (IC), the education and youth de-

velopment bureau and the social welfare bureau, the event, running from April 20 to 26, features a wide range of activities aimed at fostering a reading culture across the city.

According to the IC, the reading week introduces a "10-minute reading" initiative that includes incentive schemes and reading corners. A series of extended activities from April to May will also be held, such as workshops, book clubs, parent-child reading sessions, themed book fairs and award ceremonies.

Speaking at the opening ceremony, Leong Wai Man, head of the IC, said the bureau has actively responded to national initiatives by upgrading its existing program into this year's reading week, positioning it as a new cultural brand to help build Macao into a "city of reading" and promote the high-quality development of public cultural services. (Xinhua)

Technology

Logging on at a cafe?

Key privacy & security tips for digital nomads

NEW YORK, April 25, (AP): For digital nomads, logging on to work from a cafe, co-working space, hotel lobby or airport lounge is a way of life.

Remote working has been made possible by reliable high speed internet and turbocharged by the pandemic. For some remote workers, that includes working from somewhere other than their home, perhaps because their company doesn't have a physical location in their area, or because they don't have an ideal home office setup.

Working in public, however, doesn't come without privacy and security risks. Here's a quick reminder of precautions to take:

Hybrid or fully remote working is the norm for many jobs, so it's a good idea to check for guidance from your employer on what's expected when working away from the office.

Many companies and organizations have internal guidelines including best practices for working in public, or even offer privacy and confidentiality training for staff.

Some discourage working in crowded public places like coffee shops because of data privacy risks. The British government spells it out in guidance for staff working with classified documents. "These environments can present additional risks, including being more freely accessible to people without the appropriate clearance and need-to-know."

If you're planning to travel and work, some employers might also have rules forbidding staff from working from certain countries.

Cafes and co-working spaces are often busy with strangers, most of whom will be minding their own business. But it's still a good idea not to leave yourself exposed.

Try to find a secluded place to sit to prevent others from seeing what's on your screen, even if it's by accident. It's harder for someone to "shoulder surf" if you've got your back to a wall.

To make it even harder for prying eyes, get a screen privacy filter. This is a thin film that has tiny louvres to prevent anyone from seeing your screen when looking at it from an angle.

Password

It's so tempting to log on to that free Wi-Fi network in the airport lounge or hotel lobby so you can check your email. But cybersecurity experts advise against it because the risks are high.

Avoid a public Wi-Fi network that doesn't need a password, because any data sent over it is vulnerable to theft or manipulation, the National Security Agency warns.

Even if a Wi-Fi network requires a password, that doesn't mean the data will be encrypted, the NSA says in a cybersecurity tip sheet.

The agency warns about a number of cybersecurity risks involving public Wi-Fi. One possible danger is a rogue network that tricks people into joining.

"A malicious actor can set up a fake access point, also known as an evil twin, to mimic the nearby expected public Wi-Fi, resulting in that actor having access to all data sent over the network," the NSA says.

Instead, use a mobile hotspot, which is more secure because it uses your cellphone signal to create a mini wireless network. Most iPhones or Android phones can do this.

For even more security, use a VPN, or virtual private network. This is software that encrypts data traffic and routes it through private tunnels to secure servers to prevent anyone from being able to read it. Companies usually provide them for staff. If not, you can sign up for one yourself.

There are other common-sense measures you can take in public. Beware of your surroundings. Sitting in a public place with a laptop in plain sight could make it an attractive target for thieves. If you need to leave your spot to go to the restroom, take your devices with you.

Avoid having private conversations in public. If you're on a noisy train car or in a busy hotel lobby talking on a Zoom call about a sensitive project, it might be tempting to raise your voice to make sure you're being heard. But you can never be sure if anyone is eavesdropping.

"In public areas be aware of whether you can be overheard by any unauthorized individuals, such as members of the public, or smart listening devices," the British government's guidance warns.

Online safety push

Turkey moves to ban social media access for under-15s

ISTANBUL, April 25, (AP): Turkish lawmakers passed a bill late Wednesday that includes restricting access to social media platforms for children under 15, state media reported.

The legislation is the latest in a global trend to protect young people from dangerous online activity.

Its passage comes a week after a 14-year-old boy killed nine students and a teacher at a middle school in Kahramanmaraş, southern Turkey, in a gun attack. Police are investigating the online activity of the perpetrator, who also died, in a bid to uncover his motivation for the attack.

The bill will force social media platforms to install age-verification systems, provide parental control tools and require companies to rapidly respond to content deemed harmful, the state-run Anadolu news agency said.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan must now accept the bill within 15 days for it to pass into law. He spoke in the wake of the Kahramanmaraş killings of the need for to mitigate the online risks to children's safety and privacy.

"We are living in a period where some digital sharing applications are corrupting our children's minds and social media platforms have, to put it bluntly, become cesspools," he said in a televised address Monday.

The main opposition party - the Republican People's Party, or CHP - has

criticized the proposal, saying children should be protected "not with bans but with rights-based policies."

Under the law, digital platforms - such as YouTube, TikTok, Facebook, Instagram and others - would have to block children under 15 from opening accounts and introduce parental controls that would manage children's access.

Online game companies will also be required to appoint a representative in Turkey to ensure they abide by the new regulations. Potential penalties include internet bandwidth reductions and fines imposed by Turkey's communications watchdog.

The Turkish government has a recent record of restricting online platforms as they have grown as a means of expressing dissent. Online communications were widely restricted during last year's protests in support of Istanbul's jailed opposition mayor, Ekrem Imamoglu.

Restrictions on social media access for children under 16 first began in December in Australia, where social media companies revoked access to about 4.7 million accounts identified as belonging to children.

Last month, Indonesia began implementing a new government regulation banning children younger than 16 from access to digital platforms that could expose them to pornography, cyberbullying, online scams and addiction.

Variety

LOS ANGELES: Members of the screenwriters union overwhelmingly ratified a four-year agreement with Hollywood studios and streamers on Friday, bringing an end to a surprisingly smooth and quick process that brought a prolonged strike the last time around.

Union leaders said 90% voted to approve the deal struck between the Writers Guild of America West, Writers Guild of America East and Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers. Studios will now shift to negotiations with actors and directors.

Leaders of the unions emphasized gains in health coverage.

"In the face of industry contraction and runaway

US expands drug studies for hard-to-treat depressions

FDA plans ultra-fast review of three psychedelic drugs

WASHINGTON, April 25, (AP) — The Food and Drug Administration said Friday it will offer ultra-fast review to three psychedelic drugs being developed to treat mental health conditions, including depression, the latest step by the Trump administration toward possible approval of the experimental treatments.

President Donald Trump signed an executive order last weekend directing the FDA and other federal agencies to speed research and loosen restrictions on psychedelics, a class of hallucinogenic drugs which remain illegal under federal law.

The FDA said it awarded priority review vouchers to two companies studying psilocybin — the active ingredient in magic mushrooms — for hard-to-treat forms of depression. A third company received a voucher for methylone, a drug related to MDMA, for post-traumatic stress disorder. The FDA did not name the companies in a press release announcing the news.

"We owe it to our nation's veterans



A grower cuts psilocybin mushrooms to prepare for distribution in Springfield, Ore., Monday, Aug. 14, 2023. (AP)

and all Americans who are suffering from these conditions to evaluate these potential therapies with urgency," FDA Commissioner Marty Makary

said in a statement.

The vouchers don't guarantee approval, but instead mean that regulators will try to shorten their reviews from a period of months to weeks.

The recent moves on psychedelics reflect growing popular support for the mind-altering substances among Trump's supporters, including combat veterans and followers of the Make America Healthy Again movement spearheaded by Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr.

Last July, Kennedy told members of Congress his department aimed to make psychedelics available for hard-to-treat psychiatric conditions within one year. Some of Kennedy's top allies and staffers are proponents of the drugs.

