



Crown Prince receives senior UN official, delegation Page 2



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More airlines take off from T4

KTTAA Chief urges stronger support for travel sector, praises Kuwait Airways

By John C. Fernandes Arab Times Online Media Manager and Agencies

KUWAIT CITY, June 17: EgyptAir and Flydubai have resumed flight operations from Kuwait International Airport's Passenger Terminal 4 (T4), marking the beginning of a phased plan to restore air traffic operations after a temporary reduction in services. Also, Air Arabia, Middle East Airlines and Emirates are commencing flights from 18th June.

Kuwait authorities had announced the gradual resumption of limited flights through T4 for Gulf, Arab and international airlines as part of an operational plan designed to expand travel services while ensuring safety and security measures remain in place. Under the first phase of the plan,

flights will operate daily from 4:00 am to 10:00 pm, with participating airlines initially allowed to operate one flight each as operations are gradually increased.

The plan includes the activation of 50 check-in counters, full operation of immigration and security screening facilities, and coordination with ground handling companies to ensure smooth passenger movement. Air cargo and private aviation operations will continue without interruption.

Passengers have been advised to arrive at the airport at least three hours before departure and to confirm flight schedules directly with their airlines before traveling. Authorities also requested passengers avoid bringing unnecessary companions to the terminal to help reduce congestion.

The move is aimed at meeting passenger demand, expanding travel options for citizens and residents, and supporting the gradual normalization of aviation services while maintaining strict safety standards.

Meanwhile, Kuwait Travel and Tourism Agencies Association (KTTAA)

Mohammad Al-Mutairi emphasized on Wednesday the need to support the travel sector and boost collaboration among authorities to protect agency interests and enhance passenger services.

He told KUNA that KTTA coordinated with authorities to address sector challenges and ensure service continuity.

He noted that regional aviation has faced major recent challenges, from the COVID-19 pandemic to geopolitical events disrupting regional air traffic. He credited relevant stakeholder cooperation for helping the sector maintain operations and adapt to these changing circumstances.

Al-Mutairi praised Kuwait Airways as a strategic partner for coordinating with agencies and swiftly addressing emerging operational developments.

He stressed that crisis management requires flexibility, calling Kuwait Airways highly responsible and cooperative during industry challenges.

Al-Mutairi also commended its role in helping sustain travel services during exceptional circumstances and supporting the stability of the sector.

Opinion

Ahmed Al-Jarallah

Editor-in-Chief, the Arab Times

Rome led by Nero will never be repeated ... the agreement is a victory only for the Iranian people

STRIPPED of any embellishment, the truth is that the memorandum of understanding between the United States and Iran is a victory only for the Iranian people.

For 47 years, Iranians have endured oppression, murder, and torture. Whenever the opportunity arose, they revolted against the regime that ruled them by controlling their livelihoods. The Iranian regime followed in the footsteps of Nero who enjoyed watching Rome burn.

Over the past five decades, Iran has been on a knife's edge due to the contradictions between a large segment of the population and a sadistic regime that reveled in torturing its people, launching attacks and committing terrorist acts against its neighbors.

This situation will not last long. The day after the final agreement is signed between the United States and Iran, the Iranian people will begin holding the regime accountable. The regime will resort to its usual stalling tactics to avoid popular retribution and postpone the gallows in the squares of Tehran, Mashhad, Qom, and all Iranian cities.

However, procrastination will not save the regime from its inevitable fate. Destiny is inescapable. Neither the Revolutionary Guard nor the Basij will be able to continue suppressing hungry Iranian people who will no longer be deceived by nonsensical slogans.

Iran today stands on the threshold of a new era marked by significant popular discontent. Deep wounds have been

inflicted on the people by international and regional isolation, which has crippled the economy. The recent war has shattered what little trust neighboring countries still had in Iran. The Gulf states have never treated Iran as a normal state capable of coexistence. Expansionist ambitions have been deeply ingrained in the minds of Iran's leaders for centuries.

Continued on Page 5

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Grade 12 students check the exam schedule board on the first day of finals.

HORIZON TALK

Ahmed Al-Jarallah

The cunning Al-Mughira ibn Shu'ba and the Bahraini people's plot against him

He was one of the most cunning Arabs, known for his quick wit and sharp mind.

He was harsh on the people of Bahrain, so they complained to the Caliph, who dismissed him.

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The Belgian king, at the Berlin Conference, had his eye on the Congo.

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He forbade men from growing beards and women from wearing the hijab.

Atatürk suffered from cirrhosis of the liver and was tormented on his bed.

The greatest tyrant in the history of the Ottoman Empire was Murad IV.

He ruled for 17 years, inheriting an empty treasury and leaving it full.

Peace prospects fuel optimism across Kuwait property sector

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

KUWAIT CITY, June 17: With the easing of military tensions in the region and the beginning of a new phase of relative calm, the future of the Kuwaiti real estate market is tied to the stability of the geopolitical situation and the political and economic agreements expected to emerge in the coming months.

Although real estate experts agree that an end to the war between the United States and Iran would help boost confidence and support liquidity inflows into the market, they emphasized that caution and a wait-and-see approach will continue to dominate the current period until the situation becomes clearer.

Qais Ali Al-Faraj, Chairman of the

Board of Directors of the Kuwaiti Real Estate Appraisers Association, affirmed that the current agreement does not represent a permanent end to the war, but rather a 60-day truce during which negotiations are expected to take place to reach a lasting settlement.

He explained that market direction will therefore depend on the outcome of this phase. The timing of the agreement coinciding with the summer season may provide individuals with a sense of psychological reassurance, but it will not have a direct impact on real estate activity. The current state of anticipation and relative stagnation is expected to continue until September, which will be a pivotal point in determining the market's direction.

Continued on Page 5



Acting Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah chairs the weekly Cabinet meeting on Wednesday.

Cabinet reviews regional shifts, supports US-Iran understanding

KUWAIT CITY, June 17, (KUNA): Kuwait's Cabinet on Wednesday welcomed a framework agreement between the US and Iran to end their war, hoping that the deal would usher in lasting peace and stability around the region and beyond.

The Cabinet, amid its weekly session presided over by Acting Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah, hoped the framework agreement would immediately and effectively cease military operations across all fronts and ensure free and safe navigation in the Strait of Hormuz, acknowledging the efforts of mediator Pa-

kistan, in addition to Qatar, in bringing the warring parties' views closer together.

Discussing the agreement, set to be signed on Friday in a ceremony slated for Geneva, Switzerland, the Cabinet hoped that the deal would forge out "sustainable solutions" to all remaining sticking points between Tehran and Washington, highlighting "mutual respect and non-interference in the internal affairs of states," in addition to shunning the use of force as key conditions for security and stability in the region and the world as a whole.

Continued on Page 5

Full steam ahead for Gulf railway

By Mohammad Ghanem Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, June 17: Minister of Public Works Dr. Noura Al-Mashaan represented the State of Kuwait at the 29th extraordinary meeting

of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Ministers of Transport and Communications Committee, held virtually under the chairmanship of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Continued on Page 4

Kuwait's ancient geography reveals a greener past: study

KUWAIT CITY, June 17, (KUNA): Chairman of the Kuwait Geosciences Society Dr. Mubarak Al-Hajeri said on Wednesday that Kuwait's geographical environment underwent profound climatic transformations throughout its recent geological history, changing from a

humid landscape featuring river channels into an arid desert.

On the occasion of the World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought, Dr. Al-Hajeri told KUNA that thousands of

Continued on Page 5



Kuwait Geosciences Society Chairman Dr. Mubarak Al-Hajeri at Subiya, where evidence of ancient waterways and coastal changes offers insight into the country's environmental evolution.

G7 backs Trump-Iran deal to reopen Hormuz

EVIAN-LES-BAINS, France, June 17, (AP): Leaders at the Group of Seven summit on Wednesday threw their support behind U.S. President Donald Trump's tentative agreement with Iran to open the Strait of Hormuz and further extend a shaky ceasefire - even though neither the White House nor Iran has publicly released the text of the deal.

Closing the three-day summit, French President Emmanuel Macron called it a "very good deal," adding that U.S. allies in the G7 support it "because it's an agreement that puts a stop to a situation of great instability that had terrible consequences for our economies."

According to leaked copies of an interim agreement, Iran will immediately take steps to reopen the Strait of Hormuz, at the mouth of the Arabian Gulf, through which a fifth of the world's oil and natural gas supplies once passed, once the deal

Continued on Page 5

KFH keeps driving creativity and innovation in Kuwait



Gauvin congratulates France on impressive World Cup start



Prayer Timings

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



HH Amir Sheikh Meshal



Iceland Pres. Halla Tomasdottir

Amir congratulates Iceland on 'Founding Day' anniversary

KUWAIT CITY, June 17, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent, on Wednesday, a congratulatory cable to the President of Iceland Halla Tomasdottir, on her country's Founding Day anniversary.

His Highness the Amir wished Tomasdottir good health and further prosperity to Iceland and its people.

Crown Prince congratulates

His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, on Wednesday, a congratulatory

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Crown Prince Diwan photo

His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah receives the visiting UN Secretary-General's senior representative for the implementation of Security Council Resolution 2792 of 2025, Mari Yamashita, and her accompanying delegation.

Crown Prince receives senior UN official, delegation

KUWAIT CITY, June 17, (KUNA): His Highness Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah received on Wednesday the visiting UN Secretary-General's senior representative for the implementation of Security Council Resolution 2792 of 2025, Mari

Yamashita, and her accompanying delegation.

The meeting was attended by Chief of the Crown Prince's Diwan Sheikh Thamer Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Foreign Minister Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, along with senior officials.

KU-EPA in talks to upgrade scientific and research ties

KUWAIT CITY, June 17: The College of Science at Kuwait University met with a delegation from the Environment Public Authority (EPA), headed by acting Director General Nouf Behbehani, to discuss ways to strengthen scientific and research cooperation between the two entities.

The objectives of the meeting include benefiting from the academic and research capabilities to support national efforts in the environmental field and realize the quality and excellence vision in the strategic plan of Kuwait University.

Acting Dean of the college Dr. Haider Sayed Jawad Behbehani warmly welcomed the delegation, along with acting Assistant Dean for Planning, Consulting and Training Dr. Fawzia Abdullah, and several other college officials and faculty members.

The two sides talked about areas of cooperation in training, professional development, scientific and research consultations, organizing specialized courses

and workshops, analyzing environmental samples, conducting radiation monitoring, supporting researchers, and developing scientific services to meet the needs of EPA.

Behbehani affirmed that the college, with its academic expertise, advanced laboratories and research centers, is capable of presenting scientific solutions, technical consultations, supporting scientific research, and achieving sustainable development goals.

Abdullah affirmed the importance of expanding cooperation between the college and EPA. She stressed the need to benefit from available resources in training, consulting and knowledge transfer to enhance national capacity building and improve the quality of scientific services provided to the community.

The meeting concluded with both sides emphasizing the importance of continuous coordination between them to utilize national expertise and research capabilities in addressing environmental issues of mutual concern.

Mol – Parents beware, look out for cheat kids

Kuwait Grade 12 students go for exams



Grade 12 students appear for exams throughout Kuwait.

Photos by Samer Shaqir

KUWAIT CITY, June 17, (Agencies): The Ministry of Interior called on parents to monitor their children and warn them against joining groups that promote leaked exams or illegal information, in order to avoid legal repercussions under the Child Rights Law, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

In an awareness post published on social media platforms ahead of high school ex-

aminations, the ministry emphasized that protecting children begins with vigilant supervision.

Meanwhile, final examinations for Grade 12 students in both the science and arts for the 2025/2026 academic year commenced on Wednesday amid comprehensive organizational, administrative and technical preparations by the Ministry of Education.

Examination committees reported orderly attendance by students from the early morning hours, with school administrations implementing the necessary measures to provide a

suitable environment for conducting the tests in accordance with approved regulations and procedures.

In a previous statement, the Ministry of Education affirmed its commitment to mobilizing all human and technical resources to ensure the success of the examination period.

The ministry said it is closely monitoring examination committees' progress, ensuring the readiness of examination halls and providing appropriate facilities and support to help students complete their exams smoothly and efficiently.

Other Voices

Ayatollahs and Shah's laws

By Ahmad alsarraf

SINCE before the 1979 Iranian Revolution, various narratives have circulated regarding the origins and background of its leader, Ayatollah Khomeini, particularly concerning how he attained his highest religious title.

The widespread use of his title dates back to 1963-1964, a few years after the death of Grand Ayatollah Borujerdi.

Another, more common narrative claims that Ayatollah Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr issued a fatwa elevating Khomeini to the rank of "Grand Ayatollah." However, other historical and political sources consider both accounts inaccurate. They argue that the title is not conferred by decree or fatwa from another Grand Ayatollah, nor by any official or religious authority. Rather, a Twelver Shiite cleric gradually acquires the title through recognition by his followers and by those who pay him their share of khums (the religious tax), thereby increasing both his popular support and financial standing. There is no universally accepted text or procedure that defines how one attains the title of "Ayatollah."

It is widely believed that the title was hastily bestowed upon Khomeini, without specifying the granting authority, in order to protect him from an execution order issued by Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi following Khomeini's public opposition to the Shah's rule in 1963.

In fact, the Shah did not personally issue death sentences; such authority rested with the courts or special committees, often at the Shah's behest.

There is no verified evidence that any court issued a death sentence against Khomeini. Instead, the Shah chose to exile him. Likewise, there is no agreed-upon text that a person holding the title of "Ayatollah" is

exempt from execution.

Khomeini resided in Najaf from 1965 to 1978, having arrived there from Turkiye. He maintained a good relationship with Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, who welcomed him upon his arrival. Al-Sadr frequently visited Khomeini, but Khomeini did not return those visits, perhaps because of his status as a political refugee. Instead, he often sent his son, Sayyid Ahmad, in response to al-Sadr's visits.

Throughout history, Iranian rulers have dealt with religious figures considered dissenting or politically troublesome through imprisonment, house arrest, or exile.

This was what Reza Shah, the first ruler to adopt the title "Pahlavi," having previously been known as Reza Khan, did. He ruled Iran from 1925 to 1941, and his efforts to secularize Iran, modeled in part on the reforms of Turkish President Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, encountered strong resistance from the country's powerful, wealthy, and influential clerical establishment. By contrast, Atatürk faced less organized resistance as he significantly reduced the political influence of the clergy and established a fully secular state.

After his son, Mohammad Reza Shah, ascended the throne in 1941 following his father's forced abdication and exile to South Africa by the British, he continued the modernization and secularization policies of his predecessor, albeit at a less violent pace. While relatively more tolerant towards the clergy, Mohammad Reza Shah used SAVAK, the state's intelligence and security organization, to suppress their opposition.

Ayatollah Khomeini was arrested in 1963 and exiled the following year. In 1977, the reformist religious intellectual Ali Shariati was assassinated in London. Ayatollah Kashani, Ayatollah Behbehani, and Ayatollah Mohammad Taqi Bafaqi were arrested. Bafaqi died in custody under mysterious circumstances, and Kashani was arrested several times and exiled to a remote area in Iran.



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Minister of Health Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadhi with the Azerbaijan ambassador to Kuwait.



KUNA photos Minister of Health Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadhi, Azerbaijan ambassador to Kuwait and other officials.

Call to exchange expertise in multiple fields

Kuwait, Azerbaijan to up ties in health arena

KUWAIT CITY, June 17, (KUNA): Minister of Health Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadhi discussed on Wednesday with Ambassador of Azerbaijan to Kuwait Emil Karimov prospects for enhancing health cooperation and expanding areas of medical expertise exchange.

This comes as part of the ministry's efforts to strengthen international partnerships and support the sustainable development of the health sector.

Al-Awadhi said in a press statement that the deep-rooted bilateral relations between Kuwait and Azerbaijan provide a solid foundation for further cooperation that serves mutual interests and promotes the exchange of knowledge and expertise in various health fields.

For his part, Assistant Undersecretary for External Health Services Dr. Hesham Kalandar said the Ministry of Health continues to work on establishing effective strategic partnerships with leading international health institutions in support of the ministry's approach toward innovation, knowledge transfer and the adoption of advanced healthcare solutions and best practices.

Meanwhile, Ambassador Karimov expressed his country's appreciation for the level of cooperation with Kuwait, affirming Azerbaijan's readiness to expand health cooperation and exchange specialized expertise and experiences in a manner that enhances mutual interests and opens new horizons for partnership between the two sides.

He also commended the rapid progress and qualitative achievements witnessed by Kuwait's healthcare system, praising the Ministry of Health's efforts to develop healthcare services and strengthen its regional and international presence through constructive cooperation with various international partners.

The meeting reviewed opportunities for joint cooperation in a number of priority health areas, particularly medical training and qualification, the exchange of expertise and specialized competencies, and benefiting from successful experiences and modern health technologies to enhance the efficiency of the healthcare system and improve the quality of services provided in line with international standards and best practices.

Airport customs seizes 3 shipments of narcotics

KUWAIT CITY, June 17, (KUNA): Kuwait's General Administration of Customs announced on Wednesday that air cargo customs officers foiled an attempt to smuggle narcotics into the country from a European state after inspecting three inbound shipments falsely declared as hair oils and spare parts.

During the customs clearance process, inspectors grew suspicious of the contents of the consignments and subjected them to further examinations, according to a statement by customs authorities.

The examinations revealed they contained around five kilograms of a liquid suspected to be the narcotic substance known as "chemi-

cal," concealed in a way intended to evade detection and facilitate its entry into the country.

The seizure was the result of the vigilance, expertise and continued efforts of customs inspectors in detecting evolving smuggling methods, the statement added.

The necessary legal procedures have been initiated, and an official report has been prepared to the relevant authorities for further action.

The authority reaffirmed its commitment to tightening oversight at all customs ports and combating attempts to smuggle prohibited substances to protect public safety and security.

HORIZON TALK

Ahmed Al-Jarallah



The cunning Al-Mughira ibn Shu'ba and the Bahraini people's plot against him

AL-MUGHIRA ibn Shu'ba was one of the most cunning Arabs, known for his quick wit and sharp mind.

A governor was appointed in the Bahraini province during the rule of Caliph Umar ibn Al-Khattab. Because of his harsh treatment of the local population, they appealed to the Caliph, who subsequently removed him from his post. Still, the people remained anxious that he might be reappointed, given the Caliph's high regard and affection for him.

To ensure he would not come back, they formulated a strategy. They amassed one hundred thousand dinars and selected their sheikh to travel to the caliph with their plan. When the sheikh was granted an audience with Umar ibn Al-Khattab, Al-Mughira was present.

The representative announced, "O Commander of the Faithful, I bring greetings from the people of Bahrain. I also carry one hundred thousand dinars that Al-Mughira took from the Muslim treasury and gave to me for safekeeping. I am here to return it to you and present my testimony."

Turning to Al-Mughira, Umar asked, "What is your response to this?"

Displaying remarkable wit, Al-Mughira countered, "He is not telling the truth. The actual amount I took was two hundred thousand dinars, not one hundred thousand dinars. He only presented half and kept the remaining portion for himself."

A surprised Umar asked, "What would drive you to commit such an act?"

Al-Mughira answered, "The needs of my large family and my lack of wealth drove me to it. I stand before you now and admit to taking two hundred thousand dinars."

The sheikh, visibly shaken and trembling, exclaimed, "I swear, he never gave me anything! This sum was gathered by the Bahraini people as a plot to prevent Al-Mughira from returning to us."

With a smile, Umar asked Al-Mughira, "How did you manage that?"

Al-Mughira replied, "He lied in his accusation of theft. My intent was to disgrace him. Instead, Allah brought him to disgrace."

• He was one of the most cunning Arabs, known for his quick wit and sharp mind.

• He was harsh on the people of Bahrain, so they complained to the Caliph, who dismissed him.

• The Sheikh: I have one hundred thousand dinars that Al-Mughira stole, and I am returning it.

• Al-Mughira: He stole two hundred thousand dinars and brought back half the amount.

• This man accuses me of theft, and he is lying. May Allah disgrace him!

• The Belgian king, at the Berlin Conference, had his eye on the Congo.

• He forced the villagers to collect rubber, and those who refused were killed.

• The ruler who claimed to be the most righteous in Islam built hundreds of taverns.

• He forbade men from growing beards and women from wearing the hijab.

• Atatürk suffered from cirrhosis of the liver and was tormented on his bed.

• The greatest tyrant in the history of the Ottoman Empire was Murad IV.

• He ruled for 17 years, inheriting an empty treasury and leaving it full.

During this era, Belgium lacked the colonial holdings possessed by other major European powers, a fact that the king found personally affronting.

He identified an opening at the Berlin Conference, where Africa was being divided, and targeted the Congo.

He secured control of a territory vastly larger than Belgium by convincing European leaders of his intent to civilize the local people, establish hospitals and schools, and eradicate slavery through Christian outreach.

While the international community initially accepted these claims, a period of profound suffering began in Congo.

The king instituted a regime of terror to enforce rubber collection, resulting in the deaths of those who resisted.

Families were subjected to grueling labor, and children were held as hostages.

This systemic brutality lasted for years, during which none of his philanthropic pledges were realized, and around 10 million Congolese people perished.

Growing international condemnation eventually forced him to cede control of the Congo in 1908.

He passed away a year later, maintaining wealth and prestige without ever facing legal accountability or trial. Rather than being condemned, he was commemorated with statues. This monarch was Leopold II.

The Most Hateful Ruler of Islam

Do you know who was the most hateful ruler of Islam?

He demolished mosques and Quranic schools, and legalized adultery and the consumption of alcohol!

He built hundreds of taverns, forbade men from growing beard, and prohibited women from wearing the hijab.

He also deprived his people of performing Hajj and Umrah pilgrimages, and executed and tortured Muslims until the number of his victims exceeded 10,000.

He once mocked the Holy Quran, saying, "We no longer rely on figs and olives, we are now in the age of progress."

He suffered from cirrhosis of the liver and was

bedridden, only to discover later that the cure for his illness was extracted from the bark of the fig tree.

He was Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, who ended the Ottoman Empire and became the first president of the Republic of Türkiye.

The Greatest Tyrant in History

The greatest tyrant in the history of the Ottoman Empire was Murad IV, son of Ahmed I. He assumed power as a child after deposing his uncle Mustafa.

Despite his young age, he was the target of several assassination attempts, even by his mother, Kösem Sultan, who was ready to do anything to gain the upper hand in the government.

However, Murad was a strong-willed man, so he threatened her and prevented her from interfering in the affairs of the state.

