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POSITIVE ATMOSPHERE AS VOTERS FLOCK TO POLLING STATIONS

Kuwait sees strong voter turnout



Kuwaiti citizens line up to vote in the 2024 National Assembly elections.



Ahmed Al-Jarallah, Editor-in-Chief of Arab Times and Al-Seyassah newspapers, exercises his voting right in the 2024 National Assembly elections.

30 individuals lose Kuwaiti citizenship

KUWAIT CITY, April 4: The Supreme Committee for Nationality Investigation has issued a series of decisions revoking the Kuwaiti citizenship of 30 persons who had obtained it through establishment and naturalization, among them three women from Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and the United Arab Emirates, reports Al-Qabas daily. These decisions were made following a review of Article 1 of Amiri Decree No. 15 of 1959 concerning the Kuwaiti Nationality Law, as well as its subsequent amendments. The Supreme Committee for Citizenship is actively engaged in various measures to assess these files and receive reports concerning forgery and duplication, as part of the state's efforts to cleanse the nationality registry from any irregularities. The Supreme Committee for Nationality said efforts are ongoing to uncover instances of counterfeiting, fraud, and deception in the acquisition of citizenship.



Kuwaiti voters actively participate in the 2024 National Assembly elections, exercising their democratic right to vote.



Photos by Samer Shiker and lehab Qurtal

Assembly election committees ensure smooth voting process

By Raed Yousef, Suzan Naser, Jaber Al-Hamoud, Munif Nayef, Fares Al-Abdan and Saeed Mahmoud Saleh
Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff and Agencies

KUWAIT CITY, April 4: Amidst a notable turnout reflecting strong and positive participation, hundreds of male and female voters hurried to the polling stations as soon as they opened across various ar-

reas in the First Constituency, notably in Rumaithiya and Salwa.

Dozens of voters in their vehicles were witnessed outside schools before the doors even opened, especially the elderly. According to official data, the number of male and female voters who cast their votes in the First Constituency as of 2:00pm reached 4,845, or about five percent of the total number of registered voters in the constituency. By 2:00 pm, the number of voters at Daiya Joint School for Girls in the First Constituency stood at 330. This included 120 individuals from the electoral committee out of a total of 1,043,

100 from the first sub-committee out of 1,070 registered, and 110 from the second sub-committee out of 1,167.

According to the latest list released by the Ministry of Interior, the First Constituency comprises 104,038 male and female voters. The total number of committees is 93, with 45 designated for men and 48 for women. These committees are distributed among 16 schools.

A total of 41 male and female candidates are competing for the ten seats, some of who are seeking to break the monopoly of a number of parliamentary seats in the electoral constituency.

In a statement to Al-Seyassah, Judge Muhammad Al-Sanea said the Muhammad Al-Shayji School Center for Girls in Rumaithiya received 150 female voters out of 1,458, or about ten percent, as of 2:30pm.

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News watch

CAIRO: The Arab League's decision held the occupying Israeli entity full accountable for this dangerous development, which confirms that it is the approach of the occupying army.

The approach resulted in the killing of dozens of UN workers, relief staffers, journalists and medical teams. (KUNA)

DUBAI: Iran's state media said security forces were able to release hostages taken by gunmen Thursday following clashes in three separate areas in southeastern Iran that left 18 militants and 10 troops dead.

The fighting erupted overnight in Sistan and Baluchistan province when gunmen opened fire on Revolutionary Guard posts in Rask and Sarbaz towns and a coast guard station in Chahbahar city, some 1,400 kilometers (870 miles) southeast of the capital, Tehran, the agency said. (AP)

WASHINGTON: Houthi rebels in Yemen may be running through their supplies of drone swarms and anti-ship ballistic missiles as the pace of their attacks has slowed a bit, the top U.S. Air Force commander for the Middle East said Wednesday.

Lt. Gen. Alexis Grynkwich, who heads U.S. Air Forces Central, said that the persistent American retaliatory strikes on the Iran-backed militia group have "certainly affected their behavior. Their pace of operations is not what it was." (AP)

PARIS: Lebanon's billionaire caretaker prime minister has denied allegations of money laundering after a complaint was filed in France by two anti-corruption groups this week.

The complaint against Najib Mikati was formally filed Tuesday with France's National Financial Prosecutor's office by French anti-corruption non-governmental organization Sherpa and the Collective of Victims of Fraudulent and Criminal Practices. (AP)

ANKARA: Turkey's highest electoral authority on Wednesday restored the right of a newly elected mayor from a pro-Kurdish party to hold office, overturning an earlier decision by a lower body that had sparked widespread protests and led to dozens of arrests.

The reversal was another boost for Turkey's opposition following Sunday's local elections, which dealt a blow to President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his Islamic-oriented Justice and Development Party, or AKP, after their wins last year in the presidential and parliamentary elections. (AP)

Diplomatic crisis erupts

Kuwait denounces Israel aggression in Gaza Strip

CAIRO, April 4, (Agencies): Kuwait's Permanent Representative to the League of Arab States, Ambassador Talal Al-Mutairi, affirmed, Wednesday, the Kuwaiti condemnation of the starvation and genocide crimes that the Israeli occupation forces continue to commit against the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip.

This came in a speech by Ambassador Al-Mutairi before the extraordinary session of the Arab League Council at the level of permanent delegates to discuss the continuation of the crime of genocide and the policy of starvation committed by the occupying Israeli entity.

The ambassador warned of the Israeli occupation forces continuing their grave violations of international humanitarian law against the Palestinian people, considering this a threat to international peace and security.

He made it clear that it is unacceptable to continue the international stagnation towards ending the Israeli war on the Gaza Strip and remain silent on the daily violations and official statements of officials in the Israeli occupation authorities, which confirm that they have flagrantly violated international laws and norms and all UN resolutions.

Meanwhile, a new diplomatic crisis between Poland and Israel has erupted following the death of a Polish aid worker in Gaza, with the Polish president on Thursday denouncing a comment by the Israeli ambassador as "outrageous" and the Foreign Ministry in Warsaw saying it was summoning him for a meeting.

A 35-year-old Polish man was among seven people who were killed while delivering food to besieged Palestinians with the charity World Central Kitchen.

Israel has called the incident a "mistake" that followed a misidentification. The charity said its vehicles were clearly marked. Amid shock in Poland over the death of the charity worker, Israel's ambassador to Poland, Yacov Livne, pushed back at what he said were attempts by the "extreme right and left in Poland" to accuse Israel of "intentional murder in the attack."

He said on social media on Tuesday that "anti-Semites will always remain anti-Semites, and Israel will remain a democratic Jewish state that fights for its right to exist. Also for the good of the entire Western world."



A ballot box sits ready at a polling station on April 4.

Photo by lehab Qurtal

'Voting crucial for Kuwait's progress'

KUWAIT CITY, April 4: Minister of Health Dr. Ahmad Al-Awadhi said on Thursday that participating in the electoral process was a national duty and everyone must participate to serve the nation.

After casting his vote in the Al-Asmaa Bint Al-Harith High School electoral committee in the second constituency, Minister Al-Awadhi said in a statement to KUNA that his participation is part of returning the favor to Kuwait, calling on everyone to do their part to make this election a success.

Al-Awadhi stressed the keenness of the Ministry, represented by the medical emergency management sectors, in addition to the medical principles, including doctors and nurses, to carry out the role assigned to it in preparing to keep pace with the parliamentary elections.

He pointed out that 140 centers have been prepared and distributed among the electoral headquarters, adding that he made inspection tours to ensure that these headquarters are equipped at the highest level.

Meanwhile, Minister of Social Affairs, Family and Childhood Affairs Sheikh Firas Saud Al-Malik Al-Sabah said that voting in the elec-

tion is a national commitment. In a statement to reporters Thursday, after casting his vote, the minister affirmed that he is here today in implementation of the directives of His Highness the Amir, Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, where he urged in a speech every citizen to participate in the election and vote for those who would serve the nation.

In other news, the press center of the National Assembly elections has been receiving representatives of Arab and foreign media outlets who are in Kuwait to cover the elections tomorrow Thursday.

Since yesterday, the center, located at Grand Hyatt Kuwait, has received 37 journalists and media people who are ready to provide audio, video and printed coverage of the election day in coordination with the Kuwaiti Ministry of Information.

On the eve of the National Assembly 2024 election, two American experts commended Wednesday Kuwait's unique parliamentary experiment.

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Day by Day

THE happiness of a people often hinges on the discerning nature of their ruler. Great nations owe much of their strength to leaders who possess the astuteness to select capable assistants.

Indeed, the art of effective governance lies in choosing aides who understand the timing and manner of offering counsel, knowing when to speak up, when to step back, and when not to barter their advice.

These trusted advisors operate discreetly, sharing their wisdom only with those who seek it earnestly and are receptive to it. Their consciences remain untainted, devoid of any ulterior motives or desire for personal gain. They are akin to beacons of purity, clad in white garments symbolic of the purity of their counsel and intentions.

... Yet tomorrow is another day.

Zahed Matar

Ramadan Timings

Iftar	Friday	18:09
Imsak	Saturday	04:08
Iftar	Saturday	18:10
Imsak	Sunday	04:07

Prayer Timings

Fajr	04:14	Asr	15:23
Sunrise ..	05:35	Maghrib ..	18:08
Zohr	11:51	Isha	19:26

Local

BIOMETRIC/FINGERPRINT APPOINTMENT: <https://meta.e.gov.kw/En/>

Expected weather for next 24 hrs:

By Day: Rather hot with light variable wind to light to moderate northwesterly wind, with speeds of 06-28 km/h.

Weather

By Night: Mild with light variable wind, with speeds of 06-22 km/h.

Station **Max Exp** **Min Rec**
Kuwait City 36 22

Kuwait Airport	37	17
Abdaly	37	19
Jahra	36	20
Salmiyah	31	22
Nuwaisib	34	18
Wafra	36	18

Bid to enhance transparency

Civil society plays pivotal role in monitoring Kuwait's elections

By Fahad Al-Saeed

KUWAIT CITY, April 4, (KUNA): The upcoming parliamentary elections, due on April 4, 2024, come amid pivotal local and regional challenges in Kuwait's modern history.

Kuwait, like other countries, faces challenges, whether at the political, economic, or social levels, in a region that requires concerted efforts to establish pillars of stability and a comfortable life for its people.

Kuwait is keen in every parliamentary election to involve civil society organizations (SCOs) and international observers to monitor the elections for full transparency.

Chairman of Kuwait Transparency Society, Majed Al-Mutairi told KUNA that the Society had monitored the electoral process and all government procedures, especially since following a system of decentralization in managing the electoral process.

He added that the Society also issues periodic reports on how to adjust the electoral process, noting that it has begun monitoring the electoral process since the issuance of the Amiri decree to dissolve the National Assembly.

He affirmed the Society's keenness in every parliamentary election to invite international teams with the approval of the government, which indicates its understanding of the role of SCOs.

Al-Mutairi continued that the presence of international teams is important to order to monitor and study the effectiveness of the democratic climate and the electoral system in general in Kuwait.

He noted that the general impression of all participating international teams was positive, expressing pride as Kuwait is founded on democracy and freedom of expression.

Al-Mutairi added that the Society issues a report at the end of each election covering all the observations and solutions, submitted to the Government and the parliament's Legislative Committee to then meet with the Legislative and Executive authorities to discuss the observations and come up with a consensus formula to resolve them.

He indicated that Kuwait advanced significantly in the latest Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), released by Transparency International, improving by 22 ranks.

Al-Mutairi attributed this to Kuwait's honorable performance in fighting corruption in general, the government's role in involving CSOs in monitoring the electoral process, and its efforts to improve the space of democracy and improve the quality of the electoral law.

On his part, Chairman of the Kuwait Bar Association, Sheryan Al-Sheryan told KUNA that the Association would not spare any effort if asked to monitor the electoral

process and express its observations. This task is a "national duty that enhances the principle of transparency in the Kuwait election," as it is a transparent democratic experience organized according to the principles of law, in addition to the right to object during counting process by the candidates' representatives.

He said that the role of the Association is to write reports and make observations and then submit them to the relevant authorities. The Association, he added, did not register any observation in the past regarding whether there was a matter obstructing the electoral process.

He added that through these observations taken by the Association on election day, the candidate will be able to submit his appeal to the Constitutional Court within the specified periods in accordance with what the Constitution guarantees.

He expressed hope that the 2024 National Assembly elections would be fair, transparent and organized as usual in the electoral process in Kuwait, especially since it is in the holy month of Ramadan.

He added that he expects the turnout to be very high as the Kuwaiti people appreciate democracy and participation is a national duty that everyone must perform.

For his part, Kuwait Society of National Integrity (KSNI) Director's Mohammad Al-Otaibi, said that the Society aims through monitoring the electoral process, when invited, to deliver the Kuwaiti experience to the international community, which would add more transparency to the electoral process in Kuwait.

He pointed out that KSNI aims to reflect the positive image of Kuwait's electoral process in a transparent manner to show the international community that CSOs take part in the monitoring process in a sign of integrity and transparency.

As for the role played the KSNI on the field, he noted that since the first day of candidacy registration at the Ministry of Interior's Department of Election Affairs, representatives of the Society were present to observe the process of the candidates' registration until election day, and its observers will be deployed in all polling stations, in addition to monitoring the counting of votes.

He added that after participating in monitoring the electoral process, the Society prepares a comprehensive report and sends it to the Government, including all observations and recommendations that would improve the quality of the electoral process.

Al-Otaibi affirmed that Kuwait democracy is witnessing a development and further modernization, praising the strong democratic balance that is always renewed and developed by all modern means.

Kuwait parliament known for freedom, democracy

Arab media predicts successful polls, sees new era

By Fahad Shfaq

KUWAIT CITY, April 4, (KUNA): The Arab media personnel affirmed on Wednesday that the Kuwaiti parliament was one of the most advanced democratic institutes in the region, carrying the banner of freedom and transparency since the 1960s.

Speaking to KUNA at the Media Center for the 2024 National Assembly Elections, the personnel said that they were impressed with the level of freedom for the press in covering the elections due Thursday, April 4.

Editor-in-chief for the Egyptian Al-Akhab newspaper Mohammad Hendawi predicted the success for the upcoming elections, hoping that it would be followed by a period of compressive development for Kuwait under the keen eye of the country's leadership.

Hendawi also noticed Kuwaiti authorities prepared well for the approaching democrat-

ic process, saying that they took all preparatory measures to facilitate voting and also allow Arab and foreign media to cover the elections.

Georges Alam, a Lebanese political analyst and writer, said that the current elections was held in a different atmosphere as set by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah who called for implementing steps to create real change in Kuwait's democratic discourse.

Alam indicated that he was looking forward tomorrow to be part of the media delegation monitoring elections, which hopefully have a good outcome for Kuwait and its people.

Similarly, Assistant chief editor of the Egyptian newspaper Al-Masri Yusri Badri said that the advent of election during the holy month of Ramadan was very special, viewing the decision to set Election Day as a day of rest would contribute to a huge turnout.

He also affirmed that the presence of Arab and foreign media would reflect the transparency of Kuwaiti elections.

Meanwhile, the Arab League expressed on Thursday its gratitude towards Kuwait's efforts in supporting joint Arab media work and its sponsorship for media excellence award this year under the slogan (crisis, disaster and hazardous media) including the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

This came in a statement by Assistant Secretary General Ambassador Ahmad Khattabi after his meeting with Kuwait's Permanent Representative to the League Ambassador Talal Al-Mutairi.

Khattabi said that choosing this year's award slogan reflects the horrific natural disasters that the Arab region has been exposed to in the recent period, including the violent earthquake in Al-Haouz region in Morocco and the torrential floods that struck the City of Derna in Libya.



Mohammad Al-Otaibi



Majed Al-Mutairi

Light shed on reasons for decline in female presence in parliament

'Male mentality, lack of support kept us away: Dr Al-Fureih

KUWAIT CITY, April 4, (KUNA): Although nearly 15 years have passed since the first four Kuwaiti women won seats in the National Assembly in 2009 and with the increased participation of Kuwaiti women in various domains, there remains to be questions about the reasons behind the decline in the female representation in the parliament in recent years.

Two Kuwaiti female activists in public affairs told KUNA that the decline in womens representation in the National Assembly since 2012 is due to many reasons, mainly their need for more support and to promote a culture of boosting their participation in public affairs and their societal role.

Dr. Seham Al-Fureih, Professor of Literature and Criticism at Kuwait University (KU) said that since Kuwaiti women were granted their political rights on May 16, 2005 to run for election and to vote, the path for women to be members of the National Assembly has become "very weak."

She added that the presence of Kuwaiti women in the National Assembly started strong in 2009 with four women winning seats but has since then declined for many reasons.

"Perhaps the first of which was the lack of support provided to them, in addition to lacking in understanding their active participation in public affairs," she said, calling for more support to increase their chances of winning in future parliamentary elections.

She continued that some women may be affected by what she described as "the male mentality" and certain way of thinking that requires them to stay away from serving the nation in the political field, calling for a change of such ideologies through media campaigns and promoting public culture.

She also called for building a new vision that highlights positive images of the status of Kuwaiti women and their distinguished role in many domains for Kuwaiti women to move from the world of political isolation into the pinnacle of political practice.

She urged to strengthen society's belief in women's participation in building public life in the political field and to deepen women's self-confidence to perform their duty towards their country, as is the case in other Arab and Islamic countries where women have occupied senior and influential positions.

For her part, political activist and Chairperson of Kuwaiti Womens Hope Society Widad Al-Mishal, attributed the decline in Kuwaiti womens presence in the National Assembly to a number of fundamental reasons, calling on women and relevant institutions to stand up to address them and avoid them radically.

The society, she said, should believe in the need for women's representation in the National Assembly to give an opportunity to a significant number of qualified women, who have an interest in public affairs, to win. She called on civil society organizations to appoint qualified and specialized women to their boards of directors, saying Kuwait has a large number of women who have achieved pioneering success in many fields.

She said that the electoral campaigns of female candidates must include clear-cut electoral programs that define problems and lay out adequate solutions for each problem.

She called for avoiding catchy slogans, of which their luster wares off once a woman candidate wins a parliamentary seat.

Customary absenteeism of students 'resurfaces'

KUWAIT CITY, April 4: Once again, the widespread phenomenon of mass student absences has resurfaced prior to official holidays, with many schools across the country experiencing a significant decrease in attendance Wednesday, reports Al-Qabas daily.

This absence compelled the few students who did attend to leave their schools prematurely.

According to an educational source, the high percentage of absences can be attributed to two main factors. Firstly, schools have shifted to online studies during the parliamentary elections scheduled for Thursday. Secondly, anticipation of the upcoming holiday has also contributed to the trend, as it has become customary for students to be absent both before and after holidays.

Despite efforts to maintain academic schedules, including the administration of tests for some students, the absenteeism persisted, prompting teachers to postpone assessments until after the Eid Al-Fitr holidays.

The source anticipates that high rates of absenteeism will continue into the following week, as students seek to extend their break beyond the official Eid Al-Fitr holiday, a practice observed annually during official holidays, celebrations, and festivities.



Photo by Mohammad Morsi
The prayer-leader in supplication with other worshippers at the Grand Mosque (Masjid Al-Kabir) in Kuwait City. The Muslim faithful pray late night (qiyam prayer) in the last ten days of Ramadan in hunt for the Lailat Al-Qadr (Night of Power). Allah (SWT) fulfills any prayer on this night. It could fall on any odd day. Mosques are usually crowded in the last part of the Holy Month.

Mosques crowded on 25th night

Muslims hunt for 'Lailat-ul-Qadr'

By Abdul Nasser Al-Aslami

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff and Agencies

KUWAIT CITY, April 4: Throughout various governorates of the country, worshippers commemorated the 25th night of the month of Ramadan with recitations, remembrance, supplications, and prayers, earnestly seeking the 'Night of Destiny' on this blessed night.

In the Grand Mosque, many worshippers arrived early as usual to reserve a place in the front.

Imam Mishari Al-Afasy and Imam Bader Al-Ali led the worshippers. In the first four rak'ahs, Imam Meshari Al-Afasy recited as much as he could from the Holy Qur'an. In the subsequent rak'ahs, Imam Bader Al-Ali recited verses that deeply touched the souls of the worshippers, leaving a profound impact.

At the Abu Bakr Al-Siddiq Mosque in Jahra Governorate, the Qiyam prayer began at midnight, and the reciter Sheikh Mohammad Al-Saeedi led the worshippers.

Several worshippers reminisced about the late Sheikh Khaled Al-Saeedi, the imam of Abu Bakr Al-Siddiq Mosque, and the Imam of the Grand Mosque. They recalled how on occasions like these, they used to join him for the 'Qiyam' prayer both in their mosque and at the Grand Mosque.

They said, "We pray to Almighty Allah to bestow mercy on his grave, and to reward him for every letter he recited with the weight of mountains and the measures of seas."

In the Khawla Al-Hasawi Mosque at Ouyun area in Jahra Governorate, the Qiyam prayer began half an hour after midnight. The prayers were led by the Imam Taher Al-Ahdal from Yemen, and the Imam Ra'ad Al-Kurdi from Iraq.

At the Sheikhha Al-Dabbous Mosque in Abu Fatira, the Imam Sheikh Ahmad Al-Khader led the congregation in the first four rak'ahs, and the Imam Sheikh Abdul-Wali Al-Arkan led the second four rak'ahs.

At the Aqla Al-Dhafiri Ramadan Center, the Imam Sheikh Salman Al-Nafi'i led the people in prayer in the first four rak'ahs, and the Imam Sheikh Hamza Al-Far led the people in prayer in the second four rak'ahs. Sheikh Hamoud Fayez delivered a thought of faith between those rak'ahs, speaking about the coming of the 'Day of Judgement', and what the believer must prepare for in the first journey of his life.

Zakat timings: The Zakat House has an-

Making a fast buck?!

Illegal donations eyed

KUWAIT CITY, April 4: The Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA) revealed that the field teams tasked to inspect charitable activities conducted 452 field visits to mosques and 79 visits to the headquarters of charitable societies during which they monitored 31 donation collection kiosks, reports Al-Anba daily.

Clothes were removed from 21 stalls and 22 violations were recorded against a restaurant asking for donations for breaking of fast meals and a commercial company that did the same through social media. The Ministry of Commerce and Industry was informed about these violations.

In addition, 99 advertisements for charities, organizations and other parties that did not comply with advertising regulations were uncovered and the concerned charities were advised to avoid committing such violations.

The teams recorded 35 violations in mosques; such as the display of advertisements for collecting donations for breaking the fast meals, implementing many charitable projects, and failure to follow the schedule of Imams and the schedule for distributing associations in mosques. The Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs was informed about these violations.

announced that it will receive Zakat Al-Fitr in kind in its 14 revenue centers throughout the country from the 25th to 29th days of the holy month of Ramadan, reports Al-Anba daily.

In a press statement, acting Director General of Zakat House Dr Majid Al-Azmi revealed the Zakat Al-Fitr will be received from 8:45 pm to 11:30 pm within the specified period. He disclosed the receiving units include the Communication Office for Major Donors in Abdullah Al-Salem; as well as its revenue centers near the cooperative societies in Khalidiyah, Qortuba, Sabah Al-Salem, Mishref, Rawdah, Shaab, Adan, Qurain, Ardiya, Andalus, Fahad Al-Ahmad, Saad Al-Abdullah and the Salmiya warehouse.

Other Voices

Happiness and the five Amirs

By Ahmad alsarraf

According to an annual happiness report released by a United Nations agency, the Finns have maintained their position at the top of the happiness rankings for the seventh consecutive year. They are trailed by Denmark, Iceland, Sweden, Israel, the Netherlands, Norway, Luxembourg, Switzerland, and Australia.

One of the most unexpected developments, initially met with scepticism, was Kuwait's surge to 13th place from 50th in just one year. This propelled Kuwait to not only the happiest country among all Arab nations but also among most Third World countries.

This significant advancement took many by surprise, including supervisors overseeing the report. Additionally, the United Arab Emirates climbed from 26th to 21st place in the index, also Saudi Arabia and Bahrain made advancement. Notably, Qatar and Oman did not feature prominently in the advanced positions of the index.

Undoubtedly, the happiness of a populace is intricately tied to their way of life, which governments largely influence through their policies, services, freedoms granted, and overall sense of security and well-being. Factors such as how authorities address people's aspirations, the provision of services, the degree of freedom individuals experience, and their sense of security -- both social and financial -- all play a pivotal role.

Additionally, access to fundamental freedoms like movement, speech, work, and trade, as well as the availability of essential services like education, healthcare, and entertainment, contribute to overall happiness. However, when observing the discourse on social media filled with complaints and grievances, it seems to contradict the notion that we are among the happiest people globally. It's possible that others might indeed be happier than us, challenging this assumption.

Paradoxically, our ability to freely voice complaints might be a contribut-

ing factor to our happiness. Without this freedom, minor issues might escalate into perceived disasters. For instance, consider the example of the Razaqa roundabout.

Reflecting on this, I recalled a conversation with a friend during the height of the Soviet Union's power. He claimed that Russian planes were safer than American ones because news of their crashes was scarce. I countered by noting that information behind the Iron Curtain was limited, and lack of reports didn't necessarily equate to safety.

Similarly, just because we don't often hear complaints from others doesn't mean their lives are free of turmoil or that they are happier. Transparency and the ability to express grievances are vital; suppressing them can breed anxiety and discontent among many.

We, as Kuwaitis, are happy with our Amirs.

Historically, five of them, over a period of approximately one hundred and twenty years, played a distinguished role in maintaining state security.

1. Mubarak Al-Sabah (1838-1915) had a decisive role in stabilizing the state, ending its disputes, and fortifying its security with the security agreement with Britain, which put an end to all foreign ambitions. He ruled from 1896 until his death.

2. Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah (1885-1950) was able to manage the state's helm firmly, with great flexibility, and rescue the country with minimal losses during the difficult period of the Legislative Council and the period of World War II. He ruled from 1921 until his death.

3. Abdullah Al-Salem (1895-1965) saved the country's wealth and lands from plunder, fortified its independence and unity with democracy, and saved it from the evil of Qasim Iraq. He ruled from 1950 until his death.

4. Sabah Al-Ahmad: (1929-2020) He was credited with saving the state from serious internal turmoil during the Arab Spring, and preserving state security with the least amount of risks, and he ruled from 2006 until his death.

5. His Highness Amir Mishal Al-Ahmad, who saved us and the nation from the dangers of two bad councils, and put us on the path to prosperity and progress.

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diwaniya

A DIGEST OF PUBLIC OPINION

'Kuwaitis need to heed to rulers advice for security and stability'

"KUWAITIS are accustomed to listening to the advice of their rulers during the last ten days of Ramadan every year. This advice is very valuable and preserves the security and stability of the country and protects the rights of the citizens and the benefits them from all past experiences," columnist **Dr Hind Al-Shoumer** wrote for **Al-Anba** daily.



Dr. Al-Shoumer

"His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad, may God protect and preserve him, addressed the citizens on the occasion of the last ten days of Ramadan this year, and called on everyone to open a new page by relying on God, practicing virtues and obedience, doing good deeds, avoiding sins, to be careful when and what the speak, and staying away from fanaticism, strife, and discriminations, and called on everyone to be loyal to Kuwait and unite their ranks and speech.

"His Highness called on citizens to participate in the elections and choose well their representatives whose goal is the public interest rather than the personal interest and without creating crises so that the National Assembly is distinguished by members with enlightened thinking who seek to build a brilliant future for the nation.

"His Highness the Amir warned against betraying the trust of the voters and staying away from any personal interest, or any matter that might lead to strife, as every citizen must be a guardian of his country and maintain the constitutional constants to build a healthy generation that contributes to build the nation, its development, and its progress.

"His Highness stated that whoever neglects his constitutional right and boycotts the elections, has no right to blame anyone for the results of the elections, as the vote is a trust and must be used in a manner appropriate to the nation's rights, stability, security, security and prosperity.

"The Amir stated that the national identity must be preserved from tampering and corruption, and he also praised all the measures and efforts that aim to preserve it and support it to preserve the security and stability of the country from everything that could disturb its peace.

"The speech of His Highness to the Kuwaiti people is like advice from a father to his children to ensure their rights and enjoy a prosperous life that guarantees them security and safety and preserves the many blessings that God has bestowed upon them.

"At the conclusion of the speech His Highness called on God Almighty to restore the month of Ramadan to everyone and to the Islamic and Arab nation with blessings and good tidings, and prayed to God to have mercy on our righteous martyrs, and be kind to our brothers in Gaza and grant them victory over their enemies and have mercy on their righteous martyrs.

"His Highness also called for God to heal our sick Muslims, and to have mercy on our departed former rulers, to cover them with His vast mercy, and to dwell them in His spacious Paradise, and (to God we belong, and to Him we shall return"

Also:

"The Kuwaiti National Assembly elections, which are held on April 4, are the 21st parliamentary elections in the history of Kuwait," columnist **Prof. Dr. Bahija Behbehani** wrote for **Al-Qabas** daily.

"The holding of these elections comes after a decree was issued to dissolve the 2023 National Assembly on February 15, 2024. Since time was tight for some to establish electoral headquarters and prepare resonant speeches to win voters over to them, some of them resorted to directing harsh criticisms and accusations, which were published on social media, in an attempt to attract the attention of voters and win their votes, and they forgot or tried to forget that Kuwait is a state of law, which is a red line that cannot be crossed.

"Kuwait is above everyone, no matter how high their status, and people are equal before the nation, no matter how high their ranks, and many of the events that have surpassed confirm this quality of the nation and proves its sincerity.

"Because of this, the tongues of some candidates vying for the Parliament seat have begun to emit nothing but loud noises, because they do not have the wisdom or experience or use words with a clear meaning and balanced content, that support development in the field of the economy and an alternative wealth to oil as a source of national income, education, health, and demographics, or propose solutions to issues.

"Forgery of citizenship and forgery of certificates, has limited their minds to shallow thinking -- made them utter things that have nothing to do with anything but to achieve their personal interests.

"One of the candidates expresses in assertive tones and with a raised voice his intention to address the issue of unifying nationality in the National Assembly upon his success.

"He emphasizes that should his proposal be met with disapproval, he will pursue an interrogation of His Highness the Prime Minister.

"Meanwhile, another candidate issues a stern warning to His Excellency

the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense, and Acting Minister of the Interior, holding them accountable for the cancellation of dual citizenship or the forged nationalities. These individuals, he contends, have exploited these fraudulent nationalities for benefits exclusive to Kuwaiti citizens.

"It's evident that a significant portion of the candidates vying for seats in the new council are former members of the dissolved council.

"However, it is worth noting that during their previous tenure, they failed to submit any proposals or achieve tangible advancements for the country's development. This prompts the question: where were they in addressing the nation's challenges? What solutions do they offer for the issues faced by citizens, including both active employees and retirees, and how do they intend to enhance their quality of life?"

"The interest of the nation is above all considerations, and may all who those make empty noises not reach the green chair."

"Kuwaiti citizens were converging on polling stations to exercise their democratic right by selecting representatives for the 2024 National Assembly. This pivotal event was accompanied by meticulous preparations by various government agencies to ensure its success, underscoring the significance of this democratic celebration," columnist **Khaled Al-Arafa** wrote for **Al-Anba** daily.

"As the stewards of their nation's future, Kuwaiti voters bear the weighty responsibility of choosing representatives who will shape the legislative landscape within the Parliament's chambers.

"It is imperative that voters make informed and conscientious decisions, steering clear of divisive tendencies based on race, tribe, class, or sectarian affiliations. Such divisive voting patterns only serve to undermine the unity and progress of the country and its people.

"Moving forward, it is crucial to prioritize the nation and its citizens over personal allegiances. This necessitates a departure from past biases and a rejection of fanaticism, instead opting for a political trajectory guided by integrity and merit. Kuwait must seek out individuals of strength and honesty, free from the shackles of passion, fanaticism, and racism that often act as wrecking balls to societal cohesion.

"We earnestly hope that the elected council will focus its efforts on addressing the pressing issues faced by the populace, such as housing, education, healthcare, corruption, and overall quality of life. These concerns have perennially taken center stage in electoral campaigns and demand immediate attention for the welfare of Kuwaiti citizens. Achieving true prosperity necessitates making the right choices.

"To voters, we urge you to seek out reformers with pragmatic approaches and clear visions, individuals who prioritize the interests of Kuwait and its people above all else. Beware of those who offer flashy slogans without substance or constructive solutions. Furthermore, we encourage all eligible voters to participate in this democratic process, disregarding any attempts to sow despair or disillusionment. The future of Kuwait and its people hinges upon your choices at the ballot box. Choose wisely for the betterment of Kuwait."

"Deter forgers... The owner of the forged certificate is discovered, then he is asked to return the amounts he received illegally, the certificate is cancelled and he goes to his family and stretches out, as if nothing happened. He returns to his job and may even receive an exceptional promotion! The forger of the disability certificate is discovered, whether he is a citizen or an expatriate, and the disability certificate is withdrawn and the path of the forger of the certificate is followed! The law prohibits by-elections and no one complies with the law. Rather, they challenge the State by holding by-elections in one way or another, and nominate themselves as if nothing happened!" columnist **Talal Al-Saeed** wrote for **Al-Seyssah** daily.

"This miserable situation should not continue. The Court of Cassation recently upheld the decision to disqualify parliamentary election candidates who participated in previous by-elections. I wish the preamble of the ruling would be published for everyone to read, as it contains words that should be written in golden letters and taught in law colleges. Indeed, it is considered a deterrent ruling. After this, no one with political ambitions will dare to participate in the by-elections. The ruling is considered a precedent that established new principles, obligating everyone to comply with the law. It will be taken into account in future rulings.

"As for the Criminal Court, it issued deterrent rulings against those who forged disability certificates, and awaiting the appeals to talk about the final ruling. Without a doubt, the initial ruling is deterrent, even if it includes suspension of enforcement. We may understand the justifications of a citizen falsifying a certain certificate for the sake of merit, but when an expatriate visitor does the same, that is the greatest calamity. If he fears punishment, he would not have committed forgery. The foreigner is no longer a man of letters in our country, unless the State strikes with an iron hand and tightens the rules within the administrative dimensions."

— **Compiled by PFX Fernandes**

Jail cut in 'Hospitality' case as expat appeals

KUWAIT CITY, April 4: The Court of Appeal, led by Counselor Nasr Salem Al-Heid, has overturned a previous ruling in absentia, reducing the imprisonment term of an expatriate accused in the Interior Hospitality case from 30 years to 15 years. Additionally, it upheld the imprisonment sentence of three other defendants, including a Kuwaiti businessman, for 10 years each, reports **Al-Jarida** daily.

The defendants were accused by the Public Prosecution of money laundering and seizing over 36 million dinars from the Ministry of Interior through organized operations. They were also charged with forging fake invoices in collaboration with others, utilizing electrical companies, gifts, and hotels to conceal the illicit funds in other bank accounts.

Originally, the Criminal Court had sentenced one defendant to 30 years in absentia and the remaining defendants to 10 years each, along with fines and an order to return excess amounts exceeding 76 million dinars. The Public Prosecution published the accused individuals' names in the Official Gazette, indicating that they must be tried before the Court of Appeal to finalize the ruling.

The recent ruling by the Court of Appeal modifies the sentence for one defendant while upholding the penalties for the others, providing them with one level of recourse before the Court of Cassation.



Fire truck at the scene of the incident.

Child rescued from fire

Kuwait Firefighting Force (KFF) dealt with two fire incidents in Abdullah Al-Mubarak and Al-Mangaf, reports **Al-Anba** daily.

According to KFF, it received a report on the fire in a house in Abdullah Al-Mubarak; so a firefighting team was dispatched to the area immediately. The firefighters doused the fire in record time and rescued a little girl who was referred

to the medical emergency workers.

In addition, firefighters were also dispatched to a house in Mangaf where the fire led to minor material losses.

Another team rushed to Wafra after the KFF received information about a man who was trapped inside his vehicle due to the accumulation of rainwater. He was rescued and referred to the medical emergency workers.

Food waste and extravagance burn pockets of family heads in Ramadan

'Iftar' gatherings, 'ghabqas' spike expenditure

KUWAIT CITY, April 4: Food waste and extravagance are among the dangerous phenomena spreading in the country and have exacerbated during the holy month of Ramadan, which is characterized by customs, occasions and gatherings when food plays a vital role, reports **Al-Qabas** daily.

According to statistics, about half a million tons of surplus food is wasted annually in Kuwait, which ranks 20th globally in terms of food waste.

Ramadan comes with many social gatherings and events, such as family visits at Iftar tables or ghabqa gatherings, which are often characterized by manifestations of extravagance. A variety of foods including sweets are served on these tables, most of which are not consumed.

At a time that Ramadan events turned from social custom into a means of showing off and bragging; citizens confirmed that family spending doubles during Ramadan, and that the excessive cost "burned the pockets of the heads of families."

Fatima Al-Qahtani said some people publish pictures of tables and invitations on social media to show off, noting that the race to buy food is inconsistent with the purpose of Ramadan. She pointed out a family that spends KD500 per month on normal days; spends about KD1,200 during Ramadan.

Ali Al-Shammari stated that a lot of surplus food ends up in garbage containers; indicating the abundant Ramadan tables are exhausting the heads of families. He said it has turned into a sort of imitation as many ghabqas are broadcasted live on social media during the month of asceticism and austerity.

The daily's staff toured the markets and confirmed 50 percent increase in food purchases since the beginning of Ramadan compared to the rest of the months of the year.

Man and machine busy

Schools cleaned up to receive 'Poll 24' voters

KUWAIT CITY, April 4: The Director of Public Relations and Official Spokesman, Muhammad Al-Mutairi, has announced the meticulous preparation of 124 designated schools for the voting process. Teams from public hygiene departments across all governorates have tirelessly completed necessary arrangements to welcome male and female voters today, on Thursday, reports **Al-Anba** daily.

Al-Mutairi revealed that cleaning teams have successfully concluded their tasks in 119 schools allocated to the main and subsidiary committees within the five electoral districts. Additionally, they've attended to 5 schools dedicated to the main committees in each electoral district.

Highlighting the scale of the operation, Al-Mutairi disclosed that a total of 1,720 cleaning workers are involved in the cleaning process across all governorates during both morning and evening periods. This extensive effort is supported by 387 machines and equipment utilized for cleaning purposes. Furthermore, 1,037 containers of various sizes have been strategically distributed in front of polling schools and their surroundings to maintain cleanliness and facilitate waste disposal.

Jobs for Kuwaitis at UN

KUWAIT CITY, April 4: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has confirmed the availability of a number of job opportunities for Kuwaitis at the United Nations (UN), calling on all those who meet the conditions to apply immediately, reports **Al-Qabas** daily.

The ministry stated: "In the context of enhancing Kuwait's role and status in international forums, increasing its representation in regional and international organizations, and strengthening its presence for the benefit of Kuwaiti youths; the UN job opportunities are in the following: Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva, Counter-Terrorism Office in New York, Global Compact Office in New York, United Nations Program in Nairobi and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs in New York; among other UN functions around the world."



The Kuwaiti Red Crescent Society (KRCS) begins the second phase of distributing thousands of food parcels to displaced Palestinians.

Failed promises for money

Compatriot swindles Kuwaiti man

KUWAIT CITY, April 4: In a case titled Fraud No. 22/2024, a citizen born in 1990 reported to the Mina Abdullah and Ali Sabah Al-Salem police station that he was deceived by another citizen into believing he could easily obtain a commercial license for him, reports **Al-Jarida** daily.

The victim handed over 3,000 dinars to the accused, expecting the promised license, but the accused failed to deliver, citing various excuses.

Upon investigation, the accused confessed to the fraud, admitting to taking the money but providing no legitimate justification for his actions. He claimed financial desperation and lack of support from friends as reasons for resort-

ing to fraud.

The case is now under investigation, with authorities looking into the matter further to determine appropriate legal actions.

Ahmadi fire tackled: The fire teams from the Al-Ahmadi and Al-Mangaf fire stations contained a house fire in the Al-Ahmadi area, reports **Al-Anba** daily.

Technicians from the investigation unit have been dispatched to determine the cause of the fire. Efforts are now underway to ascertain the root cause of the fire as part of the ongoing investigation by the authorities.

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Maltese president congratulated on swearing oath

HH Amir cables Senegalese president on occasion of National Day

‘MoJ’ real estate auctions see surge in sales ... led by residential sector

Total sales reach approximately KD 41.6 million

KUWAIT CITY, April 4: The Ministry of Justice has conducted several real estate auctions in the first quarter of this year, witnessing significant sales across various sectors, with the residential sector leading the pack, reports Al-Jarida daily.

Total sales at the ministry auctions during this period reached approximately 41.6 million dinars, marking a notable 12.7 percent increase from the initial value of 36.9 million dinars -- an impressive gain of 4.7 million dinars.

Comparing these figures to the corresponding period in 2023 reveals a remarkable surge of about 53.1 percent, with sales amounting to approximately 27.1 million dinars. The demand for “Justice” auctions remains robust among citizens and investors, especially given the offering of numerous distinguished

‘Limited seats’ University opens registration for aptitude tests for non-Kuwaitis

KUWAIT CITY, April 4: The Kuwait University has started registration for academic aptitude tests for non-Kuwaiti students, with the registration deadline set for next Sunday. Seats are limited, and registration will close once capacity is reached, reports Al-Jarida daily.

In another development, the College of Arts, in collaboration with the Public Relations, Media, Security, and Safety departments, has arranged an orientation tour for newly

properties.

The month of January emerged as the month with the highest real estate sales, totaling about 27 million dinars, followed by February with

appointed faculty members at Sabah Al Salem University City.

The tour encompassed key locations such as Al Dana Hall, the Central Library, and various buildings within the university campus.

The college expressed gratitude and recognition to Yousef Al-Khamis, Acting Director of the Security and Safety Department, for his informative guidance and dedicated efforts during the university tour.

sales valued at 9.2 million dinars. March recorded the lowest sales at 5.3 million dinars, albeit with a substantial increase of 35.3 percent compared to the initial price for the

same month.

Among the notable sales in March were three plots of land in the Mahboula area, each measuring 875 square meters, fetching prices ranging from 1,005 to 1,055 million dinars.

Additionally, a property in the Al-Rehab area, spanning 400 square meters, was sold for 288 thousand dinars, marking a 14.2 percent increase from the initial price of 252 thousand dinars. An investment building with an area of 793 square meters, strategically located in Salmiya, was sold for 1.46 million dinars -- an increase of 20.1 percent from the initial price of 1.21 million dinars.

To participate in these auctions, the Ministry of Justice mandates that a certified check or a bank letter covering at least one-fifth of the property's price must be submitted to the Ministry's Enforcement Department.

Successful bidders approved by the judge are required to pay the full approved price, along with associated expenses and registration fees, during the sale session.

KUWAIT CITY, April 4, (KUNA): His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a cable of congratulation to President of the Republic of the Senegal Bassirou Diomaye Faye on the occasion of his country's National Day.

In the cable, His Highness the Amir wished President Faye good health and wellbeing, and further development for the people of Senegal.

Meanwhile, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah sent a cable of congratulation to President Bassirou Dio-

maye Faye on the occasion of his country's National Day.

In the meantime, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad sent a cable of congratulations to President of Malta Myriam Spiteri Debono on swearing the oath.

In the cable, His Highness the Amir wished President Debono good health and wellbeing, and further development for Malta.

Also, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah sent a cable of congratulations to President Debono on swearing the oath.



KUNA photo Minister of Social Affairs Sheikh Feras Saud during the meeting with representatives of Kuwaiti Charitable Societies Union (KCSU).

Sheikh Feras hails charities' humanitarian efforts

Kuwaiti Minister of Social Affairs, Family and Childhood Affairs Sheikh Feras Saud Al-Malik Al-Sabah on Wednesday touted the distinguished humanitarian role of the Kuwaiti Charitable Societies Union (KCSU).

Welcoming the union's representatives, the minister said the partnership between the ministry and civil society organizations is the key to the success of the recently launched humanitarian

campaign aiming to help those in debt.

The second edition of this annual humanitarian initiative is supervised by the ministries of social affairs, media, labor and endowments, the Union of Consumer Cooperative Societies, and the Kuwaiti Charitable Societies Union.

It is chiefly meant to help Kuwaiti families who are locked in financial trouble. (KUNA)

Minister appoints Al-Daihani as MoE undersecretary

KUWAIT CITY, April 4: Minister of Education, Higher Education and Scientific Research Dr Adel Al-Adwani issued a decision appointing Director of the Capital Educational District Mansour Al-Daihani as Undersecretary of the Ministry of Education, reports Al-Anba daily.

In addition, the Ministry of Education, through its various sectors, is keen on complet-

ing the procedures for employees entitled to the excellent job performance bonus.

Sources informed the daily that the educational districts and the administrations of religious and private education institutions have intensified their efforts to complete these procedures to pave way for submitting the lists of eligible employees to the Administrative Sec-

tor.

Sources affirmed that the Farwaniya Educational District was the first to send the lists to the ministry for review and verification before the disbursement process.

They disclosed that 14,961 administrative staff are eligible for the bonus; confirming that the lists are being finalized.

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123 medical clinics set up

MoH prepared for parliamentary polls

By Marwa Al-Bahrawi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, April 4: Confirming the article titled “700 Technicians and 25 Ambulances Geared Up for General Election 2024” published by Al-Seyassah in last Tuesday's edition, Dr. Abdullah Al-Sanad, the official spokesperson for the Ministry of Health, assured the preparedness of various sectors within the ministry for the National Assembly elections. This readiness includes the setup of 123 medical clinics and 25 ambulances across the five constituencies, and the availability of air ambulance services in anticipation of any potential emergencies.



Dr Al-Sanad

In a press statement issued to announce the ministry's plan to cover the elections, Dr. Al-Sanad explained that the medical clinics are distributed among various electoral sites, whether main or sub-committees. About 655 health personnel to be designated for providing health care services. They will work on two shifts in the subcommittees, and three shifts in the five main committees. Each committee will have three doctors.

The concerned ministry sectors have completed coordination and cooperation among themselves to provide health care services - both preventive and curative - in all locations related to the National Assembly elections, in accordance with the

plan drawn up in this regard, under the direct supervision and follow-up of His Excellency the Minister of Health Dr. Ahmad Abdel Wahab Al-Awadhi, and Undersecretary of the ministry Dr. Abdul Rahman Al-Mutairi.

The emergency plan in all emergency departments in public hospitals have been activated, ensuring the readiness of primary health care centers (dispensaries), and preparing various medical clinics, of which the total number of medical devices and equipment supplied reached 2,500. This includes respirators, First Aid equipment, and all the required supplies in the event of any emergency, in addition to the allocation of 252 male and female nurses who are trained to deal with emergency situations.

The Civil Defense Department at the Ministry of Interior has been provided with 500 wheelchairs to receive and transport elderly voters and those who suffer from difficulty in moving. Also, mobile medical bags designated to treat cases until they are transported to clinics or treatment facilities have been provided.

Dr. Al-Sanad said among the roles undertaken by the ministry is monitoring the safety of the food provided to those supervising the conduct of the electoral process, as 9 preventive teams were formed, consisting of a preventive doctor, health inspectors, and a nutritionist to inspect the central kitchens and hotels specialized in preparing and serving food to election participants.

He expressed appreciation for all the sincere efforts exerted by the various sectors of the ministry to provide all health care requirements in accordance with the required quality standards.

News in Brief

Positive response hailed: The Kuwait Teachers Association has expressed its appreciation for the Ministry of Education's positive response and the understanding demonstrated by Assistant Undersecretary for Public Education, Hessa Al-Mutawa, regarding the demands of graduates from the College of Basic Education, reports Al-Jarida daily.

The KTA had earlier raised the issue concerning the rightful appointment of these graduates as physical education teachers.

Assistant Undersecretary Matrook Al-Mutairi took action by sending a letter to the President of the Civil Service Bureau regarding the nomination of graduates from the College of Basic Education for positions within the ministry.

The association reiterated its support for the demands of these graduates, emphasizing the need to address their uncertain fate and acknowledging their responsibility in advocating for their rights.

□ □ □

Mol leaders appointed: In continuation of the process related to the appointment of security leaders in various sectors of the Ministry of Interior, security sources explained that decisions were issued to appoint the following officials:-

1. Brigadier General Abdullah Al-Hasan as the Director General of Criminal Investigations
2. Brigadier Fahad Al-Bader as the Assistant Director-General for Governorate Affairs

3. Brigadier Nasser Al-Sulhim as the Director-General of the General Administration for Weapons Collection
4. Brigadier General Walid Al-Fadil as the Assistant General of the General Administration of Weapons Collection

5. Brigadier Ali Al-Wahaib has been appointed as the Director General of Saad Al-Abdullah Academy

6. Brigadier Yousef Al-Hamdan as the Assistant Director-General for Support Services Affairs
7. Brigadier Salem Ashour as the Assistant Director-General for Academy Affairs

8. Brigadier General Mohammad Bader Al-Roumi as the Director General of the General Administration of Training

9. Brigadier Mishal Al-Foudari as the Assistant Director General of the Directorate General of Training

10. Brigadier Osama Dhafer Al-Shammari as the Director-General of the Research Center

11. Brigadier Ali Al-Mousa as the Assistant Director-General of the Research Center

12. Brigadier Mishal Al-Huwaila as the Director-General of the National Security College

13. Brigadier General Mahdi Al-Ajmi as the Assistant Director General of the National Security College.

Meanwhile, other sources revealed that the Assistant Director of Jahra Security Affairs Brigadier General Saqer Fayed submitted a letter requesting to be referred for retirement days after he was appointed to his new position.

Al-Enezi speaks at event organized at UN headquarters

Kuwait reaffirms commitment to boost kids, adolescents mental health

NEW YORK, April 4, (KUNA): Kuwait reaffirmed its commitment to enhancing mental health care for children and adolescents through comprehensive legislation and programs.

This came in a speech by Kuwait's Minister Plenipotentiary and deputy permanent representative to United Nations Faisal Al-Enezi on Wednesday at an event held at the organization's headquarters on mental health

of children and adolescents.

In the context of seeking to achieve better mental health for children and adolescents, Al-Enezi said that Kuwait issued a law in 2019 for mental health, which was not limited to treatment only, but includes correction and rehabilitation.

He added that this law authorizes the Ministry of Health to establish rehabilitation centers and grant li-

censes to private centers to support mental health patients.

Kuwait also launched (Kuwait National Child Protection Program) Initiative in 2016 to protect children and adolescents from abuse and neglect, providing a framework for social and therapeutic rehabilitation services and the necessary support, moral guidance and social counseling to vulnerable children.

Al-Enezi added that Kuwait's government had established a hotline to protect anonymous children in line with the Kuwaiti Child Rights Law No. 21/2015, which serves as a channel for investigating cases of child abuse and neglect in the six governorates of Kuwait.

Kuwait also launched the Child Protection Office of the Ministry of Health, which was opened under

the auspices of the Supreme Council for Family Affairs to deal with complaints related to children at risk.

Al-Enezi stated that the center also conducts comprehensive assessments of children's well-being and providing health and psychological treatment and rehabilitation services to affected family members.