Calley Means, a former Kennedy campaign staffer now serving as a senior health adviser, has previously written about the "mind-blowing" power of psychedelics and his plans to invest in companies developing the drugs.

FDA's special treatment for psychedelics is likely to renew scrutiny of its program for speeding up drug reviews, known as the Commissioner's National Priority Voucher program.

Democratic members of Congress have noted that vouchers have gone to companies that are politically favored by the White House, including those that have agreed to cut prices on their medications.

In a separate move, the FDA authorized initial testing of a drug related to ibogaine, a powerful psychedelic made from an African shrub, for people with alcohol use disorder. Ibogaine is known to sometimes cause dangerous heart rhythms but has been embraced by combat veterans as a way to treat trauma and addiction.

The drugmaker, DemeRx, is led by a Florida-based researcher who first began studying ibogaine as a treatment for cocaine addiction in the 1990s, before federal health officials pulled funding for the work.

"Every grant proposal that I submit-

ted to (the National Institute on Drug Abuse) was rejected," Deborah Mash, a neurologist and founder of DemeRx, told The Associated Press. "I couldn't get that funding and that's why ibogaine didn't advance in the 1990s."

Ibogaine is known to cause intense hallucinations, nausea, vomiting, tremors and sometimes dangerous irregular heart rhythms. Mash says DemeRx's drug is a metabolite of ibogaine, and doesn't carry the same hallucinogenic effects or risks as the original drug.

Saturday's White House event on psychedelics suggested Trump's political allies had a role in pushing the drugs to the top of his agenda.

Joe Rogan, the podcaster who appeared at the Oval Office event, said he texted Trump about the psychedelic ibogaine, which he's repeatedly discussed on his show. According to Rogan, the president quickly responded: "Sounds great. Do you want FDA approval? Let's do it."

Muscle composition identify high-risk individuals in CKD

Muscle condition may help predict death risk in kidney disease: study

LINKÖPING, Sweden, April 25, (AP) — AMRA Medical researchers recently set out to answer the question: what is the relationship between adverse muscle composition (AMC) and mortality in kidney disease? Recent findings demonstrate that AMC, characterized by low muscle volume z-score and high muscle fat infiltration, is an independent and strong predictor of all-cause mortality in individuals with chronic kidney disease (CKD). The findings, published in *Clinical Journal of the American Society of Nephrology*, were based on data from the UK Biobank imaging study and further reinforce the clinical relevance of MRI-derived muscle biomarkers in identifying high-risk populations across chronic diseases.

Researchers from AMRA, alongside our collaborators at Linköping University (LiU), analyzed 894 participants with CKD using AMRA's MRI-based body composition analysis to quantify thigh fat-free muscle volume and muscle fat infiltration (MFI). AMC was identified in approximately 30% of the cohort, highlighting a substantial at-risk population. Over a mean follow-up period of 3.6 years, individuals with AMC showed a markedly increased risk of all-cause mortality, with an unadjusted hazard ratio of 6.17. Importantly, this association remained significant even after adjusting for demographic, lifestyle, and clinical factors, with a hazard ratio of 4.21.

These findings demonstrate the strength of AMC as a clinically meaningful phenotype, capturing a large proportion of participants while maintaining a strong association with adverse outcomes. Unlike traditional risk markers that often isolate smaller subgroups, AMC enables broader stratification of high-risk individuals, offering valuable insights into population heterogeneity within clinical trials. The publication underscores the value of MRI-based muscle composition assessments to support clinical trials evaluating risk and interventions in CKD.

This study adds to a growing body of evidence supporting the role of muscle composition as a critical factor in chronic disease. By applying standardized MRI-based assessments across diverse populations including recent work in MASLD, heart failure and advanced disease states such as end-stage liver disease (ESLD), AMRA supports the generation of consistent, high-quality data that can be compared across studies and indications.

This publication also builds on prior investigations into muscle composition in CKD, including a study of hemodialysis patients, further underscoring the relevance of AMC across different stages of disease severity. Together, this research highlights the potential of targeting muscle composition as part of future therapeutic strategies and trial design in chronic disease management.

AMRA Medical is a global leader in health informatics, pioneering the field of fat and muscle analysis with proprietary, MRI-based technologies. Our gold-standard platform delivers highly precise and standardized biomarkers, providing an advanced understanding of metabolic and musculoskeletal health that surpasses conventional body composition metrics. These insights play a critical role in optimizing clinical trial design, improving endpoint selection, and supporting data-driven decision-making in both research and clinical practice.

Built on rigorous science and driven by continuous innovation, AMRA's solutions are designed to meet the complex demands of modern healthcare and pharmaceutical development. Through standardized, cloud-based workflows and strategic collaboration, we enable partners to access actionable data with clarity and confidence—accelerating progress from early-stage discovery to impactful clinical outcomes.



This image provided by the US National Science Foundation's NOIRLab on Friday, April 24, shows Messier 104, a spiral galaxy nicknamed the Sombrero galaxy. (AP)

Sombrero galaxy captures in full splendor

The Sombrero galaxy and its glowing halo of stars have never looked this good. The US National Science Foundation's NOIRLab released the latest photo of the popular hat-shaped galaxy on Friday. A telescope in Chile observed it four years ago, but the color imaging was not completed until this week.

Located approximately 30 million light-years away, this spiral galaxy — formally known as Messier 104 — is one of the largest in the constellation Virgo cluster. It's

an estimated 50,000 light-years across. A light year is about 6 trillion miles.

Captured in incredible detail, the galaxy's stellar halo appears to be triple the size of the sombrero itself.

A dark energy camera on the telescope also caught a stream of stars pouring out of the galaxy's southern edge. Scientists believe the stars in this stream, as well as the halo, were ripped from other galaxies in a long-ago collision. (AP)



Left: A hippopotamus's tooth is given to participants. Right: Monika Jansen, 85, touches a sculpture of a rhino during a guided tour for people with dementia organized by Malteser Deutschland, part of the international Catholic aid organization Malteser Order of Malta, at the Zoo in Berlin, Germany, March 26, 2026. (AP)

Specialized tour offers lifeline to caregivers

Zoo tour aims to change how dementia is seen

BERLIN, April 25, (AP) — Christel Krueger peered through thick glass and murky water at the Berlin Zoo, staring in awe at a mother hippopotamus and her child sleeping on a sandbar.

Krueger, 86, and her daughter were on a specialized zoo tour last month for people who live with dementia that was organized by Malteser Deutschland, part of the international Catholic aid organization Malteser Order of Malta.

On the tour with Krueger, Ingrid Barkow watched from her wheelchair as the elephants roamed their habitat, while Monika Jansen balanced on her tiptoes to get a better view of a rhinoceros.

"When I get home, I'll still be thinking about it," said Jansen, 85. "Maybe even at night, while I'm sleeping and dreaming about it."

The three women are among roughly 1.6 million people living with dementia in Germany, according to the Office of the National Dementia Strategy. The figure is expected to rise to 2.8 million by 2050.

Museums and other cultural institutions across the globe have added spe-

cialized, barrier-free tours and guides to their repertoire in recent years, some made possible by advances in technology.

These include sign-language tours for people who are deaf and hard of hearing, touch-based events for those with blindness or low vision and programs for people on the autism spectrum.

The Berlin chapter of Malteser Deutschland last year designed a cultural program in the capital catering to people with dementia.

"People with dementia aren't very visible in our society. It's still a major taboo subject, yet it actually affects a great many people and it's important that they continue to be at the heart of society," project coordinator Christine Gruschka said. "They have a right to participate, just like everyone else."

Millions of people around the globe have some form of dementia, a progressive loss of memory, reasoning, language skills and other cognitive functions. People can experience changes in personality, emotional control and even visual perception. Alzheimer's is the most widely recognized type, but there are many others, with their own

symptoms and underlying biology.

