



Amir, Crown Prince receive Lebanon's Interior Minister

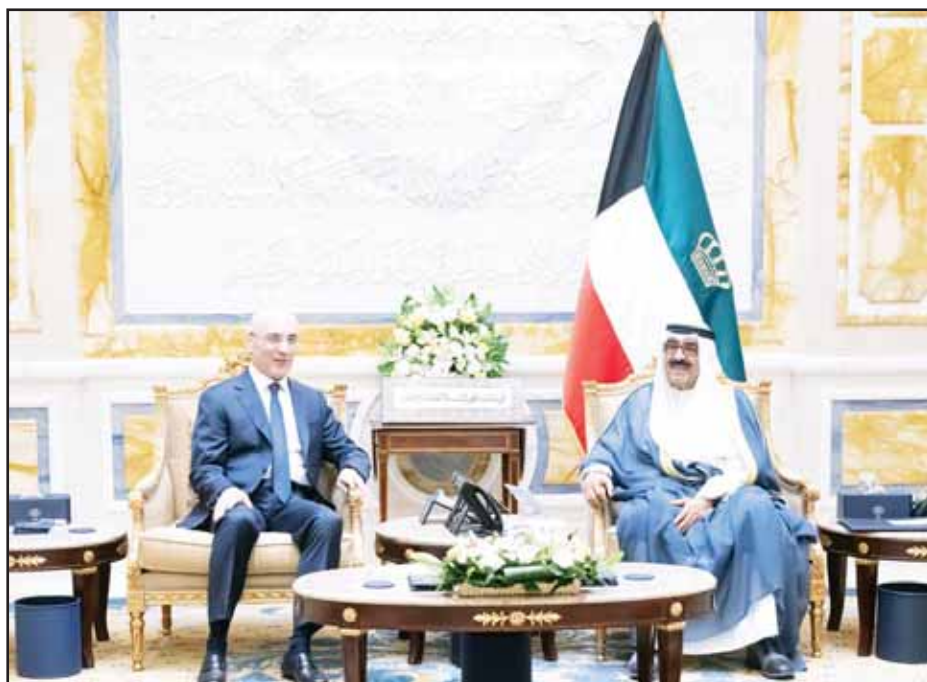
KUWAIT CITY, June 29, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir, Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, received Lebanon's Minister of Interior and Municipalities, Ahmad Al-Hajjar, and his accompanying delegation on Monday on the occasion of their official visit to Kuwait.

Minister Al-Hajjar conveyed the greetings of Lebanese President Joseph Aoun and his wishes for His Highness' continued good health and for Kuwait's further progress and prosperity.

His Highness the Amir asked the minister to convey his greetings to President Aoun, wishing him good health and the Lebanese people continued progress and prosperity.

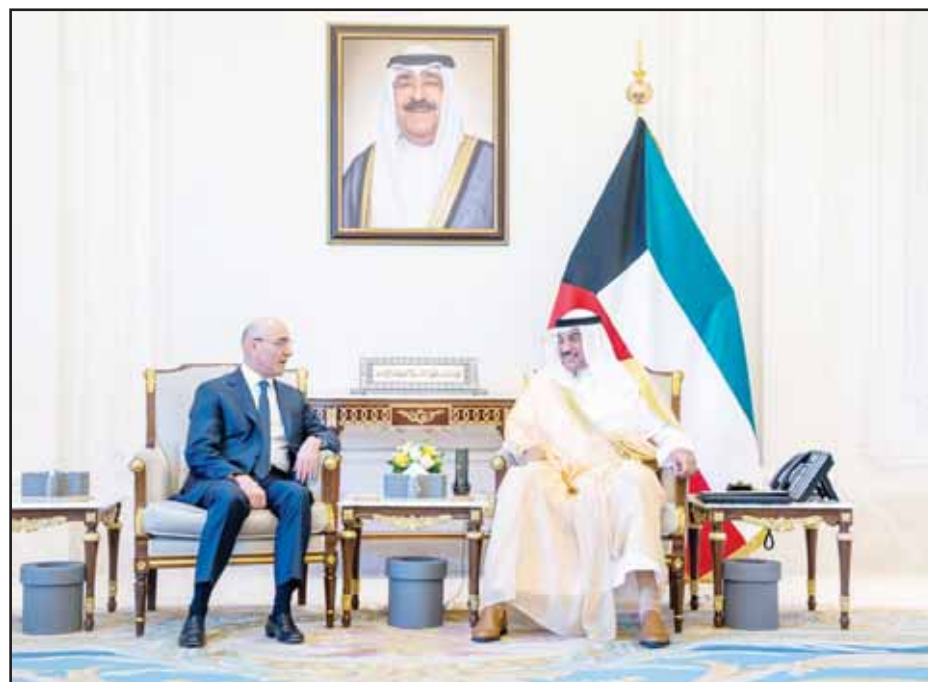
The meeting reviewed the close fraternal relations between the two countries and discussed ways to strengthen cooperation across various fields in support of shared interests.

The meeting was attended by First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah, Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs



Amiri Diwan photo

HH the Amir receives Lebanon's Minister of Interior and Municipalities, Ahmad Al-Hajjar.



Crown Prince Diwan photo

HH the Crown Prince receives Lebanon's Minister of Interior and Municipalities, Ahmad Al-Hajjar.

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Opinion

Ahmed Al-Jarallah

Editor-in-Chief, the Arab Times

Mr. Zaidi, do hurry before owls hoot in Mesopotamia

THE world welcomed the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime, led by the United States and its international and regional allies, because that regime sought to destabilize the region and the world and threatened its neighbors.

However, months later, the welcome turned to resentment as Washington made Tehran its proxy/agent in Iraq. Tehran, in turn, quickly exploited this situation by establishing terrorist proxies, around 60 factions, most of which participated in the government and parliament, and controlled major state institutions.

This is the first step in spreading corruption throughout Iraq, which went beyond the theft of public funds to a severe breakdown of security. The situation enabled terrorist factions to control neighborhoods, villages and cities, establishing something tantamount to security enclaves outside the authority of the legitimate state.

The United States allowed Iranian proxies to control public institutions and cause the erosion and plunder of national income. According to international reports, the amount of public funds stolen is estimated at \$1.4 trillion, while the poverty rate reached about 17 percent of Iraq's 46 million inhabitants.

Those who benefited from corruption, mostly followers of the Iranian regime and high-ranking state officials, were smuggling money either to Iran to invest and prop up its ailing economy, or to their groups in Lebanon to finance terrorist operations and invest in institutions affiliated with Hezbollah.

Many of them also smuggled the stolen funds to some European countries and the United States. Many scandals involving these thieves, who have gone unpunished because of their collusion with executive officials, parliamentarians and leaders of terrorist factions, have been widely circulated on social media and in some western media outlets.

It is strange that their justification is that state funds belong to no one and are like rain—a right for everyone. The truth is that they were into corruption and plunder in the

interest of Iran, or rather, as an international report called it, "a network circumventing international sanctions on Iran through a local system of corruption."

Therefore, the campaign launched by the Iraqi authorities against some parliamentarians and officials over the past two days was not surprising. This campaign is part of a strategy to restore the state's sovereignty and stop Iranian influence in Iraq, similar to what happened in Lebanon after the 'framework agreement' was signed between Beirut and Tel Aviv under auspices of Washington, and weeks before new Iraqi Prime Minister Ali Al-Zaidi's visit to Washington in mid-July.

The goal of this anti-corruption campaign is inseparable from the campaign announced by the Baghdad government to disarm militias and limit weapons to the state. This approach ushers in a new era, led by a young Iraqi prime minister who does not belong to any of the parties that have controlled Iraq for 23 years, transforming it from a regional breadbasket into a desert rife with hunger, poverty and corruption.

It is important to note that the United States may have realized that dismantling Iran's power is the way forward. To atone for the sin it committed in 2003, America is now trying to put Iraq on the right track, as well as offering an indirect apology to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, which suffered enormously in the hands of the Tehran regime's proxies over the years, particularly from terrorist operations and the launching of missiles and drones from Iraq. Without dismantling the Iranian regime, the Iranian plague of terrorism and subversion will continue to spread throughout the region.

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Traffic sweep reels in eight on the run

Plate-less trip ends behind bars

By Munif Naif

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, June 29: Officers from the Jhara Traffic Department have arrested eight individuals of various nationalities who are wanted by law.

A security source indicated that these individuals were apprehended within 24 hours of the issuance of the arrest warrant. He said all those arrested were referred to the concerned authorities to complete the legal measures against

them.

Meanwhile, officers from the Traffic Investigation Department arrested a citizen for driving his vehicle without a plate number. The vehicle was impounded and the citizen was taken to the traffic detention center.

A source from the security sector affirmed that the officers, during their daily patrol to uncover traffic law violations, noticed the citizen driving his vehicle without a plate number. He was immediately arrested and taken to the traffic detention center.

The source underscored the necessity of affixing plate numbers to vehicles and reiterated the prohibition of driving without them.



Ministry of Interior photo

First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah with Lebanon's Minister of Interior and Municipalities Ahmad Al-Hajjar.

Kuwait, Lebanon deepen security ties

KUWAIT CITY, June 29, (KUNA): First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah held talks on Monday with Lebanon's Minister of Interior and Municipalities Ahmad Al-Hajjar on ways to enhance bilateral security cooperation.

The Ministry of Interior said in a state-

ment that the discussions took place during an official meeting held on the occasion of Al-Hajjar's visit to Kuwait, in the presence of Undersecretary of the Ministry of Interior Lieutenant General Abdulwahab Al-Wuhaib.

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Day by Day

AN ancient Indian king once asked his close minister and advisor, "I want you to engrave on my ring a phrase that will make me happy when I read it in sad moments, and make me sad when I read it in happy moments."

After thinking for a moment, the advisor replied, "This time shall pass."

Who among us does not grieve the passing of time, and who does not rejoice for the same reason? Both are joyful and sorrowful. Sometimes, as time passes, relief comes, and we receive what we have long awaited.

The Indian king engraved that phrase on his ring - "This time will pass," and as they say - perhaps it is for the best.

... Yet tomorrow is another day.

Zahed Matar

Unity key, says PACA chief

Kuwait backs safer Arab skies

RABAT, June 29, (KUNA): The 74th session of the Executive Council of the Arab Civil Aviation Organization (ACAO) commenced in Rabat on Monday with the participation of delegations from member states, including Kuwait.

Head of Kuwait's delegation, President of the Public Authority of Civil Aviation (PACA) Sheikh Eng. Humoud Mubarak Al-Humoud Al-Jaber Al-Sabah said Kuwait's participation reflects its firm commitment to supporting joint Arab action in civil aviation.

He expressed appreciation to Saudi Arabia for its successful presidency of the Executive Council and the efforts it exerted in advancing joint Arab cooperation and strengthening coordination among member states in this vital sector.

Sheikh Humoud also welcomed

the International Civil Aviation Organization's (ICAO) decision condemning the recent Iranian attacks on Kuwait, other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states and Jordan, describing the move as a victory for state sovereignty, the protection of national airspace and the safety of civil aviation infrastructure.

He said the meeting reviewed reports submitted by specialized technical committees on aviation safety and aviation security, while adopting unified strategies to reduce carbon emissions in the aviation sector in line with global environmental goals.

The council also discussed enhancing Arab coordination in international forums, particularly within ICAO, and reviewed a report by the Arab Air Carriers Organization (AACO) on key environmental commitments related to carbon emissions by civil aviation companies.

Participants also discussed developments concerning the construction of the organization's new headquarters in the Moroccan capital, Rabat.

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New airport road takes shape as minister inspects progress

By Mohammed Ghanem

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, June 29: Minister of Public Works, Dr. Noura Al-Mashaan, conducted a field visit to the roads leading to the new airport

to inspect the progress of construction and ensure the readiness of the project's connecting roads. The tour included several vital roads, bridges, and tunnels within the project area.

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Ministry of Public Works photo

Minister of Public Works, Dr. Noura Al-Mashaan, during a field visit to the roads leading to the new airport.

Numbers ditched

WhatsApp goes username mode

LONDON, June 29, (AP): WhatsApp users will soon get the option of going by usernames instead of phone numbers, the company said Monday, announcing plans to address a privacy blind spot.

The app said it has started allowing users to reserve unique usernames, which can be used to contact WhatsApp users when the feature is launched later this year.

WhatsApp, which says it has more than 3 billion users globally, has until now allowed users to be contacted by anyone who has their phone number.

The app, owned by Meta Platforms, said in a blog post that over the "coming months" users will get the option to be found and contacted only by their username, and not their number. It wasn't more specific about the timeline.

"We have designed this as a core privacy feature," Alice Newton-Rex, WhatsApp's vice president of

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Landmark Group expands Centrepoin's quick-commerce reach through strategic partnership with talabat



KFH wins Best Digital Bank - Kuwait & MENA Best Islamic SME Bank Awards



Prayer Timings

Fajr	03:16	Asr	15:25
Sunrise	04:51	Maghrib	18:51
Zohr	11:51	Isha	20:24

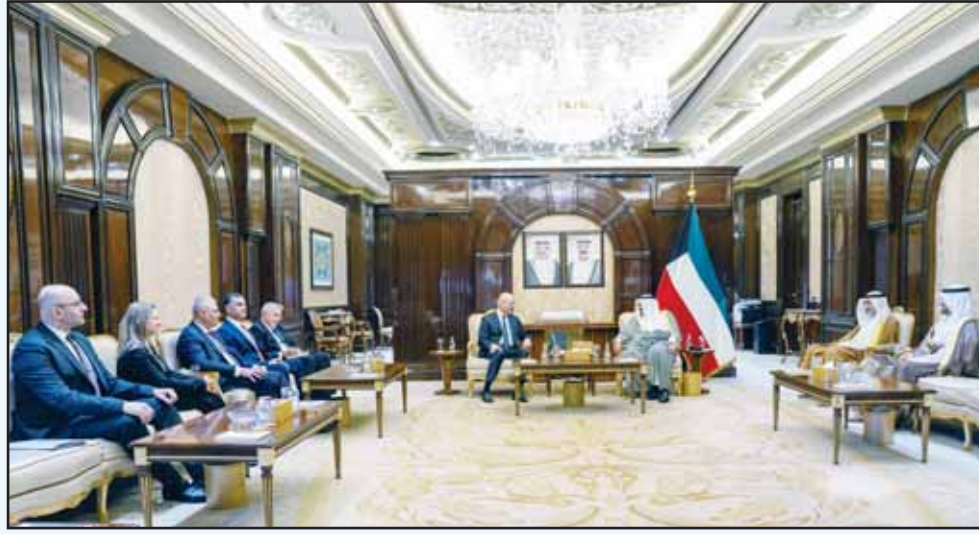
Kuwait, Lebanon review long-standing relations between two countries

KUWAIT CITY, June 29, (KUNA): His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah received Lebanon's Minister of Interior and Municipalities Ahmad Al-Hajjar and his accompanying delegation on Monday during the minister's official visit to Kuwait, in the presence of First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah.

During the meeting, both sides reviewed the longstanding relations between Kuwait and Lebanon and discussed means of enhancing bilateral cooperation across various fields in ways that serve the shared interests of both countries and their brotherly peoples.

His Highness the Prime Minister asked the Lebanese minister to convey his greetings to Lebanese Prime Minister Dr. Nawaf Salam, expressing his sincere wishes for continued progress, stability and prosperity for the Lebanese Republic and its people.

The meeting was attended by Acting Chief of the Prime Minister's Diwan Sheikh Khaled Mohammad Al-Khaled Al-Sabah and Lebanon's Ambassador to the State of Kuwait Ghadi Khoury, alongside members of the accompanying delegation.



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah receives Lebanon's Minister of Interior and Municipalities Ahmad Al-Hajjar and his accompanying delegation.



PM Diwan photos First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah (left) attends the meeting.



The total closure of Fourth Ring Road opposite Yarmouk has led to a total chaos on roads surrounding the area. Motorists were stuck for long hours as queues formed everywhere. People took an extra hour or so to reach home after duty at 9pm and the sweltering heat led to clenched fists and utter frustration while sitting for long time in the over-heated cars. Road repairs are underway in most parts of Kuwait and workers come out well after the sunset.

'People with disabilities get fair share of jobs in market'

UN, other countries adopt Kuwait methodology: Dr Al-Huwailah

By Fares Ghaleb

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, June 29: Minister of Social, Family and Childhood Affairs Dr. Amthal Al-Huwailah affirmed the commitment of Kuwait to empower, rehabilitate and integrate people with disabilities into the labor market to enhance their participation in national development in line with Kuwait Vision 2035 and the sustainable development goals.

Al-Huwailah made the statement during her patronage of the graduation ceremony for the seventh batch of the 'Partners for Their Employment' program for the 2025/2026 training year.

She disclosed that the program, which was launched in 2018 through the coordinated efforts of the Public Authority for Disability Affairs (PADA), Human Development Society for Social Development and United Nations Office in



KUNA photo Minister of Social, Family and Childhood Affairs Dr. Amthal Al-Huwailah making a speech at the ceremony.

Kuwait, is now a national model for the rehabilitation and employment of people with special needs. She said the seventh batch consists of 100 participants nominated to enter the labor market, increasing the total number of beneficiaries to 481 who benefited from five training programs in partnership with 27 national entities.

She added that the initiative achieved 97.6 percent job retention rate in the six batches, surpassing similar programs in the United States and the United Kingdom.

She stated that the initiative's

methodology has been adopted outside Kuwait, reflecting the leading role of the country in supporting the rights of persons with disabilities.

She also commended the efforts of PADA, Human Development Society for Social Development, United Nations Office, and the supporting entities like the Public Authority for Minors Affairs (PAMA) and various institutions in the public and private sectors.

On the other hand, Aalia Al-Khaled, Deputy Chairperson of the Board of Directors of the Human Development Society for So-

cial Development, revealed that the program achieved 97 percent job stability rate, with a turnover rate of 2.4 percent, surpassing many international initiatives.

She pointed out that the initiative not only provided job opportunities, but also contributed to the financial savings of about KD1.3 million for the country, as graduates transitioned from receiving monthly allowances to relying on their own salaries.

Ghada Al-Taher, Representative of the Secretary General of the United Nations and Resident Coordinator in Kuwait, confirmed that the program is a national model fully appreciated by the United Nations and it has been included in the national reports for the Universal Periodic Review of the Human Rights Council.

She indicated that the cooperation with Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED) includes other initiatives in partnership with United Nations organizations, in addition to the joint program for the period 2026-2029 with funding of \$5 million to develop these experiences and transfer them regionally and internationally.

Kuwait seeks to broaden bonds with China: envoy

BEIJING, June 29, (KUNA): Kuwait's Ambassador to China, Jassem Al-Najem, on Monday affirmed Kuwait's commitment to expanding cooperation with China across various fields.



Al-Najem

Speaking at the opening of the First China-Shanghai Cooperation Organization Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation in Qingdao, Al-Najem highlighted Kuwait's focus on science, technology and innovation under Kuwait Vision 2035.

He said the vision aims to diversify the economy, accelerate digital transformation, develop smart infrastructure, support scientific research and empower youth.

Al-Najem reaffirmed Kuwait's interest in strengthening cooperation with China in artificial intelligence, renewable energy, smart cities, higher education and scientific research to advance shared interests and sustainable development.

He stressed the importance of enhancing scientific, technological and innovation cooperation among Shanghai Cooperation Organization member states and expressed hope the forum would produce practical partnerships and initiatives.

Kuwait reaffirms commitment to rights cooperation with EU

KUWAIT CITY, June 29, (KUNA): Assistant Foreign Minister for Human Rights Ambassador Sheikha Jawaher Ibrahim Al-Duaij Al-Sabah affirmed Kuwait's commitment to continuing coordination and cooperation with the European Union across areas of mutual interest, particularly within the framework of the United Nations Human Rights Council.

In a statement to KUNA following her meeting with the European Union Ambassador to Kuwait and ambassadors of EU member states, Sheikha Jawaher said the talks focused on enhancing cooperation and coordination during the 62nd session of the Human Rights Council, as well as exchanging views on key draft resolutions on the council's agenda.

She praised the level of cooperation between Kuwait and the European Union, commending the EU and its member states for supporting joint efforts in multilateral forums and stressing the importance of maintaining dialogue and coordination to promote and pro-

tect human rights.

The meeting also reviewed Kuwait's priorities during the 62nd session of the Human Rights Council, including the country's draft resolution on the consequences of obstructing the delivery of humanitarian assistance and threats to the safety of humanitarian workers.

The two sides also exchanged views on current regional developments and their implications for regional security and stability.

In turn, the European Union reaffirmed its commitment to continued cooperation and coordination with Kuwait, particularly within the framework of the Human Rights Council.

The EU also expressed support for Kuwait's efforts in the field of human rights and commended the achievements of the National Committee for the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security, stressing the importance of continuing cooperation and exchanging expertise in this area.

Kuwait leadership & people condole Saudi over tragedy

KUWAIT CITY, June 29, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a cable of condolences to Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, expressing his sincere condolences over the victims of the Saudi Aramco helicopter crash in Ras Tanura.

His Highness prayed to Allah Almighty to bestow His mercy upon the victims and provide their families with patience and solace.

His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent a cable of condolences to Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, expressing his sincere condolences over the victims of the Saudi Aramco helicopter crash in Ras Tanura.

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His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah sent a cable of condolences to Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, expressing his sincere condolences over the victims of the Saudi Aramco helicopter crash in Ras Tanura.

Kuwait expressed its sympathy on Sunday with Saudi Arabia following the crash of a Saudi Aramco helicopter in Ras Tanura Governorate.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement that Kuwait extends its sincere condolences and heartfelt sympathies to the leadership, government and people of Saudi Arabia over the tragic incident.

Kuwait, Japan hold talks on latest region developments

KUWAIT CITY, June 29, (KUNA): Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah received a phone call on Monday from Japan's Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement that the two sides reviewed the strategic bilateral relations and ways to further strengthen and develop cooperation across various fields.



Sheikh Jarrah



Toshimitsu Motegi



Photo by Samer Shaqair Embassy of Lebanon in Kuwait is the first to adopt the biometric fingerprint service for issuing Lebanese passports outside Lebanon.

'Lebanon embassy in Kuwait is first to enforce biometrics'

By Fares Ghaleb

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, June 29: Lebanese Interior Minister Brigadier General Ahmad Hajjar confirmed that the Embassy of Lebanon in Kuwait is the first to adopt the biometric fingerprint service for issuing Lebanese passports outside Lebanon.

During the launching of the service at the embassy, Hajjar said the project will be gradually rolled out to Lebanese embassies worldwide in the coming months. He explained that the service allows Lebanese citizens abroad to complete their transactions without the need to travel to Lebanon.

He stated that the project was developed in coordination with the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants, Ministry of Finance, and the Lebanese Public Security General Directorate. He added that the biometric fingerprints will be taken at the embassy and electronically transmitted to the General Directorate of Public Security in Beirut for passport issuance and return to Kuwait for delivery to the passport holder.

He disclosed that the service will be available through two ways -- the standard process that takes about three weeks and the fast track process through DHL, which allows passport delivery within two to three days for an additional fee.

He confirmed that the old passport will no longer be valid as of Oct 1, signaling the completion of the transition to the interna-

tionally recognized biometric passport.

He praised the Kuwaiti authorities' cooperation in ensuring the success of the project. He also commended the brotherly relations between the two countries.

He shared the message he received from First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef, that members of the Lebanese community are among the least likely to commit violations, as they are committed to respect the law.

On the other hand, Lebanese Ambassador to Kuwait Ghadi Khoury affirmed that choosing Kuwait for the launching the service for the first time outside Lebanon reflects the high regard in which it is held by the Lebanese state and people. He stressed that the service will save time and effort for members of the Lebanese community.

He urged the Lebanese citizens to take the initiative to replace their old passports, emphasizing that holding the new passport is mandatory, not optional. He added that children under the age of 15 and individuals over the age of 60 are exempted from biometric fingerprinting.

He indicated that the embassy will begin operating the service during a trial period without the need for an appointment in order to assess demand. He stated that an appointment booking system will be implemented later if the need arises. He added that it only takes less than 10 minutes to complete the fingerprinting process and submit the application.

diwaniya ديوانية

A DIGEST OF PUBLIC OPINION

Is Hormuz int'l waterway or a device for blackmail?

"AS regional tensions escalate, the Strait of Hormuz has once again come to the forefront, raising important questions about the true nature of its control," Kuwaiti journalist **Salem Al-Wawan** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

"Has it become a private trade route used by Iran to confront the international community, or is it an international waterway that serves the interests of the region and the world?"

"Geographically and legally, the Strait of Hormuz is not the exclusive property of Iran. It is an international waterway linking the Arabian Gulf to the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean, serving as a vital route for the export of energy and the movement of goods and commercial trade to and from the Gulf states.