He sought out and executed all those involved in the murder of his brother, Osman II, even those remotely connected to him.

He banned tobacco and alcohol, closed taverns, and prohibited soldiers from frequenting cafés.

He killed anyone whose loyalty he suspected or who opposed his opinions or decisions. He even went as far as executing some scholars who opposed him, an unprecedented act in the history of the Ottoman Empire. For this reason, historians labeled him a 'despot'.

However, his aim in all these measures was to surround himself and the state with an atmosphere of awe and terror in order to restore the Sultanate's glory and prestige, which was lost under the previous sultans.

On the international stage, he attacked Safavid territories and forced the Shah to relinquish Baghdad and several other cities.

Murad IV ruled for 17 years, inheriting an empty treasury and leaving it full. He eradicated corruption and the Janissary corps' dominance.

He was called the second founder of the Ottoman Empire, because he revived it after its fall, reformed its economy, and restored its prestige, which lasted for many years.

The Belgian King and the Congo

Under the guise of promoting freedom and

Christianity, a Belgian monarch oppressed an African nation beginning in 1885.



The Undersecretary of the Ministry of Interior, Major General Abdulwahab Al-Wuhaib, visits Husseiniyas to check security arrangements.

Tight security at Husseiniyas

Al-Wuhaib urges admin cooperation

KUWAIT CITY, June 17: The Undersecretary of the Ministry of Interior, Major General Abdulwahab Al-Wuhaib, inspected several Husseiniyas (Shia religious centers) in various areas on Tuesday to assess the level of security and organizational preparations, reports Al-Seyassah daily.



Fahad Al-Yousef, regarding strengthening the security system during the month of Muharram. Major General Al-Wuhaib inspected ar-

rangements related to organizing the movement of worshippers at the Husseiniyas and managing crowds in an organized and safe manner.

According to the statement, Major General Al-Wuhaib praised the level of readiness and security deployment demonstrated by Ministry of Interior personnel in securing the Husseiniyas.

He also commended the coordination between the various participating entities to ensure the smooth and safe conduct of the events.

Major General Al-Wuhaib urged those in charge of the Husseiniyas to cooperate with Ministry of Interior personnel and facilitate their field duties, emphasizing that the presence of security personnel is for the safety of everyone and to protect lives and property.

Gov: Work for digitalization, ease in transactions

KUWAIT CITY, June 17: Governor of Farwaniya Sheikh Athbi Nasser Al-Athbi Al-Sabah had a meeting with Director of the Citizen Service Centers Department in Farwaniya Governorate Colonel Thamer Khaled Al-Hashash at his office in the headquarters of the governorate on Wednesday.

During the meeting, Al-Hashash conducted a presentation on the operational mechanisms of the centers and the services they provide to the public. He discussed the efforts exerted toward digital transformation and procedural improvements aimed at facilitating remote transactions and streamlining service delivery.

The governor praised the role of the Citizen Service Centers Department and the improvements it has achieved in terms of the services.

He then underscored the importance of continuous development of digital services and simplification of procedures in line with the directive of the State to improve government services.

At the end of the meeting, Al-Hashash thanked the Governor for his support and interest, while affirming his commitment to continue exerting tremendous efforts to improve services and ease the completion of transactions.



Farwaniya Governorate photo Governor of Farwaniya Sheikh Athbi Nasser Al-Athbi Al-Sabah receives Director of the Citizen Service Centers Department in Farwaniya Governorate Colonel Thamer Khaled Al-Hashash in his office.

44 meters power cables stolen

KUWAIT CITY, June 17: Khaitan Police Station registered a felony case, classified as theft, after an engineer from the Ministry of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy, acting as the authorized representative of the Electrical Transmission Networks Security and Safety Department, reported a theft at the Khaitan electrical substation, reports Al-Anba daily.

According to the report, unknown individuals broke into the substation and stole four electrical cables totaling 44 meters in length from the basement of the facility in Khaitan, Block 7, opposite a bank.

The on-duty prosecutor was informed and he ordered the case to be officially registered, with all necessary legal procedures to be taken. He also instructed that the case be referred to detectives for investigation to identify those involved.

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23911175 ☎ 23911174

Random parking of trucks, buses irks area residents

Truck ban in peak traffic hours; two lanes shut on Riyadh Road

By Inaas Awadh

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, June 17: Municipal Council member and Jahra Governorate Committee Chairman Abdullah Al-Enezi said the random parking of trucks, heavy equipment, buses and other vehicles in public squares and residential, investment and commercial areas has become a problem, which necessitates radical and sustainable solutions due to its negative impact on traffic safety, urban landscape, environment and quality of life.



Al-Enezi

In a press statement, Al-Enezi confirmed that the council took oversight and legislative steps to address the issue through the proposals and questions submitted by members Khaled Al-Mutairi and Dr. Hassan Kamal.

These proposals and questions were discussed by the Reform and Development Committee, culminating in the resolution issued by the council and ratified by the minister of state for Municipal and Housing Affairs.

Al-Enezi revealed that the resolution mandates coordination among the Kuwait Municipality, Ministry of Public Works and Ministry of Finance to re-evaluate the designated sites and determine the government entity responsible for their management and operation as integrated regulatory and investment facilities.

He explained that the objectives of this move include benefiting from government land, providing sustainable financial resource for the state, and eliminating haphazard parking.

He added that addressing the issue requires the concerted efforts of relevant government agencies to reorganize truck, bus and heavy equipment assembly sites.

He emphasized that the project will reduce visual pollution, enhance traffic safety, protect infrastructure, and provide integrated logistics services and sustainable economic returns.

He pointed out that the success of the project hinges on obligating companies and institutions that own trucks and heavy equipment to use the designated sites and prohibiting parking such vehicles in residential, investment and commercial areas to instill discipline and organize the areas.

He stressed that the time has come to move from addressing the problem to investing in the solution by transforming truck assembly sites into organized facilities with economic returns, support urban environmental improvement, and improve the quality of life.

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Truck ban in peak hours: The General Traffic Department announced a ban on trucks using all roads during peak hours with the aim of facilitating traffic flow and reducing congestion, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

In an official statement, the department explained that the ban is applied as per a specific schedule. From September 1 to June 14 of the following year, the ban is enforced during the morning period from 6:30am to 9:00am and the afternoon period from 12:30pm to 3:30pm. From June 15 to August 31, it is limited to the afternoon period from 12:30pm to 3:30pm.

The department urged truck drivers to adhere to the specified timings to ensure smooth traffic flow and the safety of all road users.

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GTD shuts two lanes: The General Traffic Department announced on Wednesday the closure of the right and middle lanes on King Faisal bin Abdulaziz Road (Riyadh Road) for traffic heading towards Kuwait City, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The department explained that the closures also include the Riyadh Road exit leading to the Fourth Ring Road, the Qurtuba exit leading to Riyadh Road, and the Sheikh Zayed Road (Fifth Ring Road) exit leading to Riyadh Road towards Kuwait City from both directions, coming from Salmiya and Jahra. Traffic will be diverted to Riyadh Road towards Kuwait International Airport.

The closure began on Wednesday, June 17, 2026, and will continue until Monday, July 27, 2026.



KUNA photo
Kuwait's Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah receives United Nations Secretary-General's Senior Representative for the Implementation of Security Council Resolution 2792 (2025) Mary Yamashita.

Talks focus on Kuwaiti missing persons, property & residents

KUWAIT CITY, June 17, (KUNA): Kuwait's Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah received on Wednesday the United Nations Secretary-General's Senior Representative for the Implementation of Security Council Resolution 2792 (2025) Mary Yamashita on her official visit to Kuwait.

Yamashita is concerned with the follow-up of the file of missing Kuwaiti nationals, Kuwaiti property and third-country nationals, including the national archives.

The Foreign Ministry said in a statement that Sheikh Jarrah Al-Sabah congratulated Yamashita on assuming her

new position and expressed Kuwait's aspiration to work closely with her during the coming period.

He affirmed Kuwait's full support for her efforts in carrying out her mandate efficiently and effectively in a manner that contributes to advancing efforts aimed at achieving tangible progress in the search for missing Kuwaiti nationals and third-country nationals, determining their fate, and recovering Kuwaiti property, including the national archives.

He stressed that these issues remain a top priority for the State of Kuwait given their national and humanitarian dimensions.

Municipality detects 23 violations, 135 warnings issued

KUWAIT CITY, June 17: The Kuwait Municipality issued 135 safety warnings and recorded 23 construction violations in Jahra Governorate, following reports of debris being dumped in front of sites in Saad Al-Abdullah, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The Municipality stated that it carried out intensive field inspections to identify site waste

and ensure compliance with safety and security requirements, as well as to take legal measures against violators.

Director of the Safety Department at the Jahra Municipality Eng. Al-Humaidi Al-Mutairi said these tours aim to detect violations and take legal action.

He affirmed that inspection teams are con-

tinuing their work in various areas.

Meanwhile, the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET) welcomed the Municipal Council's approval of its request to expand the site of the Entrepreneurs and Small Projects Center in the Shuwaikh Industrial Area, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

MEWRE awaits SAB okay for 6 tenders worth KD159 mln

By Mohammad Ghanem

Al-Seyassah and Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, June 17: The Ministry of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy is waiting for the approval of the State Audit Bureau (SAB) for six tenders with a combined value of KD159.7 million.

The ministry submitted the contracts to the bureau at various dates in May and June for pre-audit, audit and review procedures, with the aim of obtaining final approval if there are no observations requiring its corrective action.

In a related development, the ministry obtained approval from CAPT to award the contracts to the bidders whose offers best met the required specifications and conditions.

These contracts are for the development and modernization of water infra-

structure to increase the water reserves of the country and ensure uninterrupted water supply, particularly during summer when consumption rises due to high temperatures.

One of the contracts is for the construction of the Hawally Water Distribution Complex and related works at a cost of KD42.268 million. Once completed, it will increase fresh water storage capacity by 66 million gallons per day, raise pumping capacity to 54.5 million gallons per day, and increase brackish water pumping capacity to 23.5 million gallons per day.

Another contract is for the supply and installation of the Doha Seawater Reverse Osmosis Desalination Plant at a total cost of KD114.28 million. The plant is expected to add 60 million imperial gallons of fresh water per day to meet the rising water demand of new urban and residential areas.

Online ID renewal for GCC citizens

250 fraud, scam cases in May '26

KUWAIT CITY, June 17: The Communications and Information Technology Regulatory Authority (CITRA) announced that it handled 250 reports of fraud and scam cases during May 2026, distributed across various electronic platforms and channels, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

Statistics showed that websites topped the list with 128 reports, followed by social media with 63, phone calls with 32, WhatsApp with 24, and SMS messages with 3.

CITRA emphasized the importance of reporting any suspicious messages, links, or phone calls, and stressed the need to avoid sharing personal or banking information with any untrusted entity.

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Online ID renewal: The Public Author-

ity for Civil Information (PACI) has launched an enhanced service for renewing GCC citizens' identity cards online through the Sahel app, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The step aims to promote digital transformation and streamline government procedures for citizens, residents, and GCC nationals.

PACI confirmed that the updated service includes a comprehensive mechanism for renewing the GCC individual card based on the applicant's status, thus expediting transactions and reducing time and effort for beneficiaries.

The service allows users to select the appropriate status when submitting a renewal request via the Sahel app, ensuring data accuracy and faster completion of procedures, without the need to visit relevant authorities except in special circumstances.

Continued from Page 1

Full steam

The meeting focused on ways to enhance logistical integration and expedite the implementation of the GCC Railway project.

The committee talked about the directives issued by the leaders of GCC states, who emphasized the importance of the relevant ministerial panels to continue their intensive meetings in order to closely monitor developments and challenges and submit recommendations to strengthen Gulf cooperation.

The committee affirmed the importance of the GCC Railway project as a major initiative that will reinforce economic and logistical connectivity among member states, reduce reliance on trucks, open new avenues for connecting GCC countries to the regional and international markets, and provide more efficient and flexible options for transporting goods and commodities among member states.

The GCC Secretariat General reviewed the procedures and executive steps taken to implement the decision of the Supreme Council on conducting a comprehensive

study to expand logistical integration and expedite the completion of the Gulf Railway project.

It also presented a report on the progress in this area and the efforts exerted, in coordination with the relevant authorities in the member states.

The committee commended the Secretariat for conducting the necessary studies and the steps taken to support the Gulf logistical integration project and accelerate the connection of member states through the railway network.

The committee emphasized the importance of completing the studies according to the highest technical standards, and to fully benefit from the experience and expertise of the member states to ensure that the objectives of the project are achieved.

It also assigned the Secretariat to conduct a workshop for senior officials and specialists in the transport and logistics sectors in GCC countries. This workshop will assess the study plan, facilitate the exchange of relevant national experience and best practices, improve the outputs, and support the Gulf integration process in the transport sector.



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Continued from Page 1

Rome led

As a result, engagement with Iran has always been conducted with a high degree of caution. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states have generally maintained relations with their Iranian neighbor across the Arabian Gulf with careful and measured cordiality.

Despite all this, there is still a possibility for cautious coexistence with the Iranian people and establishment of normal relations on an equal footing, but only after the demise of the current regime, which has burdened the people of the region with terrorism and had closed every avenue for communication.

The Iranian regime has even attacked the neighbors who were mediating between it and the United States, Europe, and the world to end its isolation. The control exerted by some adolescent officials within the Iranian regime over the military capabilities eliminated any possibility of communication with them.

Whoever is familiar with Iran's history since 1979 is aware to what extent the Iranians have been patient. They have risen against the regime ten times. The so-called "Green Movement" of 2009 came very close to toppling the regime, but brutal and bloody repression saved it. However, this situation changed dramatically after the January uprising.

Furthermore, the results of the recent war have left the Iranian regime weakened and vulnerable, meaning that a return to the past is impossible, especially given the people's feeling that they have nothing left to lose. The people will rise up in pursuit of a dignified life and freedom.

The mosaic nature of Iranian society is not as cohesive as some might think. Each ethnic group has its own aspirations. The ambitions of the Azers differ from those of the Kurds, Lurs, Baloch, Arabs, and Turkmen. These groups will not remain silent about the injustice they have suffered under a minority regime that has systematically killed and tortured them.

The day following the final agreement signing will mark the beginning of liberation from the Iranian regime or the new Nero.

Cabinet reviews

The Cabinet then discussed a recent phone call between His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and Britain's King Charles III, in which the latter

deplored a wave of Iranian attacks against Kuwait and expressed London's unwavering support for Kuwait's security and stability, a warm gesture highly appreciated by His Highness the Amir as a testament to the depth of "historic" bilateral relations.

The contents of a letter forwarded to His Highness the Amir by Armenian President Vahagn Khachaturyan was another topic of discussion, in which an invitation was extended to His Highness the Amir to attend the UN Biodiversity Conference (COP 17) in the Armenian capital Yerevan scheduled to take place from October 19-30 of this year.

The Cabinet went on to discuss a phone call between His Highness the Amir and US President Donald Trump, which took place shortly after the framework deal between Tehran and Washington was announced, with the framework being praised by His Highness the Amir as a step that could potentially resolve the conflict between the US and Iran.

His Highness the Amir thanked the US president for his efforts to end the war and hoped that ramping up diplomacy and the use of dialogue and other "peaceful means" would help stifle all conflicts in the region and beyond in a bid to usher in lasting peace and security.

Foreign Minister Sheikh Jarrah Al-Sabah then briefed the cabinet on the outcome of the 167th Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Ministerial Council talks in the Bahraini capital Manama, in which GCC member states condemned Iran's latest attacks targeting Kuwait, Bahrain and Jordan, slamming the transgression as grave threat to the wider Gulf Arab region's security and stability.

The Cabinet then looked into another gathering that brought together GCC foreign ministers and their Canadian counterpart Anita Anand, which looked into bilateral relations and efforts to propel these ties to greater levels, placing much emphasis on bilateral cooperation across key sectors running the gamut from trade and energy to food security and logistics.

The Kuwaiti foreign minister then informed the Cabinet about a string of recent phone calls the minister made with his counterparts from a number of friendly countries, all of which welcomed the framework agreement between the US and Iran to end their war and reopen the Strait of Hormuz to free and safe navigation.

Given the current circumstances around the region and subsequent

measures introduced in Kuwait to ensure the safety of nationals and non-Kuwaitis alike, the cabinet said that it would continue to convene regularly to keep abreast of regional and global developments.

Kuwait's ancient

years ago Kuwait's environment was closer to a semi-humid land characterized by seasonal lakes and summer rainfall, while the sea extended further inland along its coasts.

He noted that Kuwait's present-day summer temperatures, which approach 50 degrees Celsius, and its dust-laden northerly winds were not a feature of the region thousands of years ago during the Holocene epoch. Successive climatic cycles gradually altered the climate, leading to the conditions currently prevailing across the Arabian Peninsula.

Al-Hajeri noted that Kuwait now lies within a continental desert climate zone marked by a long, hot and dry summer, with temperatures reaching 50.7 degrees Celsius as recorded in August 2012, and a short, mild winter accompanied by irregular rainfall, while dust activity has increased.

He stressed that Kuwait's climate stabilized into its current desert pattern by the first millennium BC, noting that climatic cycles play an important role in shaping patterns of human life and activity.

He referred to a report issued by the society on Kuwait's climate, which showed that the Subiya area was once the outlet of four rivers and witnessed human settlements and activities near those water sources. Kuwait at that time formed part of a submerged coastal plain, with geological studies indicating that the last retreat of sea levels around 4,000 years ago extended between four and six kilometers inland from the current shoreline.

Al-Hajeri said the sea retreated from the coasts of Subiya in six main stages, the first occurring more than 43,000 years ago and the last around 4,000 years ago, according to a study conducted by Dr. Taibah Al-Asfour as part of her doctoral dissertation at Durham University in England in 1975. Each stage of retreat left behind a limestone coastal rock layer composed of shell and mollusk fragments.

He also pointed to a recent study by King Abdullah University of Science and Technology in Saudi Arabia indicating that a vast lake existed in the Empty Quarter around 6,000

years ago before rainfall declined and the lake dried up. The Empty Quarter subsequently became a barrier that traps northerly winds and windborne dust.

G7 backs

is signed. Iran will also be allowed to sell its oil without restrictions. Officials say the leaked text broadly matches the document.

The accord, due to be formally signed in a ceremony in Switzerland on Friday, lays out that the U.S. would work to end all American and United Nations sanctions imposed on Tehran if a final agreement addressing Iran's nuclear program is reached.

"I think it'll be done. They want to sign. They want to get back to a normal life," Trump said.

Meanwhile, Iran will immediately take steps to reopen the Strait of Hormuz once a tentative deal with the U.S. to end the war is signed and will be allowed to sell its oil without restrictions, according to leaked copies of an interim agreement that officials say broadly matches the document.

The accord, due to be signed Friday in Switzerland, also envisions Iran receiving at least \$300 billion to rebuild after the war and says the U.S. would work to end all American and United Nations sanctions imposed on Tehran - if a final agreement addressing Iran's nuclear program is reached.

U.S. President Donald Trump on Wednesday cast some uncertainty on whether the signing would happen as planned. Asked how confident he was that the ceremony would take place, Trump remarked on the unpredictability of deals.

"You never know with deals, do you? But you're going to find out pretty soon," he said.

Peace prospects

He stressed that many companies postponed their real estate investment decisions during the past period due to geopolitical tensions, adding that the return of investment activity will depend on the success of the ongoing negotiations and the achievement of a stable agreement.

Al-Faraj emphasized that the real estate sector would be the main beneficiary if stability is achieved, particularly with the expected revival of government and infrastructure projects and increased demand, adding

that a decrease in geopolitical risks would first support the return of local liquidity and subsequently attract foreign investment into the Kuwaiti market.

He affirmed that the recent crisis prompted many investors to reassess their investment priorities, with a stronger trend emerging toward real estate investment within Kuwait, as it is considered safer and easier to manage during crises compared to foreign real estate.

Al-Faraj predicted an improvement in activity and liquidity during the last quarter of the year if a final agreement is reached between Iran and the United States.

Meanwhile, real estate expert Badah Al-Dousari said the Kuwaiti real estate market is expected to witness relatively positive effects during the second half of 2026 with the return of regional stability.

He explained that the period of geopolitical tensions led many investors to postpone purchase and investment decisions, which was reflected in a decline in transaction volumes and values during the first quarter of the year.

The return of stability will gradually contribute to boosting investor confidence and directing liquidity into the real estate market, supported by the continued growth of non-oil activities and anticipated reforms, most notably the housing finance law.

The residential sector is expected to benefit the most in the short term, given the accumulated demand for housing and the rising number of housing applications, in addition to the expected role of housing finance in enhancing citizens' purchasing power.

Residential real estate accounts for approximately 49 percent of total market transactions. Investment real estate has strong growth potential in the coming period, benefiting from the return of liquidity and continued improvement in rental and price levels.

Al-Dousari also predicted that the commercial and industrial sectors would benefit more in the medium term, supported by infrastructure projects, economic development, and New Kuwait 2035 vision.

Furthermore, real estate activist Basma Al-Sultan stated that the military tensions negatively affected the real estate market, particularly leading to a decline in land prices, which created investment opportunities that were seized by a large number of buyers and investors. The decline did not result in a lack of demand; on the contrary, some sectors, especially land, chalets, and livestock pens, witnessed

a noticeable increase in purchasing activity driven by lower prices and investors' desire to capitalize on opportunities.

Al-Sultan said a cessation of hostilities and a return to stability would significantly restore confidence in the market.

She anticipates that real estate transactions will regain momentum in the coming period, potentially even reaching levels exceeding those seen before the crisis.

In addition, real estate activist Yousef Al-Safran confirmed that the Kuwaiti real estate market maintained its activity and stability during the first half of 2026, despite regional circumstances and tensions.

He noted that Kuwaiti investors demonstrated continued confidence in the strength of the national economy, the government's approach, and its ability to overcome challenges.

Al-Safran indicated that any positive impact from the current stability could be influenced by anticipated real estate legislation that is still under review.

He stated that the enactment of some of these laws during the second half of the year could affect the volume of real estate transactions and overall market trends.

Al-Safran pointed out that the residential sector will benefit most from the post-war period, as it is the sector most closely linked to citizens' needs.

He predicted an increase in residential activity with the stabilization of the political and security situation in the Gulf region.

Al-Safran affirmed that the recent improvement in Boursa Kuwait could be reflected in increased liquidity flowing into the real estate sector in the coming period.

Regarding prices, he said the government's move to release more vacant land and increase real estate supply will contribute to greater market balance and help curb price increases.