Malteser Berlin's tours for people with dementia occur at the zoo, the Museum of Natural History, Britzer Garden and Charlottenburg Palace, with hopes of expanding to other locations.

"Normal" tours — so-called normal tours — are often too fast, too loud, with too many people and too many distractions," Gruschka said. "That's why we've made it our goal to create programs specifically for people with dementia: Where they still feel seen, where they feel comfortable, and where they can still show that they're still here and can still be part of it."

Krueger, Jansen and Barkow followed Malteser Berlin tour coordinator Carola Tembrink around the Berlin Zoo, accompanied by their daughters and a caregiver.

Tembrink skipped the majority of the zoo's vast offerings to focus on the hippo, rhino and elephant habitats so the participants would not get too tired or overwhelmed.

"The zoo is a wonderful place for tours like this because almost everyone who grew up in Berlin has been here

as a child," Tembrink said. "And especially for people with dementia, childhood memories are often still present — they just need to be jogged a bit — and that happens naturally when they see the animals, smell the air as they enter the zoo, or when they go into the rhino house and catch a different scent."

For the caregivers and families, the tours are a lifeline. During long and sometimes frustrating days of caring for someone with dementia, a specialized tour lets them connect with others who understand the journey.

Krueger was formally diagnosed last year with dementia, but her daughter, Kerstin Hoehne, said the symptoms appeared more than two years ago.

"What's nice is that it's also with, let's say, like-minded people, that you're not alone, but that you have a sense of belonging because everyone else might have the same problem," Hoehne said.

Barkow's daughter, Manuela Grudda, said the tour brought them closer together. Grudda pushed Barkow's wheelchair through the zoo, her hands caressing her mother's shoulders or pointing out the animals.

'Strengthen immunization'

Only 4 European countries meet flu vaccination target

OSLO, April 25, (Xinhua) — Only four countries in the World Health Organization European region have met a two-decade-old global target for influenza vaccination among older adults in the 2022-2023 season, the Copenhagen-based European branch of the UN Health agency (WHO Europe) said Friday.

The agency published a 15-year analysis entitled "The Lancet Regional Health — Europe" to mark European Immunization Week 2026 after tracking influenza vaccination programs across the WHO European region over 15 seasons from 2008-2009 to 2022-2023.

According to its findings, Belarus, Denmark, Ireland and Britain are the only four among 54 countries and areas in the region to reach the target of vaccinating 75 percent of older adults against influenza — a target set by the World Health Assembly in 2003.

WHO Europe acknowledged progress made in the region, saying that the number of vaccine doses distributed has doubled since 2008-2009. By the 2021-2022 season, every member state had established a national influenza vaccination program, making it the first of WHO's six global regions to do so.

However, the analysis showed wide inequalities in vaccine access and uptake. In the 2022-2023 season, high-income countries in the region distributed an average of 139.9 doses per 1,000 people, compared with 14.6 doses per 1,000 people in lower-middle-income countries.

Vaccination coverage among seniors stood at 55 percent in high-income countries but only 5 percent in lower-middle-income countries, according to WHO Europe. Older adults account for 70 percent of all influenza-related deaths globally.

Seasonal influenza causes up to 5 million severe cases and kills up to 650,000 people worldwide each year, the agency said.

"These numbers tell a clear story about who we are protecting and who we are leaving behind, and sadly, it's a tale of inequality," said Hans Henri P. Kluge, WHO regional director for Europe.

"A tenfold gap in dose availability within a single region should concern every health minister in the European Region," he said, adding that making vaccines free, confronting misinformation and building trust in communities could help improve uptake.

There were also "promising signs," Kluge said, noting that influenza vaccination among older adults in the region rose during the first COVID-19 winter in 2020-2021 and appears to have been sustained in subsequent seasons.

In another development, WHO on

Thursday renewed its call for intensified immunization efforts across the Western Pacific region, warning of a resurgence of vaccine-preventable diseases.

The WHO stressed the need to protect hard-won gains in vaccination programs, reach children who continue to miss routine immunizations, and sustain public confidence in vaccines at every stage of life, according to a statement from the WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific in Manila, Philippines.

"Vaccines are a miracle of science and medicine, and they have protected generations of families and communities across our region. But we cannot take this protection for granted," said Saia Ma'u Piukala, WHO Regional Director for the Western Pacific.

Yet in 2024, nearly 2.1 million children in the Western Pacific missed at least one vaccine dose, leaving far too many at risk of preventable diseases. Across the region, with 2.2 billion people representing over a quarter of the world's population, countries have made major gains against vaccine-preventable diseases, according to the WHO.

The WHO emphasized that strengthening routine immunization systems, improving outreach to underserved populations, and ensuring reliable vaccine supply chains are critical to reversing the trend.

Also:

WASHINGTON: Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth has announced last Tuesday that the U.S. military will no longer require all American troops to get the flu vaccine, citing "medial autonomy" and religious freedom.

"The notion that a flu vaccine must be mandatory for every service member, everywhere, in every circumstance at all times is just overly broad and not rational," Hegseth said in a video posted on social media.

He said American service members are free to get the flu vaccine but will not be forced to "because your body, your faith and your convictions are not negotiable."

Hegseth's directive does allow for the military services to request to keep the vaccine requirement in place, according to a memo enacting the policy posted online. It says the services have 15 days to make those requests.

Vaccination programs in the US military date back to the American Revolution. But they became a contentious political issue during the coronavirus pandemic, when more than 8,400 troops were forced out of the military for refusing to obey the 2021 mandate for the COVID-19 vaccine. Thousands of others sought religious and medical exemptions.

Ultra-processed foods linked to poor focus, dementia risks

MELBOURNE, April 25, (Xinhua) — A diet high in ultra-processed foods (UPFs) can negatively impact the brain's ability to focus and increase the risk of developing dementia, new research revealed Friday.

The study analyzed the diets and cognitive health of more than 2,100 dementia-free Australian adults aged middle and older, finding that even a slight daily increase in UPF intake was linked to a measurable drop in atten-

tion span, regardless of overall diet quality, said a statement of Australia's Monash University.

The study, published in *Alzheimer's & Dementia: Diagnosis, Assessment & Disease Monitoring*, reinforces a clear connection between industrial food manufacturing and cognitive decline, said lead author Barbara Cardoso from Monash University.

Cardoso said a 10-percent increase in UPF intake — roughly equivalent

to adding a packet of chips a day — was associated with "a distinct and measurable drop in a person's ability to focus" and lower scores on cognitive tests.

Participants consumed about 41 percent of their daily energy from UPFs, such as soft drinks, packaged salty snacks and ready-made meals, close to Australia's national average of 42 percent.

"Food ultra-processing often de-

stroys the natural structure of food and introduces potentially harmful substances like artificial additives or processing chemicals," Cardoso said, adding that the degree of food processing itself, not just poor diet quality, may affect brain function.

While no direct link to memory loss was identified, they noted that reduced attention could impact learning and problem-solving over time.

SPORTS



A unified gathering of the sports community hosted by Adel Al-Jassem.

Al-Jassem reception unites Kuwait sports leaders and media figures

KUWAIT CITY, April 25: Former a standout figure at Al Arabi, Adel Al-Jassem, hosted a reception and dinner that brought together leading figures from Kuwait's sporting community, including officials, former players, and media personalities, in a gesture celebrating the "sports family."

In his address, Al-Jassem warmly welcomed club leaders, veteran athletes, and journalists who have all contributed to the growth of sport in Kuwait. He also paid special tribute to members of the media for their role in highlighting achievements and supporting athletes over the years, notably veteran journalist Salah Rushdi.

Al-Jassem expressed his appreciation to the attendees for accepting the invitation, voicing hope that such gatherings would become an annual tradition, helping

younger generations stay connected to the values and legacy of Kuwaiti sport.