"Its strategic importance extends far beyond the borders of the countries that border it. The Strait is a critical artery for the global economy and international energy security. For this reason, no single country should exercise exclusive control over the Strait of Hormuz.

"It is difficult to imagine that the Arabian Gulf states would accept having their trade or oil exports subjected to the control of any single party, whether the United States or Iran. Over decades, these states have invested in building international security and economic partnerships to ensure freedom of navigation and protect shared interests. International straits must remain open to global trade, free from political pressure or military considerations.

"Iran affirms in its official discourse that it respects international maritime law, yet it has repeatedly clashed with other countries over the interpretation of navigation rules and the rights of passage through the Strait of Hormuz.

"On the other hand, the international community upholds the fundamental principle that international straits must not be used as tools of political or economic blackmail, as any disruption to navigation in these waterways affects the stability of global markets and energy security.

"The future of the Strait of Hormuz is not determined by the will of a single nation, but by the principles of international law, regional power dynamics, and global economic interests. As such, the Strait will remain a vital international waterway, and freedom of navigation within it will continue to be a red line for the Gulf states and the world at large, regardless of rising tensions or changing political calculations."

Also:

"International conflicts are no longer purely military in the traditional sense. A fundamental shift has occurred, as advanced technology has become a subject of competition between major powers and a determinant of their foreign policies," **Omar Abdullah Ahmad** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

"A very important book titled 'The Chip War,' by author and researcher **Chris Miller**, was published in 2022.

"Global technological conflict has recently become highly significant. The book reviews the geopolitical history of semiconductors, explaining their strategic importance and the international competition over them, particularly between the United States and China.

"Chris Miller presents the various historical transformations in the semiconductor industry and shows how the Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC) became one of the most important links in global supply chains.

"After World War II, American companies increasingly sought to design and manufacture chips in Silicon Valley, which is home to the leading technology companies near San Francisco. The Soviet Union attempted to develop its own version of Silicon Valley, but it remained secondary to the American semiconductor market.

"European companies entered the semiconductor market, but European semiconductor manufacturing did not pose a serious threat to American dominance. The next development in the semiconductor industry came from Asia. With the rise of major technology producers such as Sony and Samsung in Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Taiwan, it seemed Asia was poised to overtake the United States as the world's leading chip-maker.

"Upon President Xi Jinping's arrival in March 2013, China focused on achieving breakthroughs in core chip technologies, the fundamental building blocks of computers, software, artificial intelligence, modern computing, networks, and processing units.

"The Trump administration, during its first term, dealt a series of blows to China's chip industry by imposing export restrictions on US-made chips and drawing geopolitical allies into a similar approach, including Taiwan, which was committed to restricting exports to

China.

"This policy continued under the subsequent US administration and is expected to persist in Trump's second term, with sanctions imposed on companies that fail to comply with the ban on supplying China with chips. China is currently striving to reduce its reliance on foreign chip production capabilities. The world is undergoing a rapid digital and technological transformation.

"Military power has also become increasingly reliant on highly complex and advanced computing systems, artificial intelligence, automation, machine learning, and virtual reality. Weapons such as laser-guided missiles, submarines, ships, and aircraft have been transformed.

"Consequently, modern military power is no longer measured by the number of tanks or soldiers. Attacks can be launched from long distances with minimal manpower but with high-precision technology to achieve decisive military outcomes.

"The 'chip war,' as Chris Miller termed it, between the United States and China is likely to intensify. Despite the United States' dominance in this field, China is advancing rapidly."

□ □ □

"Every four years, billions of people eagerly await the FIFA World Cup, the world's most popular sporting event," columnist **Mohammad Nasser Al-Aleem** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

"This raises an important question - Why does football attract such global attention while international competitions in science, innovation, education, and humanitarian work receive far less recognition? Football has achieved this status because it is a universal language understood by people everywhere. It combines entertainment, competition, and national pride, while giving countries an opportunity to showcase their identity and sporting excellence.

"The tournament has also become a powerful platform for bringing nations together, promoting cultural and economic exchange, and boosting tourism and investment. However, nation-building depends not only on sports, but also on science, knowledge, and innovation. This highlights the need to expand the concept of global competition to include other fields that are no less important than sports.

"The world today faces major challenges in education, healthcare, the environment, technology, and sustainable development. These are areas that demand investment in human potential and the encouragement of innovation. Organizing major international competitions in scientific research, innovation, entrepreneurship, and humanitarian and volunteer work can create a positive spirit of competition among nations, inspire young people to excel, and give scientists, inventors, and development leaders the recognition they deserve.

"Celebrating scientific and humanitarian achievements on a global stage will strengthen the culture of knowledge and make scientific success a source of national pride, just as sporting victories are today. Nations progress not only through the goals they score on the field, but also through the ideas, inventions, and initiatives they create to improve lives and advance humanity.

"The world needs international competitions that celebrate intellectual achievement as much as athletic excellence, because true progress depends on a balance between physical and intellectual development. While sports unite people, inspire joy, and promote mutual understanding, science and innovation shape the future. The most successful nations are those that combine sporting achievement with scientific excellence and humanitarian leadership."

□ □ □

"Behind every way of thinking lies a fundamental logic that shapes how a person reasons and reaches conclusions. This logic influences values, principles, perceptions, and reactions to everything they encounter," Kuwaiti writer **Dr. Khaled Al-Janfawi** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

"A rational person should understand this underlying logic, whether it is sound or flawed, in order to better understand themselves, recognize their own nature, and live a balanced life. Flawed logic may involve excessively adopting other personas in ways that are contrary to one's individual nature. A kind and friendly person is generally less likely to encounter problems, belittle others, or be exploited.

"Avoiding confrontation with toxic personalities and distancing oneself from them can reduce their negative impact on one's life. Making important life decisions based on emotions, being misled by flattering words, or being influenced by money are not prerequisites for a happy life.

- Compiled by Simi K. Kutty



Salem Al-Wawan



Al-Aleem

Man in shock as wife sells all, flees with child

KUWAIT CITY, June 29: An Arab resident filed a report at a police station in Hawally Governorate stating that his wife had taken advantage of his presence at his workplace to sell a large portion of the furniture and belongings from their marital home before leaving Kuwait with their child, reports **Al-Anba** daily.

The 36-year-old man explained that his wife had informed him via WhatsApp of

her intention to initiate legal proceedings for divorce. Upon returning home from work around 4:00 pm, he was shocked to find that most of his electronic devices, furniture, personal belongings, and gold jewelry were missing, along with his wife and child.

He tried unsuccessfully to contact his wife until he received a WhatsApp message informing him of her departure from Kuwait

and her decision to pursue divorce.

According to a security source, the complainant accused his wife of taking items from the home, asserting that he had done nothing to justify such an action.

He further stated that the disagreements between them were ordinary marital disputes that did not justify selling the furniture and leaving the country so suddenly.

20 employees under probe for skipping working hours

By Fares Ghaleb

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, June 29: The Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA) referred 20 employees of the Sabah Al-Ahmad Development Center for investigation for failing to adhere to official working hours.

These measures are being carried out in line with the directives of the Minister of Social, Family and Childhood Affairs, Dr. Amthal Al-Huwaila, who consistently emphasizes the importance of instilling principles of professional discipline and commitment to duties and responsibilities. This contributes to enhancing the efficiency of government work and improving the level of services provided to citizens and residents.

According to informed sources, the ministry deals firmly with any administrative violations without leniency or exception, in order to foster a work environment based on commitment and accountability and to ensure the delivery of the best possible services.

Grade 12 students exams end

KUWAIT CITY, June 29, (KUNA): Grade 12 students completed their second semester final examinations for the 2025-2026 academic year on Monday following preparations and measures implemented by the Ministry of Education.

Arts students sat their final Statistics exam, while Science students completed their Chemistry exam on Sunday, marking the conclusion of this year's secondary school examinations.

The graduates have now completed a key stage of their academic journey and will prepare to pursue higher education.

Beating in loo ... culprits nabbed

Son threatens to kill 60s mom over cash

By Munif Naif

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff and Agencies

KUWAIT CITY, June 29: The Criminal Security Sector, represented by the General Department of Criminal Investigation, concluded its investigation into a widely circulated video showing an assault on a person inside a public restroom in Salmiya.

Investigations led to the identification and arrest of the perpetrators, who were found to be juvenile Kuwaiti citizens.

In an official statement, the Ministry of Interior explained that the first suspect, aged 17, physically assaulted the victim, while the second suspect, aged 16, filmed the incident. The third suspect, also aged 17, posted the video on social media

platforms. The suspects have been referred to the Juvenile Prosecution for legal action.

The ministry emphasized its firm stance against such misconduct and irresponsible behavior, affirming that it will take strict legal action against anyone who threatens the safety and security of others.

It also urged parents to monitor their children's behavior and provide proper guidance to protect them from legal consequences.

□ □ □

Son threatens mother: Security authorities launched an investigation into a report filed by a woman in her sixties, who stated that she was threatened with death by her son inside the family home in Adan, reports **Al-Anba** daily.

The mother explained in the report that a dispute arose with her son over money. When she refused to give him the money, he became enraged and threatened to kill her before leaving the house.

A security source stated that the police investigator ordered the arrest and detention of the ac-

cused for questioning. A case has been registered and legal procedures are underway.

□ □ □

Crane catches fire on road: Fire broke out in a crane on Fahaheel Highway on Sunday evening, reports **Al-Seyassah** daily.

In an official statement, the Kuwait Fire Force (KFF) stated that firefighters from Al-Bida'a Fire Station rushed to the location and extinguished the fire. No casualties were reported in the incident.

□ □ □

No injuries in basement fire: Fire broke out in the basement of a house in Hiteen recently, reports **Al-Seyassah** daily.

The Kuwait Fire Force (KFF) stated in a press release that firefighters from the Mishref and Subhan fire stations rushed to the location and extinguished the fire. No casualties were reported.

Investigations were launched to determine the cause of the fire.

Appeal acquits man accused of cash fraud

KUWAIT CITY, June 29: The Court of Appeals acquitted a defendant of money laundering and possession of unlicensed firearms and ammunition due to insufficient evidence, reports **Al-Seyassah** daily.

Attorney Ayed Mahdi Al-Rashidi, lawyer for

the accused, argued in court that the arrest and search procedures were invalid and that the evidence was inadequate.

In its reasoning, the court affirmed that the case file lacked conclusive evidence to support

the charges, which were based solely on the statements of the investigating officer.

The court clarified that the acquittal decision is based on Article 172/1 of the Criminal Procedures and Trials Law.

Jail, deportation upheld in expat sedition lawsuit

KUWAIT CITY, June 29: The State Security Circuit of the Court of Appeals issued several rulings in an evening session held recently against individuals accused of inciting sedition, sympathizing with Iranian aggression, and promoting the ideologies of banned organizations on social media, reports **Al-Anba** daily.

The court upheld the decision to refrain from sentencing a number of male and female citizens accused in cases of sympathizing with Iranian aggression, while requiring them to sign a pledge of good conduct for two years.

The court overturned the acquittal of a blogger accused of insulting the Arab Republic of Egypt and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and promoting the ideology of the terrorist organization Hezbollah. The court instead decided to refrain from punishing him and ordered him to pay bail of 3,000 Kuwaiti dinars, requiring him to maintain good conduct for two years.

The court upheld the three-year prison sentence issued against an expatriate, followed by deportation, for inciting sedition and sympathizing with Iranian aggression on social media.

Better healthcare for prisoners discussed

CAIRO, June 29, (KUNA): Kuwait participated on Sunday in an Arab workshop on ways to develop healthcare services provided to inmates at correctional and rehabilitation institutions, ahead of the opening of the 23rd Arab Conference of Heads of Correctional and Rehabilitation Institutions.

Kuwait was represented at the workshop by a delegation from the Ministry of Interior, comprising Assistant Director of the Central Prison Colonel Abdullah Al-Ajmi and Assistant Director of Information and Follow-up at the Correctional Institution Colonel Ayed Al-Saeed.

The workshop discussed several topics related to improving healthcare services for inmates at correctional and rehabilitation institutions across Arab countries.

It also reviewed the experiences of several countries in this field as part of ongoing efforts to promote human rights principles and ensure adequate healthcare for inmates.

The workshop was held in conjunction with Egypt's Ministry of Interior, hosting the 23rd Arab Conference of Heads of Correctional and Rehabilitation Institutions, which is set to open on Monday.

According to a statement issued by the General Secretariat of the Arab Interior Ministers Council, the conference will bring together representatives of Arab interior and justice ministries, the League of Arab States, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Naif Arab University for Security Sciences and the council's General Secretariat.



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Municipal Council nods expansion of Nuwaiseeb border crossing with 2 new sites

By Inaas Awadh

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, June 29: The Municipal Council, during its Monday session chaired by Abdullah Al-Muhairi, approved the General Administration of Customs' request to allocate two additional sites for the expansion of the Nuwaiseeb border crossing, covering a total area of 1,420,000 square meters.

The expansion aims to enhance logistical services and improve the operational efficiency of the border crossing.

The approval includes the allocation of two new sites - the first covering 99,828 square meters and the second spanning 1,320,172 square meters. The sites will be used for dry and wet storage, as well as shaded and open storage areas, in addition to providing supporting services.

Following the expansion, the total area of the Nuwaiseeb border crossing will increase to 2,580,700 square meters, which will strengthen its infrastructure and enhance its capacity to accommodate commercial traffic and logistical services.



Municipal Council members attend the Monday session.



Photos by Rizk Taufiq



HH the Amir



HH the Crown Prince



HH the PM

Amir congratulates Seychelles Pres. on Independence Day

KUWAIT CITY, June 29, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a congratulatory cable to the President of the Republic of Seychelles Dr. Patrick Herminie on his country's Independence Day, wishing him long-lasting health.

His Highness the Amir wished the President long-lasting health and the country of Seychelles and its people further progress and prosperity.

Crown Prince congratulates

His Highness the Crown Prince

Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent a congratulatory cable to the President of the Republic of Seychelles Dr. Patrick Herminie on his country's Independence Day, wishing him long-lasting health.

PM congratulates

His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah sent a congratulatory cable to the President of the Republic of Seychelles Dr. Patrick Herminie on his country's Independence Day.

Belgium beckons Kuwaitis

Direct flights under study: Ambassador Doods

By Fares Ghaleb

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, June 29: Belgian Ambassador to Kuwait Christian Doods said many Kuwaitis remain unaware of the diverse destinations that Belgium offers, boasting a rich historical, cultural and natural heritage.

In a statement to reporters on the sidelines of an event organized by the Belgian Embassy to promote Belgian tourism, Doods revealed that Belgium offers a comprehensive tourism experience combining visits to historical cities, enjoyment of stunning natural landscapes, shopping and world-class festivals, in addition to experiencing renowned Belgian cuisine that caters to all tastes.

He explained that the capital, Brussels, is not only important as the home of European Union institutions, but also a city rich in landmarks, museums and activities. He asserted that Belgium's small size allows visitors to easily travel between cities and enjoy multiple destinations



Christian Doods

within a single trip.

He added that Belgium consists of prominent cities like Bruges, Ghent and Antwerp, as well as coastal resorts and the natural Ardennes region. He said Antwerp is world-renowned for its diamond trade, indicating that his country hosts international events, most notably the Tomorrowland Music Festival and the Spa-Francorchamps Circuit for the Formula 1 World Championship.

He also disclosed that he is currently working on the launching of direct flights between Kuwait and Belgium, clarifying that the lack of

a direct route is one of the main factors limiting the number of Kuwaiti tourists. He cited the difficulty in accurately counting the number of passengers arriving in Belgium from Kuwait through indirect flights.

He indicated that the next phase will involve hosting representatives from Belgian travel companies and agencies in Kuwait to promote tourism opportunities, expressing his confidence that this step will solidify tourism exchange between the two countries.

He then pointed out that investment cooperation between Kuwait and Belgium is at a good level, particularly in the petrochemical sector. He is hoping to expand the horizons of economic cooperation in a way that serves the interests of both countries. He added that the Port of Antwerp is currently participating in a public tender in Kuwait, hoping this participation will yield positive results in the coming period.

He affirmed the continuation of communication between the two sides to strengthen defense cooperation, adding that the Belgian military attaché recently visited Kuwait. He stated that another visit is expected in September or October to continue discussions and explore opportunities for cooperation.



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KUNA photo
Acting Director General of Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) Mohammad Al-Mannai receives the Ambassador of Tanzania to Kuwait Saidi Hussein Massoro.

KUNA, Tanzania discuss ways to enhance media cooperation

KUWAIT CITY, June 29, (KUNA): Acting Director General of Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) Mohammad Al-Mannai, met with the Ambassador of Tanzania to Kuwait Saidi Hussein Massoro on Monday, to discuss ways to enhance media cooperation between the two friendly countries.

During the meeting, Al-Mannai emphasized KUNA's commitment to building bridges of media cooperation and developing relations with various media institutions in brotherly nations, noting that this cooperation aims to facilitate the exchange of news and knowledge and keep pace with shared media developments worldwide.

For his part, Ambassador Massoro

praised KUNA's leading and distinguished role on both the regional and international stages, highlighting its objective and professional coverage of news events, expressing his country's aspiration to strengthen media cooperation with Kuwait in a way that serves the common interests of both countries and their friendly peoples.

The meeting was also attended by KUNA's Deputy Director General for Editorial Affairs Essam Al-Ghanim, Director of Marketing and Public Relations Essam Al-Ruwaieh, Director of the Director General's Office Lamia Al-Farsi and several staff members of the Tanzanian Embassy.

Kuwait, Cyprus to upgrade ties

BEIRUT, June 29, (KUNA): Kuwait's Ambassador to Cyprus, Abdullah Al-Turki, on Monday discussed with Cypriot Foreign Minister Constantinos Kombos ways to strengthen bilateral relations across various fields in a manner that serves the interests of both friendly countries.

The Kuwaiti Embassy in Nicosia said Al-Turki conveyed greetings from Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and his wishes for continued progress and prosperity for Cyprus and its people.

The ambassador praised Cyprus' role during its presidency of the Council of the European Union and its efforts to enhance dialogue between the EU and Gulf Cooperation Council states.

He also commended Cyprus' supportive positions on Gulf security and its commitment to dialogue and international law, stressing the importance of continued coordination on regional and international issues of mutual interest.

Both sides reviewed recent regional and international developments and reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening cooperation and coordination in the coming period.



KUNA photo
Kuwait's Ambassador to Cyprus, Abdullah Al-Turki, meets with Cypriot Foreign Minister Constantinos Kombos.

ening cooperation and coordination in the coming period.

Maintenance deal focuses on safety, performance

Kuwait opens Jaber Causeway bid race

By Mohammad Ghanem

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, June 29: The Board of Directors of the Central Agency for Public Tenders (CAPT) approved, during its meeting last Wednesday, the request of the Ministry of Public Works to float a tender for the management, operation and maintenance of Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah Causeway.

CAPT granted approval after reviewing the letter of the ministry about the final amendments to the tender documents.

CAPT set July 28 as the deadline for companies wishing to compete for the project to submit their bids, paving the way for the awarding of the contract as

per the regulations.

This project is important for the Ministry of Public Works, given the significance of the Sheikh Jaber Causeway as one of the most prominent infrastructure projects.

The tender aims to ensure that the management, operation and maintenance of the causeway are according to the highest technical and operational standards. It includes the provision of all the needed materials, equipment, and technical and administrative personnel for managing and operating the causeway. The tender covers supplementary works required by the ministry as per the contract terms, operation and management of the truck weighing station buildings, the visitor center

in Shuwaikh, headquarters of the ministry in Doha, maintenance of fire suppression systems, stormwater drainage and sewage networks, provision of security and guarding services, waste management in coordination with the relevant authorities, and securing the necessary water supply.

The winning contractor must be committed to carry out periodic cleaning of the road surface and bridge components, and conduct regular inspection, monitoring and maintenance works, including dehumidification and the use of specialized cranes, to ensure structural integrity, enhance operational efficiency, and achieve the highest level of safety for those using the causeway.

Continued from Page 1

Amir, Crown Prince

Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah, Director of His Highness the Amir's Office retired Lieutenant General Jamal Mohammad Al-Theyab, Undersecretary of the Amiri Diwan Sheikh Abdulaziz Meshal Mubarak Al-Sabah, and Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs at the Amiri Diwan Mazen Essa Al-Essa.

Separately, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah also received Lebanon's Minister of Interior and Municipalities, Ahmad Al-Hajjar, and the accompanying official delegation on Monday on the occasion of their visit to Kuwait.

The meeting reviewed the close fraternal relations between Kuwait and Lebanon, as well as issues of mutual interest and ways to strengthen bilateral cooperation across various fields.

The meeting was attended by First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah, Chief of the Crown Prince's Diwan Sheikh Thamer Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, and senior officials.

New airport

The minister received briefings from officials and supervising engineers on the current stages of implementation and plans for completing the work according to the approved schedules.

Dr. Al-Mashaan emphasized the importance of adhering to the highest standards of quality and safety in pro-

ject execution.

She stressed the need to expedite the work and complete the roads on time to facilitate traffic flow to and from the new airport in line with the project's significance and expected large traffic volume.

Kuwait backs

Sheikh Humoud stressed that the current challenges facing the civil aviation industry require greater integration and stronger partnerships among Arab civil aviation authorities, affirming Kuwait's readiness to share its expertise and contribute to developing training programs and enhancing the capabilities of Arab professionals in the sector.

The Arab Civil Aviation Organization, headquartered in Rabat, is a specialized organization affiliated with the League of Arab States.

Established in 1996, it aims to strengthen cooperation and coordination among Arab civil aviation authorities and provide a common framework to ensure the safety and development of civil air transport in line with global standards.

Kuwait, Lebanon

The statement said the two sides reviewed several issues of mutual interest, exchanging views and emphasizing the importance of continuing coordination and consultation, while further developing mechanisms for security cooperation and the exchange of expertise between the rel-

evant authorities in both countries.

Both ministers reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening bilateral cooperation and expanding it to broader levels.

The statement added that the meeting also reviewed the distinguished brotherly relations between Kuwait and Lebanon.

WhatsApp goes

product, told reporters.

There won't be a directory of usernames on the app, and the app won't suggest names as you type.

"People will need to know your exact username to contact you for the first time," she said.

WhatsApp's current privacy settings are limited to blocking individual users and silencing unknown callers. The app also allows users to add a profile name, but that's only displayed in chat groups for other people who don't have the user's contact info saved.

While Americans still prefer text messaging to WhatsApp, the app is widely used in Europe, Asia and much of the rest of the world.

Catchy online handles are highly coveted and users will likely scramble to claim a desirable one.

"I think a lot of people will go and get usernames and that's why we decided to open reservations early," Newton-Rex said.

Companies, organizations and creators with existing accounts on Meta's social media platforms, Instagram and Facebook, will get the chance to claim their usernames on WhatsApp.



Ministry of Justice photo

Kuwait's Minister of Justice Nasser Al-Sumait during a press conference held at the Ministry of Justice.

Justice Minister hails law reform milestone

Court caseload falls after legal reforms

By Jaber Al-Hamoud

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, June 29: Minister of Justice Nasser Al-Sumait announced the completion of the second phase of the National Plan to Modernize the Legislative System, approximately six months ahead of schedule.

This phase included the review, issuance, amendment, and repeal of 250 laws, representing about 25 percent of all laws currently in force in Kuwait. The third phase aims to review and update 400 laws by December 2027.

During a press conference held at the Ministry of Justice, Al-Sumait explained that the second

phase involved the issuance of 24 new laws, the amendment of 56 laws, and the repeal of 9 laws, in addition to 161 laws, decrees, and approvals related to international agreements and memoranda of understanding. This achievement was made possible through the combined efforts of various governmental, judicial, and legal bodies.

The third phase will add approximately 150 laws to those already completed, with a focus on reviewing legislation that has a direct impact on economic, criminal, and social aspects.

The amendments will include the Penal Code, the Criminal Procedures and Trials Law, the Personal Status Law, the Family Court Law, laws related to the protection of children and families, as well as the Real Estate Registration Law and the private sector labor law.

Meanwhile, Minister Al-Sumait explained that the total number of cases before the courts decreased from 534,226 to 422,713, a decline of 20.88 percent.

Cases before the Court of Cassation decreased by 45.31 percent, while criminal cases before the Court of First Instance fell by 27 percent, reflecting the impact of updated legislation and improved judicial procedures.

Al-Sumait revealed that amending the Civil and Commercial Procedures Law by raising the minimum amount of money subject to appeal from KD 1,000 to KD 2,000 contributed to a 27.1 percent decrease in partial appeal cases.

He added that amending the system of payment orders led to a 39.9 percent decrease in such cases, after enabling the court to rule directly on the merits of the dispute when considering appeals.