It is worth highlighting that real estate transactions showed mixed performance during the second week of June, with 134 deals valued at KD 108.7 million, compared to 88 deals valued at KD 124.9 million in the previous week. This reflects a 52.3 percent increase in the number of transactions, while the total value declined by 13 percent.

According to the weekly report from the Real Estate Registration and Documentation Departments at the Ministry of Justice, covering the period from June 7 to 11, the market witnessed activity across the private, investment, industrial, coastal strip, and retail real estate sectors.



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A passenger, top, jumps out of a plane after it crashed on a highway as other people help on June 16, in Laredo, Texas. (AP)

Texas highway plane crash kills 1

A business jet with six people on board crashed on a highway in Laredo, Texas, and caught fire Tuesday night, authorities said, killing one person and causing chaos as people left their vehicles to frantically try to smash the cockpit window and free those inside.

Drivers who came upon the burning plane, which was nearly sheared in half and tipped on its side, captured dramatic rescue scenes on video or rushed toward the aircraft

on foot to help. Two people came running with a sledgehammer and shovel, which they used to strike the cockpit glass and try propping open the plane's door.

The plane crashed on the Loop 20 highway near the Texas-Mexico border shortly after 10 p.m., said Jose Baeza, an investigator with the Laredo Police Department. It was unclear if the person who died was on the plane or the ground. (AP)

Trump delays Clayton's nomination for intel director in bid to push Congress on voting bill

EVIAN-LES-BAINS, France, June 17. (AP): US President Donald Trump said Wednesday that he was delaying Jay Clayton's nomination to lead the U.S. intelligence community in a bid to force Congress to act on a voter ID bill that currently lacks enough support for passage.

Trump said in a social media post just hours before Clayton's scheduled confirmation hearing that he will keep Bill Pulte, a top U.S. housing official, as acting director of national intelligence.

Lawmakers in both parties had opposed Trump's nomination of Pulte, citing his lack of known experience in intelligence and his use of his current administration perch to target perceived adversaries of the president — resistance that last week forced Trump to turn to Clayton.

The abrupt announcement creates instant uncertainty over the long-term leadership of the 18-agency



Jay Clayton, US Attorney for the Southern District of New York, listens during a news conference in New York on March 9. (AP)

intelligence community and dashes hopes for a swift renewal of a crucial surveillance program that expired in Congress last week due to bipartisan anger over Trump's pick of Pulte.

That tool, Section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, permits spy agencies to collect without a warrant the communications of targeted foreigners located

outside the United States. National security officials across both political parties have for years described Section 702 as vital for gathering intelligence that can disrupt terror attacks and espionage operations, though some lawmakers and civil liberties advocates have raised concerns over the government's use of information about Americans that is incidentally collected through the program.

Clayton had been set to appear on Wednesday for a Senate confirmation hearing that was fast-tracked because of the program's lapse. Democrats had said they would not renew the expired surveillance programs until Trump withdrew Pulte's nomination.

Trump's post suggests that debate to revive Section 702 could be indefinitely postponed. Lawmakers have sounded the alarm about the government operating without congressional authorization of the powerful spy tool.

Democrat Wahab advances in Calif special election to replace Swalwell

Hern wins Oklahoma GOP nomination for Senate, gov's race heads to runoff

WASHINGTON, June 17, (AP): US Rep Kevin Hern easily won Oklahoma's GOP nomination for US Senate on Tuesday, and the race for a new governor in the deeply conservative state began with Republicans Gentner Drummond and Mark Mazzei advancing to a runoff.

In a primary that again tested President Donald Trump's status as Republican Party kingmaker, both Hern and Mazzei carried his endorsement in their bids to win open races for two of Oklahoma's biggest offices. With nearly all the votes counted, Drummond, the state's attorney general, was narrowly ahead of Mazzei, a former state senator.

The primary had Republicans picking their preferred successor to outgoing Republican Gov. Kevin Stitt and a nominee for the Senate seat once held by Homeland Security Secretary Markwayne Mullin. Democrats haven't won a Senate seat in Oklahoma since 1990.

Hern's most serious potential GOP rivals stayed out of the Senate race after Trump endorsed him even before Mullin was confirmed as a replacement for fired Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem. Hern received more than 50% of the primary vote to avoid a runoff.

He struck a somewhat bipartisan tone in speaking with reporters after winning big, touting his experience as a House member working on issues such as trade and energy. He promised

to represent conservative principles and "Oklahoma ideologies" in the Senate and noted he already has relationships with senators.

"We have a lot of friends in a lot of different states, including blue states," Hern said.

Trump endorsed Mazzei last month in a hotly contested race that also had other major candidates, including former Oklahoma House Speaker Charles McCall and Chip Keating, a former state public safety director who is the son of a two-term governor.

Drummond told reporters at his watch party that he had expected a runoff after Trump endorsed Mazzei and suggested that Trump could reconsider his endorsement of Mazzei, saying, "who knows?"

"Mr. Mazzei got a bump, but now he's got to earn the rest," Drummond said.

Trump repeated his endorsement of Mazzei on his Truth Social platform on Monday. Mazzei told supporters Tuesday night, "All I can say is, 'Wow.'"

"Eighteen months ago when we started this adventure, no one thought this was possible," he said. "The political insiders said we had no chance. We started at zero, but who in here actually had faith we could get the job done and get in the runoff? You did."

Mazzei also boosted his campaign with personal funds — nearly \$10.9 million, or almost 95% of the \$11.5 million he raised, according to cam-



US Rep Kevin Hern speaks to reporters on Capitol Hill in Washington on Oct. 23, 2023. (AP)

paign finance reports. Drummond put \$2.5 million from his own pocket in raising about \$7.2 million. Together, Drummond, Mazzei, Keating and McCall contributed \$22.5 million of their own funds to their campaigns, or 72% of their combined fundraising of more than \$31 million.

The winner of the GOP runoff will face Oklahoma House Minority Leader Cyndi Munson, who won the Democratic nomination Tuesday by a wide margin.

In a solidly Republican state, the races for two of Oklahoma's biggest offices set off a political scramble.

to replace Mullin in the Senate through this year, Stitt appointed Republican Alan Armstrong, an energy executive, but state law prohibited him from seeking a full term.

In November, Hern will face the winner of a Democratic runoff between N'Kiyla Thomas, a nurse and community activist, and Jim Priest, an attorney and minister.

The governor's race is open because Stitt is finishing his second four-year term and cannot serve a third under the state constitution. Trump has seemed eager for him to go.

As head of the National Governors Association, Stitt drew Trump's ire earlier this year over a dispute over invitations to White House events at the group's annual meeting. The fallout led to Trump attacking Stitt on social media as a "RINO," meaning Republican in Name Only.

Also:

LOS ANGELES: Democratic state lawmaker Aisha Wahab advanced Tuesday to the special general election in California for the US House seat vacated by Rep. Eric Swalwell after he resigned from Congress amid allegations of assault.

Wahab, a state senator who focused her campaign message on reducing housing costs, goes on to the Aug 18 runoff, which will determine who will fill the remainder of Swalwell's term through January.

The 14th District includes East Bay cities such as Fremont, Hayward and Livermore. It heavily favors Democrats, and Swalwell typically beat Republican challengers by wide vote margins.

Also among the 11 names on the ballot was fellow Democrat Melissa Hernandez, a Bay Area Rapid Transit director and former mayor of the East Bay city of Dublin.

She and Wahab represent different wings of the party that have been battling in numerous states this primary season. The more progressive Wahab proposed combating high costs by expanding the social safety net

and taking on "corporate profiteering." Hernandez, considered more moderate, emphasized job growth and supporting small businesses.

Others in the race were Democratic businessperson Rakhi Israni Singh and Republicans Wendy Huang, a real estate investor, and Dana Maldonado, who runs a small flower business.

Separate from the special election, a regular primary was held June 2 for a full term in the seat beginning in January, with many of the same candidates who were on Tuesday's ballot.

Wahab and Hernandez were the top two vote-getters June 2 and advanced to the general election in November. If one of them comes out on top in the special election, their hope is that serving in the office for a few months this summer and fall could provide a boost in visibility and some job experience they can tout as they campaign for the full term.

Swalwell held the seat for seven terms before resigning in April — and also dropping out of this year's governor's race — after the San Francisco Chronicle reported allegations that he sexually assaulted a woman twice, including when she worked for him.

CNN later reported that other women accused him of sending inappropriate messages and nude photos.

Swalwell has repeatedly denied the accusations, but he said it would be unfair to his constituents to remain in Congress.



In this photo provided by the Zaporizhzhia Regional Administration on June 16 a building burns after a Russian strike in Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine. (AP)

G7 leaders pledge more vital help for Ukraine against Russia: Zelenskyy

KYIV, Ukraine, June 17, (AP): Ukraine has won key pledges of further support for its fight against Russia from world leaders attending the Group of Seven summit in France, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Wednesday.

The leaders of the world's leading industrial economies promised to strengthen Ukraine's air defenses and ensure its energy supply, as well as step up international economic pressure on Moscow, as Kyiv's fight against Russia's all-out invasion stretches into its fifth year with no end in sight.

"The G7 Summit in France delivered important results for Ukraine. Most importantly, we agreed on additional strengthening of Ukraine's air defense," Zelenskyy, who attended the gathering, said on X.

"Our partners will ensure support for our defense and energy resilience," he said, adding they will also introduce new sanctions on Russia.

The Ukrainian leader has spent a lot of time since Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022 trying to



Swiss Federal President Guy Parmelin, right, speaks with Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, left, prior to a bilateral meeting on the sidelines of the Evian G7 summit in Geneva Airport, Switzerland on June 15. (AP)

secure international support for his country and diplomatically isolate Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Zelenskyy was expected to attend a European Union summit in

Brussels on Thursday. Ukraine on Monday officially started EU membership negotiations, launching a process that could take years even as it fights Russia.

The Iran war has distracted Washington from its largely fruitless year-long effort to stop the fighting in Ukraine, and Zelenskyy sought to engage with U.S. President Donald Trump at the G7 gathering where key European leaders were also present.

Putin has tried to cut out Europe and Kyiv and negotiate Ukraine's future directly with Washington.

The leaders of Japan, the UK, France, Germany, Italy, Canada and the US threw their support behind Ukraine in a joint statement published overnight.

"We commend Ukraine for its resilience and progress on the battlefield in recent months and emphasize there is now a new momentum" in Kyiv's resistance, it said.

Ukraine's battlefield performance against Russia's bigger army has markedly improved in recent months, Western officials and analysts say.

Germany and Poland to sign new defense deal as balance of power in Europe shifts

WARSAW, Poland, June 17, (AP): Germany and Poland were set to sign a new defense agreement on Wednesday, putting aside their complicated past to strengthen European military cooperation at a time of heightened tension with Russia and growing uncertainty over US engagement in Europe.

Relations between the two neighbors in recent years have become more pragmatic in the wake of Russia's full-scale war on Ukraine in 2022 and the coming to power of a liberal government in Poland in 2023.

As the US weighs a partial drawdown of its military presence in Europe, Poland is keen to ensure that major European allies take a greater role in defending the continent's eastern flank.

Germany is seeking partners as it moves to revitalize its military, the Bundeswehr, after decades of neglect with ambitions to build the strongest conventional army on NATO's European side — an effort that will make it a central pillar of European defense in the years ahead.

Poland's importance as a logistics hub for Ukraine, alongside its growing economy and heavy defense investment, has made it a compelling partner for Germany and other core European countries.

"We Germans need a strong Poland as an equal partner," German Chancellor Friedrich Merz said in Berlin after meeting with liberal Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk in December. "This is in our funda-



German Chancellor Friedrich Merz welcomes Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk at the Chancellery in Berlin on Dec 15, 2025. (AP)

mental interest."

The defense agreement is to include plans for protecting the Baltic Sea region and details about cooperation on military mobility and infrastructure, cyber defense and new technologies.

The two countries are irreversibly tied by NATO's defense plans, which give Germany a key role in the defense of the Baltic region, together with Poland and other countries in the central and eastern European region, said Justyna Gotkowska, deputy director of the Warsaw-based think tank Center for Eastern Studies.

"Germany is largely responsible for the defense of the Baltic states and without cooperation with Po-

land, that will not happen," Gotkowska said.

The Baltic countries are often referred to as the most likely target for Russia if it were to attack NATO territory in the future. The agreement is expected to reaffirm the mutual defense obligations set out in NATO and European Union treaties, to which both countries are parties.

However, unlike bilateral treaties each has signed with France and the United Kingdom in recent years, the Polish-German agreement is interministerial, focused on the practical aspects of military cooperation and does not include political mutual defense declarations that the bilateral treaties do.

Europe

Norway Crown Princess gets lung transplant: Crown Princess Mette-Marit of Norway has undergone a successful lung transplant at a hospital in Oslo, the country's royal house said Wednesday.

The 52-year-old was diagnosed in 2018 with pulmonary fibrosis, a progressive disease that damages and scars lung tissue. It can cause serious breathing problems, and there is no known cure.

Earlier this month, the royal house announced that she had been placed on a lung transplant list. On Wednesday, it said in a statement that she had received a transplant at the Rikshospitalet in Oslo.

The head of the hospital's pulmonary department,



Mette-Marit

Are Holm, said in the statement that "we are very pleased that everything has gone well so far." (AP)

□ □ □

Spain's ex-PM faces questioning: Spain's former Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero is appearing before a judge in Madrid on Wednesday in connection to his alleged role in a government airline bailout and links to jewelry discovered in a police raid on his office. It is Zapatero's first appearance before the National Court judge since he was placed under investigation last month for alleged influence peddling, money laundering and other possible financial wrongdoing in connection with the Spanish government's rescue of the Plus Ultra airline.

Zapatero, 65, who was prime minister from 2004 to 2011, had been out of public office for a decade when Plus Ultra received 53 million euros (\$61.5 million) in public money in 2021 from a COVID-19 recovery fund. (AP)

Cayetano, a key supporter of Duterte, concedes defeat

Gatchalian elected Philippine Senate president in special session of Congress

MANILA, June 17, (AP): A leadership standoff in the Philippine Senate ended Wednesday with the removal of an ally of former President Rodrigo Duterte as leader of the chamber, which will soon start the impeachment trial of his daughter, incumbent Vice President Sara Duterte.

With 13 of 24 senators backing him, Sherwin Gatchalian, an ally of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., was elected Senate president. His rival, Alan Peter Cayetano, a key supporter of Duterte, conceded defeat.

Both had claimed leadership of the Senate in the last two weeks based on contrasting legal interpretations of the quorum that led to their elections. An allied senator of Cayetano, however, defected Wednesday and gave his rivals' bloc a clear majority.

"It's a relief," Jean Franco, a political professor at the state-run University of the Philippines said, but added that the country's democracy, "with its weak and fragile institutions," faces more headwinds.

The Senate infighting has been perceived as being swayed by the long-running political disputes between Marcos and Vice President Duterte. The country's top two leaders were once allies but had a bitter falling out in a high-profile dispute that reflects the divisions and turbulent politics long plaguing the Asian democracy.

The vice president has blamed Marcos for the arrest of her father, Rodrigo Duterte, and his handover to the International Criminal Court in The Hague last year. The detained former president is scheduled to be tried by the global court starting in November for alleged crimes against humanity.

The charges stem from his brutal anti-drugs crackdowns, which left thousands of mostly poor suspects dead while he was in office. He has denied authorizing extra-judicial killings.

Cayetano captured the Senate presidency on May 11 after his Senate faction attained a slim majority when Sen. Ronald dela Rosa suddenly reappeared to



New Senate President Sherwin Gatchalian, (third from left), takes his oath during a special session at the Philippine Senate in Pasay City, Philippines on June 17. (AP)

support him after months of hiding.

Dela Rosa once served as Rodrigo Duterte's national police chief and has been named by the ICC as a co-perpetrator of the former president in the widespread killings of drug suspects. After the ICC unsealed a warrant for dela Rosa's arrest on May 11, he went back into hiding and remains at large.

Another Cayetano ally, Sen. Jinggoy Estrada, was arrested and jailed on June 1 after being indicted on a plunder charge. He was accused of receiving huge kickbacks from a flood control project, a charge that he denies.

Control over the Senate is crucial. It's expected to start the trial in July of the vice president, who was impeached by the House of Representatives last month over criminal charges, including unexplained wealth and publicly threatening to have Marcos assassinated.

The House is dominated by Marcos' allies. The vice president denies the allegations, which her supporters say were fabricated to prevent her from pursuing an announced plan to seek the presidency when Marcos' six-year term ends in 2028.

Also:

MANILA, Philippines: German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier said in the Philippines on Tuesday that Europe is worried over tensions in the disputed South China Sea where a major flare-out could endanger freedom of navigation as has happened in the Strait of Hormuz.

In a joint appearance with Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr in Manila, where Steinmeier is on a state visit, the German president referenced the blockade of the Hormuz as a result of the Iran war and said European leaders were concerned about continuing territorial confrontations in the South China Sea, particularly between the Philippines and China.

The United States lays no claims to the South China Sea but has repeatedly warned it's obligated to help defend the Philippines, its oldest treaty ally in Asia, if Filipino forces, ships and aircraft come under an armed attack.

The closure of the Strait of Hormuz, which led to global spikes in fuel and fertilizer prices, was among the issues Steinmeier and Marcos discussed in a closed-door meeting.

Violence displaces 1.5 million, 2,300 killed in 2026

UN chief visits Haiti, int'l force gets ready to fight gangs

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti, June 17, (AP): UN Secretary-General António Guterres visited Haiti on Tuesday, where surging gang violence has left more than 1 in 10 people homeless.

New statistics released by the UN reveal that 2,300 people have been killed across Haiti so far this year, with another 100 kidnapped, while 1.5 million have been displaced. Among those abducted is James Boyard, cabinet director of the Defense Ministry, who was kidnapped last week in one of the few relatively safe areas of the capital.

Guterres' one-day visit to Port-au-Prince comes after more than 30 people were killed, injured or missing last weekend in Cité Soleil, a seaside slum, according to Cooperative for Peace and Development, a local human rights organization.

His convoy sped past a neighborhood once fully controlled by gangs that left in their wake decimated car dealerships, abandoned homes and dozens of concrete buildings pockmarked with bullet holes. A colorful bus known as a tap-tap rumbled past, its windshield peppered with bullet holes.

Graffiti scrawled on a crumbling concrete wall read: "Down with Viv

Ansann, long live the police." Viv Ansann is a powerful gang federation that the US government designated a foreign terrorist organization. It is estimated to control 70% of Port-au-Prince.

Guterres traveled past dozens of Haitians who fled the clashes and now live in makeshift homes under large pieces of canvas strung up with frayed rope.

They are among the more than 300,000 people displaced by gang violence across Port-au-Prince - a record. Among them are more than 18,000 people who fled the Cité Soleil slum in May, according to the U.N. International Organization for Migration.

"Haiti's displacement crisis is entering an even more alarming phase," Gregoire Goodstein, IOM chief of mission in Haiti, said in a recent statement.

Guterres' first stop was the headquarters of the new gang-suppression force, which the U.N. Security Council approved in September. It replaces a U.N.-backed mission led by Kenyan police that aimed to help Haiti's National Police fight gangs but remained underfunded and understaffed. So far, Jamaica, Chad, El Salvador and Guatemala have deployed troops that number less than

1,000 to form part of the growing force, which is due to start operations in the coming weeks.

They are expected to work with Haiti's National Police and its growing Armed Forces, with hundreds of Haitian men and a couple of women lining up on a dusty road hoping to interview to join.

Guterres then met behind closed doors with Prime Minister Alix Didier-Fils-Aimé, who is under pressure to hold elections in the country of nearly 12 million people that hasn't had a president since Jovenel Moïse was killed at his private residence in July 2021.

"We had a frank conversation about what's happening in Haiti, the vision the government has for the future," Fils-Aimé told The Associated Press after the meeting.

He said security is a priority so the transitional government can hold elections and "get back to republican rule." Fils-Aimé added that Guterres can help with that effort by ensuring that the countries backing the gang-suppression force "live up to their engagement."

Guterres also stopped by a makeshift shelter in a former school where dozens of the people living there crowded around him.

Forced to flee their homes after gangs shot up their community and set fire to it, some had been living there for up to four years.

"Solino is not ready," 31-year-old Clifford Lala said of going back to his community. It was one of the last holdouts in Port-au-Prince until gangs overran it.

Guterres ducked into a hot classroom and met privately with a group of six women who decried the lack of privacy at the shelter, even to shower or use the bathroom, and said they worried about their young children.

"It's skin-to-skin and mouth-to-mouth," said one woman.

The shelter houses more than 1,200 people who sleep side by side, and only one meal a day is guaranteed.

"We're going to do our best," Guterres told the women.

Outside, a man began to slap the building's metal siding and belted, "We want to go back home!" His voice grew louder and angrier as security walked into the room and whisked Guterres away.

Wendy Cejour, 26, told the AP that he and his family have been living at the school for a year and a half.



UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres greets soldiers from Chad at a base in Port-au-Prince, Haiti on June 16. (AP)

Far-right backlash surging in Lat-Am as crime fears fuel Bukele-style crackdowns

BOGOTA, Colombia, June 17, (AP): At the start of this decade, Latin America was hurtling to the left. Progressives, seizing on public outrage over entrenched inequities exacerbated by the pandemic, swept to power in many of the region's biggest economies, including Brazil, Chile, Colombia and Peru.

A political backlash is brewing, though. Although homicide rates have broadly declined across Latin America compared to a decade ago, spikes in some countries and a regionwide rise in other crimes, particularly extortion, have created the conditions for conservative populists to score votes by promising strong-arm tactics against crime and immigration.

Stump speeches casting migrants as criminals and pitching heavy-handed security strategies popularized by El Salvador's president, Nayib Bukele, have won conservative candidates U.S. President Donald Trump's backing and fired up their disaffected electorates despite concerns that such tactics could encourage human rights abuses or threaten democracy.

"You have an emergent right wing



US President Donald Trump poses for a group photo with, (from left), Paraguay President Santiago Peña, Dominican Republic President Luis Abinader, Bolivia President Rodrigo Paz Pereira, El Salvador President Nayib Bukele, and Argentina President Javier Milei, at the Shield of the Americas Summit at Trump National Doral Miami in Doral, Fla on March 7. (AP)

that is very much in collaboration across the region and with the U.S. through the MAGA movement, which has also used crime as a rallying cry for political mobilization," said Enrique Roig, vice president of

the nonprofit Human Rights First and a former State Department official. "It's easier to sell locking people up than it is to deal with the reasons why mainly young men join gangs in countries like El Salvador."