On behalf of the press, Jassem Ashkanani praised the initiative, describing journalism as a "profession of challenges," and thanked Al-Jassem for uniting key figures from across the sporting landscape and reviving cherished memories from their careers.

He also commended media professionals who have served the sports movement, highlighting Salah Rushdi's extensive coverage of regional and international competitions across the Gulf, Arab world, and Asia.

The evening concluded with lively discussions reflecting on past and present achievements, as attendees applauded Al-Jassem's initiative for reinforcing unity and renewing the social and sporting spirit within Kuwait's athletic community.

Bayern sends PSG warning with dramatic comeback win

Heidenheim staves off demotion

BERLIN, April 25, (AP): Bundesliga champion Bayern Munich survived a scare, fighting back from three goals down to beat Mainz 4-3 for a morale-booster before facing Paris Saint-Germain.

Bayern, which goes to Paris on Tuesday for the first leg of their Champions League semifinal, arrived in Mainz in good cheer after clinching the title last weekend and reaching the German Cup final with a win over Bayer Leverkusen on Wednesday.

But Mainz romped to a deserved 3-0 half-time lead against a heavily-rotated Bayern team, with Harry Kane, Jamal Musiala and Michael Olise among those on the bench.

Mainz might even have scored more than the goals that came from from Dominik Kohr, Paul Nebel and Sheraldo Becker.

Bayern coach Vincent Kompany sent on Kane and Olise for Luis Diaz and Aleksandar Pavlović at the break - all four are likely to start against PSG.

Nicolas Jackson pulled one back in the 53rd and Olise let fly with a brilliant strike

inside the far post in the 73rd before Musiala equalized in the 81st.

Kane then scored the winner two minutes later from the rebound after Daniel Batz had saved Musiala's effort.

Last-place Heidenheim staved off demotion with a 2-0 win over relegation rival St. Pauli.

Budu Zivzivadze scored early and Eren Dinkçi late on to keep Heidenheim's hopes of survival alive with three rounds remaining. Second-last Wolfsburg was unable to capitalize on St. Pauli's loss as it drew 0-0 at home with Borussia Mönchengladbach.

Cologne remains in danger after a 2-1 loss at home to Leverkusen in their Rhine derby. The win moved Leverkusen a point behind fourth-place Stuttgart before its game against visiting Werder Bremen on Sunday.

Also Saturday, Eintracht Frankfurt drew 1-1 at Augsburg.

Leipzig defeated Union Berlin 3-1 in the Bundesliga and dealt coach Marie-Louise Eta her second defeat in as many games in charge.

Max Finkgräfe, Romulo and Ridle Baku scored for Leipzig to consolidate third place and move closer to Champions League qualification after five straight wins.

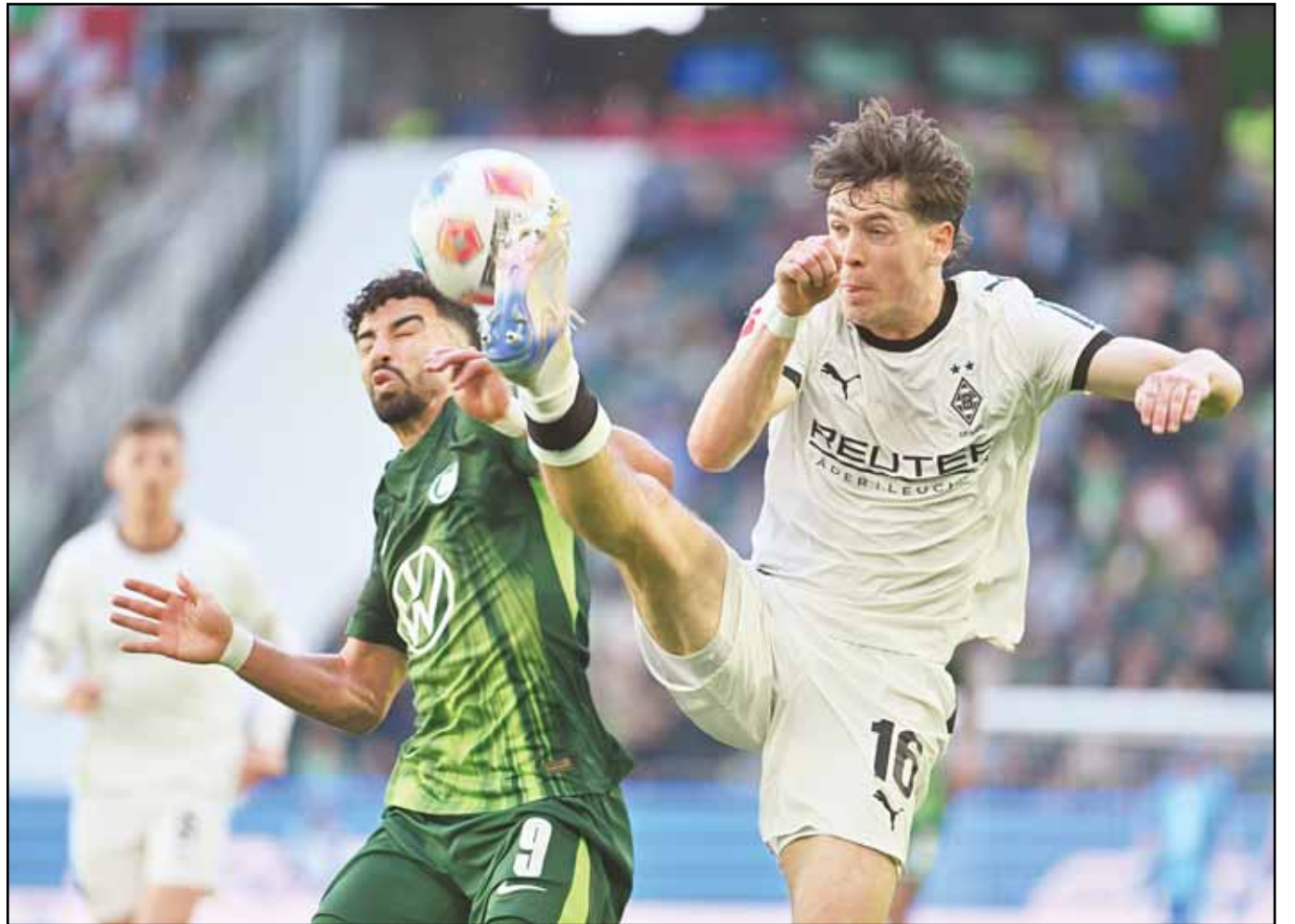
Eta made her debut as the first female coach in the Bundesliga - or any of the top divisions in Europe's big five men's leagues - last weekend in a 2-1 loss at home to relegation-threatened Wolfsburg.

She's been the subject of a torrent of sexist abuse on social media and Leipzig was accused of joining in on Thursday when it responded to a post on X from Union saying it was a "nice city" with photos of Eta posing with former Leipzig coach Marco Rose and former players Dominik Szoboszlai and Emil Forsberg with the words, "Your head coach didn't just find the city pretty nice..."

The photos were from Eta's internship at Leipzig in 2022, and Eta initially posted them herself on Instagram on Jan. 1, 2023.

Eta, who was Union's men's under-19s coach, was appointed head coach for the last five games of the season to secure Bundesliga survival. Union, which is six points above the relegation zone before the rest of the 31st round, next faces Cologne, Mainz and Augsburg.

"We knew it would continue to be a tough path ahead, that we couldn't expect to turn everything around overnight," Eta said. "So



Wolfsburg's Mohamed Amoura, left and Moenchengladbach's Philipp Sander, right, challenge for the ball during the German Bundesliga soccer match between VfL Wolfsburg and Borussia Moenchengladbach in Wolfsburg, Germany. (AP)

I'm feeling positive for now, because there were things today that were OK, things that were good, and we'll work on those. Next up is Cologne at home, where we want to get the three points."

