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150 FILS

POOR WEATHER CONDITIONS, RUGGED TERRAIN HAMPER RESCUE MISSION

Kuwait Amir receives PM

Helicopter carrying Iran's Raisi suffers hard landing

Public urged to pray for Iranian president



Amiri Diwan photo

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah at Seif Palace on Sunday.

DUBAI, May 19, (AP): A helicopter carrying Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi suffered a "hard landing" on Sunday, Iranian state media reported, without elaborating. Some began urging the public to pray for Raisi and the others on board as rescue crews sped through a misty, rural forest where his helicopter was believed to be.

The likely crash comes as Iran under Raisi and Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei launched an unprecedented drone-and-missile attack on Israel just last month and has enriched uranium closer than ever to weapons-grade levels. Meanwhile, Iran has faced years of mass protests against its Shiite theocracy over an ailing economy and women's rights - making the moment that much more sensitive for Tehran and the future of the country as the Israel-Hamas war inflames the wider Middle East. Raisi was traveling in Iran's East Azerbaijan province. State TV said the inci-

dent happened near Jolfa, a city on the border with the nation of Azerbaijan, some 600 kilometers (375 miles) northwest of the Iranian capital, Tehran. Later, state TV put it farther east near the village of Uzi, but details remained contradictory.

Traveling with Raisi were Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian, the governor of Iran's East Azerbaijan province and other officials and bodyguards, the state-run IRNA news agency reported. One local government official used the word "crash" to describe the incident, but he acknowledged to an Iranian newspaper that he had yet to reach the site himself.

Neither IRNA nor state TV offered any information on Raisi's condition in the hours afterward. However, hard-liners urged the public to pray for him. State TV later aired images of the faithful praying at Imam Reza Shrine in the city of Mashhad, one of Shiite Islam's holiest sites, as well as in Qom and other locations across the country.

"The esteemed president and company were on their way back aboard some

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Opinion

Countries excelled through their leaders, others flopped through their democracy

By Ahmed Al-Jarallah

Editor-in-Chief, the Arab Times

EVERYONE knows the circumstances that prevailed in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and how they imposed the existence of the Constitution and democracy among us; especially the threats from the then Iraqi regime, the Soviet Union's support for this regime and its refusal to recognize Kuwaiti independence.

This is the reason why the great and beautiful Constitution was drawn up by the people of Kuwait -- members of the Constituent Assembly.

The first Assembly went through some good stages and provided a lot for the country, while some witnessed several setbacks; but they did not deviate from the path drawn by the founding fathers in order to preserve the country's political stability no matter the cost.

Kuwait was the first Gulf country to have its own advanced Constitution at the time. Despite the coups and revolutions witnessed in the Arab world, as well as the nationalist and religious movements and others; the people of Kuwait did not deviate from the path until the 1980s, which witnessed a major crisis.

The Kuwaitis, despite their great popular movement, were keen on adhering to the essence of their Constitution; because they knew that Kuwait's sovereignty and unity are the sources of their strength.

Unfortunately, those who inherited these great values were not at the level of the founding fathers of mature democracy, as they were merely political teenagers.

Therefore, they understood that freedom of opinion and expression meant insulting and undermining the powers of the ruler, and that democracy meant encroaching on the powers of other authorities; up to the point that they violated the judiciary and tried to undermine the powers of the ruler.

Rather, they tried several times to restrict him. To make matters worse, social media spread fake accounts that sought to undermine people's dignity in order to subjugate them.

On the other hand, they forgot that the Constitution stipulates that it would develop itself within five years. Yet, they even spread fear of harming it, because they knew about the loopholes that would allow them to impose what they wanted.

Consequently, whenever someone proposed amending it, they launched campaigns against him; up to the extent of denouncing him. They strived to defy the text, so we noticed in recent years that majority of Kuwaitis are fed up with the Constitution and democracy.

In this regard, I remember a story that contains many lessons regarding the outcome of Kuwait's situation and its image in the region. When Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa assumed power in Qatar, succeeding his father in 1995, he sought suggestions from prominent personalities in the country, and told them: "I want us to have a democracy similar to that of Kuwait, what do you think?"