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INTERNATIONAL



The Snyder Fire burns near Thompson Springs, Utah, on June 28. (AP)

Heat wave and high humidity will blast much of eastern US, say meteorologists

WASHINGTON, June 29, (AP): A long and dangerous heat wave will blast a large swath of the central and eastern United States this week, the National Weather Service said, with temperatures rising ahead of the July Fourth holiday and feeling even hotter because of the high humidity that's arriving with it.

Already, parts of the US, especially Phoenix and central Texas, and much of the Southwest were experiencing temperatures around 100 F (38 C) on Sunday, while the weather service warned of severe wildfire conditions developing across much of the West as new fires popped up across the region.

On Sunday, well over 130 million Americans across southern and Great Plains states were under moderate to severe heat risk conditions, according to weather service maps, with that area forecast to expand and

temperatures to intensify as the week drags on.

Forecasters say several days of high temperatures - some above 100 degrees F - will settle in across the lower Great Lakes, the mid-Atlantic and the Mississippi and Ohio River valleys. Some record highs could be set in areas from the lower Great Lakes to the mid-Atlantic and New England later in the week, said weather service meteorologist Bryan Putnam.

A number of big cities could see their highest temperatures of the year so far as they host World Cup matches and celebrations for America's 250th anniversary.

Feeling the heat will be the East Coast cities of New York, Philadelphia, Washington and Baltimore, and Midwestern and Great Lakes cities including Chicago, Indianapolis, St Louis and Detroit. Southern

cities including Dallas, Little Rock, Arkansas, and Memphis, Tennessee, will also see high temperatures.

High heat will last into next weekend across the Great Plains, the Southeast and the mid-Atlantic, the weather service said.

Temperatures will reach well into the 90s and low 100 degrees Fahrenheit (mid to high 30s Celsius), the weather service said. High humidity will lead to heat indexes of 100 to 110 degrees F (40 C to 43 C), and as high as 115 F (46 C).

"That's heat that's impactful to anyone," Putnam said. "It's not just older adults or younger children or people who are spending a ton of time outdoors, maybe straining themselves a little more than normal. This is heat that really could impact everyone, especially with people outdoors going into the holiday weekend."

Initiative petitions can be direct or indirect, depending on state

As Massachusetts ballot initiatives multiply, critics want to limit them

WASHINGTON, June 29, (AP): This year, eight initiative petitions are likely headed to voters on the November ballot. The Legislature, which had a chance to approve the measures last month, opted not to approve any of them, requiring ballot committees to gather additional signatures this month.

Massachusetts voters have passed several major laws by initiative in past elections. A 2016 initiative legalized marijuana, and a 2022 initiative created a tax on millionaires.

But as the number of initiatives on the ballot has increased, lawmakers have grown frustrated with the system. House Speaker Ron Mariano and Senate President Karen Spilka criticized the ballot measure process in February, with Mariano describing it as "fraught with peril." And the Legislative committee tasked with voting on potential initiatives - some of which targeted the Legislature - held a series of tense hearings in March.

Several elected officials and scholars have called for reform to the ballot measure process.

The Massachusetts Legislature is not the only state government critical of the initiative process. An increasing number of states have attempted to restrict the practice.

Still, direct democracy advocates say ballot measures serve as a check and balance on representative government.

"We believe that representative government is one of the most fundamental, best ways to govern," said Dane Waters, founder of the Initiative and Referendum Institute. "But lawmakers, for whatever reason, whether through personal interest or conflict, sometimes just choose not to do things, and there needs to be a mechanism for the people to hold them accountable."

What is an initiative? Ballot initiatives allow citizens to adopt laws or constitutional amendments, depending on the state. Massachusetts permits both.

The ballot measure process emerged during the Populist and Progressive movements in the 1890s and early 1900s because the reformers believed state governments were controlled by moneyed special interests rather than the people.

In 1912, an Oregon initiative gave women the right to vote. A 1996 California initiative banned affirmative action.

Initiative petitions can be direct or indirect, depending on the state. Direct initiatives are placed on the ballot without any legislative say. Indirect initiatives - Massachusetts' approach - are first presented to the Legislature. The process of how a state legislature handles an indirect petition varies by state. In every state with an initiative process, citizens must collect signatures to qualify for the ballot, though the requirements vary by state.



A spool of stickers rests on a table at a polling station during Massachusetts state primary voting, Sept. 3, 2024, at the Newton Free Library, in Newton, Mass. (AP)

Initiatives are distinct from referendums, which ask voters to accept or reject legislation recently adopted by the Legislature.

Twenty-three states have some form of initiative process, the majority of which are in the West. According to Waters, many of these states entered the union during the Progressive Era and were "more prone to want to have that mechanism versus states that had been around since the founding of our

and Oregon, I think it would probably represent like 30% to 40% of all the initiative usage ever," Waters said.

He added that no state stands out as more likely to respond to ballot proposals with a legislative compromise.

"I respect representative government, but I seriously am hard pressed to find a single legislature that is supportive or sympathetic to the people using the process," Waters said. Despite legislative leaders' opposition, several New Bedford lawmakers told The Light they don't view the ballot measure process as a threat.

Rep. Antonio F.D. Cabral, D-New Bedford, said ballot measures are a "useful democratic barometer" that informs the Legislature of residents' priorities.

"At the core of our democracy is the belief that every resident deserves a meaningful voice in the decisions that shape their lives," Cabral said in a written statement. "The ballot initiative process is an alternative avenue, alongside direct engagement between constituents and their elected officials, and stands as a valuable component of the democratic system in Massachusetts."

Rep. Christopher Hendricks, D-New Bedford, said the ballot measure process can "nudge the Legislature sometimes in the right direction, where it otherwise wouldn't happen." He pointed to the Fair Share Amendment, which voters passed in 2022, creating

an additional tax on millionaires. Rep. Christopher Markey, D-Dartmouth, echoed this sentiment, using the 2016 initiative that legalized marijuana as an example.

Hendricks and Markey both argued that some issues are too complex to be decided at the ballot box, including a proposal to cut the state income tax from 5% to 4%, which the Supreme Judicial Court recently struck from the ballot.

"I think when you start to get into technical bills, where there's a lot of issues, it's really difficult for someone to understand the entire bill and understand the nuances that (lawmakers) get," Markey said. "We get lots of meetings with people in special interest groups and advocacy groups so that we can learn the pluses and minuses of a particular bill in more detail."

Waters disputes this commonly used argument.

"For democracy to work, you have to have faith in the voters," he said. "If you're going to trust voters to choose among a candidate, then you have to have faith in them that they can choose among an issue."

Rep. Steven Ouellette, D-Westport, said that as long as a question is legal and constitutional, the Legislature should institute it. "Unless there's some kind of legal issue argument, we are planning on going forward with what the people want," he said.

Burnham to pledge 'good growth in every postcode' in devolution plan

MANCHESTER, England, June 29, (AP): Andy Burnham, likely the next UK prime minister, pledged Monday to give away a chunk of his power by handing greater autonomy to local leaders in a "circuit-breaker" for the sclerotic British state.

The former mayor of Greater Manchester also said he would move part of the prime minister's office from London's 10 Downing St. to northwest England as part of "the biggest rebalancing of power our country has seen."

"Growth cannot be ordered from the top down. Indeed, it can only be nurtured from the bottom up," Burnham said in a speech aimed at bringing voters, Labour Party colleagues and financial markets up to speed with his economic vision.

Burnham is the strong favorite to replace Prime Minister Keir Starmer, who announced his resignation last week.

"If councils can't fix potholes, what chance do they have of bringing forth major regeneration schemes to get growth going?" Burnham said. He set out a 10-year plan to get "good growth in every postcode," in a country where wealth and power are concentrated in London and the south of England.

He said he would reverse almost



Labour party's Andy Burnham delivers a speech at the People's History Museum in Manchester, England on June 29. (AP)

two decades of low growth since the 2008 financial crisis through an approach dubbed "Manchesterism" - harnessing private and public money to invest in areas like transport, housing and infrastructure. He also pledged to create new industrial jobs and better educational opportunities, and to reform the UK's inefficient and expensive privatized water and energy utilities.

During the speech at the People's History Museum in the city where he spent nine years as mayor, Burn-

ham said a new government office in Manchester - dubbed "No. 10 North" - would oversee regional development nationwide and become "the nerve center of a rewired Britain." Regional mayors will get more power over housing, welfare and education as part of his planned reforms.

Burnham's rousing speech was short on specifics about where the government will find more money, and he didn't take questions from journalists.

Burnham won praise for his role in revitalizing and regenerating Manchester, but he has not served in a U.K. government for almost two decades, and may struggle to replicate "Manchesterism" on a U.K.-wide scale.

Starmer also announced a 10-year mission - the equivalent of two full terms in government -- to transform Britain soon after he was elected in a landslide in July 2024. Starmer is leaving after two years in office marred by missteps and judgment errors that eroded his standing with his party and the public.

Burnham won a special election for a seat in Parliament on June 18 and was sworn in as a lawmaker on June 22, the same day Starmer announced that he will resign as soon as a successor is chosen.

Zelensky slams 'horrific attacks' as Russia strikes kill 8

KYIV, Ukraine, June 29, (AP): Russian missiles and drones killed at least eight civilians and injured 35 others in Ukraine on Monday in what Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky described as "horrific attacks."

Since Russia launched its all-out invasion of its neighbor more than four years ago, its forces have conducted strategic bombing in an effort to destroy the country's infrastructure and sap Ukrainian morale. More than 16,000 Ukrainian civilians have been killed, according to the UN.

A Russian missile targeting infrastructure struck the central city of Dnipro, killing five people and wounding 29, Zelensky said on social media.

Russian drones also hit a passenger minibus in the southern city of Zaporizhzhia, killing three and wounding six, including a child, he said.

In addition, Russia drones killed a 69-year-old woman and a 77-year-old man in Ukraine's northeastern Sumy region, National Police said.

Other deadly attacks occurred in at least six other regions of Ukraine, authorities said.

Some customers in eight Ukrainian regions were left without power Monday after Russian strikes, after hot weather drove up electricity use as people turned on air conditioners, grid operator Ukrenergo said.

Zelensky renewed his plea for Europe to step up its development of air defenses to block Russia's ballistic missiles, which are hard to stop.



In this photo provided by the Ukrainian Emergency Services on Monday, June 29, 2026, a rescue worker puts out a fire of petrol station damaged by a Russian strike on Poltava region, Ukraine. (AP)



A girl cools off in a public fountain in Vilnius, Lithuania on June 26. (AP)

Europe's record heat has overwhelmed Paris mortuaries, left families in distress

PARIS, June 29, (AP): Every few minutes, the mortuary owner's phone rings. Since a record-smashing heat wave started taking lives and storage space for bodies in Paris and beyond, the funeral directors and mourning families calling him mostly have the same question: Do you have room for one more?

With all 32 places in his cold room taken, Zouhaier Hertelli reluctantly has to gently say "Non," over and over and over again.

"We're facing a really catastrophic situation," he said. "I'm getting hundreds of calls."

As the historic heat wave shifted its deadly temperatures eastward this weekend to other parts of Europe, France began counting the human cost it left in its wake.

The statistical and public health work of tallying heat-related deaths could take weeks or months. But it's already apparent that the toll exacted by the intense, unrelenting extreme temperatures was terrible in France, the first country hit from mid-June, particularly among older people who died at home.

"We're dealing with an enormous spike of deaths because of the heat wave and we're really full, full, full," Hertelli said.

In its first preliminary estimate, the national public health agency said deaths surged during the heat wave's peak in France last week, which roasted most of Europe's largest country with temperatures that

soared in many places above 40C (104 F) and also broke records for nighttime highs - an exhausting one-two punch for fatigued bodies.

Public Health France said there were more than 1,200 deaths last Wednesday, when France registered its hottest-ever day, breaking a record that had been set just the previous day.

Deaths then increased to more than 1,400 on Thursday and another 1,400 on Friday, it said. By way of comparison, the pre-heat wave death rate in April and May was around 900 to 1,000 per day, it said.

The agency cautioned that its estimate of at least 1,000 additional deaths during those three sizzling days alone is expected to increase as more death certificates come in for people who died at home and in care facilities for older people, where most deaths are still not registered electronically.

"Mortality will as a consequence be higher than these first figures," the agency said.

It said that 85% of the deaths registered so far during the three days it studied involved people aged 65 and above and that there was a sharp increase in deaths at home - up by about 40% - particularly in the Paris region.

Hertelli and others in the funeral industry said Paris mortuaries quickly ran out of storage space. City Hall said two temporary storage units, with 20 places each, were installed for municipal mortuaries and that

city hospitals provided another 50 additional places.

Still, Hertelli said funeral directors he spoke to told him they were having to store bodies as far away as Chartres - 80 kilometers (50 miles) from Paris - and in other regions around the capital. To open more space, he said he has asked authorities for permission to temporarily install refrigerated containers outside his mortuary, which is next to Paris' Orly airport, but is still waiting for a green light.

"Families are suffering," he said. "We have no solution to offer them, because the funeral homes are full. So we are deeply affected, we have empathy for them, but there's nothing we can offer. We are really facing a problem, a big problem," he said.

Historic high temperatures in 2003, surpassed this time, were blamed for 15,000 deaths, provoking a national reckoning about care of older people, who were particularly hard-hit. More than 5,700 deaths were also attributed to heat during an exceptionally hot summer last year.

Véronique Bertrand, a Paris funeral director, said she fears that lessons have been forgotten.

"Most of the deaths that we are dealing with at the moment were people who were living alone at home, isolated. Given the circumstances in which they were found, there can be no other conclusion than that these were deaths caused by the heat," Bertrand said.

'Operations launched in response to multiple militant attacks'

Pakistani airstrikes kill 36 civilians in Afghanistan and wound 160: officials

KABUL, Afghanistan, June 29, (AP): Overnight ground operations and strikes by Pakistani forces killed at least 36 civilians and wounded more than 160 others, Afghan officials said Monday, as tensions between the neighbors further escalated. One Afghan official said the attacks would be met with retaliation.

Pakistani security forces carried out a ground operation along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border late Sunday, followed by strikes against militant hideouts and safe havens, killing 29 fighters, Pakistan's Information Minister Attaullah Tarar said. Pakistan said the operations were launched in response to multiple militant attacks across Pakistan.

Afghanistan condemned the strikes as a "cowardly act of aggression" and an "act of brutality." Hayatullah Mohajer Farahi, the deputy minister for publications at the Ministry of Information and Culture, said Afghanistan would respond "in due time."

"The military regime in a cowardly manner bombed Paktia, Paktika, and Kunar provinces last night," Farahi said. "This will definitely be retaliated against in due time. The decisions of the regime are not made based on emotions, but rather serious measures are taken at the right time."

Hamdullah Fitrat, the deputy spokesperson for Afghanistan's Taliban government, said the Pakistani forces targeted a home in Paktia's Chamkani district, killing an elderly man and a child, while other family members were wounded. When residents gathered to rescue people, the area was struck again, killing 28 villagers and wounding 158, he said.

Six people, mostly women and children, were killed in a village in Giyan district, Paktika province, when another home was struck, he said. A civilian home in Kunar province was also hit, causing no casualties but killing some 30 livestock. Pakistani officials said an uneasy calm prevailed along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border Monday, with security forces remaining on high alert.

On Monday, Afghanistan and Pakistan summoned each other's top diplomats to protest the attacks.

Zia Ahmad Takal, the Afghanistan Foreign Ministry's deputy spokesman, accused Islamabad of repeatedly blaming Afghanistan for security incidents inside Pakistan without "credible evidence."

Pakistan's behavior "seriously harms the atmosphere of trust between the two countries, good neighborly relations and the security and stability of the



Residents walk through the rubble after what Taleban officials said were Pakistani airstrikes a day earlier that killed civilians, including children, in the village of Mandokhail, Chamkani district, Paktia province, Afghanistan on June 29. (AP)

region," Takal said.

Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said it summoned Afghanistan's top diplomat in Islamabad to protest the involvement of Afghan nationals in recent attacks, including one in Karachi over the weekend.

Tarar, the Pakistani information minister, shared three videos on X that he said showed projectiles striking sprawling camps and safe havens of Jamaat-ul-Ahrar and Fitna al-Khwarizj in Afghanistan's Paktia, Paktika and Kunar provinces. Tarar said the overnight strikes killed "terrorists" and destroyed weapons and ammunition stockpiles.

Tarar said Pakistan's relentless counter-terrorism campaign "will continue at full pace to wipe out the menace of foreign-sponsored and supported terror-

ism from the country."

Pakistan uses the phrase "Khawarij" to refer to Indian-backed Pakistani Taleban and other militants. Jamaat-ul-Ahrar is a breakaway faction of the Pakistani Taliban.

India however, strongly denied any involvement, with Foreign Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal calling the statements "baseless allegations." Pakistan should "look inwards, take credible action against the terror infrastructure on its territory," he said.

Militant attacks targeting Pakistan's police and security forces have surged in recent years. Authorities have blamed the Pakistani Taleban, or TTP, and allied militant groups for most of the violence. The Pakistani Taliban are separate from but allied with the Afghan Taleban that returned to power in 2021.

The Pakistani security operation followed a militant attack targeting the regional headquarters of the paramilitary Rangers in Karachi that killed three soldiers. Security forces killed three attackers and arrested another assailant, whom the military identified as a wounded Afghan national.

Jamaat-ul-Ahrar claimed responsibility for the Karachi attack.

Officials in Pakistan claimed one Afghan suspect was captured following the attack, proving that "Afghan soil and Afghan nationals continue to be used to orchestrate terrorist attacks inside Pakistan." Police later released the statement of the wounded Afghan detainee, who confessed the Karachi attack was planned by Jamaat-ul-Ahrar, though it remained unclear if the confession was made under duress.

Sunday's cross-border strikes and ground operation came less than three weeks after Pakistan's military launched airstrikes on what it said were militant hideouts in Afghanistan. They ended about a month of relative calm following what Islamabad had described as an "open war" between the neighboring countries, despite international efforts to broker a lasting peace.

The escalation follows months of tit-for-tat military action. Hundreds of people have been killed in cross-border fighting since February, when Afghanistan launched retaliatory strikes after Pakistan carried out airstrikes inside Afghan territory.

Multiple rounds of talks have failed to secure a lasting ceasefire. China also hosted the two sides in April and Beijing later said Pakistan and Afghanistan had agreed not to escalate their conflict and to explore a solution.

Rights group warns Vietnam ramping up arrests under broad laws to crush dissent

BANGKOK, June 29, (AP): Vietnam is increasingly using broadly written laws to arrest activists, dissidents and others that authorities consider a threat to the Communist Party's rule, according to a new analysis released Monday by a human rights group.

The 88 Project, which focuses on rights issues in Vietnam, documented 56 such arrests in 2025, the third consecutive year of increases and double the number in 2022. The report includes only arrests where the defendant could be identified by name and the case tracked, and the actual numbers are believed to be much higher, said Ben Swanton, co-director of the group.

The report says the country under leader To Lam "routinely weaponizes criminal law" to quash dissent. To Lam, the country's former top security official who has served as general secretary of the Communist Party since 2024, was also elected president earlier this year.

The arrests are largely driven by fears of an uprising against the leadership in a so-called "color revolution," like the 2004 Orange Revolution in Ukraine, or the 1986 Yellow Revolution in the Philippines, according to the report.

It is a fear shared by the Communist



A giant Vietnamese national flag hangs from a balcony in the old quarter of Hanoi, Vietnam on Sept 1, 2025. (AP)

Party in neighboring China, which has been accused of using similar tactics to stifle critics. Though competing maritime claims have led to confrontations between the two countries and a tense diplomatic relationship at times, China and Vietnam were able to agree earlier this year to together "prioritize political security and enhance efforts to prevent and resist color revolutions," the Chinese state-run Xinhua News Agency

reported.

"With the ascendancy of To Lam, the country has become a literal police state that tolerates no dissent," Swanton said.

"This represents a serious regression from the period of relative openness in the 2010s when some dissent was tolerated and civil society groups were able to engage in policy activism."

Malaysia extends search for missing flight MH370 for another year

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia, June 29, (AP): Malaysia has extended for another year its contract with marine robotics company Ocean Infinity for a deep-sea search in the southern Indian Ocean for wreckage of a Malaysia Airlines flight that disappeared 12 years ago.

The Cabinet on Friday approved the extension of a "no-find, no-fee" agreement with Ocean Infinity until June 30 next year, Transport Minister Anthony Loke said Monday.

"This decision is a manifestation of the government's continuous and unwavering commitment to provide a closure for the next of kin of the passengers aboard flight MH370," he said in a statement.

The extension enables Ocean Infinity to complete the remaining 7,428.54-square-kilometer (2,868-square-mile) search area, after temporarily redeploying its primary search assets to fulfill other commercial contracts, he said.

The Boeing 777 plane vanished



A girl stands in front of a condolence message board during a Day of Remembrance for MH370 event in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on March 3, 2019. (AP)

from radar shortly after taking off on March 8, 2014, carrying 239 people, mostly Chinese nationals, on a flight from Malaysia's capital, Kuala Lumpur, to Beijing. Satellite data showed the plane turned from its flight path and headed south to the far-southern Indian Ocean, where it is believed

to have crashed.

An expensive multinational search failed to turn up any clues to its location, although debris washed ashore on the East African coast and Indian Ocean islands. A private search in 2018 by Ocean Infinity also found nothing.



Mexican Army rescue workers search for people trapped in collapsed buildings after earthquakes struck La Guaira, Venezuela on June 28. (AP)

Strong aftershock rattles Venezuela as rescue workers race to find survivors

LA GUAIRA, Venezuela, June 29, (AP): A strong aftershock jolted Venezuela early Monday following last week's devastating back-to-back earthquakes, as civilians and emergency responders kept combing through the ruins of fallen buildings for survivors.

The aftershock, which struck about 27 kilometers (17 miles) north of Caraballeda on Venezuela's Caribbean coast at 7:01 am local time, measured 4.6 on the Richter scale, according to the United States Geological Survey. Colombia's geological survey put the magnitude at 5.1.

Jorge Rodríguez, the leader of the Venezuelan National Assembly, said there were no immediate reports of additional damage from the quake, which sent residents in the capital of Caracas screaming into the streets.

"Here we are again, back in the street. I don't know when we'll have a moment of true peace," said Concepción Hernández, 51, who evacuated her apartment building in the Chacao municipality of Caracas.

Monday's tremor also convulsed the hard-hit port city of La Guaira,

where local and international rescue teams have been racing against time since the twin earthquakes struck the northern state five days ago.

The government has reported 1,450 dead from the quakes as it faces growing criticism from Venezuelans that its response is inadequate and overshadowed by civilian-led efforts to rescue people buried under collapsed buildings. Thousands more have been reported missing.

Even as the likelihood of finding people alive diminished with each passing hour, rescuers continued to free some survivors from debris, offering anguished families a sliver of hope. The first 48 to 72 hours after a natural disaster are crucial to rescue efforts, though survival can be extended if people have access to food and water.

Venezuela's acting President Delcy Rodríguez said late Sunday that even as the time threshold passed, the search for survivors would continue. More than 2,600 rescue workers from around the world had arrived with trained search dogs and machinery, the government said.

"It's been incredibly hard work, but we're going strong," said Jason Mercano, a civilian who was able to communicate with family buried under the rubble and was working with rescue teams to pull them out.

"We've never given up hope," he added.

Still, many Venezuelans are struggling to hold onto hope in an increasingly desperate situation. The one-two punch of 7.2 and 7.5 magnitude earthquakes that hit last Wednesday have left a trail of devastation. The UN said up to 6.8 million of Venezuela's nearly 30 million residents may be affected by the earthquakes.

A layer of dust coated coastal communities, and as the stench of decomposing bodies spread, more people began to wear masks.

Authorities said Sunday that more than 770 buildings had totally or partially collapsed from the earthquakes, twice as many as were reported destroyed or damaged on Friday. The risk of further damage remains as aftershocks continued to shake Venezuela; quakes measuring 4.2 and 4.5 hit Sunday morning.

Africa

Ugandan army chief orders major news platform closure: The offices of a major news organization in Uganda were shut down on the orders of the military chief, who warned Sunday that all media "will follow the rules" while asserting his authority as the East African country's de facto ruler.

Gen Muhoozi Kainerugaba, the eldest son of President Yoweri Museveni, has served as the top military commander since 2024. In recent days, after Museveni was sworn in for a seventh consecutive term, Kainerugaba has strengthened his grip with a series of directives and orders usually reserved for the head of state.

Soldiers were deployed outside the Kampala offices of the Daily Monitor newspaper early Sunday. The paper is part of the Nation Media Group of companies whose headquarters is in Nairobi, the Kenyan capital.

"I have the power in Uganda to shut down ANY media house I want to," Kainerugaba wrote on X, his preferred channel of communication. "I have had this power since 2017. This power was given to me by my great father." (AP)

Uganda to evacuate 746 nationals from South Africa: Uganda on Sunday announced plans to evacuate 746 of its nationals from South Africa after months of escalating xenophobic violence, with the operation expected to begin within the next few days.

