

UAE ranks second in world and tops among Gulf states

Kuwait ranks 4th in Arab world in index of safest countries

KUWAIT CITY, June 19: Kuwait ranked 18th out of 134 countries, and fourth in the Arab world, in the index of safest countries in the world for the current year; while the United Arab Emirates (UAE) ranked second in the world and topped the Gulf, and Qatar ranked third globally, reports Al-Qabas daily.

Globally, Iceland is the safest country, followed by the UAE, Qatar, Singapore, Finland, Mongolia, Norway, Denmark, Canada and New Zealand.

In the Arab world, Saudi Arabia ranked 19th, Morocco ranked 24th, Oman in 25th place, Jordan ranked 52nd, Algeria ranked 61st, Egypt ranked 65th and Tunisia ranked 93rd. Lebanon was among the countries that ranked low at 110th, while

Yemen ranked 126th. Countries at the bottom of the list include the Philippines that ranked last at 134th, preceded by Colombia at 133rd, Guatemala at 132nd, Nigeria at 131st, Bosnia and Herzegovina at 130th, Brazil at 129th, Mexico at 128th, Peru at 127th and North Macedonia at 125th.

MPW okays launch of 30 projects within dev plan for current fiscal

Govt printing press earns KD 140K revenues in Q1 of '23/'24

KUWAIT CITY, June 19: The Ministry of Public Works has approved the launching of about 30 projects within its development plan for the current fiscal year --2023/2024 -- in various sectors like sanitary engineering, planning and major projects sectors, and the Government Center for Examinations and Quality Control; while it is in the process of approving projects in the rest of the sectors, reports Al-Qabas daily.

as well as dealing with floods and protecting communities since road users are at risk during torrential rains. The plan is to close the current sewage network and rainwater sewers that pour water into the sea, and then divert sewage water to a treatment plant that will be established for this purpose.

Another project is the development, construction and operation of a treated water system in the southern part of the country to enhance food security by building the third treated water line from the Control Center to Wafra farms. This is in addition to studying and developing the existing Wafra station, as well as the irrigation network in Wafra farms.

There is also a plan to study the development, construction,

completion and maintenance of the treated water system in the northern region to increase agricultural production, strengthen food security and support the strategic stock of treated water to reduce imports.

In the Major Projects Sector, the plan includes the launching of the fourth stage of the new Kuwait airport project, which is related to government buildings at Kuwait International Airport, along with linking automated and cybersecurity systems with the Airport Command Building.

The project consists of the construction of civil aviation buildings as follows: the Command and Control Center, Eastern Data Center, Western Data Center, Communications Center, and buildings of the Health and Interior ministries.

Following are the most important projects:

1. Study and design of the deep tunnel system.
2. Operation and maintenance of pumping stations in Abdally farms.
3. Maintenance and operation of the Governmental Center for Testing and Quality Control,

4. Establishment and operation of a network of treated water tanks throughout the country.

5. Fourth stage of the Kuwait International Airport project. Meanwhile, Assistant Undersecretary for the Press, Publishing and Publications Sector at the Ministry of Information Lafi Al-Subaie said the government printing press earned unprecedented revenues in the first quarter of fiscal 2023/2024 -- more than KD140,000; since it resumed the printing of reference books used in schools after stopping it in 1975, reports Al-Anba daily.

In a press statement, Al-Subaie revealed it is expected that the revenues of the printing press will reach about KD1 million this year; compared to less than KD100,000 in previous years. He attributed this achievement to the ministry's strategy in strengthening partnership with various institutions like the Ministry of Education. He affirmed that the sector is working hard to maximize revenues in order to achieve the ministry's vision in diversifying services and increasing the operational capacity of the sectors.



KUNA photo

Part of the assistance for the beneficiaries and people with special needs.

Al-Rahma charity delivers medical tools to special cases in Gaza Strip

Al-Rahma International Charity has supplied medical devices and equipment to Palestinians of special needs in Gaza Strip.

The medical tools have been secured with grants from Kuwaiti Al-Awqaf Secretariat General.

Adib Shuwaiki, the charity deputy

chief, said in remarks to KUNA on Thursday that the society personnel distributed the tools for cases of special needs in the Palestinian community.

Beneficiaries received the equipment after a news conference held at the headquarters of the social development affairs department. (KUNA)

KU panel to announce vacant post

Residence Affairs receives 1,000 sports-related 'visa' applications

KUWAIT CITY, June 19: According to informed sources, the Residence Affairs Department received about 1,000 applications from a number of sports clubs and related associations during the initial days of announcing the introduction of a new type of visa to enter Kuwait for sports, cultural or social activities, reports Al-Rai daily.

They explained that the decision of the First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Interior and Acting Minister of Defense Sheikh Talal Al-Khalid specified the residency period for the visa holder to be three months, renewable for a period not exceeding one year from the date of entry.

So far, about 250 visas that have met all the conditions were issued.

The website of the Ministry of Interior offers the possibility to apply for visas electronically. In the event of approval, an appointment is set for the applicant to visit the residency affairs departments and submit the required official documents.

The sources explained that the entity requesting the visa is obligated to submit a pledge to assume full responsibility of the visitor during his stay in Kuwait and to bear

his expenses. However, in the event of a violation, a block is placed on the entity, preventing it from requesting the issuance of new visas, except after the departure of the violating visitor, in order to limit the presence of violators of the residency law in the country.

Vacant positions: The Kuwait University Director Selection Committee is expected to announce the position vacant not later than Wednesday, reports Al-Qabas daily quoting sources.

Sources disclosed the announcement will include the dates for applying for the position and the conditions, and then the committee will set the dates for interviewing the applicants.

Sources clarified that the recent court ruling to cancel the appointment of former university director Dr Youssef Al-Roumi and oblige the university to appoint Dr Yaqoub Al-Kandari will not affect the work of the committee, since no executive order regarding the ruling has been issued so far. Therefore, the procedures for the selection of the director are still ongoing, sources added.