As they always do whenever their team plays in Leipzig against the Red Bull-backed club, Union's fans refrained from singing and chanting for the first 15 minutes to protest against its existence. They see it as a manufactured endeavor with marketing as its raison d'être after it was formed and bankrolled by the energy drinks giant in 2009.

They watched in silence as Leipzig made an ominous start. The home team should have scored more with Union goalkeeper Frederik

Rønnow denying Antonio Nusa and Brazilian forward Romulo, and Andras Schäfer clearing the rebound from the latter off the line.

Finkgräfe opened the scoring in the 22nd minute - when the Union fans were in full voice - by thumping Leopold Querfeld's attempted headed clearance inside the right post.

Romulo shrugged off Querfeld's weak challenge to score three minutes later, and Union suffered another blow when Rønnow had to go off injured. The Danish goalkeeper signaled he couldn't continue after a kickout. Carl Klaus replaced him for his Bundesliga debut at 32 years of age.

"It's special," said Klaus, who had to react straight away to deflect Christoph Baumgart-

ner's header against the crossbar, then fished another near-goal off and over the bar.

Oliver Burke should have scored before the break with Union's only chance of the half when he was through after a defensive mistake, but failed to get past Leipzig 'keeper Maarten Vandevoort.

Though her team improved after the break, Eta made three changes around the hour mark, only for Yan Diomande to set up Baku for the third.

Daniilho Doekhi scored Union's consolation with a header to a corner in the 77th, and substitute Ilyas Ansa thought he scored another in stoppage time only to have it ruled out for offside.



Bayern's Jamal Musiala celebrates after scoring his side's third goal during the Bundesliga soccer match between FSV Mainz 05 and FC Bayern Munich in Mainz, Germany. (AP)

Reigning 2-time champ Alcaraz out of French Open due to wrist injury

LONDON, April 25, (AP): Hellen Obiri has studied race videos from the London Marathon. She's talked at length with her coach, who has competed along the scenic course.

So in some ways, the decorated Kenyan runner's London debut on Sunday feels like any other race. And just like every other race she's in, Obiri will be a favorite - she won the New York Marathon in a course-record time in November - and she could make a run at setting the world record along the fast and flat route.

The time to beat stands at 2 hours, 9 minutes, 56 seconds, which was turned in by Ruth Chepngetich in October 2024 at the Chicago Marathon. This course is well-suited for a fast time, too, as Paula Radcliffe set the world record in London in 2003 and held it for 16 years.

To prepare for a speedy performance, Obiri left the elevation and hills of Boulder, Colorado, for four weeks to train in the warmth and relative flatness of Phoenix.

"When you trust the progress, anything can happen," said the 36-year-old Obiri, who is from Kisii, Kenya, and now resides in Boulder. "But for me, I'm looking forward to just running a good race."

It's another step toward her loftier ambitions - gold at the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics. That particular medal is pretty much the only thing missing from a running career that began at 14 and has taken her around the world.

To think, she wanted to be a basketball player. That's why she still shoots jumpers in the gym - when she's not training, of course.

"I said to myself when I was young, 'I need to work hard. I need to be the best in the world,'" said Obiri, who is sponsored by the sportswear company On. "That's what I'm doing right now, trying to be the best in the world."

Her accomplishments show her running versatility. She captured the bronze medal at the 2024 Paris Olympics in the marathon, along with winning the Boston Marathon earlier that season. She's also a two-time Olympic silver medalist in the 5,000 meters (2016 and 2021). In 2019, she was the world cross country champion and the gold medalist in the 5,000 at the world



In this file photo, Spain's Carlos Alcaraz toweled off during the final of the French Open tennis tournament against Italy's Jannik Sinner in Paris. (AP)

championships.

This weekend, there's a chance to not only win in London but a shot at the world record. That's why she's closely examining footage of the course and chatting with Laura Thweatt, her coach at the On Athletics Club.

"Hellen is a true competitor and she is honestly looking at London very much the same way that she looks at any other race," said Thweatt, who finished sixth at the 2017 London Marathon. "She loves to test herself against the very best and she is a great tactician with a very high race IQ."

"So even though London is a flatter, faster course with pacers, which will all present her with new challenges, she is approaching it the same way. But she is excited to test her limits."

Obiri views each race that way. Always has, since she was a teenager and started running for the Riruta Central secondary school in Nairobi. She burst on the international scene in 2011, earning bronze in the 800 meters at the Military World Games in Rio de Janeiro.

A career path was launched. "Every race is like a stepping stone to a new dream of running well," said Obiri, whose favorite post-race meal is chapati (Kenyan flatbread) and beef stew.

Every so often, she will head to a basketball court close to her house and shoot around.

Rahul's 152 in vain after record chase vs Delhi

DELHI, India, April 25, (AP): Delhi Capitals batter Lokesh Rahul hammered an Indian record 152 not out in 67 balls but it proved in vain as the Punjab Kings won by six wickets to register the most successful run chase in IPL history.

Punjab charged to 265-4 in 18.5 overs in reply to Delhi's 264-2 after opener Prabhsimran Singh had led the chase with 76 off 26 balls, including five sixes and nine fours.

Skipper Shreyas Iyer also bludgeoned 71 not out in 36 deliveries, with seven sixes, as Punjab surpassed its own record for the previous highest successful run chase, when it made 262-2 against Kolkata Knight Riders in 2024. Priyansh Arya chipped in with 43 off 17 balls, including five sixes.

Earlier, opener Rahul notched the highest IPL score by an Indian batter, going past Abhishek Sharma's 141 for Sunrisers Hyderabad - also against Punjab - in 2025.

Rahul smashed nine sixes and 16 fours in his sixth IPL century, while Nitish Rana hit 91 off 44 balls as Delhi scored its highest-ever total in the competition.

Prabhsimran and Priyansh Arya, who made 43 in 17 balls, then gave Punjab a speedy start.

Punjab now has six wins in seven games this season, with one no-result. Delhi's loss was its fourth of the campaign as it slipped to sixth in the table.

In the evening game, Rajasthan Royals hosts Sunrisers Hyderabad in

Kohli and Padikkal lead Bengaluru into top two



Punjab Kings' Prabhsimran Singh hits a six during the Indian Premier League cricket match between Delhi Capitals and Punjab Kings in New Delhi, India. (AP)

Jaipur.

Meanwhile, Virat Kohli smashed 81 after he was dropped off the first ball and Royal Challengers Bengaluru ran down Gujarat Titans by five wickets.

Thanks to Kohli's 44-ball knock and Devdutt Padikkal's 55 in a whirlwind second-wicket stand of 115 runs off 59 balls, Bengaluru comfortably reached 206-5 in 18.5 overs.

Gujarat made 205-3 on the back of opener Sai Sudharsan's even 100 off 58 balls, his third IPL century.

Sudharsan, in his 47th IPL game,

became the quickest player to 2,000 IPL runs, eclipsing Chris Gayle's record of 48 matches.

Kohli was dropped by Washington Sundar at mid-wicket in Mohammed Siraj's first over and went on to crash eight boundaries and four sixes.

Padikkal and Kohli punished Gujarat's two premium bowlers Kagiso Rabada (0-45) and Rashid Khan (2-49). Kohli welcomed Rashid with a straight six off the second delivery and Padikkal smashed Rabada for a six off the first ball he faced.

Padikkal was the aggressor of the two batters and completed his half-century from 20 balls with six sixes and two fours while Kohli raised his third fifty of the season from 30 balls.

Bengaluru was in sight of a big finish in front of its home fans chanting "R-C-B" before they lost four wickets in four overs. Rashid deceived Padikkal with a perfect googly while Kohli dragged Jason Holder's slower ball onto his stumps.