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Corona variant 'FLiRT' more contagious, resists vaccines

By Marwa Al-Bahrawi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, May 19: The World Health Organization (WHO) announced that the new Coronavirus variant 'FLiRT' as the most contagious and dangerous in the world, especially with the expected rise in air temperature this year.

In an exclusive statement to the daily, Internal Diseases and Epidemiology Consultant at Adan Hospital Dr. Ghanem Al-Hujailan clarified that the entry of 'FLiRT' into the country is inevitable, coinciding with the return of students from abroad and the start of the travel and summer season. He said it is expected to appear in Kuwait in the middle of June.

Al-Hujailan pointed out this variant is way different from Omicron, because it is more contagious and resistant to vaccination as a result of numerous mutations in its genetic chain. He said the antibodies formed through repeated infections made it more resistant to vaccination, so it is considered one of the most evasive variants.

He confirmed there is no danger at present, so there is no reason for fear and anxiety and it is not necessary to take additional preventive measures; because 'FLiRT' is like the rest of the Corona variants and the same mechanism will be used to deal with it.

He added the symptoms of infection are the same as those of previous variants -- high fever, congestion in the upper part of the respiratory system and other known influenza symptoms; but it is more contagious and resistant to vaccination, which means those who have been vaccinated are also at risk of infection.

Newswatch

KUWAIT CITY: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah is to patronize and attend the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training ceremony for honor graduates for the academic year 2022/2023.

The ceremony is to take place at 10 a.m. tomorrow Monday at the Authority's theater in **Shuwaikh**. (KUNA)

KUWAIT CITY: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah received a telephone call from his Iraqi counterpart **Mohammad Al-Soudani** who expressed congratulations on the Amiri Order appointing him to the post and assigning him to form the new government.

The Iraqi prime minister wished His Highness the prime minister success and for the State of Kuwait further progress and prosperity. (KUNA)

KUWAIT CITY: Kuwait Minister of Foreign Affairs **Abdullah Al-Yahya** received Sunday the credentials of the new Ambassador of **South Sudan** to the country **Awad Abdulkareem Araasto Ibrahim**.

During a meeting, the Kuwaiti minister wished the new ambassador success in his role and the ties between the two countries further prosperity. (KUNA)

RIYADH: The Saudi Royal Court stated that **King Salman bin Abdulaziz** would undergo medical tests on Sunday due to "high temperature and joint pain."

The Saudi Press Agency (SPA) reported that the examinations would be conducted at the royal clinics at Al-Salam Palace in **Jeddah**. (KUNA)

Kuwait-Philippines meeting on domestic workers imminent

KUWAIT CITY, May 19: Abdulaziz Al-Ali, the director and advisor of the Union of Owners of Domestic Workers Recruitment Offices, has indicated that there are positive signs suggesting an upcoming meeting between Kuwait and the Philippines to revive bilateral discussions and bridge the gap between the two countries, reports Al-Jarida daily.

This effort aims to facilitate the return of Filipino domestic workers to Kuwait. Al-Ali expressed optimism, especially with Philippines Department of Migrant Workers (DMW) Secretary Hans Leo Caedac's involvement, which has sparked hope among stakeholders interested in domestic workers.

Highlighting the significance of Filipino domestic workers in Kuwait, Al-Ali stated that they constitute around 50 percent of the total domestic workforce in the country while at the same time emphasizing the importance of Filipino workers due to their communication skills, level of education, and familiarity with Kuwaiti society's customs and traditions.

Al-Ali underscored the challenge of replacing this workforce, as it has left a significant void in the market.

He urged the relevant government agencies to expedite the

Al-Ali

Continued on Page 5



PM Diwan photos



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah chairs the first Cabinet meeting.

Labor experts suggest fixes for domestic worker issues

Info ministry, Bait Al-Othman agree on cooperation

KUWAIT CITY, May 19, (KUNA): The Kuwait Ministry of Information signed, Sunday, a cooperation protocol with Bait Al-Othman Museum to promote Kuwaiti heritage and nationalism.