US strike on drug boat kills 1, leaves 2 survivors in eastern Pacific Ocean

WASHINGTON, June 17, (AP): The US military attacked a boat accused of smuggling drugs in the eastern Pacific Ocean on Tuesday, killing one man and leaving two survivors, as the Trump administration continues its monthlong campaign against alleged traffickers in Latin America.

The latest attack brings the number of people who have been killed in boat strikes by the US military to at least 208 since the Trump administration began targeting those it calls "narcoterrorists" in early September.

As with most of the military's statements on strikes in the eastern Pacific Ocean and Caribbean Sea, US Southern Command said it targeted the alleged drug traffickers along known smuggling routes. The military did not provide evidence that the vessel was ferrying drugs. A video posted on X showed a boat traveling in the water before being hit by the strike and bursting into flames.

Southern Command said it



US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth speaks during a meeting with Ecuador's President Daniel Noboa at the Pentagon on June 15 in Washington. (AP)

"immediately notified US Coast Guard to activate the Search and Rescue system for the survivors."

President Donald Trump has said the US is in "armed conflict" with cartels in Latin America and has justified the attacks as a nec-

essary escalation to stem the flow of drugs into the United States and fatal overdoses claiming American lives. But his administration has offered little evidence to support its claims of killing "narcoterrorists."

Congo opp'n condemns new bill seen as opening way for third term for Tshisekedi

DAKAR, Senegal, June 17, (AP): Congo's opposition on Tuesday condemned the adoption of a bill that could open the door to a third term for President Félix Tshisekedi, denouncing what they say is a power grab.

The bill, adopted by the Senate on Monday, would enable a referendum on a new constitution under which Tshisekedi's previous terms wouldn't count against him - effectively resetting the clock. It has already passed the National Assembly and now awaits the president's signature.

Tshisekedi, 62, has been in office since 2019. He has said that he would seek a third term, if voters approved of it in a referendum. But no date has been set for one.

Congo's constitution explicitly bars any revision of presidential term limits. The bill works around that provision by allowing the president to amend the constitution in the event of a "major dysfunction" paralyzing state institutions.

The central African country is



Democratic Republic of Congo President Felix-Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo speaks during the Homegoing Celebration of Life for the Rev. Jesse Jackson on March 7, in Chicago. (AP)

plagued by multiple crises, including an Ebola outbreak and an escalation of the decades-long conflict with the Rwanda-backed M23 rebels, one of more than 100 armed groups vying for control in the eastern provinces.

Congo's next presidential election is set to take place in 2028. Tshisekedi said last month that Congo won't be able to organize and hold elections unless the conflict is resolved and stability returns.

Brazil's court convicts son of Bolsonaro for coercion

SAO PAULO, June 17, (AP): Brazil's Supreme Court convicted former lawmaker Eduardo Bolsonaro on Tuesday for coercion related to the trial that last year sentenced his father and ex-President Jair Bolsonaro to 27 years in prison for a coup attempt.

The court sentenced him to four years and two months in prison. All five justices considering the case agreed he illegally interfered by lobbying the U.S. government to threaten Brazilian officials to stop the trial.

Justice Alexandre de Moraes, who also oversaw the former president's coup attempt case, said Eduardo Bolsonaro's job as a federal lawmaker "is not to lobby overseas against his own country." De Moraes and his wife were sanctioned by the US government in July last year.

Lawyers for Eduardo Bolsonaro disputed the verdict, saying there was not enough evidence to convict him. The former lawmaker has lived in Texas since February 2025.

US President Donald Trump slapped Brazil with a 50% tariff last year in protest of Jair Bolsonaro's prosecution for trying to overturn his electoral defeat to President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva in 2022.

Trump's relations with Lula seem to have improved in early May, when the Brazilian leader visited the White House, but then in June the US government once again proposed 25% tariffs on imports from Brazil, claiming the world's 10th-biggest economy engages in unreasonable trade practices.



Bolsonaro

Africa

Zimbabwe train-bus collision kills 9: A freight train struck a bus at a level crossing in Zimbabwe on Tuesday, killing at least nine people including two children, police and rail authorities said.

The crash occurred at a railway crossing in Triangle, a sugar-producing town in the country's south, according to police.

National Railways of Zimbabwe spokesperson Andrew Kanambura said in a statement the bus driver failed to stop and check for oncoming trains before crossing the tracks, violating railway safety regulations. He said at least 25 others were hurt and taken to the hospital.

Photos posted by local media showed the bus crumpled beside the railway tracks with part of its side sheered off. Twisted fragments of metal and shattered debris were strewn on the ground. (AP)

Court opens trial of ex-CAR prez Bozizé: A UN-backed court in Central African Republic on Tuesday opened the trial of former President François Bozizé, who is accused of crimes against humanity for abuses committed by members of his security forces between 2009 and 2013.

The trial at the Special Criminal Court, a tribunal created in 2015 to prosecute serious crimes committed during the country's conflicts, centers on abuses at a prison and a military training center in Bossembélé, about 150 kilometers (90 miles) northwest of the capital, Bangui. (AP)

Kuwait oil drops to \$85.84 pb

KUWAIT CITY, June 17, (KUNA): Kuwait crude oil dropped USD 4.83 in Tuesday's trading to reach USD 85.84 per barrel compared with USD 90.67 pb the day before, Kuwait Pe-

troleum Corporation (KPC) said Wednesday. Brent future lost USD 4.21 to USD 78.96 pb and West Texas Intermediate dropped USD 4.70 to USD 76.05 pb.

Oil sales resumes

Iran to reopen Hormuz under draft US accord

DUBAI, June 17, (AP): Iran will immediately take steps to reopen the Strait of Hormuz once a tentative deal with the U.S. to end the war is signed and will be allowed to sell its oil without restrictions, according to leaked copies of an interim agreement that officials say broadly matches the document.

The accord, due to be signed in Switzerland on Friday, also envisions Iran receiving at least \$300 billion to rebuild after the war and says the U.S. would work to end all American and United Nations sanctions imposed on Tehran - if a final agreement addressing Iran's nuclear program is reached.

The U.S. and Israel went to war on Feb. 28 in part to prevent Iran from ever getting a nuclear weapon - although U.S. President Donald Trump's goals in the conflict have repeatedly shifted. The interim deal stops the war before that aim is secured - instead opening a two-month period for nuclear negotiations - and appears to offer Iran several benefits up front while extracting little in return.

The U.S. agreement to immediately allow Iran to sell its oil freely and the offer to eventually lift all sanctions, for instance, represent major concessions that outstrip the terms of Iran's 2015 nuclear deal with world powers that Trump withdrew America from in his first term, declaring it the "worst deal ever."

The accord likely will draw intense criticism in Washington - and appears to be a major setback for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who is coming under intense criticism at home as the details emerge.

Much of the agreement would restore the status quo before the war, including ending hostilities, restarting negotiations between the U.S. and Iran over Tehran's nuclear program, and reopening the strait, which is a crucial passage for the world's oil and natural gas and whose closure created a historic energy crisis.

The deal includes an end to the fighting in Lebanon between Israel and the Iranian-backed militia Hezbollah. That is one of the most delicate parts of the agreement because Israel has maintained it will continue to defend itself and to occupy vast swaths of Lebanon. Iran has said Israel must withdraw under the deal, although the leaked versions make no mention of withdrawal.

A person who was briefed on the memorandum of understanding after it was signed and another who viewed a copy beforehand said it largely matched the text of what was published by the Saudi-owned broadcaster Al Arabiya, which reported details of the deal Tuesday. The two people spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the discussions.

Another two officials in the Mideast, who spoke on condition of anonymity for the same reason, also said the versions published by Al Arabiya and Bloomberg broadly matched the final agreement.

The White House and other American officials have not published the terms and did not immediately respond to questions. However, White House communications director Steven Cheung wrote online Wednesday after CNN published a leaked version of the deal that it "does not reflect the language of the actual" agreement, without elaborating.

Iran also has not published an official version of the deal. Iran's semiofficial Tasnim news agency, close to its paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, claimed Wednesday that Bloomberg's version had missing portions, without offering a full accounting.

Trump has cited various goals for the war, including at times vowing it would end Iran's nuclear and missile programs and its support for Hezbollah and other proxy groups in the region. He also suggested it could lead to toppling the

Iranian government.

The interim deal falls short of all of these goals, but Trump hailed it Wednesday.

"Nobody knows what it is but it's very strong," Trump said in France, where he is attending a Group of Seven summit.

But he also opened the door to abandoning it: "It's a memorandum of understanding and if I don't like it, we'll go back to shooting at them, dropping bombs."

Some concessions to Iran - including the full lifting of sanctions and the release of frozen assets - would happen gradually and be linked to progress in the nuclear talks, according to officials from Pakistan, a key mediator. They outlined some of the deal's major points on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the issue.

But in the meantime, the U.S. will issue waivers to sanctions that allow Iran to sell oil freely. Iran's main buyer of oil, China, is believed to have bought at below-market prices because of its willingness to ignore the sanctions.

Granting oil waivers at the start of the 60-day talks strips the U.S. of a major point of leverage. Only at the conclusion of the overall deal in 2015 were sanctions on Iran's oil lifted.

The interim deal also opens the door to ending all sanctions Iran faces from the U.S. and at the U.N. - though it says the schedule for that will be worked out later. Still, that is far beyond the 2015 deal, which only lifted some sanctions in exchange for Iran drastically reducing its enrichment and stockpile of uranium.

The accord would also provide Iran with at least \$300 billion to rebuild after an intense U.S. and Israeli bombing campaign - an extraordinary figure and another major benefit for Iran. That also appears dependent on the progress of further negotiations.

U.S. Vice President JD Vance has said Gulf Arab nations would invest that amount. Trump reiterated Wednesday that the U.S. would not contribute and said it was up to other countries if they wanted to invest.

The deal provides a major win for the global economy - the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow mouth of the Persian Gulf through which a fifth of all oil and natural gas traded once passed before the war began. Since then, Iranian attacks on shipping and the threat to vessels effectively shut the strait.

The strait's closure drove up energy prices around the world and made many basics, including food, more expensive. Iran let out some vessels that paid tolls, something never done before in the strait, which has long been considered an international waterway. The U.S. later provided military support to get other tankers out, but traffic was nowhere near levels before the war.

The deal also says the U.S. will lift a blockade imposed on Iranian ports and that the strait will return to its prewar traffic levels in 30 days, while acknowledging Iranian mines may need to be destroyed.

The interim deal sets a 60-day window, which can be extended, to negotiate over limiting Iran's nuclear program, which has been discussed at multiple rounds of talks during Trump's second administration without success. The U.S. promises not to make threats of military action under the current deal after two rounds of talks were interrupted by attacks.

Iran maintains its nuclear program is peaceful, though it has enough highly enriched uranium to build multiple atomic bombs, should it choose to do so, according to the International Atomic Energy Agency.

In the interim deal, Iran reiterates that it will never build a nuclear weapon - a promise it also made in the 2015 nuclear accord.

Business

The Bank renews strategic partnership with CODED Academy

KFH keeps driving creativity and innovation in Kuwait

KUWAIT CITY, June 17: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) has renewed its support for the sixth edition of the "Kuwait Codes" initiative as part of its strategic partnership with the CODED Academy, a specialist entity in artificial intelligence and programming training.

At a press conference for the renewed strategic partnership, KFH Executive Manager Corporate Relations and CSR, Faisal Alsurayye emphasized that collaborating with CODED Academy reflects the bank's commitment to pioneering educational and technical initiatives. He noted these efforts prepare national talents, enable youth to acquire essential digital labor market skills, establish a culture of creativity, and enhance Kuwait's innovation environment.

Alsurayye expressed pride in KFH's support for the sixth edition of "Kuwait Codes" initiative, celebrating the partnership's multi-year success. "This collaboration has significantly enhanced the skills of young Kuwaitis, nurturing future programmers and leaders in digital transformation while fostering a societal culture of innovation."

He noted that KFH is expanding its collaboration with CODED Academy by supporting new, high-quality programs and initiatives



Faisal Alsurayye and Ahmad Marafi.

keeping pace with rapid advancements in programming, technology, and artificial intelligence, while opening wider horizons for young people to innovate and create.

Alsurayye explained that the strategic partnership with CODED, since 2018, empowers youth through innovative technology and programming initiatives. "This collaboration launched several projects, notably the Coded Juniors program, offering over 50 educa-

tional courses that benefited more than 1,700 children. The initiative introduces young learners to programming fundamentals and technological innovation, providing practical experience with current technologies to foster a passion for science and develop creative skills," he added.

The partnership includes organizing specialized cybersecurity workshops for Baiti account holders to raise children's awareness of data

protection and cybersecurity, while also supporting Kuwait Hackathon, one of the largest programming and cybersecurity events in the country.

Alsurayye emphasized KFH's commitment to building effective partnerships with leading educational and training institutions, driven by social responsibility and supporting Kuwait's development. He noted that investing in education is a cornerstone of sustainable development, essential for building a knowledge-based economy benefiting society and future generations.

Meanwhile, CODED Academy CEO, Ahmad Marafi praised the strategic partnership with KFH as a successful integration model between banking and education. He noted this collaboration supports innovation and digital transformation while enhancing youth investment, particularly in cybersecurity and technology.

It serves to note that "Kuwait Codes 2026" initiative offers free training to 1,000 high school and ninth grade students, using an advanced curriculum centered on artificial intelligence.

This year, the program provides three fully updated tracks: web development, cybersecurity, and Python programming with AI applications.

Al-Mutairi urges vigilance against phishing scams

Warba Bank warns against cyber-fraud schemes under 'Let's Be Aware' campaign

KUWAIT CITY, June 17: Warba Bank has issued a public warning regarding increasingly sophisticated cyber and financial fraud schemes targeting individuals and banking customers. This initiative reflects the bank's ongoing commitment to fostering community awareness, financial literacy, and inclusion, in support of the Central Bank of Kuwait's (CBK) nationwide "Let's Be Aware" (Diraya) campaign, organized in collaboration with the Kuwait Banking Association (KBA).

Continuous Awareness Efforts:

Ayman Salem Al-Mutairi, Director of Public Relations and Corporate Communications at Warba Bank, stated that the bank is intensifying its awareness efforts. Warba Bank regularly publishes awareness materials, instructional content, and security tips across its digital platforms, official social media channels, and via SMS, while also sharing cybersecurity advisories issued by the Central Bank of Kuwait.

Al-Mutairi emphasized that these proactive measures aim to mitigate fraud risks and educate customers on safeguarding their accounts against unauthorized access, phishing schemes, and fraudulent websites that mimic official institutions.

Vigilance Against Phishing and Evolving Tactics:

"Fraudsters are constantly evolving their methods to manipulate victims and exploit sensitive data to steal funds," Al-Mutairi warned. "Within the 'Let's Be Aware' framework, we are



Ayman Al-Mutairi

shedding light on the critical risks of phishing emails, which are specifically designed to obtain personal and financial credentials."

He noted that these fraudulent emails often utilize counterfeit logos of well-known banks, telecom firms, and official entities, making it challenging for users to distinguish between legitimate and malicious correspondence. Al-Mutairi urged the public not to engage with phone calls, notifications, or emails promising fake financial prizes or lucrative investment opportunities.

Essential Email and Data Security Guidelines:

To enhance digital security, Al-Mutairi outlined key protective practices for customers:

■ **Sender Verification:** Carefully check the source of any incoming email and look for spelling mistakes or grammatical errors, which frequently expose fraudulent communications.

■ **Mobile Device Security:** Refrain from saving confidential information—such as debit/credit card numbers or PINs—on mobile phones.

■ **Credential Confidentiality:** Never write down PINs on physical cards or share them with any party, a rule that strictly applies to One-Time Passwords (OTPs).

■ **Logging Out Securely:** Ensure immediate and proper logouts from digital banking applications and online portals after completing any transaction.

Strict Institutional Policy:

Al-Mutairi reaffirmed Warba Bank's strict operational policy: "Warba Bank will never request personal, financial, or account information via email, text message, or phone calls. Any communication demanding such disclosures should be treated as a potential fraudulent attempt to compromise account security."

About Warba Bank:

Warba Bank is a leading Islamic bank in Kuwait with a strong focus on Sharia-compliant digital banking. With one of the largest shareholder bases in the country, the bank continues to deliver innovative financial products and services, reinforcing its position as a digital-focused institution.

Offering continuous access to US equities

Markaz launches 24-hour US market access

KUWAIT CITY, June 17: Kuwait Financial Centre "Markaz" announced the introduction of 24-hour U.S. market access through its digital investment platform, iMarkaz Invest, enabling clients to monitor and trade eligible U.S. equities and ETFs beyond traditional market hours.

The new capability provides investors with greater flexibility to engage with U.S. markets as developments unfold, such as economic releases, geopolitical events, and other market-moving news. It also allows clients in Kuwait and the wider GCC to access one of the world's most active equity markets in a way that better aligns with regional time zones and investor schedules.

The enhancement represents a significant step in the continued development of iMarkaz Invest and positions the platform among a select group of investment platforms in the region, to offer continuous access to U.S. markets. It also reinforces Markaz's commitment to advancing its digital investment ecosystem and providing clients with seamless, efficient, and technology-enabled access to regional and international investment opportunities.

The introduction of 24-hour U.S. market access builds on the launch of iMarkaz Invest as a next-generation digital trading platform. Through the platform, clients can access selected



Salman Olayan

regional and international markets, benefit from real-time market visibility, manage their portfolios digitally, and engage with investment opportunities through a secure and regulated environment. This latest enhancement reflects Markaz's broader strategy to strengthen its digital wealth management capabilities while maintaining the institutional standards, investment discipline, and client-focused approach that have defined the company for more than five decades.

Commenting on the enhancement, Mr. Salman H. Olayan, Senior Vice President - Strategy, Digitization & Analytics, at Markaz, said: "At Markaz, we are continuously investing in digital capabilities that make global investing more accessible, efficient, and responsive to our clients' evolving needs. Through iMarkaz Invest, investors can access and trade across multiple markets, including Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Oman, and the United States, through a single integrated platform that combines convenience with institutional-grade standards. The introduction of 24-hour access to eligible U.S. equities and ETFs further strengthens this offering by enabling investors to react to market developments as they happen, regardless of time zone differences. Coupled with fast and efficient trade execution, market visibility, and seamless digital access, iMarkaz Invest empowers clients to manage their investments with greater flexibility, confidence, and control while staying connected to opportunities across regional and international markets."

This enhancement also reinforces Markaz's position as a leading investment institution in Kuwait and the GCC since 1974, with a continued focus on developing future-ready investment platforms that help clients navigate increasingly dynamic and interconnected global markets.

Adding Vienna, Sarajevo, Trabzon, Salalah

Kuwait Airways expands Summer 2026 network

KUWAIT CITY, June 17, (KUNA): Kuwait Airways launched on Wednesday flights to four destinations as part of its Summer 2026 schedule, including Vienna, Sarajevo, Trabzon, and Salalah.

In remarks to KUNA, Acting Chief Executive Officer Abdulwahab Al-Shatti said that the four destinations are among the key stations added to the airline's network and enjoy strong demand from travelers.

He noted that the move reflects the company's commitment to meeting customer expectations and offering a diverse range of destinations that cater to different travel preferences and needs.

Al-Shatti added that Kuwait Airways continues to implement plans to ex-

pand its international route network and provide broader travel options during the summer season.

The CEO said the summer destinations were selected following careful assessment of market requirements and travel trends, describing them as a valuable addition to Kuwait Airways' route network for the Summer 2026 season.

He affirmed that the national carrier remains committed to enhancing its operational services and improving the travel experience, while strengthening its position as Kuwait's national airline linking the country with major destinations around the world.

When applying through the NBK Mobile Banking App by June 25

NBK launches rewarding cashback offers & exclusive benefits when new credit card customers make their first transaction

KUWAIT CITY, June 17: As part of its firm commitment to providing a seamless and comprehensive digital banking experience, and its continuous dedication to rewarding its customers and delivering added value that meets their aspirations, National Bank of Kuwait announced the launch of a campaign targeting new credit card customers for KWT Visa Infinite cardholders and NBK Kuwait Airways Oasis Club Credit Card holders, enabling them to benefit from rewarding cashback offers and exclusive advantages when obtaining the card through NBK Mobile Banking App and using it.

The campaign offers new customers the chance to receive KD 50 cashback when they spend KD 250, or KD 100 cashback when they spend KD 500, upon making the first transition when issuing a new credit card through the program.

Additionally, this campaign includes waiving issuance



Abdullah Al Saleh

■ **Al Saleh:** We are committed to enhancing our customers' digital experience and providing added value that meets their expectations



Your Card Comes With Additional Cashback up to KD 100

fees for eligible credit cards, in addition to giving customers access to the Bank's ongoing rewards programs, Kuwait's highest cashback, and exclusive offers from Visa, adding more value to their card experience.

This campaign runs until June 25th, during which the cashback amount will be automatically credited to customers' accounts, and they will also be exempt from issuance fees

within a maximum of 60 business days of meeting the eligibility requirements.

NBK emphasized that obtaining credit cards is easy and straightforward through the NBK Mobile Banking App, encouraging customers to utilize digital channels and providing them with a convenient and secure banking experience without the need to visit branches.

On this occasion, Abdullah Al

Saleh Specialist - Cards Services commented: "At NBK, we are committed to enhancing our customers' digital banking experience by offering innovative solutions that combine convenience and added value, keeping pace with their evolving aspirations and providing them with a more advanced and flexible banking experience. This campaign reflects our ongoing commitment to rewarding our customers and delivering added

value that meets their expectations".

"This initiative", Al Saleh added, "reflects our commitment to providing real incentives, including cashback, waivers of issuance fees, and exclusive benefits, ensuring a seamless user experience that adds real value for every customer. We are also committed to enabling customers to access our services quickly and easily through the NBK Mobile Bank-

ing App, which allows them to access services and complete their transactions efficiently and securely".

Al Saleh also emphasized that NBK continues to invest in developing its digital channels and enhancing innovation in its services, aiming to encourage customers to adopt digital banking solutions more widely and provide a flexible and reliable banking experience, supported by the best offers and rewards that meet their diverse needs and lifestyles.

NBK, one of the leading financial institutions in the region, is committed to offering a comprehensive range of credit cards with diverse benefits to suit various customer needs, including rewards programs, cashback options, and exclusive offers both locally and internationally.

The Bank continues to develop its digital services and solutions to ensure an innovative and secure banking experience that reflects its leadership in the banking sector.