Bengaluru slipped to 173-5 in the 16th over but Krunal Pandya and Tim David, who have played more than 550 Twenty20s and scored more than 9,000, safely finished Bengaluru's fifth win in seven games.

Earlier, Sudharsan dominated Gujarat's batting - especially square of the wicket - as the left-hander shared a 128-run century opening stand with captain Shubman Gill (32).

Sudharsan's solid hundred included 11 fours and five sixes, but he was dismissed next ball when he offered a simple return catch to Josh Hazlewood's 143 kph short ball.

Bengaluru planned for the last over to be bowled by pacer Rasikh Salam, but he left the field due to cramps and Pandya bowled instead. Holder smashed two sixes and a four and Gujarat passed 200 runs.

Bengaluru was second in the table after its fourth home win. Gujarat was seventh on net run-rate.

Obiri set for London Marathon debut after New York win

LONDON, April 25, (AP): Hellen Obiri has studied race videos from the London Marathon. She's talked at length with her coach, who has competed along the scenic course.

So in some ways, the decorated Kenyan runner's London debut on Sunday feels like any other race. And just like every other race she's in, Obiri will be a favorite - she won the New York Marathon in a course-record time in November - and she could make a run at setting the world record along the fast and flat route.

The time to beat stands at 2 hours, 9 minutes, 56 seconds, which was turned in by Ruth Chepngetich in October 2024 at the Chicago Marathon. This course is well-suited for a fast time, too, as Paula Radcliffe set the world record in London in 2003 and held it for 16 years.

To prepare for a speedy performance, Obiri left the elevation and hills of Boulder, Colorado, for four weeks to train in the warmth and relative flatness of Phoenix.

"When you trust the progress, any-

thing can happen," said the 36-year-old Obiri, who is from Kisii, Kenya, and now resides in Boulder. "But for me, I'm looking forward to just running a good race."

It's another step toward her loftier ambitions - gold at the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics. That particular medal is pretty much the only thing missing from a running career that began at 14 and has taken her around the world.

To think, she wanted to be a basketball player. That's why she still shoots jumpers in the gym - when she's not

training, of course.

"I said to myself when I was young, 'I need to work hard. I need to be the best in the world,'" said Obiri, who is sponsored by the sportswear company On. "That's what I'm doing right now, trying to be the best in the world."

Her accomplishments show her running versatility. She captured the bronze medal at the 2024 Paris Olympics in the marathon, along with winning the Boston Marathon earlier that season.

SPORTS

Rockets reeling as Lakers march toward sweep



Los Angeles Lakers forward LeBron James (23) tips the ball inbounds in front of Houston Rockets center Alperen Sengun, left, during the second half of Game 3 in a first-round NBA playoffs basketball series in Houston. (AP)

Celtics, Spurs take 2-1 lead

HOUSTON, April 25, (AP): LeBron James scored 29 points, including a tying 3-pointer with 13 seconds left in regulation, Marcus Smart had eight points in overtime and the Los Angeles Lakers took advantage of a Houston Rockets team missing Kevin Durant for a 112-108 to take a 3-0 lead in the Western Conference first-round series.

The Lakers rallied from a six-point deficit with under 30 seconds remaining and can sweep the series Sunday night in Houston.

Los Angeles opened overtime with a 6-2 run, highlighted by a 3-pointer from Smart to take a 107-103 lead.

Smart made two free throws with 35.5 seconds to go to make it 111-105. Reed Sheppard made a 3-pointer to get Houston within three with less than 30 seconds left in overtime but Smart made 1 of 2 free throws to push the lead to 112-108.

The 41-year-old James played more than 45 minutes. He said with top scorers Luka Doncic and Austin Reaves out with injuries he has no choice but to do whatever he can.

Smart added 21 points and 10 assists, and Rui Hachimura added 22 points for the Lakers.

Even with Durant out for a second game in this series - this time with a sprained ankle after missing Game 1 with a knee injury - the Rockets were in position to close out the game after James had consecutive turnovers that Houston turned into a 101-95 lead.

Houston struggled at times to close out games in the fourth quarter and the problem continued Friday night.

Durant wasn't on the bench Friday night and Udoka said it was because he was receiving treatment on his injured ankle.

Alperen Sengun led the Rockets with 33 points and 16 rebounds. Amen



Boston Celtics' Jayson Tatum, left, goes up for a shot against Philadelphia 76ers' Adem Bona during the second half of Game 3 in a first-round NBA playoffs basketball series in Philadelphia. (AP)

Thompson added 26 points and 11 rebounds.

The Lakers led by 15 early, but were down six before Smart was fouled on a 3-point attempt with 25 seconds to go after a Houston turnover and made all three free throws.

Celtics 108, 76ers 100

In Boston, Jayson Tatum continued to shine in his return from injury with 25 points and Jaylen Brown also scored 25 to help the Boston Celtics beat the Philadelphia 76ers and take a 2-1 lead in the Eastern Conference first-round series.

Game 4 is Sunday in Philadelphia.

Tatum was 5 of 9 on 3-pointers in just his 19th game this season following surgery last May to repair his Achilles tendon. Brown scored eight straight points late in the fourth for a 96-92 lead that put some distance between them and a Sixers team brimming with confidence following a surprise Game 2 win in Boston.

Tatum buried a 3 for a 100-96 lead and Payton Pritchard hit a step-back 3 to make it 103-98. Tatum, still looking to regain his top form after not

playing for nearly a year, may just be there and hit the final 3-point dagger for the 106-100 lead that even sent Allen Iverson headed toward the exit.

Philadelphia played again without center Joel Embiid for Game 3 as he continues to ease his way back into practice following an appendectomy on April 9.

Spurs 120, Trail Blazers 108

In Portland, Stephon Castle had 33 points and San Antonio overcame the absence of Victor Wembanyama to beat Portland for a 2-1 series lead.

Dylan Harper added 27 points and 10 rebounds for the Spurs, who trailed by 15 points in the third quarter. Game 4 of the first-round series Sunday at the Moda Center.

Before the game Spurs coach Mitch Johnson announced that Wembanyama would not play while he continues to recover from a concussion he sustained in Game 2 on Tuesday night.

Jrue Holiday had 29 points for the Trail Blazers, who were making their first home playoff appearance since 2021, but couldn't ultimately take advantage Wembanyama's absence.

Ranieri out as Roma adviser after spat with Gasperini

Cremonese falls into drop zone after drubbing at Napoli

NAPLES, Italy, April 25, (AP): Napoli beat Cremonese 4-0 and sent it into the Serie A relegation zone.

Scott McTominay got the opener after three minutes with Kevin De Bruyne providing the assist, his first in Serie A since signing from Manchester City last summer.

De Bruyne got the third goal on the stroke of halftime with a close-range shot in a packed penalty box. Two minutes earlier, Danish forward Rasmus Højlund's shot was deflected past his own goalkeeper by Filippo Terracciano to make it 2-0 for the home side.

Alisson Santos added the fourth early in the second half with a fine solo effort as Napoli overran its struggling opponent.

McTominay should have made it 5-0 seven minutes from time but Emil Audero got down brilliantly to save his penalty.

Cremonese dropped into third-to-last place.

Meanwhile, Claudio Ranieri is out as a special adviser at Roma following a falling out with coach



Cremonese's Martin Payero, left, Napoli's Alessandro Buongiorno battle for the ball during the Serie A soccer match between Napoli and Cremonese in Naples, Italy. (AP)

Gian Piero Gasperini.

"AS Roma confirms the relationship with Claudio Ranieri has ended," the club said in a statement. "The club would like to thank Claudio for his significant contributions to Roma. He led the team through a very challenging time and we will always be grate-

ful for his efforts."

The 74-year-old Ranieri stepped down as Roma coach at the end of last season - when the team missed out on qualifying for the Champions League by one point despite a strong finish. He then became a special adviser for the team's American owners and

was involved in picking Gasperini as his successor.