On the cooperation protocol, the Undersecretary of the Information Ministry Dr. Nasser Mhaisen elaborated that this protocol seeks to create and apply strategies of cultural and intellectual partnerships between institutions and museums.

Through the cooperation protocol, Kuwaiti cultural events and exhibitions would be broadcasted on both television and radio for everyone to experience, added Dr. Mhaisen.

Dr. Mhaisen praised Bait Al-Othman Museum's role for setting a cultural and historical example in Kuwait for local and visiting enthusiasts.

Meanwhile, Abdullah Al-Othman Heritage

Center Director Anwar Al-Refai told KUNA that the cooperation agreement is a commemorative effort to highlight Kuwait's forefathers and honor their legacy in paving the way for Kuwait to flourish.

Al-Refai also praised the Minister of Information Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi in his determination through cooperating with both private and volunteer sectors to emphasize the important role of displaying Kuwaiti history and heritage.

According to the cooperation protocol, the museum's displays will be well prepared for filming.

Furthermore, the cooperation between Bait Al-Othman Museum and the Ministry of Information will result in holding events and festivities related to National holidays of Kuwait as well as promote cultural tourism in the country.



KUNA photo

Undersecretary of the Information Ministry Dr. Nasser Mhaisen and Abdullah Al-Othman Heritage Center Director Anwar Al-Refai during the signing of cooperation protocol.

Al-Dagher & Al-Ajmi secure Council seats

KUWAIT CITY, May 19, (KUNA): Waleed Al-Dagher and Fahad Al-Ajmi won seats of the sixth and ninth constituencies, respectively, in the 13th legislative term of the 2024 Municipal Council on Saturday.

Announcing the results of the by-elections, head of the main committee of the sixth constituency **Abdullah Al-Attal** said Al-Dagher got 3,322 votes.

Meanwhile, head of the main committee of the ninth constituency **Nasser Al-Badr** said Al-Ajmi got 10,404 votes.

The results came after completion of the vote counting following a 12-hour voting process.

Ten nominees were contesting for the

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Prayer Timings

Fajr 03:23 Asr 15:20
 Sunrise .. 04:54 Maghrib .. 18:35
 Zohr 11:44 Isha 20:03

Local

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

Ministry's initiative drives conservation and savings

MEW implements strategies to manage citizens' debt in private housing

KUWAIT CITY, May 19: Falah Al-Mutairi, Acting Undersecretary of the Customer Service Sector at the Ministry of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy, provided insights into the variable nature of citizens' debt in private housing, which fluctuates daily due to continuous debt collection efforts, reports Al-Jarida daily.

He mentioned that the debt typi-

cally ranges between 125 and 130 million dinars and highlighted the ministry's success in collecting approximately 500 million dinars during the last fiscal year, with an annual increase in this figure. He emphasized the ongoing efforts to collect debts through various means and channels, as well as the ministry's provision of facilities to citizens to facilitate timely debt

payment. Al-Mutairi explained that citizens with large debts are offered installment payment options, where an initial payment is made followed by equal installments over a specified period, with a signed acknowledgment of debt. He assured that there is no shortage of staff in customer service offices and encouraged citizens to utilize

Expected weather for next 24 hrs:
By Day: Hot with light to moderate northwesterly wind, with speeds of 10-32 km/h and some scattered clouds will appear.
By Night: Mild and relatively

Weather

humid over coastal areas with light variable wind to light to moderate southeasterly wind, with speeds of 08-28 km/h.

Station **Max Exp** **Min Rec**
 Kuwait City 41 29

Kuwait Airport 41 25
 Abdaly 42 24
 Jahra 42 26
 Salmiyah 36 29
 Nuwaisib 38 26
 Wafra 41 23



Above: Some photos from the event to celebrate 'Kuwaiti Women's Day' by the Ministry of Interior.



Photos by Mohammad Morsi

'Mol proud of women in uniform'

On the occasion of Kuwaiti Women's Day, which falls on May 16 of each year, the Ministry of Interior issued a statement in which it said: 'We are proud that women in the Ministry of Interior have achieved paramount success in the field of military work and their continued giving to meet the call of national duty, which confirms their loyalty and fidelity to their homeland,

reports Al-Anba daily.