Al-Enezi pointed out that Kuwait's continued efforts to strength-

en family protection and mental health guidelines is an investment in the collective future of the world.

Kuwait participated in organizing this event in cooperation with the permanent delegations of Qatar, Canada, Romania, Indonesia and Mexico, and in coordination with the World Health Organization as well as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

Kuwait sees

Continued from Page 1

He said he is expecting the pace of voting to increase in the evening after breakfast (Iftar).

In this regard, candidate Ali Al-Kandari said, "The turnout at polling stations is good in the morning, and these are indicators of an increase in numbers in the upcoming election hours."

He stressed that the electoral process is progressing smoothly thus far, with no delays or issues encountered as voters enter the polling halls. This seamless operation owes much to the collective efforts of those overseeing the electoral center, including security personnel and other state agencies responsible for supervising the conduct of the electoral process.

Al-Kandari revealed that the number of people who have cast their votes so far bodes well for the turnout of citizens to choose who will represent them, adding that he is expecting the attendance rate to increase in the evening period after breakfast.

Meanwhile, candidate Ali Al-Mousa stressed that participation is a national message of adherence to democracy, and an affirmation that the Kuwaiti people will not abandon their constitutional rights and duties, and their belief that managing the state and its affairs is a shared responsibility.

He said, "We look forward to effective electoral participation."

Furthermore, a candidate from the First Constituency Ali Al-Sabri said, "Kuwaitis are keen on change and are all optimistic about the new era. We do not want the return of the corruption approach."

Also, candidate Ahmad Al-Shahoumi said, "We are living in a transitional era in which we need to focus on development and the future."

As for the candidate Abdullah Al-Tarjii, he called on the loyal people of Kuwait to choose well those who will represent the nation and be of assistance to His Highness the Amir of the country in correcting the mistakes of the past, protecting popular gains, promoting stability, and protecting the constitution and democracy.

In turn, candidate Abdullah Al-Roumi said, "There is no voice above Kuwait. We all will leave but Kuwait will stay."

The dissolved parliament lacked many things, the most important of which was the lack of parliamentarians with experience and political sophistication. We hope that the new parliament would be different from the previous one and that everyone would succeed in the interest of Kuwait."

Al-Roumi called on the new government to adhere to the laws and implement them as well as to establish the principle of cooperation between the two authorities.

He said he hopes the new government would meet the requirements of the Kuwaiti citizens and lead Kuwait and its people to safety.

Meanwhile, in the context of activating the laws and decisions regulating the elections, voters noticed the presence of posters in polling centers warning against parking vehicles in front of these centers so that they are not subjected to a violation and the vehicle will be towed.

In addition, Kuwait Municipality has started removing tents and tables in front of schools and issuing a violation report against the violating candidates.

Moments before the commencement of voting in the 2024 National Assembly Elections at polling stations across the Fourth Constituency, a surprising influx of Kuwaiti men and women caused unexpected congestion outside many schools. Fasting did not curb their enthusiasm.

The voting process proceeded without delay, thanks to the efficient cooperation of the authorities overseeing the electoral process. Administrative and security arrangements were well organized, ensuring a smooth and hassle-free voting experience.

As the voting process commenced, schools experienced a significant surge of voters, notably elderly individuals and those with special needs. Many were eager to arrive early at the polling centers with the aim of avoiding crowds anticipated particularly after Iftar (breakfast).

In this regard, Hamad Al-Hatllani, head of the polling station at the Abdullah Al-Roumi School in Sabah Al-Nasser, confirmed that the number of voters exceeded 1,250. He said the turnout exceeded 70 voters in the first hour, and the number continued to increase.

Al-Hatllani said he is expecting the turnout to be less during the period before breakfast, then increase by double in the evening, and then increase furthermore in the final hours before polling stations close.

He highlighted the great awareness among voters in checking their restrictions before entering the polls so as not to cause any delay, and in knowing the requirements and prohibitions in the voting process.

Meanwhile, Muhammad Al-Mutairi, head of the polling station at Saleh Al-Ruwaihi School in Ardiya, said, "The voting process began at 12 noon, and the turnout has been excellent so far. The election process takes approximately one minute per head. The number of voters who cast their votes in the first hour in this committee was about 93 voters out of 1,063."

The voting process took place with ease. The voters brought with them either their original nationality ID or a certificate issued by the Nationality Department dated yesterday."

He praised the voters' commitment to not commit any violations that the legislator warned about during the electoral process, such as photocopying the ballot paper or attempting to vote publicly.

Furthermore, a large number of voters turned up at Umm Baraa Bint Safwan

School in Qasr to cast their votes, amid a large security and traffic presence.

Hassan Al-Shammari, head of the polling station at Umm Al-Baraa School, affirmed that the committee includes 1,070 voters out of whom 36 cast their votes during the first hour.

He said he is expecting the numbers to increase after breakfast, revealing that the school has one electoral committee and seven subcommittees.

Also, a large number of voters arrived at Waha Primary School in the first two hours of the opening of the polls, including elderly men. The Civil Defense volunteers facilitated the process of entry and exit of voters with ease.

Meanwhile, female voters flocked to the ballot boxes at Sayed Hashem Al-Hanayan School in Jahra in the first hours and cast their votes in the presence of women police and female volunteers who facilitated their entry and exit while casting their votes.

In addition, Shaddadiya School in Abdullah Al-Mubarak witnessed a remarkable attendance of voters during the first hours of the opening of voting. The voting process was conducted with ease and without any problems.

A number of voters confirmed to Al-Sayassah that they will choose the most suitable candidate based on the interest of the country and its people. They stressed that the selection process is a great responsibility for citizens and they must participate in this democratic wedding.

Polling stations in the five constituencies witnessed medium to high turnout of voters during the National Assembly Election on Thursday.

Chairman of the main polling station (number 224) in Ayoub Husain Al-Ayoub School Judge Mishal Al-Beraiki disclosed the number of voters who came to elect their representatives at the Assembly was higher than expected, especially during the fasting hours.

Chairman of the main polling station in Abdullah Bin Al-Arat School Judge Abdulla Othman said the first few hours witnessed an average number of voters, indicating that almost 10 percent of the voters came in the first few hours.

Chairman of Al-Shadadiya School polling station at Saad Al-Abdullah City Judge Naif Al-Mesama revealed that 144 out of 1,253 voters already voted at 1:30 pm - one and a half hour after the start of the voting period at 12:00 noon.

The election atmosphere was positive as the concerned institutions are fully prepared, especially the ministries of Interior and Health.

Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and acting Minister of Interior Sheikh Fahad Yusuf Al-Sabah conducted a field tour to personally look into the preparations of the concerned departments, follow up the enforcement of regulations and provide support for the voters.

Kuwait Municipality Director Eng Saud Al-Dabbous took the same step to monitor the teams tasked to follow up the elections. He affirmed these teams efficiently carried out their tasks in and outside the polling stations, including the removal of violating advertisements. He added these teams have been instructed not to leave the areas where they were assigned until the election results are announced.

The counting of votes will start immediately after the voting period at 12:00 midnight and results are expected to be announced by Friday morning.

Since the opening of the polling stations for the 2024 National Assembly's elections, senior citizens were the first to make their way to cast their votes.

So far, they have exceeded the younger generations in casting their votes since the start of the elections Thursday, with all amenities provided to them including wheelchairs, and guidance from election committees.

'Voting crucial

Continued from Page 1

"Kuwait really stands out in the region for both the strength of its parliament -- the constitutional powers that had been given to the parliament --, and the clarity and competitiveness of its elections," Kristin Diwan, a senior resident scholar at the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, told KUNA.

"I think that something to cherish in a way that in this time not a lot of countries in the region have this kind of secure electoral processes." Diwan noted that Kuwaiti people have a voice in the government and state management.

She pointed out that she is visiting Kuwait to observe the elections and has done so several times before.

"I have been coming to Kuwait for over 20 years. So I have a long experience in the country" she said.

She elaborated that she witnessed important milestones in Kuwait's parliamentary history like the National Assembly's vote on women's political rights. Diwan referred to the females who won four seats in the National Assembly in 2009, noting the steady progress of this democratic and political experience despite the great challenges.

Meanwhile, Leon Shahabian, Senior Associate (Non-resident), International Security Program and Risk and Foresight Group, said he came to see democracy in action and be briefed on views and atmosphere especially the region is going through a "critical phase".

"In Washington DC, there is a lot of think tankers, they are concerned about the Middle East and the Gulf. But there is not enough coverage of Kuwait in general," Shahabian told KUNA.

Ambassador affirms depth of American & Kuwaiti relations

Sasahara hosts Iftar for local press

KUWAIT CITY, April 4: American Ambassador to Kuwait Karen Sasahara recently hosted an Iftar for the local press at her official residence, reports Al-Qabas daily.

After breaking the fast with dates and sharing Iftar meal together, the ambassador and local media practitioners shared memories of previous Ramadan celebrations and reminisced over significant milestones in the American-Kuwaiti relationship.

The Iftar also provided an opportunity for meaningful discussion on the media environment in Kuwait and the importance of the press to open societies.

Sasahara stated: "Kuwait is an exceptional place with its own culture and heritage. Kuwaitis show me warmth and hospitality everywhere I go, and I am glad to return the favor by welcoming you to my home during Ramadan. I am proud of the educational, cultural and commercial ties between our countries. I look forward to seeing what we can achieve together."

Speech

Earlier, Sasahara delivered a speech at the annual Iftar gathering organized by the American Business Council.

Also present at the event were Canadian Ambassador Aliya Mawani, Australian Ambassador Melissa Kelly, and a number of Kuwaiti and American diplomats and businesspersons.

In her speech, Sasahara affirmed the depth of the growing relationship between the United States and Kuwait through their shared values, mutual respect and commitment to work toward prosperity and peace. Sasahara pointed out: "Our bilateral relations continue to flourish, driven by strong economic cooperation, strategic partnership, and a shared vision for a stable and prosperous region."

She added: "Cooperation between the US Embassy and the American Business Council in Kuwait has been instrumental in promoting our common goals and business opportunities that benefit our countries. Together, we will continue to foster an environment conducive to innovation, entrepreneurship and sustainable growth, and lay the foundation for a brighter future for all."

Praised

She praised the exemplary role and work of Kuwait Society for the Care of Children in Hospitals and Bayt Abdullah Children's Hospital, as well as their dedication in improving the wards at the hospital to better serve the patients and their families.

"We also praise the influential programs of the Kuwaiti society for following up issues concerning people with disabilities. Their commitment to serving the needs of the most vulnerable groups among us is a testimony to the generosity and compassion that characterize this society," she added.

"As we break our fast; let us renew our commitment to building bridges of understanding, cooperation, and friendship. Together, we can overcome challenges, seize opportunities and create a brighter future for generations to come," she concluded.



Karen Sasahara



Minister Al-Awadhi and Al-Jumaa during the opening of the new branch in Jahra.

Al-Jarida photo

'Plans underway to open another branch in Farwaniya'

Minister of health inaugurates Jahra Medical Council branch, ensuring better patient care

KUWAIT CITY, April 4: In line with the government's work program and the 100-day plan aimed at enhancing access to comprehensive healthcare services, Minister of Health, Dr. Ahmed Al-Awadi inaugurated the General Medical Council branch in Jahra yesterday morning, reports Al-Jarida daily.

This branch, the second of its kind after the Funaitees branch, serves residents of the Jahra Governorate and marks a significant step in alleviating pressure on the General Medical Council in the Al-Sabah Specialized Medical District, ensuring optimal patient care.

Dr. Al-Awadi underscored the ministry's commitment to expand-

ing the Medical Council's branches to enhance patient convenience, with plans underway to open another branch in Farwaniya Governorate. He also reiterated the ministry's readiness to accommodate the parliamentary elections, having conducted inspection tours of schools to ensure medical equipment and clinics are prepared to handle any emergencies.

Dr. Nadia Al-Jumaa, Assistant Undersecretary of the Ministry of Health for Health Care Affairs, highlighted the new branch's focus on providing healthcare services to newly employed citizens, streamlining the process by offering required analyses and laboratory tests in one location.

She noted that the Funaitees

branch's opening led to a notable decrease in the number of visitors to the General Medical Council, particularly for blood sample collection, attributed to digital transformation initiatives.

The Jahra Medical Council branch includes four clinical examination clinics and four blood drawing clinics, catering to over 200 cases daily.

Dr. Al-Jumaa emphasized that the branch's opening will not only enhance service quality but also contribute to overall improvements in healthcare accessibility. She expressed hope for the future establishment of a fourth branch in Farwaniya Governorate, further expanding healthcare services across Kuwait.

MEW provides power generators to poll panels

Power consumption increases as temps start to rise

KUWAIT CITY, April 4: Power consumption has started to increase as temperatures reached above 30 degrees Celsius, reports Al-Anba daily.

The power consumption index recorded 9,730 megawatts in the afternoon recently, with temperature rising to 33 degrees Celsius.

Meanwhile, sources from the Ministry of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy confirmed that the ministry was to provide power generators to the electoral committees during the 2024 National Assembly election if the need arises.

Sources affirmed the provision of generators in the five main election committees in the constituencies to ensure the electoral process is not disrupted and for any emergency that might occur on election day.

Sources said the Emergency Services Department in the Electrical Distribution Networks Sector, which is under Director Eng Adel Mahmoud, was fully prepared to supply generators to the rest of the schools allocated for the election when needed. Sources added the ministry has been coordinating with its Interior counterpart and the election committees in this regard.

In the meantime, the Ministry of Interior has confirmed updating the service for inquiring about electoral registration data by adding the Polling and Voting Committee headquarters to the 'Nation 2024' services on the Sahel application, reports Al-Anba daily.

In a press statement, the ministry disclosed the update allows the user to inquire about his electoral registration and other related data, as well as the headquarters of the abovementioned committee.

Security authorities efforts hailed

Minister of Justice lauds all parties efforts to ensure election integrity

KUWAIT CITY, April 4, (KUNA): The Minister of Justice and Minister of Endowments and Islamic Affairs, Counselor Faisal Al-Gharib, lauded the concerted efforts to ensure the integrity of the elections.

In a statement to KUNA, following his tour to one of the polling stations, the minister affirmed that the Ministry of Justice had arranged for this day some time ago and formed an advisory committee to prepare and follow up on the election procedures.

He also stated that approximately 759 members of the judiciary, including judges, advisors and prosecutors, were selected to participate in organizing the elections, in addition to selecting 400 reserve members.

Further, he affirmed that 144 accounting experts were hired to play a positive role in collecting votes to assist members of the judiciary.

Minister Al-Gharib touched on the prominent role of all parties in organizing the electoral process.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Interior and Kuwait Fire Force ensured the smooth and efficient conduct of the 2024 electoral process on Thursday, providing services and facilitating procedures for voters to fulfill their national duty.

Kuwait Fire Force is present at 22 points, including main and sub-

polling stations, with heavy and rapid intervention machinery, a force from the Prevention and Control sectors is also prepared for any emergency.

In the meantime, some observers praised the efforts of the parties concerned with organizing the election and their contribution to facilitating the voting process.

In a statement Thursday, Vice President of the Kuwaiti Society for Monitoring and Evaluating Parliamentary Performance, Abdulaziz Al-Shulaimi, said that the Cabinet's decision to involve civil society organizations in supervising the electoral process is consistent with the international requirements and standards.

He also noted that the voters have a high level of political awareness and that their participation has a significant impact on changing the parliamentary map.

In turn, the Secretary of the Kuwait Journalists Association, Jassem Kamal, said that the Cabinet's selection of the Kuwait Journalists Association and its supervision of the electoral process alongside public benefit associations and civil society institutions for the seventh time in a row is a positive matter that reflects on the electoral process and reinforces the principle of transparency and integrity.

World News Roundup

Europe

NATO marks 75th b'day

Russia drone attack kills four in Kharkiv

KYIV, Ukraine, April 4, (Agencies): Russian forces fired drones at two apartment buildings and a power plant in Ukraine's second-largest city, killing four people, local authorities said Thursday, as the Kremlin's forces apparently set in motion their strategy for the coming months of war by escalating the bombardment of civilian areas.



Putin

Shahed drones smashed into two apartment buildings in Kharkiv, near the Russian border, which has frequently been targeted during more than two years of war. Other drones targeted the power grid.

The Kremlin's forces in recent months have stepped up their aerial barrages of Ukraine, hitting urban areas. The approximately 1,000-kilometer (620-mile) front line is largely deadlocked, but Kyiv officials say Moscow's troops have recently been probing for Ukrainian weaknesses on the front line ahead of an expected large-scale Russian offensive in the summer. The Institute for the Study of War said the goal of Russia's escalated attacks on civilian areas and the country's power grid may be to compel Ukraine's army to deploy air defense systems away from the front line. That would allow Russia under the government of **Vladimir Putin** to provide more air cover for its ground operations on the battlefield, the think tank said late Wednesday.

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NATO marks its 75th birthday: NATO marked on Thursday 75 years of collective defense across Europe and North America, with its top diplomats vowing to stay the course in Ukraine as better armed Russian troops assert control on the battlefield.

The anniversary comes as the now-32-nation alliance weighs a plan to provide more predictable longer-term military support to Ukraine. Plagued by ammunition shortages, Ukraine this week lowered the military conscription age from 27 to 25 in an effort to replenish its depleted ranks.

"Ukraine is under heavy attacks, like daily, 24-seven," Estonian Foreign Minister Margus Tsahkna told reporters, appealing for more military materiel for Ukraine like air defense systems, drones and artillery shells.

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'Berlin fully supports NATO': Germany's President Frank-Walter Steinmeier affirmed on Wednesday Berlin's full support of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and their continued investment in NATO's defensive assets.

In a message to NATO's General Secretary Jens Stoltenberg, Steinmeier said that Berlin will keep spending two percent of its gross domestic product (GDP) on NATO defense.

Steinmeier also confirmed in the message distributed to the press in the German Palace of Republic, there are many reasons behind this decision, mainly its strength in this time of need.

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Austria minister aims to tighten 'law': Austria's justice minister said Thursday she plans to tighten the country's rules on espionage, which currently is explicitly banned if directed against Austria itself but not if it targets other countries or international organizations.

Justice Minister Alma Zadic's push to tighten Austria's laws comes as the arrest of a former Austrian intelligence officer on allegations of spying for Russia focuses attention on espionage activities in the country.

Austria is a European Union member that has a policy of military neutrality. Its capital, Vienna, is host to several UN agencies and other international groups such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, or OPEC.

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EU Council chief travels to Romania: European Council President Charles Michel traveled to Romania's capital on Wednesday for talks with several European Union country leaders on the bloc's so-called strategic agenda to address goals for the next five-year period.

Michel arrived in Bucharest at the presidential Cotroceni Palace where he was hosted by Romanian President Klaus Iohannis. The informal meetings, which are periodically held in different EU capitals, come ahead of the June 6-9 elections for the European Parliament.

Michel said in a joint press conference that the 27-nation bloc has in recent years faced an "extraordinarily difficult" period of challenges including the COVID-19 pandemic, climate and energy crises, and Russia's ongoing war in Ukraine.

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Cruise ship stuck in Spain port: A cruise ship reportedly carrying 1,500 passengers was stuck Wednesday in the Spanish northeastern port of Barcelona due to the visa problems of a group of Bolivian passengers who were due to disembark there, officials said.

Authorities say 69 Bolivians were not being allowed to leave the ship because they lacked valid documents to enter the European border-free Schengen area. Solange Duarte, a Bolivian diplomat in Barcelona, told The Associated Press she received reports some of the stranded Bolivians had been duped into obtaining fake visas but had no further information.

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'12-year-old shooter bullied at school': A 12-year-old student suspected of fatally shooting a classmate and wounding two others in Finland told police that he was bullied at school, officials said Wednesday, as a nation shocked by the attack held a day of mourning.

The suspect, a sixth grader who attended the school in the city of Vantaa, just outside Helsinki, was apprehended less than an hour following the shooting on Tuesday morning.

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Bomb threats cause short lockdown: Two bomb threats led to a brief lockdown of the Norwegian parliament Wednesday, while lawmakers continued debate inside.

Heavily armed police were posted outside the assembly and the surrounding streets were cordoned off. Bomb sniffing dogs were seen in action outside the building. The 169-member Storting was reopened after a bit more than two hours. A senior police officer, Sven Bjelland said authorities were "confident that it is now safe."



A general view of the round table meeting of the NATO-Ukraine Council at NATO headquarters in Brussels on April 4. NATO celebrates on Thursday 75 years of collective defense across Europe and North America as Russia's war on Ukraine enters its third year. (AP)

Politics

Ex-prez request to delay hush-money trial rejected

Trump events aren't drawing big protests

NEW YORK, April 4, (AP): When Donald Trump first ran for the White House eight years ago, protesters filled the streets.

His inflammatory rhetoric and often dehumanizing descriptions of immigrants spurred thousands to demonstrate outside his rallies. By this time in 2016, protesters regularly interrupted his speeches, sparking clashes and foreshadowing Trump's habit of encouraging violence against those he casts as his enemies.

"Knock the crap out of them, would you?" Trump once said as he egged on the crowd to go after protestors on their own - even promising to pay their legal bills.

No longer. As he runs again with an agenda that is arguably more extreme than his two previous campaigns, mass protests at Trump rallies and appearances are a thing of the past. When Trump returned to New York last week for a hearing in one of his criminal cases, just a smattering of detractors turned up outside the courthouse. During a Midwestern swing Tuesday, Trump was interrupted briefly by a protest in Green Bay, but otherwise encountered minimal opposition.

In a twist, it's now President Joe Biden who is facing a sustained protest movement, largely by those furious over the administration's support for Israel in its war against Hamas. During his first major rally of the year, Biden's 22-minute speech was interrupted no less than a dozen times by detractors calling for a ceasefire in Gaza. Protesters repeatedly disrupted his celebrity fundraiser last week with former presidents Barack Obama and Bill Clinton at New York's Radio City Music Hall, as hundreds more demonstrated outside.

Nearly a decade after Trump launched his first campaign, organizers and others who participated in past protests describe a change in tactics as they focus their efforts on other issues or turning out voters in November. Some described a "Trump fatigue" after nearly a decade of outrage.

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A judge on Wednesday rejected **Donald Trump's** bid to delay his April 15 hush money criminal trial until the Supreme Court rules on presidential immunity claims he raised in

In Wisconsin, Democrat 'hustles' to keep key Senate seat against Hovde

NEW GLARUS, Wis., April 4, (AP): Democratic Sen Tammy Baldwin, whose "go everywhere" 2018 campaign strategy became a model for how to win in battleground Wisconsin, knows her road to victory this year against a multimillionaire Republican supporter of former president Donald Trump goes through places like New Glarus.

The bucolic village of 2,200, founded by Swiss immigrants and famous for its Spotted Cow drink is a world away from the urban Democratic strongholds of Milwaukee and Madison, where Democrats like Baldwin and President Joe Biden rack up massive margins of victory.

"Look, in a state like Wisconsin, a 50-50 battleground state, you don't have to win every county," Baldwin said in a warehouse surrounded by pallets of New Glarus drink, sold only in Wisconsin. "But it is really

critical that you get folks out to vote, and you have the discussions and up the turnout in every community that you can."

The likely contest between Baldwin and Republican Eric Hovde shapes up as one of the most competitive and expensive Senate races in the country. A Baldwin victory is crucial for Democrats who are defending 23 seats in the Senate, including three held by independents who caucus with Democrats clinging to a 51-49 majority. That's compared with just 11 seats that Republicans hope to keep in their column.

Baldwin emphasizes her deep ties to Wisconsin, forged over nearly 40 years in elected office, and her ability to fight for issues that resonate deeply in the state, like supporting the dairy industry, investing in infrastructure and keeping jobs in America.

party leadership.

Trump and the Republican National Committee closed out the month with \$93.1 million in their campaign accounts, a significant increase as they try to catch up to the fundraising of President Joe Biden and the Democrats.

"Our campaign, working together with the RNC, has been steadily ramping up our fundraising efforts, and our March numbers are a testament to the overwhelming support for President Trump by voters all across the spectrum," **Susie Wiles**, a senior advisor to Trump's campaign, said in a statement. "Republicans may not be beneficiaries of the self interested largess from Hollywood and Silicon Valley elites, but President Trump is proud to be supported by donations from voters who are the backbone of this nation, which will fuel Republicans up and down the ballot."

Biden and the Democratic National Committee have not released fundraising numbers for March, but their political operation said they brought in \$53 million in February and closed that month with \$155 million cash on hand.



A local woman looks on her house which was damaged after a Russian drone strike on residential neighborhood in Kharkiv, Ukraine, on April 4. Russian forces fired drones at two apartment buildings and a power plant in Ukraine's second-largest city, killing four people, local authorities said Thursday. (AP)



James



Jennifer

America

'Burglars steal \$30m in cash': Thieves stole as much \$30 million in an Easter Sunday burglary at a Los Angeles money storage facility in one of the largest cash heists in city history, police said Wednesday.

The burglary occurred Sunday night at an unnamed facility in the Sylmar area of the San Fernando Valley where cash from businesses across the region is handled and stored, LA Police Department Commander Elaine Morales told the Los Angeles Times.

The burglars were able to breach the building as well as the safe where the money was stored, Morales said.

The operators of the business, whom police did not identify, did not discover the massive theft until they opened the vault on Monday. (AP)

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MS-13 member pleads guilty: An MS-13 gang member has admitted to participating in the brutal killing of four young men on Long Island in 2017.

Edwin Rodriguez, 24, pleaded guilty Wednesday to racketeering charges in connection with the April 11, 2017, deaths of Justin Llivicura, Michael Lopez, Jorge Tigre, and Jefferson Villalobos in Central Islip.