Prime Minister Mark Carney waits for the arrival of dignitaries during a G7 working session at the G7 summit in Evian-les-Bains, France, on Wednesday, June 17, 2026. (AP)

Carney says 'no snub'

Canada-US trade pact faces uncertain future

EVIAN-LES-BAINS, June 17, (AP): Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney will leave the G7 summit on Wednesday without a formal meeting with U.S. President Donald Trump as the free-trade agreement between their countries faces an uncertain future.

Canadian leaders typically get a bilateral meeting with American presidents at summits of the world's leading industrialized democracies, but Carney dismissed any notion of a snub.

"I wouldn't take a big message from that," Carney said. "I had seven or eight discussions with President Trump over the course of last 36 hours. I'll have more today, a wide range of subjects from the economy, relations, his birthday, artificial intelligence, Ukraine, obviously Iran."

Carney's speech at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, in January helped make him an international political star, when he declared the global rules-based order over and condemned coercion by great powers on smaller countries. The prime minister received widespread praise and attention for his remarks and upstaged Trump at the gathering.

Talks on the latest iteration of the North American free-trade pact have reached a crucial moment. The agreement, which has intertwined the economies of Canada, the United States and Mexico since the early 1990s, is up for renewal on July 1. Trump said last week he may not renew the deal.

Preserving the accord is critical for Canada, which sends about 75% of its exports to the U.S.

Dominic LeBlanc, Canada's minister responsible for trade with the U.S., and Janice Charette, Canada's chief negotiator, met with U.S. Trade Ambassador Jamieson Greer at the summit. LeBlanc said they made progress.

LeBlanc has previously said he believes the U.S. might want to have the trade agreement sub-

ject to annual reviews, and that the Trump administration might seek to cause uncertainty about its permanence.

French President Emmanuel Macron, the summit host, is the only G7 leader to get a bilateral meeting thus far. Trump also met one on one with the leaders of non-G7 countries of Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt and India.

Carney noted the host country always meets with the American president.

Carney used humor to engage with Trump in at least one of their interactions about trade. In a lighter moment, a microphone caught Carney and Trump joking about stealing Macron's watch.

Carney then moved to a serious exchange about allowing Chinese electric vehicles into Canada. A microphone recorded Carney telling Trump about how less than 3% of Canada's market, 49,000 cars, will be allowed to enter from China after he made a deal with Beijing.

"It's a cap, we capped, a hard line," Carney said. "I thought you'd actually like that."

"That's good, I like it," Trump responded.

Breaking with the United States, Canada agreed to cut its 100% tariff on Chinese electric cars earlier this year in return for lower tariffs on Canadian farm products. Carney said he spoke to Trump about it twice.

"I'm not surprised that the president of the United States doesn't follow every detail of every agreement that Canada has, and he likes the structure. Actually, we had a follow-up conversation about it as well," Carney said.

Peter Boehm, a member of the Canadian Senate who led a number of G7 summits for Canada, said Carney would have had a lot of time for conversations with Trump.

"I wouldn't see it as a snub," he said. "It's amazing how much time leaders can actually have to have conversations."

While 4.2% inflation traps the Fed

European Central Bank strikes with historic hike

By National Bank of Kuwait

THE global financial landscape is defined by a severe stagflationary impulse triggered by war with Iran and the closure of the critical Strait of Hormuz, though a sudden wave of diplomatic optimism has temporarily altered short term asset trajectories. The macro data paints a stark picture of broadening price pressures: U.S. consumer inflation accelerated to a three-year high of 4.2% in May, fuelled by a staggering 23.5% year-on-year jump in energy costs, while producer prices surged 6.5% to flag intensive pipeline costs. This aggressive inflation is clashing directly with a softening U.S. labor market, where continuing jobless claims have risen to 1.795 million and long-term unemployment has climbed to its highest level since late 2021. This domestic stagflation has trapped the Federal Reserve, which is expected to keep rates steady next week but face market pressure for a year end hike. A similar dilemma is playing out across Europe, where the UK economy officially contracted by 0.1% in April, and the European Central Bank has uncharacteristically led the global monetary response by executing its first rate hike in nearly three years to defend its credibility against a 3.0% inflation forecast, even as it trims Eurozone growth outlooks to 0.8%. In the currency and commodity markets, this fundamental economic pain is being temporarily masked by a dramatic relief rally following President Donald Trump's announcement that a 14 point peace treaty with Iran could be signed in Europe as soon as this weekend. This diplomatic breakthrough has sparked a sharp unwinding of safe haven assets, dragging the U.S. dollar index down to around 99.8 and triggering a massive 4% plunge in Brent crude oil to below \$86.5 per barrel on expectations that Iranian sanctions will be lifted and the Strait of Hormuz reopened within 30 days. This weaker greenback has provided a temporary lift to the euro, pushing it just below \$1.16 for a 0.5% weekly gain as investors price in an additional ECB rate hike by September. Similarly, the British pound has stabilized just above \$1.34 for its best weekly performance in a month, though its upside remains heavily restricted by the UK's negative GDP print and intense political uncertainty surrounding Prime Minister Keir Starmer ahead of the June 18 Mackerfield election. Meanwhile, gold has consolidated slightly below \$4,200 an ounce, giving up minor safe-haven premium on the peace talks but remaining strongly supported by structural global inflation. Ultimately, while a finalized peace treaty will continue to deflate oil and the dollar in the short term, corporate earnings face a prolonged threat.

United States

Soaring Gas Price Drives May Inflation to 4.2%, Keeping Fed on High Alert

US inflation accelerated again in May, with the annual CPI rate rising to 4.2%, its highest level since April 2023, from 3.8% in April. The move was largely driven by a sharp energy shock linked to the escalation with Iran, as energy costs jumped 23.5% year-on-year, with gasoline prices surging 40.5% and fuel oil up 58.9%. Food inflation also picked up to 3.1%, while shelter edged higher to 3.4%, showing that price pressures were not limited to energy alone.

Currencies	Previous Week Levels				This Week's Expected Range		3-Month Forward
	Open	Low	High	Close	Minimum	Maximum	
EUR	1.1518	1.1499	1.1589	1.1568	1.1400	1.1600	1.1612
GBP	1.3329	1.3302	1.3433	1.3406	1.3215	1.3480	1.3407
JPY	160.14	159.64	160.69	160.21	159.10	161.50	159.08
CHF	0.7953	0.7938	0.8012	0.7969	0.7870	0.8100	0.7895

On a monthly basis, CPI rose 0.5%, slightly below April's 0.6% increase but still strong enough to keep inflation concerns alive. Core inflation also moved higher on an annual basis to 2.9%, marking its highest level since September 2025, although the monthly core reading slowed to 0.2%, below forecasts of 0.3%. Overall, the report reinforced the view that inflation remains vulnerable to geopolitical shocks, keeping the Fed's policy path tilted toward caution despite some softer details in the core figures.

Wholesale Prices Jump at Fastest Pace Since 2022, Pressuring Fed to Eye Year-End Rate Hikes

U.S. wholesale prices rose 6.5% in May compared to the previous year, marking the fastest annual growth since late 2022. This surge was primarily driven by the outbreak of the Iran war, which caused wholesale gasoline prices to skyrocket by over 23% in a single month. Because these producer prices reflect costs before they reach the public, they serve as an early warning that consumer inflation which already hit a three-year high of 4.2% in May due to soaring gas prices and airfares could continue to climb. This financial strain is fueling widespread public frustration just five months before the midterm elections, which will decide control of Congress. Although gasoline prices have dipped slightly in recent days, the average cost of a gallon of regular gas has remained stubbornly above \$4 since March, and prices are expected to face upward pressure now that the summer driving season has officially begun. Even when stripping out volatile food and energy costs, underlying "core" wholesale prices still rose 4.9% from last year, proving that inflationary pressures are widespread. With inflation running well ahead of the Federal Reserve's 2% target, the central bank is expected to keep its benchmark interest rate unchanged at its upcoming meeting. However, financial markets anticipate that the Fed may implement a rate hike by the end of the year in an effort to cool down the economy and rein in rising costs.

Jobless Claims Edge Higher to 229K Amid Low Layoffs and Geopolitical Headwinds

The number of Americans filing new claims for unemployment benefits rose marginally last week by 4,000 to a seasonally adjusted 229,000. While this figure was slightly higher than the 219,000 claims economists had predicted, the labor market continues to show resilience, supported by a steady 4.3% unemployment rate and low layoff numbers. Some of the slight uptick in claims is also typical for early June, as non-teaching school staff often apply for benefits during the summer holidays a seasonal shift that government data models sometimes struggle to fully smooth out. However, beneath the surface of low layoffs, actual hiring has slowed down significantly. A recent small business survey revealed that plans to create new jobs have plunged to

a six-year low, largely because employers are feeling hesitant due to policy uncertainties surrounding import tariffs and the U.S. led war with Iran. As a result, out of work Americans are facing a much tougher job hunt. The number of people receiving ongoing jobless benefits rose to 1.795 million, and long term unemployment those jobless for 27 weeks or more jumped to its highest level since late 2021, with the average time spent unemployed stretching to nearly three months.

The Greenback was last seen trading at 99.747.

United Kingdom

UK Economy Shrinks 0.1% as Iran War Energy Shock Hits Growth Ahead of Rate Decision

The UK economy contracted by 0.1% in April, reversing its strong first-quarter growth as the outbreak of the Iran war and the closure of the critical Strait of Hormuz shipping route drove up global energy prices. Chancellor Rachel Reeves blamed the economic downturn on the conflict, criticizing Donald Trump for unleashing it, while asserting that previous government choices have left the UK in a stronger position to handle these costs. The decline was largely driven by a 0.2% drop in the services sector partly caused by the cancellation of Middle Eastern sporting events affecting UK businesses which outweighed a minor boost in construction repair work. With higher oil prices forcing economists to downgrade growth forecasts and political uncertainty looming over a potential Labour leadership challenge, the Bank of England now faces the difficult task of balancing rising inflation against a slowing economy as it decides whether to raise interest rates next week.

The GBP/USD currency pair last seen trading at 1.3406.

Europe

ECB Press Conference

The European Central Bank unanimously raised interest rates for the first time in nearly three years, becoming the first major central bank to act against the inflation pressures triggered by the Iran war's energy shock. With euro zone inflation already above 3%, ECB President Christine Lagarde defended the hike as a necessary step to keep prices from overshooting their 2% target, pushing back against economists who labeled it a premature "insurance hike" or a policy mistake that could stifle an already weak economy. While the ECB revised its inflation projections upward and slightly trimmed growth forecasts, policymakers are expected to pause at their July meeting if energy prices stabilize, though they remain open to further rate hikes later this year if broader economic pressures intensify.

The EUR/USD currency pair last seen trading at 1.1568.

Kuwait

Kuwaiti Dinar
USD/KWD closed last week at 0.30725.

Alfouz relaunch features larger, more frequent prizes

Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait enhances Alfouz draw with expanded rewards

KUWAIT CITY, June 17: Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) has announced a significant enhancement to its flagship Alfouz draw account, introducing an expanded rewards structure that features increased prize values, monthly salary-style payouts, and the addition of a new semi-annual draw.

The updated structure is designed to further elevate the customer experience by offering more rewarding opportunities and chances to win, while reinforcing ABK's commitment to encouraging a culture of savings and long-term financial wellbeing.

The enhanced prize structure includes weekly, monthly, quarterly, semi-annual, and annual draws, with rewards distributed as monthly salary-style payouts. Customers can win between KD



Johair Marafi, General Manager - Retail Banking



Alfouz flyer

1,000 and KD 3,000 per month in the weekly, monthly and quarterly draws, depending on the prize tier.

In addition, the semi-annual and annual draws offer prizes of KD 5,000 per month for periods of 5 and 10 years, respectively.

Customers can participate in the draws by maintaining a minimum balance of KD 200 in their Alfouzdraw account.

Commenting on the enhancement, Johair Marafi, General Manager of Retail Banking at ABK, said, "The development of the Alfouz draw account underscores ABK's commitment to innovation in retail banking, offering customers meaningful and practical rewards that support their saving habits and long-term financial stability.

Through this evolution, we continue to strengthen our value proposition while delivering solutions that align with our customers' evolving expectations."

This update reflects ABK's continued focus on delivering customer-centric solutions that align with evolving financial needs.

By increasing both the prize pool and the frequency of draws, the Bank aims to maximise customers' chances of winning while strengthening long-term engagement.

This initiative forms part of ABK's broader strategy to deliver differentiated banking experiences, while maintaining its position as a trusted financial partner in Kuwait.

Consumer spending jumps 0.9%

US retail sales beat forecasts in May

NEW YORK, June 17, (AP): Shoppers stepped up their spending in May and surpassed expectations as temperatures warmed and gasoline prices cooled.

Retail sales rose 0.9%, up from a revised 0.4% gain in April, according to new Commerce Department data released Wednesday.

Sales got a boost from generous government tax refunds in both April and May, though economists say that cash cushion is starting to fade.

Excluding sales at gas stations, retail sales in May rose 0.7%.

Spending was broad-based. Business at clothing, accessory and furniture stores all posted increases. Online sales rose 1.5%.

There were a few weak spots. Electronics and appliance stores and department stores both registered slight declines.

The data released Wednesday offers only a snapshot of consumer spending and doesn't include activities like travel and hotel stays. The lone services category - restaurants - registered a 0.1% decline.

But the so-called control group - which excludes food services, autos, building materials and gas station sales and is used to calculate economic growth - rose 0.7%. That suggests solid spending, economists said.

Consumers are the engine of the

American economy, driving most of the nation's economic growth. And the latest retail sales report underscores that spending has remained resilient so far this year despite rising prices.

Solid increases in hiring have also buoyed spending, economists said.

"The stronger-than-forecast and broad-based gains in May retail sales show that consumers continued to spend strongly despite higher gasoline prices in the month," Nationwide Chief Economist Kathy Bostjancic writes.

"The large tax refunds and overall tax reductions for households this year and the recent strengthening in employment growth helped buffer the negative drag from higher gasoline prices."

Rising gas prices pushed inflation to its highest level in three years, U.S. data showed last week, with consumer prices rising 4.2% in May, compared with last year. On a monthly basis, prices rose 0.5% last month, after big gains of 0.6% in April and 0.9% in March.

There is a tentative deal to end the Iran war and reopen the Strait of Hormuz, but even after oil starts flowing again from the Middle East it could take awhile for the supply crunch to ease.

Gas prices fell about a penny overnight to \$4.02, down 11% from

a month ago, according to motor club AAA. The national average for a gallon of gasoline has not been below \$4 since March, according to AAA.

"While the deal is encouraging, our industry is still holding its breath," said Steve Lamar, the CEO of trade group American Apparel & Footwear Association. "Our question now is, will this agreement be strong enough for our global industry to begin recovering?"

Lamar noted that unplanned costs continue to squeeze profit margins, with companies facing higher expenses for ocean freight, air cargo and packaging. He said that even under the best-case scenario, it will take time to stabilize.

The spike in gas prices this year due to the Iran war may alter some behavior, peace deal or not.

Even as gas prices continue to retreat, analysts say some shoppers will stick to habits they picked up as prices soared, like filling up the car at big box stores where they can get discounts.

Visits to gas stations operated by big box chains like BJ's, Costco and Sam's Club, which offer discounts to members, began to accelerate in early March, aligning with a sharp rise in fuel prices, said R.J. Hottovy, the head of analytical research at Placer.ai, which tracks people's movements based on cellphone usage.

Huang: AI adoption is inevitable for society

SHERMAN, June 17, (AP): Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang - whose work helped enable artificial intelligence - stressed in an Associated Press interview Tuesday that society has no choice but to change in the advent of AI.

Huang has been optimistic about the technology's potential to rapidly change society, creating faster economic growth and more scientific breakthroughs. But as the head of a computer chip company now developing AI systems, Huang has felt obligated to respond to critics who warn of job losses and threats to humanity itself.

"We need to create new social norms," Huang said in an interview. "I would advocate that everybody use AI. Just go engage it."

Huang made his case as AI has emerged as a political flashpoint, with objections to plans to build more data centers and fears that the speed with which it's being adopted could spur the layoffs of workers who might not have a safety net. Such questions have threatened public support of the technology.

His close relationship with President Donald Trump has been a source of criticism among Democrats, even as he makes the case that the computing power created by AI is key to adding the factory jobs that have been promised for decades without much enduring success.

He said the ability of AI to build a website, analyze complex documents, guide advanced research or even plan a kitchen remodeling has helped to close the technological divide in America. People can now do advanced work on computers without having to know how to program or write software, he added.

Huang stressed that there is a need for government regulation and safety standards for AI, emphasizing that national security also needed to be a priority for the technology that has been powering stock market gains and much of the U.S. economy in recent years.

The head of the world's most valuable company said society will adapt to AI just as it did to automobiles. He said cars were once portrayed as killing children, but the world changed its norms by having sidewalks and crosswalks and stopping kids from playing in the streets.

"When I was growing up, I used to play in the streets," Huang said. "When cars came along, you obviously can't play in the streets now."

With a market capitalization of roughly \$5 trillion, Nvidia has soared in valuation in recent years to become the world's most valuable company. AI modeling companies OpenAI and Anthropic are potentially set to also clear the \$1 trillion mark once their stocks are publicly traded.

That explosive surge in wealth concentrated in AI companies has prompted renewed worries about economic inequality. Trump has tried to defuse those concerns, recently musing about the prospect that the U.S. government could own some shares in AI firms, so any windfalls would be more broadly shared with the public. That idea has also been advanced by Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., and even OpenAI CEO Sam Altman.

Huang expressed skepticism about the idea, saying he expects the country will already benefit broadly from AI advancements.

"I'm not exactly sure what they're trying to achieve," he said regarding government ownership. "I haven't had a dialogue with them about that. But just remember that these are American companies. Their success benefits the stock price, of which many Americans are investors in. It generates taxes, which helps many Americans. It creates a lot of jobs."

He noted that AI companies could also lead to higher profits for energy, construction and hardware technology firms.

"Americans have a stake in American companies already, naturally, in a whole lot of different ways," Huang said.

The Trump administration has recently reversed course from using a light touch on regulating AI to taking a heavier hand.

It placed export controls on the AI company Anthropic's latest models, lead-

ing the company on Friday to shutter all public access to those models over security concerns. Trump, a Republican, also signed an order to have new AI models voluntarily vetted by the government.

Huang said the government was properly focused on national security issues, but it was important to provide clear guidance when taking restrictive actions, as doing so could lead to unintended consequences.

"National security should always be the top concern of all technologies," Huang said. "But having said that, you know, you have to be very specific about the risk that you're concerned about, before setting up policies for export controls."

During the Biden administration, Nvidia pushed back against export controls that were designed to restrict its ability to sell chips to China, rejecting the administration's premise that a ban would guarantee an American edge on AI. Huang had warned that the export controls might limit America's ability to develop the world's AI ecosystem, as China would respond with its own advanced chips.

Huang stressed that while the U.S. has many strengths on AI, it is vulnerable because of a lacking energy infrastructure. The data centers performing the computations used in AI are creating a huge demand for electricity, which could be a strain on the power grid.

Some data centers will be constructed with their own electricity sources, but Huang said the U.S. is starting from a disadvantage on energy. And without more energy, it can be harder to play to American strengths in its AI infrastructure, models and computer chip development.

"The United States is woefully behind in energy production," Huang said. "We just suffocated energy production for too long."

Huang complimented Trump on his approach to seeking to increase energy production. The president has aggressively supported the use of oil, coal and natural gas, but he has scorned the use of solar and wind power.

The Nvidia CEO was not commenting on Trump's opposition to climate-friendly energy sources, but the gap he identified goes to some of the fears that U.S. households have about AI increasing their utility bills.

Huang was speaking Tuesday in Sherman, Texas, at an expansion of the Coherent factory to develop a laser for transmitting data among chips, which could cut power use by AI systems by up to 50%.

Trump, not known for technological expertise, quickly developed a friendship with Huang. The president has called him "smart," a "friend" and "amazing," insisting that Huang accompany him on foreign trips. Most recently, Trump had Air Force One pick up the leather-jacketed CEO in Alaska while en route to his state visit to China.

Their relationship started last year with an invitation to dinner at Mar-a-Lago, Trump's home and private club in Florida. Huang was in the area to receive the Edison Achievement Award for his AI work.

"He says drop by for dinner, and so I did," Huang said. He went with his wife, Lori.

"He was incredibly engaging, incredibly charismatic, conversational, asked a lot of questions," Huang recalled. "From the moment that I met him, the only thing that he's ever talked to me about is creating more jobs, reindustrializing the United States, protecting national security, winning." He added that Trump "calls me in the middle of the night and wants to talk about one of these topics."

But his proximity to Trump has also led to criticism from Democratic lawmakers. Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., objected to Huang not testifying before a Senate committee even as "he has time to attend a \$1 million-a-head dinner at Mar-a-Lago."

Huang said he wants the U.S. president and other officials - regardless of party - to succeed. "We could differ with politics, but we should want him to succeed," he said. "Because when President Trump succeeds, our country succeeds."

Investors watch Warsh for clues on future rates

Fed holds rates as Warsh debuts as Chair

WASHINGTON, June 17, (AP): The Federal Reserve will enter the Kevin Warsh era Wednesday, as President Trump's pick to lead the central bank oversees his first policy meeting and holds his first news conference.

Yet Warsh isn't expected to immediately usher in significant policy changes. The Fed is likely to keep its key rate unchanged Wednesday at about 3.6% for the fourth straight meeting, economists say. Fed policymakers could change their post-meeting statement so that it no longer signals the central bank's next move will be to reduce interest rates. Such a change would suggest it could keep rates unchanged for an extended period - or even raise them if inflation stays elevated.

Wednesday's highlight is likely to be the press conference Warsh will hold in the afternoon, which Wall Street investors, economists, and quite likely the White House will closely watch to see how Warsh conducts himself. Warsh was previously an investment banker, a member of the Fed's board of governors from 2006-2011, and a visiting fellow at the conservative Hoover Institution.

Fed-watchers will look for clues to the answers to some key questions: What, if anything, will he signal about where interest rates will head next? How does he think the Fed should address the elevated inflation stemming from the Iran war and its boost to gas prices? Will he change the Fed's communication practices, and how?

It's possible, for example, that Warsh could cut the number of press conferences each year from eight - one after each meeting - to four, or one after every other meeting, which was the approach taken by former chair Ben Bernanke when he inaugurated the post-meeting press conference. Warsh has said he would like

the Fed to lower its public profile and reduce its commentary on the economy, which he thinks can lock in Fed officials to supporting specific policies for too long, simply because they've expressed their support publicly.