This is in addition to their keenness to highlight the bright civilized face of the country with pride and progress and also confirms the sound vision of the political leadership that was keen to empower Kuwaiti women and consider them an authentic element and an active partner in society.

Other Voices

Exponential growth of clergymen

By Ahmed alsarraf

The widespread issue in our societies is the unnatural surge in the number of clergy members across various sectors like government, education, and society at large. Historically, until the mid-seventies, their numbers were manageable.

However, with the sudden increase in oil prices and subsequent rise in revenues, particularly in Gulf countries, there was an exponential growth in clergy members. This was further exacerbated by regional conflicts, where certain regimes sought clerics to justify expenditures and bolster their image.

Clergy members began playing a crucial role, attracting even outsiders to join their ranks. To assert their significance, some offered personalized interpretations of religion, positioning themselves as intermediaries between humanity and the divine, with authority to elevate certain beliefs and condemn others.

In my experience, genuine devotion to faith is rare among clergy, regardless of their wealth. Many seem driven by financial gain and social status, engaging in petty rivalries over positions on Sharia committees, boards, and charitable associations.

Over time, many have portrayed themselves as "scholars," commanding undue reverence wherever they go, surpassing the acknowledgment

received by professionals in fields like physics or biology, or exceptional doctors who have saved countless lives.

Reflecting on this, it's clear that our reliance on clerics for matters beyond ceremonial rituals like marriage is waning. With governmental bodies addressing issues such as divorce and inheritance in Islamic countries, and the abundance of religious knowledge available through smartphones, the necessity for clerical guidance is diminishing.

A smartphone can provide access to a wealth of religious information, surpassing the expertise of many clerics. This prompts questions about the validity of labeling these individuals as scholars in an age where such knowledge is readily accessible to anyone with a smartphone.

The value of any human being, state, or society lies in the fact that these entities, individually or collectively, have provided great services to humanity and the world, making the lives of "all human beings" longer, their living more comfortable, their happiness more lasting, their health better, and their future more beautiful, through geographical, medical, pharmaceutical discoveries, methods of treatment and air conditioning, providing the maximum conditions for speed and safety in transportation, providing food for billions of mouths, 365 days a year, and so on.

So where does the role of those who insist on calling them scholars lie when they are not scholars?!

□ □ □

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Sulfur line blockage, oil leakage cited

Temporary malfunction of some units in Ahmadi Refinery: report

KUWAIT CITY, May 19: A defect was uncovered in Ahmadi Refinery recently; resulting in the blockage of the sulfur line, oil leakage into the sea and a leak in the main seawater line used for cooling; which led to temporary power outage and malfunction of some units in the refinery, reports Al-Seyassah daily quoting sources.

Sources confirmed that owing to the efficiency of the concerned employees in the Security and Safety Sector and those in charge of immediate repairs, the defect

was fixed quickly and operations returned to normal within a short period.

Sources said the alternates at Mina Al-Ahmadi Refinery exerted tremendous efforts to protect all the units, confirming none of the concerned employees were injured during the repair works.

In another development, sources revealed the price of one barrel of Kuwaiti oil increased by 84 cents to reach \$74.85 per barrel during Friday's trading, compared to \$84.90 on Thursday.

KUWAIT CITY, May 19: The Ministry of Education has granted a one-week grace period to employees who have not uploaded academic certificates higher than high school on its website, reports Al-Jarida daily.

Senior educational sources stated that 18,000 employees already uploaded their academic qualifications on the ministry's website and through Sahel application. However, 19,000 employees have not yet uploaded their qualifications; so the sources stressed that those who fail to upload their certificates during this grace period will face legal problems, as the ministry warned in its latest announcement.

Sources added the ministry may also withhold the salaries of these employees to compel them to submit documents related to their academic qualifications obtained after high school. It should be noted that the ministry is coordinating with the Ministry of Higher Education to ensure the authenticity of these certificates.

Meanwhile, Hessa Al-Mutawa, the acting Assistant Undersecretary for Public Education Affairs at the Ministry of Education, has announced that teachers and administrative staff will be allowed to remain in schools after official working hours if there is a genuine need for them to do so.