Al-Wazzan wedding hall said ready

MoSA closes about 35 wedding halls

KUWAIT CITY, June 19: According to informed sources, about 35 wedding halls currently managed by the Ministry of Social Affairs have been closed due to the absence of maintenance and service contracts, reports Al-Qabas daily.

They explained that one of the reasons for the ministry's desire to return the management of the halls to cooperative societies and their owners is to lift the financial burden on the shoulders of the ministry, especially with the 20 percent reduction in the budgets allocated to government agencies, and the cancellation of tenders for the maintenance of halls nationwide by the Central Agency for Public Tenders.

The Minister of Social Affairs Mai Al-Baghli sent a letter to the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers, in which she referred to the two decisions of the Council of Ministers related to approving the ministry's request to manage and maintain wedding halls, and to set regulations for their establishment, in coordination with Kuwait Municipality and the Ministry of Finance, and regarding the approval of the conversion of the halls from private state properties to public state properties that are affiliated to the ministry.

Al-Baghli said the ministry has prepared its plan to withdraw the 70 halls, which were established by donors or cooperative societies.

She revealed that the ministry had maintained, restored and furnished 20 halls that were withdrawn from its budget, in implementation of the decisions of the Council of Ministers.

Highlighted

The minister highlighted the previous Cabinet decision to reduce the budgets of government agencies by 20 percent due to the COVID-19 pandemic, due to which the issuance of tenders for maintenance of the halls was canceled. This led to a review of the ministry's plan to withdraw the halls due to the high cost of contracts for their restoration, maintenance, furnishing and supervision, in addition to the closure of 35 halls run by the ministry due to the lack of maintenance and service contracts. This prompted the ministry to consider a request by some cooperative societies and donors to return the halls to them for maintenance and management and to remove the financial burden from the shoulders of the ministry.

She revealed that the Union of Consumer Cooperative Societies expressed its desire for the cooperative societies to take over the management of the halls that were withdrawn, as this has a direct impact on serving shareholders and addressing the negative effects resulting from the management of the halls by the ministry, as well as the management of wedding halls provided by some donors who do not have the ability to man-

age them. Al-Baghli called for returning the halls to donors and cooperative societies in accordance with three controls, which she hopes will be approved. These controls are:

1. Returning the halls to the cooperative societies that established them. In the event that they do not wish to accept them, they shall be presented to other cooperative societies.
2. Returning the halls to the donors who established them. In the event that they do not wish to accept them, they will be presented to cooperative societies for management.
3. Complying with the controls and conditions decided by the Ministry of Social Affairs regarding its tight control and supervision of those halls.

Donation

Meanwhile, acting Undersecretary of the Ministry of Social Affairs Abdulaziz Sari, revealed that the Ministry of Electricity and Water has finished delivering electricity to the Al-Wazzan wedding hall located in Salmiya area. Through a donation from the Al-Wazzan family, this hall was established on an area of 1,000 square meters to serve the people and residents of Hawally Governorate and the neighboring areas, reports Aljarida daily.

Sari said, "The ministry is currently preparing to supervise the entire process of furnishing the hall, which will be carried out by the donor, after which necessary steps will be taken for the delivery of fresh water, and ensure its readiness. It will be launched later on the automated reservation application called the "House of Events" to join the chain of halls. The list is currently distributed in all areas of the country, and will be available to citizens soon to use for their various social occasions."

He highlighted that the hall is considered a beautiful construction landmark, because it was built according to the latest architectural styles but preserving the authentic Kuwaiti heritage.

Sari said, "Based on ministerial resolution No. 77/A/2014 regarding the conditions and controls for establishing wedding halls, the ministry will take over the hall upon the completion of construction and furnishing, and manage it, as well as undertake any maintenance operations for it so that it is always ready to receive various events."

Meanwhile, the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Affairs had issued administrative decision No. 1863/2023 for mandating the assignment of the Director of Supplies and Warehouses Department in the ministry Munira Al-Kandari with the competencies entrusted to the Assistant Undersecretary for Financial and Administrative Affairs until Monday when the assistant undersecretary returns from leave.



June

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Editor-in-Chief intends on producing significant impact as it publishes noteworthy articles

Kuwait magazine steps towards modernization, promotes cultural message

KUWAIT CITY, June 19, (KUNA): The State of Kuwait has always taken a special interest in the cultural scene, especially as it believes culture and literature to be integral to the development of a nation, and this belief is manifested in the Information Ministry's Kuwait Magazine.

The monthly magazine, chaired by Editor-in-Chief Aisha Al-Asousi, is quite intent on producing significant impact as it publishes noteworthy articles by local and Arab writers, creates space for the flow of ideas, highlights prevalent topics, and helps young writers demonstrate their skills.

Alongside its cultural agenda, the magazine takes it upon itself to celebrate the Kuwaiti national identity and heritage via publishing pieces written by historians.

Kuwait Magazine's administration is very keen on connecting with the audience and presenting them with publications that are riveting in both content and appearance.

In an effort to become more accessible, particularly as the world of publications is undergoing rapid changes, the magazine released a web version.

This also comes as confirmation to ministry's efforts in achieving new Kuwait 2035 vision of digitalization, and the ministry's 2021-2026 strategy.

Despite the web form being more widespread, the magazine did not neglect its traditional version but rather it adapted it to become more in sync with modern day requirements, as it released issues with a barcode that readers can scan to access audiovisual version, listen to poetry readings and



Editor-in-Chief Aisha Al-Asousi signs a media cooperation protocol.

watch documentaries related to subject matters.

Furthermore, Kuwait Magazine aims to keep up with developments via publishing special issues on vital top-

ics, observing cultural artistic movements, examining and analyzing them and providing researchers with valuable references.

It also sets out to acquaint readers with prominent Kuwaiti figures, local anecdotes as well as highlight local attractions whether historic or modern.