Yet reduced communication - whether through fewer press conferences or other means - risks alienating the public and financial markets, which have grown used to clear guidance on where the Fed is headed.

Warsh also faces a sharply different economic environment than when he appeared to campaign for the job of Fed chair last year. Back then, he was outspoken in favor of lower interest rates, as Trump has demanded. He pointed to the development of AI as a technology that could vastly expand the economy's ability to produce goods and services cheaply, which would over time bring down inflation.

Even then, many economists were skeptical of his claim. At least in the short run, analysts note that soaring investment in semiconductors and computing equipment is contributing to higher inflation.

Indeed, since the Iran war began Feb. 28, inflation has accelerated to a three-year high of 4.2%, lifted mostly by costlier gas stemming from the Iran war. The Fed typically fights higher inflation by raising its key interest rate to cool spending and growth.

five years.

At the same time, hiring has picked up in recent months, removing a key rationale for cutting rates. In January, the Fed forecast that it would reduce rates twice this year, as part of its quarterly economic projections. A big reason for those potential cuts is that employers were shedding jobs and policymakers worried that the unemployment rate would rise. The central bank typically cuts its key rate to spur economic growth and hiring.

But earlier this month a government report showed that hiring jumped in May, when employers added 172,000 jobs, the third straight month of solid job gains.

Since returning to the White House last year, Trump has repeatedly demanded that the Fed cut its key rate. Yet in recent weeks as inflation has picked up, he has said he wants "Kevin" to be independent and make his own decisions. But he also said earlier this month that the Fed shouldn't raise rates, despite higher inflation.

Trump repeatedly attacked Warsh's predecessor, Jerome Powell, for not cutting rates deeply enough. In January, the Department of Justice even launched an unprecedented investigation into Powell over brief testimony he gave last July about a building renovation. A federal judge threw out the DOJ's subpoenas in the case and the government dropped the investigation.

The move largely backfired, as Powell decided to stay on the Fed's board of governors even after his term as chair ended May 15. He can serve a separate term as governor until January 2028. By staying on, he has denied the Trump administration an opportunity to fill an additional seat on the seven-member board. Powell is expected to vote on the Fed's rate decision Wednesday.

Toy Story 5 defies sequel fatigue



This image released by Disney shows characters Woody, voiced by Tom Hanks, left, and Buzz Lightyear, voiced by Tim Allen, in Disney and Pixar's "Toy Story 5." (AP)

Pixar's beloved franchise finds new relevance in digital era

The "Toy Story" movies, like "Star Wars" and those games Michael Jordan played with the Washington Wizards, pose a problem of canon.

The first three movies are a near-perfect trilogy: a series that spanned a childhood: from bedroom playtime to college, from enchantment to loss. The scope didn't seem epic. The movies rarely strayed much further than the pizza joint down the road or Al's Toy Barn. Yet those first three films, so attuned to the pangs of both childhood and parenthood, seemed to stretch to infinity and beyond.

But, of course, narrative neatness is not an abiding principle in modern-day Hollywood franchise guardianship. Nine years after "Toy Story 3" - an ending as flawless as Jordan's almost-goodbye jumper in 1998 - came "Toy Story 4." It made a billion dollars, easy, and blew up the artful arc of "Toy Story." The less said about "Lightyear" - for sure the Washington Wizards chapter of "Toy Story" - the better.

Yet as much as my bitter heart wanted to reject "Toy Story 4," I had to grant that it was pretty good. There is only so much moral grandstanding I can do in the face of Tony Hale as a fork and Key and Peele as plushies.

And "Toy Story 4" also had a decent point. If the original trilogy suggested the story ends when the kid reaches adulthood, the fourth movie is about Woody, the empty nester. Tom Hanks' cowboy and Annie Potts' Bo Peep find out life goes on after Andy. They might as well have moved to Florida.

This is my belabored way of saying "Toy Story 5" is, also, a crime against humanity and, also, pretty good. It may fall shy of the first three and probably ranks as the fifth best of these movies. But "Toy Story" has a high bar and the quality and thoughtfulness that has long distinguished Pixar is very much present here in the film directed and co-written by Andrew Stanton, a Pixar stalwart who goes all the way back to 1995's "Toy Story."



This image released by Pixar shows the character Jessie, voiced by Joan Cusack, in a scene from "Toy Story 5." (AP)

There are some basic things going for the latest "Toy Story" movie. This one moves Joan Cusack's Jessie, the cowgirl, closer to the center, and she's always been a hoot. The cute-as-a-button Bonnie (voiced by Scarlett Spears) is an upgrade over Andy. (Sorry, Andy.)

But most of all - as the movie's "toys vs. tech" advertising has made abundantly clear - "Toy Story 5" is predicated on an extremely relatable conflict for kids and parents, alike.

In "Toy Story 5," tablets arrive just as ominously as weapons did

in "2001: A Space Odyssey." Bonnie's parents, fearing their child is being left out, cave in and get her a Lilypad ("Lily," voiced by Greta Lee). When Bonnie brings Lily to a sleepover, the toys, peering through a basement window are appalled to find them "just sitting there." Alarms are sounded.

"The age of toys is over!" shrieks a nearby forlorn toy. Later, the dinosaur Rex (Wallace Shawn) exclaims: "Extinction! Not again!"

In the world of "Toy Story," as in ours, the onset of "screen time"

is a legitimately cataclysmic event. It has, of course, been a central part of other recent animated movies. ("The Mitchells vs. the Machines" and "Ron's Gone Wrong" are among the many that come to mind.)

But taking up the topic means something more in a "Toy Story" movie - and not just because Pixar was the Bay area-based pioneer of digital animation. These films have done so much to capture childhood that they almost seem like part of all our own. And given just how profoundly screens have inserted them-

selves into the experience of growing up, the paradigm-shift storyline gives "Toy Story 5" something most sequels can't claim: a reason for being.

Lily is a threat not just to the toys, but to 8-year-old Bonnie, too. She soon stops playing with her toys and becomes addicted to the device. We experience this as a kind of tragedy not just because it leads Bonnie even further into loneliness but because she's doing it to fit in. Like a plague, none of the other kids play with toys, either.

That humans never catch the toys in motion has always been a reliable gag in the "Toy Story" movies. But there's an actually haunting scene this time. When the adventure ramps up, and a small band of toys take a short cut through a house, they go unnoticed because everyone inside has their heads buried in screens.

There's also a parent on a Zoom call in "Toy Story 5" and something like cyberbullying, in toddler form. The fallout of Bonnie's Lilypad experience sends Jessie and Bullseye to the farmhouse where Emily, Jessie's first child, once lived. There now is a horse-riding, creative 9-year-old named Blaze (Mykal-Michelle Harris).

It's not hard to see the answer to the toys' existential doom: a play-date. Getting Bonnie and Blaze together becomes a rescue mission for Jessie, her familiar pals (including a visiting Woody) and a small group of Blaze's own lost playthings. Those include a band of early-generation AA-battery devices like a potty trainer (Conan O'Brien), a camera (Shelby Rabara) and a GPS-enabled hippo (Craig Robinson).

The ensuing action - which includes a fleet of Buzz Lightyears (Tim Allen) in demo mode - is predictably delightful, even if it's not (snobby voice again) top-tier "Toy Story" stuff. But the most convincing thing about how all this gets settled are the few sections of crayon-styled drawings that animate moments of pure, childlike play. These scenes, the products of Bonnie or Blaze's imaginations, are like wonderful entreaties to kids (or beyond) to make your own fun.

The "Toy Story" movies are about growing up, and maybe that means realizing the original trilogy wasn't a hill to die on. After all, we all know that the real hill to die on is that the best Pixar movie is "Ratatouille."

"Toy Story 5," a Walt Disney Co. release in theaters Friday, is rated PG by the Motion Picture Association for some thematic elements and rude humor. Running time: 102 minutes. Three stars out of four. (AP)

Online creators emerging as Hollywood's new filmmaking talent

NEW YORK, June 17, (AP) - Some of the most promising young filmmakers in the movie business are arriving in Hollywood already experts at entertaining audiences and going viral.

The twin sensations of "Obsession" and "Backrooms" - both by 20-something YouTube-turned-filmmakers - has put a new spotlight on an increasingly well-trod path to the director's chair.

Hollywood executives are scouring platforms like YouTube, TikTok and Instagram to find the next Steven Spielberg. There, young aspiring filmmakers are not only working on their craft but building a relationship with audiences that can transfer to the box office.

"These filmmakers are in a dialogue with their audience from the word 'Go'. Their

subscribers have direct input in each iteration of these things," Mike De Luca, Warner Bros. Motion Picture Group co-chair, said at a conference last month. "By the time you get to the movie, they've had a billion test screenings."

"Obsession" and "Backrooms" aren't the first of their kind. Issa Rae and Bo Burnham are among those who began on YouTube. But more and more of today's indie filmmakers began online. Here are some of the digital creators who have already broken through, and some who may soon.

Known online as "Kane Pixels," the 20-year-old Parsons is the director of the A24 horror hit "Backrooms." The Petaluma, California, native began publishing videos online at the age of 9. His video series based on the creepypasta Backrooms

meme led to his feature film debut, starring Chiwetel Ejiofor and Renate Reinsve. It's made \$250 million worldwide at the box office. A sequel is already in development.

The 26-year-old Barker, who grew up in Mobile, Alabama, attended film school in Los Angeles for a year before he began making videos for a YouTube sketch series and eventually the horror short "The Chair" and a found-footage horror film made for \$800, "Milk & Serial." After Tea Shop Productions saw "The Chair," the company financed Barker's \$750,000 production of "Obsession." After a premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival, Focus Features acquired it for \$15 million. It's expected to soon pass \$300 million worldwide in ticket sales. Barker has already made his next film, "Anything But

Ghosts," for Blumhouse Productions, and A24 has enlisted him for a reboot of "The Texas Chainsaw Massacre."

The 36-year-old Markiplier, or Mark Fischbach, became popular on YouTube for his playthrough videos of indie video games. With more than 38 million subscribers, he created series and podcasts before making his directorial debut earlier this year with "Iron Lung." He also wrote and edited the sci-fi horror film based on a 2022 video game. Made for less than \$5 million and self-distributed, "Iron Lung" grossed more than \$50 million.

The 34-year-old Firstman, who grew up in New Jersey, first broke through with a series of short skits on Instagram Live posted during the pandemic. A comedian, writer and actor, Firstman carved out a

more traditional path to filmmaking. He notably co-starred in the 2025 HBO series "I Love LA" and was a consulting producer on the animated series "Big Mouth." But in May this year, Firstman made his directorial debut with "Club Kid" at the Cannes Film Festival. The film, starring Firstman as a nightclub promoter who discovers he has a son, was a breakout hit at the festival. After a bidding war, A24 acquired it for \$17 million.

Clark, a north Virginia native, has been posting horror shorts on YouTube for the last eight years. Now, he's turning the most popular of those, "Portrait of God," into a feature, with Jordan Peele and Sam Raimi producing. Clark has also been tapped by Lionsgate and Blumhouse to direct a new "The Blair Witch Project."

Fashion



Racegoer Alysén Miller arrives on the second day of the Royal Ascot horse race meeting in Ascot, England, Wednesday, June 17, 2026. (AP)



Racegoer Leonora Swee arrives on the second day of the Royal Ascot horse race meeting in Ascot, England, Wednesday, June 17, 2026. (AP)



Racegoer Maria Tutus poses for photographers on the first day of the Royal Ascot horse race meeting in Ascot, England, Tuesday, June 16, 2026. (AP)



Racegoer Tamara Holmgren arrives on the first day of the Royal Ascot horse race meeting in Ascot, England, Tuesday, June 16, 2026. (AP)



Racegoer Isabell Kristensen poses for photographers on the first day of the Royal Ascot horse race meeting in Ascot, England, Tuesday, June 16, 2026. (AP)



Racegoers pose for photographs on the first day of the Royal Ascot horse race meeting in Ascot, England, Tuesday, June 16, 2026. (AP)



Racegoer Flora Gibbs arrives on the second day of the Royal Ascot horse race meeting in Ascot, England, Wednesday, June 17, 2026. (AP)

Royal Ascot hats steal show in spectacle of style and tradition

ASCOT, Britain, June 17, (AP): Extravagant, elaborate and sometimes gravity-defying hats take center stage each summer at Royal Ascot, the five-day horse racing festival held at Ascot Racecourse in southern England, a venue founded by Queen Anne in 1711.

'Birth of Venus' & 'Primavera' split for better visitor flow

Uffizi unveils new layout for Botticelli's iconic paintings

MILAN, June 17, (AP): Sandro Botticelli's masterpieces "The Birth of Venus" and "Primavera" have been repositioned at the famed Uffizi Gallery in Florence, the latest effort to reshape how visitors experience two of the Italian Renaissance's most celebrated masterpieces.

Starting Tuesday, visitors to Italy's most popular museum will be able to view "The Birth of Venus" in one room and then turn around to see "Primavera" in an adjoining space on the opposite wall.

The update by Uffizi director Simone Verde, who took over in January 2024, marks a new phase in the ongoing renovation of the museum.

The Botticelli rooms "seek to present visitors with the Uffizi of the future, while keeping its feet



Left: This picture made available Tuesday, June 16, 2026 shows the renovated and refurbished Botticelli rooms, with Renaissance master Sandro Botticelli's paintings: from left, "The discovery of the body of Holofernes", "The return of Judith to Bethulia" and "The adoration of the Magi" displayed at Florence's Uffizi Galleries, Italy. Right: This picture made available Tuesday, June 16, 2026 shows a view of the renovated and refurbished Botticelli rooms, with Renaissance master Sandro Botticelli's paintings: "Spring", center, "Madonna of the Rose Garden", left and "Madonna in glory with Seraphim" displayed at Florence's Uffizi Galleries, Italy. (AP)

firmly on the ground and its roots deeply planted in the history of this extraordinary museum," Verde said.

Most recently, "The Birth of Venus" and "Primavera" were displayed on adjacent walls, allowing visitors to view both paintings

at once. In previous decades, they hung on opposite walls in the same room, contributing to crowding and a difficult viewing experience.

JR sends visitors into darkness

Paris's oldest bridge opens hidden cave art exhibit



Left: Visitors walk into the artwork "The Pont Neuf Cave" by French street artist JR on the Pont Neuf bridge in Paris, open to the public from June 15 to 28. Right: A woman takes a photo of the artwork "The Pont Neuf Cave" by French street artist JR on the Pont Neuf bridge, Paris open to the public from June 15 to 28. (AP)

PARIS, June 17, (AP): For weeks, a black mountain loomed over the Seine where Paris' oldest bridge should have been. On Monday evening, its doors finally opened.

Inside, Paris smells different. The air carries the scent of earth after rain - damp ancient stone, cellar walls, perhaps a trace of smoke.

Visitors step from the bright riverfront into a dark passage lined with glowing photographs of caves, as a low electronic pulse seems to breathe through the walls.

Beneath it all, the old cobblestones of the Pont Neuf rise and fall underfoot.

The Pont Neuf Cavern, a monumental installation by French street artist JR - also known as the French

Banksy - is free to enter around the clock through June 28.

Made largely from printed fabric and air, it transforms the 17th-century bridge into an artificial cavern rising 18 meters (59 feet) above the Seine.

"It feels like the city has disappeared," said Léa Martin, a 22-year-old art student from Lyon on Tuesday. "You know the river is right outside, but for a moment you're somewhere ancient."

The smell is central to the illusion. Olfactory expert Sarah Bouasse created two shifting scents: drawing on geosmin and isoborneol, compounds associated with the aroma released when rain strikes dry earth.

It changes along the crossing: first

wet earth and mineral dampness, then something warmer, smokier and faintly animal.

"Usually I cross here without looking up once," said Michel Dupré, a 67-year-old retiree, blinking as he emerged into daylight. "Today I felt the stones under my feet. And smelled them too. It makes you walk like a child again."

A sound installation by Thomas Bangalter, formerly of the French electronic duo Daft Punk, accompanies the work, filling the cavern with low rumbles, echoes and pulses.

Completed in 1607, the Pont Neuf - despite its name, "New Bridge" - is the oldest bridge still standing in Paris. JR's installation asks people to experience the familiar crossing

through their noses, ears and feet.

It also pays tribute to Christo and Jeanne-Claude, whose 1985 wrapping of the bridge in pale golden fabric drew an estimated 3 million visitors.

Their work covered the Pont Neuf in light.

JR sends visitors into darkness. "You enter into the darkness," he has said, "and emerge into the light on the other side."

Visitors can also raise their phones to activate an augmented-reality experience developed with tech company Snap.

Digital bats trail light through the cave, passing bodies leave ghostly traces and a dancer materializes in space.

Hollywood history on sale

Beatles lyrics & Darth Vader era lightsaber set for auction

LOS ANGELES, June 17, (AP): A lightsaber with Luke Skywalker's severed hand from "The Empire Strikes Back" that is expected to sell for seven figures headlines an upcoming auction of valuables from movies, music and other corners of pop culture.

The Hollywood & Entertainment Signature Auction presented by Heritage Auctions announced Tuesday and held July 13-17 also includes hats from "The Wizard of Oz" and "Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory," hoverboards from "Back to the Future II," rugs from "The Big Lebowski" and a pair of Rocky's boxing boots.

A major Beatles artifact will also be up for sale: John Lennon's handwritten lyrics for "If I fell," written on the back of a Valentine card while he was in New York for the Fab Four's first appearance on "The Ed Sullivan Show" in 1964. The bidding for it will open at \$500,000.

The lightsaber, used onscreen by Mark Hamill in the climactic Cloud City fight in the 1980 "Star Wars" sequel, where Darth Vader declares "I am your father," includes a severed hand effects rig. It's never been up for auction before and bidding opens at \$1 million.

Bidding starts at \$100,000 for a Wicked Witch of the West hat worn by actor Margaret Hamilton in 1939's "The Wizard of Oz" and at \$50,000 for the brown top hat worn by Gene Wilder as the title character in 1971's "Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory."

The auction will also include a pair of boxing boots worn by Sylvester Stallone in "Rocky III." Stallone wears the showy boots featuring tassels and a Nike swoosh in the opening montage of the 1982 film. Bids will begin at \$100,000.

Also up for sale are the two rugs that are essential to the plot of "The Big Lebowski," including the rug belonging to Jeff Bridges' the Dude that is soiled at the beginning of the 1998 film that "really tied the room together," and the other that he takes from his wealthy namesake. Bidding on them opens at \$15,000



This combination of images released by Heritage Auctions shows a top hat from the 1971 film "Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory," left, and a witch hat worn by Margaret Hamilton in "The Wizard of Oz." (AP)



This combination of images released by Heritage Auctions show the light saber used on screen by Mark Hamill's character Luke Skywalker in the 1980 "Star Wars" sequel "The Empire Strikes Back." (AP)



This combination of images released by Heritage Auctions shows boxing boots worn by Sylvester Stallone in the 1982 film "Rocky III." (AP)

apiece.

"This auction represents the full spectrum of entertainment history, from Hollywood's Golden Age to modern blockbuster cinema and the most influential moments in popular music," Joe Maddalena, executive vice president of Heritage Auctions, said in a statement.

Many other items including a Paul Newman hockey jersey from "Slap Shot," a necklace worn by the title character in "The Bride of Frankenstein" and the inflatable "Otto the Autopilot" from "Airplane" will be up for auction.

HEALTH/SCIENCE



A Long March-12 carrier rocket carrying the 22nd group of low-orbit internet satellites blasts off from a commercial spacecraft launch site in south China's Hainan Province, June 17. (Xinhua)

China's Long March-12 rocket launches new internet satellite group

China launched a Long March-12 carrier rocket on Wednesday from a commercial spacecraft launch site in the southern island province of Hainan, sending an internet satellite group into space.

The rocket lifted off at 10:44 a.m. (Beijing Time) and successfully placed the payload, the 22nd group of low-orbit internet satellites, into the preset orbit, according to the launch site. (Xinhua)

China updates Ebola prevention, control plan in wake of outbreak in Africa

BEIJING, June 17, (Xinhua): China's National Disease Control and Prevention Administration released an updated Ebola prevention and control plan Tuesday in the wake of a recent outbreak in Africa.

The plan guides local authorities in carrying out scientific and orderly epidemic response measures and safeguarding public health. It also sets out tracking and health management requirements for people arriving from affected regions.

The World Health Organization on May 17 determined that the Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda constitutes a "public health emergency of international concern."

China has so far reported no Ebola cases domestically.

The plan requires health monitoring and management for people arriving in China from Ebola-affected countries or regions, foreign nationals who traveled to affected areas within 21 days before entering China, and Chinese citizens returning from epidemic zones.

Also:

JOHANNESBURG: South African President Cyril Ramaphosa on Tuesday pledged 13.5 million US dollars



Asylum seekers rest in the Kigonze camp for internally displaced people (IDP) on the outskirts of Bunia, Ituri Province, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, June 9. Bunia is one of the epicenters of the Ebola outbreak, which has so far infected 676 people and killed 136. (Xinhua)

to help tackle Ebola outbreaks in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Uganda.

Ramaphosa, who serves as the African Union Champion for Pandemic Preparedness, Prevention and Response, made the announcement during a high-level virtual meeting of heads of state,

government leaders and development partners on the Ebola outbreak.

"I am pleased to announce that South Africa is increasing its pledge to 13.5 million US dollars as our commitment to solidarity and sovereignty for the people of this continent," Ramaphosa said.

Indonesia prepares incentive scheme to curb marine waste pollution

African, Commonwealth nations urge quick execution of key treaty protecting oceans

MOMBASA, Kenya, June 17, (Agencies): African and Commonwealth nations called Tuesday for a swift implementation of a landmark treaty protecting the high seas, warning that despite record commitments to marine conservation, much of the world's ocean protection still exists only on paper.

The call to action was issued at the 11th Our Ocean Conference in Mombasa, the first time an African nation has hosted the major annual event, which focuses on addressing critical ocean issues, including climate change, biodiversity and pollution.

Hundreds of delegates from Africa, the United States, the European Union, and climate-vulnerable Caribbean and Pacific island nations are taking part in the conference, where leaders have sought to position Africa as a driving force in global ocean governance.

Former U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry said in his opening remarks at the Commonwealth Ocean Ministers' Roundtable that the High Seas Treaty, which came into effect in January after ratification by 60 countries, marked a historic turning point by creating, for the first time, a legal mechanism to establish protected areas in international waters.