This decision is in response to the comments of Kuwait Teachers Society regarding the circular prohibiting the presence of academic and administrative staff after official working hours, which had a negative impact on the workflow in schools.

In light of this, Chairman of the society Hamad Al-Houlim has commended the cooperation of Al-Mutawa and her understanding and quick response to their comments.

Al-Mutawa sent a letter dated May 14, 2024 to school administrations, permitting the presence of staff in schools after official working hours based on the actual work requirements, and after coordination and approval.

He clarified that tasks such as exams and grading papers are considered part of the work requirements and necessitate the presence of educational and administrative staff in schools after official working hours.

MoE extends grace period for employees certificate uploads

Ministry addresses Teachers' Society concerns



MEW and KPTC officials during the launch of 30 buses carrying awareness advertisements to rationalize energy consumption.

30 buses to carry awareness advertisement

MEW launches energy conservation promotion in cooperation with KPTC

KUWAIT CITY, May 19, (KUNA): The Ministry of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy (MEW) launched 30 public transportation buses carrying awareness advertisements to promote energy conservation in cooperation with the Kuwait Public Transport Company (KPTC).

The Ministry stated in a press release that the advertisements for the "Wafer" (Conserve) campaign and the "Hafiz" (Preserve) program, which encourages the rationalization of water and electricity consumption, were broadcasted.

This grants people incentives of up to 50 percent off their bills through conserving water and electricity in private residences, reflecting the ministry's belief in the importance of awareness campaigns to reduce excessive consumption of electricity and water.

The ministry explained that the national campaign will assist in updating its vision regarding the country's electricity and water needs and rationalizing their consumption, which will directly alleviate the burden on public finances and contribute to the development of the environmental system in Kuwait.

Ban on working under sun from June

KUWAIT CITY, May 19: The Public Authority for Manpower (PAM) is preparing to enforce Administrative Decision No. 535/2015, which prohibits working in open areas from 11:00 am to 4:00 pm during the months of June to August, reports Al-Jarida daily quoting sources.

Sources explained this decision aims to protect workers from the Sun's intense rays during summer and to regulate work without causing disruptions to ongoing projects.

Sources warned that PAM will not tolerate violations of this decision, as field inspection teams from the National Center for Occupational Health Administration will monitor compliance over a three-month period. These teams will conduct campaigns on work sites to identify violations and take legal action against business

owners. Penalties and fines, as outlined in the Private Sector Labor Law, will be imposed on businesses that violate this decision. Fines range from KD100 to KD200 per worker affected by the violation, and the company's file could be blocked until the violation is rectified, sources stated.

Sources pointed out that working in open areas during summer is challenging due to the harsh climatic conditions in the country. The implementation of this decision has been widely accepted and supported by companies across various sectors, as it considers public interest and aligns with Kuwait's commitment to international labor standards. By implementing this decision, business owners demonstrate their commitment to the health and safety of their workers, sources added.

The campaign aimed to change the consumption behavior of elec-

tricity and water among individuals in Kuwait.

diwaniya ديوانية

A DIGEST OF PUBLIC OPINION

'Sheikh Mishal's decisions aim at correcting democratic path'

"WITHOUT A shred of doubt, the majority of Kuwaiti citizens, particularly the sincere rationalists devoted to the nation's well-being, stability, and prosperity, yearned for a top-down reform revolution to shatter the political stagnation, eradicate the rampant corruption and bureaucratic inertia, and quell the democratic and legislative disorder that had long threatened Kuwait with collapse and utter chaos," columnist **Dr Noura Saleh Al-Majim** wrote for **Al-Qabas** daily.



Dr Al-Majim

"Finally, the long-awaited revolution dawned upon Kuwait, orchestrated by His Highness Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. His resolute decisions, including the dissolution of the National Assembly and the suspension of some constitutional articles for a limited period, not exceeding four years, while entrusting a committee to scrutinize and overhaul these articles and the constitution at large, marked a pivotal moment.