KPC awaits decision from CSC to disburse front-line rewards

KUWAIT CITY, June 19: According to reliable oil sources, the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) has completed all procedures required to disburse bonuses for front-line workers in the oil sector during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the disbursement process is subject to a decision by the Civil Service Commission (CSC), reports Al-Anba daily.

The sources explained that KPC and its subsidiaries, during the last period, provided CSC

with all the necessary documents required for the employees and the grievances committee that was formed, in addition to updating the employees' phone numbers and signing the declaration and undertaking for some.

The oil sector is fully ready to start the exchange operations, as it will be taking funds from the account of the Ministry of Finance, provided that the institution undertakes the disbursement and deposit of bonuses in the employees' accounts.



The magazine's recent publication marking Kuwait's national celebrations.



KUNA photos Kuwait Magazine's publications.

Demand to extend contract for operation of Kuwait's T4

DGCA forms cmte to study financial offer

KUWAIT CITY, June 19: As the contract for the operation and maintenance of the Terminal 4 (T4) at the Kuwait International Airport approaches its official end on August 14, demands have increased for the extension of the contract before its expiry date in order to keep pace with the increasing travel momentum in the summer, and work to protect the rights of national cadres working in the company operating the building, reports Al-Qabas daily.

A number of citizens working on this contract said, "The company operating Terminal 4 (T4) has issued an administrative circular stating that their work will be terminated."

They explained that the company demanded in its circular for the return of all documents, assets, keys, cash and everything that is its property by August 14, 2023.

The company assured them that it would continue to employ them in the event of an extension of the contract.

New tender

On the other hand, informed sources indicated that the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) intends to extend the contract of the current operator in the T4 passenger terminal for a year, starting from August 15, until a new tender is issued to operate the building.

The sources said, "We are committed to preserving the rights of Kuwaiti employees. We will not accept the arbitrary dismissal of any citizen. In the event that the current employer's contract ends, they will be transferred to the new company."

They revealed that the company has started terminating the contracts of a specific number of employees, especially those who hold leadership



KUNA photo Secretary General of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf and High Representative for the Foreign and Security Policy of the European Union during their meeting.

'EU committed to deepen relations with GCC'

BRUSSELS, June 19, (KUNA): The European Union Monday lauded the meeting between GCC Secretary General Jassem Al-Budaiwi, with EU High Representative Josep Borrell in Brussels last Friday as a commitment to deepen relations between the two regional blocs.

"This meeting is to be seen in the context of EU's commitment to develop and deepen the already good relations between the EU and the GCC exactly in line with the strategic cooperation with the Gulf, and GCC as an organization," EU lead spokesperson for foreign affairs and security policy, Peter Stano, told a news conference today.

"The meeting was really about how to take the strategy forward, the next step, what we can do together more in terms of concrete implementation," he said in reply to a question by KUNA.

"So this was a very good meeting between the Secretary General and the High Representative, proving the commitment and attachment of both sides to deliver on this jointly defined ambition of deepening our relation-

ship," he stressed. There will be more meetings of course, added Stano.

On his part, Al-Budaiwi told KUNA in an exclusive interview in Brussels on Friday that the meeting with Mr. Borrell was very important and comprehensive. "We discussed issues that are related to GCC and EU and other issues related to regional files.

"Mr. Borrell is a great friend to the region and we expressed our appreciation to the efforts that the EU has been taking towards the GCC region," said chief of the GCC, which includes Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, UAE, Oman and Saudi Arabia.

Al-Budaiwi expressed appreciation for the adoption by the EU in May 2022 of the 'Communication on Strategic Partnership with the Gulf,' as well as the recent appointment of EU special representative for the Gulf, former Italian foreign minister Luigi de Maio.

Al-Budaiwi participated in the 7th Brussels conference on Syria held last Thursday.

positions, with the aim of rationalizing expenses, adding that Kuwaiti employees are at a loss without any serious solutions that can guarantee their future career.

The sources said DGCA formed a committee to study the financial

offer submitted by the company to extend the contract, adding that the renewal of the contract will be linked to the company's commitment for the continuity of Kuwaiti employees without dismissing any citizen.

When asked by the sources if the company wanted to continue, they answered that the Operations Department of DGCA is able to manage the T4 passenger terminal according to a pre-established plan for that purpose.

Al-Asousi affirms Kuwait's keenness to hold meetings actively

Kuwait takes over presidency of 15th session of Water Resources Committee of UNESCWA

BEIRUT, June 19, (KUNA): The State of Kuwait assumed on Monday the chairmanship of the Water Resources Committee of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UNESCWA). Acting Undersecretary of the Kuwaiti Ministry of Electricity and Water, Eng. Maha Al-Asousi, chaired the Water Resources Committee in its 15th session, succeeding the State of Palestine, the 14th session chair.

In a statement to Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) on the sidelines of the conference, Al-Asousi affirmed Kuwait's great keenness to

hold meetings, actively attend and activate the work of the committees to serve the goals of sustainable development and achieve advanced goals in water issues in the Arab region.

She pointed out the importance of UNESCWA meetings reaching recommendations that reflect the positive side to solve any problem that our countries may face in water issues and the transfer of expertise and technical support during meetings and discussions.

Al-Asousi said that UNESCWA discussed issues of water security in the Arab region, im-

proving groundwater management, financing the water sector and the progress made in implementing the sustainable development goals related to water in the Arab countries.

She added that she also discussed the activities related to water resources undertaken by UNESCWA within the framework of its program of work and the advancement of climate change issues in the water and energy sectors.

For his part, UNESCWA Secretary Karim Khalil said in a statement to KUNA that the State of Kuwait's presidency of the Water Resources Committee gives it a greater role in supporting the implementation of the committee's recommendations, indicating that the water issue is central to the State of Kuwait and is a threat facing all countries in the Arab region.