But he warned that progress remained too slow.

"We have 10% of the ocean under protection this year," Kerry said. "That is worth marking. But only 3% is highly or fully protected, and the rest of the protections are, unfortunately, just lines on a map."

Kerry said that industrial fishing fleets continue to exploit the oceans, with some vessels operating thousands of miles from home and using massive nets that indiscriminately catch marine life.

"Ratify it if you haven't, and move immediately to implementation," he urged countries, noting that key decisions on the future of the treaty will be taken next year.

The treaty, formally known as the Agreement on Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction, aims to help countries achieve a global target of protecting 30% of the world's land and oceans by 2030.

The Kenyan Cabinet secretary of maritime affairs, Hassan Joho, said that governments must now shift from promises to tangible action.

"The purpose of this roundtable is not to restate ambition, but to convert



Fish swim near coral on the ocean bed near Shimoni, Kenya, June 13, 2022. (AP)

such pledges into measurable results for our communities, our economies and our oceans," Joho said.

Joho noted that since 2014, the One Ocean Conference has generated more than 2,900 pledges worth more than \$169 billion. The challenge, he said, is to turn them into effective management of marine ecosystems.

The Commonwealth's 56 member states collectively account for 36% of the world's ocean jurisdiction and nearly half of its coral reefs, giving the bloc a unique responsibility in protecting marine resources.

Africa, meanwhile, is increasingly setting itself as a leader in ocean conservation.

Kerry praised African countries for championing transboundary marine

protection and pointed to commitments by eight Gulf of Guinea nations to sustainably manage all of their waters by 2030.

"A region long described as a victim of ocean exploitation is now choosing to lead instead," he said.

The East African nation has adopted integrated coastal management plans, expanded marine protected areas and stepped up efforts to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. Its 640-kilometer (400-mile) coastline and vast exclusive economic zone support fisheries, tourism and other sectors that sustain millions of livelihoods.

As negotiations continue in Mombasa, delegates say the coming months will be critical in determining whether the new treaty becomes a transformative tool for ocean conservation or another set of international promises that fail to materialize.

Also:

JAKARTA: Indonesia's Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries has been preparing an incentive and disincentive scheme for regional governments as part of a national waste management policy aimed at preventing marine pollution, a senior official has said.

"Regions that still have waste leaking into the sea will receive disincentives. Those who have successfully managed their waste properly will be given incentives and awards," the ministry's Director General of Marine Spatial Management Koswara said at a recent press conference.

Indonesia is estimated to see around 20 million tons of waste entering the sea each year. Koswara said the issue could not be solved by relying solely on the state budget, but required cooperation between local governments, businesses, and communities.

Koswara emphasized that the condition of the sea is highly influenced by land-based activities, noting that plastic waste polluting the ocean originates from human activity.

"Waste does not appear in the sea by itself. We are the ones producing plastic waste, so we must manage it, reduce it, and ensure it does not end up in the ocean," he said.

We created health guidelines for fighting loneliness – here's what we recommend

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

By Daniel P. Aldrich, Northeastern University and Kiffer George Card, Simon Fraser University

Social isolation kills. It increases your risk of death by 30% - roughly the same as smoking cigarettes and much worse than factors such as obesity and sedentary living.

Americans are living through what researchers call a friendship recession, spending less time with friends than at any point in recent history.

In 2023, the US Surgeon General declared loneliness an epidemic. Deaths from factors like suicide, addiction and alcoholism, referred to as deaths of despair, continue climbing.

While doctors routinely check patients' blood pressure and ask about exercise habits, they rarely assess social health.

Public health guidelines urge Americans to eat their vegetables, exercise for 150 minutes weekly, sleep seven to nine hours nightly and drink less than one or two alcoholic beverages per day. But few public health bodies have addressed social connection - until now.

As scholars who focus on public policy and social determinants of health and well-being, we are part of an international team of more than 100 experts who undertook the first systematic effort to develop evidence-based guidelines for social connection.

These guidelines, which are now publicly available, aim to do more than offer advice. Elements of them are already being embedded into policies in the Netherlands and the UK.

Our hope is that the guidelines can elevate the importance of social connection to the same level as basic public health practices such as exercising, not smoking and relying on a designated driver when you go out drinking with friends.

Research has shown for decades that social connection is crucial for good health. The World Health Organization's constitution, adopted in 1946, defines health as "complete physical, mental and social well-being."

Codifying different dimensions of health into evidence-based guidelines matters because guidelines allow people to put recommendations into action. Nutrition labels help people understand what they're eating. Exercise recommendations help people know how much movement protects their health. Blood pressure cutoffs tell both patients and clinicians when it's time to intervene.

Guidelines also shape systems in ways people feel every day. Exercise guidelines, for example, helped motivate cities to invest in walkable streets and bike lanes, workplaces to design wellness programs, and schools to include physical activity in curricula.

Social health guidelines can play a similar role. Standardized metrics for social well-being can help health care providers identify when someone is socially isolated, enable employers to design workplaces that foster connection, and give schools and cities clearer targets for building socially supportive environments.

They also lay the groundwork for "social prescriptions" - structured ways to connect people with community programs or group activities - which some health care systems are already beginning to test.

Beginning in the summer of 2023, our team spent more than two years developing a set of international guidelines for social health by drawing on more than 40 plain-

language evidence summaries, numerous case studies, conversations with marginalized communities, and extensive consultation with global experts.

What we found highlights several foundational principles of social well-being.

First, there are no universal rules for social health. There is no magic number of friends or ideal number of weekly social hours. Social needs vary widely. Both introverts and extroverts need connection, but they meet that need differently. A new parent's social world is completely unlike a retiree's. And quality trumps quantity: One meaningful conversation can be more nourishing than a dozen quick exchanges.

Second, technology is not the villain it's often made out to be. Passive scrolling can harm well-being, but active, intentional use can strengthen bonds - whether through video calls with distant family, group chats that sustain friendships or apps that help neighbors organize local meetups. The key is using technology to facilitate real connection rather than replace it.

Third, relationships are shaped as much by systems as by individuals. Social health isn't just about personal effort. It emerges from local environments that make connection possible. Research shows that investments in social infrastructure - the places and spaces where we connect, such as libraries, parks and cafes - measurably improve well-being. And communities that have denser concentrations of such spaces have better health outcomes after disasters.

Finally, diverse networks matter. Strong social health includes both close relationships and "weak ties" - acquaintances, neighbors, local business staff and others you see in passing. These lighter-touch interactions offer meaningful benefits: the barista who remembers your order, a colleague you exchange a few words with, a fellow dog walker along your route.

Studies show that weak ties provide novel information, unexpected opportunities and a broader sense of belonging that close friends alone can't provide. A mix of ties - deep and shallow - forms the basis of a socially healthy life.

Forward-thinking institutions are already experimenting with principles that underpin our guidelines.

Some workplaces now assess social health when making decisions about policies such as remote work or office layout, recognizing that communication norms and physical design shape how employees connect. Schools are teaching emotional intelligence and friendship skills as core curriculum, not extras. Cities are investing in social infrastructure - community centers, shared public spaces and plazas - that naturally bring people together.

On a personal level, the guidelines suggest a few simple shifts:

■ Prioritize face-to-face time. Even short, in-person interactions boost mood, reduce stress and build trust.

■ Use technology actively, not passively. Reach out to someone, schedule a video call or use apps to create opportunities for connection - not just to scroll.

■ Treat solitude as restoration, not failure. Healthy social lives include both meaningful interaction and the downtime needed to recharge.

■ Build routines that create natural interaction. Walk the same route daily, become a regular at neighborhood spots or join recurring community activities to create predictable opportunities for connection.

■ And most importantly, take initiative. In a culture that treats socializing as a luxury, prioritizing connection is quietly radical. (AP)



This undated photo shows a themed installation depicting Chinese virologist Gu Fangzhou at an exhibition commemorating his 100th birth anniversary in Beijing, capital of China. (Xinhua)

China's 'sugar pill' vaccine developer Gu remembered on centenary

BEIJING, June 17, (Xinhua): Chinese virologist Gu Fangzhou's heroism in swallowing an untested vaccine and then secretly feeding it to his infant son ultimately gave rise to China's oral polio vaccine, a "sugar pill" that would protect millions of children.

Although the story is decades old and the disease long been wiped out in China, Gu has never been a forgotten icon. His name remains inseparable from the breathtaking gamble.

On Tuesday, an exhibition commemorating the 100th anniversary of the late scientist's birth opened in Beijing, and his name has once again appeared in news outlets across the country.

Gu Liedong, the son who took that first dose, still feels proud to have participated in his father's scientific work in such an extraordinary way, over 60 years ago.

"I have no memory of it. It was only later, through media reports and family members, that I learned I was the first child to receive the vaccine," the son recalled in a recent interview. "I feel very honored that I could make a small contribution to his work."

Born on June 16, 1926, Gu devoted his life to fighting poliomyelitis, a highly-contagious disease that paralyzed thousands of children across

mid-20th-century China. In 1955, a severe outbreak ravaged many cities, including Shanghai and Qingdao. At the time, no vaccine existed to prevent it. Parents carried their limp sons and daughters to Gu and his colleagues, begging for help.

In 1957, Gu was tasked with developing a polio vaccine. To produce it, Gu and his team went to the remote southwestern province of Yunnan, where they built laboratories inside mountain caves.

After animal trials, they needed to test the experimental vaccine on humans. Gu drank the first vial himself. He did not get sick. But adults often carry natural antibodies, so the real test required children. Later, Gu brought his infant boy to the lab and fed him the vaccine, without telling his wife.

"If my own child won't take it, how can I ask other people's children to take it?" Gu said.

The baby stayed healthy. Moved by Gu's example, his colleagues vaccinated their own children, the nation's first kids to receive the polio shots.

"My father rarely talked about his own achievements at home," said Gu Lienan, Gu's second son. "But if you understood what he went through: giving up a comfortable life in Beijing and moving the entire family, including his mother, his wife and

his children, to a remote mountain valley in Yunnan, then you would realize that his decision to test the vaccine on himself and on his own child was not a sudden heroic act, but a determined choice."

By the end of 1960, the first batch of 5 million doses of the liquid vaccine had been rolled out in 11 cities across China. In those cities, the peak of polio outbreaks gradually began to subside.

As the epidemic receded, however, Gu saw a new challenge. The vaccine's refrigeration requirements made it difficult to reach remote areas, and children did not like injections or taking bitter medicine.

After intensive experiments, Gu's team transformed the liquid vaccine into a white sugar pill, much more palatable for kids. It could also be stored longer than the liquid form.

With the help of the vaccine, in 1990, China began implementing its plan to eradicate polio across the country. In 2000, the World Health Organization declared China polio-free.

Gu's given name "fangzhou" means "ark" in Chinese. Netizens dubbed him "Sugar Pill Grandpa" after his story spreading online. Gu died in January 2019, and months later he was awarded the national honorary title of "People's Scientist."

Loss raises questions about Wimbledon singles readiness

Serena falls in Berlin Open doubles return after comeback win

BERLIN, June 17, (AP): Serena Williams' comeback hit a bump Tuesday with a loss in her opening-round doubles match at the Berlin Open.

Giuliana Olmos and Erin Routliffe defeated Williams and her partner Karolina Muchova 6-4, 6-4 to end Williams' involvement in the WTA 500 grass-court tournament at the first stage.

It didn't dim the love Williams was shown from the appreciative fans on what was her second appearance after a win at Queen's Club last week in London. That had been Williams' first professional match since the 2022 U.S. Open. But her participation at Queen's Club was cut short when partner Victoria Mboko injured her knee in a singles match.

The 44-year-old Williams was welcomed by a huge roar and applause to center court at the Steffi Graf Stadium, which quickly filled up as fans snacking and drinking outside realized the main attraction was about to start.

Earlier Tuesday, Wimbledon organizers announced that Williams and her older sister Venus, who turns 46 on Wednesday, were being given a doubles wild card invitation for the tournament that starts in less than two weeks.

"Welcome back Serena!" one fan in Berlin shouted as Williams showed flashes of her tenacity with some ferocious returns.

"Serena, we love you in Berlin!" another fan shouted to cheers in the second set.



Serena Williams of the U.S. tosses the ball in the air to serve as she and Czech Republic's Karolina Muchova play during their round of 16 doubles match against New Zealand's Erin Routliffe and Mexico's Giuliana Olmo during the WTA 500 Berlin Open tennis tournament at Steffi Graf Stadium, in Berlin, Germany. (AP)

But Olmos and Routliffe broke Muchova's serve for 3-2 in the second set, and Routliffe set up the match point with an ace.

"Honestly, I felt pretty good out there," Williams said in her post-match news conference. "I felt actually more nimble and more sturdy and quicker than the first match in Queens'. Yeah, overall, I feel pretty good. Just physically and quickness, which I think you need a lot of quickness on grass."

Williams won 23 Grand Slam singles titles - including seven at Wimbledon - before stepping away from the game, saying at the time she was "evolving" away from tennis rather than "retiring."

She has also won 14 Grand Slam doubles titles, including six

at Wimbledon - all with her sister Venus.

Williams still hasn't decided if she'll play singles again at the tournament.

"Oh my gosh, there are some left?" she replied when she was told there was still a singles wild card spot for Wimbledon. But then she mused about her readiness for it.

"Do you think I'm ready for singles?" she asked a reporter and then turned to Muchova to ask what she thought.

"I think I would be interested in it," the Czech player responded.

"That's the question of the hour, right?" Williams said of playing singles at Wimbledon. "I don't know. I don't know. I wonder why there's - I don't know."



Winners of the professional experience trial with Salisbury Club celebrate on the podium.

Official praises program

Salisbury selects 3 Kuwaiti players for England trials

KUWAIT CITY, June 17: English club Salisbury has selected players Roudhan Al-Armeli, Ghanem Al-Othman and Ahmed Al-Jarwi to take part in a professional trial following a four-day assessment camp held in Kuwait in cooperation with the Public Authority for Sport.

The closing day of the trials was attended by Minister of State for Youth Affairs and Sports Dr. Tareq Al-Jalahma, who joined the players in a training session on the outer pitches of Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium. The session was supervised by Salisbury head coach Brian Dutton and club Chairman Ali Al-Hamad.

Al-Jalahma said the Public Authority for Sport welcomes initiatives from clubs seeking to provide genuine opportunities for Kuwaiti players, stressing the importance of projects that contribute to the development of sport in Kuwait.

He expressed hope that the Salisbury initiative would encourage other club owners to follow suit in opening pathways to professional football for Kuwaiti talent. He praised the enthusiasm of players, noting that more

than 430 participants had registered with hopes of pursuing opportunities abroad.

He also said his on-field involvement reflected his personal connection as a former player and his commitment to supporting young athletes in gaining professional exposure.

Al-Jalahma thanked the organizers and participants, adding that other players still have future opportunities to pursue professional careers, and wished them success in their sporting journeys.

Player Roudhan Al-Armeli expressed pride at being selected for the next stage of the trial, describing the process as highly competitive and demanding, with extensive evaluations to identify the top performers.

He thanked Salisbury for offering Kuwaiti players the chance to experience professional football, calling it a dream opportunity for any young player, and also expressed gratitude to the Public Authority for Sport for making the initiative possible, describing it as an important milestone in his career.

England keeps unbeaten run

Sri Lanka dents NZ T20 title defence with stunning win

LONDON, June 17, (AP): Sri Lanka crippled New Zealand's title defense at the Women's Twenty20 World Cup with a final-over comeback victory in Southampton on Tuesday.

Sri Lanka beat New Zealand for the first time in a World Cup after Nilakshika Silva and Kaushini Nuthyanganana combined for an unbeaten 48 runs off 28 balls to reach the 151 target with two balls and five wickets remaining at the Rose Bowl.

New Zealand has lost its first two group matches. Only one team in tournament history has advanced to the semifinals with two defeats - South Africa at home in 2023.

In the second match of the double-header, England earned two wins from two games after comfortably handling a spirited Ireland by four wickets.

Ireland struggled to 118-9 and England calmly overhauled that in 17.3 overs at 119-6.

New Zealand was tainted again by dropped catches; six in the opening loss to the West Indies and three more against Sri Lanka.

"The West Indies game and today's game, if we'd taken our chances we'd probably win both by 50 runs," New Zealand captain Melie Kerr said. "We've dropped a lot. There's no real excuse. Fielding is what won us the last World Cup."

Sri Lanka captain Chamari Athapaththu was put down on 6 and made 27 to start her charge in the powerplay, and Silva was dropped on 1 and made 54 not out. Sri Lanka ended up 153-5 in reply to New Zealand's 150-6.

"New Zealand is one of the best teams and the world champions, and the tournament favorites," Athapaththu

said. "We beat them and it means we can beat anyone in the comp, we just need to execute our plans."

An unchanged New Zealand from the West Indies loss on Saturday chose to bat first on the same pitch but only Kerr and Sophie Devine got going with 45s. They were battering Sri Lanka together until they were caught on the boundary. The Kiwis collected only 11 runs off the last two overs.

New Zealand had already dropped two catches in Sri Lanka's chase when Georgia Plimmer took a brilliant grab running in from long-on. The ball slipped between her hands but she trapped it with her knees during a run of four Sri Lanka wickets in four overs.

It should have been five in five but Silva turned Bree Illing's drop on 1 into a player-of-the-match performance.

When Kavisha Dilhara ran herself out at 105-5 in the 15th over, New Zealand was still favored. But, under pressure and in a rain shower, Silva's second T20 fifty in 13 years and Nuthyanganana's career-best 24 rushed Sri Lanka to the win after its opening hiding from England.

Rain delayed the evening start for an hour and England didn't hesitate to bowl first. The spinners dominated led by Charlie Dean's 2-11, player-of-the-match Sophie Ecclestone's 3-22, and No. 1-ranked Linsey Smith's 1-20.

Orla Prendergast and Louise Little top-scored for Ireland with 26s.

Ireland removed both England openers and Alice Capsey to shade the powerplay but the host's most experienced players, former captain Heather Knight and successor Nat Sciver-Brunt steered their team away from brief jeopardy.

Kuwait Club closes in on title

Al-Qadsia, Al-Arabi chase continental spots after wins

By Hassan Mosa

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, June 17: Kuwait Club is now on the verge of sealing its fifth consecutive Zain Premier League title and 21st overall, needing just one point to confirm its dominance.

Al-Abyad strengthened their charge with a commanding 4-0 win over Al-Fahaheel at Ali Sabah Al-Salem Stadium in the Championship Group (Top Six), lifting its tally to 47 points. It now sits 12 points clear of Al-Qadsia, who defeated Al-Salmiya 2-1 in the same round.

Al-Fahaheel remains on 21 points in sixth place, having already secured its survival in the top flight for the 2026-2027 season.

Kuwait Club requires only a single point from their remaining four matches to officially clinch the championship. Their next test comes on Friday against Al-Salmiya in what is expected to be a challenging fixture in the second round of the group stage.

Elsewhere, the battle for second place intensified as Al-Qadsia and Al-Arabi continued their push for continental qualification spots. Al-Qadsia edged Al-Salmiya 3-2, while Al-Arabi secured a 2-0 victory over Kazma.



Kuwait players cheer after scoring during a match against Al-Fahaheel.

Al-Qadsia now sits second with 35 points, while Al-Salmiya remains on 30 points in fifth place. Al-Arabi moved to 33 points, breaking a tie with both Al-Salmiya and Kazma, with the latter also on 30 points in fourth place.

The race for Asian and Gulf competition places remains wide open.

The league runner-up will enter the AFC Champions League 2 qualifying playoff, the third-placed side will feature in the AFC Challenge League, and the fourth-placed team will compete in the GCC Champions League.

Kuwait Club has already secured their place in next season's AFC

Champions League 2 after winning the AFC Challenge League title in May.

Attention now turns to Friday's crucial fixtures, which are expected to further clarify the title race: Kuwait Club vs. Al-Salmiya, Al-Qadsia vs Al-Arabi, and Kazma vs Al-Fahaheel.

Presence marks a milestone after years of conflict

Sudan's girls reopen a path to football

CASABLANCA, Morocco, June 17, (AP): Their red jerseys stood out against the green pitch. Most were teenage girls. Some had fled war. Others had never played in an organized soccer league or set foot in a major stadium before.

Yet when they took the field at Larbi Zaouli Stadium in Casablanca, Morocco, they marked Sudan's first appearance in international women's soccer since a civil war erupted in a country where women's participation in sports has long been controversial.

"My goal is to lift up soccer in my country," Nura Mohamed, the 17-year-old team captain, told The Associated Press.

"It's a beautiful, unique feeling because, at the end of the day, I just love playing."

Sudan's under-17 women's national team traveled to Morocco last week for qualifying matches on the road to the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics. The inexperienced squad suffered heavy defeats against Comoros, conceding 30 goals in two matches. Many of the players broke down in tears after the final whistle in front of a dozen cheering fans.

They faced an older, fitter, and more experienced opponent. Unable to assemble a senior women's squad in time, Sudan's soccer federation



Sudan's U-17 women's national team players, in red, defend the ball during a soccer match against Comoros, during qualifiers for the 2028 Los Angeles Summer Olympics, in Casablanca, Morocco. (AP)

entered a younger team to avoid forfeiting its place in the qualifiers. They only started training weeks ago.

"The difference between us and the others is huge. We cannot yet compete at the highest level," Burhan Tia, a veteran Sudanese soccer coach who oversees all of Sudan's women's national teams, said after the first match, a 17-0 defeat.

"Comoros has many players competing in Europe, our team is mainly

made up of schoolgirls."

Sudan's women's soccer collapsed when civil war erupted in 2023. For federation officials, debuting this young squad in Casablanca after years of conflict marks an important step in keeping women's soccer alive in Sudan.

"Some traveled long distances just to attend training. Many are separated from their families, yet they continue to work hard and pursue their dream," Manal Ali Bushra, a busi-

nesswoman who heads the women's soccer committee, told the AP.

To support that vision, Ali Bushra said the federation is working on infrastructure projects, including a planned sports city and the renovation of key stadiums in safer parts of the country. She declined to answer questions about the women's program budget and funds.

Tia knew the magnitude of the challenge when he accepted the job of rebuilding a shattered team.

"First, I had to find girls who played soccer. Then, once I found girls who played, I had to make sure they were the right age," he said. "Then I needed to convince their parents to let them miss classes for training."

With the league suspended, his scouting trips took him to schools across Sudan and to neighboring Egypt, where many families had fled the war. He recruited 10 players from teams and academies in Cairo, with the rest drawn from Sudanese cities.