Haruna Kasolo, Uganda's acting minister of foreign affairs, told reporters that the evacuees had registered to return home and that the ministry was working with relevant government agencies, the Ugandan community in South Africa, and the Uganda High Commission in Pretoria to finalize the evacuation plan. The government will facilitate the registration of returnees, their transfer to safe assembly centers, the issuance of emergency travel documents where necessary, and their departure from South Africa,



M23 rebels escort government soldiers and police who surrendered to an undisclosed location in Goma, Democratic Republic of the Congo on Jan 30, 2025. (AP)

Kasolo said. (Xinhua)

US imposes sanctions on networks fueling Sudan war: The US Department of State on Friday imposed fresh sanctions on networks fueling the ongoing war in Sudan and impeding peace efforts.

"Today, the US is taking further action against those responsible for perpetuating violence, obstructing peace efforts, and fueling the war in Sudan.

We are sanctioning eight individuals and entities prolonging the devastating conflict through procurement and recruitment operations," Spokesman for the Department Tommy Pigott told reporters.

"These networks supply weapons, explosives, and foreign fighters to both the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces. Their support has prolonged a conflict that has created the world's worst humanitarian crisis and provided space for terrorist groups to operate," he added.

"We are also imposing a second round of sanctions on Sudan pursuant to the Chemical and Biological Weapons Control and Warfare Elimination Act (CBW Act). These sanctions include opposing loans or financial or technical assistance to Sudan from international financial institutions, further export restrictions by the Commerce Department, and a bar on Sudanese state-owned air carriers from operating in the United States," he noted. (KUNA)

Congo files ICJ case against Rwanda: Congo said Friday it has filed a case against Rwanda at the International Court of Justice, accusing its neighbor of bearing legal responsibility for more than three decades of violence that has devastated eastern Congo.

Congo accused Rwanda of breaching international conventions on genocide, racial discrimination, discrimination against women and torture. It said civilians in the east have suffered massacres, extrajudicial killings, torture, sexual violence, forced displacement and ethnic and gender-based discrimination since the 1990s.

Mineral-rich eastern Congo has been battered by decades of conflict as government forces and allied militias fight more than 100 armed groups, the most potent of them the Rwandan-backed M23. Its fighters made major advances early last year, seizing Goma and other key cities as they quickly expanded their presence. (AP)

Boursa Kuwait ends higher

KUWAIT CITY, June 29, (KUNA): Boursa Kuwait closed Monday's trading session on a positive note, with its general index advancing 56.87 points, or 0.65 percent, to settle at 8,750.69 points. Trading activity saw 257 million shares exchanged through 21,667 cash transactions, with a total value of KWD 69

million (approximately USD 224.5 million). The main market index led gains, rising 271.36 points, or 3.07 percent, to reach 9,105.65 points. A total of 161.6 million shares were traded via 12,339 transactions, valued at KWD 32 million (around USD 104.1 million).

Business

Conflict de-escalation to lay foundation for domestic economic recovery

By National Bank of Kuwait

Four months since the onset of hostilities in late February and the conflict appears to be winding down with the US and Iran signing a tentative MoU in mid-June, albeit with a final resolution on various diplomatic and economic matters still pending. Data continue to reveal the disruption to Kuwait's economic activity from the war and especially from shipping in the Strait of Hormuz – including low oil output, decelerating credit growth, weaker bank card spending, declining business inventories and slower real estate activity. The reopening of the Strait from June together with a reduction in conflict related uncertainty promises to alleviate a lot of the economic pressure going forward, and we expect oil production (alongside other activity metrics) to rise steadily through Q3. However, the projected gradual return to normal traffic flows over the coming months has led us to revise down our expectations for oil production and GDP growth this year compared to our previous forecast in April – followed by a stronger rebound in 2027. A sharper drop in oil revenues will also result in a wider fiscal deficit this year than before, but liquidity will remain adequate aided by further successful local currency debt issuances in April and May at below pre-conflict yields.

Latest developments

US and Iran agree to stop hostilities, weighing on oil prices. The recent peace agreement between the US and Iran, and imminent (though uncertain) signing of an MOU prompted a further selloff in oil markets. Despite an estimated 14–15 mb/d of disrupted supply, Brent futures fell by 16% over four trading sessions in mid-June and, at the time of writing, had dropped even further to \$72/bbl, reversing all conflict-linked price gains. This reflects the perception of a lower geopolitical risk premium, and optimism that crude supplies would recover soon, even though tankers have sporadically been targeted and hostilities in the Gulf between Iran and the US continue to flare up.

The decline was driven by a combination of aggressive oil inventory drawdowns and signs of demand destruction due to elevated price levels. Kuwait's crude output in May, increased slightly on April's low of 562 kb/d to 578 kb/d, according to OPEC's June Oil Market report. (Chart 1.) The monthly increase is typical for this time of year, with production rising to supply oil refineries gearing up to produce fuel oil for power stations amid higher summer electricity consumption. Despite the increase, 78% of Kuwait's pre-war production of 2.58 mb/d remained shut-in. OPEC-7 approved a 188 kb/d increase in its aggregate output for July, with Kuwait permitted to raise output by 16 kb/d to 2.64 mb/d. However, given ongoing logistical constraints, the rise is largely notional in the near term, though it provides a higher production ceiling that should support a faster rebound once shipping flows normalize through the Strait. On that note, KPC CEO Sheikh Nawaf Al-Sabah announced recently the lifting of all force majeure notices and indicated that Kuwait's oil production could rise to 2 mb/d within a week of the Strait reopening, provided international shipping normalizes.

Kuwait's Petroleum Corporation (KPC) completes downstream merger. The government has approved the merger of KPC's downstream subsidiaries, KNPC and KIPIC, with KNPC assuming control of KIPIC's 615 kb/d Al-Zour refinery and LNG import terminal, in a move aimed at enhancing operational efficiency, streamlining activities, and rationalizing costs. The decision follows through on restructuring plans announced by the Supreme Petroleum Council in 2020. Post-merger, KPC will retain seven subsidiaries, though the broader strategic direction points toward further consolidation, with activity increasingly centered around three core segments: upstream production, exploration, and downstream refining. In line with this strategy, media reports indicate that the next phase of restructuring could involve the integration of KGOC into KOC, further simplifying the organizational structure and supporting operational efficiencies across the sector.

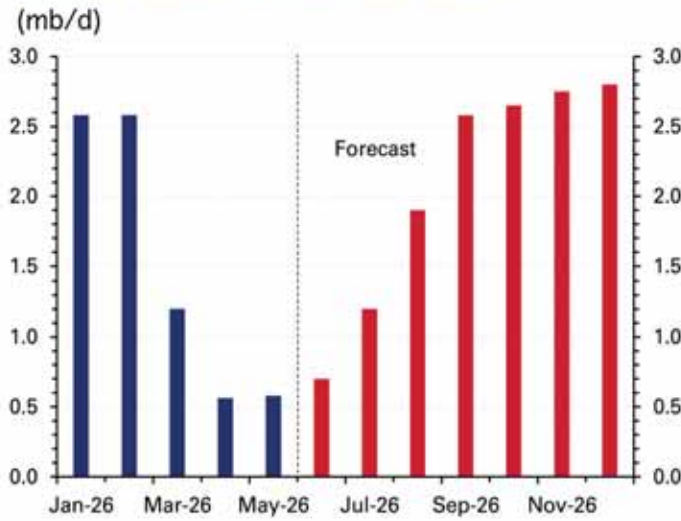
Non-oil private-sector activity remained in contraction in May, though the pace of decline continued to ease, with the PMI edging up to 47.2 from 46.3 in April, marking a third consecutive sub-50 reading. (Report here.) (Chart 2.) The output and new orders components showed notable improvement, with both approaching the no-change threshold, pointing to a gradual stabilization in demand conditions, albeit without a clear rebound taking hold. Supply-side pressures persisted, with input costs rising on higher purchase prices, only partly offset by a decrease in staffing

Table 1: Key macroeconomic indicators

		2023	2024	2025e	2026f
Nominal GDP	\$ billion	165	161	157	161
Real GDP	% y/y	-1.6	-1.5	2.7	-13.1
- Oil sector	% y/y	-4.2	-6.7	2.4	-25.5
- Non-oil sector	% y/y	1.1	3.7	2.9	-2.0
Fiscal balance*	% of GDP	-3.1	-2.1	-7.9	-16.6
Public debt	% of GDP	3.0	2.9	17.1	19.1
Inflation (avg.)	% y/y	3.6	2.9	2.4	2.5
Oil price (KEC, avg.)	\$/bbl	84	81	71	90
Oil production (avg.)	mb/d	2.59	2.41	2.47	1.84

Source: Official sources, NBK estimates; *fiscal year

Chart 1: Crude production profile (mb/d)



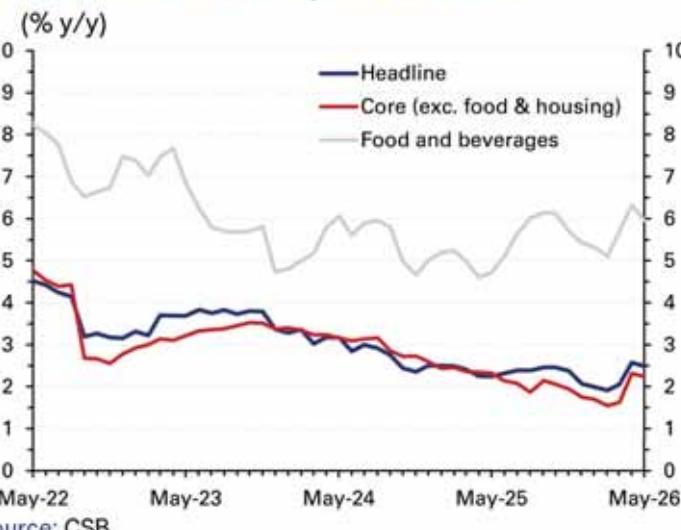
Source: OPEC direct communication production figures

Chart 2: Purchasing manager's index (index, >50 = expansion)



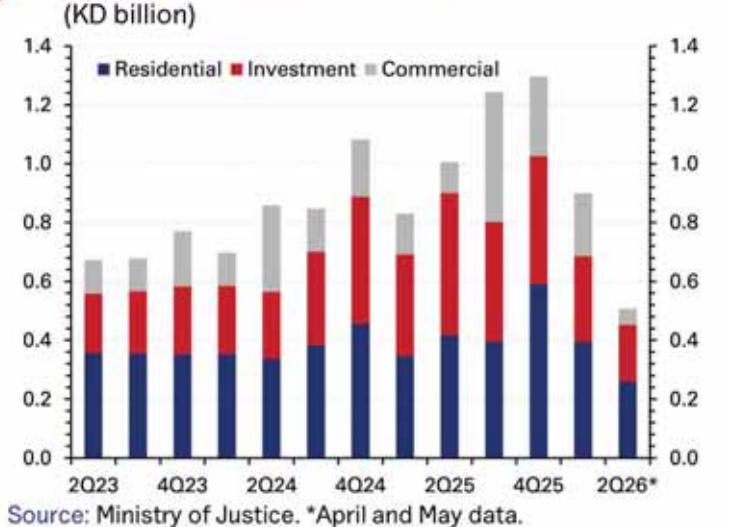
Source: S&P Global

Chart 3: Consumer price inflation (% y/y)



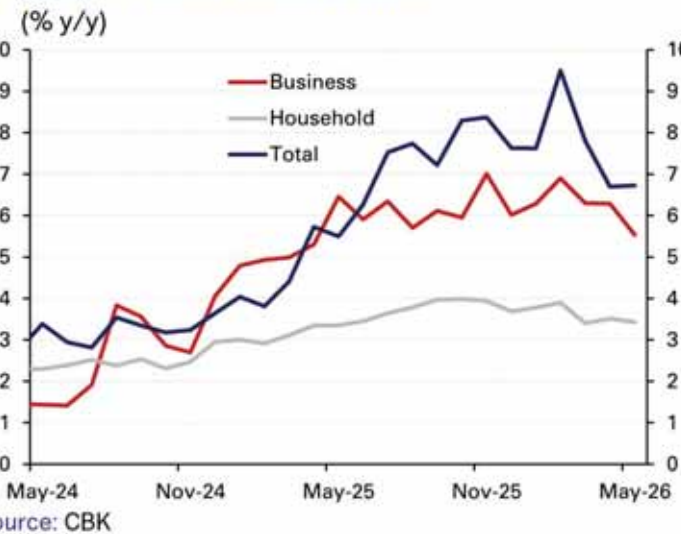
Source: CSB

Chart 4: Real estate sales (KD billion)



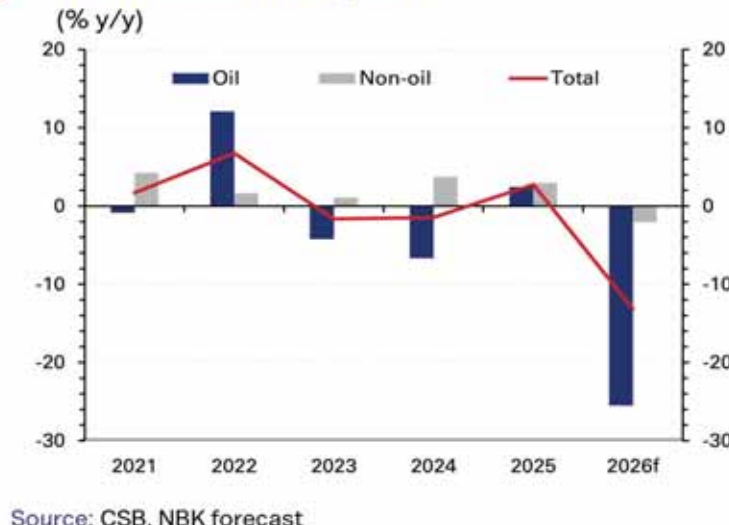
Source: Ministry of Justice. *April and May data.

Chart 5: Bank credit growth (% y/y)



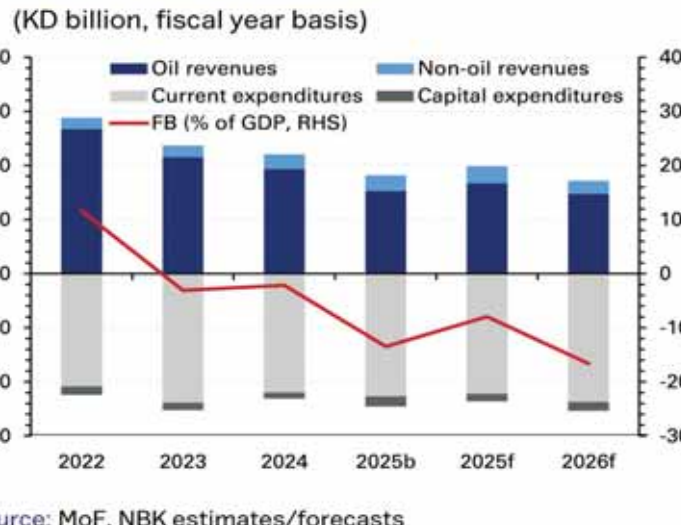
Source: CBK

Chart 6: Real GDP growth (% y/y)



Source: CSB, NBK forecast

Chart 7: Fiscal balance (KD billion, fiscal year basis)



Source: MoF, NBK estimates/forecasts

costs. These dynamics continued to pass through to selling prices, with firms raising output prices albeit at a still modest overall pace. Supply chain disruptions and higher costs weighed on procurement, with inventory purchasing contracting at its fastest pace since April 2020. Looking ahead, business sentiment remains subdued but has shifted closer to neutral, suggesting that firms are increasingly anticipating a gradual normalization in operating conditions, even as near-term challenges persist.

Consumer price inflation eased to 2.5% y/y in May from 2.6% in April, helped by softer food price dynamics. (Report here.) (Chart 3.) Food and beverage inflation moderated to 6% y/y (from 6.3%), supported by slower increases in meat & poultry and fish & seafood prices. Meanwhile, housing services inflation – the largest component in the CPI basket and mainly reflecting rents – was unchanged as was unchanged at 0.5% y/y. Excluding food and housing, core inflation edged down to 2.2% y/y from an 11-month high of 2.3% in April, with health services the only major segment to record stronger growth (+1.2%). The softer headline reading suggests that the conflict-linked pass through from supply chain disruptions has so far been limited, with the most visible price increase coming from the transport component (now 4.5% y/y), reflecting higher airfares.

Real estate activity declined in May after partially rebounding in April. (Report here.) Property

sales fell in May after rebounding in April, with total sales down 18% m/m (-37.6% y/y) to KD229 million. (Chart 4.) This was the second lowest reading in over two years with investors downbeat amid lingering war-related uncertainty. Sales were down across all sectors, with the sharpest fall seen in the commercial sector (-43.8% m/m; -11.3% y/y) followed by the investment sector (-27.7% m/m; -56.4% y/y). Residential sales declined by a less acute 2.3% m/m (-19.2% y/y).

Debt issuance continues apace with state finances disrupted by Strait's closure. Kuwait resumed local currency public debt issuance in April-June, following a pause in March. The government, through the Central Bank, raised KD1.25 billion across 2, 3, 5, and 7-year maturities. Despite the conflict, investor appetite remained strong, with issuances at least 3x oversubscribed, underscoring continued confidence in Kuwait's sovereign credit profile and liquidity buffers. Pricing also improved at the margin, with yields declining across the curve. Notably, the 5-year tranche was issued at 3.25%, down from 3.625% in February, suggesting a degree of easing in funding conditions despite the challenging macro environment.

Domestic credit growth picked up in May, rising 0.5% m/m (6.7% y/y), supported mainly by stronger business lending, though overall momentum remains below earlier levels. (Report here.) Business credit grew 0.6% m/m, lifting YTD growth to 3.6%, with gains

across services, trade, and real estate, while household lending eased slightly to 0.4% m/m (+1% YTD). Credit for securities rebounded, whereas lending to financial institutions and non-residents declined, the latter falling for a second consecutive month. On the funding side, deposit growth moderated (+0.3% m/m), reflecting weaker private sector deposits and declines in public sector balances, while non-resident deposits continued to contract. As a result, the loan-to-deposit ratio remained stable at 97.7%. Looking ahead, credit growth is expected to strengthen, supported by improving sentiment and regional developments, provided deposit growth keeps pace to maintain liquidity.

Forecast

Conflict expected to hit growth in 2026

After expanding by 2.7% in 2025, GDP will contract in 2026, weighed down by nearly four months of war-induced oil production losses and trade disruptions. We highlighted in the previous edition that the economic impact would be sensitive to the duration and intensity of the conflict. Although Iran and the US have reached an interim peace agreement, the longer expected disruption to the Strait of Hormuz and associated negative spillovers have led us to revise down our forecast from our April projection. Assuming a July reopening of the Strait and normalization of shipping over many weeks, the projected drop in GDP could deepen to 13% in 2026 from 4% in our previous estimate.

The main contributor to the revision is oil GDP, which is now projected to decline by 26% in 2026 due to the more prolonged closure of the Strait which halted oil exports and forced production to be drastically reduced to levels sufficient to cover only refinery demand. We see average crude oil output in 2026 dropping to just 1.84 mb/d (with April representing the monthly low) from 2.47 mb/d in 2025. This incorporates a relatively gradual post-Strait reopening production recovery profile, with output topping 80% of pre-conflict levels within 8 weeks, which is within the range of KPC's statements.

We maintain our oil price forecast from April of Brent averaging \$90/bbl in 2026, with the balance of risks skewed to the downside at this juncture, given how quickly prices sold-off on the US-Iran deal announcement and in anticipation of a wall of unleashed GCC oil supply. On the upside, though, geopolitical risk is elevated while adherence to the MoU remains uncertain amid a tentative ceasefire; Iran has and could close the Strait at any time, imperiling shipping again. Also, positive for prices is the prospect of a lift in oil demand during the peak summer driving season allied to the continued dwindling of global oil stocks due to the lagged effect of the Strait closure, and the need for potentially aggressive global stock rebuilding.

Meanwhile, non-oil GDP growth (excluding refining) in 2026 is forecast to be flat, weakening slightly from our April estimate of 1% growth. Sectors such as trade and

travel have been heavily affected, supply chains for businesses under extended strain, project implementation has slowed, and heightened uncertainty has dampened spending in recent months. Still, our base case remains that the non-oil economy can avoid a recession – a respectable outcome given the huge shock of the conflict – helped by steady public sector employment that has protected incomes, and government price controls and subsidies that have cushioned the inflationary impact of higher food and commodity prices on consumers, and strong actions by the authorities to support the banking system including government deposit injections and regulatory changes by the central bank such as cuts to liquidity and capital adequacy ratios.

We see a strong post-conflict rebound in economic activity led by a recovery in oil sector output, but also a return to a broadly pre-conflict pace of project awards, a continuation of the pre-February trend of improving consumer spending and as pressures on business supply chains unwind. GDP is projected up 27% in 2027, with a jump of 56% in oil GDP. We also see oil prices remaining higher than pre-conflict levels, averaging \$75/bbl in 2027.

Inflation seen steady despite war pressures

Inflation is forecast to average just 2.5% in 2026 (2.4% in 2025) as conflict-induced inflationary pressures are countered by government food price controls and subsidies, low housing inflation and disinflationary trends in other consumer items. The policy discount rate stands at 3.50% and the futures market sees a broadly even chance of one to two 25-bps rate hikes by the US Fed this year.

Fiscal deficit to widen sharply in FY26/27

Prolonged disruption to oil exports – almost four months at the time of writing – together with higher spending on subsidies and post-conflict reconstruction and a decline in non-oil revenues will trigger a sharp widening of the fiscal deficit this year. We forecast a deficit of 17% of GDP in FY26/27 (KD8.1bn) from an estimated 7.9% in FY25/26. This would be much smaller than the gap of 32% of GDP recorded during Covid, though still the 11th deficit in the past 12 years.

Long-standing fiscal reform objectives are assumed to be temporarily superseded by conflict-linked reconstruction and spending imperatives. The official (pre-conflict) budget had projected a 6% rise in spending that included a surge in capex and KD700 million in non-recurring allocations to support the pension fund. We expect similar-sized growth in spending overall, while incorporating higher subsidy spending and a smaller rise in capex. The budget had also projected a 20% increase in non-oil revenues to a record KD3.5 billion (22% of all revenues), incorporating measures such as higher service fees and expatriate health insurance charges, a vacant land tax as well as the corporate income tax (CIT) on multinational firms. While some of these initiatives have been implemented, weaker non-oil growth and delays in revenue collection are likely to postpone the full realization of these gains.

Looking to FY27/28, we forecast the deficit narrowing sharply to 3% of GDP on a recovery in oil production and a decline in war-related spending. Underlying fiscal consolidation progress should also resume, with the expected implementation of an excise tax, as per the recent statement from the MoF. Together with the CIT, this is expected to generate up to KD450 million (0.8% of GDP) in additional revenue. Other, near-term prospective measures include further subsidy rationalization, service fee repricing and discretionary spending item cuts. The government's huge reserve assets (estimated unofficially in excess of \$1 trillion) and still very low debt levels of 17% of GDP despite recent issuance, provide ample room to finance the expected deficits. Both S&P and Moody's have left Kuwait's sovereign credit rating unchanged with a stable outlook since the conflict began, citing the scale of the government's financial buffers.

Conflict underscores need for diversification

The war has exposed underlying vulnerabilities in the economy, particularly its reliance on oil revenues, rigid public sector structures, and limited private sector. This underscores the imperative of advancing critical Vision 2035 reforms to stimulate the private sector, diversify revenues, rationalize spending, and boost investment – and we expect the government to pursue such with increased vigor going forward. Downside risks to the outlook center on a longer-than-expected recovery in oil output and lower oil prices; upside risks include faster growth in consumer spending allied to a renewed projects, business reforms and investment drive.

The collaboration brings Centrepoint's family lifestyle essentials closer to customers across Kuwait

Landmark Group expands Centrepoint's quick-commerce reach through strategic partnership with talabat

With more than 3,000 products available for delivery in 45 minutes or less



KUWAIT CITY, June 29: Landmark Group announced a strategic collaboration between Centrepoint and talabat, further expanding Centrepoint's quick-commerce reach and making its trusted family lifestyle offering even more accessible to customers across Kuwait.

The partnership brings together Centrepoint's established retail footprint across Kuwait and talabat's digital platform capabilities to deliver a faster, more convenient shopping experience. Customers can now browse and order from a curated selection of more than 3,000 products spanning fashion, beauty, home and daily essentials, with delivery available in 45 minutes or less across all governorates in Kuwait.

Building on the earlier launch of Centrepoint Beauty on talabat, the expanded collaboration reflects Landmark Group Kuwait's continued focus on strengthening omnichannel retail and meeting customers wherever, whenever and however they choose to shop.