Khalil stressed that the UNESCWA Water Resources Committee represents the regional hub for decision-makers and discusses water challenges facing Arab countries and how to formulate mechanisms to deal with these challenges.

He stressed the importance of cooperation and coordination between Arab countries in water issues, because water challenges have a regional and cross-border dimension, as 65 percent of the water resources in the Arab region come from outside the Arab borders.

The Director of the Chemical Works Department and the Acting Director of the Water Facilities Department, Eng. Sarah Al-Mutairi, participated in the representation of Kuwait, in addition to representatives of UNESCWA member states and some international and regional organizations and institutions and relevant civil society organizations.



KUNA photo Acting Undersecretary of the Kuwaiti Ministry of Electricity and Water Maha Al-Asousi during her chairmanship of the Water Resources Committee in (ESCWA).

Deal will be in effect 90 days after its entry into force

Kuwait, Japan trade notes for visa waiver for diplomatic & official passport holders

TOKYO, June 19, (KUNA): Kuwait and Japan have exchanged notes about the waiver of diplomatic and official visa requirements for diplomatic and official passport holders between the two countries, the Kuwaiti Embassy in Tokyo said Monday.

The notes were exchanged by Kuwaiti Ambassador to Japan Sami Al-Zamanan and Assistant Foreign Minister and Director-General for the Middle Eastern and African Bureau of

the Japanese Foreign Ministry Kansuke Nagaoka, the embassy said in a statement to Kuwait News Agency (KUNA).

The agreement will be in effect 90 days after its entry into force, it said. The agreement is a major achievement for both countries, as it constitutes the first step towards working on the waiver of visa requirements for ordinary passport holders in the near future, the embassy noted.



KUNA photo Kuwaiti Ambassador to Japan Sami Al-Zamanan and Assistant Foreign Minister and Director-General for the Middle Eastern and African Bureau of the Japanese Foreign Ministry Kansuke Nagaoka.

Netflix hypes 'The Last Airbender,' 'One Piece' at starry fan event

'The Full Monty' returns 25 years on, with its politics laid bare

LONDON, June 19, (AP) — The Sheffield strippers of "The Full Monty" return 25 years on, in a new TV series that wears its politics on its sleeve.

In the much-loved original movie, a group of unemployed men from the north of England decide to form a striptease act in a desperate attempt to raise money after the local steelworks closed down.

A new comedy-drama TV series from the same writer, Simon Beaufoy, and producer, Umberto Pasolini, returns to those characters more than two decades later in a compelling portrait of contemporary Britain. After the dismantling of heavy industry, the area has been subjected to an erosion of public services and the welfare safety net.

"The politics are in there," actor Steve Huison told The Associated Press recently. "You don't have to be slammed in the face with them but hopefully people will see it and realize, 'Oh, you know, that's where I'm at at the moment.'"

The original movie was a surprise international hit, earning nearly \$260 million and even spawning a musical in 2000 and a play in 2013. Robert Carlyle, who plays grifter Gary "Gaz" Schofield, attributes that success to its universal themes.

"One of the principal reasons why it did have such an appeal worldwide, particularly in Europe, was that places like Sheffield exist all over Europe, and all over the US, if you think of it, you know, probably Detroit or something like that. The death of the car industry there is similar to the death of the steel industry in Sheffield," Carlyle said.

The 1997 movie was nominated for four Academy Awards, including best picture, and won one for Anne Dudley's score.

The men of "The Full Monty" — older but not necessarily wiser — do

not strip in the TV series, but are struggling to keep up with developments in modern society and, in some cases, to survive. It co-stars original castmembers Tom Wilkinson, Mark Addy, Wim Snape, Paul Clayton and Paul Barber.

Original star Hugo Speer, who once taught King Charles III a dance routine from the movie at the then-prince's 50th birthday party, was sacked from the show after allegations of inappropriate conduct, but does make a brief appearance in the series.

Beaufoy co-wrote the series with frequent collaborator Alice Nutter, the Chumbawamba singer who's also written for "Trust" and "The White Princess." Unlike the movie, the new TV series doesn't just focus on the plight of working class men; women are front and center in the story, no longer just sidelined as wives.

"You know, from the original to the series, I felt that Simon had been incredibly generous," said Lesley Sharp, who returns as Jean. "He and Alice have invested really beautifully in other female characters."

The series has a new character, Destiny, a tearaway teen played by Talitha Wing who has inherited her father Gaz's tendency to get her friends into trouble, but has a steely determination to get on in life.

"There's really, really strong women," said Wing ("Alex Rider," "Wolfe"). "It's fantastic to see and to play as well."

The eight-part original series from FX is now available on Hulu in the US and Disney+ in the UK.

Also:

LOS ANGELES: Netflix gave audiences first looks at some planned

and upcoming projects including "Avatar: The Last Airbender," "One Piece" and the third season of "Bridgerton" at a fan event on Saturday.

The event, called "Tudum," was live-streamed from São Paulo, Brazil with the participation of talent like Kevin Hart, Chris Hemsworth, Arnold Schwarzenegger, John Boyega and Gal Gadot.

The streamer announced the addition of Linda Hamilton to the "Stranger Things" season 5 cast, a third "Extraction" movie and more of the cast for "Squid Game" season two, including Yim Si-wan, Kang Ha-neul, Park Sung-hoon and Yang Dong-guen. They will join returning cast Lee Jung-jae, Lee Byung-hun, Wi Ha-jun and Gong Yoo.

Lily Collins also teased some details about the fourth season of "Emily in Paris," which she said will bring her ex-pat to Rome.

The live-action "Avatar: The Last Airbender" is one of the most eagerly anticipated series in the bunch. It stars Gordon Cormier as Aang, Kiawentiio as Katara, Ian Ousley as Sokka, and Dallas Liu as Zuko, who were seen in their character costumes for the first time.