The then 17-year-old, who authorities said went by the nickname "Manicomio," fled the country after the killings but was arrested in El Salvador in 2019 and extradited to the US in 2022.

Rodriguez's lawyer Glenn Obedin said in an emailed statement after the proceedings in federal court in Central Islip that his client was "relieved" to have reached a plea deal and was "ready now to move on to the next phase of the proceeding and the next phase of his life." Rodriguez faces up to life in prison for the crimes. (AP)

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Sisters mystified by slaying: After the killing of their octogenarian parents last month in their South Florida home, Kim Melvin Hill and Tonya Mitchell went before a bank of TV cameras seeking answers on Wednesday. Why were they killed? Who would have done this? And where can the killer or killers be now?

The youngest of 11 children of Major

and Claudette Melvin, they are mystified as to why anyone would kill their elderly parents inside their Fort Lauderdale home and, it appears, only steal their 10-year-

old Ford.

The case has drawn major attention in South Florida and the Fort Lauderdale police have issued a nationwide alert for



Supporters cheer as Republican presidential candidate former US president Donald Trump speaks (not seen) on April 2 at a rally in Green Bay, Wis. (AP)

the couple's red 2014 Ford Focus, Florida license plate LTDQ16. (AP)

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'10 yrs in jail for Crumbley': Prosecutors in Michigan are recommending at least 10 years in prison next week for two parents who are the first in the US to be held criminally responsible for a school shooting.

Jennifer Crumbley showed a "chilling lack of remorse" for her role, and **James Crumbley** "failed to exercise even the smallest measure of ordinary care" that could have prevented the deaths of four students at Oxford High School in 2021, prosecutors said in a court filing Wednesday.

The Crumbleys, the parents of shooter Ethan Crumbley, were convicted of involuntary manslaughter at separate trials earlier this year. They were not accused of knowing their son's plan. But prosecutors said they failed to lock up a gun at home and ignored his mental health.

The maximum prison stay for the crime is 15 years. But the minimum sentence set by the judge on April 9 will be critical because the Crumbleys would be eligible for parole consideration after that time. They will get credit for about 2 1/2 years spent in the Oakland County jail since their arrest. (AP)

Lat/Am

'241 died in jail'

Argentina's leader cuts 15K state jobs

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina, April 4. (AP): Argentina said Wednesday that it had cut 15,000 state jobs as part of President **Javier Milei's** aggressive campaign to slash spending, the latest in a series of painful economic measures that have put the libertarian government on a collision course with angry protesters and powerful trade unions.

Presidential spokesperson Manuel Adorni announced the job cuts in a news conference, portraying them as key to Milei's promised shake-up of Argentina's bloated public sector.

"It's part of the work we are doing to reduce state expenses," he told reporters, describing the dismissed workers as a drag on taxpayers.

"They perhaps did not have a very defined job," he said.



Milei

Hundreds of defiant employees - some notified of their termination last week and others before that - stormed their workplaces in Buenos Aires and nearby cities on Wednesday, beating drums, decrying their dismissal as unjust and demanding their reinstatement.

Despite the rain, crowds wearing the green T-shirts of the country's biggest union, The Association of State Workers, or ATE, swelled outside national ministries. In some cases, scuffles erupted as police struggled to evict protesters from government buildings.

Workers at ministries that Milei has vowed to close, such as the National Institute Against Discrimination, along with a range of state agencies - including the ministries for the economy, energy and social security - received the latest layoff notices.

"These layoffs have a face, they have a family, they have real needs in this context of great change and great poverty in Argentina," Mercedes Cabezas, a secretary-general of ATE, told The Associated Press outside the Ministry of Labor as protesters pumped their fists and chanted around her.

Poverty

"The impact runs very deep because it's combined with the reduction of social programs, so what we end up with is increasing poverty," she said.

Milei campaigned for president while brandishing a chainsaw - promising to fix Argentina's long-troubled economy by chopping down the size of the state. Determined to balance the country's budget, he has slashed energy and transportation subsidies, halted public works, cut payments to provincial governments and devalued the peso by over 50% to close the gap between the official exchange rate and the black market rate.

However, that has hiked inflation, making it even harder for struggling Argentines to make ends meet.

Even before last week, when 41-year-old Hernán Silva still had his job at the National Road Safety Agency that paid a basic monthly salary of \$250, he was stressed about not having enough money "for anything" as the prices of fuel, meat and medication surged.

"I was barely making it to the end of the month," he said. After 14 years at the road safety agency, his boss called last Wednesday to tell him - and 20 of his colleagues - it was their final day.

Silva and his colleagues tried to force their way into their office on Wednesday - the first day back at work after a holiday week in Argentina - but gave up when managers threatened to call the police.

"My only plan right now is to fight for my job because this is unfair," he said. Neither he nor his colleagues had received official termination notices.

Also:

MEXICO CITY: A Mexican drug cartel not only forced vendors to buy chicken at wildly inflated prices - they sold them chicken "not fit for human consumption," investigators concluded this week.

Prosecutors in the **State of Mexico** this week concluded a months-long investigation that found the hyper-violent **Familia Michoacana** cartel had been forcing small stores and market vendors to buy chicken at almost twice the normal price.

But to add insult to injury, test results released Monday on chicken found at one cartel-controlled warehouse in the city of **Toluca** - just west of Mexico City - found additives, some of which prosecutors said were potentially cancer-causing.

State prosecutors said they are "continuing with investigations of two warehouses seized on March 27 in Toluca because of their presumed links with extortion, and crimes against consumers."

"The seized food products are not fit for human consumption," the report said, citing the presence of potassium and sodium tartrate, among other additives found in the chicken.

The investigation began in December, when, days before Christmas, four chicken-processing workers were abducted from one of the warehouses.

Strangely, in a country where kidnap victims are often never seen again, the four men were found later unharmed and freed from a vehicle.

Prosecutors said last week they later discovered the workers at the warehouse had been abducted by the gang as part of a dispute with rivals, because the kidnapppers wanted that warehouse for themselves.



SAN SALVADOR: At least 241 people have died in El Salvador prisons since the start of President **Nayib Bukele's** "war on gangs" two years ago, according to the organization Humanitarian Legal Relief.

Ingrid Escobar, director of the rights organization, said they received 500 reports of deaths in state custody, but they have confirmed about half, including two minors. Last year, the organization documented 126 deaths, just half of the number they documented this year.

In March 2022, Bukele announced a "state of exception," waiving many constitutional rights to combat the gangs that have terrorized the Central American nation.

Since then, El Salvador has arrested 80,000 people - more than 1% of the country's population - throwing them into prison, often with little evidence of their ties to gangs and almost no access to due process. The prisons have been likened to torture chambers, with horrifying conditions.

According to the NGO report, "of these deaths, 44% died of violent death, serious torture, 29% due to lack of medical attention."

While the government is accused of committing mass human rights abuses in their crackdown, Bukele remains highly popular in El Salvador because the homicide rates sharply dipped following the detentions.



Smoke rises from a ferry in Surat Thani province, Thailand, on April 4. The ferry caught fire off the southern Thailand coast on Thursday morning while carrying more than a hundred people, sending panicking passengers to jump into the sea to escape the raging blaze. (AP)

People jump into sea to escape ferry fire in Gulf of Thailand; all 108 on board safe

Panicked passengers jumped into the sea to escape a raging ferry fire in the Gulf of Thailand early Thursday, and all 108 people on board were safe.

The overnight ferry from Surat Thani province was about to arrive at Koh Tao, a popular tourist destination off the Thai coast, when one of the passengers suddenly heard a crackling sound and smelled smoke.

Maitree Promjampa said he saw billowing smoke

and fire less than five minutes later, and that was when people started shouting and rang the alarm.

"We could barely get the life vests in time," he told The Associated Press. "It was chaotic. People were weeping ... I also teared up."

Of the 108 people on the ferry, 97 were passengers, Surat Thani officials said on Facebook. The province's public relations department posted that everyone was rescued with no casualties.

Videos showed people hurrying out of the ferry's

cabin while putting on life vests, as thick black smoke swept across the ferry. It was later engulfed in fire.

Maitree, a Surat Thani resident who often travels to Koh Tao for work, said several boats came to their rescue around 20 minutes after they called for help, but the boats could not get close to the ferry out of fear of explosions. He said people had to jump into the sea to be rescued. Videos showed the ferry was also carrying several vehicles. (AP)

Asia

Rescuers in Taiwan search for those missing

6.0 quake jolts Japan; no tsunami warning

TOKYO, April 4. (Agencies): A strong earthquake with a preliminary magnitude of 6.0 on the Richter scale struck eastern Japan on Thursday, the Japan Meteorological Agency said.

There were no immediate reports of casualties and damage. No tsunami warning was issued for the 12:16 p.m. (0316 GMT) quake.

The focus of the tremor was off the coast of Fukushima Prefecture, about 250 km north of Tokyo, at a depth of about 40 km, according to the weather agency. The quake measured 4 on the Japanese seismic scale of 7 in the northeastern prefectures of Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima.

The agency defines an intensity of four as capable of causing dishes and objects in shelves rattle.

The Japanese scale measures how much places were shaken on the surface, while the Richter scale measures the energy of the quake itself.

There were no signs of abnormalities at the crippled Fukushima No.1 and No. 2 nuclear power plants from the quake, its operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. said. Japan is one of the world's most earthquake-prone countries, accounting for about 20 percent of earthquakes of magnitude six or greater around the globe.

Also:

HUALIEN, Taiwan: Rescuers searched Thursday for dozens of people still missing a day after Taiwan's strongest earthquake in a quarter century damaged buildings, killed nine people, and left others stranded in remote areas or sleeping in tents.

In the eastern coastal city of Hualien near the epicenter, workers used an excavator to stabilize the base of a damaged building with construction materials, as some officers took samples of its exterior and chickens browsed amid potted plants on its slanted roof.

Mayor **Hsu Chen-wei** previously

Tonga's prime minister says he's open to Chinese help with security support

MELBOURNE, Australia, April 4. (AP): Tonga's prime minister said on Thursday he is open to Beijing's offer of security support when the South Pacific kingdom hosts a major regional leaders' summit, raising concerns in the United States as it strives to counter China's growing influence.

Prime Minister Siasosi Sovaleni said there was nothing to fear from China's offer to help Tonga host leaders of the 18-member Pacific Islands Forum in August, despite the United States urging regional nations not to strike security pacts with Beijing.

"There's no reason to be concerned. China is offering to assist with the hosting of the foreign leaders' meeting," Sovaleni told reporters in the Tongan capital Nuku'alofa.

"If it's training and if the (Tonga) police deem it to be necessary, of course we will take up the offer," Sovaleni added, addressing an Australian government fear that authoritarian Chinese policing methods could take hold in the Pacific.

The United States and its most important South Pacific ally, Australia, have been working to strengthen ties in the region since Beijing struck a security pact in

2022 that raised fears of the Solomon Islands hosting a Chinese naval base. China has since been rebuffed in its attempt to encompass 10 Pacific Island nations in a single security treaty. Beijing is now seeking one-on-one deals with individual island nations.

Also:

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia: Indonesian President-elect **Prabowo Subianto** held talks Thursday with Malaysia's leader on bolstering bilateral ties as part of a regional visit that has also taken him to **China** and **Japan**.

Prime Minister **Anwar Ibrahim** said he and Subianto discussed next steps to strengthen bilateral ties, and also exchanged views on their political experiences.

"Our political journeys are almost similar as we were both tested with various challenges before being appointed," Anwar said in a statement on Facebook after their meeting. He said Subianto also recalled his secondary education at a school in Kuala Lumpur. "May Malaysia-Indonesia relationship continue to be strengthened for our common good," he added.

said 48 residential buildings had been damaged, some of which were tilting at precarious angles with their ground floors crushed.

Some Hualien residents were still staying in tents, and the main road linking the county to the capital and the island's was still closed Thursday afternoon, but much of the island's day-to-day life was returning to normal. Some local rail service to Hualien

resumed, and the Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co. - one of the world's most important manufacturers of computer chips - restarted most operations, the Central News Agency reported.

Taiwan is regularly jolted by earthquakes and its population is well-prepared for them. It also has stringent construction requirements to ensure buildings are quake-resistant.



Somalia, IFAD sign agreement: The Government of Somalia and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) have signed a new financial

agreement worth USD 31.22 million to fund the Rural Livelihood Resilience Program (RLRP).

The deal aims to support Somalia's efforts to address the effects of decades of conflict, environmental degradation, and

underfunded infrastructure and agricultural productivity, according to Somalia's official news agency.

It will also improve the lives of rural smallholders by raising their productivity, incomes, and nutrition security in a sustainable way, it added.

Commenting on the agreement, IFAD President Alvaro Lario said rural development in Somalia faces numerous challenges, stemming from decades of conflict, environmental degradation, and limited infrastructure, in addition to cycles of drought and flooding. (KUNA)



Dozen civilians killed in Congo: Congo's army says extremist-linked rebels have killed at least a dozen people in a raid on a rural community in the volatile east, in the latest violence near the border with Uganda.

Allied Democratic Forces rebels with ties to the Islamic State group have long operated in the border area. The United Nations said last week that almost 200 people have been killed there this year.

Capt. Anthony Mulushayi, spokesperson for the Congolese army in North Kivu province, on Tuesday said the attackers earlier that day set a local hospital on fire and took a number of civilians into the bush. He said the army responded, killing four of the attackers and rescuing four people. (AP)



Taiwan Premier Chen Chien-jen visits residents taking refuge in a shelter a day after a powerful earthquake struck, in Hualien City, eastern Taiwan on April 4. Rescuers searched Thursday for dozens of people still missing a day after Taiwan's strongest earthquake in a quarter century damaged buildings, killed nine people, and left others stranded in remote areas or sleeping in tents. (AP)



Kiir



Nqakula

Africa

Kiir warns lawmakers: South Sudan's President **Salva Kiir** on Wednesday warned lawmakers "not to cling to power" just weeks after his former rival turned deputy proposed a postponement of elections expected to be held in December.

Kiir said an extension of the period of transition to elections would deny citizens an opportunity to choose their leaders and urged parliament to pass the necessary laws to pave the way for the elections.

The president was addressing lawmakers as parliament returned from recess Wednesday. South Sudan was supposed to hold elections before February 2023 but that timetable was pushed back last August to December 2024.

Parliament Speaker Jemba Nunu Kumba said lawmakers would redouble their efforts to ensure that all the prerequisites for elections are met. (AP)



S.Africa speaker resigns: South Africa's parliament speaker resigned on Wednesday and relinquished her seat in the legislature over allegations of corruption, a day after she lost a bid in court that would block her arrest.

Prosecutors last week said they intend to charge Speaker **Nosiviwe Masisi-Nqakula** with corruption, accusing her of receiving about \$135,000 in bribes from a defense contractor during her three years as defense minister.

She allegedly received the payments between December 2016 and July 2019, while another bribe, amounting to \$105,000, was not paid.

Masisi-Nqakula announced in a statement that she has tendered her resignation but insisted she was innocent of the accusations against her. (AP)



Police stand at the entrance of the National Institute against Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Racism, to prevent laid off workers from entering their workplace, in Buenos Aires, Argentina, on April 3. According to the State Workers Association, more than eleven thousand dismissals of state employees have been carried out by Javier Milei's government. (AP)



Ivan Ostojic

new research reveals conversational channels rapidly spreading across Mideast

According to recent research by Infobip, a leading cloud communications platform, conversational customer experiences and generative AI have significantly impacted interactions between people and brands in the MENA region. Infobip analyzed over 473 billion digital communications interactions in 2023 between businesses and consumers and identified notable trends in business messaging.

As consumers in the MENA region look for deeper engagement with the brands they use, conversational messaging

channels have become the focal point of communication growth. In 2023, Infobip observed an increase of 184% in voice and video applications, 146% in mobile app messages, and a 51% increase in the use of WhatsApp YoY in the Middle East region. This paradigm shift underscores the region's proactive approach to embracing innovative communication technologies, facilitating seamless connectivity and engagement.

The research also shows that the telecommunication sector saw the highest growth in the adoption of conversational

channels (89%), followed by the media and entertainment sector (53%), and the finance sector (52%).

Ivan Ostojic, Chief Business Officer at Infobip, said: "Our data shows how conversational experiences are rapidly spreading across the Middle East and the world as businesses roll out marketing, sales, and support use cases. Where 2022 revealed a spike in omni channel adoption when brands recognized the importance of connecting with their customers on their preferred channel, 2023 shows how brands are perfecting the

end-to-end customer journey.

Customers can now seamlessly progress through a journey within a single conversational thread on a chat app. With the emergence of interactive AI, we expect brands to incorporate a federation of different chatbots and AI algorithms working together to trigger actions at the ideal points during the customer journey. In the next year, we foresee the widespread adoption in customer service, marketing and sale automation, and for operational use cases like scheduling deliveries and managing payments."

Market Movements

04-04-2024

	Change	Closing pts
SAUDI	- Tadawul	+83.20 12,705.42
UAE	- DFM	+6.62 4,246.67
JAPAN	- Nikkei	+321.29 39,773.14
PAKISTAN	- KSE 100	+496.72 68,369.94

	Change	Closing pts
PHILIPPINES	- PSEI	-36.76 6,827.06

Business

Boursa grapples with surge in inactive trading accounts

Stagnation in Kuwait stock market due to lack of IPOs

KUWAIT CITY, April 4: The Boursa Kuwait has witnessed a surge in trading accounts, yet the majority of these accounts remain inactive, highlighting a concerning phenomenon, reports Al-Jarida daily.

At the end of the first quarter of this year, out of the 424,530 thousand registered accounts, only 17,717 thousand were active, leaving a staggering 95.7 percent of accounts inactive. This alarming trend warrants thorough analysis to uncover the underlying causes and propose effective solutions to revitalize the market.

One of the primary reasons for this stagnation is the absence of initial public offerings (IPOs), leading to a lack of fresh listings and diminishing investor interest. The reluctance to list persists, regardless of whether the stock exchange is government-owned or privatized. Moreover, the decline in market confidence, particularly in certain companies experiencing significant losses, has further dampened investor enthusiasm.

To address this challenge, there is a pressing need for a sovereign fund to act as a market maker, injecting liquidity and restoring investor confidence.

The government's participation, alongside private sector involvement,

can help bolster market depth and facilitate the success of new investment instruments. Leveraging the strength of the banking sector, which continues to demonstrate resilience and stability, is crucial in instilling confidence among investors.

While the legislative and regulatory framework provided by the Markets Authority is robust, there remains a lack of proactive engagement from key stakeholders. Investment companies, once pivotal players in creating investment opportunities, have seen a decline in their role and are struggling to compete in offering innovative products.

Moving forward, collaboration between the Investment Authority and government agencies must be strengthened to harness available market resources effectively. With abundant liquidity in both the banking and private sectors, there is immense potential to capitalize on operational opportunities and drive market growth.

The current year presents a pivotal moment for revitalizing the Kuwait Stock Exchange and sustaining the positive momentum observed in early 2024. By addressing the underlying challenges and fostering a conducive investment environment, Kuwait can unlock its market's full potential and attract renewed investor interest.

Concerns arise over land allocation

New committee raises questions on past 'SME funding' in Kuwait

KUWAIT CITY, April 4: The recent decision to establish a joint committee between the National Fund for Small and Medium Enterprises Development and Care and the Public Authority for Industry has sparked questions regarding the status of previous applications submitted to the Fund in recent years. This move, representing the second committee of its kind, has drawn attention to past initiatives and allocations, reports Al-Jarida daily.

Sources familiar with the matter revealed that similar committees were formed in 2018 and 2021, aimed at distribution and land allocation respectively.

Despite these efforts, concerns have arisen about the eligibility criteria and role of potential beneficiaries, particularly amid delays in distributions and a funding hiatus of four years.

Several entrepreneurs in the small and medium enterprise sector have faced challenges in accessing indus-

trial lands, with reports of violations including the allocation of lands without proper authorization from the National Fund. It has been noted that the Fund has not received industrial or agricultural lands for allocation to entrepreneurs over the past 11 years.

According to Article 10 of the National Fund Establishment Law, a percentage of industrial lands offered by the state should be allocated to the Fund for small and medium enterprise development. The anticipated projects in Al-Shaddadiya Industrial City are seen as crucial for addressing these challenges, with plans to settle at least 250 projects on a quarter-million square meter area.

In addition to the joint committee, efforts to address obstacles facing small and medium enterprises have been ongoing, including the formation of a ministerial committee in 2021 to tackle these issues and allocate suitable lands for their operations.

Oil price rises to \$90.00 per barrel

Kuwait praises OPEC+ decisions for market stability

KUWAIT CITY, April 4, (KUNA): Kuwait Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Oil Dr. Imad Al-Atiqi said Wednesday OPEC+ decisions were "initiative taking and precautionary" to protect oil markets' balance, and Kuwait's voluntary output cuts contributed to markets' stability.

"OPEC+ decisions are initiative taking and precautionary to protect the oil markets' balance," Al-Atiqi said during a video conference meeting of the Joint Ministerial Production Monitoring Committee (JMMC).

Al-Atiqi, quoted by an Oil Min-

istry statement, praised compliance of member countries with their quotas within OPEC+, and need to adhere to OPEC+ decisions to achieve the balance of the oil market.

Al-Atiqi, also Chairman of Board of Directors of Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC), expressed optimism about all decisions that would contribute to strengthening OPEC+ leading role in achieving the desired goals and aspirations of member countries.

He noted that OPEC+ was closely following and monitoring developments in oil markets, and would take

appropriate measures to ensure the balance of the markets.

The State of Kuwait's decision to extend its voluntary reduction of 135,000 barrels per day until the end of the second quarter of this year contributed to support and stabilization of oil markets in coordination and cooperation with countries participating in the coalition, he said.

Following the production reduction, Kuwait's production stabilized at 2.413 million bpd until the end of June 2024.

Al-Atiqi was joined in the JMMC meeting by Kuwait's Governor to

OPEC Mohammad Al-Shatti and National Representative to OPEC, Sheikh Abdullah Sabah Al-Sabah.

Also:

KUWAIT CITY: The price of Kuwaiti oil went up by 45 cents to USD 90.00 per barrel on Wednesday compared to USD 89.55 pb the day before, said the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) on Thursday.

The prices of the Brent crude and the West Texas Intermediate at the global markets both increased by 43 and 28 cents respectively, reaching USD 89.35 pb and USD 85.43 pb each.

KPC plans subsidiary consolidation

KIPIC leadership adjustments signal industry mergers

KUWAIT CITY, April 4: Recent leadership adjustments at Kuwait Integrated Petroleum Industries Company (KIPIC) are poised to catalyze planned mergers within the country's oil and gas industry, eliciting positive sentiments among contractors, reports Al-Qabas daily.

According to MEED magazine, the appointment of Wadha Al-Khatib, CEO of Kuwait National Petroleum Company, as acting CEO of KIPIC, underscores Kuwait's commitment to implementing long-awaited mergers in the sector.

These initiatives are anticipated to streamline operations, reduce

costs, and expedite decision-making processes in the oil, gas, and petrochemical sector.

MEED magazine reported that the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation aims to consolidate its eight subsidiaries into four, following a study conducted by New York-based consulting firm Strategy& in 2020. This restructuring is anticipated to yield substantial long-term benefits for KPC.

The recent influx of executives from Kuwait National Petroleum Company into leadership roles at "Quebec" suggests that the merger with Kuwait National Petroleum Company may be the first to be re-

alized, leading to the integration of KIPIC's operations into the latter.

MEED noted that these developments reflect the current Kuwaiti government's efforts to enhance stability and drive forward crucial reforms that have previously faced obstacles. The advancements in the oil and gas sector projects signify a departure from years of political instability that had stymied progress.

Despite the burgeoning optimism, MEED cautioned that Kuwait's political landscape remains delicate, highlighting the potential for setbacks if internal political tensions resurface. However, continued col-

laboration and avoidance of internal crises could foster a positive impact on trade and economic matters.

MEED observed a contraction in Kuwait's oil and gas project market value due to project approvals stagnating amid political turmoil. From early 2020 to May 2023, the total value of active projects plummeted by 65% from \$67.1 billion to \$23.5 billion.

It is hoped that the planned merger between KIPIC and Kuwait National Petroleum Company will signal a departure from recent challenges, reflecting positively on Sheikh Nawaf Al-Sabah, CEO of Kuwait Petroleum Corporation.

\$994 bln financing gap identified

MENA infrastructure deficit reaches staggering levels

KUWAIT CITY, April 4: The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region confronts a staggering infrastructure deficit, with annual estimates ranging from \$75 billion to \$100 billion, projecting a cumulative investment need of \$2 to \$2.5 trillion by 2050, reports Al-Qabas daily.

Despite these substantial requirements, regional spending has remained below targets, with the World Bank indicating a need for at least 8.2% of GDP allocation towards infrastructure, yet averaging only 3% over the past decade.

Compounded by fiscal constraints exacerbated by the pandemic and global economic shocks, the MENA region faces significant challenges in addressing critical infrastructure

gaps. The ICD-Refinitiv OIC Infrastructure Outlook highlighted a substantial financing gap of \$994 billion in 2023, spanning various sectors such as roads, water, communications, railways, ports, electricity networks, and airports.

The repercussions of this deficit are tangible, with underinvestment in road infrastructure alone estimated to cost the region 5.5% of GDP annually due to inefficiencies and accidents. Similarly, frequent power outages in the manufacturing sector result in significant business losses, with the MENA region experiencing the highest average monthly outage hours compared to other regions.