Commenting on the partnership, Rohit Nanda, Executive Vice President and Country Head, Landmark Group, Kuwait, said: "Our partnership with talabat is an important step in strengthening Centrepoint's omnichannel ecosystem in Kuwait. Quick commerce is

- Partnership strengthens Centrepoint's omnichannel ecosystem and expands access to trusted Landmark Group brands.
- Customers across all governorates in Kuwait can now shop selected fashion, beauty, home and daily essentials through talabat.
- The launch builds on the success of Centrepoint Beauty on talabat and supports Landmark Group Kuwait's digital growth agenda.

becoming an increasingly relevant part of the retail journey, particularly for customers looking for trusted products, faster access and greater convenience. By combining our retail presence across Kuwait with talabat's digital reach, we are enhancing customer access to Centrepoint's much-loved brands while supporting our digital growth and operational agility."

He added: "This collaboration allows us to serve urgent, need-based purchases more effectively, while opening new opportunities across high-demand categories. Whether customers are shopping for Babyshop essentials, Lifestyle Beauty products or selected fam-

ily lifestyle needs, the experience is designed to be simple, seamless and fast."

"Today's signing marks an important step in our efforts to further strengthen talabat's role as a leading everyday app," commented Abdullah Al-Mansour, Director of Corporate Affairs at talabat Kuwait, "As we continue to expand our offering beyond food, working with leading retailers such as Centrepoint help bring lifestyle, fashion, and home essentials closer to our customers. This partnership further enhances the convenience and variety available on our platform, enabling us to better serve customers' everyday needs."

The collaboration was formalized during a signing ceremony held at talabat Kuwait's headquarters, attended by senior representatives from both companies, including Abdullah Al-Mansour, Director of Corporate Affairs at talabat Kuwait, and Rohit Nanda, Executive Vice President and Country Head, Landmark Group, Kuwait.

Through this partnership, Centrepoint and talabat are bringing a more integrated and on-demand retail experience to customers in Kuwait, combining the trust of a leading family shopping destination with the convenience of a smart everyday platform.

Weyay, PAAET team up to enhance student onboarding

KUWAIT CITY, June 29: Weyay Bank, Kuwait's first fully digital bank, has announced its strategic partnership with the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET) in support of this year's admissions and registration campaign.

The partnership aims to support newly admitted students transitioning from high school into PAAET's colleges and institutes, enhancing their academic journey from day one and providing them with the tools and resources needed to succeed in their studies.

The announcement was made during a meeting attended by Dr Hassan Al-Fajjam, Director General of the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training, Mr. Mohammed Al-Othman, CEO of Consumer and Digital Banking at National Bank of Kuwait, Mrs. Amal Al-Duwaisan, Head of Weyay Bank, alongside senior representatives from both entities.

Dr. Hassan Al-Fajjam emphasized the importance of this collaboration in supporting students as they begin their academic journey, noting that the partnership will help enhance awareness of



Mohammed Al-Othman and Dr Hassan Al-Fajjam on the sidelines of the signing of the agreement.

available specializations and provide a supportive environment that enables students to make informed educational decisions and succeed in their studies.

Commenting on the partnership, Mr. Mohammed Al-Othman highlighted Weyay Bank's commitment to supporting students at key stages of their educational journey, particularly at the start of their

academic path. He noted that the collaboration reflects the Bank's focus on delivering initiatives that enhance student experience and respond to their evolving needs within the educational environment.

Both parties aim to deliver an integrated support system focused on enriching the academic experience of students. This includes provid-

ing access to relevant knowledge, guidance, and digital educational resources that help students navigate their academic choices and better understand the programs available to them.

The partnership also aligns with the upcoming exhibition "Starting Right" organized by PAAET, where both entities will collaborate on initiatives targeting prospective students and their families. The aim is to simplify the admissions process, strengthen academic awareness, and support students in making confident and informed decisions about their education.

Under the agreement, the Authority will share students' academic needs and raise awareness of the specializations and academic programs available across its colleges and institutes, while Weyay Bank will contribute to empowering students in these areas.

Both Weyay Bank and PAAET reaffirmed their commitment to continuing collaboration and developing joint initiatives that support students from the start of their academic journey, contributing to a more informed, confident, and successful student experience.

'Bans contract intermediaries'

Kuwait revamps KPC law to boost oil sector governance

KUWAIT CITY, June 29, (KUNA): The issuance of the decree-law amending certain provisions of the law establishing KPC represents a qualitative leap in the development of the legislative framework governing the corporation's operations, said Minister of Oil and Chairman of the Board of Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) Tareq Al-Roumi.

In a statement to KUNA on Monday, Al-Roumi said the amendments come more than 46 years after the original law was issued and will enhance KPC's ability to keep pace with rapid changes in the global oil industry.

He noted that the decree-law has entered into force while maintaining the sovereign role of the state in managing oil wealth through the Supreme Petroleum Council headed by His Highness the Prime Minister, ensuring that strategic decisions are taken according to the powers specified by law.

Al-Roumi said the new framework reflects a balanced approach between sound governance and operational flexibility, noting that the amendments emphasize KPC's commercial nature and its management according to modern commercial principles, which would improve efficiency and enhance the corporation's ability to generate sustainable returns.

Reorganizing responsibilities between the Supreme Petroleum Council and KPC's Board of Directors reflects optimal governance in line with the corporation's commercial activities, he added. The minister noted that the decree-law prohibits the use of local agents or commission agents in contracts concluded by KPC and its subsidiaries, a measure aimed at strengthening transparency and integrity, reducing costs associated with mandatory intermediaries, and tightening oversight of contracts.

Al-Na'ayem project to drive Kuwait's industrial growth

By Najeh Bilal

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff
KUWAIT CITY, June 29: The completion rate of the Al-Na'ayem Industrial City project has reached 15 percent and the target full completion year is 2032, say reliable sources.

Sources indicated that the establishment, completion, operation and maintenance of the infrastructure of the city, under the BOT (Build-Operate-Transfer) system, will support various private sector industries, in cooperation with the government.

Sources said the city will consist of at least 1,800 industrial plots, in addition to the services and economic facilities.

Sources stated that the city will rely on clean energy to reduce the negative impact of the industrial sector on the environment and increase green manufacturing to create an attractive destination for industrial investments.

An official, who preferred to remain anonymous, confirmed that the location of the city was carefully chosen -- in Southwest Jahra -- to serve as the starting point for several industrial cities, accommodating different industries and providing industrial plots.

He pointed out that the launching of this project by Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority (KDIPA) will boost the national economy, ease the financial burdens of the state, decrease the budget deficit, and attract foreign and local investments. He added that this massive project will contribute to the ongoing efforts to eliminate environmental pollution through the use of smart industrial technologies in recycling waste.

He also stressed the importance of the project in providing job opportunities for Kuwaiti youths, while confirming that the project is in line with the strategy of Kuwait to achieve carbon neutrality in the oil and gas sector by 2050 and in other industries by 2060. He revealed that the project is being implemented in a highly efficient manner and in accordance with environment friendly requirements, such as the provision of energy through solar panels.

He asserted that the significance of the project is amplified with the opening of Mubarak Port, which will make Kuwait a gateway for exports to most Asian countries, thus, contributing to the development of the Kuwaiti industrial sector by strengthening the integration of supply chains.



A commemorative photo taken after the announcement of the partnership between Weyay Bank and the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training.

KFH wins Best Digital Bank – Kuwait & MENA Best Islamic SME Bank Awards

KUWAIT CITY, June 29: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) won two MEED magazine awards: Best Digital Bank in Kuwait and MENA Best Islamic SME Bank. These awards recognize KFH's leading successes in digital transformation and evolving customer banking services, alongside its prominent role in providing integrated financing solutions that support SME growth, expansion, and sustainability.

MEED confirmed that choosing KFH came after a thorough evaluation process amidst high competition within the 2026 Banking Excellence Awards for the Retail Banking, Digitalization and SME sectors in the Middle East and North Africa region.

The magazine explained that this year's awards celebrate and recognize financial institutions for their strength in shaping the banking sector's future regional through innovation, enhancing customer experience, digital transformation, and supporting economic development sustainability.

"Despite intense competition, KFH successfully demonstrated its superior performance, operational flexibility, and vital contributions to regional banking. The bank confidently continues to lead the industry by supporting customers, ensuring business continuity, and strengthening the regional economy amid exceptional challenges," MEED added.

Haytham Alterkait

Commenting on the accolades, Deputy Group CEO Transformation, Technology and Operations at KFH, Haytham Alterkait said that winning the Best Digital Bank in Kuwait award reflects the bank's major achievements in digitalization and the growing role of technology in enhancing business and operational activities.

Alterkait added that KFH continues investing in the latest financial technology services, digital product design, and smart solutions under the highest quality, governance, and cybersecurity standards. This raises productivity, accelerates service delivery, lowers costs, and enhances customer satisfaction, confidence, and banking experiences while anticipating future growth. Ultimately, this has consolidated the bank's position as a prominent digital banking institution regionally and globally.

Yousef Almutawa

As for the MENA Best Islamic SME Bank



Haytham Alterkait

Yousef Almutawa

■ **Alterkait:** Digitalization and technical milestones cement the bank's leadership position

■ **Almutawa:** Strategic partnerships & financing solutions increase competitiveness



Award, KFH Group Chief Corporate Banking Officer, Yousef Almutawa, emphasized that award reflects the growing confidence in the bank's capabilities and its excellence in building long-term strategic partnerships with various corporate customers, in addition to providing advanced financial solutions that support business expansion

and enhance competitiveness in local and global markets.

Almutawa added that KFH continues to support SMEs with an integrated suite of Sharia compliant financing solutions like Murabaha, Ijara, and Tawarruq, alongside advanced digital services, financial advisory, and training programs aimed at

empowering corporates and enhancing their sustainability.

He pointed out that KFH offers various solutions for SMEs, including cash financing, letters of credit, and letters of guarantee, to meet diverse corporate needs.

Almutawa noted that KFH launched the "Growing Sustainably" program with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) to promote sustainable business practices among SMEs, while providing technical consultation and knowledge sharing to support project growth and sustainability.

Award criteria

MEED's MENA Banking Excellence Awards honor financial institutions and banks that achieve advanced levels of leadership, innovation and impact in retail banking, digital services and SME sectors.

Supported by the MEED editorial team, an independent jury judges the awards based on defined qualitative and quantitative criteria. The process focuses on measurable outcomes, evidence-based results, and responsiveness to evolving customer and market needs, with winners selected according to the specific criteria of each category.

Judges' Citation

Best Digital Bank – Kuwait

"Kuwait Finance House has done what few banks can credibly claim: it has made digital the default, not the alternative. With more than 600 million transactions processed digitally in 2025, a platform spanning over 330 end-to-end services, and the successful launch of TAM, Kuwait's first fully sharia-compliant digital bank, KFH demonstrated that digital transformation at scale can be strategically coherent, customer-led and commercially proven."

MENA Best Islamic SME Bank

"Kuwait Finance House stood out for using Islamic banking as a practical growth platform for SMEs and entrepreneurs, not just as a financing structure. Through sharia-compliant SME support, microfinance solutions, digital access at scale, and its collaboration with UNDP to support sustainable growth pathways for SMEs and entrepreneurs, KFH demonstrated a proposition that combines access, capability building and responsible Islamic finance."

ABK boosts accessibility services & installs dedicated ramps across its branch network as part of 'Let's Be Aware' campaign

KUWAIT CITY, June 29: As part of its active participation in the 'Let's Be Aware' campaign, Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) continues to enhance the banking services and solutions it offers to customers with special needs, reaffirming its commitment to supporting the campaign and strengthening its position as a responsible and leading banking institution in Kuwait. This comes within the framework of its ongoing collaboration with the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) and the Kuwait Banking Association.

On this occasion, the Bank announced that all of its branches across Kuwait's governorates have been equipped with dedicated access ramps to facilitate entry for customers with special needs and enable easier access to ATMs.

ABK also offers customers with special needs the option to request the presence of witnesses when conducting banking transactions. The decision to accept or decline such assistance remains entirely at the customer's discretion, ensuring equal treatment among customers while promoting the independence of this segment. This initiative supports broader financial inclusion efforts across all segments of society.



The Bank currently serves customers with special needs through six branches located across all governorates of Kuwait, specifically in Jabriya, Adan, South Subahiya, Al Jahra, the Head Office branch, and Al Firdous. ABK has also assigned employees trained in sign language at these branches to communicate effectively with customers who have hearing and speaking disabilities. In addition, the Bank provides a range of facilities designed to help customers complete their financial and banking transactions with ease, including priority service within branches and ATMs equipped with Braille keypads to

improve accessibility.

ABK remains committed to ensuring that customers with special needs receive the highest standards of banking service and support in managing their financial affairs, in a manner that enhances customer satisfaction and reinforces the Bank's position as a trusted banking partner.

The Bank continues to play a key role in supporting the success of the 'Let's Be Aware' campaign by promoting its various themes through branch screens, social media platforms, and its website. Through ongoing engagement with customers across the local market, ABK contributes to achieving the campaign's objectives and advancing financial awareness throughout the community.

Beijing targets Mitsubishi

China imposes new export curbs amid Japan tensions

TAIPEI, June 29, (AP): China imposed new export controls Monday on 40 Japanese entities it says are contributing to the country's "remilitarization," as tensions with Tokyo rise.

Relations between Beijing and Tokyo have been increasingly tense since Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi last year implied Japan could intervene if China used military force against Taiwan, an island democracy China claims as its own.

Meanwhile, Japan has accelerated its military expansion, especially by adding offensive capabilities, which Beijing has condemned.

China's Commerce Ministry on Monday placed 20 Japanese entities, including multiple divisions of Mitsubishi Corporation, on a control list, which prohibits Chinese and foreign exporters from selling to them dual-use items made in China. Dual-use items can be used for both civilian and military purposes.

Additionally, 20 other entities have been added to a watch list for dual-use items, according to the ministry. It includes Mitsui E&S, which makes engines and other equipment for ships, as well as divisions of Fujitsu and Komatsu corporations.

Chinese companies exporting to these firms will be required to apply for special licenses, submit risk assessment reports on the Japanese companies and written pledges that the dual-use items will not be used for military purposes.

The export controls are "entirely justified, reasonable and lawful," the Chinese Commerce Ministry said, adding they are aimed at "firmly deterring Japan's reckless pursuit of 'new militarism.'"

"We hope Japan will recognize its mistakes, reverse its wrongful course, genuinely reflect on its past and return to the right track," it added.

Japan's top government spokesperson called the curbs as "unacceptable and extremely regrettable," while calling on Beijing to retract the measures.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Minoru Kihara said Monday that Japan would take necessary countermeasures after thoroughly assessing the curbs and their impact.

Under Takaichi, Japan's military has been equipped with more offensive capabilities, including long-range missiles on remote islands. Exports of lethal weapons are now allowed under a new policy. Japan will revise its defense and secu-

rity documents by December, which could further increase its defense budget.

On Monday, Japan's Ground Self-Defense Force announced the deployment of a Type-12 missile launcher on the southernmost remote island of Minamitorishima, an apparent response to China's growing activity expanding into the Pacific.

In February, China put 20 Japanese companies on an export control list and 20 others on a watch list.

The Commerce Ministry said that since then, "instead of reflecting on its past and correcting its course, Japan has continued down the wrong path" by accelerating remilitarization, deploying offensive weapons and launching missiles.

The ministry emphasized the curbs affect only a small number of Japanese entities, and the measures only apply to dual-use items. "They do not affect normal Sino-Japanese economic and trade exchanges, and honest and law-abiding Japanese entities have absolutely nothing to worry about."

The measures function more as a "diplomatic message" as Beijing steps up its pressure on Tokyo, said George Chen, partner for Greater China at the advisory firm The Asia Group.

"From Beijing's perspective, Japan has not taken meaningful actions to stabilize bilateral ties," Chen said. "And concerns are growing in China about deeper defense cooperation between Japan, the United States, and potentially other partners."

In the short term, Japan-China relations will likely remain fragile "and at risk of slipping further if neither side moves to arrest the downward trend," he added.

For Beijing, the issue of Taiwan is particularly sensitive. China considers the self-ruled island its own territory, to be retaken by force if necessary, and has increased military pressure on it.

Earlier this month, the Chinese coast guard conducted patrols east of Taiwan in what state media described as a "pointed warning" to Japan and the Philippines following an announcement that the countries would discuss their maritime boundaries in waters that Beijing views as its own.

The United Kingdom, Germany and France in a rare joint statement last week condemned Chinese activities in the waters east of Taiwan, adding they opposed any change of the status quo between China and Taiwan.

AI chip war intensifies

Huawei overtakes Nvidia in China's AI chip market

HONG KONG, June 29, (AP): In the race between the U.S. and China to develop artificial intelligence, the battle over hardware and computing power is heating up as Chinese companies like Huawei overtake global industry leaders like Nvidia in their home market.

Jensen Huang, the CEO of computer chip giant Nvidia, was mobbed by onlookers as he hit the streets for the "zhajiangmian" noodles while visiting Beijing during U.S. President Donald Trump's May summit with Chinese leader Xi Jinping. But his celebrity status has not translated into success in selling Nvidia's advanced chips in China.

Controls imposed by Washington on exports of advanced technology due to national security concerns initially stalled sales of Nvidia's advanced H200 AI chips there. By the time Huang won a reprieve, with Trump agreeing to their sale, Beijing had switched to encouraging use of domestically designed chips made by local rivals led by Huawei.

Huang has acknowledged that the U.S. has lost its edge in China's advanced AI chips market as Chinese competitors have become "giants."

"Well, we were in China for 30 years, and before the export control banned Nvidia out of China we had about 95% market share, and so we were competing just fine," he said in a recent interview with The Associated Press.

"We have to have, number one, make sure that we have national security and that we protect our nation, but we also simultaneously should go and compete and grow our technology industry and maximize our exports," he said.

Since the U.S. in 2019 excluded Huawei, and later China in general, from buying some of the world's most powerful computer chips and chip-making machinery, Chinese semiconductor makers have rushed to become self-sufficient, developing their own chips and knowhow.

Santa Clara, California-based Nvidia and its main rival AMD, or Advanced Micro Devices, dominate in the U.S. AI chip sector and much of the global market, but Huawei has made big inroads in China as Chinese AI companies like DeepSeek drive a push for improved chip performance and cost-effectiveness.

A report by Bernstein, a global equity research and brokerage firm, estimated that Nvidia had about a 40% market share in China's AI chips market in 2025, roughly matched by Huawei. Bernstein has predicted Nvidia's market share will shrink to around 8% this year, while Huawei's will likely grow to about 50%.

Nvidia "has definitely lost significant ground

to Huawei, which (now) leads domestically," said Antonia Hmaid, with the Mercator Institute for China Studies who focuses on semiconductors.

By some measures, Huawei's most advanced commercial AI chips, the Ascend 950 series, can be seen as roughly comparable to Nvidia's H200, considered in the industry to be among Nvidia's most powerful products, according to industry analysts.

"China now believes in its own self-sufficiency and supply capabilities," said He Hui, director of semiconductor research at research and advisory firm Omdia.

Last September, Huawei also said it was rolling out some of the world's most powerful AI computing clusters, combining the power of thousands of chips like its global rivals, despite having to rely on Chinese-made semiconductors due to the U.S. export controls.

Asked at a recent event about how Huawei's chip technology compares its rivals', including in the United States, He Tingbo, head of Huawei's semiconductor business, said: "We have found pretty good solutions."

"Who can walk faster? Huawei or other companies? I don't know the answer," she said. "I think only time will tell."

The semiconductor supply chain is global and no single country can build an advanced AI chip on its own.

Demand still exceeds available supply in China when it comes to AI chips, said Rui Ma, founder of Tech Buzz China.

Several recent cases linked to smuggling Nvidia's AI chips into China to circumvent export controls show the appetite for its technology.

Nvidia designs the world's most powerful AI chips. To make them, it relies on Dutch company ASML's extreme ultraviolet lithography, or EUV, machines, which rely on U.S. components and technologies. Taiwan chipmaking giant TSMC uses those machines to make a large share of Nvidia's top AI chips at its fabrication plants.

China is barred from buying Nvidia's most powerful AI chips or ASML chipmaking EUV machines.

Huawei's high-performance chips lag behind Nvidia's most advanced technologies in many areas. Cutting edge technologies in China such as training AI models like DeepSeek's still rely on Nvidia AI chips, analysts say.

Chinese universities and other big tech companies also want chips like the H200, in part for research and development.

Nvidia's global sales are still expanding as AI

demand surges. The company expects around \$91 billion of revenue in May-July, up from nearly \$82 billion in the previous quarter, excluding any data center compute revenue from China.

Nvidia's latest annual revenue was almost \$216 billion, while Huawei's was \$126 billion for a comparable period.

DeepSeek, the fast-growing Chinese rival of OpenAI's ChatGPT or Anthropic's Claude, said that its latest V4 AI model rolled out in April was adapted for Huawei's advanced Ascend chips.

Paul Triolo, a partner at DGA-Albright Stonebridge Group, said it is likely there is "significant effort going into collaboration between DeepSeek and Huawei" to train future DeepSeek models on domestic hardware.

That shows how Chinese-made chips can potentially replace Nvidia ones, said Phelix Lee, an analyst at Morningstar. But he added that, "We don't expect an abrupt switch toward (Huawei's) Ascend."

Nvidia engineered its H200 chips, stripping down their computing power, so they could be sold to China without violating U.S. restrictions. Up to last year, it was still selling H200 chips in China, although shipments were gradually declining, said Brady Wang, a Taipei-based semiconductor analyst with Counterpoint Research.

Beijing's public stance on imports of H200 chips has been unclear and Nvidia has said it has not sold H200 chips in China. At Nvidia's recent shareholders meeting, Huang said it had "yet to generate any revenue, and we are uncertain whether any imports will be allowed into the country."

Already the world's biggest supplier of telecommunications network equipment, Huawei has been expanding in global markets and its chips are no exception.

The company says it operates in 170 countries and regions with a mission of "bringing digital to every person, home and organization for a fully connected, intelligent world."

While there may be demand in other countries for its chips, China's production capacity for advanced chips still falls short of demand at home.

As China's advanced chip manufacturing capacity increases and pricing become more competitive, they could gain market share in regions like Southeast Asia among others, said Wang of Counterpoint.

"China's strategy of pursuing technological self-sufficiency - and eventually exporting its technologies - is unlikely to change regardless of whether Nvidia can sell its chips in China," Wang said.

Lauryl Hill crowns soul-stirring BET Awards filled with surprise, soul and standing ovations



Common, left, and Queen Latifah perform during the BET Awards on Sunday, June 28, 2026, at the Peacock Theater in Los Angeles. (AP)

After watching a 20-minute tribute celebrating her groundbreaking career, Lauryn Hill surprised the BET Awards audience Sunday with an impromptu performance of her 1998 classic "Ex-Factor" after accepting the Living Legend Icon Award before closing the show with "Everything Is Everything."

Introduced by Ice Cube, the eight-time Grammy winner was honored with performances at Los Angeles' Peacock Theater from SZA, Doechii, Lizzo, Queen Latifah, Common, her children Selah Marley and Zion Marley, who revisited songs from Hill's stellar catalog while she stood smiling, singing along and applauding throughout the tribute.

After she accepted the honor, Hill encouraged artists to embrace their gifts and remain true to their purpose.

"I fight for y'all," Hill said. "And fighting for y'all is me fighting for myself, it's me fighting for my children, it's me fighting for my community."

The Living Legend Icon Award recognizes pioneers whose work has remained culturally essential across generations. Hill first emerged as a member of the Fugees before releasing her landmark solo debut, "The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill," featuring classics including "Doo Wop (That Thing)," "Ex-Factor" and "Everything Is Everything."

Teyana Taylor fought back tears Sunday after an emotional surprise at the BET Awards:

Janet Jackson walked onto the stage to present Taylor with the Icon of the Year Award.

Taylor, visibly stunned as Jackson received a standing ovation, embraced the music legend before thanking one of her biggest inspirations.

"They did not tell me Janet was coming," Taylor said through tears. "There will be no me without you."

Presenting the award, Jackson praised Taylor's relentless work ethic and artistic range, highlighting her Golden Globe win for best supporting actress in "One Battle After Another" and calling her gifts "God-given."

The Icon of the Year Award recognizes a creative force whose influence is shaping culture. Taylor has evolved from a multiplatinum recording artist into an award-winning actor, director,



Raye performs during the BET Awards on Sunday, June 28, 2026, at the Peacock Theater in Los Angeles. (AP)



T.I. arrives at the BET Awards on Sunday, June 28, 2026, at the Peacock Theater in Los Angeles. (AP)



Kehlani performs during the BET Awards on Sunday, June 28, 2026, at the Peacock Theater in Los Angeles. (AP)



Leon Thomas, winner of the award for best male R&B/pop artist, poses in the press room during the BET Awards on Sunday, June 28, 2026, at the Peacock Theater in Los Angeles. (AP)

producer and choreographer. Accepting the honor, Taylor reflected on her two-decade career.