But Ranieri recently turned critical of Gasperini's complaints over Roma's dealing in the transfer market and went public with his disapproval.

The team has sided with Gasperini.

"As we look to the future, our direction is clear. The club is strong, with solid leadership and a defined vision," Roma said. "AS Roma will always come first. We have full confidence in the path ahead under Gian Piero Gasperini, with the shared objective of growing, improving and delivering results worthy of our history."

"I was surprised and disappointed because I never felt like it was such a tough situation" Gasperini said of Ranieri's exit.

Ranieri was brought out of retirement to coach his hometown team in November 2024 when Roma was struggling in 12th place. He guided the team to a fifth-place finish as the Giallorossi lost just once during the second half of the season.

Fans to be allowed to attend Pakistan Super League final

ISLAMABAD, April 25, (AP): Spectators will be allowed to attend the Pakistan Super League final after Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif approved a request from franchise owners, a top official of the Pakistan Cricket Board said on Saturday.

PCB chairman Mohsin Naqvi, who is also interior minister in the government, wrote on social media that Sharif has "graciously approved" the presence of fans at the May 3 final in Lahore.

Pakistan's biggest sports spectacle of the year started behind closed doors late last month with fans asked to stay home because of soaring fuel prices related to the Iran war.

Pakistan's government had urged people to restrict travel and to work from home because of rising fuel prices and Naqvi had said it wouldn't be right to have 30,000 fans attending crick-

et matches every day while the government is asking the public to stay home.

The PCB also reduced the number of PSL venues from six to two as part of austerity measures, but barred spectators from PSL games at Lahore and Karachi.

Naqvi said while Sharif was inclined to permit fans, the prime minister emphasized that austerity measures are currently in place across Pakistan, with efforts underway to minimize fuel consumption.

Peshawar Zalmi, led by Babar Azam, Multan Sultans and three-time champions Islamabad United have already qualified for next week's playoffs ahead of the final.

Defending champions Lahore Qalandars, first-timers Hyderabad Kingmen and Karachi Kings are still in the running to secure the fourth playoff spot.

Prestianni handed six-game ban

Estevao's World Cup hopes in doubt after injury rules him out for rest of the season

MANCHESTER, England, April 25, (AP): Brazil forward Estevao's World Cup hopes are in doubt after it was confirmed Friday he would miss the rest of the season with a hamstring injury.

It is not clear if the Chelsea player will recover in time for the tournament that runs through June and July.

Chelsea interim coach Calum McFarlane did not give a timeframe for Estevao's recovery from the injury sustained in the first half of last week's game against Manchester United.

"Estevao unfortunately won't play for us this season because he is going to be out for a little bit of time. That's really unfortunate, especially for someone so young and so talented," McFarlane said. "I am sure he is very hopeful he can make the World Cup, but I don't know on that."

The 19-year-old Estevao was taken off after 16 minutes of the 1-0 loss at Stamford Bridge and missed Tuesday's 3-0 defeat at Brighton.

Former coach Liam Rosenior revealed last week that the teenager was in tears after being taken off. Hamstring injuries can take several weeks to recover from, or months in the most severe cases.

Brazil's first game at the World Cup is against Morocco at New York/New Jersey Stadium on June 13.

Estevao joined Chelsea from Palmeiras last year and has scored eight goals this season. He

was expected to be part of Carlo Ancelotti's squad for the World Cup in the United States, Canada and Mexico after scoring five times in his last six international appearances.

His injury is the latest blow to Brazil, which will be without Real Madrid winger Rodrygo because of a torn ACL and meniscus in his right knee. Chelsea plays Leeds in the semifinals of the FA Cup on Sunday. Injured duo Cole Palmer and Joao Pedro could both be in contention to play.

UEFA handed Benfica midfielder Gianluca Prestianni a six-game ban for verbally abusing Real Madrid forward Vinicius



In this file photo, Benfica's Gianluca Prestianni fights for the ball against Real Madrid's Vinicius Junior during a Champions League playoff soccer match between SL Benfica and Real Madrid in Lisbon, Portugal. (AP)

Júnior in a Champions League game earlier this season.

A UEFA statement said Prestianni's comments were "discriminatory conduct."

UEFA said three of those six games were on probation, and he has already served one game of a provisional punishment already. That means Prestianni will initially only need to serve out two more games of the suspension, which UEFA said could include appearances with Argentina at the World Cup if he were selected for the June tournament.

Argentina's first two games are against Algeria on June 17 in Kansas City and Austria five days later in Arlington.

The 20-year-old winger made his first and only appearance for Argentina in a friendly in November.

If he is not selected by Argentina for the World Cup in North America, he will serve his ban in UEFA club competitions.

The incident happened during a game in Lisbon in February.

The game was halted for nearly 10 minutes after the Brazil forward scored and celebrated by the Benfica corner flag, upsetting local fans and players. After being confronted by Prestianni, Vinicius accused the Argentine player of calling him a "monkey."

Prestianni reportedly denied using the term "mono," Spanish for "monkey," but admitted to using a homophobic slur directed at Vinicius.

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In this file photo, Kuwait head coach Helio Sousa, eyes locked on the action as he studies every detail from the sidelines.

Kuwait sets Bangkok camp with friendlies against Thailand, Oman

KUWAIT CITY, April 25: Kuwait's national team will hold a foreign training camp during the upcoming FIFA international break in June, with Bangkok chosen as the base for preparations.

The Kuwait Football Association has arranged two friendly matches as part of the camp. Kuwait will face

Thailand on June 5, before taking on Oman on June 9.

The technical staff, led by Portuguese coach Helio Sousa, along with the team management, is awaiting the resumption of domestic sporting activity – halted since early March – to finalize the full preparation schedule ahead of the two friendlies.

Best of the Rest

Türkiye to return to Formula 1: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced that Türkiye will officially rejoin the Formula 1 (F1) World Championship starting from 2027, following a new long-term agreement.

Speaking at a promotion program at the Dolmabahçe Working Office in Istanbul, Erdogan stated that the Istanbul Park circuit will host the racing series for five consecutive seasons through 2031.

"The return of Formula 1 to Istanbul Park will provide significant value to the championship," Erdogan said, adding that the event would offer "exciting and high-quality racing" for global fans. (Xinhua)

Former Nigeria forward Eneramo dies: Former Nigeria forward Michael Eneramo died after collapsing on the field during a friendly game.

The 40-year-old Eneramo "appeared to have suffered cardiac arrest five minutes into the second half of the said friendly match," the Nigerian Football Federation said, citing early reports.

Eneramo played the whole first half of the game in Ungwan Yelwa, Kaduna, on Friday morning.

"This is devastating. I am short of words at this moment," NFF general secretary Mohammed Sanusi said.

Eneramo made 10 appearances for Nigeria after turning down the opportunity to play for Tunisia, where he enjoyed a prolific club career and considered accepting citizenship.

He was nicknamed "The Tank" by fans of Espérance Sportive de Tunis, which he helped to "a number of silverwares," the NFF said. He also played in Turkey for Sivasspor, Beşiktaş and Başakşehir among others. (AP)

Sports

Judokas Al-Dosari, Al-Marzouqi bow out

Kuwaiti teqball duo begin mixed doubles challenge



Left: A young Kuwaiti sailor focuses intently while handling the ropes of a dinghy during the Asian Beach Games in Sanya. Right: Yousef Al-Dosari (bottom) of Kuwait competes with Lim Noah Tian Run of Singapore during the Jiu Jitsu men's 69kg round of 32 match at the 6th Asian Beach Games in Sanya, south China's Hainan Province. (Xinhua)



SANYA, April 25: Kuwaiti athletes continued their participation in the Asian Beach Games, with the teqball mixed doubles duo Salman Al-Ibrahim and Hessa Al-Failakawi kicking off their group-stage campaign.