Another series that had people talking was "One Piece," a live-action pirate adventure based on the popular manga, which is wrapped and due for its premiere on Aug. 31.

But specific release dates for many are still to be determined as the Hollywood Writers' Strike continues and uncertainty looms about whether actors will be joining the picket lines after their SAG-AFTRA contract expires on June 30. Netflix is one of the studios represented by the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers (or AMPTP), the bargaining arm negotiating with the major guilds over issues such as residuals, minimum pay and the use of artificial intelligence.

Television

Variety



This image released by A24 shows Michelle Yeoh in a scene from 'Everything Everywhere All at Once.' (AP)

Pop Culture

What if things could turn out differently?

How multiverse got into our heads

By Ted Anthony

Let's do things differently this time.

Those are the first words you hear in this month's "Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse," an otherworldly meditation on multiple realities. The message is clear from the get-go: We have choices. You are you, sure. But wait — you might also be you and you and you.

The world is a stressful, sometimes lonely place. But what if things could turn out another way? What if, somewhere, they had? Enter the realm of the multiverse and alternate realities, one of the most glorified pop culture canvases — and a repository for the ache and longing of living in an era of uncertainty.

"The cultural assumption used to be that the world we live in is the way it is, and that's the only way it could be," says Douglas Wolk, who read 27,000 Marvel comics for his book, "All of the Marvels."

"What has happened in culture," Wolk says, "is that people are saying, 'Well, no. This consensus reality is not how things have to be.'"

The notion of exploring life's twists and turns through alternate timelines has been around for a while, albeit in varying guises.

"It's a Wonderful Life" sent George Bailey tumbling into a timeline where he'd never been born to reveal his true impact. In the decades since, that notion has accelerated — a rise in stories that consider events both fictional and real, extrapolating different choices.

What if the South had won the Civil War ("CSA: The Confederate States of America")? What if Germany and Japan had won World War II ("The Man in the High Castle")? What if John F. Kennedy hadn't been assassinated ("11/22/63")?

Fictional worlds are more malleable. Imaginary characters — particularly beloved ones with established stories — are toyed with in books, TV shows and movies that airlift them out of one life and into another. It's a canvas that cuts across genres, from

rom-com (1998's "Sliding Doors") to near-musical (2019's Beatles jukebox "Yesterday").

You have the reality where Spider-Man never married M.J. (Marvel Comics' "Brand New Day"); the universe where a Ben Affleck Batman never existed but the Michael Keaton Batman stuck around and got old ("The Flash"); and the "mirror universe" of "Star Trek" that reveals the baser instincts of beloved characters.

"It's a way to explore a problem that's never actually happened in the main story," sums up Nic Lemire, a California teenager who co-hosts the occasional "Marvel Mondays" podcast with his mother (a former Associated Press film critic).

One crowning example of multiverse success: The Oscar-sweeping "Everything Everywhere All at Once," which showed all the different lives Michelle Yeoh's main character might have lived — with the point being that across the multiverse, her family remains a family.

Theme

These works are united by one theme: There are always possibilities, for better and for worse, and exploring them is entertaining, enlightening and escapist. That's no small thing in a post-COVID world where convulsive change can seem the only constant.

"We're bombarded with things that seem arbitrary, random," says Hannah Kim, an assistant professor of philosophy at Macalester College. "The number of difficult developments the past few years — the pandemic, political upheaval, effects of climate change, etc. — leave the anxiety-riddled person with the nagging feeling that this all could have been otherwise."

Exploring the question of "what if" continues to be lucrative — there's even an entire Marvel show called "What If...?" While multiple universes may start to feel spread thin as a plot device, the trope isn't going away.

After all, if you can remix popular characters

while retaining the potential for a reset in a "prime universe," what is there to lose? Well, there's this: If everything is reversible, how high can the stakes really be?

"It narratively lets you have your cake and eat it too — you can kill off the character, have an emotional death scene and then bring the character back from another universe," says Matt Ruff, whose 9/11 novel, "The Mirage," posits an alternate universe that flips aggressors, victims and prejudices.

"If everything's possible, the choices are less interesting. The consequences don't matter all that much," Ruff says. "Part of engaging in the real world is engaging with the fact that there's no magical solution."

That, though, may be precisely why the notion resonates. Humans have always wanted to try on other outfits, other outcomes, other lives. Technology has enabled people to obtain most anything from the world's bounty within 48 hours. So why not thousands of stories with thousands of possible endings? What does that do to our relationship with our stories?

"You are looking at a piece of a bigger cultural picture that provides a constant barrage of cultural images that reinforce this idea that we can be better versions of ourselves," says Colgate University sociologist David Newman, who has written a book on second chances. "People want to believe that when we have a problem, the problem is fixable."

There's one Marvel Comics offshoot, "Marvel 1602," in which Earth's mightiest superheroes exist at the beginning of the 17th century.

"I posit we are in a universe which favors stories," Fantastic Four leader Reed Richards says. "A universe in which no story can ever truly end; in which there can only be continuances."

However it might play out, that's a universe full of possibilities. And judging from the past two decades, it's good business as well to keep on asking: What if? (AP)

LOS ANGELES: DC and Warner Bros' long-in-the-works superhero movie "The Flash" opened to \$55 million in its first three days in North American theaters, according to studio estimates on Sunday.

Though a fair amount of money by normal standards, a sizable jump from DC's last release, the "Shazam!" sequel, and enough for a first place start, it's also muted by superhero standards where \$100 million debut weekends are almost commonplace.

It was a crowded weekend at the multiplex overall. In addition to "The Flash" there was the new Pixar family film "Elemental" and the horror-comedy "The Blackening." The only big win was Wes Anderson's stary "Asteroid City" which earned \$720,000 from just six theaters and the distinction of having the highest per-theater average (\$132,211) since the start of the pandemic.