"I worked my (expletives) off 20 years," she said. "So I'm not accepting what I've earned with arrogance. I'm accepting what I've earned with gratitude."

The BET Awards paused to honor influential figures from music and entertainment who died over the past year during an emotional in memoriam tribute.

Erica Campbell of Mary Mary introduced the segment by reflecting on the enduring legacies left behind by those who died, paying special tribute to the late gospel composer Richard Smallwood, whose music she said strengthened her faith. She also remembered the late music executive Clive Davis, who died earlier this week at 94, before performing Whitney Houston's "I Love the Lord" with Le'Andria Johnson.

The tribute remembered Smallwood, Davis, Malcolm-Jamal Warner and others whose contributions left a lasting mark on music, television and culture.

The show also celebrated the late D'Angelo's legacy with a star-studded tribute that opened with appearances by his three children.

Ari Lennox, BJ the Chicago Kid, Durand Bernarr, George Clinton and RAYE were among the artists who honored the singer with performances of his music, celebrating the enduring influence of one of R&B's most acclaimed voices.

Music executive Sylvia Rhone received the BET Ultimate Icon Award in recognition of her groundbreaking leadership and lasting impact on the music industry.

Presented by Kelly Rowland, the



Lauryn Hill accepts the living legend icon award during the BET Awards on Sunday, June 28, 2026, at the Peacock Theater in Los Angeles. (AP)



Madisin Rian arrives at the BET Awards on Sunday, June 28, 2026, at the Peacock Theater in Los Angeles. (AP)

honor celebrated Rhone's trailblazing career as the first Black woman to lead a major record company owned by a Fortune 500 corporation. A video tribute featured messages from artists including Missy Elliott and Busta Rhymes, highlighting her role in helping develop the careers of performers such as Tracy Chapman, Brandy, Erykah Badu, Lil Wayne, Kid Cudi, Future, Travis Scott and Tyler, the Creator.

While accepting the award, Rhone dedicated the honor to the artists and creative teams she has worked alongside throughout her career.

"Tonight's honor bears my name, but it really belongs to all of us who create culture," she said.



Teyana Taylor, winner of the icon of the year award, poses in the press room during the BET Awards on Sunday, June 28, 2026, at the Peacock Theater in Los Angeles. (AP)



Don Toliver performs during the BET Awards on Sunday, June 28, 2026, at the Peacock Theater in Los Angeles. (AP)

Rhone also used the moment to urge the music industry to protect artists as artificial intelligence reshapes the business.

"We make the algorithm. The algorithm doesn't make us," she said. "We must honor the musician. We must compensate the creator."

She concluded by calling on the industry to ensure the next generation of artists has the opportunity to create "the songs that will change the world."

Druski made a grand entrance to kick off the BET Awards on Sunday, descending from the rafters in a harness as a choir filled the theater with a rendition of Kirk Franklin's "Revolution," setting the tone for a night celebrating



Janet Jackson arrives at the BET Awards on Sunday, June 28, 2026, at the Peacock Theater in Los Angeles. (AP)

BET Awards winners and honorees:

- Cardi B
- Kehlani
- Leon Thomas
- Teyana Taylor
- Lauryn Hill — Living Legend Icon Award
- Sylvia Rhone — BET Ultimate Icon Award



Sylvia Rhone, winner of the ultimate icon award, poses in the press room during the BET Awards on Sunday, June 28, 2026, at the Peacock Theater in Los Angeles. (AP)

music, comedy and culture.

The comedian and digital creator made history by becoming the youngest host of the ceremony. The show's opening performances featured Kehlani, who sang "Folded" with Jamie Foxx and his daughter, Anelise Estelle Foxx, on guitar. Don Toliver also performed his hits "E85" and "Body."

Accepting the award for best female R&B/pop artist, Kehlani admitted she hadn't prepared a speech, instead marveling that "Janet Jackson is here," before telling the icon she was "really honored to be here" among the night's talent.

Druski, 31, surpassed Kevin Hart, who previously held the distinction as the BET Award's youngest host when he emceed in 2011.

Throughout the night, Druski leaned into his comedic persona with appearances alongside Martin Lawrence and Latto. Lawrence jokingly shut down Druski's pitch to appear in the next "Bad Boys" film before teasing his upcoming Paramount+ series, while Latto playfully poked fun at the host during one of the show's transitions. Druski also spoofed Jay-Z's Roots Picnic freestyle.

Druski became one of entertainment's fastest-rising stars through his viral sketches before expanding into sold-out comedy tours and collaborations with artists including Drake and Snoop Dogg, as well as appearances alongside figures like Tom Brady and Timothée Chalamet.

Hip-hop pioneer MC Lyte returned as the show's announcer. (AP)



Kenny Iko performs during the BET Awards on Sunday, June 28, 2026, at the Peacock Theater in Los Angeles. (AP)



Lizzo performs during a living legend tribute for Lauryn Hill at the BET Awards on Sunday, June 28, 2026, at the Peacock Theater in Los Angeles. (AP)



Common performs during the BET Awards on Sunday, June 28, 2026, at the Peacock Theater in Los Angeles. (AP)

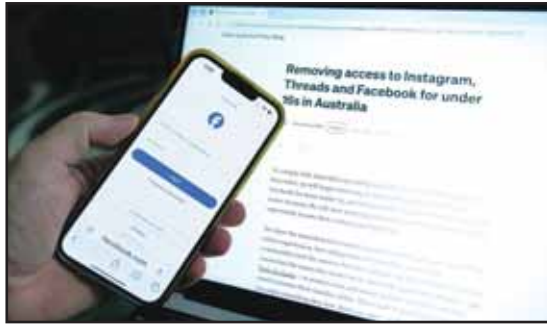
Platforms still failing to block child accounts under new law

Australia to double fines on social media giants over under-16 access

MELBOURNE, Australia, June 29, (AP): Australia plans to double potential fines for social media platforms, including Facebook and Instagram, who fail to prevent Australian children from holding accounts as critics argue the world-first ban on under-16s was failing.

Communications Minister Anika Wells on Monday blamed the platforms' resistance to the age restrictions for the need to toughen the laws that came into force on Dec. 10. "We can all agree we would like the scheme to work better than it is currently, but that is on Big Tech taking the Mickey," Wells told the Australian Broadcasting Corp., using an Australian slang term for deceiving, teasing or mocking.

The government announced Sunday it would introduce draft legislation into Parliament this week that would double the maximum fine to 99 million Australian dollars (\$68 million) for platforms that fail to take reasons steps



In this file photo, a login screen for Facebook and the new Meta policy are photographed in Sydney, Australia, on Nov. 20, 2025. (AP)

to prevent Australian children from holding accounts.

The amendments would also increase the powers of eSafety Commissioner Julie Inman Grant, Australia's on-line safety watchdog, to demand information and documents to ensure platforms were complying with Australian law, a government statement said.

The new powers would also include information from third parties, such as age assurance technology providers, to test claims made by the platforms about how those under 16 continued to circumvent the ban, the statement said.

Senior opposition lawmaker Jane Hume said her party would consider voting for the reforms, saying the "social media ban wasn't working" because of deficient laws.

"The legislation was clearly undercooked in the first place. The eSafety Commissioner wasn't given the powers to be able to pursue these Big Tech companies,"

Hume said.

Parliament passed the initial legislation with overwhelming support in 2024. The targeted platforms were given more than 12 months to plan to implement the ban.

Many countries who have implemented or are planning similar restrictions have been closely watching progress of Australia's ban.

The government initially reported more than 5 million children had accounts removed, deactivated or restricted after the ban became law.

But eSafety reported in March that seven in 10 children who held accounts on restricted platforms on Dec. 10 remained on Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and TikTok.

Inman Grant said in April she was considering court action against those platforms and YouTube, alleging they were not taking reasonable steps to exclude children.

Film

Ortega & Elordi among the latest additions

Film academy invites 529 new members

NEW YORK, June 29, (AP): The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences on Wednesday invited 529 members to the Oscar voting body, a new class that brings the group's membership to nearly double what it was a decade ago.

Among those who received invites are "One Battle After Another" nominee Teyana Taylor, Josh O'Connor, Jenna Ortega, Jacob Elordi and Simu Liu.

If all new members accept their invitations, the film academy will number 11,319, with 10,338 voting members. In 2016, the academy numbered closer to 6,000 members.

But to diversify its ranks, the Oscars organization has swelled in recent years. In 2015, the academy was 75% male and 92% white. That year, all 20 acting nominees were white, prompting the #OscarsSoWhite hashtag.

Following the induction of this year's new members, the academy will be 64% male and 75% white. One by-product of the membership expansion has been an increase in international voters. Overseas members now account for 22% of the group.



This combination image shows the following people in Los Angeles, from left, Jacob Elordi on March 15, 2026, Josh O'Connor on Nov. 17, 2025, Jenna Ortega on May 22, 2026, Simu Liu on May 9, 2026, and Teyana Taylor on April 29, 2026. (AP)

The makeup of the new class is 42% women, 56% from underrepresented communities and 53% from countries outside the U.S.

"Membership selection is based on professional qualifications, with an ongoing commitment to representation, inclusion and equity remaining a priority," the academy said in its announcement.

After several new classes that numbered closer to 1,000, the academy has in recent years grown at a more modest pace. Last year, 534 voters were added.

As it has grown in size, the academy has also added new categories to its annual awards ceremony. Earlier this year, the first award for casting was handed out. In

2028, the first Oscar for achievement in stunt design will be given.

Other new members include Anthony Ramos, Bill Skarsgård, Mia Goth, Jon Bernthal, Jemaine Clement, Şöpe, Dirisu and Stephen Fry. Among the invited filmmakers are Josh and Benny Safdie, "Weapons" director Zach Cregger and "Sirat" filmmaker Oliver Laxe.



Vespa enthusiasts parade in front of Colosseum during celebrations for the 80th anniversary of the Vespa scooter, in Rome, Saturday, June 27, 2026. (AP)

Colosseum hosts anniversary ride

Vespa invasion hits Rome as iconic scooter turns 80

ROME, June 29, (AP): More than 10,000 Vespas putt-putt-putted around the Colosseum and past the Roman Forum on Saturday, marking the 80th anniversary of the iconic scooter.

Enthusiasts came from all over; the AP spoke to people from across continental Europe, northern England, San Francisco, Australia's Gold Coast, the Philippines and more. Vespa-borne visitors converged on the Eternal City's cobblestone streets to celebrate a brand they likewise view as timeless. If for only a day, Ferrari and Ducati were forgotten as the little Vespa left them in its dust.

"The passion for Vespa is for the Italian style, freedom, the '60s," said Natalie Dunand, a retiree from France who was celebrating her own 61st birthday, too. "I love it."

Made world-famous by the film "Roman Holiday" in 1953, when Gregory Peck gave Audrey Hepburn a romantic lift through Rome's center, Vespa has since featured in others, including "The Talented Mr. Ripley" and more recently the animated "Luca."

With curved lines evoking a bygone era, plus an ability to produce smiles among onlookers, Vespa - which means "wasp" in Italian - is to two-wheeled transport what the Volkswagen Beetle is to cars.

Its invention was a bit of chance as Italy rebuilt from the rubble after World War II. Piaggio, a major aircraft manufacturer that saw its Pontedera factory destroyed by bombings, had



Vespa enthusiasts parade in front of the Colosseum during celebrations for the 80th anniversary of the Vespa scooter, in Rome. (AP)

to change gears. Downshifting considerably, Piaggio started churning out scooters.

Women were among initial target clients, according to Davide Zanolini, Piaggio's executive vice president of marketing, since they could ride them while wearing long skirts and without showing their legs. That's reflected in the Vespa's design.

"The shape, the elegance. This very charming attitude of Vespa is much more of a lady than a man," Zanolini told The Associated Press in an interview.

That little two-wheeler helped kick-start Italy's economy, and soon enough they were everywhere.

An AP article from 1950 said that Vespas had become so prevalent that their "staccato exhaust racket" had downtown Rome sounding like the Indy 500.

"There probably isn't a noisier scooter in all the world," it said. "Scooters darting loudly around Rome are said to impress motor-minded Americans as strongly as St. Peter's or the Colosseum. The scooter quickly teaches visitors to look four ways at once at street crossings."

Such scenes have again become commonplace since Vespa aficionados started arriving on Thursday, flooding streets all over the city and with traveling groups making their presence known in matching T-shirts.

The parking lot outside Rome's Stadium of the Marbles on Thursday had rows upon rows of Vespas of all makes from the past eight decades. It was like a motorcycle rally - except adorable. Some Vespas featured flowers and stuffed animals.

Dunand's Westie terrier rode behind her, its fur cut short to cope with the heat. A man from Tokyo, with his 8-year-old daughter behind him, swapped his hometown club's banner with an Italian. Others traded stickers. And the Vespa logo tattooed on a German man's meaty left calf appeared next to three words in flowery cursive: "La Dolce Vita" - The Sweet Life.

NASHVILLE, Tenn., June 29, (AP): For a few years at the turn of this century, Nashville was home to a remarkable carousel.

Described by its artist-creator Red Grooms as a sculpto-pictorama, the "horses" were 36 whimsical figures related to Tennessee. Legendary country musician Chet Atkins rode the neck of a guitar. Davy Crockett wrestled a bear. You could even ride a chigger, a summer mite that latches onto ankles causing an intense itch.

The Tennessee Fox Trot Carousel was magical but was perhaps in the wrong place at the wrong time, perched on the riverfront at the edge of downtown Nashville when the area was up-and-coming but not quite the tourist draw of today. When it could no longer support itself financially, the carousel was disassembled and given over to the care of the Tennessee State Museum, which placed it in a storage facility where it sits to this day.

Now, more than 20 years later, momentum is building for the carousel to ride again.

Tennessee State Museum Executive Director Ashley Howell says the question she most commonly hears from the public is: "What about the Red Grooms carousel?"

The museum was planning a grand new building when it took custody of the ride, but it didn't create an area for the carousel due to a lack of funds, Howell



(Left): A figure of the Bell Witch and (Right): A figure of Mr. Fox Trot from the Fox Trot Carousel is seen in a state government storage facility in Nashville, Tenn. (AP)



Artist Red Grooms poses in New York, July 16, 1998, with one of the figures for the Tennessee Fox Trot Carousel he has created for Nashville, his native town. (AP)



A figure of Adelia Acklen from the Fox Trot Carousel is seen in a state government storage facility in Nashville, Tenn. (AP)

said. The new museum opened in downtown Nashville in 2018 with a retrospective of Grooms' work but no carousel.

In November, the museum put out feelers for private parties interested in "partnering with the Museum in the restoration, placement, and operation of the Red Grooms Fox Trot Carousel."

Howell, who took the top job at the museum in 2017, said she had planned to turn her attention to the carousel sooner, but was hindered by twin disasters in 2020: A tornado clipped the new museum and destroyed a storage building then, just days later, the COVID-19 pandemic shut everything down.

However, all the questions about

the carousel's return underscore "how beloved this work of art is to the community," she said.

"It was only on the riverfront for a short time, but it has sort of lived in memory much longer than it was in operation," Howell said. "We're excited to think about next steps."

Grooms, who was born in Nashville in 1937, left the city after high school and spent most of his career in New York.

His work is colorful and whimsical, and he often creates large installations that viewers can enter and touch.

One of his best known exhibits is Ruckus Manhattan, from 1976. The New York Times described it as "a walk-in carnival reconstruction of Manhattan landmarks and the sometimes bizarre fauna that inhabit them," including a subway car that was "a form of participation theater."

Marina Pacini, who curated a Grooms exhibit for the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art in 2016, said he is really a storyteller whose work is filled with "absolutely riveting" details.

"They operate on multiple levels, but you do not have to be an art expert in order to enjoy unpacking what's going on in them," she said, adding: "People adore his work."

While selecting pieces for the exhibit, Pacini visited the carousel in storage. She said it was hard to choose from among them.

The Conversation

30 years after Reasonable Doubt, Jay-Z embodies hip-hop's contradictions

(The Conversation is an independent and nonprofit source of news, analysis and commentary from academic experts.)

Jabari M. Evans
University of South Carolina

"Reasonable Doubt" was not the first rap album I ever owned. But Jay-Z's debut was the first hip-hop album I bought with my own money. More importantly, it was the first one I studied as a young writer who aspired to become a rapper, a dream that eventually came true.

Jay-Z sounded cool in a way that resembled a jazz musician more than a conventional rap star. He rapped with a quiet calm that also conveyed supreme confidence. His lyrics were layered, skillful and unorthodox.

Yes, the tracks often revolved around drug dealing. But the hustlers who populated "Reasonable Doubt" weren't degenerates. They were refined and astute thinkers. And unlike other gangsta rappers, there was a moral quandary at the heart of his storytelling. In tracks like "D'Evils," Jay-Z's narrator turns crime, aspiration and paranoia into meditations on capitalism and the psychic cost of wealth:

We used to fight for building blocks
Now we fight for blocks with buildings that make a killing
The closest of friends when we first started
But grew apart as the money grew, and soon grew black-hearted

And later:
My soul is possessed by D'Evils in the form of diamonds and Luxes

The cinematic complexity displayed in its tracks helps explain why "Reasonable Doubt" was inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame, and why it still matters 30 years later.

But the album also launched the career of a rapper whose own trajectory has come to mirror hip-hop's own transfor-

mation. In 1996, hip-hop was still fighting for legitimacy. Three decades later, it had been folded into the mainstream. Kendrick Lamar can win a Pulitzer Prize, Nas can have an endowed fellowship at Harvard University, and Jay-Z, who once couldn't get signed to a label, can create a label of his own and become a billionaire business mogul.

Is it even possible for hip-hop to be seen as countercultural in 2026? And what happens when hip-hop's most successful outsider becomes central to the very institutions he once seemed to challenge?

When "Reasonable Doubt" was released, hip-hop was both ascendant and under siege.

In February 1996, Tupac Shakur came out with "All Eyez on Me," which became one of the bestselling rap albums of all time; seven months later, he was shot and killed. His friend-turned-rival, The Notorious B.I.G., was shot and killed in a drive-by shooting the following year. The media often cast these high-profile deaths as proof that rap music was inseparable from street violence, and the moral panic around hip-hop's influence on young listeners only intensified.

How times have changed. Today, hip-hop powers advertising campaigns, luxury branding and streaming platforms. According to Nielsen, rap surpassed rock music as the most popular music genre in the U.S. in 2018. Today, it accounts for roughly 1-in-4 on-demand audio streams.

Jay-Z has played an outsized role in that transformation. Since 1998, he's won 25 Grammys for his own music. In that time, he's also built a business empire. There's his talent agency, Roc Nation; his streaming platform, TIDAL; his venture capital firm, Marcy Venture Partners; and his luxury alcohol brands, Armand de Brignac and D'Ussé. Through Roc Nation, he's also a strategic partner with the NFL, advising the football league on its entertainment programming.

Forbes currently pegs his net worth at US\$2.8 billion. In April 2026, GQ published a long interview with Jay-Z.

This was a big deal: Jay-Z hadn't interacted with the media like this since 2017, when he was promoting his 13th solo album, "4:44."

How would one of hip-hop's elder statesmen reflect on his career and his many successes?

In the interview, Jay-Z didn't present his riches as a complicated outcome of capitalism's contradictions. Instead, he talked about his wealth as if it were something his critics had failed to understand. When asked about the belief that there's something inherently suspect about accumulating so much money, he pushed back:

"It's almost like a cop-out. You get to demonize this group of folks without fixing the actual system that exists [...] Your morality defines who you are. Your morality is not defined by a dollar amount."

As for the notion that his career trajectory was somehow hypocritical:

"The only thing I heard coming up was the American dream. You could make it, if you pull yourself up by the bootstraps. I heard that my entire life - until we started being successful. Then it was like: You're selling out because you're making money."

He then went on to insist that being handsomely paid is not some sort of betrayal to hip-hop, art or his community.

"I make art first and then I make sure that I'm compensated for my art. ... That [capitalist] structure exists; I just see the world for what it is, not for what I want it to be. I'm a realist."

To me, Jay-Z certainly sounded persuasive. He also sounded defensive. I think that's because hip-hop has long been haunted by the idea that wealth compromises credibility, even as the tracks have always contained aspirational themes of luxury and entrepreneurship.

For my generation, Jay-Z sold aspiration in addition to albums.

I wore Rocawear denim suits in high school with a kind of

conviction that now feels almost funny to admit. In college, drinking Belvedere vodka, which appeared in many a Jay-Z track in the early 2000s, felt like a rite of passage.

That's because Jay made luxury seem urbane, sophisticated and distinctly Black. Even later in life, when I'd smoke Cohiba cigars, drink D'USSÉ or read about art collecting, I felt like I was living inside a script he had helped write.

Looking back, I can see that much of my admiration for him was cloaked in materialism. Now, I think about the work of political scientist Cedric Robinson, who wrote extensively about what he called "racial capitalism."

He argued that capitalism has always been structured through race. It does not merely tolerate racial hierarchy; it depends on it. That means Black wealth - even spectacular Black wealth - does not automatically equal Black liberation. One Black billionaire can be held up as evidence of progress, while the broader system that continues to produce Black inequality remains intact.

In other words, if Jay-Z's ascent becomes shorthand for Black progress, then the critique of the system that continues to oppress those at the margins starts to fade. The culture begins to confuse exceptional mobility with collective freedom.

At the same time, I don't think Jay-Z can be simply understood as a sellout. Communication scholar A.J. Essoffery has written a lot about what he calls "reparative media." Essentially, he calls for media institutions to do more than offer tokens of representation to marginalized communities. Media companies need to be built or owned by those communities.

Jay-Z's defenders will sometimes describe him along these lines - as a Robin Hood-like figure who has taken capital from historically white-owned institutions and redirected some of it toward Black communities or Black entrepreneurs. Even if those gestures remain, at heart, capitalist - like his investments in cannabis brands - he'll often use his positioning and clout to fund minority-owned businesses. (AP)

South Sudan urges removal of outbreak-related travel restrictions

Africa CDC and WHO launch unified platform to support Africa's Ebola response

ADDIS ABABA, June 29, (Xinhua): The Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC), the World Health Organization (WHO), and the Ugandan government have officially launched the Joint Continental Incident Management Support Team (IMST) to support continental health emergency capabilities amid the ongoing Ebola outbreak.

The Africa CDC, in a statement issued late Saturday, said the newly launched IMST establishes a unified operational platform to strengthen Africa's capacity to prepare for, coordinate, and respond to public health emergencies, while supporting the ongoing Bundibugyo Ebola virus disease response.

Launched at Makerere University in Uganda's capital Kampala on Saturday, the IMST will support Uganda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and neighboring at-risk countries through integrated technical assistance, operational coordination and multidisciplinary expertise, it was noted.

"The launch marks a significant milestone in strengthening Africa's public health emergency architecture and reflects a shared commitment by Africa CDC, WHO, and African Union (AU) member states to build faster, more coordinated, and country-led responses to increasingly complex public health threats," the Africa CDC said.

The new platform reinforces regional preparedness and cross-border collaboration as essential pillars of Africa's health security, the AU's specialized continental public health agency added.

The agency highlighted that the IMST -- guided by the principles of one team, one plan, and one budget -- brings together specialists in surveillance, laboratory systems, case management, infection prevention and control, emergency logistics and operations, risk communication, information management, and partner coordination to strengthen outbreak response across the region.

Meanwhile, (Africa CDC) on Friday commended its collaboration with China in support of Africa's ongoing response to the Bundibugyo Ebola outbreak.

Africa CDC Director General Jean Kaseya made the remarks following a meeting with Head of the Chinese Mission to the African Union (AU) Jiang Feng at the agency's headquarters in Ethiopia's capital, Addis Ababa.



A health worker walks past Ebola warning and instruction posters at a temporary health clinic at the Mpondwe border crossing linking Uganda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo on June 4. (AP)

During the meeting, the two officials signed a handover certificate formalizing China's 2 million US dollars in emergency support for Africa's Ebola response, Kaseya disclosed in a statement via X on Friday, formerly Twitter.

The Africa CDC chief lauded China's "timely solidarity and strong partnership" in support of the African continent's response efforts against the continued Ebola outbreak.

China's latest support came as the AU's specialized continental public health agency called for enhanced international solidarity and assistance as the outbreak expanded in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Uganda, with a mounting number of confirmed cases and death toll.

In a recent interview with Xinhua, the Africa CDC director general welcomed China's firm commitment to Africa's public health priorities, as the continent responds to the outbreak.

"Africa CDC welcomes China's continued engagement and its firm commitment to supporting Africa's public health priorities," Kaseya said, highlighting the China-Africa cooperation in the public health sector, which encompasses partnerships in public health infrastructure, capacity building, emergency preparedness, and technical exchange, among others.