Addressing these infrastructure deficiencies is paramount for eco-

nomie growth and sustainability, especially considering the potential to generate approximately 2.5 million jobs annually by meeting investment needs. Moreover, the MENA region faces imminent water scarcity challenges, with the annual shortage projected to increase drastically by 2050, necessitating urgent action.

A comprehensive approach is required to stimulate private sector involvement in infrastructure investments, including clear policy guidance, regulatory frameworks, and technological adaptation. Initiatives like the Middle East Green Initiative and the Circular Carbon Economy Framework demonstrate the region's commitment to sustainable infra-

structure development and achieving net-zero emissions goals by 2050.

Access to financing remains a critical factor, with opportunities emerging in green finance, including green bonds and Sharia-compliant sukus. Governments are exploring avenues such as public-private partnerships (PPPs) and mobilizing climate finance to attract private capital and accelerate infrastructure development.

Ultimately, enhancing infrastructure investment attractiveness and leveraging sustainable financing mechanisms are essential steps towards addressing infrastructure gaps, fostering economic growth, and advancing sustainability in the MENA region.

Layoffs remain low

US applications for jobless benefits rise to highest level in two months

WASHINGTON, April 4, (AP): The number of Americans applying for jobless benefits rose to their highest level in two months last week, but layoffs remain at historically low levels as the labor market continues to chug along despite elevated interest rates.

The Labor Department reported Thursday that filings for unemployment claims for the week ending March 30 climbed by 9,000 to 221,000 from the previous week's 212,000.

The four-week average of claims, which evens out some of the weekly volatility, rose modestly to 214,250, an increase of 2,750 from the previous week.

In total, 1.79 million Americans were collecting jobless benefits during the week that ended March 23, a decline of 19,000 from the previous week.

Weekly unemployment claims are considered a proxy for the number of U.S. layoffs in a given week and a

sign of where the job market is headed. They have remained at historically low levels since the pandemic surge of millions of jobs in the spring of 2020.

The Federal Reserve raised its benchmark borrowing rate 11 times beginning in March of 2022 in an effort to bring down the four-decade high inflation that took hold after the economy roared back from the COVID-19 recession of 2020. Part of the Fed's goal was to loosen the labor market and cool wage growth, which it believes contributed to persistently high inflation.

Many economists thought the rapid rate hikes could potentially tip the country into recession, but jobs have remained plentiful and the economy has held up better than expected thanks to strong consumer spending.

In February, U.S. employers added a surprising 275,000 jobs, again showcasing the U.S. economy's resilience in the face of high interest rates.

UK airports granted extension for new scanners

LONDON, April 4, (AP): Drink it or bin it: That phrase should have become history this summer at all U.K. airports.

But it's set to persist for at least another year after the British government said it will grant extensions to several large U.K. airports unable to meet the June 1 deadline to fully install new scanning technology. The

airports include London's two biggest, Heathrow and Gatwick.

The new scanners use computed tomography, commonly known as a CT scan, to produce clearer images. They are being rolled out globally, including in the U.S. and across Europe, and will allow passengers to go through security with two liters (70 ounces) of liquid in their hand luggage - rather than the current paltry 100 milliliters (3.5 ounces).

They will also mean laptops and tablets won't need to be removed from bags - saving even more time.

The restrictions were introduced around the world in 2006 following a foiled terror plot to blow up planes flying from London to the U.S. with homemade liquid bombs. They were

not expected to be in place for 18 years and have been cited as one of, if not the, biggest cause of delays at airport security checks.

A deadline for the new technology to be in place at U.K. airports had originally been set for Dec. 2022 but that was delayed to this summer as a result of the huge disruption caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

US to add tax subsidies on Chinese products

The US is planning to add tax subsidies on Chinese products to protect its industries affected by the overflow of Chinese products. In a statement to reporters late Wednesday, US Secretary of the Treasury Janet Yellen, who is set to start a second-of-its-kind visit to China, said the US is seriously considering the flexibility of supply-chains, while it seeks to reduce the high dependency on Chinese clean energy supplies. China is providing cheaper products in the international markets, which reduces demand on similar products from other

rival-countries, especially the USA, she explained. The US is concerned that the impact of cheaper Chinese products could spread to other countries like Japan, Mexico and Europe, Yellen. Yellen is set to visit China from April 4-9 to meet with senior Chinese officials and senior CEOs of American companies. The two sides will discuss global economy issues, efforts to limit drugs smuggling and boosting cooperation to fight climate change. (KUNA)

British billionaire Lewis may dodge prison time

British billionaire Joe Lewis, whose family trust owns the Tottenham Hotspur soccer club, was set to be sentenced Thursday after pleading guilty to insider trading and conspiracy charges in New York. Federal prosecutors in Manhattan had plenty of stern words to say about the 87-year-old's crimes in court papers, but they also agree that his age, medical issues and willingness to come to the U.S. to face criminal charges have earned him

leniency that might result in no prison time. U.S. sentencing guidelines call for Lewis, a citizen of the United Kingdom and resident of the Bahamas, to serve 18 months to two years behind bars. At his January plea, Lewis admitted that he agreed in 2019 to share secrets about publicly traded companies with several individuals. He told Judge Jessica G.L. Clarke that he was "so embarrassed" for his con-

duct. Prosecutors said afterward that his company, Broad Bay Limited, and Lewis would pay \$50 million in financial penalties, the largest financial penalty for insider trading in a decade. Prosecutors wrote in their presentence submission that Lewis deserved leniency because he is elderly and "battles significant health issues" that would cause a term of imprisonment to be more difficult for him than others. (AP)

Feud over Moscow's diamonds put aside

Russia and West join forces to tackle trade in 'blood diamonds'

UNITED NATIONS, April 4, (AP) - The United States and its Western allies are feuding with Russia over its diamond production, but they joined forces Wednesday to keep supporting the Kimberley Process, which aims to eliminate the trade in "blood diamonds" that helped fuel devastating conflicts in Africa.

At a U.N. General Assembly meeting, its 193 member nations adopted a resolution by consensus recognizing that the Kimberley Process, which certifies rough diamond exports, "contributes to the prevention of conflicts fueled by diamonds" and helps the Security Council implement sanctions on the trade in conflict diamonds.

The Kimberley Process went into effect in 2003 in the aftermath of bloody civil wars in Angola, Sierra Leone and Liberia where diamonds were used by armed groups to fund the conflicts.

Zimbabwe's U.N. Ambassador Albert Chimbindi, whose country chaired the Kimberley Process in 2023, said in introducing the resolution that it would renew the General Assembly's "commitment to ensuring that diamonds remain a force for inclusive sustainable development instead of a driver of armed conflict."

It was true in 2003 and "remains true now," he said, that profits from the diamond trade can fuel conflicts, finance rebel movements aimed at undermining or overthrowing governments, and lead to the proliferation of illegal weapons.

The European Union's Clayton Curran told the assembly after the vote that the Kimberley Process "is facing unprecedented challenges" and condemned "the aggression of one Kimberley Process participant against another" - Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

For the first time in its history, last November's plenary meeting of Kimberley Process participants failed to produce a consensus communique because of serious differences between Russia and the West.

The key reason was a Ukrainian request, supported by the United States, Britain and others, to examine whether Russia's diamond production is funding its war against

Kyiv and the implications for the Kimberley Process which Russia and several allies strongly opposed.

Russia refused to support a communique that acknowledged Ukraine's request. And before Wednesday's vote, the deputy director of the Russian Foreign Ministry's economic department, Alexander Repkin, accused Western countries of sabotaging international cooperation on diamonds for "their own geopolitical interests."

Alluding to sanctions on Russian diamonds by the European Union, Repkin accused the West and its companies of trying to gain a hold over the global production and processing of diamonds.

He said "the further functioning of the Kimberley Process is at stake," but Russia will do everything it can to support its work.

He noted that the plenary communique has served as the foundation for the General Assembly resolution on the role of conflict diamonds in fueling conflict but without one the resolution approved Wednesday "is largely technical in nature."

The EU's Curran urged reform of the process "to broaden the definition of 'conflict diamonds' to capture the evolving nature of conflicts and the realities on the ground." He said the EU will also try again this year to discuss the issue of the negative impact of the illegal trade in diamonds on the environment.

Britain expressed regret at the failure to discuss the link between Russia's rough diamond revenue and their invasion of Ukraine, and reiterated the need for a discussion to ensure that the Kimberley Process deals with issues related to delinking diamonds from conflict.

United Arab Emirates deputy ambassador Mohamed Abushahab said it's more important than ever to strengthen the Kimberley Process, which his country is chairing this year.

The UAE has identified three ways: to establish a permanent secretariat which was approved at the end of March in Botswana's capital Gaborone, to complete a review and reform of the process by the end of the year, and to identify digital technologies that can strengthen the Kimberley Process, he said.

Powell says Fed still sees cuts in the rates this year

Election timing won't affect decision

WASHINGTON, April 4, (AP) - Federal Reserve officials will likely reduce their benchmark interest rate later this year, Chair Jerome Powell said Wednesday, despite recent reports showing that the U.S. economy is still strong and that U.S. inflation picked up in January and February.

"The recent data do not ... materially change the overall picture," Powell said in a speech at Stanford University, "which continues to be one of solid growth, a strong but rebalancing labor market, and inflation moving down toward 2% on a sometimes bumpy path."

Most Fed officials "see it as likely to be appropriate" to start cutting their key rate "at some point this year," he added.

In his speech, Powell also sought to dispel any notion that the Fed's interest-rate decisions might be affected by this year's presidential election campaign. The Fed will meet and decide whether to cut rates during the peak of the campaign, in July and September.

Fed officials will face a delicate decision during those months and during their upcoming meetings in May and June. The policymakers must take care not to cut rates too soon or inflation could stay high - or even re-accelerate. Annual inflation ticked up in February to 2.5%, according to the central bank's preferred measure, though that was down sharply from its peak of 7.1%.

Yet if Fed officials wait too long to reduce rates, the current high borrowing costs for mortgages, car loans and business loans could seriously weaken the economy - even tip it into a recession. Though inflation has cooled significantly from its peak, it remains above the Fed's 2% target. And average prices are still well above their pre-pandemic levels - a source of discontent for many Americans and potentially a threat to President Joe Biden's reelection bid.

The recent pickup in inflation, though slight, has led some economists to postpone their projections for when the Fed will begin cutting rates. Rate cuts would begin to reverse the 11 increases the Fed carried out beginning in March 2022 to fight the worst inflation bout in four decades. A lower Fed rate would likely lead, over time, to reduced borrowing rates for households and businesses.

Some economists now predict that the central bank's first rate cut won't come until July or even later. That expectation has fueled speculation on Wall Street that the Fed might end up deciding to delay rate cuts until after the presidential election. The Fed's November meeting will take place Nov. 6-7, immediately after Election Day.

Former President Donald Trump has called Powell "political" for considering rate cuts that Trump has said could benefit Biden and other Democrats. Powell was first nominated to be Fed chair by Trump, who has said that, if he is elected president, he



Federal Reserve Board Chair Jerome Powell speaks at the Business, Government and Society Forum at Stanford University in Stanford, Calif., Wednesday, April 3, 2024. (AP)

S.Korean chipmaker plans \$3.87b Indiana semiconductor plant and research center

WEST LAFAYETTE, Ind., April 4, (AP) - A major South Korean computer chipmaker said Wednesday it plans to spend more than \$3.87 billion in Indiana to build a semiconductor packaging plant and research and development center.

SK Hynix expects the campus to create as many as 800 high-wage jobs in engineering, technical support, administration and maintenance by the end of 2030.

The investment will move Indiana to the forefront of artificial intelligence in America, said Purdue University President Mung Chiang said. The new plant will be built at the Purdue Research

Park, an economic development incubator at the university.

The company said the plant will produce high-bandwidth memory chips that will help meet U.S. demand for semiconductors, develop future generations of chips and house an advanced packaging research and development line at the 430,000-square-foot plant (nearly 40,000-square-meter) around 100 miles (160 kilometers) southeast of Chicago.

"We believe this project will lay the foundation for a new Silicon Heartland, a semiconductor ecosystem centered in the Midwest," company CEO Kwak Noh-Jung said in a news release.

Gov. Eric Holcomb said the project "not only reaffirms the state's role in the hard tech sector, but is also another tremendous step forward in advancing U.S. innovation and national security."

The Indiana Economic Development Corp. offered the company of up to \$3 million in incentive-based training grants, up to \$3 million in manufacturing readiness grants, up to \$80 million in performance payments, up to \$554.7 million in tax rebates and other incentives. The cities of West Lafayette and Lafayette, Tippecanoe County and Duke Energy offered additional Incentives.

will replace Powell when the chair's term ends in 2026.

In his speech Wednesday, Powell noted that Congress intended the Fed to be fully independent of politics, with officials serving long terms that don't coincide with elections.

"This independence," Powell said, "both enables and requires us to make our monetary policy decisions without consideration of short-term political matters."

In the past, presidents such as Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon sometimes bluntly pressured Fed leaders to cut rates before elections to try to boost the economy. In contrast, recent presidents have avoided publicly pressuring the Fed, with the striking exception of Trump, who denounced Powell for raising the Fed's benchmark rate in 2018 during the Trump presidency.

"If you look at the modern historical record, you'll see that the Fed has been prepared to move or not move, and do what it thinks is the right thing for the economy ... without regard to outside considerations," Powell said, "and it's important to just have people know

that." When they met two weeks ago, Fed officials forecast that they could cut their benchmark rate three times this year. Still, nearly half the 19 policymakers penciled in just two or fewer rate cuts.

Strong economic growth could diminish the likelihood of a Fed rate cut later this year for two reasons. One is that steady hiring and brisk consumer spending can lead companies to raise prices and thereby worsen inflation.

The other reason is that a healthy economy reduces the need for the Fed to cut rates, which tends to stimulate growth. Typically, the central bank reduces its key rate when growth stumbles and companies start cutting jobs. Powell and other officials have underscored that as long as the economy remains healthy, they can take time to assess the path of inflation and ensure that it's headed back down to their 2% target.

Last week, a government report showed that consumer spending accelerated in February, and prices rose

faster than is consistent with the Fed's inflation target for the second straight month.

"On inflation, it is too soon to say whether the recent readings represent more than just a bump," Powell said. "Given the strength of the economy and progress on inflation so far, we have time to let the incoming data guide our decisions on policy."

In remarks this week, some other Fed officials reiterated their expectations for three quarter-point rate reductions this year, while also underscoring that such cuts would depend on inflation slowing from the January and February readings.

"I think three is still reasonable, but it's a close call," Loretta Mester, president of the Federal Reserve's Cleveland branch, told reporters Tuesday.

Still, Raphael Bostic, president of the Atlanta Fed, said earlier Wednesday on CNBC that he envisions just one interest rate cut this year, likely in the final three months of the year.

Mester and Bostic are among the 12 policymakers with a vote on the central bank's interest rate decisions this year.

What that means for rates

Inflation has slid again in Europe

FRANKFURT, Germany, April 4 (AP) - The inflation that has squeezed European shoppers fell more than expected in March to 2.4%, as cost spikes in the grocery aisle eased and overall price rises headed down in the two biggest economies, Germany and France.

The annual figure for the 20 countries that use the euro currency came in below the 2.5% predicted by financial markets and brings the European Central Bank ever closer to its inflation goal of 2%.

But analysts say the decline from 2.6% in February, though welcome, would likely not be enough to move up the ECB's first interest rate cut.

The bank's rate-setting council meets next week, but the first reduction in borrowing costs is not expected until June despite an economy that's failing to grow, several analysts said.

Food inflation fell to 2.7% from 3.9%, and energy prices dropped by 1.8%, according to numbers released Wednesday by Eurostat, the European Union's statistics agency. Meanwhile, core inflation, which excludes volatile food and energy costs, eased to 2.9% from 3.1% in February.

Annual inflation fell to 2.3% in Germany from 2.7% the month before and to 2.4% in France from 3.2%. The data from Germany - Europe's largest economy - "brings some relief for the ECB," said Carsten Brzeski, global head of macro at ING bank.

But prices for services, which include everything from movie tickets to medical care, are still high, and ECB officials will want to see the latest numbers on wage increases, analysts say.

"We think the ECB will commence with rate cuts in June," said Rory Fennessy, senior economist

at Oxford Economics. "While core inflation eased, the stubbornness of services inflation and the desire for the ECB for more wage data makes an April rate cut unlikely."

The U.S. Federal Reserve also is expected to cut rates later this year. Fed officials have penciled in three rate cuts, even as the decline in inflation there has slowed.

In Europe, inflation spiked to an record high of 10.6% in October 2022 after Russia cut off most of its natural gas to the continent over the war in Ukraine, sending energy prices skyrocketing and driving a cost-of-living crisis.

Along with losing that affordable supply of gas needed to heat homes, generate electricity and power factories, the rebound from the pandemic also strained supply chains, helping push up inflation.

Those price pressures have eased, but now workers are pressing for higher pay to make up for lost purchasing power. That has slowed the decline in inflation and left the ECB wary of cutting interest rates too soon.

The ECB rapidly raised its key rate from minus 0.5% to a record-high 4% between July 2022 and September 2023. Raising interest rates fights inflation by making credit to buy things more expensive, driving down spending and easing pressure on prices.

But rate hikes also can hinder economic growth, and the focus has now turned to when the ECB will declare victory over inflation and start cutting rates to support the stalled economy. The slowdown came as inflation drained consumers' pocketbooks of purchasing power and rate hikes kicked in.

The eurozone economy didn't grow in the last three months of 2023, and figures for the first three months of this year are due April 30.

EPA awards \$20b in grants for clean energy projects

DETROIT, April 4, (AP) - The Environmental Protection Agency on Thursday awarded \$20 billion in federal "green bank" grants to eight community development banks and nonprofit organizations to use on projects combating climate change in disadvantaged communities and helping Americans save money and reduce their carbon footprints.

The money could fund tens of thousands of eligible projects ranging from residential heat pumps and other energy-efficient home improvements to larger-scale projects such as electric vehicle charging stations and community cooling centers, according to senior administration officials.

Vice President Kamala Harris, EPA Administrator Michael Regan and other officials planned to announce the grant selections during a visit to Charlotte, North Carolina on Thursday.

Recipients were awarded competitive grants from two of the three programs overseen by the "green bank" created in the Biden administration's landmark climate law, the Inflation Reduction Act, passed in 2022.

Formally known as the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund, the \$27 billion bank is one of many federal efforts to invest in solutions that cut planet-warming greenhouse gas emissions and address human-caused climate change, a topic President Joe Biden has emphasized in his presidency and reelection campaign.

The bank's goals are to reduce climate and air pollution and mobilize public and private capital in the communities that need it most.

As part of Thursday's news, the \$14 billion National Clean Investment Fund program granted money to three nonprofits that will partner with states

and the private sector to provide affordable financing for projects across the country.

The \$6 billion Clean Communities Investment Accelerator also granted money to five institutions that will work with other groups to establish hubs that make funding and technical assistance accessible to community lenders.

Recipients committed to spending \$7 in private sector funding for each \$1 from the federal investment money, to "reduce or avoid" 40 million metric tons of carbon dioxide each year and earmark 70% of the money for disadvantaged and low-income communities. These groups are often passed over by commercial banks and investors yet are disproportionately impacted by climate change.

Among the eight funding recipients are:

-Coalition for Green Capital, a nonprofit working with a nationwide network of state, local, and nonprofit green banks, received \$5 billion.

-Power Forward Communities, a nonprofit coalition formed by five housing, climate, and community investment groups, received \$2 billion.

-Appalachian Community Capital, a nonprofit community development financial institution working with lenders in Appalachia, received \$500 million.

Also part of the bank is the \$7 billion Solar for All program, which will award states, tribes and municipalities money for a variety of residential and community solar projects at a later date.

Specifics around the bank were outlined last February, with applications for the programs sought in July and due last fall.



Group photo during CASL's annual general meeting with the successful launch of its inaugural magazine, 'The Hub', held at the Crowne Plaza Hotel.

Uniting knowledge and innovation: 'The Hub' emerges as industry beacon

CASL Kuwait Chapter launches business and lifestyle magazine

KUWAIT CITY, April 4: The Kuwait Chapter of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Sri Lanka (CASL Kuwait Chapter), in collaboration with Media Services (Pvt) Ltd, has made a marked innovation with the successful launch of its inaugural magazine, 'The Hub', during its Annual General Meeting held at the Crowne Plaza Hotel.

This is the first-ever magazine published by an overseas chapter of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Sri Lanka.

This prominent event was graced with the presence of dignitaries, including H.E. Kandeepan Balasubramaniam, the Ambassador of Sri Lanka to Kuwait who graced the

event as a guest of honor, and Mr. Heshana Kuruppu, the President of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Sri Lanka and the South Asian Federation of Accountants (SAFA), who honoured the gathering as the chief guest.

Also present were Mr. Sabah Mubarak Al-Jalawi, the Board Chairman of Kuwait Association of Accountants and Auditors (KAAA), and Mr. Rabin Gonsalves and Mr. Aditya Dhanuka, the Chairperson and Vice Chairperson of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) - Kuwait Chapter. Other dignitaries, sponsors, and members of the CASL Kuwait Chapter, including



CASL Kuwait Chapter honors industry leaders with 'The Hub' debut.

its President Mr. Dimuthu Ethugala and Executive Committee, added to the grandeur of the event.

The magazine's committee, chaired by Mr. Samantha Weerasekera, was composed of several other senior members from the CASL Kuwait Chapter. 'The Hub' impressively encapsulates a blend of business and lifestyle, also featuring contributions from business leaders and entrepreneurs.

In addition to in-depth features and articles relevant to the times, the magazine also proudly showcases the distinctive talent of CASL Kuwait Chapter members. With an array of thought-provoking pieces, 'The Hub' resonates as

an essential source of knowledge, insights, and entertainment for its readers.

This initiative reinforces the CASL Kuwait Chapter's commitment to play a defining role in the accounting and finance profession in Kuwait. The launch of 'The Hub' is a testament to the collective dedication and ingenuity of the executive committee of the CASL Kuwait chapter, magazine committee, sponsors, and allies, promising a thriving future for the industry.

For media inquiries, please email to info@caslkuwait.org. Also, follow the link for a digital copy of the magazine: <https://www.caslkuwait.org/magazines/>

Move aims to reduce injuries and accidents

NBK organizes 'Safe Ramadan' campaign in collaboration with the Kuwait Fire Force

KUWAIT CITY, April 4: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) in collaboration with Kuwait Fire Force organizes its Safe campaign during the summer season.

NBK volunteers along with the Kuwait Fire Force team visited Kuwait Towers, to provide visitors with safety kits that included a fire blanket, fire alarm, first aid and fire extinguisher to support ensuring that they adhere to regulations for safety.

"The campaign targeted limiting the fire incidents during Ramadan",



Al Baqer

environment clean and people safe this Ramadan. The visits aimed to

said Yaqoub Al Baqer, NBK Public Relations Senior Manager. "NBK Volunteers and Fire Force team visited Kuwait towers to distribute the safety kits".

"NBK aims to help keep the

urge people to enhance their security as well as environmental awareness about precautions to be used to prevent accident fires and maintain cleanliness", he added.

NBK and Kuwait Fire Force Team distributed safety kits and provided visitors with a safety kit ensuring that they adhere to regulations for safety and wellbeing.

Al Baqer praised the Fire force efforts and the influential role they play in raising to avoid accidents during camping.



NBK volunteers and Fire Force team visited Kuwait Towers to distribute the safety kits.

Future Eye Theatre celebrates World Theater Day

KUWAIT CITY, April 4: Future Eye Theatre, one of Kuwait's foremost theater organizations, commemorated World Theater Day at the Mangaf Kalasadan Auditorium on March 27, 2024.

The event was inaugurated by Mr. Peter Mullay, a theater artist and deputy vice principal of Fahheel English School.

Mr. Unni Kaimal, the General Secretary of Future Eye Theater, extended a warm welcome to the attendees while Mr. Santhosh Kutat delivered the presidential address. Patron Shri Shemej Kumar presented this year's World Theater Day message authored by Nobel laureate and Norwegian dramatist John Fosse. He further elucidated on Future Eye Theater's activities since its inception in 2009.

As part of the program, Mr. Peter Mullay, a distinguished drama teacher and theater practitioner, shared insightful experiences from his theatrical journey and extended his best wishes to Future Eye Theater for its future endeavors.

The evening also featured Mr. Bivin Thomas presented an abridged version of the renowned Malayalam



Group photo during the Future Eye Theatre's celebration of World Theater Day.

dramatist Mr. NN Pillai's play 'Kutumbayogam'. Additionally, Mrs. Drishya Prasad provided a captivating overview of how ordinary individuals can appreciate Kathakali, a unique art form from Kerala, and performed a segment of Nalacharitam. The program continued with a video montage showcasing snippets of plays performed by Future Eye

Theater since 2009.

Vatiyur Kaw Krishna Kumar, Prem Raj, Pramod Menon, Jinu-Vaikat, Chinnu Kora, Shibu Philip, Sajeesh Kumar GovindShanta, and Vasu Mampat conveyed their felicitations during the event. Mrs. Jijuna Menon served as the host, and Dr. Pramod Menon delivered the vote of thanks.

Bringing together faith and fellowship

HMWA hosts annual Iftar get together 2024

KUWAIT CITY, April 4: Hyderabad Muslim Welfare Association (HMWA) hosted a grand and traditional annual Iftar gathering, which took place on Saturday, the 23rd of March, 2024, at Masjid Al-Muzaini, Salmiya, Kuwait. The program was well-attended by more than 400 people, including ladies and children.

The program commenced at 5:15 p.m. with a recitation of the Holy Quran by Master Talha Ajaz. The General Secretary of HMWA, Mubeen Ahmed, initiated the program and served as the Master of Ceremony.