"The Flash" faced more complications than marketplace conditions. It has been in the headlines often over the past year, not because of the movie itself but because of its star Ezra Miller's off-screen troubles, including arrests, erratic behavior and accusations of misconduct. Miller has apologized and said they are seeking mental health treatment. They also bowed out of participating in the normal publicity circuit, except for the premiere.

The studio's leadership remained bullish on releasing their \$200 million movie, however, confident in its quality and importance to future DC Studios storylines. The movie introduces the multiverse, which allowed for the return of Michael Keaton's Batman in a movie that also had Ben Affleck's Batman.

Going into the weekend analysts expected "The Flash" to earn at least \$70 million in its first three days, playing in 4,234 locations domestically. Now, it's projected to net out with \$64 million in its first four, including Monday's Juneteenth holiday. Internationally, it made \$75 million, giving it a \$139 million global start.

"I think Warners did a fantastic job of dealing with the situation they had," said Paul Dergarabedian, the senior media analyst for Comscore. "It's a very interesting case study of what can happen when the title character of a huge movie has these very public controversies. But it's hard to reverse engineer it to know

what effect it may have had."

Another obstacle was that some of the main promotional outlets — late night talk shows — are still shut down as the Writers Strike continues. Also, with the knowledge that DC is undergoing a major reset, fans might have decided to move on and wait for that.

Critics were mixed but more



Keaton



Affleck

positive than not, with a 67% on Rotten Tomatoes. AP's Jocelyn Noveck wrote in her review that despite some "breezily clever and entertaining" moments, "the final act bogs down in what feels like an endless, generic CGI battle and a kitchen-sink resolution."

Audiences polled for CinemaScore only gave the film a B, which

has not historically been great news for word-of-mouth potential and longevity.

But there is a bit of a gap in the schedule before the next major blockbuster comes in "Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny," which opens on June 30. Next week's biggest offering is the R-rated Jennifer Lawrence comedy

"No Hard Feelings" and the nationwide expansion of "Asteroid City."

Second place went to "Elemental" with an estimated \$29.5 million from 4,035 locations in North America — a new low for Pixar's three-day openings. Before, that title belonged to "The Good Dinosaur" and "Onward," which both debuted to \$39 million. " (AP)

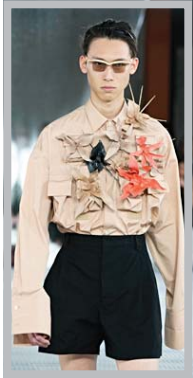
Features

ARABO TIMES

TUESDAY, JUNE 20, 2023

People & Places

MILAN
a guy thing



Prada



Simon Cracker



Jeffrey Loverboy



Prada



Prada



Prada

Liberate, not constrict

Prada explores the menswear fluidity

MILAN, June 19. (AP):The architecture at Prada's showroom shifts with every season, but never so fluidly as for Spring-Summer 2024 menswear.

The collection was viewed through a wall of clear falling slime - a form of fluid architecture - that gathered on the metallic grate runway in piles of green foam. The moving architecture was a metaphor for a collection that was meant to express the fluidity of menswear.

Some highlights from the third day of Milan Fashion Week of mostly menswear runway shows for next spring and summer: Prada explores the fluidity of menswear, through a 1940s workwear tailored silhouette that is at the same time liberating.

Co-creative directors Miuccia Prada and Raf Simons said they were experimenting with the idea of a fluid architecture that animates the male form, never constricting.

The collection's building blocks are the white shirt, mid-thigh shorts, black socks and thick-soled shiny loafers. Clothes for real men, the collection also includes jeans, blazers and raincoats. The look can be layered with a reporter's vest. Leather bags are soft, with decorative pockets.

The textiles are super-light, allowing button-down shirts or jackets to be tucked neatly into shorts, which are gathered at the waist, emphasizing an idealized male form: wide shoulders, narrow waist.

"We were very interested to see how we could liberate that, in the sense you had a lot of freedom to move," Simons said.

Hawaiian-inspired prints of sci-fi dragons were curtained with a long fringe, creating motion. Pockets on a reporter's vest were more decorative than utilitarian, the designers said. Looks were finished with molded eyewear and headbands, conveying a kinetic energy.

Loverboy

British designer Charles Jeffrey proposed a joyful Loverboy collection for a new Carolean era in Britain driven by the people and inspired by the tumultuous season when King Charles III ascended the throne amid political turmoil.

"I wanted to reclaim that space. I decided to do my own counterculture," Jeffrey said backstage. "I looked at the previous Carolean era of the 17th century: the reformation of the monarchy, the opening of theaters, arts and culture, new Romanticism."

Like the new Romantics, Jeffrey used costume "to depict euphoria, to depict a better life."

The designer used Loverboy's design codes of tartan, tailoring and knitwear and combined them with what he called "joyful slapstick accessories." They included a fanciful shield and sword decorated with classical figures, and tricorn hats adorned with scenes from Carolean theater created with paper dolls.

Look included fluorescent yellow bloomers, a maiden's bustled dress with an AI-created floral pattern, a knight's armor transposed on to athletic running gear, and a barrel dress created from fabric strips belted together. The brand's leather claw shoes finished many looks.

"They are a depiction of what the Carolean era should be: Free education, gay rights, women's rights free borders," Jeffrey said backstage.

The upcycled, hand-crafted artisanal brand Simon Cracker presented an irreverent and even chaotic collection dubbed "Theoretically," for that so-called moment when everything goes well.

Style



Jeffrey Loverboy



Prada



Prada



Jeffrey Loverboy

Fashion

hockey at the University of Alaska Anchorage, and settled in Unalakleet, where he met his wife Ferno. The couple and their three daughters were featured in the Discovery series, which aired in 2011-2012. (AP)

SEOUL, South Korea: A British man was detained after climbing more than half way up the world's fifth-tallest skyscraper in Seoul with only his bare hands, authorities said.