A five-member Chinese expert team arrived in Kinshasa, the capital of the DRC, on June 2 for a three-month mission to support the country's fight against the Ebola outbreak.

In another development, South Sudan on Friday urged foreign governments to lift Ebola-related travel and visa restrictions imposed on its citizens, saying the measures are affecting those who need to travel abroad for medical treatment and education.

"There is no Ebola here. No one is dying here. But people are now dying because they are unable to travel abroad for medical treatment," Francis Oromo, undersecretary in the Ministry of Health, told a joint press conference with the World Health Organization (WHO) in Juba, the capital of South Sudan.

According to Oromo, South Sudan activated its emergency response plan immediately after outbreaks were reported in neighboring countries by deploying response teams to high-risk states, strengthening surveillance, and expanding isolation capacity.

The ministry noted that all seven suspected Ebola cases identified nationwide, including four in Juba, tested negative.

As South Sudan remains at risk due to cross-border movement and its proximity to affected areas, health authorities are collaborating with neighboring countries, regional health bodies, and international partners to share information and strengthen disease surveillance.

Humphrey Karamagi, WHO representative in South Sudan, reaffirmed that the country remains Ebola-free, saying the detection and investigation of suspected cases demonstrate that the national surveillance system is functioning effectively.



A mosquito feeds on a technician at the Salt Lake City Mosquito Abatement District on July 26, 2023, in Salt Lake City. (AP)

Scratching that bug bite might feel good at first but science explains why it's a bad idea

WASHINGTON, June 29, (AP): You've likely heard it since childhood: Don't scratch that bug bite or rash, you'll make it worse. But why would something that feels so good be bad?

A lot of things can cause itchiness, sometimes serious diseases. Whatever the cause, doctors have long warned that scratching too much can damage the skin. Now researchers better understand why even a mildly annoying itch could put you on an itch-and-scratch cycle if you give in. How did they find out? In part by putting tiny "cones of shame" onto mice to uncover what happens on a cellular level when an itch gets scratched - or left alone.

They also gained insight into why a good scratch at least at first brings a sigh of relief. After all, not just people and other mammals scratch, even fish do. The commonality suggests there must be some evolutionary reason and the mouse experiment hints at a little germ protection - but still not a reason to scratch.

Dr. Daniel Kaplan, a University of Pittsburgh dermatologist whose lab studies immune reactions in skin, was exploring a run-of-the-mill type of itch called allergic contact dermatitis, caused by irritants such as poison ivy or nickel in jewelry.

Kaplan's research team put a rash-inducing irritant on the ears of mice. Normal mice scratched and inflammatory immune cells rushed to the site, increasing swelling. The rash was much milder in mice bred with defective itch-sensing nerve cells. But was the difference really the scratching?

Normal mice put into collars like those veterinary "cones of shame" so they itched but couldn't scratch gave the answer: They, too, had much less swelling and fewer inflammatory cells.

Kaplan said that evidence matches people's everyday experiences that scratching really can make things worse.

Ignore a mosquito bite and the itch is "gone in five or 10 minutes for most people," he said. "But if you start scratching it, it's your friend for a week," getting itchier and more inflamed.

To understand what was happening in the skin, Kaplan's team took a deeper look at mast cells, among the immune system's first responders. When called into action, they release compounds that can help fight germs or toxins - or, through a compound called histamine, trigger itchy allergic reactions.

Scientists have long known that allergens can activate mast cells. But other signals can summon mast cells, too, including pain. And when we scratch, "we tend to scratch until it starts to hurt," Kaplan noted.

Pain-sensing nerve cells release a chemical messenger called substance P. In findings published last year, Kaplan's team reported that substance P can activate mast cells through a different molecular pathway than allergens do - a double whammy that explains why scratching further inflames itchy rashes or bites. If we experience pain like touching a hot stove, we'll learn not to do that again. Yet relief from a good scratch, in evolutionary terms, is positive feedback. Why?

One long-held theory is that it may help creatures slough off parasites like fleas or mites. But Kaplan also was intrigued by other labs' findings that mast cells could fend off a common type of skin bacteria called *Staphylococcus aureus*. So his team infected mice and then repeated the cone-of-shame itch experiment. Sure enough, those that scratched had lower levels of that germ on their ears, maybe because of the extra inflammation or some other mast cell-related compound.

But that's not enough of an upside to change the health advice. "Ultimately, scratching is deleterious," Kaplan stressed. "You should avoid scratching," he said, although acknowledging that it's "easier said than done."

What fights an itch depends on its cause and there's a need for better treatments. For now, antihistamines and certain other drugs for hives can tamp down some itchiness triggered by mast cells. Drug companies are experimenting with other approaches called MRGPRX2 blockers that target the pathway Kaplan's team linked to scratching. Kaplan hopes better understanding of that pathway eventually could help skin diseases such as chronic eczema.

South African study finds no male markers in ancient human fossils

CAPE TOWN, June 29, (Xinhua): Scientists in South Africa have found no biological male markers in fossils of an extinct archaic human species, a discovery that is raising new questions about possible sex-specific burial practices among a population that lived hundreds of thousands of years ago.

In a statement issued, the University of the Witwatersrand said the findings were reported in an international study published in the journal *Cell*.

The fossils belong to *Homo naledi*, an extinct species of archaic human discovered in 2013 in South Africa's Rising Star Cave system in the Cradle of Humankind World Heritage Site.

Researchers analyzed 23 fossil teeth from at least 20 individuals using paleoproteomic techniques. They searched for Amelogenin-Y, a protein linked to the Y chromosome and biological males, but found no trace of it in any sample.

Scientists from the University of Copenhagen in Denmark and the National Geographic Society in the United States, together with collaborators from other institutions, said the results could indicate either a strongly sex-

biased burial pattern or an unusual genetic feature within the population.

"Unlike those found in other remains like bone fragments, proteins in tooth enamel are preserved because dental enamel -- the hardest tissue in the human body -- shields proteins from environmental contamination even for millions of years. This makes them ideal carriers of genetic information from deep time," said Palesa Madupe, South African-born lead author of the study.

"Our study helps resolve the long-standing mystery of why *Homo naledi* lacked significant variation; it's probably because they could have all belonged to one sex," she added.

National Geographic Explorer and co-author Lee Berger said the pattern may reflect behavior rather than biology. "It appears that the most likely explanation for the observed absence of an Amelogenin-Y marker in these individuals is that we are seeing a sex-bias in mortuary practice," he said.

He added that the probability of sampling 20 individuals of one sex is extremely unlikely.

Researchers also noted that the Y-linked marker gene may have been lost or mutated over time, although they said it is unlikely that such a scenario would affect an entire population.



Berger

Gracie the Giraffe, finally found

TEXAS, June 29, (AP): Gracie the Giraffe, who went missing for about two weeks in Texas after wandering off a remote private ranch, was finally found Friday - and the open range appeared to have agreed with her.

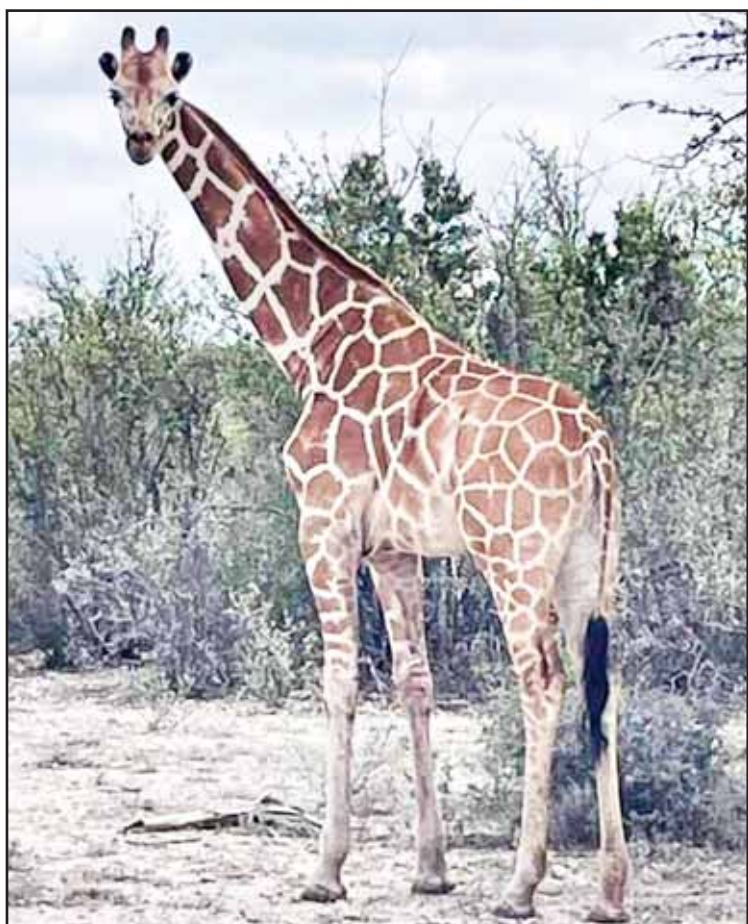
The giraffe was spotted about 4 miles (6.4 kilometers) south of her enclosure during an aerial search in the Texas Hill Country, according to Real County Sheriff Nathan Johnson. He said Gracie's owner, Vick Jones, contacted a veterinarian and began putting together a team to bring the giraffe safely back to the ranch.

"She's in good shape," Jones said. "She's standing there, swishing her tail."

Gracie, who is about 3 years old and weighs at least 1,200 pounds, was found within a half-mile of a pond and creek and had plenty of vegetation to feed on, said Jones, adding that she appeared to have been in that area for about a week.

Getting the 10-foot-tall giraffe home to the Cedar Hollow Ranch, about 100 miles (160 kilometers) west of San Antonio, was taking some work.

Veterinarians needed time to sedate Gracie and put a hood over her eyes, Jones said. From there, Gracie will be moved with an open-pasture trailer to a taller, enclosed trailer made for giraffes for the trip back to the ranch.



This undated image provided by Vic Jones shows Gracie, a giraffe whose owner says went missing in Texas, in Uvalde County, Texas. (AP)



This photo provided by NASA shows Kieran Wilson, LINK's principal investigator, and Hunter Robertson, a space systems engineer, both at Katalyst Space, standing next to their spacecraft inside the SES (Space Environment Simulator) at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, Md on April 17, ahead of thermal vacuum testing. (AP)

NASA races to save Swift telescope from falling back to Earth with daring rescue mission

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla., June 29, (AP): NASA is racing to save an aging telescope from falling back to Earth with a daring rescue mission. The \$30 million salvage operation gets underway as soon as this week with the planned launch of a robotic lifesaver.

NASA hired startup Katalyst Space Technologies to boost the Swift Observatory to a higher orbit where it can continue hunting for some of the universe's biggest explosions. A three-armed spacecraft built by Katalyst will chase after Swift once it takes off from an atoll in the Pacific's Marshall Islands aboard an airplane-launched Pegasus rocket. Liftoff could occur as early as Tuesday.

Scanning the cosmos since its launch in 2004, Swift has been sinking faster and faster because of recent intense solar activity. It needs to get to a higher, more stable orbit as soon as possible to survive. NASA's Hubble Space Telescope - also at risk - could be next.

Like Swift, Hubble is losing altitude as the sun erupts with one flare after another. Katalyst Space CEO Ghon-hee Lee said his company's next-generation robot, still in development, could save the day for the much bigger Hubble in a couple years.

Only China has attempted a mission like the upcoming one, successfully boosting a satellite into a higher graveyard orbit four years ago.

"This is the first American space robot to go up and do anything like this," Lee told The Associated Press. "NASA has all these big senior observatories ... all of

them can benefit from a service like this. So what we're proving with this mission is this is a new play in the play-book that's available."

It will take Katalyst's autonomous spacecraft, named Link, about a month to rendezvous with Swift and catch it, and another couple months to raise its orbit from the current 224 miles (360 kilometers) to the desired 373 miles (600 kilometers).

The 1.6-ton (1.4-metric ton) gamma ray observatory must be above 185 miles (300 kilometers) for the rescue to work. It's expected to reach that point of no return in October, according to the latest estimates.

Roughly the size of a small kitchen refrigerator with a 40-foot (12-meter) solar wingspan, Link sports three arms with a reach of just over 3 feet (1 meter). Each arm has two finger-like pinching grippers that resemble the hands of a Lego mini figure.

If all goes well, Swift could be back in business by September, according to Lee.

Worth hundreds of millions of dollars, Swift was never designed to be repaired, let alone retrieved by hands - human or otherwise. That's what makes this so challenging, according to company officials, who stress there is no guarantee it will work.

NASA signed a contract with Katalyst last September with only two requests: It has to be a rush job, but please don't make things worse. Nine months later, the company is ready to rumble.

SPORTS

Briscoe settles for second in tight finish

Van Gisbergen extends road course dominance with Sonoma win

SONOMA, Calif., June 29, (AP) — Shane van Gisbergen continued his remarkable run on the twistiest tracks in NASCAR, but this was no easy Sunday drive.

The Trackhouse Racing driver became the winningest active Cup Series driver on road and street courses with his second consecutive victory at Sonoma Raceway. Though he led 74 of the final 83 laps after starting sixth on the 1.99-mile road course north of San Francisco, van Gisbergen had to fend off a charge by runner-up Chase Briscoe with a No. 97 Chevrolet that hadn't been entirely to his liking since practice a day earlier.

"We were really bad yesterday, and these guys did an amazing job turning this car into a winner," said van Gisbergen, who celebrated with a massive burnout for the grandstands. "(Briscoe) was coming. He was really, really good, and I ran out at the end. Yeah, a couple more laps, we would have had some problems."

Finishing second to van Gisbergen at Sonoma for the second consecutive year, Briscoe came up 0.357 seconds short and was left lamenting a mistake in getting his No. 19 Toyota

into Turn 1 with four laps remaining. "Not very many people get that close to him at the end of one of these road course races," Briscoe said. "Just frustrated with myself. I felt like I definitely had the better car. I didn't do as good of a job as he did driving. I was having to push so hard, and that was where I would make up my ground. It was just such a razor's edge, and I about crashed. If I don't make that mistake, I'm probably ahead of him at the end."

"Just bummed that it was my fault we didn't win with the best car. Against that guy, you've got to be absolutely perfect."

Van Gisbergen notched the eighth victory of his career on the tracks that require left and right turns, breaking a tie with 2020 Cup champion Chase Elliott.

With his second win this season, van Gisbergen improved three spots to 14th in the points standings, moving back into a provisional spot in the Chase.

But there are no road or street courses remaining over the final 18 races of the season, so the New Zealand native will need to diversify his skillset after entering NASCAR



Shane van Gisbergen celebrates after winning a NASCAR Cup Series auto race at Sonoma Raceway in Sonoma, Calif. (AP)

three years ago with no experience on ovals.

"I need to really step it up on the ovals," he said. "This is an oval championship, and I need to keep getting better at them."

Pole-sitter Ty Gibbs finished third, and Kyle Larson and Christopher

Bell rounded out the top five.

For the second year in a row, the top seed was knocked off in the opening race of the In-Season Challenge, the bracket-style tournament that pits 32 drivers head to head with the top finisher advancing.

Tyler Reddick finished four laps

down in 36th because of a power steering problem. That turned his first-round matchup into a walkover for 10th-place finisher Alex Bowman, who nabbed the 32nd and final seed in the In-Season Challenge despite missing four races with vertigo.

"It's just a very odd issue," Reddick said. "Everything seemed fine when we left the pit stall, and then the steering just really got notchy with the power steering going in and out. It was just really hard to make any kind of lap time with it."

The 23XI Racing driver salvaged a point by setting the race's fastest lap after the team made repairs. After leading the Chase standings since winning the Daytona 500 season opener, Reddick fell one point behind Denny Hamlin with eight races remaining in the regular season.

"I'd say we got pretty fortunate," Reddick said. "All things considered, for the issues that we had, we were very fortunate to only lose nine points to Denny while finishing last."

Second-seeded Hamlin advanced despite a 26th-place finish, avenging a first-round upset by Ty Dillon last year.

In a rematch, Dillon was ahead of

Hamlin for most of Sunday's race until he lost power steering with 15 laps remaining and fell to 35th. Hamlin rebounded from being spun from seventh by Carson Hocevar on a restart with 46 laps remaining.

"I had a really fast car, a top-five car on speed," Hamlin said. "Once we got spun, it just lost all the downforce, and we struggled."

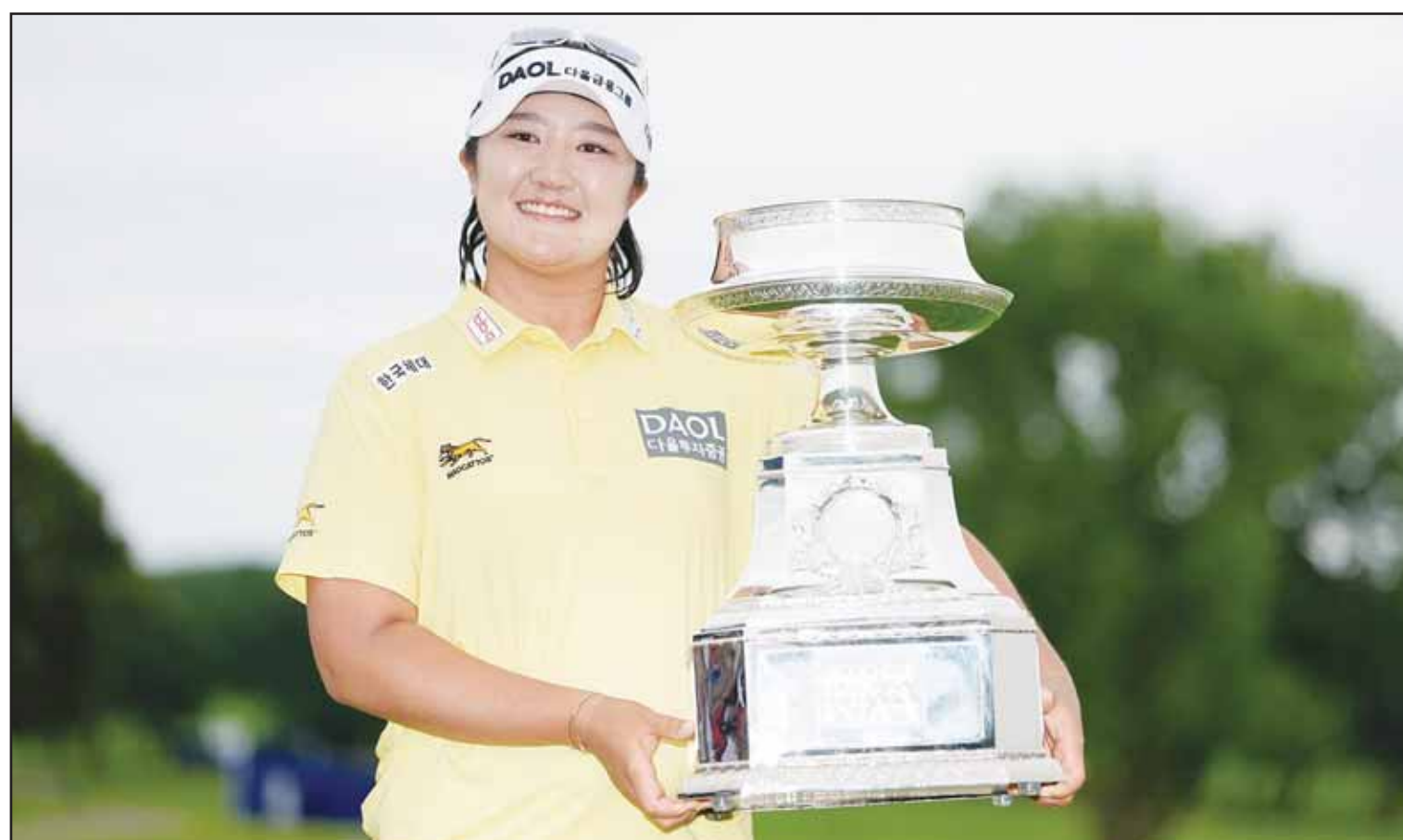
Hocevar, who was also involved in a separate incident with Bell, apologized for the contact with Hamlin.

"I was watching my mirror the whole time, and I wasn't even seeing that I was hitting Denny," said Hocevar, who has tangled with several veterans this year. "I was happy to hear that I wasn't the difference maker of Ty beating Denny because I would be looked at for sports fixing probably with the way I was singing Ty's praises."

NASCAR will return to Chicagoland Speedway for the first time in seven years with a 400-mile race on July 5. In the most recent Cup race on the 1.5-mile oval in Joliet, Illinois, Alex Bowman earned his first victory in NASCAR's premier series by beating future teammate Kyle Larson on June 30, 2019.

Ryu wins KPMG Women's PGA

Hovland beats Scheffler in Travelers playoff



Haeran Ryu, of South Korea, poses with the trophy after winning the Women's PGA Championship golf tournament at Hazeltine National Golf Club in Chaska, Minn. (AP)

CHASKA, Minn., June 29, (AP): Haeran Ryu ended Nelly Korda's hopes for a Grand Slam when she recovered from a shaky start and won the KPMG Women's PGA Championship for her first major, beating Ina Yoon by two shots at Hazeltine.

Ryu closed with a 2-under 70 to finish at 13-under 275 and become the sixth South Korean to win the event in the last 12 years. Ryu, the 2023 LPGA rookie of the year, also was the first major champion in at least 60 years to win when trailing by at least 10 shots after the first round.

Korda, trying to become only the third player in LPGA history to win the first three majors of the season, got within three shots early on the back nine but could not get any closer.

Viktor Hovland capped off a gritty rally when he made a 7-foot birdie putt on the first playoff hole Monday morning and won the Travelers Championship when

Scottie Scheffler missed a 4-foot birdie putt.

Scheffler had to make an 8-foot par in near darkness Sunday night to force the playoff.

They returned for one hole, which did not lack for drama or atmosphere. Both found the middle of the fairway on the par-4 18th. Scheffler hit his approach to 4 feet as some 3,000 fans surrounding the green erupted in cheers.

Eugenio Chacarra captured a second straight title on the European tour by closing with a 7-under 64 for a five-shot victory in the Italian Open.

The 26-year-old Spaniard got an extra reward - a spot in the British Open next month at Royal Birkdale. It will be his debut in golf's oldest major.

Dicky Pride closed with a 7-under 65 and beat Padraig Harrington on the first playoff hole to win the Dick's Sporting Goods Open for his second PGA Tour Champions title.

Harrington shot 66 in the final round at En-Joie Golf Club. But he missed the fairway on the 18th hole in the playoff and his 10-foot par putt slid by on the right.

Drew Nesbitt of Canada made a key par save from the bunker on the 17th hole and closed with another par for a 5-under 66, giving him a one-shot victory in the Memorial Health Championship for his first Korn Ferry Tour title.

Nesbitt, who has two victories on the PGA Tour Americas circuit, held off Cole Sherwood, who had



Viktor Hovland, of Norway, reacts after making a birdie on the first playoff hole of the Travelers Championship golf tournament at TPC River Highlands in Cromwell, Conn. (AP)

two eagles and shot 29 on the back nine to close with a 62. Nesbitt finished at 26-under 258 and moved to No. 22 in the Korn Ferry points list.

Matthew Riedel also shot 62 in the final round and tied for third with Will Cannon (66).

Kaleiya Romero closed with a 4-under 68 and made eagle on the first playoff hole to defeat Liqi Zeng of China in the Island Resort Championship. Romero, the older sister of top-ranked amateur Kiara Romero, won for the first time on the Epson Tour.

Dawson Armstrong closed with a 2-under 68 and made birdie on the sixth playoff hole to defeat Harry Lord and Corey Pereira in the Wichita Open on the PGA Tour Americas.

Noora Komulainen on Finland closed with a 6-under 66 and made birdie on the first playoff hole against Justice Bosio and Lisa Pettersson to win the Tipsport Czech Ladies Open for her first Ladies European Tour title.

John Gough closed with a 2-under 69 for a two-shot victory over former LIV Golf player Fredrik Kjettrup in the Blot Play 9 in France on the Challenge Tour.

Team to face Egyptian clubs

U-18 basketball team heads to Cairo for training camp

By Hassan Mosa

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, June 29: Kuwait's national under-18 basketball team departs today for Cairo, Egypt, to begin a 15-day training camp as part of its preparations for the Gulf Championship, which serves as the qualifier for the Asian Cup finals. The tournament is scheduled to take place in Doha, Qatar, from July 17 to 22.

The delegation is headed by acting Assistant Secretary-General and Chairman of the Training and National Teams Committee, Mohammed Al-Hassawi. It includes team administrator Ghazi Al-Otaibi, Serbian head coach Marko, Serbian fitness coach Milan, assistant coach Yahya Al-Bahar, and a squad of 16 players.