"Kuwait, hailed as one of the oldest democracies in the region, had prided itself on stable and transparent governance, ensuring freedoms and representation akin to Western democracies.

"However, regrettably, in recent years, this democratic ethos had devolved into chaos, characterized by squabbles, personal agendas, and an alarming disregard for the state's fundamental concerns and citizens' vital interests.

"More worrisome was the encroachment upon constitutional powers, including those of the Amir, which remained sacrosanct in established Western democracies, such as England.

"His Highness the Amir's recent decisions primarily aimed to recalibrate the democratic trajectory and decisively eliminate the entrenched chaos that historically led even venerable democracies like Italy into decades-long turmoil, whose repercussions endure.

"Indeed, Sheikh Mishal's address resonated with the gravity of this chaos and outlined the roadmap for a transformative transitional phase, steering Kuwait towards a new era conducive to national stability and prosperity.

"His speech pinpointed the myriad manifestations of democratic chaos witnessed in Kuwait in preceding years, notably the legislative authority's blatant overreach into executive powers, incessant and unproductive interrogations of executive members, and obstructionism against new governments based on objections to certain appointments -- an egregious constitutional transgression, given that governmental accountability traditionally follows its tenure, as per the Amir's prerogative.

"These actions, contrary to the tenets of sound democracy, reflect not democratic principles but chaos, driven by a desire for monopolistic control under the guise of democracy. Upholding the separation of powers among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches is paramount for stable democratic governance.

"Even the practice of interrogation, an inherent democratic right, must be conducted judiciously, focusing on significant issues rather than trivial or personal matters that hinder legislative productivity and decision-making.

"It's noteworthy that major international institutions monitoring democratic transitions have flagged the United States, the world's largest democracy, for undergoing significant democratic upheaval due to Congressional discord and protracted inquiries into (former US president Donald) Trump's eligibility and pending legal matters.

"In conclusion, as His Highness emphasized, Kuwait's founding visionaries championed democracy to safeguard rights, stability, and the common good.

"Democracy, as underscored by His Highness, hinges on respecting authorities and their boundaries. Thus, his recent decisions, notably the dissolution of the National Assembly, are geared towards resetting the democratic trajectory to ensure the nation's welfare, stability, and the liberties and rights of Kuwaiti citizens."

Also:

"We must wholeheartedly believe that the only path to rectify the current steep decline in our political and parliamentary landscape lies in the procedural measures undertaken by His Highness the Amir. Perhaps this is the key to steering our nation towards a new era of democracy, as promised by His Highness," columnist **Youssef Al-Shayji** wrote for **Al-Jarida** daily.

"It's essential to note that the steps taken by His Highness, such as dissolving the National Assembly and suspending certain constitutional articles, as delineated in the Amiri decree issued by His Highness Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, were anticipated by some, including myself.

"I had articulated a similar scenario in an article written over four months ago, precisely on January 14, 2024. However, the publication of that article was obstructed, with the title "Addressing citizenship issues requires halting the National Assembly" held back by the editorial board of **Al-Jarida** newspaper.

"The rationale behind this title was the interconnectedness between cleansing the citizenship register of fraudulent entries and ensuring electoral integrity, paving the way for fair and transparent elections.

"The intent behind highlighting this episode is to underscore that His Highness's actions resonated with the desires of many segments of our society. While such

measures may not be conventional or universally accepted in all circumstances, the severity of our country's problems, compounded over many years, made it exceedingly challenging to address them through conventional means.

"Even administrations and national councils that were once successful have contributed to the deterioration we face today, a sentiment repeatedly expressed by His Highness since assuming the role of Crown Prince and then Amir. His decisive actions preempted further deterioration.

"Without delving into the specifics of His Highness's address, I must commend the historic speech for its comprehensive review of the circumstances and reasons behind the momentous decisions made.

"It's crucial to dispel any comparisons between the recent events and the dissolution of the National Assembly in 1976 and 1986. The political and parliamentary landscapes during those times were vastly different.

"The 1975 Assembly, for instance, was renowned for its achievements, notably its role in nationalizing petroleum resources, while the 1985 Council excelled in oversight, holding the minister of justice accountable for financial misconduct.