More than 90 emergency, police and other personnel were dispatched to the 123-story, 555-meter (1,820-foot)-tall Lotte World Tower, after the man was spotted scaling the building on Monday morning, the Seoul fire agency said in a statement.

The man, in his 20s, reached the



Robert



Tweto

Above and below: Model wear creations as part of the Prada, Simon Cracker and Jeffrey Loverboy men's Spring Summer 2024 collections presented in Milan, Italy, Sunday, June 18. (AP)

72nd floor, which is about 310 meters (1,020 feet) high, before officials took him to a gondola lift and moved him inside the building, the statement said.

South Korean media identified the man as free climber **George King-Thompson**. The reports said he was carrying a parachute and told police that he wanted to BASE-jump from the top of the building.

Fire and police authorities didn't immediately confirm the man's name or his motive.

King-Thompson was arrested in 2019 after scaling the Shard in London — the UK's tallest skyscraper at 310 meters (1,017 feet) — after the owners of the building pressed charges against him for trespassing. He was sentenced to six months in prison and served three.

In 2021, he climbed the 36-story Stratosphere Tower, a residential block in east London's Stratford neighborhood and reached the top in less than half an hour. He said he picked the building because he was shocked by the flash floods that recently hit the area and wanted to raise awareness to the seriousness of climate change.

In 2018, French climber **Alain Robert**, known as "Spiderman" for his daring stunt, was also detained after climbing the 75th floor of the Lotte World Tower. Lotte officials said they heard he was eventually released and left South Korea after they told police they didn't want to press charges for obstruction or trespassing. (AP)

HAHNVILLE, La: A 28-year-old woman who enrolled at a Louisiana high school and posed as a 17-year-old student to learn English has been arrested along with her mother, authorities said.

Martha Jessenia Gutierrez Serrano and her mother, **Marta Elizabeth Serrano Alvarado**, 46, both of **Boutte**, were arrested Tuesday, the St. Charles Parish Sheriff's Office said in a news release. Each are charged with a one count of injuring public records.

Serrano Alvarado used a fake passport and birth certificate from Honduras to register and enroll her daughter at Hahnville High School for the 2022-2023 school year, the sheriff's office said.

Sheriff **Greg Champagne**, at a news conference said Gutierrez Serrano told investigators she enrolled in school to learn the English language. "She wanted to learn English. She wanted to become proficient in the English language," Champagne said.

"There was no nefarious reason behind this," he said, adding that the falsifying of government documents to do this was just "bad judgment." (AP)

Variety

ANCHORAGE, Alaska: Bush pilot **Jim Tweto**, known for his starring role in the Discovery Channel's "Flying Wild Alaska" series, was killed along with a hunting and fishing guide from **Idaho** when their small plane crashed shortly after takeoff, Alaska State

Troopers said. Tweto's family-run rural aviation business in Unalakleet was featured in three seasons of the television series a decade ago. He and passenger **Shane Reynolds of Orofino**, Idaho, died Friday near the coastal village of **Shaktoolik**, roughly 125 miles (200 kilometers) east of **Nome**, the statement said. The plane "was witnessed taking off but not climbing and then crash-

ing," their report said. Troopers were notified of an SOS activation around 11:48 am Friday, followed by a report that a Cessna 180 had crashed 35 miles northeast of Shaktoolik. Troopers responding from Nome recovered both bodies. The National Transportation Safety Board said it is investigating. The Anchorage Daily News reported that Tweto was a co-owner of Hageland Aviation Services and then

Era Alaska, which would later become Ravn Air Group; Reynolds operated Northwest Fishing Expeditions, guiding clients in Alaska and across the Pacific Northwest for years. Tweto, 68, died doing what he loved, his daughter **Ariel** posted on Instagram. She called Reynolds, 45, "a wonderful hunting guide and friend of our family." Born in **Kansas** and raised in **Minnesota**, Tweto came to Alaska to play



United States players celebrate after defeating Canada in a CONCACAF Nations League final match in Las Vegas. (AP)

Americans clinch 2nd 'straight' CONCACAF Nations League title

Canada beaten

LAS VEGAS, June 19, (AP): Having scored his first goal for the United States and won his first medal, Folarin Balogun looked to a future that includes a 2026 World Cup co-hosted by America.

"I've only here a short amount of time, but already I feel a part of it and I feel a part of something bigger," he said.

Balogun and Chris Richards scored their first international goals, both off assists from Gio Reyna, and the U.S. beat Canada 2-0 on Sunday night for the Americans' second straight CONCACAF Nations League title.

SOCCER

"It's another step in the right direction," U.S. captain Christian Pulisic said. "It's just going to be about these knockout games. Come those big tournaments, Copa América, World Cup, it's time to get tough. We got to step up and score the goals when it counts and keep them out of our goal."

Richards scored in the 12th minute from Reyna's corner kick, bouncing a header from 7 yards to the left of goalkeeper Milan Borjan for his first goal in 10 international appearances.

Balogun, who debuted in Thursday's 3-0 win over Mexico after choosing to play for the U.S. over England, doubled the lead in the 34th when he took a feed from Reyna and held off Scott Kennedy with his right arm to slot past Borjan.

"We're looking beyond to the 2026 World Cup, and we need to perform in high-intensity knockout games," interim coach B.J. Callaghan said. "That's something that we learned from the World Cup."

Callaghan took over May 30 and also will run the team in the CONCACAF Gold Cup starting next weekend. Gregg Berhalter, brought back as coach Friday 5 1/2 months after his contract was allowed to expire, won't return to the sidelines until September exhibitions.

Before a crowd of just 35,000 at Allegiant Stadium, the U.S. extended its home unbeaten streak against Canada to 22 games dating to 1957. Canada remained without a title since the 2000 Gold Cup.

Reyna sparked both goals from a central midfield role rather than the wing Berhalter used him on, then left at halftime with a calf injury and was replaced by Luca de la Torre. Reyna's lack of hustle in training at the World Cup and his family's angry response created the controversy that let to Berhalter's January departure.