Yousef Al-Ghanim, Hussein Bouftain, Ali Al-Rabah, Ahmed Al-Rashid, Mishal Al-Azmi, Omar Murad, Furaij Al-Furajj, Abdullah Al-Juraid, Omar Al-Saleh, Musaed Al-Obaidi, Ali Al-Salahi, Abdulrahman Al-Marzouq, Abdullah Al-Ali, Ali Al-Hindal, Amir Asadallah, and Adam Asadallah.

Al-Hassawi stressed that the overseas camp is a key step in the team's build-up for the Gulf Championship, noting that the federation aims to remain competitive and return to podium finishes in youth competitions, as achieved in previous editions.



Mohammed Al-Hassawi, Acting Assistant Secretary-General and Chairman of the Training and National Teams Committee for Kuwait's U-18 national basketball team.

He added that the upcoming Gulf Championship is expected to be highly competitive, with all participating teams preparing at a strong level.

He also confirmed that Kuwait will play several friendly matches against top Egyptian clubs during the camp, highlighting that the technical staff prepared the training program early to ensure optimal readiness.

Al-Hassawi thanked the Public Authority for Sports for its continued support in developing national teams, expressing hope that the preparation phase will proceed as planned and deliver the desired results.

Valkyries down Liberty

Reeve ties wins record as Lynx powers past Wings

ARLINGTON, Texas, June 29, (AP): Natasha Howard had 21 points and 14 rebounds, Olivia Miles added 21 points and eight assists and Cheryl Reeve tied the WNBA record for career coaching wins as the Minnesota Lynx beat the Dallas Wings 85-77 on Sunday.

Reeve, who already owns the WNBA's record for playoff wins, tied Mike Thibault for the most regular-season wins in league history at 379. She can break the record when Minnesota takes on the Liberty in New York on Friday.

Reeve was inducted Saturday night into the Women's Basketball Hall of Fame in Knoxville, Tennessee.

Howard went 9 for 17 from the field and added three steals for Minnesota (15-4), which improved to 9-1 on the road and 3-0 against Dallas this season. Miles went 8 for 8

from the free-throw line and has 64 points over the last three games.

Kayla McBride scored 17 points and made four 3-pointers, and Courtney Williams added 12 points for the Lynx.

Minnesota led 28-16 after the first quarter, then stretched the lead to 45-29 at halftime after holding Dallas to 11-for-37 shooting with eight turnovers before the break.

Paige Bueckers led Dallas (11-8) with 25 points on 10-of-17 shooting. A'zha Fudd had 21 points and made 12 of her first 14 shots in the third quarter, while Jessica Shepard had 16 rebounds.

Valkyries 76, Liberty 67
In San Francisco, Kaila Charles tied a season high with 13 points off the bench and the Golden State Valkyries held the New York Liberty to their lowest-scoring first half of the season en route to a victory.

A Leading Oil & Gas Company in Kuwait Required

Sl. No.	Job Title	Requirement
1	Costing & Tendering Supervisor	Bachelor's degree or equivalent qualification preferred. Experience in Prequalification & Documentation, Tendering & Costing and other related jobs for Oil & Gas (EPC, Maintenance and Construction projects).
2	Supervisor (Rotating)	Diploma or Bachelor's degree and having relevant experience in respective field. Shall be well aware of basic refinery safety aspects and use of Personal Protective Equipment.
3	Supervisor (Rigging)	
4	Supervisor (Welding & Fabrication)	
5	Heavy Equipment Operator	Industrial Training Certification in Mechanical Trade. Possess valid Kuwait Equipment license and Heavy Vehicle Driving License.
6	Crane Operator	Industrial Training Certification in Mechanical Trade and holding valid Kuwait heavy driving license and operating license for medium and heavy cranes of capacity up to 250 tons.

* Minimum 7 Years proven experience in same category in oil & gas sector.
* All Categories are Full time job. Market salary, free food & Accommodation and other benefits are provided as per Kuwait labour law.

Interested candidates meeting the requirements are invited to send their CV to:

Email ID: apply4jobkwt@gmail.com

Daunting task

City hires Maresca as manager to replace Guardiola

LONDON, June 29, (AP) — Enzo Maresca was hired as the successor to Pep Guardiola at Manchester City on Monday, with the Italian taking on the daunting task of replacing one of soccer's greatest ever coaches.

Maresca signed a three-year deal following a delay in the announcement while City negotiated with Chelsea, the Premier League rival he left in January, over a compensation package.

The 46-year-old Maresca was City's academy coach in the 2020-21 season and Guardiola's assistant in 2022-23 - the year the team won the Premier League-Champions League-FA Cup treble.

After that, Maresca joined Leicester, which he led to the title in the second-tier Championship in England before immediately joining Chelsea for what has so far been his only top-flight coaching job.

He was at Chelsea from June 2024 to January 2026, winning the Club World



Chelsea's head coach Enzo Maresca reacts during the Champions League opening phase soccer match between Atalanta and Chelsea, in Bergamo, Italy. (AP)

Cup and Conference League titles and also qualifying for the Champions League.

Maresca left at the start of January following a deterioration in his relationship with Chelsea's hierarchy, during a period when English media were already reporting that he had been lined up as Guardiola's eventual replacement at City. Maresca, who had a contract with Chelsea until 2029, played down those reports at the time.

Chelsea said in a statement Monday that Maresca's head had been turned by City's interest. "In autumn last year, the club was informed by our former head coach that there might be an opportunity for him to succeed Pep Guardiola at the end of the season," Chelsea said. "It became clear to us that it was his strong desire to succeed Guardiola and that he was fully committed to pursuing the opportunity, despite the fact he was under a long-term contract which he had no right to terminate."

Chelsea said it "felt let down" when he

resigned "as we believed that his head and heart were focused on another club and another opportunity."

Maresca accepted that his departure from Chelsea "caused disruption for the club and I apologize for that."

"It was neither my intention nor my wish," he added, while saying he was "ecstatic" to be joining City.

Now he has the near-impossible task of following Guardiola, who left City in May after a decade in which he won 17 major trophies - including the Premier League six times and a first Champions League title.

"Manchester City is a club I know very well and to have the chance to manage this team is a brilliant opportunity for me," Maresca said in a City statement.

"City is an incredibly well-run football club. Everything they do is innovative, planned and purposeful. For a manager, that is a dream situation. It provides the consistency I need to do my job effectively."



Gulf nations struggle at WC despite heavy investment

Saudi FA President quits after disappointing campaign

ATLANTA, June 29, (AP): Gulf countries like Saudi Arabia and Qatar that poured a fortune into soccer and infrastructure experienced unceremonious exits from the World Cup, proving that big money doesn't guarantee success on the sport's biggest stage.

Saudi Arabia is out at the earliest point. Again. Bottom of a group that included tiny Cape Verde, the third-smallest nation ever to compete on this stage and into the knockouts for the first time.

By signing the likes of Cristiano Ronaldo, Neymar and Karim Benzema as part of a spectacular recruitment drive in recent years, Saudi Arabia has been a major disruptor of club soccer. But on the international stage it still has a long way to go eight years out from hosting the World Cup in 2034.

On Sunday, Saudi Arabian Football Federation president Yasser Al-Misheal resigned. Taking full responsibility for the failed World Cup campaign, he said that stepping aside will allow for a "new phase" of leadership within Saudi football.

Qatar, the host four years ago, is also on its way home after just three games, so too are the other gulf nations Iran and Iraq. Compared to the success of African teams at this World Cup, with nine out of 10 advancing to the round of 32, gulf nations are struggling mightily to make their mark.

A goalless draw against Cape Verde ended Saudi Arabia's hopes of advancing from the group phase for the first time since 1994.

"It was not what we wanted because when playing in such a match against a team that is more or less the same level as us, our performance was not good. So this gives rise to concern," Saudi coach Georgios Donis said.

Qatar made history with its first point at a World Cup, scoring a dra-



Saudi Arabia's Ali Lajami (3) battles for a header on a corner kick with Cape Verde's Diney Borges (3) during the World Cup Group H soccer match between Cape Verde and Saudi Arabia in Houston. (AP)

matic late equalizer against Switzerland. But it was another disappointingly early exit after it was eliminated just two games into its home tournament in 2022.

"I think that they show that at least we were able to compete in these kind of matches," coach Julen Lopetegui said.

The appointment of Lopetegui - the former Spain and Real Madrid coach - is evidence of the type of investment Qatar has made to try to

boost its performance on the global stage. Unlike Saudi Arabia, it has not embarked on such an audacious drive to attract aging stars from Europe to its domestic league.

Despite a population of 3 million people and only around 300,000 citizens, it has managed to develop enough homegrown players to win back-to-back Asian Cups in recent years and assert its dominance on a region that includes powers like Japan and South Korea.

But it has not been able to translate those performances to the World Cup, and such an early exit marks a disappointment less than four years after hosting the tournament and spending billions of dollars to create eight state-of-the-art stadiums.

"You compare with other countries ... for sure we know who we are," said Lopetegui. "But at the same time I think that this is one little country but with a big passion, a big investment ... we have to im-

prove every day and they did this. "We look to the future being optimistic about this for sure."

It's all about the future for Saudi Arabia, too, after winning the right to host the World Cup in 2034.

It has been on a mission to wield influence in sports around the world, from buying Premier League Newcastle to launching LIV Golf and hosting world title boxing matches and Formula 1.

The World Cup would be its stand-

out achievement as it looks to move away from its heavy reliance on oil and explore other revenue-generating sectors.

It will want its national team to make a statement at its home tournament and while superstar signings like Ronaldo have raised the profile of its league, the hope is that they will also raise standards.

Yet after pulling off one of the biggest upsets in World Cup history by beating eventual champion Argentina four years ago, there was no standout moment this time - failing to advance beyond the group phase for the sixth time in a row.

"When we have these stars in the Arabian League, I think that the more competitive the competition, the better our players will be," said Donis. "But it's different when we're playing for the national team because in the national team, these experiences, there needs to be a certain mentality."

Focus on development of homegrown talent is clear as 2034 approaches.

Star signings from overseas have slowed and some big names, including Neymar, have departed. U.S. Soccer's sporting director Matt Crocker was lured away to head up talent development in Saudi Arabia and youth investment is said to have doubled over the past three years.

If Saudi Arabia and Qatar have been disruptors with their sudden mega spending, Iran has been competing in World Cups since 1978.

It had to contend with difficulties regarding preparation and travel in the wake of war with the United States and only narrowly missed out on advancing as a best third place team after three draws. In seven appearances at the World Cup it has never gone beyond the groups.

Likewise for Iraq in its two appearances 40 years apart.

At a time when a supersized 48-team World Cup has opportunities for the likes of Cape Verde and Congo to make history, gulf nations are still waiting for their moment.

Belgium center back Zeno Debast practices at World Cup for 1st time

France looks to halt Sweden's surprise World Cup run

NEW YORK, June 29, (Agencies): France face Sweden at the New York-New Jersey Stadium at 12:00 midnight on Tuesday-Wednesday in the Round of 32, with Les Bleus entering as strong favorites after a flawless group-stage campaign, while Sweden aim to extend their surprise run and pull off a major upset.

France topped its group with a perfect nine points, while Sweden advanced as one of the best third-placed teams with four points.

The French arrive in confident form after a commanding 4-1 victory over Norway in their final group match.

Ousmane Dembélé stole the headlines with a hat-trick, taking his tournament tally to four goals and joining Kylian Mbappé at the top of France's scoring chart.

The pair continues to lead one of the tournament's most dangerous attacking lines, with both among the competition's leading scorers.

France has also shown a consistent habit of starting strong, scoring

the opening goal in each of their last six matches across all competitions.

Sweden booked their knockout place after a 1-1 draw with Japan, with Anthony Elanga scoring their goal.

Elanga and Yasin Ayari have been key attacking figures, both leading Sweden's scoring charts with two goals each.

However, defensive issues remain a concern, with Sweden conceding 14 goals in its last six matches - the highest among teams in the knockout stage.

It has also conceded eight first-half goals in that run, a weakness that could be exposed by France's high-powered attack.

Head-to-head history also favours France, who won the last meeting 4-2 in the 2020 UEFA Nations League.

Meanwhile, Belgium center back Zeno Debast, who has not appeared in a World Cup match this summer due to injury, participated in his first training session of the tournament.

Debast underwent a follow-up

MRI scan on Saturday for a leg injury, which he said was "positive." The 22-year-old defender injured his leg last month while training with Portuguese club Sporting Lisbon.

"Everything is going as planned," Debast said. "So, we are positive. I feel good. Today, I can partially take part (in) the team training. So, yeah, it's going good."

Debast warmed up with the 26-man squad, then practiced on his own with a coach during the portion of Sunday's training session that was open to the media. Without Debast, Belgium opened the group stage with two draws before a 5-1 victory over New Zealand on Friday night, to advance to the knockout round atop Group G.

"As a player, it is not easy to watch your team train and play without being able to participate," Debast said in French. "But, I am grateful to be here and to be able to work on my return here."

Debast has 26 matches for Belgium and was on the 2022 World

Cup roster in Qatar. It is unclear whether coach Rudi Garcia would insert Debast into the starting lineup whenever he is deemed fit to play.

During the French portion of his press conference, Debast said that he cannot pinpoint when he will return, nor does he want to put that pressure on himself.

"I want to be at 100%," Debast said. "That's the only way to help the team. If it were up to me, I'd already be on the field. I'm coming back from a tough season, with a few injuries."

Belgium's first knockout round game is on Wednesday in Seattle against Senegal, which is coming off a 5-0 rout of Iraq. Debast commended the Senegal side, which is led by Sadio Mane, but is confident in Belgium's ability to advance.

"I think it will be a good game, one knowing that we also have the qualities," Debast said in English. "If we are in good form and we continue in a positive way like our last game, I think it will be a very good game."

Lee criticizes national team structure

South Korea coach quits after early World Cup exit prompts fierce criticism from president

SEOUL, June 29, (AP): South Korea coach Hong Myung-bo resigned Sunday after the team's quick elimination from the World Cup drew a harsh condemnation from the country's president, who called the coach "incapable" and ordered a complete review of the national team program.

South Korea won its opening match against Czech Republic, then lost its next two Group A matches to South Africa and Mexico.

South Korea hoped it would qualify for the next round as one of the third-place teams to advance in this year's expanded tournament. That ended when Congo defeated Uzbekistan 3-1 on Saturday.

The quick exit for a team that expected to advance left the national team program in turmoil and drew a sharp rebuke from President Lee Jae Myung. He leveled pointed criticism at the coach.

"As a former honorary professional football club chairman and, at heart, a member of the Red Devils, I feel not just surprise but deep bewilderment at this unexpected result," the president said.

The president criticized the national team structure and oversight, and the coach's appointment in the first place.

"Once again, it has been proven that personnel decisions determine everything. If loyalty and factionalism are valued over competence and



South Korea head coach Hong Myung-bo looks on ahead of the World Cup Group A soccer match between South Africa and South Korea in Guadalupe, near Monterrey, Mexico. (AP)

incapable person is appointed as a leader, the outcome is as predictable as fire," the president said.

Hong, 57, announced his resignation with an apology to Korean fans before the team left its

base camp in Mexico, where South Korea had played all three of its group matches.

Hong was in his second stint with the national team. He was the coach at the 2014 World Cup in Brazil when South Korea also failed to advance past the group stage.

"To all of the Korean people who love and support our national team, I would like to genuinely apologize. Today, I'd like to announce that I will step down as the national team head coach," Hong said.

"As the head coach, no explanation can supersede the ultimate result. I could not bring the result that our people had expected. All responsibilities are with me," Hong said. "Today, I step down as the national team head coach. However, my heart for Korean football will remain the same. I will now support Korea national team to regain the trust and love of our people."

South Korea is a regular at the World Cup with 11 consecutive appearances, and was a semifinalist when it was co-host of the tournament in 2002.

Lee called for the national Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism to review the national team and its failures.

"I sincerely apologize to the public for the deep disappointment caused by this absurd situation. We will move swiftly to reform sports administration to ensure this does not happen again," Lee said.

Fan Zone



Canadian and South African fans enjoy the atmosphere during the FIFA World Cup Round of 32 encounter. (AP)



Canada's Stephen Eustaquio (7) celebrates scoring their opening goal against South Africa during the World Cup round of 32 soccer match in Inglewood, Calif., near Los Angeles. (AP)

Sports

Last-gasp Canada keeps dream run alive

'You are Canadian heroes'

INGLEWOOD, Calif., June 29, (AP): Right after Canada finished its first knockout match victory in a World Cup, coach Jesse Marsch huddled his players on the grass of a stadium still in pandemonium and spoke from his heart - shouted, actually.

"You guys are Canadian heroes today!" Marsch declared. "Canadian heroes for the future children of this country who play this sport. The sport has a big future because of you guys. You should be so proud of who you are. You should be so proud of this game. You never lost belief. You went after it, point after point, moment after moment. You are Canadian heroes!"

Stephen Eustaquio's dramatic late goal had inspired Marsch to Ted Lasso levels of earnestness, and he didn't care who knew it.

Soccer has never been the main event on Canada's busy sports calendar, and Les Rouges are playing in only their third World Cup this summer. But Marsch realized this landmark 1-0 win over South Africa on Sunday is the type of achievement that can seize an entire nation's attention for a generation.

"We could have made life a little easier on ourselves if we would have made a play earlier when we had some big chances," Marsch said. "But obviously the timing of the goal means that the win is incredibly dramatic, and I think the effect that it will have in Canada, and the inspiring of people, will be immense."

After 90-plus minutes of frustration and failure to break down cagey South Africa at SoFi Stadium, Canada made history in an instant when Alistair Johnston's long pass into the box was cleared directly into the path of Eustaquio.

The midfielder who plays professionally at nearby Los Angeles FC coolly chested it down and blasted it off the bounce into the bottom corner of Ronwen Williams' net before sprinting away to celebrate with Canada's bench in the second minute of second-half stoppage time.

"We worked for it," Eustaquio said. "We have a special group. We feel like we are brothers. When we fight for each other, when we play for each other,



South Africa's Sphephelo Sithole and Canada's Jonathan David (10) go for a header during a World Cup round of 32 soccer match in Inglewood, Calif., near Los Angeles. (AP)

special things like this can happen. I am over the moon, but at the same time I don't want to say that the job is finished."

Canada, which sits 30th in the most recent FIFA world rankings, advanced to face the Netherlands or Morocco in Houston on Saturday.

After playing its first three group matches in Toronto and Vancouver, Canada missed the chance to also make this bit of history at home when it lost 2-1 to Switzerland last Wednesday and got sent on the road for the knockout rounds. But Marsch's plucky team responded by winning this tournament's

first round of 32 match and reaching the round of 16 for the first time in its three trips to the World Cup.

The Canadians were still the clear crowd favorite in the Los Angeles area between their traveling fans and thousands of supportive locals, including several in Eustaquio's LAFC shirt who couldn't have imagined the day they were about to enjoy.

"We never stopped believing," Eustaquio said. "And I think the goal is really something that we deserved."

World Cup Fixtures

Ivory Coast vs Japan 20:00

Wednesday

France vs Sweden 00:00

Mexico vs Ecuador 04:00

Al-Irada clinches Para Table Tennis Championship with 11-medal haul



Al Irada Club receives the championship trophy from officials.

KUWAIT CITY, June 29: Al-Irada Club emerged as overall champion of the first combined Para Table Tennis Clubs Championship for the 2026-2027 season after topping the medal standings with a total of 11 medals, including 3 gold, 4 silver, and 4 bronze.

Al-Warba Club secured second place with four medals (1 gold, 1 silver, 2 bronze), while Kuwait Disabled Sports Club finished third with two medals (1 gold, 1 silver). Al-Tahaddi Club came fourth with a single gold medal. The tournament concluded on Saturday evening at the Kuwait Disabled Sports Club hall, with the participation of more than 30 male and female players representing five clubs, and in the presence of Para Table Tennis Committee

Chairman Duaij Al-Hajri, Table Tennis Federation President Falhan Al-Otaibi, and Kuwait Disabled Sports Club Chairman Shafi Al-Hajri.

The championship delivered strong technical standards and closely contested matches across men's and women's categories. In the men's standing (A) category, Ali Al-Sanea of Al-Irada took first place, while Naji Sultan of Al-Warba won gold in the men's standing (B) category.

In the seated events, Mohammed Bin Jabal of Al-Tahaddi secured gold in men's seated (A), and Dari Al-Azmi claimed top spot in men's seated (B). In the women's seated category, Fajr Al-Khalaf of Al-Irada won gold, while Kuwait Disabled Sports Club's Noura Al-Dubai captured first place in the women's

standing competition.

Al-Hajri praised the strong participation from clubs in the inaugural championship, describing it as a technical and organizational success thanks to coordinated efforts and solid preparation for the participants.

He added that the competition was highly balanced and competitive, reflecting promising progress for Para Table Tennis in Kuwait, and stressed the need for continued development to achieve stronger results at Arab and Asian levels.

He also thanked the Kuwait Table Tennis Federation, led by Falhan Al-Otaibi, for its support and cooperation in ensuring the success of the event, expressing hope for further collaboration to develop the sport in the future.

Kuwait drawn with Qatar and Syria in West Asia Volleyball Championship



Alvarez briefs players ahead of departure to Cairo.

By Khaled Al-Enezi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, June 29: The draw for the second West Asia Men's Volleyball Championship, held via video conference, and placed Kuwait's national team in Group A alongside Qatar and Syria. The tournament is scheduled to take place in Muscat, Oman, from July 11 to 22.

Group B features hosts Oman, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Lebanon, setting up a highly competitive stage as teams' battle for qualification to

the next round.

Kuwait will open its campaign with ambitions of progressing beyond the group stage, relying on its preparation phase ahead of the tournament. The technical and administrative staff is focused on delivering a strong performance and achieving positive results in the regional competition.

As part of its final preparations, the national team has already begun an overseas training camp in Cairo, Egypt.

The delegation is headed by Board Member Ziad Al-Anzi and includes

team administrator Abdullah Al-Ali, Argentine head coach Julian Alvarez, assistant coach Zaid Al-Kazemi, fitness coach Agustin Javier, analyst Loqs Al-Borash, and physiotherapist Mohammed Al-Yamam.

The training camp squad includes Abdunnasser Al-Anzi, Rashid Anbar, Nasser Dashti, Ahmed Al-Menes, Fares Suleiman, Abdullah Fares Al-Anzi, Adhbi Al-Anzi, Omar Al-Anzi, Mohammed Al-Dhafiri, Abdullah Al-Muainaa, Fahd Saad Yacoub, Ali Sadoon, Talal Ahmed Abdulrazzaq, and Saud Al-Duwaisan.

Defending champion Sinner comes back to beat Kecmanovic in 5 sets at Wimbledon

LONDON, June 29, (AP): Defending champion Jannik Sinner had to come back from a set down twice and regain his composure following a worrisome tumble to the grass in a five-set victory over 50th-ranked Miomir Kecmanovic in the first round of Wimbledon on Monday.

A month after his French Open meltdown, the top-ranked Sinner produced a 4-6, 6-3, 6-7 (6), 6-2, 6-3 win that lasted 3 hours and 30 minutes in the honorary opening match on Centre Court reserved for the past year's men's singles champion.

Lleyton Hewitt, the 2002 champion, remains the only

Wimbledon men's singles winner in the professional era (since 1968) to have lost in the first round the following year. The Australian was defeated by Ivo Karlovic in his 2003 opener.

Sinner hadn't played an official match since he struggled with dizziness during a heat wave at Roland Garros, where after being within one game of concluding his second-round match in straight sets, he was beaten by Juan Manuel Cerundolo in five.

Wimbledon's strict rules about all-white clothing didn't prevent Naomi Osaka from making another fashion statement as she walked onto the grass at the All England Club

on Monday.

Osaka, who has made a habit of creating a buzz with her creative outfits at recent Grand Slam tournaments, wore a flowing kimono with swinging sleeves and elaborate embroidery as she walked onto No. 3 Court for her first-round match against Elsa Jacquemot.

After winning 6-1, 7-5, Osaka said she got the inspiration for the outfit from a Quentin Tarantino movie.

"For me, my Japanese heritage means a lot. They say all white at Wimbledon and I thought it would be really cool to come out in a kimono," Osaka said in an on-court

interview. "I just get inspired by a lot of different things, and for me, one of my favorite movies is 'Kill Bill.' So I really love Lucy Liu's character, O-Ren Ishii, and she comes out in this really iconic white kimono. I always tell people I like to be like a video game character sometimes, I don't want to be myself when I'm playing on the court. And I kind of try to embody her a little."

The Japanese player's latest creation drew a rave reaction from the crowd, many of whom were eagerly waiting with their phones aloft to record her entrance. One female fan shouted "C'mon queen!" as Osaka walked out.