"The motivations behind their dissolution differed significantly from the recent measures aimed at reforming the democratic process.

"In response to His Highness's corrective measures, we, as citizens, must play a positive role by:

-- Expressing widespread support for and endorsement of the recent measures through various mediums such as advertisements, statements, and articles.

-- Establishing temporary mechanisms of popular communication to replace the suspended National Assembly, comprising diverse representative delegations from various sectors of society.

-- Ensuring that proposed constitutional amendments primarily address procedural hurdles that hindered the relationship between the executive and legislative branches. These amendments should focus on issues such as the formation of the government, session requirements, and time-frames.

-- Prioritizing proposals that enhance freedoms and equality, as enshrined in the Constitution's Article 175.

-- Collaborating with His Highness the Crown Prince and the Prime Minister to identify key issues to be included in the government program for the next four years, particularly those concerning economic stability, financial prudence, preservation of national identity, and combating corruption.

In conclusion, our motivation for these endeavors must stem from a deep commitment to safeguarding the Kuwaiti constitution and strengthening democratic life while purging it of past missteps and parliamentary deviations.

"We must firmly believe that His Highness's procedural measures offer the only viable path to correct our current political trajectory and usher in a new era of democracy."

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"Their evil is upon us ... They always start with the citizen, or in other words, they discipline others in us, so their goodness is for others and their evil is for us!" columnist **Talal Al-Saeed** wrote for **Al-Seyassah** daily.

"Now, the removal committees have started working again. First, these committees went to offices that were set up outside citizens' homes. Here, we are not saying that it is not a violation or that there is no encroachment on State property. We acknowledge all of these.

"But, why do you start with us, the citizens? Do these esteemed committees not see the violations in the industrial zones in Shuwaikh, Jahra, Fahaeel and others, violations that have no limit and require months to be removed, until they occupied the sidewalks in these areas? The violations are countless.

"Do the respected removal committees not see cafés and restaurants occupying the squares where tables and chairs are placed outside the shops while the Kuwait Municipality watches? Where are the esteemed removal committees for the random markets in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh, Hasawi, Khaitan, Mahboula and Jahra, which were removed today until they will be established tomorrow?

"Where are the homes that are supposed to be residential and turned into unlicensed markets in random areas, which the removal committees know, as we know them? Do you see the barber, baker, carpenter and other permitted and unpermitted professions -- clear violations of the Residential Real Estate and Residence laws?

"Do the esteemed removal committees not see that the parking lots in schools, mosques, public squares, cooperative societies and even police station squares are full of expatriates' cars, without fear or shame?

"Do the removal committees not see the chains that closed the parking lots or the parking occupiers who illegally rent the parking lots and place empty water bottles to reserve the parking lot for whoever pays, until we have a new job called 'parking boy', accompanied by a car washer, and both of them are in violation of the law? Is residency based on the entry of the first person into Kuwait as a construction worker, and the second as a house worker?

"Do the removal committees not see the violations in Taima and Sulaibiya?

"We tell the removal committees to start with all of these, then the transgressions of citizens, otherwise, my father will only be able to do things... Is it okay?"

— Compiled by PFX Fernandes



A photo taken during the meeting.

'Protecting lives, preserving property'

GFF rolls out summer fire prevention campaign

KUWAIT CITY, May 19: The Chief of the General Fire Force, Major General Khaled Fahd, has instructed the Public Relations and Media Department to organize a comprehensive campaign titled "Prevention and Protection." This initiative, set to launch at the beginning of the summer season, aims to enhance awareness of safety procedures to prevent fires and accidents in homes, workplaces, commercial and tourist complexes, farms, rest houses, chalets, and coastal areas. The campaign will

be executed in full coordination with military and government agencies, public benefit organizations, and associations. It will emphasize national societal responsibility in accident prevention, property and life protection, and community security, reports **Al-Rai** daily.

The campaign will feature an extensive awareness program utilizing the latest technological advancements to reach all citizens and residents, regardless of age, through various electronic channels and social media platforms.