Tia would have liked to recruit from conflict-hit areas like Darfur or Kordofan, a region known for producing Sudan's top athletes. But many girls had lost their identification documents, making it impossible to verify their ages under international regulations.

Fenerbahce gets Gornik

Hearts draw Sturm Graz in CL qualifier

NYON, Switzerland, June 17, (AP): After a devastating final-game loss in the Scottish Premiership, Heart of Midlothian's longer path toward the lucrative Champions League will start in Austria in July.

Hearts was paired with Sturm Graz in the draw Wednesday for the second qualifying round, needing to advance through three rounds to play in the 36-team league phase starting in September.

Scottish champion Celtic, which beat long-time leader Hearts in the final game last month, will start in the qualifying playoffs round in late-August.

Fenerbahce will play Gornik Zabrze in the other pairing of teams that finished runner-up in mid-

ranked leagues.

First-leg games start two days after the World Cup final, and are played July 21 and 22. Return games are one week later.

Since losing the title race, Hearts has seen star forward Lawrence Shankland - now on World Cup duty with Scotland - join Rangers. The storied Glasgow club also is set to hire coach Derek McInnes away from Hearts, just five weeks before it begins a Champions League qualifying program.

Opponents in the third qualifying round could be Bodo/Glimt, Lyon or Union Saint-Gilloise.

Two first-time national champions entered in a separate second qualifying round draw Wednesday for



In this file photo, Galatasaray's players celebrate at the end of a Turkish Super League soccer match between Galatasaray and Fenerbahce in Istanbul, Turkey. (AP)

domestic title holders, and received very different results.

Swiss champion Thun got a tough draw playing at home first against

Champions League regular Dinamo Zagreb.

Mjallby of Sweden also is at home first, against Lincoln Red Imps of Gibraltar or Inter Club d'Escaldes of Andorra. They meet in the first qualifying round over two legs in early July.

Thun and Mjallby were unseeded in the draw and sure to face a seeded team, which could have been Dinamo, former European champion Red Star Belgrade or Lincoln, which has a higher UEFA ranking after playing in last season's third-tier Conference League.

Red Star, the 1991 European Cup winner, was drawn to play the away leg first against Tre Fiori of San Marino or Northern Ireland's Larne.



Haaland marks World Cup bow with authority as Norway dispatches Iraq



Norway's Erling Haaland, right, and Iraq's Ali Alhamadi jump for a header during the World Cup Group I soccer match between Iraq and Norway in Foxborough, Mass., near Boston. (AP)

Ali: Proud to be back after 40 years, but 4-1 defeat hurts

FOXBOROUGH, Mass., June 17, (AP): Norway will go as far in this World Cup as Erling Haaland takes it.

In his tournament debut, he showed he's more than up for that challenge.

Haaland scored two goals, including one off a defensive blunder, to propel Norway to a 4-1 victory over Iraq in Group I.

The Manchester City striker's 56th and 57th international goals came in Norway's first appearance in the tournament since reaching the knockout round at the 1998 World Cup in France - two years before Haaland was born.

Haaland said he will do his best to meet the expectations he created with this performance.

"Of course I will try," Haaland

said. "It's about continuing and don't think too much. It's difficult at this stage. But I'll focus on (the) next (game) and of course be happy. But also stay calm."

Norway coach Stale Solbakken said he had a feeling Haaland was ready after watching how loose he was in the team's last training session before the match.

"You could see that he lived up to the occasion," Solbakken said. "The occasion wasn't too big for him."

Leo Ostigard scored in the 76th minute off a corner kick from Martin Odegaard. An own-goal by Iraq forward Aymen Hussein just before the final whistle completed Norway's scoring.

Hussein also scored for his team, an equalizer just nine minutes after Haaland's first strike.

Haaland put the Norwegians in front for good just before halftime

when he sneaked in front of a poor back pass to Iraq goalkeeper Jalal Hassan. Haaland beat Hassan to the ball, preempting his attempted clearance, and then used his shin to put the ball in the back of the net.

"It's one of those things. It happened," Iraq coach Graham Arnold said. "It is what is and we have to learn from it."

Haaland's first goal, which came in the 29th minute, followed a cross into the box from David Moller Wolfe. Haaland slid and used his right heel to finish it off. It ignited waves of cheers from the Norway supporters, who dominated the stands clad in red as they broke out in synchronized Viking row chants.

Iraq, playing in the World Cup for just the second time after debuting in 1986, held its own with a sizable contingent of supporters that was

most concentrated behind one of the goals.

That energy helped Iraq briefly get back into the game.

In the 38th minute, Amir Alammari corralled a ball on the baseline halfway between the left corner and the goal and fired a cross in front of the net. It eluded Norway's defenders, allowing Hussein to get a clean header that bounced under the hand of diving goalkeeper Orjan Nyland to even the score at 1-1.

It was Hussein's 34th international goal. That includes his winning goal against Bolivia in Iraq's final World Cup qualifying match in April that gave the country the last spot in the 48-team tournament field.

"It's a proud moment to be back in the World Cup after 40 years. To lose 4-1, it hurts," Iraq's Hussein Ali said.

Blamed for killing momentum

FIFA hydration breaks spark backlash

ATLANTA, June 17, (AP): Curaçao fans went wild. The Germans were in shock.

Livano Comenencia had scored a goal for the smallest nation by population to ever qualify for the World Cup against four-time champion Germany.

At 1-1 in Houston a famous upset looked possible.

Then came the hydration break.

Curaçao lost the initiative, conceding two goals before halftime in what eventually became a 7-1 defeat to the Germans.

"I actually felt sorry for them," former England striker Alan Shearer told The Rest is Football podcast. "They scored and then it was maybe 30 seconds after that it stopped. So it's killed their momentum."

FIFA's new hydration breaks midway through each half - a novelty for this World Cup - were introduced to help players deal with the summer heat in the United States, Canada and Mexico. But critics say they're having unintended consequences, ruining the flow of the game and giving coaches a chance to tactically shift momentum in their team's favor.

While player welfare is a real concern with temperatures expected to exceed 90 F (32 C) in the hottest World Cup venues, some say the hydration breaks are just an excuse for broadcasters to go to commercials in the middle of the game.

"We're in America, right? So, it's like it is it's like it's a timeout," former Ireland international Roy Keane said on The Overlap, a podcast that he co-hosts with long-time Manchester United teammate Gary Neville.



Uruguay's Agustin Canobbio cools off during a hydration break in a World Cup Group H soccer match against Saudi Arabia in Miami Gardens, Fla. (AP)

"We love football because of the pace of the game ... what it's doing is stopping the flow of the game, the momentum."

Rather than players merely taking on fluids, coaches have been seizing the opportunity to pass on in-game tactical instructions that would normally not be possible. And early indications are that it is having an effect.

"You can use the break to tell the players what they need to improve or what is good or what they should do better," Netherlands coach Ronald Koeman said. "So you can use it in different ways to your advantage, and this is what we will be doing."

In eight of the first 16 games there were goals scored within 10 minutes of the rehydration break.

Curaçao never recovered after the restart against Germany.

Morocco paid the price against Brazil in New Jersey, having dominated the game from the start and scored just before the first break. Less than 10 minutes after play resumed the game was level with Vinicius Junior equalizing.

Canada, the U.S., Australia, Scotland, Sweden and Iran have all benefited with goals soon after the break.

Momentum maps have shown how games have shifted after the new stoppages in play.

The hydration breaks also affect the experience of fans watching the games at stadiums. There were boos from the crowd on the first hydration break in the game Tuesday between Iraq and Norway in Foxborough, Massachusetts.

Referees pause the games 22 minutes into each half, with players given three minutes to rehydrate.

FIFA stipulated that the breaks would occur regardless of the weather, venue or location, meaning the Spain vs. Cape Verde match in Atlanta on Monday was interrupted despite being under a roof and in an air conditioned stadium.

The governing body said it was to "ensure equal conditions for all teams, in all matches."

Spain coach Luis de la Fuente said the breaks make sense in "extreme" heat conditions but questioned whether they were necessary at every match.

"Pause, freshen up and continue. Tomorrow, when the temperature that we'll have in this stadium is chill, maybe these breaks are not so needed, but we need to abide by the rules," he said.

Norway coach Stale Solbakken agreed. "I can understand it when it's like it's been in Greensboro (North Carolina), when it's been 35 degrees (95 Fahrenheit) and a really hot climate and there's a bit vibration in the air - then I think it's fine. But I don't like it otherwise. I think it's unnecessary," he said.

Tunisia's Renard embraces challenge against Japan in World Cup debut

MONTERREY, Mexico, June 17, (AP): New Tunisia head coach Hervé Renard held his first practice with the squad, shortly after replacing Sabri Lamouchi, who was fired after the team's 5-1 thumping to Sweden.

The 57-year-old Frenchman had four days to get the team prepared for its second Group F game against Japan.

"At the moment we need to be focused on ourselves," Renard told reporters at the team's training ground just hours after flying into Monterrey. "We still have a few days to be ready."

Renard led Saudi Arabia at the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, where the

Green Falcons earned a shocking 2-1 victory over favorite and eventual champion Argentina. In the 2018 tournament, his Moroccan side earned a draw against Spain but failed to reach the knockout stage.

Renard said he was eager to experience the thrill of the tournament again.

"It's a World Cup," he said. "I know the passion around this event. That's what motivated me to come

and it's a challenge which isn't easy."

It's not the first time Renard has replaced Lamouchi. The two-time Africa Cup of Nations winner succeeded his French counterpart in 2014 as head coach of Ivory Coast following its group stage exit at the World Cup.

It would be a tough ask for Renard to guide Tunisia out of the group stage for the first time in seven World Cup appearances. After their loss to Sweden on Sunday, the Eagles of Carthage need results against Japan and group favorites Netherlands if they are to advance.

"I've told them they have to keep their heads up, you're here to represent your country," Renard said.



Renard

Vozinha becomes Instagram sensation

GUADALAJARA, Mexico, June 17, (AP): When shown the number of Instagram followers he had gained after helping tiny Cape Verde hold off powerhouse Spain in his team's World Cup debut, 40-year-old goalkeeper Vozinha gasped and laughed, in shock.

He was speaking shortly after Monday's stunning 0-0 draw in Atlanta against the European champions, when he had gone from about 50,000 followers to more than 1 million. Less than 24 hours after the game, Vozinha already had nearly 10 million Instagram followers - more than NBA superstar Victor Wembanyama (6.2 million) and NFL quarterback Patrick Mahomes (6.4 million).

"Crazy, that's crazy," Vozinha told Brazilian YouTube channel CazéTV after the match that turned him into the biggest new name of the World Cup so far. It was CazéTV, the only channel in Brazil with the rights to all 104 World Cup

games, that was taking credit for the huge surge in followers.

CazéTV is anchored by the popular Brazilian streamer Casimiro Miguel, known as Cazé. The channel has more than 31 million subscribers on YouTube and is known for sports broadcasts marked by a more informal and conversational approach, with a focus on community-based fan engagement. While watching Vozinha's performance during the broadcast, Cazé realized that the goalkeeper did not have many Instagram followers and began asking his audience to start following him.

Spain, one of the World Cup favorites, was widely expected to cruise past the tournament debutants. But La Roja could not find a way past Vozinha and a stubborn defense that had an answer to everything Spain's superstars threw at them.

"Normally we ask for subscribers," Cazé said. "We are not going

to ask for subscribers today, we are going to ask for followers. For Vozinha. He is stopping Spain. He is shocking the world. He is the stand-out player of the first half. Why not show him some love?"

His followers increased by a few hundred thousand shortly after that, and kept growing and growing throughout the day. Vozinha, who only began playing professionally at 25, is one of the few players 40 or older in the tournament. He made several crucial saves against Spain's powerful attack and was named the man of the match.

The result sparked celebrations in Cape Verde, the group of islands off Africa's west coast that is home to about half a million people. Cape Verde is the third-smallest nation by population to ever qualify for the World Cup.

Vozinha said after the game that his mom was not able to make it to the United States to watch him play because of difficulties getting a visa.

Fan

Zone



Norwegian fans pose for photos prior to the World Cup Group I soccer match between Iraq and Norway in Foxborough, Mass., near Boston. (AP)



Left: A fan cheers before the World Cup Group J soccer match between Austria and Jordan in Santa Clara, Calif., near San Francisco. Right: A Jordan fan looks on prior to the World Cup Group J soccer match against Austria in Santa Clara, Calif., near San Francisco. (AP)



Argentinian fans react ahead of the World Cup Group J soccer match between Argentina and Algeria in Kansas City, Mo. (AP)



France fans on the stands wait for the start of the World Cup Group I soccer match between France and Senegal in East Rutherford, N.J., near New York. (AP)



Fans cheer before the World Cup Group J soccer match between Argentina and Algeria in Kansas City, Mo. (AP)

Sports

Messi rolls back the years with World Cup hat-trick

Argentina lays down marker with dominant victory over Algeria



Argentina's Lionel Messi (10) shoots against Algeria's Nabil Bentaleb (19) and Hicham Boudaoui (14) during the World Cup Group J soccer match between Argentina and Algeria in Kansas City, Mo. (AP)

KANSAS CITY, Mo., June 17, (AP): Lionel Messi used the front of his white-and-blue, sweat-soaked jersey to wipe the tears from his eyes, a flood of emotions cracking his usually calm, confident demeanor after he gave Argentina an early lead in its World Cup opener against Algeria.

Then he scored again. And again.

Suddenly, any questions about Messi's hamstring injury, or whether he could help Argentina become the third team to win consecutive World Cups - even as his 39th birthday approaches next week - had been answered. With a brilliant hat-trick in a 3-0 win over Les Fenecs, Messi moved into a tie with Germany's Miroslav Klose for the career scoring record at the men's World Cup.

"My tears after the first goal? I've had some tough days. It wasn't related to football. And those feelings were because of that," Messi said afterward, without elaborating. "I thank my teammates, the coaching staff, and the delegation for helping me."

Messi scored that emotional first goal in the opening minutes on a nifty feed from Inter Miami teammate Rodrigo De Paul, the second off an opportunistic rebound early in the second half, and the third on a crisp strike moments before subbing out to a standing ovation from a crowd of 69,045 tilted heavily toward the three-time World Cup champions.

"At a loss for words about Leo. What can I say?" Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni said. "He's incredible."

His incredible trio of goals came 20 years to the day that Messi made his World Cup debut in a match against Serbia and Montenegro - he scored in that one, too - and made the pride of Rosario only the second player to score in five editions of the men's tournament.

Messi has 16 goals in his record six World Cup appearances overall, and it seems inevitable that Klose's record will fall in the coming weeks. The hat-trick was the 61st of Messi's career, his 11th while playing in his national team colors, and his first in the World Cup.

It was also the fifth straight World Cup game in which Messi has scored. "It makes me very happy to have lived through everything that came my way. What I'm living through now is the cherry on top," Messi said. "I'm

very happy and grateful for this group. I enjoy it so much." Messi upstaged other stars - Kylian Mbappé of France and Erling Haaland of Norway - who had big scores in Tuesday's France's 3-1 win over Senegal to move into a tie for fourth in the men's World Cup. But the eight-time winner d'Or, which honors global soccer's best player, had scored twice in a sharp performance. "This is my sixth World Cup, and I still feel good shape," Messi said. "Fortunately, I'm doing and today we managed to win a tough match. It's important to start the tournament with a victory in the game, as that's never easy in a World Cup."

Messi's appearance against Algeria was the 200th of his international career, which began in 2005 at the age of 18. The only players with more are Portugal's Cristiano Ronaldo, who will play his 229th on Wednesday, and Bader al-Mutawa, who played in 202 for Kuwait. Messi and Ronaldo are the only men to have scored in five World Cups.

Senegal swept aside

Mbappé hits double as France gets campaign off to flying start

EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J., June 17, (AP): Kylian Mbappé passed Pelé on the World Cup goal-scoring list and moved into first in the record books for France's national team.

Mbappé scored his 13th and 14th World Cup goals in France's 3-1 tournament-opening victory against Senegal. Those were his 57th and 58th playing internationally, tying and passing Olivier Giroud for the most in the country's rich history.

"I play to make history with my country and help my team win the World Cup," Mbappé said in French, adding that he was thinking of his family, friends and loved ones when he scored.

Mbappé first scored in the 66th minute after having several quality scoring chances denied by goalkeeper Édouard Mendy, including earlier in the second half. He scored again from long range in the sixth minute of stoppage time, mere seconds after Senegal got its first goal.

"It was crazy," France defender William Saliba said. "We just conceded the first goal for Senegal, and just one minute after, we score a banger. I was so happy. Yeah, a crazy goal."

Mbappé's second goal broke a tie with Pelé. He celebrated by mimick-



Senegal's Sadio Mane, bottom, slides in on France's Kylian Mbappe (10) during the World Cup Group I soccer match between France and Senegal in East Rutherford, N.J., near New York. (AP)

ing playing a flute, after comedian James Corden suggested that on his Fox show.

After scoring his second of the afternoon to pass countryman Just Fontaine, the 27-year-old playing in his third World Cup is now tied with Germany's Gerd Müller for the fourth most in tournament his-

tory. Mbappé is one behind Brazil's Ronaldo and two away from the record of 16 held by Miroslav Klose of Germany and Lionel Messi, who had a hat-trick for Argentina hours later to match that mark.

"Of course, I think he has everything to beat the World Cup (record)," Saliba said. "I hope he is

going to do it in this tournament because for sure he has everything, and I'm sure that he will do it."

France coach Didier Deschamps liked what he saw from Mbappé even before putting the ball in the net.

"Before he scored the first two goals today, as a captain and outside of the field, he does a lot for the group," Deschamps said through an interpreter. "He's got a global aura due to his real talent. He's a very decisive player at all times."

Deschamps called Mbappé an iconic player, while acknowledging there will always be criticism. That does not seem to be a problem for a player coming off scoring 25 goals this past season for Real Madrid.

"The critics? It's not about revenge," Mbappé said. "If I started playing for all the people who criticize me just to silence them, I'd have to play until I was 80."

Mbappé helped France win the World Cup title in 2018 and reach the final in 2022, when he was awarded the Silver Ball as the second-best player. Joined up front by Désiré Doué and reigning Ballon d'Or winner Ousmane Dembélé, France went into this year's tournament as the favorite along with Spain.

'No one was expecting us to be that bold'

Jordan's dream World Cup debut ends in loss to Austria

SANTA CLARA, Calif., June 17, (AP): Austria won a World Cup game for the first time in 36 years with a 3-1 victory over a Jordan team on debut at soccer's premier global event.

An own goal from a corner kick that deflected off Jordanian defender Yazan Al Arab gave Austria a 2-1 lead in the 76th minute. Veteran striker Marko Arnautovic's penalty kick deep in stoppage time extended the margin.

"This was a very intense evening, sometimes a little too intense," Austria coach Ralf Rangnick said. "Jordan did an amazing job and made it very difficult for us. At the end of the day, we deserved to win, but it was very difficult."

The Group J game between a Jordanian team at the World Cup for the first time and an Austrian squad back on soccer's biggest stage after missing the last six tournaments featured plenty of excitement.

It peaked in a stretch in the second half that featured an equalizer by Jordan and two balls sent into the net off corner kicks by Austria - with only one of those counting.

The 37-year-old Arnautovic had appeared to give Austria the lead when he fired in after a misplay by Jordanian goalkeeper Yazeed Abu-laila. But the decision went to a VAR review, and the referee called a handball on Stefan Posch in the lead-up.

Austria got another corner kick shortly after the second-half hydration break, and they took a 2-1 lead on Al Arab's own goal.

That proved to be the difference for Austria, which earned its first win at the World Cup since beating the United States in a group-stage match in 1990. Jordan fell short in its attempt to become the first country to win its World Cup debut game since Senegal did it in 2002 against defend-



Austria goalkeeper Alexander Schlager clears the ball during the World Cup Group J soccer match against Jordan in Santa Clara, Calif., near San Francisco. (AP)

ing champion France.

"No one was expecting us to be that bold, to be that proactive and to be that capable of benefiting from the available opportunities," Jordan coach Jamal Sellami said. "This was exactly the message we wanted to convey."

Romano Schmid scored in the 20th minute for Austria when he capped off an impressive buildup that put the Jordanian defense on its heels. Xaver Schlager fed a pass to Schmid, who hit a perfectly struck right-foot shot from the edge of the area into the top corner of the net.

Ali Olwan tied it for Jordan in the 50th when he made a long run into the box on a counterattack and beat Alexander Schlager with a right-foot shot that delighted the large contingent of Jordanian fans.

Posch injured his jaw later in the match, and his status going ahead is in doubt.

Gauvin congratulates France on impressive World Cup start

By Fares Ghaleb

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, June 17: French Ambassador to Kuwait Olivier Gauvin congratulated the French national team on its victory in its opening World Cup match, describing the result as a reflection of the strength, unity and ambition of the team.

Gauvin stated that the French team delivered an impressive performance that fully merited the victory. He pointed out that the two goals scored by Kylian Mbappé elevated him to the status of the French national team's all-time leading scorer with 58 international goals. He added that the goal scored by Bradley Barcola demonstrated the exceptional talent and determination of the players.

He said the match was played in an excellent sporting atmosphere, bringing together French and Kuwaiti supporters in a shared celebration of their love for football. He expressed his happiness over experiencing these moments, alongside fans and followers of the game.

He also praised the Senegal national football team, indicating that it had a strong performance and displayed a high degree of skill and competitiveness throughout the match.



French Ambassador to Kuwait Olivier Gauvin celebrates France's victory over Senegal.

He emphasized that this victory is just the beginning of the French team's journey in the tournament. He expressed confidence in the ability of the team to maintain its high level of performance in the upcoming matches and affirmed the continuous support of fans throughout the World Cup period.

World Cup Diary

Neymar returns to action for limited training: Neymar was back on the training field Tuesday, returning to action for the first time since he joined Brazil's World Cup squad while nursing an injured right leg.

Neymar still wasn't at full speed, though, and did mostly physical conditioning at the team's training camp outside New York.

He had undergone tests on his right calf on Monday to determine the progress of the injury that he sustained while playing with Brazilian club Santos on May 17.

The 34-year-old Neymar, playing at his fourth World Cup, has yet to join the rest of the squad in full training sessions during the team's preparations. (AP)

World Cup Fixtures

Czechia vs South Africa 19:00

Switzerland vs Bosnia 22:00

Friday

Canada vs Qatar 01:00

Mexico vs South Africa 04:00