"It shows his quality that's on the field, his ball security, his ability to take on two or three players



Ismael Diaz, of Panama, (left), attempts to shoot around Israel Reyes of Mexico during the first half of a CONCACAF Nations League soccer match for third place in Las Vegas. (AP)

Hamilton on podium again

Max ties Senna in wins as Red Bull earn 100th victory



Red Bull Racing's Max Verstappen, of the Netherlands, celebrates his win on the podium following the Formula One Canadian Grand Prix auto race in Montreal. (AP)

and connect passes," Callaghan said. "We've challenged Gio to do more work off the ball on the defensive side, and he's absolutely risen to the occasion."

Before Richards' goal, the Americans had not scored from a corner kick since Jordan Morris' goal at El Salvador on June 14 last year.

"I definitely know I didn't play that much this year, but I know what I can bring," said Richards, who had just four Premier League starts and nine appearances for Crystal Palace.

Callaghan made three changes from Thursday, inserting central defender Walker Zimmerman for Miles Robin-

son and midfielder Brenden Aaronson and right back Joe Scally for Weston McKennie and Sergio Dest, both suspended after getting red cards against El Tri.

Canada coach John Herdman said the 6-foot-3 Zimmermann and 6-foot-2 Richards were difficult to defend against.

Mexico beat Panama 1-0 in the third-place match on Jesús Gallardo's fourth-minute goal. Aníbal Godoy's apparent equalizer on a 55th-minute bicycle kick was disallowed in a video review for offside, and 76th-minute penalty kick awarded to Mexico by Jamaican referee Daneon Parchment also was reversed in a video review.

"And of course I'm proud of that. But of course I hope it's not stopping

here. I hope that we can keep on winning races."

Lewis Hamilton holds the all-time record with 103 wins, but the seven-time champion said in Canada he expected Verstappen to surpass the mark eventually. Verstappen was quick to note that as Red Bull celebrated its 100th win, he alone was responsible for 41 victories.

MOTOR RACING

"We'll talk about maybe a new contract because of that," Verstappen said with a laugh.



Aston Martin driver Fernando Alonso, of Spain, drives during the Formula One Canadian Grand Prix auto race in Montreal. (AP)

Tanzania's ball boys ejected

Nigeria qualify for Afcon

JOHANNESBURG, June 19, (AP): Nigeria qualified for next year's African Cup of Nations by beating Sierra Leone 3-2 thanks to a winning goal in the fifth minute of added time by Kelechi Iheanacho, while Tanzania held on for a crucial home victory over Niger despite a bizarre late incident when the referee ejected Tanzanian ball boys for interfering with play.

In Tanzania, the ball boys threw numerous balls onto the field on at least two occasions, apparently to force the referee to stop play as Niger launched late attacks in search of an equalizing goal.

There were at least four balls on the field at one point as Niger put together one of its attacks, leading Egyptian referee Mohamed Al Sayd to lose his patience and march over to the ball boys on the sidelines and behind one goal and order them away from the playing area.

Tanzania still held on for a 1-0 win through Saimon Msuva's 69th-minute goal, putting it in pole position to qualify from Group F behind Algeria, which has already booked its place at the Cup of Nations in Ivory Coast.

Tanzania needs a point away at Algeria in the last round of qualifiers in September to take the group's second qualifying place ahead of East African rival Uganda.

Algeria beat Uganda 2-1 later Sunday with a double by winger Mohamed El Amine Amoura.

Nigeria appeared on course for a

fairly straightforward victory over Sierra Leone after two goals from Victor Osimhen put it 2-0 ahead after 32 minutes and put the Napoli striker level with Sadio Mane as the leading scorers in the qualifiers with five.

Sierra Leone pulled one back before halftime and equalized in the 84th minute through Augustus Kargbo.

There were about 55 seconds left to play when Nigeria left back Zaidu Sanusi cut through the defense and provided a cross for Leicester's Iheanacho to tap in to take the Super Eagles to the African Cup. Guinea-Bissau also qualified from Group A alongside Nigeria.

SOCCER

Mane's Senegal, World Cup semi-finalist Morocco, Egypt and Algeria have all qualified, with Egypt securing its place last week by coming from behind to beat Guinea 2-1. Morocco surprisingly lost 2-1 in South Africa on Saturday, although both had already qualified.

Five-time African champion Cameroon and four-time champion Ghana are the biggest teams still to seal their places in Ivory Coast and both face nervous final qualifiers.

Cameroon's fate will be decided in a home game against Burundi in September, by which time the Cameroonians could have slipped down to third in their group.

row next to Verstappen for the start.

But Hamilton, starting alongside Mercedes teammate George Russell on the second row, got a surprise jump on Alonso and snagged second place at the start. Verstappen still easily pulled away from both, and on the first dry day of the weekend in Montreal, rolled to another easy win.

The one bright spot for everyone chasing Verstappen was that his margin of victory over Alonso was only 9.5 seconds.

Only? Yes. It was the closest race of the season because Verstappen has been so dominant that he typically wins by 20-plus seconds a race. In fact, Alonso himself noted following Saturday qualifying that the only way to even pressure Verstappen was to be "two seconds behind them. Not 20 seconds behind them."

"Probably not our best race, but still to win by nine seconds, I think shows that we have a great car," Verstappen said of the margin of victory.

It wasn't an overwhelming Red Bull rout; Sergio Perez, who had hoped to "reset" his season in Canada, was a distant sixth. Perez has been so underwhelming of late that Alonso answered a simple "yes" when asked if he can pass Perez in the championship standings.

Perez is second in the standings with just a nine-point lead over Alonso. Verstappen leads Red Bull teammate Perez by 69 points.

Hamilton finished third for his second consecutive podium and was followed by Ferrari teammates Charles Leclerc and Carlos Sainz Jr.