Distinguished guests from Kuwait including Haji Abdul Kareem, Mr. Esdani Basha, Dr. Nayeem FIMA (Ex-General Secretary), Mr. Ahmed Ali, Mr. Haneef CIWS, Muzeeb Rahman Hanif Sahab from IMWA, Tanveer from Old Boys Aligarh, Mr. Ajaz Baig Mujtaba Quadri, and representatives from various social organizations along with prominent personalities from India and Hyderabad shared the dais and praised the activities carried out by HMWA.

President Abdul Azeem addressed and welcomed the audience. As usual, he quoted well-known couplets from Allama Iqbal's poetry, which glorify the teachings of Islam and the Quran,



Photo from the event.

reminding attendees about the role needed by each individual in uplifting society through charity and care.

The distinguished guest speaker and well-known Radio Kuwait question and answer cleric, Sifaat Alam Madani Sahab, was the main speaker of the day and spoke on the topic of "SULEH RAHIMI" (KINDNESS TO RELATIVES). Capturing the attention of all

attendees through his dynamic addressing style, he emphasized how Ramadan is the month of patience and the Quran, which provides guidance for all humankind, showing the straight path to whoever seeks guidance and obeys Allah. Shaikh Sifat also emphasized that maintaining ties with relatives is crucial for promoting social harmony, strengthening family bonds, and fostering a sense of unity within the community.

He urged people to follow the teachings of the Quran and Sunnah in the remaining days of Ramadan, stating that only those who do so will be successful in this world and the afterlife. He emphasized that individuals who engage in good deeds for humanity and adhere to the norms of the religion will always be dominant and successful. Additionally, he noted that Ramadan is the month of Duas (supplications), and hence, people should remain steadfast in their prayers not only during Ramadan but throughout the entire year.

Mr. Mujtaba Quadri, President of TEAMS School, provided a progress report on the performance of students and activities of TEAMS school, and requested each individual to take an interest in the progress of the school and help expand its activities.

The Conversation

How going back to the SAT could set back college student diversity

By Joseph Soares
Wake Forest University

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

Earlier this year, a number of colleges announced they were going back to using the SAT and the ACT. Here, Joseph Soares, a professor of sociology, expert on higher education and proponent of test-optional admissions, answers a few questions about the rationale behind the colleges' decision to require applicants to submit scores from standardized college admissions tests.

No. As of early 2024, just four schools announced the return of mandatory testing: Brown, Dartmouth, Yale and MIT.

Meanwhile, many other schools are sticking with test-optional admissions. These schools include Boston University, Columbia University, Cornell University, the University of Michigan, the University of Missouri system, the University of Utah, Vanderbilt University and William & Mary.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2019, there were approximately 1,050 test-optional schools out of approximately 2,300 bachelor's degree-granting in-

stitutions, not counting the four-year for-profit schools.

Today, in 2024, there are over 1,900 test-optional or test-free schools. Nationally, test optional is still the norm.

The four schools that have gone back to standardized tests had initially dropped their requirement because of the pandemic. The College Board put its test administrations on pause during the pandemic because testing sites could not host them.

Now, administrators at Yale and Dartmouth say that some students from low-income families were harmed by not submitting test scores. Their argument is that by submitting test scores, it would have enabled colleges to find youths of promise from low-income families. The assumption is that students from an under-resourced high school, without an abundance of extracurricular opportunities or AP courses, will perhaps have a strong test score that will signal their potential.

I don't believe the facts support the claims being made by the four universities that decided to reinstate the SAT.

After going test optional, the Ivy League and MIT had more racial and economic diversity than ever before.

Taking 2018 as a pre-pandemic benchmark, when test requirements were more common, and 2022 as a year of test-optional admissions by these schools,

we can see the largest increase in the Ivy League's history in underrepresented Black and Hispanic students came while being test optional. In 2018, there were 72,654 undergraduates in the Ivies plus MIT; in 2022, there were 74,258 undergraduates, an aggregate increase of 1,604 students.

Black and Hispanic students accounted for 79% of the total growth. The number of Black and Hispanic undergraduates went up at those nine schools by a total of 1,261, according to my analysis of figures from the U.S. Department of Education's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System.

The number of Pell Grant students, who are widely treated as a proxy for students from low-income families, went up at six schools, remained the same at one and declined slightly at two, my unpublished analysis found. This suggests that the numbers of students from low-income families also increased overall, although not on the same scale as increases in Black and Hispanic students.

Furthermore, test-optional policies did not prevent students from submitting test scores. If a student believed their test score was a plus, they could have submitted it.

Dartmouth has issued a study that explains why it decided to resurrect a test score requirement. It reported that being test optional produced a "35% increase in applications," and that 31% of all enrolled students at Dartmouth were admitted without a test score. (AP)

Docu triggers probe into alleged abuse at NY school

LOS ANGELES, April 4, (AP) — A Netflix docuseries spotlighting abuse allegations at a long-shuttered boarding academy for teens in rural northern New York has prompted dozens of new complaints to the local prosecutor and a fresh investigation.

“The Program: Cons, Cults and Kidnapping” started streaming last month. The three-part series by filmmaker Katherine Kubler, who was sent to the Academy at Ivy Ridge for 15 months, features former students describing an oppressive institution where teens were barred from going outside, looking out the window, or smiling, and where staff violently restrained and sexually and psychologically abused students.

Former students say the documentary, which has been viewed over 11 million times, validates their experiences after years of not being believed.

“In 20 years, I never spoke. And that documentary gave me a voice,” said Steve Caccamo, who was sent to Ivy Ridge in 2003 at 16.

St. Lawrence County District Attorney Gary Pasqua said over 50 complaints have come into his office, including allegations of physical, mental and sexual abuse at Ivy Ridge. Pasqua, elected in 2017, said none had come in before the documentary began streaming.

After the documentary, officials in New York cleared a path for former students to apply for crime victim compensation and a state agency that runs a local psychiatric center put some employees on leave amid the allegations against former Ivy Ridge staffers.

Ivy Ridge was established in 2001 and closed in 2009 on the site of a former college near Ogdensburg, New York, one of multiple institu-

tions affiliated with the now-defunct World Wide Association of Specialty Programs and Schools, or WWASPS. Ivy Ridge was marketed as a boarding school for teens with behavioral issues. A state education official in 2006 called it, “principally a behavior modification center.”

In 2005, police were called to the academy when rioting students smashed windows and overturned furniture, with some fleeing the campus.

A few months later, then-Attorney General Eliot Spitzer found Ivy Ridge had grossly misrepresented its academic credentials and issued unauthorized high school diplomas. Under a settlement, 113 graduates received partial tuition refunds totaling more than \$1 million. The academy’s roughly 400-student enrollment plummeted, and it closed four years later.

Crimes

Police investigated some complaints, such as improper medical care, but they could not be corroborated when the academy was open, Pasqua said. Former students have said they couldn’t communicate freely there.

Recent allegations are mostly from former students and include parents as well, Pasqua said. He’s working with state police and the county sheriff’s office to assess the complaints for in-depth interviews.

While there is no time limit for prosecuting certain serious sex crimes, it’s likely many complaints won’t be pursued; New York requires most felony prosecutions to begin within five years and the academy has been closed for 15.

“If there is something there that we can prosecute and we’re confi-

dent that the allegations are true, and then that’s what we’re going to do,” Pasqua said.

Former students say they want similar institutions shut down and the abusive staffers barred from jobs where they watch over vulnerable people.

Kelly Heise, 37, said in a statement to Pasqua that Ivy Ridge officials cited a nonexistent court order to keep her there after she turned 18. The Connecticut resident recounted traumatic abuse, saying she was once forced outside for an hour in January in a T-shirt and a skirt, on her birthday.

She sees the documentary as a breakthrough after hitting “brick wall after brick wall” in seeking accountability.

“That shadow, that lingering monster that we’ve felt like we’ve been under for so long, is gone,” said Nicholas Chiofalo Jr., 35, who was sent Ivy Ridge when he was 16 and says he was abused physically, mentally, and sexually.

Five former Ivy Ridge workers and managers who were named in the documentary did not respond to calls or emails from The Associated Press.

WWASPS founder Robert Lichfield said in a statement that his companies provided marketing services for schools, but he neither owned nor operated Ivy Ridge.

“I didn’t hire or train the staff or employ professionals at Ivy Ridge but I find it extremely unlikely that the vast majority would be anything but caring and committed to assisting the students,” Lichfield wrote.

Film

Variety

Features

ARABIC TIMES

FRIDAY-SATURDAY, APRIL 5-6, 2024

LOS ANGELES: Jay-Z’s annual Made in America festival, held in Philadelphia over Labor Day weekend, has been canceled for the second year in a row.

The festival announced the cancellation on social media and its official website Wednesday. A specific reason was not outlined, and a representative for Made in America referred questions back to the statement.

“As purveyors of change, the Made In America executive production team is reimagining a live music experience that affirms our love and dedication to music and the work we do. We promise an exciting return to the festival,” the statement read, without providing a timeline for the festival’s return.

A lineup had not yet been announced.

“Since its inception, this groundbreaking festival has celebrated music and community - from creating a space for fans to connect, to uplifting local small businesses and shining a light on important causes. It has strived for accessibility, eliminating barriers through affordable tickets and location,” Wednesday’s statement said.

In August 2023, a month before the festival was scheduled to take place on the Benjamin Franklin Parkway with Lizzo and SZA as the headliners, Made in America announced the festival would not happen “due to severe circumstances outside of production control,” according to a statement then.

“This decision has been difficult and has not been made lightly nor without immense deliberation,” the organizers said in 2023. At the time, they said they were looking forward to returning the following year.

When the festival was abruptly canceled last year, then-Philadelphia Mayor **Jim Kenney** expressed disappointment but said the city would “look forward to bringing Made in America back and bigger than ever to the Benjamin Franklin Parkway next year.” A spokesperson for Philadelphia Mayor **Cherelle Parker** did not immediately return comment about this year’s cancellation.

The festival began in 2012 and, up until 2023, had been held every year since except for 2020 during the coronavirus pandemic. (AP)



This image released by Universal Pictures shows Dev Patel from the film ‘Monkey Man.’ (AP)

Film

Dev Patel embraces blood and fury in his latest

‘Monkey Man’ blends politics, bloodshed

By Jake Coyle

Has there been a more satisfying actor to watch mature on screen in recent years than Dev Patel? The endearingly earnest, scrawny kid of “Slumdog Millionaire” has steadily grown into a singularly intense and sensitive leading man. It’s a transformation that, for anyone who missed “Lion,”

“The Personal History of David Copperfield” or “The Green Knight,” may be especially jarring in watching Patel’s new film, “Monkey Man.”

Like “Slumdog Millionaire,” the film is set in Mumbai and has a touch of fable to it. But in tone and texture, it could hardly be more different. Bathed in blood and fury, “Monkey Man” is one gory coming-out party for Patel, who also directed and co-wrote the film. He kicks so much butt in this movie - at one point he punches a punch - that it’s enough to make you wonder if the search for the new James Bond ought to be redirected.

“Monkey Man,” produced by Jordan Peele, is aiming for something grittier, though - more in Bruce Lee territory or the neighborhood of Park Chan-wook’s “Oldboy” - wild, kinetic places to be where martial arts action turns mythic and feverish. At its best moments, “Monkey Man” does that tradition justice. But at all its moments, the movie is a convincing display of Patel’s still-expanding power and tenacity as a performer.

“Monkey Man” is most explosive in its blistering first half-hour. Patel’s character, credited only as Kid, fights while wearing a gorilla mask in an underground boxing ring. Our first image of him is of his head, in that mask, hitting the canvas hard.

These scenes, presided over by Sharlto Copley’s ring leader, have a masochist edge to them, as does Kid’s corresponding efforts to get closer to a den of power and corruption housed in the high-rise King’s Club. We don’t know initially the reasons for his obsession; he’s a mysterious, single-minded figure compelled by hellbent revenge.

We watch with curiosity as he works his way into the building as a dishwasher hired by manager Queenie (Ashwini Kalsekar) and, soon thereafter, gains a promotion to waiter to get himself up to the penthouse. His focus is on the police chief Rana (Sikandar Kher) and the build-up to their brutal first encounter is a swiftly edited, kinetic swirl. It fails, sending Kid on a clattering cascade

down the building and beyond. Out of the frying pan, into the prostitution den with the ax-wielding maniac.

But while “Monkey Man” is thrillingly enigmatic at first, it’s overly leaden with exposition once it settles in. To its credit, the movie has other things on its mind. It opens with the Hindu epic poem “Ramayana,” in which the deity Hanuman mistakes the sun for a mango and has his powers stripped.

“Monkey Man” is sketched symbolically against the story of Hanuman but set in a sordid, contemporary Mumbai (technically it’s a fictional city named Yatana). The syndicate Kid is trying to infiltrate ultimately leads to a religious leader (Makarand Deshpande). “Monkey Man,” which Netflix dropped before it was picked up by Peele and Universal, is pointedly political in its fictionalized echoes of modern, Modi-led India.

While Kid recovers with the help of the sage Alpha (Vipin Sharma) and a group of transgender women in hiding, these elements are slowly brought from a simmer to a boil. “Monkey Man” makes room for cutaways to TV news reports (some footage comes from real demonstrations) and copious flashbacks to a violent land grab from Kid’s childhood, during which his mother Neela (Adithi Kalkunte) was brutally murdered.

The real-world metaphors and Hindu contexts of “Monkey Man” add to the film’s potency but aren’t always smoothly incorporated. This is a movie that namechecks “John Wick,” too. And it’s more successful in its frenetic fight choreography leading up to a bloody third-act showdown imbued with the rage of a class uprising.

But regardless of any incongruities, “Monkey Man” makes for a forceful directorial debut from Patel. More than anything else, he brings a compelling gravity to a film that is quite serious about getting seriously brutal.

“Monkey Man,” a Universal Pictures release, is rated R by the Motion Picture Association for strong bloody violence throughout, language throughout, sexual content/nudity, and drug use. Running time: 121 minutes. Three stars out of four.

Also:

LONDON: Aaron Taylor-Johnson is the latest actor reportedly offered a license to kill and succeed **Daniel**

Craig as the new **James Bond**.

The “Kick-Ass” star is no stranger to action movies and 33 is a good age to join the franchise, as producers likely want a 10-year commitment to the role.

Since Craig announced that he was hanging up his tuxedo after five outings as 007 - the last being “No Time to Die” in 2021 - there has been frenzied speculation over which actor will take the coveted role.

Bond producers have not commented on the Taylor-Johnson rumors.

Speculating about the next Bond is a frequent subject, leading British actors to adopt various strategies and responses when the topic comes up.

One of the foremost names in the frame over the past few years has been **Idris Elba**, though producer **Barbara Broccoli** said in 2022 that the “Luther” star had ruled himself out.

“He has said he’s out,” she told The Associated Press. “We love Idris and he’s been a wonderful friend and we love him as an actor. But I think he feels like a, you know, 10- or 12-year commitment or 15-year commitment might be a bit too much for him.”

“You know, it’s a rumor that’s stuck with me,” Elba said in 2023. “I think I’m the most famous ‘Bond’ actor who never actually played the part. So, what can I say? I’ll take that.”

Elba has high-profile fans including **Matt Damon**. “I think he’s brilliant. I’ll watch him in anything and he makes everything he’s in better and he would make that franchise better.”

“Inception” and “Dunkirk” star **Tom Hardy** was touted as the next Bond back in 2015, though he claimed to have “heard nothing” about press speculation.

“I think answering something like that means immediately you’re out of the running. So there goes my spot,” he joked.

Luke Evans, who has starred in a wide variety of movies and TV series from “The Hobbit” to “Beauty and the Beast” to “Nine Perfect Strangers,” felt his dream of playing Bond has slipped away.

“By the time they cast it again, I’ll be too old,” the 44-year-old actor told The Associated Press in 2022.

Richard Madden brushed off rumors about his involvement in Bond at a press conference for “Rocket Man” in Cannes back in 2019. (AP)

NEW YORK: Tilman Michael will become chorus director of the Metropolitan Opera next season following the retirement of **Donald Palumbo** after 17 years as chorus master.

Michael, 49, was chorus master at the National Theater in Mannheim, Germany, then has held the same job at Oper Frankfurt



Jay-Z



Michael

since 2014-15. He spent 10 years assisting the chorus master at the annual Richard Wagner Festival in Bayreuth.

Michael worked with Met music director **Yannick Nézet-Séguin** in 2019 during performances of Shostakovich’s 13th symphony with the Rotterdam Philharmonic and the choir of

the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra. Nézet-Séguin and **Thomas Lausmann**, the Met’s director of music administration, approached Michael for the job last year.

Lausmann attended a performance of Verdi’s “Don Carlo” in Frankfurt and Michael traveled to the Met to listen to the chorus

in Verdi’s “La Forza del Destino” and Puccini’s “Turandot.” His hiring was announced Tuesday.

“The Metropolitan Opera House is a special house and one of the most important opera houses in the world,” Michael said. “Of course, New York is a very, very, interesting and vibrant city which offered I think many opportunities.” (AP)

People & Places

Obit

Master of satire

Legendary playwright Durang passes away

NEW YORK, April 4, (AP) — Playwright **Christopher Durang**, a master of satire and black comedy who won a Tony Award for "Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike" and was a Pulitzer Prize finalist with "Miss Witherspoon," has died. He was 75.

Durang died Tuesday at his home in Pipersville, Pennsylvania, of complications from logopenic primary progressive aphasia, said his agent, Patrick Herold. In 2022, it was revealed Durang had been diagnosed in 2016 with the disorder, a rare form of Alzheimer's disease.

"Durang was not only a giant in our field, but a guiding light whose daring works illuminated the stage with brilliance and wit. His legacy as a playwright, lyricist, and educator is immeasurable, touching the lives of countless artists and audiences alike," the Dramatists Guild said in a statement.

Durang's plays were infused with a smart, high-octane sense of absurdism. His works include "Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All for You," "Baby with the Bathwater," "The Marriage of Bette and Boo," "Betty's Summer Vacation" and "Mrs. Bob Cratchit's Wild Christmas Binge."

"I am one of those people who laughed at not funny things," Durang told the crowd at a Dramatists Guild conference in 2013. "If you watch the adults around you make the same mistake 20 times in a row, at a certain point you want to jump out the window or you laugh. I was one of the ones who laughed."

Playwrights took to social media Wednesday to mourn a colleague and mentor. Paul Rudnick called him "a spectacular playwright with a great comic voice" who "mastered a giddy despair." Stephen Adly Guirgis on X recalled being taken to see "Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All for You" in eighth grade: "It blew my mind, broke my heart & made me laugh hard. All the reasons we go to the theater."

Career

Durang had arguably his brightest career moment with "Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike," a sweet and witty play inspired by Anton Chekhov's "Uncle Vanya" and "Three Sisters" with a huge pop culture appetite that made it to Broadway starring David Hyde Pierce, Sigourney Weaver and Kristine Nielsen.

It centers on three middle-aged siblings named after Chekhov characters who are uneasily negotiating with age. Two of them - Vanya and Sonia - have been sitting around their Pennsylvania home and bickering for years ever since their parents died. The sibling who escaped, Masha, has become an insufferable movie star and has returned to sell the house, leaving her sister and brother with the prospect of being homeless and penniless.

Durang flung all kinds of references into his word processor: Angelina Jolie, Snow White, Maggie Smith, global warming, Norma Desmond, William Penn, "Peter Pan," the HBO show "Entourage," Lindsay Lohan, ancient Greek drama, voodoo, and, of course, Chekhov. "I am a wild turkey," one character says, a riff on Chekhov's "The Seagull."

"I knew I was writing a comedy, but for all, I knew it could turn out comically despairing. I was surprised the play was less bitter than I thought it would be," Durang told the San Francisco Chronicle in 2013.

The Associated Press called it "all a bit silly, a tad daffy and very, very sweet," while The New York Times said "There's something deeply comforting about Durang, of all people, delivering Chekhov's lost souls from their eternal misery, if only for one night."

In his Tony acceptance speech, Durang noted that he wrote his first play in second grade in 1958. "It's been a long road but I'm very happy to be here," he told the crowd.

His other plays included Broadway's "Beyond Therapy" - about two therapists trying to counsel two people looking for love who are as needy as the patients they are trying to help - and "The Actor's Nightmare," about a man pulled from the audience into a play he's completely unfamiliar with.

Nominated

He was nominated for a Tony for best book of a musical in 1978 for "A History of the American Film" - about Hollywood's Golden Age - and named a Pulitzer finalist in 2006 for "Miss Witherspoon" - about a woman who wishes to die but is continually reincarnated on Earth.

Eli Browning, the executive director of Aux Dog Theatre in Albuquerque, New Mexico, said in 2010 that Durang made catharsis possible through humor. "People don't like to be preached at, but if you get them to laugh at something or at themselves, then you have a chance to sneak the truth in for them to consider," he told the Albuquerque Journal.

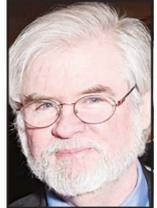
A New Jersey native, Durang was born to an alcoholic architect and a homemaker - both Catholic. He liked to talk about his first play, written when he was 8. It was a two-page version of an "I Love Lucy" episode and he got to cast and direct. Later he wrote a musical with a friend at a Catholic, all-boys prep school.

Durang attended Harvard College, studying under William Alfred, and the Yale School of Drama, where he was taught by cartoonist Jules Feiffer and met Weaver, with whom he wrote and co-starred in the satiric cabaret "Das Lusitania Songspiel" and who went on to star in many of his plays.

Durang was co-chair of The Juilliard School's playwrights program since its inception, in 1994, with Marsha Norman and has also taught at Yale and Princeton. He retired from his position at Juilliard in spring 2016. His students included playwrights Stephen Belber and David Lindsay-Abaire. The latter took over for him at Juilliard.

Durang's other Broadway credits include "All About Me" in 2010 and "Sex and Longing" in 1996. He also wrote screenplays for such films as "The Adventures of Lola" and "The Nun Who Shot Liberty Valance." He was a staff writer for "Carol and Robin and Whoopi and Carl" in 1985.

He was also an actor, with his first speaking role being a put-upon executive in Herbert Ross' "The Secret of My Success" starring Michael J. Fox. Durang was a regular on a 2001 sitcom called "Kristin," starring Kristin Chenoweth. He also acted opposite Debra Monk in 2005 in a revival of "Laughing Wild" at The Huntington Theater in Boston.



Durang



This image released by the Alley Theatre shows Christopher Salazar, (right), and Raven Justine Troup in Alley Theatre's Alley All New Festival workshop of Thornton Wilder's 'The Emporium' in Houston. (AP)



Sobhita Dhulipala, (left), and Dev Patel arrive at the Los Angeles premiere of 'Monkey Man' on Wednesday, April 3, in Los Angeles. (AP)

— Details Page 11



Mohamed VI



Smith

Variety

RABAT, Morocco: When Morocco's King **Mohamed VI** visited **Havana** in 2017, Cuban-American gallery owner **Alberto Magnan** impressed him with a "full immersion" in the Caribbean island's art and culture, drawing a line between the cultural and historical themes tackled by Cuban artists and those from across **Africa**.

Seven years after that encounter, one of the first exhibitions of Cuban art at an African museum is showing at Morocco's Mohammed VI Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art.

It's part of an effort to give visitors a view beyond the European artists who often remain part of the school curriculum in the North African nation and other former French colonies, museum director **Abdelaziz El Idrissi** said.

"The Moroccan public might know **Giacometti**, **Picasso** or impressionists," **El Idrissi** said. The museum has shown them all. "We've seen them and are looking for other things, too."

The Cuba show contains 44 pieces by **Wifredo Lam** - a major showing of the Afro-Cuban painter's work more than a year before **New York City's** Museum of Modern Art will honor him with a career retrospective show in 2025.

"We're kind of beating MoMA to the punch," Magnan said.

The Morocco show also marks the first time that the work of another luminary, **Jose Angel Toirac**, is being displayed outside Cuba. Previously, his paintings depicting the country's late anti-capitalist president **Fidel Castro** in the iconography of American advertisements and consumer culture were not allowed off the island.

Other works in "Cuban Art: On the other side of the Atlantic" - open until June 16 - show prevalent themes in Cuban art ranging from isolation and economic embargo to heritage and identity. (AP)

NEW YORK: **Robin Walter's** "Little Mercy," a debut collection of verse that celebrates the natural world, has won the 2024 Academy of American Poets' First Book Award.

Walter will receive \$5,000 and a six-week residency in **Umbria, Italy**. Her book will be published next year by Graywolf Press, an independent publisher whose authors have included **Maggie Smith**, **Elizabeth Alexander** and former US poet laureate **Tracy K. Smith**. The academy itself plans to purchase thousands of copies

Stage

Lynn resurrects 'The Emporium'

Wilder's unfinished play comes to life

NEW YORK, April 4, (AP) — For Kirk Lynn, it was like a scene from "Raiders of the Lost Ark." He was in a library at Yale, nervously opening three bankers boxes. Inside were hundreds of pages of an unknown and unfinished play by the great playwright Thornton Wilder.

"My face just emotionally melted off," Lynn says, laughing.

Lynn, a novelist, playwright and screenwriter who teaches at the University of Texas at Austin, went through the 360 handwritten pages and, with the blessing of the Wilder estate, finished the play, "The Emporium."

The nine-scene work will make its debut at Alley Theatre in Houston from May 10-June 2, capping a remarkable treasure hunt and rescue mission for a forgotten work by a literary icon.

"We're giving the world a world premiere of a great American playwright that we didn't even know we had," said Rob Melrose, Alley's artistic director and the show's director.