The Kuwaiti pair is aiming to showcase the rapid development of teqball in the country. They begin with a challenging match against Thailand at 1:00 pm, before facing North Korea at 2:00 pm in a crucial encounter that could determine qualification to the knockout rounds.

Kuwait Teqball Committee secretary Ali Behzad highlighted that teqball is a modern sport derived from football, helping players improve ball control, precision, and technical ability, adding that the committee remains open to all who wish to take up the sport.

In aquathlon, Kuwait concluded its participation in a highly competitive field featuring 40 competitors from across Asia. Abdulaziz Al-Huwaidi finished 26th, followed closely by Mohammed Bukhalaf in 27th place after determined performances.

In judo, Yousef Al-Dosari exited the 69kg category after a strong effort in a highly competitive bracket, while Fahad Al-Marzouqi was eliminated in the 77kg division.

Sailing events continued for the fourth consecutive day, featuring intense competition in the Optimist and ILCA4 classes. Meanwhile, the women's teqball duo Hessa Al-Failakawi and Shahd Al-Mansour ended their run after exiting the group stage.

Tottenham wins at last but stays in drop zone



West Ham United's Kyle Walker-Peters, left, and Everton's Iliman Ndiaye battle for the ball during the English Premier League soccer match between West Ham United and Everton in London. (AP)

West Ham grabs late victory

MANCHESTER, England, April 25, (AP): A first Premier League win in 2026 wasn't enough to lift Tottenham out of the relegation zone.

Spurs beat relegated Wolves 1-0 to hand Roberto De Zerbi his first victory as coach. But it remained in the drop zone, two points behind West Ham, which clinched a 2-1 win against Everton through Callum Wilson's stoppage time goal at London Stadium.

Liverpool moved up to fourth on goal difference by beating Crystal Palace 3-1. The defending champion leapfrogged Aston Villa which lost to Fulham 1-0.

Aston Villa missed a chance to move into the top three of the Premier League after a 1-0 loss at Fulham.

Fourth-placed Villa could have leapfrogged Manchester United in third with a point at Craven Cottage. But Ryan Sessegnon's 43rd-minute goal sealed the win for Fulham.

Nottingham Forest took a huge step toward ensuring its Premier League survival in a stunning 5-0 win at Sunderland.

Spurs occupy the third relegation

spot, two points behind West Ham.

With Burnley and Wolves already relegated, Spurs or West Ham are now the most likely candidates to join them.

Sunderland had the best defensive



Liverpool's Andrew Robertson celebrates after scoring his side's 2nd goal during the English Premier League soccer match between Liverpool and Crystal Palace in Liverpool, England. (AP)

record in the league at home after Manchester City and Arsenal, but that defensive solidity disappeared during a woeful first half.

Forest looked quicker and hungrier from the off and took the lead after 16 minutes when Igor Jesus' header went in off Trai Hume following a neatly worked short corner.

Disaster then struck for Sunderland as goalkeeper Robin Roefs gifted Forest a second. His sloppy pass went straight to Morgan Gibbs-White, who fed Chris Wood to give the big New Zealander, recently back from a long injury layoff, his first league goal since the opening day of the season.

Gibbs-White made it 3-0 three minutes later when he drilled home a low shot after Jesus' superbly cushioned header gave him time and space.

Jesus got Forest's fourth three minutes later as Sunderland crumbled.

Sunderland's Dan Ballard had a goal chalked off after a video review in the second half and if there was any doubt the home side was all out of luck it came in stoppage time when Elliot Anderson made it five and confirmed Sunderland's heaviest ever defeat at the Stadium of Light.

Election timeline in doubt

Kuwait FA President Sheikh Al-Yousef heads to FIFA Congress in Vancouver

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

KUWAIT CITY, April 25: Head of the Kuwait Football Association, Sheikh Ahmed Al-Yousef, departs today for Vancouver, Canada, after receiving an official invitation from FIFA President Gianni Infantino to attend the FIFA Congress 2026.

The visit programme begins on April 28 with participation in the Asian Football Confederation Congress, followed by the FIFA Congress on April 30, which will gather representatives from football associations around the world.

Sheikh Al-Yousef will be accompanied by board members Ayman Al-Hussaini and Dr. Ahmed Ajab, as part of Kuwait's official delegation attending the global football event.

Meanwhile, the Kuwait Football Association is awaiting FIFA's approval regarding the formation of exceptional election and appeals committees, following the expiry of the current electoral committee's mandate, which has disrupted its ability to continue its duties.

The association had opened nominations for board elections from April 5 to 14, with voting scheduled for May 20. However, the end of the electoral committee's term has raised concerns over possible delays, prompting clubs to step in to ensure the process continues smoothly.

Nine clubs – Kuwait Club, Kazma, Al-Nasr, Al-Sulaybikhat, Al-Sahel, Burgan, Al-Yarmouk, Al-Shabab, and Al-Jahra – sent an official letter to the federation stating that the committee had lost its legal standing, urging activation of Article (49) of the statutes, which allows the



Head of the Kuwait Football Association, Sheikh Ahmed Al-Yousef

general assembly majority to request FIFA intervention to form a new supervisory committee.

In contrast, six other clubs – Qadsia, Al-Salmiya, Al-Arabi, Khaitan, Al-Tadamon, and Al-Fahaheel – also submitted a request to FIFA calling for the establishment of an exceptional electoral committee.

The nomination process has already concluded, with Sheikh Ahmed Al-Yousef elected unopposed as president, while Dalaal Al-Mudhaf secured the women's seat by acclamation. The vice-presidency will see a four-way contest, while multiple candidates will compete for the remaining board seats.

Thailand takes two sprint titles

Song wins shot put at Asian Beach Games

SANYA, April 25, (Xinhua): Paris 2024 bronze medalist Song Jiayuan won the women's shot put with a throw of 19.15 meters on Saturday, claiming China's first-ever beach athletics gold at the ongoing Asian Beach Games.

Song opened strongly with 18.57m on her first attempt and never relinquished the lead. The clear favorite underlined her dominance in Asia by producing a season's best of 19.15m with her sixth and final throw. Teammate Zhang Linru took silver with 18.27m, while Wu Ci-En of Chinese Taipei earned bronze with a season's best of 16.40m.

"When I entered the field, I tried to stay relaxed, and that helped me take control with my first attempt," Song told Xinhua. "Before the last attempt, I calmed my nerves and tried to enjoy the competition. I was able to execute my technique normally and achieved my best result of the day." "This is my best finish at an international event since undergoing surgery last year, and the small goal I set before the competition has been achieved. I hope to perform even better in the future," added the 28-year-old.

In the men's 60m final, Thailand's Puripol Boonson crossed the line first in 6.62 seconds for a new personal best. China's Huang Youchao took silver in 6.67, with compatriot Liu Yang claiming bronze in 6.74. Huang set a sea-



Gold medalists team China (top), silver medalists team China's Hong Kong (bottom, left) and bronze medalists team Japan pose during the awarding ceremony for the 4x mixed relay of aquathlon event at the 6th Asian Beach Games in Sanya, south China's Hainan Province. (Xinhua)

son's best, while Liu lowered his personal best in the final.

"I am very satisfied with the result because it far exceeded my expectations. It has given me greater confidence," said Huang, a Chinese national indoor champion. "I still need to improve my finishing speed in the last part of the race, and I will work on that." In the women's 60m, Boonson's teammate Jirapat Khanonta clocked 7.46 seconds to take gold. China's Xu Jialu finished second in 7.49,

with Jessica Rose Laurance of the Philippines third in 7.52.

In the men's long jump, Pham Van Nghia of Vietnam took gold with a second-round leap of 7.44m. Tao Yege earned silver for host China with 7.41m in his fifth attempt.

The remaining four beach athletics events, including the women's 4x60m relay, men's 4x60m relay, women's high jump and men's shot put, will be contested on Sunday.