Lynn had dedicated a year to reading everything Wilder left behind when he died in 1975. Wilder's two previous full-length plays - "Our Town" and "The Skin of Our Teeth" - each won the Pulitzer Prize for drama. His novel "The Bridge of San Luis Rey" won the fiction Pulitzer.

Wilder's draw is as strong as ever, with a starry revival of "Our Town" scheduled for Broadway this fall with Jim Parsons, Katie Holmes, Richard Thomas and Ephraim Sykes.

In the late writer's letters, drafts and notebooks, Lynn sometimes found references to an unproduced third play, "The Emporium," inspired by Franz Kafka's "The Castle."

"Kirk just said, 'This must exist somewhere,'" said Melrose.

When Lynn typed some of the reference numbers for materials at the Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library at Yale, he didn't know what was going to be in the banker boxes. He said it took all his strength not to grab the nearest scholar by the lapels and scream with joy when he lifted off the top of one box.

The pages had been heavily worked

on by the playwright, with sections crossed out and new dialogue written in the margins. Occasionally, Wilder grew bored and scribbled word games, like how many other words he could make from "plenitude," "hospice" and "invalid."

To say "The Emporium" is unfinished is not quite right. Over-finished might be better - Wilder had multiple versions of each scene and it was up to Lynn to stitch the best version together and add some of his own lines. He likened himself to a carpenter, spackling over the seams to make it appear smooth.

"I felt like I unlocked a bonus level where not only can you read him, but you can touch the material and feel like you're working with him, which is great," he said.

The result is a funny, moving and experimental seven-actor play, with audience participation, jokes about Honey Boo Boo and Jodie Foster, a love story and surreal touches throughout, like a box of cards set on fire. "He's trying to write right at the edge of what he might be able to pull off," said Lynn.

Mythical

The play - about a mythical department store containing everything a person could possibly want - is a metaphor for a life in the arts. We know this because Wilder thought it would be clever to have a prologue saying exactly that plopped into the play after intermission. Wilder didn't write the prologue, so Lynn stepped in.

Wilder wanted "The Emporium" to show how frustrating it is to be an artist. In a regular corporate job - represented in the play by rival department stores - hiring, promotions, bonuses and titles are clear. But it's hard to know how to enter the world of the arts and you often have to fake it until you make it.

Lynn suspects Wilder didn't finish "The Emporium" in part because of heightened expectations. "I think he's pretty scared that it's not going to live up to his own standards and his own potential," he said. "He's anxious about whether it will be another great

work."

"The Emporium" has signature Wilder touches - like goodbye speeches - and autobiographical details, like a nod to the boarding houses he lived in and an orphanage that may be a reference to his own years in boarding school.

One puzzle facing Lynn was how to actually start the play. Wilder wanted it to be like a perfect circle that could be started at any scene. In some drafts, the play starts with scene seven. "It was a really fun problem," Lynn said.

Audiences these days are encouraged to watch shows quietly, but not at "The Emporium." Wilder asks them to make animal noises, hiss at characters and write things on cards. They're even told at some points to take out their phones and use the flashlight.

"His idea from the beginning was that the audience was going to be cast in a choral role for every scene," said Melrose. "So in the first scene, they're a bunch of rioting customers outside the Emporium. The second scene, they're orphans. The third scene, they're sheep."

Lynn and Melrose credit the Wilder estate - including Wilder's nephew, Tappan Wilder - with encouraging Lynn to put more of himself in the play and take risks. "To be invited into that was delicious," said Lynn.

This isn't the first time the Alley Theatre has been host to a world premiere of a lost play by a master playwright. In 1998, it produced the American premiere of Tennessee Williams' "Not About Nightingales," which went on to a Broadway run in 1999.

Melrose, formerly the artistic director and co-founder of the Cutting Ball Theater, recalls being jealous of Alley all those years ago and leapt at the chance when Lynn began discussing "The Emporium."

"I thought, 'Oh, my God, this is a way I could get to do the thing I didn't get to do with Williams.' I actually get to do it with Wilder and I get to feel like I'm carrying that torch that Alley started."

and distribute them to members.

Walter's book was chosen by fellow poet **Victoria Chang**, who in a statement Wednesday called her work "melodious

and wise."

"The beautiful and meditative poems in 'Little Mercy' are painterly, showcasing a perceptive speaker with a keen eye," Chang

wrote. "These poems quietly and gently ask us to look at all the natural beauty and cruelty (but mostly beauty) we face each day, every minute, every second of our strange time on this earth." (AP)

SAN FRANCISCO: Disney shareholders have rallied behind longtime CEO **Robert Iger**, voting Wednesday to rebuff activist investor **Nelson Peltz** and his ally, former Disney Chief Financial Officer **Jay Rasulo**, who had sought seats on the company's board.

The company had recommended a slate of directors that did not include Peltz or Rasulo. The dissident shareholders had said in a preliminary proxy filing that they wanted to complete a "successful CEO transition" at Disney and align management pay with performance. Despite their loss, they declared a victory of sorts following the vote, noting that since Peltz's company, Trian Partners, started pushing Iger in late 2023, the entertainment giant has engaged in a flurry of activity, adding new directors and announcing new operating initiatives and capital improvement plans for its theme parks.

"Over the last six months, Disney's stock is up approximately 50% and is the Dow Jones Industrial Average's best performer year-to-date," Trian said in a statement. Shares in Walt Disney Co., which is based in Burbank, California, closed Wednesday down 3.1%. (AP)



Actor Elizabeth Hurley, (from left), poses with her son, director Damian Hurley, and actor Georgia Lock during a photo call for the film 'Strictly Confidential' at The SAG-AFTRA Foundation Robin Williams Center on Wednesday, April 3, in New York. (AP)

The Conversation

The perils of multitasking while driving

Deceptive safety: Hands-free phone use still a hazard on the road

By Shannon Roberts
UMass Amherst

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



Do you ever use your cellphone while driving? Don't feel too guilty about saying yes - nearly 60% of drivers admit to using their phone in hands-free mode while driving.

But don't become complacent either. Using your cellphone in hands-free mode while driving is not a perfectly safe activity, despite the impression you might be getting from laws, marketing messages and the behavior of people around you.

Fatal crashes caused by driver distraction have not gone down significantly over time: Distraction caused 14% of fatal crashes in 2017 and 13% of fatal crashes in 2021. Given that these numbers are calculated based on police-reported crashes, many experts believe the actual number of crashes caused by driver distraction is much higher. For example, real-world crash data from teens indicates that 58% of their crashes are due to driver distraction.



Roberts

I am a human factors engineer who studies how drivers interact with technology. I see a gap between what people are told and what people should do when it comes to using your cellphone behind the wheel.

Most US states ban hand-held cellphone use while driving but allow hands-free devices. However, hands-free devices are still distracting. Talking on a hands-free phone and driving is multitasking, and humans are not good at doing two cognitively demanding tasks at the same time.

Distraction

For example, having a phone conversation in hands-free mode while driving causes you to stop looking out for hazards on the road and gets you into more close calls where you slam on the brakes than if you were not on the phone.

These detrimental effects last even after you end your call. There is a hangover effect: You can remain mentally distracted nearly 27 seconds after you finish using your cellphone. At 65 miles per hour, you've traveled nearly half a mile in 27 seconds.

Third-party apps that connect your smartphone to your car's interface, such as Apple CarPlay and Android Auto, encourage you to use your phone in hands-free mode while driving. You can control things like music, navigation, text messaging and phone calls using voice commands and the car's interface. iPhone users can connect their phones to more than 800 car models and Android phone users more than 500 models.

But is using these third-party apps while driving safe? Fifty-three percent of people say that if carmakers put the technology in vehicles, they must be safe. Though these third-party apps make cellphone use hands-free, they unintentionally cause you to look away from the road for dangerous amounts of time and they slow your reaction time.

Recent advances in technology have made driving a safer activity. Systems such as Cadillac Super Cruise and Tesla Autopilot control your steering and acceleration in limited situations, but they don't mean you can text at will. Though it's often lost in the marketing and enthusiasm for the systems, you are still required to pay attention to the road when you're using them.

Research has shown that drivers using Level 2 automation, which combines adaptive cruise control with lane centering, are more likely to take their eyes off the road. Research also shows that watching a video or doing anything distracting while using these systems is unsafe - you stop looking at the road, and when you need to respond, it takes more time.

Monitor

Some systems work to keep you focused on driving by monitoring your eye or head position to make sure you're looking straight ahead. If your eyes are off the road for more than a few seconds, the systems alert you to bring your attention back to driving. This makes it difficult to get distracted by your phone.

April is Distracted Driving Awareness Month. Distracted driving - in hands-free mode, using a third-party app or when using driving automation - still claims thousands of lives each year in the US. Despite continual advances in vehicle technology, cellphone use while driving is likely to remain a challenging problem for the foreseeable future.

To discourage distracted driving, it's important to look back to see what's worked in the past to keep roads safe. Modifying the culture around distracted driving as well as comprehensive education, training and media campaigns, similar to "Click It or Ticket" to encourage seat belt use, are good examples of what works. To that end, on April 1, 2024, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration launched the "Put the Phone Away or Pay" campaign to discourage distracted driving.

And for all of those who drive with children in the car, be sure to model safe behavior - they are watching and learning from you. (AP)

'It's not a new strain of the virus'

Bird flu outbreak in US raises concerns as virus spreads to cattle and humans

NEW YORK, April 4, (AP): A poultry facility in Michigan and egg producer in Texas both reported outbreaks of avian flu this week. The latest developments on the virus also include infected dairy cows and the first known instance of a human catching bird flu from a mammal.

Although health officials say the risk to the public remains low, there is rising concern, emerging in part from news that the largest producer of fresh eggs in the US reported an outbreak.

Here are some key things to know about the disease.

Dr. Mandy Cohen, the director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, told The Associated Press on Wednesday that the agency is taking bird flu seriously, but stressed that the virus has already been well studied.

"The fact that it is in cattle now definitely raises our concern level," Cohen said, noting that it means farmworkers who work with cattle - and not just those working with birds - may need to take precautions.

The good news is that "it's not a new strain of the virus," Cohen added. "This is known to us and we've been studying it, and frankly, we've been preparing for avian flu for 20 years."

Some flu viruses mainly affect people, but others chiefly occur in animals. Avian viruses spread naturally in wild aquatic birds like ducks and geese, and then to chickens and other domesticated poultry.

The bird flu virus drawing attention today - Type A H5N1 - was first identified in 1959. Like other viruses, it has evolved over time, spawning newer versions of itself.

Since 2020, the virus has been spreading among more animal species - including dogs, cats, skunks, bears and even seals and porpoises - in scores of countries.

Detected

In the US, this version of the bird flu has been detected in wild birds in every state, as well as commercial poultry operations and backyard flocks. Nationwide, tens of millions of chickens have died from the virus or been killed to stop outbreaks from spreading.

Last week, US officials said it had been found in livestock. As of Tuesday, it had been discovered in dairy herds in five states - Idaho, Kansas, Michigan, New Mexico and Texas - according to the US Department of Agriculture.

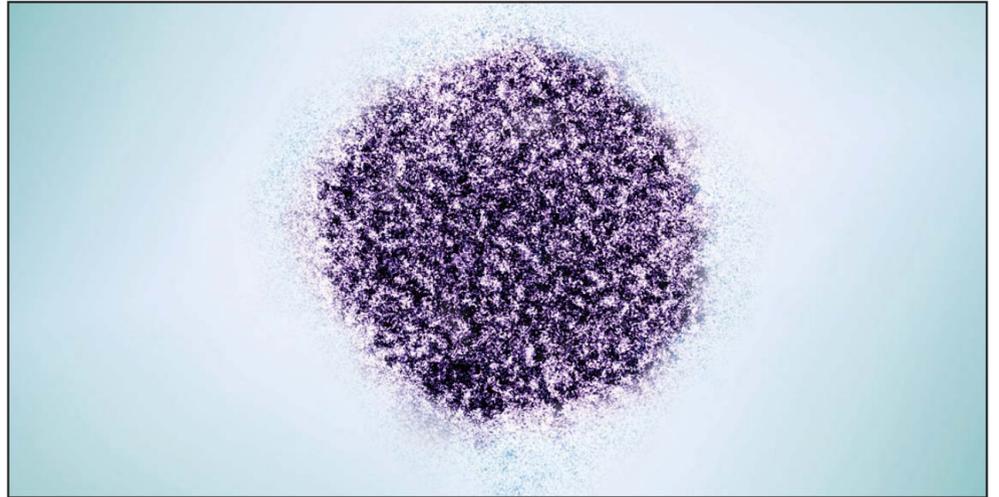
This bird flu was first identified as a threat to people during a 1997 outbreak in Hong Kong. In the past two decades, nearly 900 people have been diagnosed globally with bird flu and more than 460 people have died, according to the World Health Organization.

There have been only two cases in the US, and neither were fatal.

In 2022, a prison inmate in a work program caught it while killing infected birds at a poultry farm in Montrose County, Colorado. His only symptom was fatigue, and he recovered.

This week, Texas health officials announced that a person who had been in contact with cows had been diagnosed with bird flu. Their only reported symptom was eye redness. Symptoms are similar to that of other flus, including cough, body aches and fever. Some people don't have noticeable symptoms, but others develop severe, life-threatening pneumonia.

The vast majority of infected people have



This colorized electron microscope image provided by The Rockefeller University and NIAID shows a hepatitis C virion. New US hepatitis C infections dropped slightly in 2022, a surprising improvement after more than a decade of steady increases, federal health officials said Wednesday, April 3. (AP)

Is it an anomaly or a turning point?

Hepatitis C cases dropped in the US

NEW YORK, April 4, (AP): New US hepatitis C infections dropped slightly in 2022, a surprising improvement after more than a decade of steady increases, federal health officials said Wednesday.

Experts are not sure whether the 6% decline is a statistical blip or the start of a downward trend. Seeing 2023 and 2024 data, when it's available, will help public health officials understand what's going on, said Daniel Raymond, director of policy at the National Viral Hepatitis Roundtable, an advocacy organization.

"We've had a decade of bad news... I am cautiously encouraged," he said. "You always want to hope like something like this is real, and a potential sign that the tide has turned."

Infection rates did not occur across the board. They declined for white Americans, but continued to rise in Black, Latino and Native American communities, according to Dr. Neil Gupta, who oversees the branch of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that tracks viral hepatitis.

The hepatitis C virus is spread through contact with blood from an infected person.

The virus does most of its damage by infecting the liver, and, if left untreated, can lead to cirrhosis or liver cancer. Infections are driven mainly by people injecting illicit drugs.

Data released by the CDC for 2022 shows 4,848 new infections, down from 5,023 reported the year before. The CDC estimates about 67,000 new hepatitis C infections actually occurred in 2022, because many people who become infected don't realize it, meaning most new infections are not diagnosed and reported. But that too is down, from 70,000 estimated for 2021.

Infection

The new infection rate - used to better compare data from one year to another - dropped 6%. Though the decline is encouraging, Gupta said, the 2022 statistics are still twice as high as what the nation saw in 2015.

Cases had consistently gone up since 2013 during the longstanding opioid epidemic due to drug users shooting heroin and fentanyl. Experts say a couple of factors could have contributed to a decline in 2022,

including successful prevention efforts and needle exchanges.

The North America Syringe Exchange Network keeps a directory of US programs, and listings have grown from about 300 to nearly 500 in the last several years, said Paul LaKosky, NASEN's executive director. Many programs also have boosted hepatitis C testing and found ways to get infected people to treatment, he noted.

But LaKosky and others think something else may be at play, too: Drug users are shifting from injecting to smoking. A recent CDC report found that between early 2020 and late 2022, the percentage of overdose deaths with evidence of smoking rose 74% while the percentage of deaths with evidence of injection fell 29%.

Fewer people injecting drugs like fentanyl means fewer opportunities for the spread of hepatitis C, experts noted.

"There has been a tremendous shift in the way people are consuming their drugs. There's been a decrease in demand for syringes. We've seen this nationwide," said LaKosky, who added there is more demand for supplies to snort or smoke drugs.

gotten it directly from birds, but scientists are on guard for any sign of spread among people.

There have been a few instances when that apparently happened - most recently in 2007 in Asia. In each cluster, it spread within families from a sick person in the home.

US health officials have stressed that the current public health risk is low and that there is no sign that bird flu is spreading person to person.

While it's too early to quantify the potential economic impact of a bird flu outbreak, many of these latest developments are concerning, particularly the transmission of

the virus from one species to another, said Daren Detwiler, a food safety and policy expert at Northeastern University.

Protects (cross head)

"We don't have a magic forcefield, an invisible shield that protects land and water runoff from impacting other species," Detwiler said. "There is a concern in terms of how this might impact other markets, the egg market, the beef market."

If the outbreak is not quickly contained, consumers could ultimately see higher prices, and if it continues to spread, some industries could experience "reputational strain," possibly affecting the export indus-

try, Detwiler added.

The egg industry already is experiencing some tightening of supply following detections of bird flu late in 2023 and in early January, coupled with the busy Easter season, where Americans typically consume an average of 3 billion eggs, said Marc Dresner, a spokesperson for the American Egg Board.

Still, even with the outbreak in Texas and the nearly 2 million birds that were killed there, Dresner said there are an estimated 310 million egg laying hens in the US and wholesale egg prices are down about 25% from a February peak.

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Narine smashes 85

Kolkata falls 5 runs short of equaling IPL record in 106-run win over Delhi

VISAKHAPATNAM, India, April 4, (AP): Sunil Narine hit a career-best 85 off 39 balls and led Kolkata Knight Riders to an emphatic 106-run win over Delhi Capitals for a third straight victory in the Indian Premier League on Wednesday.

Kolkata was in sight of Hyderabad Sunrisers' IPL record of 277 runs scored - against Mumbai Indians last week - before it finished on 272-7 against the likes of fast bowlers Anrich Nortje (3-59) and Ishant Sharma (2-43).

Kolkata's multimillion dollar signing Mitchell Starc (2-25) and impact player substitute Vaibhav Arora (3-27) killed the run-chase inside the batting powerplay as Delhi got bowled out for 166 in 17.2 overs.

Kolkata's big win lifted it to the top of leaderboard in the lucrative T20 league while Delhi slipped to No. 9 with two points from one win in four games - just

above winless five-time champion Mumbai.

Delhi's ploy to go with just one spinner Axar Patel didn't work out against Narine and Angkrish Raghuvanshi as the pair raised a 104-run second wicket stand off just 48 balls.

Narine smacked seven sixes and seven fours and Raghuvanshi

CRICKET

were equally splendid in scoring 54 off just 27 balls with three sixes and five boundaries. Both fell in successive overs when Narine top-edged pull against Nortje to wicketkeeper Rishabh Pant and Raghuvanshi was caught on the edge of third man boundary while going for a ramp shot against Sharma's short ball.

Andre Russell continued the onslaught with a quickfire 41 off 19 balls and Rinku Singh smashed

Nortje for 25 in the penultimate over to remain unbeaten on a rapid 26 off just eight balls.

Hyderabad's record was well within Kolkata's reach, but Sharma conceded just eight in the final over and got Russell clean bowled off a perfect yorker.

Starc, who didn't pick up a wicket in the first two games in his first IPL season since 2015, had the wickets of his Australian teammates David Warner (18) and out-of-form Mitchell Marsh (0) in his opening spell. Arora dismissed Prithvi Shaw (10) and Abhishek Porel (0) as Delhi slipped to 33-4 in the fifth over.

Pant (55) and Tristan Stubbs (54) made rapid half-centuries with Pant smashing two sixes and four boundaries in Venkatesh Iyer's one over. However, both fell against leg-spinner Varun Chakaravarthy (3-33) while going for big shots as Delhi got bowled out with 16 balls to spare.



Kolkata Knight Riders' Varun Chakaravarthy celebrates the wicket of Delhi Capitals' Tristan Stubbs during Indian Premier League cricket match between Delhi Capitals and Kolkata Knight Riders in Visakhapatnam, India, Wednesday, April 3, 2024. (AP)

US top Switzerland in women's championship

Sweden best Denmark 3-1



Duesseldorf's Jona Niemic (left), and Leverkusen's Edmond Tapsoba challenge for the ball during the German soccer Cup match between Bayer 04 Leverkusen and Fortuna Duesseldorf in Leverkusen, Germany, April 3, 2024. (AP)

PSG beat Rennes 1-0 to reach French Cup final

Leverkusen on the verge of historic double

LEVERKUSEN, Germany, April 4, (AP): Bayer Leverkusen is on the verge of a historic league and cup double in Germany after sweeping aside local rival Fortuna Duesseldorf 4-0 in the German Cup semifinals Wednesday.

Florian Wirtz scored twice as Xabi Alonso's team, which also leads the Bundesliga by 13 points, marked its 40th game of the season unbeaten in all competitions.

Leverkusen midfielder Granit Xhaka said there was never any question of Leverkusen taking it easy against second-division Fortuna.

"Everyone thinks we're the Bundesliga leader and here comes a team from the second division, which is doing really well in the second division, and maybe we'll play at 80% or 90%," he told Sky Sport Germany. "But this team doesn't know what 90% is. This team knows 100%."

SOCCER

Leverkusen faces off in the May 25 cup final at Berlin's Olympiastadion against second-tier Kaiserslautern, which ended the surprise run of third-division Saarbrücken with a 2-0 win on Tuesday.

On a wet night, Leverkusen took the lead in the seventh minute when Jeremie Frimpong seized on a loose ball at the far post and lofted a shot over goalkeeper Florian Kastenmeier.

That forced Fortuna to open up its play in search of a goal, and Leverkusen promptly responded with a searing counterattack. Three passes took the ball from Leverkusen's touchline to the back of Fortuna's net as Amine Adli made it 2-0. Soon it was three as Kastenmeier gave the ball away to Leverkusen midfielder Robert Andrich, who set up Wirtz to score.

Wirtz scored another from the

penalty spot after a handball, before Leverkusen celebrated the return of striker Victor Boniface, back in action for the club for the first time since December after he was injured while training with Nigeria ahead of the Africa Cup of Nations.

Leverkusen had a further boost last week when Alonso said he would stay on as coach amid speculation linking him with Liverpool and Bayern Munich. Since then, Leverkusen has won both its games and seen Bayern coach Thomas Tuchel concede the Bundesliga title race.

Fortuna, which is pushing for promotion from the second division, was a heavy underdog ahead of the game, even before its star midfielder Ao Tanaka was ruled out. The Japan international had to go into urgent surgery to remove his appendix and gave his teammates a pregame thumbs-up gesture from a hospital bed.

In Paris, Kylian Mbappé saw his first-half penalty saved but then scored with a deflected shot

moments later as Paris Saint-Germain beat Rennes 1-0 to reach the French Cup final on Wednesday.

PSG goes for a record-extending 15th French Cup trophy when it faces first-division rival Lyon on May 25 in Lille.

Rennes beat PSG in the 2019 final, with Mbappé sent off in extra time for a crude challenge, and looked largely in control during the first half Wednesday at Parc des Princes.

Mbappé was having a quiet game when he appeared to let himself tumble as he earned a penalty cutting into the area from the left flank. Veteran goalkeeper Steve Mandanda guessed correctly, diving low to his right and palming away the star's spot-kick in the 37th minute.

Three minutes later, Mbappé was celebrating after finishing off a long counterattack with a deflected strike that hit a defender and wrong-footed Mandanda as it rolled into the bottom left corner.

Mandanda made a smart save from his France teammate Mbappé

early in the second half, but Rennes did not create enough in attack to threaten Gianluigi Donnarumma in the PSG goal.

Coach Luis Enrique's team remains on course for a treble.

PSG leads the French league by 12 points with only seven rounds remaining and faces Barcelona - Enrique's former club - in the quarterfinals of the Champions League. The first leg is in Paris next Wednesday.

In Florence, Italy, Rolando Mandragora scored a stunning goal to help Fiorentina beat Atalanta 1-0 in the first leg of their Italian Cup semifinal on Wednesday and leave his team on course to reach a second straight final.

The second leg will be played in Bergamo on April 24. Juventus beat Lazio 2-0 on Tuesday in the first leg of the other semifinal.

The match in Florence pitted two teams that have come close to the trophy in recent years. Fiorentina lost the final to Inter Milan last season and Atalanta was defeated in the trophy match in 2019 and 2021 - by Lazio and Juventus respectively. Fiorentina last won the Italian Cup in 2001, while Atalanta hasn't lifted it since 1963.

It was expected to be a balanced match but Fiorentina dominated from the start and took the lead in impressive fashion in the 31st minute when Mandragora unleashed a magnificent strike from 30 yards out that went into the top left corner off the inside of the post.

Atalanta had been pinned back into its own half for most of the first half and made a double change after the break.

The visitors had several decent opportunities to level matters but also had goalkeeper Marco Carnesecchi to thank for keeping them in the semifinal - notably with a spectacular, flying save to fingertip away a looping header from Nicolás González.

UTICA, N.Y., April 4, (AP): Haley Winn scored two goals, captain Hilary Knight had a goal and an assist, and the United States started its title defense with a 4-0 win over Switzerland on Wednesday night in the IIHF women's world championship.

Winn opened the scoring at 5:23 of the second period when she sent in a wrister from the point while Swiss goaltender Andrea Brändli was heavily screened. Winn added another with 5:19 remaining in the game by ripping a shot past Brändli.

ICE HOCKEY

Kendall Coyne Schofield, who sat out 2023 to give birth to her son Drew, scored her first international goal since 2022 to make it 2-0 on the 30th shot of the night for the U.S.

Knight, a nine-time world champion competing in her 14th tournament, tipped in a shot in front of the goal on a power play to put the U.S. ahead 3-0 with 9:13 remaining.

Aerin Frankel sealed it with an 11-save shutout.

Both teams play again on Friday. The U.S. will face the Czech Republic, while Switzerland has another tough test against Canada.

The defending champion Americans and Canadians are favored to play for gold on April 14 for what would be the 22nd time in 23 tournaments. The only exception came in 2019, when host team Finland upset Canada in the semifinals before losing a shootout to the Americans.

Saudi Arabia will host the women's tennis WTA Finals for the next 3 yrs

LONDON, April 4: Saudi Arabia will host the WTA Finals as part of a three-year deal announced Thursday by the women's professional tennis tour that will increase the prize money for this November's season-ending championship to a record \$15.25 million, a 70% increase from 2023.

The event for the top eight singles players and top eight doubles teams will be held in Riyadh from 2024-26, part of a recent wave of investment by the kingdom in tennis and various sports.

"We're going into this eyes wide open that the investment in sport by Saudi certainly provokes strong views from people," WTA Tour Chairman and CEO Steve Simon told The Associated Press. The reality of it is ... we are truly a global tour, a global business. We have players from over 90 nations now. We have over 90 events. ... We participate in many countries that have different cultures and values systems across the board."

As for any concerns about Saudi Arabia that current players might have, Simon said: "We don't plan to do any persuading. The players need to make their own choices, and we do believe that everyone who qualifies is going to want to play."

Locations in Europe, North America and Asia also were considered as possible new sites for the WTA Finals, which have moved around to five cities over the past five editions after a deal to put the tournament in Shenzhen, China, through 2030 was disrupted by the coronavirus pandemic and concerns over the safety of retired Grand Slam doubles champion Peng Shuai, who accused a Chinese government official of rape.

The cities that hosted in 2022 (Fort Worth, Texas) and 2023 (Cancun, Mexico) were not revealed until

Sweden 3, Denmark 1

Felizia Wikner Zienkiewicz scored the opening goal of the tournament - the first of two for Sweden in the second period - when she sent the puck over Emma-Sofie Nordstrom's glove on a breakaway.

Lina Ljungblom put Sweden ahead 2-0 with a one-timer shot - on one knee - that blasted past Nordstrom. Josefina Bouveng extended Sweden's lead with a wrap-around goal that banked off Nordstrom.

Nordstrom faced 39 shots on goal. Denmark did not have a shot on goal in the second period and finished with just five.

Denmark captain Nicoline Jensen capitalized on a misplayed puck by Emma Soderberg and sent it into an empty net midway through the third.

Denmark will try to rebound against Germany on Thursday. Sweden's next game is on Friday against China. The Swedes haven't medaled since 2007.

Czech Republic 4, Finland 0

Fast-rising Czech Republic - winners of the past two bronze medals - have now won the last three games in the rivalry with Finland.

Czech Republic also scored two goals in the second period to break a scoreless tie. Adela Sapovalivova, a 17-year-old, scored her sixth career goal in the tournament and Klara Hymrlarova knocked in her own rebound past a sprawling goalie to make it 2-0.

Finland coach Juuso Toivola pulled his goalie with nearly four minutes left in the third, and Natalie Mlynkova and Tereza Plosova each scored an empty-net goal.

Czech Republic goalie Klára Peslarová, who missed all of last season with a knee injury, stopped 21 shots for the shutout.

The Finns are back on the ice on Thursday against Canada.

TENNIS

said. "We certainly expect that you'll see more events coming there in the future. So at the end, we believe that the WTA should be a part of this development, versus being on the outside."

Saudi Arabia's Private Investment Fund (PIF) formed the LIV Golf tour and put money into soccer, for example, and the kingdom's role in tennis has been rising. The ATP Tour moved its Next Gen Finals for leading 21-and-under players to Jedda in November; the PIF is the title sponsor for the men's rankings; 22-time Grand Slam champion Rafael Nadal recently became an ambassador for the Saudi Tennis Federation; he will join 24-time major champ Novak Djokovic and rising stars Carlos Alcaraz and Jannik Sinner at an exhibition event in Riyadh in October. There have been discussions about placing a top-tier Masters 1000 tournament in Saudi Arabia, too, part of a possible larger restructuring involving the WTA, ATP and the country.



PSG's Lucas Hernandez (left), fights for the ball with Rennes' Benjamin Bourigeaud during the French Cup semifinal soccer match between Paris Saint-Germain and Rennes at the Parc des Princes stadium in Paris, France, Wednesday, April 3, 2024. (AP)

Al-Qadisiya secure resounding win over Al-Arabi



Some of the attendees pose for a group photo at the end of the annual ghabqa.

Diwan Al-Jassim hosts annual ghabqa for athletes

Engineer Adel Al-Jassim expressed his delight at the impressive turnout for the annual ghabqa for athletes held at Diwan Al-Jassim.

Reflecting on the occasion, Al-Jassim remarked, "The continuation of this tradition for thirty-two years underscores the enduring bond

between Kuwaiti society and its rich cultural heritage, which we proudly inherit from our forefathers. It's heartening to see us honor these traditions and customs."

He concluded his address by underscoring the importance of fostering brotherly relations

among all attendees. Throughout the event, discussions ranged from various sports to social issues. Attendees exchanged tokens of appreciation, and winners of competitions organized by the Diwan were duly recognized, adding to the festive spirit of the holy month of Ramadan.

India reaffirm trust in Croatian coach

Kuwait drop two places to 139th in FIFA rankings

By Khaled El Anzi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, April 4: Kuwait slipped two spots in the latest FIFA rankings released by the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA) following a series of 174 matches during the recent international break. These matches included the Asian qualifiers for the

SOCCER

2026 World Cup, the final stage of the CONCACAF Nations League, and friendly matches involving six federations.

Kuwait now stands at 139th place globally, sixth in the Gulf region, 18th in the Arab world, and 25th in Asia. The team's recent performance saw them face their Qatari



A file photo of Kuwait players reacting after their loss to Qatar.

counterpart in joint qualifiers for the 2026 World Cup and 2027 Asian Cup, resulting in a 3-0 loss in Doha and a 2-1 defeat in Kuwait.

Among Arab teams, Morocco secured the top spot, followed by Qatar, Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and the UAE.

Al-Nasr seek to build on momentum

Al-Hilal aim to extend remarkable winning streak

RIYADH, April 4: Today marks the commencement of the 27th round of the Saudi Football League (Roshan Professional League), signaling a brief hiatus afterward due to the Saudi Super Cup taking place in Abu Dhabi from April 8 to 11. The Super Cup will feature prominent clubs including Al-Ittihad, Al-Hilal, Al-Nasr, and Al-Wahda.

In today's fixtures, Al-Khaleej will face Al-Hilal, Damak will clash with Al-Nasr, Al-Ittihad will challenge Al-Taawoun, and Al-Wahda will take on Al-Ahly.

League leaders Al-Hilal aim to extend their remarkable winning streak and edge closer to securing the league title. Currently boasting a global record of 31 consecutive victories, Al-Hilal tops the standings with 74 points, maintaining a comfortable 12-point lead over rivals

Al-Nasr.

On the other hand, Al-Khaleej looks to continue its positive momentum, having remained unbeaten in their last six matches, securing three wins and three draws. Positioned ninth with 34 points, Al-Khaleej aims to solidify their spot in the safety zone.

SOCCER

Elsewhere, Al-Nasr seeks to build on their recent triumphs, particularly after their impressive 8-0 victory over Abha, as they face Damak away from home. Damak, however, has struggled in their recent outings, securing only one point in their last three matches and slipping to eighth place with 35 points.

In another encounter, Al-Ittihad

squares off against Al-Taawoun, with both teams eyeing a victory to maintain their positions in the league table. Al-Ittihad currently sits in fourth place with 46 points, while Al-Taawoun follows closely behind with the same points, aiming to continue their winning streak.

Lastly, Al-Ahly prepares for a challenging "derby" against Al-Wahda, following their victory over Al-Ittihad in the previous round. Al-Ahly holds third place with 51 points, while Al-Wahda seeks a morale-boosting win ahead of their anticipated match against Al-Ittihad in the Saudi Super Cup semi-finals.

The round's action continues tomorrow, with Al-Ettifaq hosting Riyadh and Al-Shabab facing Al-Ta'i as guests.



Players battling for the ball.

Kuwait Club face off against Kazma

By Hassan Musa

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, April 4: In a highly anticipated basketball "derby" held two days ago on Wednesday, Al-Qadisiya secured a resounding victory over Al-Arabi with a final score of 90-72. This match, part of the second round of the second division of the golden square in the league competition, showcased Al-Qadisiya's dominance on the court.

BASKETBALL

With this win, Al-Qadisiya bolstered its score to 9 points, while Al-Arabi's tally increased to 5 points. The semi-final stage will follow a two-part league system, with the first semi-final pitting the top team against the fourth, and the second pairing the second against the third, utilizing a "play-off" format consisting of three matches, where the victor of two will advance to the final.

The game began with both teams displaying a level of parity in the first quarter, with Al-Qadisiya managing to edge ahead by a single point, ending the quarter 17-16 in their favor. As the match progressed, Al-Qadisiya asserted its control, widening the gap to 13 points by the end of the second quarter, leading 49-36.

Maintaining their momentum, Al-Qadisiya continued to dominate in the third quarter, capitalizing on stellar performances from key players such as American athlete Tiran, who contrib-



Al-Qadisiya player shoots over Al-Arabi defender during their league match.

uted 31 points to the match. As the third quarter concluded, Al-Qadisiya held a commanding lead of 70-57. The team's superiority was evident throughout the game, culminating in a decisive victory of 90-72.

The second round of matches will conclude today, Friday, with Kuwait Club facing off against Kazma at 9:00 pm at the Al-Ittihad Hall in the Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Sports Complex. Kuwait Club enters the match with 8 points from 4 victories, while Kazma aims to bounce back from previous defeats, holding 5 points from 3 losses and a single victory. With experienced German coach Peter Schumers leading the charge, Al-Qadisiya appears poised to continue their winning streak, while Kazma seeks redemption and a positive outcome in today's match.

Sulaibikhat strengthen volleyball team with signing of coach Mohammed Al-Ali

By Khaled El Anzi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, April 4: The Sulaibikhat volleyball team has inked a deal with coach Mohammed Al-Ali to bolster the first team for the upcoming season.

Al-Ali's arrival at Sulaibikhat marks a significant enhancement, given his extensive background at the Al-Ma'ad Center, where he previously showcased his talent for Kuwait Club and Al-Arabi, concluding his journey with Kazma in the last season.

Nasser Mansi Al-Anazi, the Secretary General of Sulaibikhat Club,

lauded the acquisition of Al-Ali, emphasizing the club's commitment to bolstering the first volleyball team. He highlighted the collaborative efforts between the club's management and the sports authority to nurture and strengthen the team for

VOLLEYBALL

the upcoming 2024-2025 season.

Mansi expressed gratitude to the Sulaibikhat Club's Board of Directors, led by Saad Enad, for their unwavering support not only for volleyball but also for other sporting endeavors.



The signing of the contract taking place.

Salmiya unbeaten record on the line against Burgan

By Khaled El Anzi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

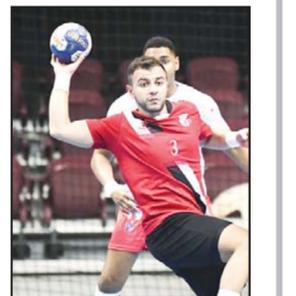
KUWAIT CITY, April 4: Today marks the conclusion of the eighth round of the Kuwait Handball League at the Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Complex Hall. Salmiya, currently ninth with five points, will face off against Yarmouk, also with five points, at 8:30 pm. Following this match at 10 pm is the highly anticipated summit clash between league leader Salmiya, boasting a perfect record with 14 points, and Burgan, positioned sixth with seven points.

Earlier Kuwait Club triumphed over Khaitan with a score of 36-30, propelling them to the runner-up spot with 12 points. Kazma secured third place, closely followed by Al-Arabi. Meanwhile, Khaitan suffered its seventh defeat, remaining in twelfth place with two points.

HANDBALL

Elsewhere, Al-Qurain reclaimed victory by defeating Al-Sahel Station 39-27, elevating its position to seventh with seven points. Al-Sahel, on the other hand, endured its seventh consecutive loss, languishing at the bottom of the table without any points.

Looking ahead to today's matches, the encounter between



A file photo of players in action.



Monterrey defender Sebastian Vegas (left), heads the ball as Inter Miami forward Luis Suarez defends during the second half of a CONCACAF Champions Cup quarterfinal soccer match in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. (AP)

Sports

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Celtics earn home-court advantage in playoffs

Timberwolves rout Raptors to move into tie for first in West

BOSTON, April 4, (AP): Kristaps Porzingis had 27 points, 12 rebounds and five blocks, helping the Boston Celtics power past the Oklahoma City Thunder 135-100 on Wednesday night to secure the best record in the NBA and home-court advantage throughout the playoffs.

Jayson Tatum finished with 24 points and Jaylen Brown added 23 points and seven rebounds for Boston, which won its 11th consecutive home game and improved to 60-16 on the season.

The Celtics trailed for only 62 seconds in the game.

Boston led by as many as 16 in the first half before Oklahoma City cut it to six points in the third quarter. Leading by 10 after three, the Celtics opened the fourth with a 12-4 run to stretch their lead to 105-87.

Josh Giddey led Oklahoma City with 17 points. Luguentz Dort added 15 points. The Thunder finished with 14 turnovers and were just 5 of 24 from beyond the arc.

BASKETBALL

OKC played without All-Star and leading scorer Shai Gilgeous-Alexander, who sat for the fourth time in five games with a bruised right quadriceps. Jalen Williams missed his second straight with a sprained left ankle.

Timberwolves 133, Raptors 85

In Minneapolis, Anthony Edwards scored 28 points, Naz Reed added 23 and the Minnesota Timberwolves routed the short-handed Toronto Raptors to move into a tie for first-place in the Western Conference.

The Timberwolves began the day tied with Oklahoma City for second in the West, one-half game behind first-place Denver. Minnesota's win moved it into a tie with the idle Nuggets with six games remaining for both teams.

Rudy Gobert had 11 points and 15 rebounds for Minnesota, whose 48-point win marked its largest margin of victory this season.

Immanuel Quickley, Grady Dick and Javon Freeman-Liberty all had 16 points for Toronto, which last 15 straight since its last win on March 3rd.

Hawks 121, Pistons 113

In Atlanta, Jalen Johnson had 28 points, 14 rebounds and 11 assists for his first career triple-double and the Atlanta Hawks overcame a 50-point effort by Detroit's Malachi Flynn for a win over the Pistons that clinched a berth in the Eastern Conference play-in tournament.

De'Andre Hunter scored 26 points and Dejounte Murray finished with 24 points and 11 assists for the Hawks, who have won six of their last seven games.

Flynn, whose previous career high was 27, was 18 for 25 from the floor and 9 for 12 at the line. The 50 points was a franchise record for a reserve. He also had a season-high six rebounds, five assists and five steals in 34 minutes.

The Pistons have lost 10 of their last 11 games.

Cade Cunningham, who averages 22.7 points per game, was a late scratch with left knee injury after initially being listed in the starting lineup for Detroit.

Lakers 125, Wizards 120

In Washington, Anthony Davis scored 19 of his 35 points in the first quarter and had 18 rebounds, helping the Los Angeles Lakers beat the Washington Wizards for their eighth victory in nine games.

LeBron James had 25 points and nine assists, and Rui Hachimura scored 19 points for the Lakers against his former team. Davis was 10 of 17 from the field and made 15 free throws without a miss.

Jordan Poole led Washington with 29.

The Lakers are ninth in the Western Conference, meaning they'd have to win twice in the play-in tournament to make the main playoff bracket. But they're making a push to move up. Los Angeles trailed Phoenix and Sacramento by 1 1/2 games entering Wednesday.

Grizzlies 111, Bucks 101

In Milwaukee, Jaren Jackson Jr. scored 35 points to lead the Memphis Grizzlies to victory over the Milwaukee Bucks.

The Bucks lost for the fourth time in their past five games as they've faltered while trying to hold on to the No. 2 seed in the Eastern Conference.

Jackson dominated in the second half, scoring 25 of his points while lifting the Grizzlies to their fifth straight victory over Milwaukee.

Brook Lopez paced the Bucks



Luton Town's Daiki Hashioka (left), challenges for the ball with Arsenal's Eddie Nketiah during the English Premier League soccer match between Arsenal and Luton Town at the Emirates Stadium, London. (AP)

Brentford draw with Brighton to move further clear of relegation zone

Three-way race for title 'looks' likely to go down to the wire as Arsenal, City win

LONDON, April 4, (AP): The three-way race for the Premier League title looks likely to go down to the wire after wins for Arsenal and Manchester City made it even tighter at the top.

Arsenal dispatched relegation-threatened Luton 2-0 while third-place Manchester City also stayed one point behind Arsenal after beating Aston Villa 4-1.

Martin Odegaard's opener and an own goal by Daiki Hashioka in the first half meant it was a comfortable evening for the hosts as Arsenal provisionally moved one point ahead of Liverpool in the tight three-way race for the title.

Facing a team in the relegation zone, Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta took the opportunity to rotate his team and made five changes to the side that drew 0-0 at Man City on Sunday. Bukayo Saka was left out of the squad completely after picking up a knock at the Etihad Stadium.

The game was still all but decided before halftime. Arsenal took the lead in the 24th when Emile Smith Rowe won possession in midfield and fed Odegaard, who exchanged passes with Kai Havertz before firing a low shot inside the near post.

Smith Rowe was heavily involved in the second as well as he drove along the left byline in the 44th before trying to pick out the charging Reiss Nelson, with Hashioka turning the ball into his own net as he tried to prevent his opponent from scoring.

Nelson was making his first Premier League start since July of the pandemic-interrupted 2020 season and was initially announced as the goalscorer - to a huge cheer from the crowd - before it was changed to an own goal.

Luton has proven time and again this season that it can never be counted out of games, with Arsenal needing a 97th-minute winner from Declan Rice to secure a 4-3 victory in the reverse fixture in December after the hosts had twice come back from a deficit.

There was no such drama this time, though, as Arsenal easily saw out the win in the second half, with goalkeeper David Raya hardly troubled and Luton going scoreless for the first time in 19 league games.

"We managed to rotate and freshen the team up a bit. Those who came in did really, really well," Arteta said. "We scored two really good goals in the first half, in the second half, because of the way they play, we didn't get the right

with 25 points and 10 rebounds while Giannis Antetokounmpo added 21 points, seven rebounds and eight assists. Bobby Portis had 19 points and Malik Beasley 10.

Magic 117, Pelicans 108

In New Orleans, Paolo Banchero scored 32 points and the Orlando Magic defeated the New Orleans Pelicans.

Franz Wagner scored 24 points and Moritz Wagner added 18 points for the Magic, who've won three straight and moved a half game ahead of the idle New York Knicks for fourth in the Eastern Conference.

CJ McCollum had 36 points and 10 rebounds for New Orleans, which has lost three straight and four of five, slipping from fourth to sixth in the Western Conference, just half a game in front of seventh-place Sacramento.

Zion Williamson scored 15 points and looked fortunate to avoid injury when his legs were cut out from under him by Gary Harris, who slipped and fell while attempting to poke the ball away from the Pelicans' star power

rhythm."

Luton stayed in 18th place, three points from safety.

Phil Foden scored a stunning hat trick as Manchester City routed Aston Villa. In the absence of Erling Haaland and Kevin De Bruyne, who had been left out of Pep Guardiola's starting lineup, Foden proved the inspiration at Etihad Stadium and took his total to 21 goals this season.

He struck just before halftime and then twice after the break as City extended its unbeaten run to 24 games in all competitions.

Rodri had put the defending champion ahead when he fired in from close range after Jeremy Doku's cross in the 11th minute.

The lead lasted just nine minutes when Jhon Duran leveled for Villa - beating City goalkeeper Stefan Ortega from a tight angle.

City went on to dominate the chances before the break, with Julian Alvarez denied by the legs of Villa keeper Robin Olsen, who was a late replacement for Emiliano Martinez due to illness.

SOCCER

But the home team was ahead again in the first minute of first-half stoppage through Foden, who curled home a low free kick from the edge of the box.

Villa had chances to get back into the match in the second half until Foden took control.

He rolled his second into bottom corner with another clinical finish in the 62nd and he blasted his third into the top corner from the edge of the box seven minutes later.

Brentford edged a point closer to safety after a 0-0 draw with Brighton.

Thomas Frank's team has now gone eight games without a win, but Luton's 2-0 loss to Arsenal meant Brentford moved six points clear of the relegation zone.

Brighton, meanwhile, missed the chance to take advantage of West Ham, Newcastle and Wolverhampton dropping points this week in the battle to secure European soccer next season.

Yoane Wissa narrowly missed the target with a chance to put Brentford ahead in the first half and Ivan Toney was denied by Bart Verbruggen.



Washington Wizards forward Corey Kispert (rear), fouls Los Angeles Lakers forward LeBron James during the second half of an NBA basketball game in Washington. (AP)

forward during the third quarter.

Williamson later went to the locker room with trainers before returning to the game, but sat on the bench for much of the fourth quarter, playing just 29 minutes.

Inter unravel late, 'fall' to Monterrey

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla., April 4, (AP): Lionel Messi remained sidelined with a hamstring injury Wednesday night as his Inter Miami team built a one-goal lead against Mexico's Monterrey then came unraveled in the second half, losing 2-1 in the first leg of the CONCACAF Champions Cup quarterfinal.

Messi, who missed his fourth straight game because of a right hamstring injury, has not played since March 13, and also missed Argentina's exhibitions last month against El Salvador and Costa Rica.

It isn't yet clear when the 36-year-old Messi will return. Inter Miami and Monterrey are scheduled to play the second leg of the quarterfinal in Mexico on April 10. Inter Miami will also play an MLS match against Colorado on Saturday.

SOCCER

"Every day he's feeling better. It would have been too much of a risk today," Inter Miami coach Gerardo "Tata" Martino said through an interpreter after the match. He added that Messi will continue to be game-to-game.

Monterrey's Jorge Rodriguez broke a 1-1 tie in the 89th minute Wednesday when he sent a shot into the top right corner past goalkeeper Drake Callender after a sloppy pass by Miami's Diego Gomez, spoiling a strong first half from Inter Miami in its toughest match of the season.

Tomas Aviles tapped in Miami's only goal off a corner kick by Julian Gressel in the 19th minute. It was the 19-year-old Aviles' first goal of the season and came during a stout first-half defensive effort that held Monterrey at bay.

But Inter Miami came unraveled after David Ruiz received a second yellow card and was sent off for unnecessary contact in the 65th minute. Miami played the final 25 minutes of the match down a man.

Monterrey quickly took advantage, tying the score less than five minutes later on a goal from Maximiliano Meza, who shot past Callender on a second attempt after a corner kick by Sergio Canales.



Manchester City's Phil Foden, (right) and Aston Villa's Diego Carlos struggle for the ball during the English Premier League soccer match between Manchester City and Aston Villa at the Etihad Stadium in Manchester, England. (AP)

Olympian Fleurs killed in hijacking

JOHANNESBURG, April 4, (AP): South African footballer and Olympian Luke Fleurs has been killed in a hijacking in Johannesburg, his Kaizer Chiefs club said on Thursday.

The 24-year-old defender was shot while waiting to be attended to at a petrol station in the Honeydew suburb in Johannesburg, according to police.

"Luke Fleurs tragically lost his life last night during a hijacking incident in Johannesburg. Our thoughts and prayers are with his family and friends at this difficult time," Kaizer Chiefs said in a statement.

According to police spokes-

person Mavela Masondo, the attackers fled with Fleurs's vehicle and police were investigating a case of murder and car hijacking.

Fleurs previously played for the national under-23 side, representing South Africa at the Tokyo Olympics.

Fleurs is the latest among thousands of people who are victims to fatal hijackings in South Africa, which has one of the highest murder rates in the world.

The latest official crime statistics from October-December last year showed 5,973 hijacking cases reported.

Suns 122, Cavaliers 101

In Phoenix, Devin Booker scored 40 points, Kevin Durant added 32 and the Phoenix Suns beat the Cleveland Cavaliers.

The Suns have won six of their past eight, moving up to the No. 6 spot in a crowded Western Conference playoff race, which would allow them to avoid the play-in tournament.

Booker - coming off a 52-point night in a win against New Orleans on Monday - shot 13 of 25 from the field, including 5 of 9 from 3-point range. Durant shot 13 of 23 and added seven assists.

It's just the second time this season that Booker and Durant have both scored at least 30 in the same game. Bol Bol added 15 points off the bench, making 3 of 4 3-pointers.

Trail Blazers 89, Hornets 86

In Charlotte, Scoot Henderson had 22 points and 10 assists and the Portland Trail Blazers beat Brandon Miller and the Charlotte Hornets in a matchup of two of the league's top three draft picks.

Henderson, the third overall pick, shot 9 of 17 from the field as the Trail Blazers snapped a 10-game losing streak. Deandre Ayton had a monster game against the Hornets with 24 points and 16 rebounds and Jabari Walker had 14 points and 22 rebounds.

With Charlotte's two 7-foot centers out, the Blazers held a 55-36 edge on the glass.

Nets 115, Pacers 111

In New York, Cam Thomas scored 27 points, rookie Noah Clowney had a career-high 22 and the Brooklyn Nets outlasted the Indiana Pacers to split a home-and-home set.

The Nets were eliminated from post-season contention when Atlanta beat Detroit at home to wrap up at least a spot in the NBA Play-In Tournament. Brooklyn last missed the playoffs in 2017-18.

Mikal Bridges added 17 points, and Nic Claxton had 14 points and 13 rebounds. The Nets had lost their previous two games, the last a 133-111 loss in Indianapolis on Monday night.