Brigadier General Muhammad Badr Ibrahim, Director of the Public Relations and Media Department, stated that this campaign is part of the force's strategic plan to educate the public on fire hazards and prevention methods. The campaign will employ scientific and realistic methods to disseminate its activities, ensuring it is modern, digitally advanced, and accessible to everyone in multiple languages. The ultimate goal is to enhance preventive awareness across society.

Customs seizes 26.5 kg narcotics; drugs, firearms recovered from 5

Domestic worker commits suicide; paramedic stabbed

By Munif Naif

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff and Agencies

KUWAIT CITY, May 19: Customs officers from the Customs Research and Investigation Department at Air Customs, in collaboration with the Directorate-General for Drugs Control, intercepted a shipment containing around 26.5 kilograms of marijuana and hashish arriving from Europe on Thursday, May 16, reports **Al-Jarida** daily.

Utilizing the "Micro Clear" program, an automated customs system, officers flagged a package suspected of originating from a European country as personal luggage via a shipping company.

Consequently, the shipment was halted, and upon inspection, two bags containing clothes and several large capsules were discovered.

These capsules concealed professionally narcotized hashish and marijuana, totaling approximately 26.5 kilograms.

The suspects involved were arrested, the illicit items were confiscated, and they were subsequently handed over to the appropriate authorities.

□ □ □

Five-man gang arrested: The joint efforts of the Criminal Security Sector of the Directorate-General for Drugs Control, in collaboration with the General Administration of Customs, led to the arrest of a criminal network comprising five individuals specialized in smuggling narcotic substances, reports **Al-Jarida** daily.

Following an exchange of gunfire with one of the suspects and resistance from security personnel, a total of 27 items were seized from their possession.

These items included one kilogram of hashish, narcotic marijuana, 200 capsules of psychotropic substances, 15 kilograms of suspected substances, 34 bottles of alcohol, as well as unlicensed firearms and ammunition.

The Ministry of Interior disclosed in a press statement today, that the arrested persons include a Kuwaiti citizen working as a customs inspector, a Syrian, an Indian and two bedoun.

The confiscated items, along with the suspects, were handed over to the competent authorities to initiate necessary legal proceedings against them, underscoring the principle that no one is exempt from the law, regardless of their status.

□ □ □

Domestic worker ends life: A domestic worker committed suicide by hanging herself in her sponsor's home in the Sulaibiya area, reports **Al-Anba** daily.

A security source said that the worker's sponsor informed Interior Ministry operations, and when the security forces moved to the house, the worker was seen dangling from a piece of cloth one end tied around the neck and the other end to the ceiling of the prefabricated room.

□ □ □

Sheep fodder store fire controlled: Firefighters extinguished a fire that broke out in a sheep fodder store in Salmi.

According to a security source, the Operations Unit at the Ministry of Interior received a report about the fire incident. Security and firefighters immediately rushed to the site and controlled the fire.

No casualties or injuries were reported. A case was registered and investigations are ongoing to determine the cause of fire.

□ □ □

Neighbor stabs paramedic: An unidentified paramedic was rushed to the Southern Sulaibiya government clinic and subsequently to Farwaniya Hospital after he was reportedly stabbed in the back and chest by his neighbor, reports **Al-Anba** daily.

The victim, a bedoun born in 1983, alleged that his neighbor who is also bedoun attacked him following a verbal altercation.

The suspect has been detained, while the victim is receiving treatment. The seriousness of the injuries is not known.



The marijuana and hashish seized from the shipment coming from a European country.

Ministerial decision regulates advertisement fees & height

KUWAIT CITY, May 19: Minister of State for Municipal Affairs and Minister of Public Works, Dr. Noura Al-Mashaan, has issued a ministerial decision endorsing amendments proposed by the Municipal Council to the advertisement regulations, reports **Al-Jarida** daily.

Among the approved changes, Al-Mashaan incorporated revisions to Clause Five of Article 20 of Ministerial Resolution No. 599 of 2023. These revisions include the introduction of a financial fee of 75 dinars annually per square meter for mobile electronic advertisements and 50 dinars annually per square meter for fixed

and non-mobile electronic commercial advertisements.

Additionally, Al-Mashaan introduced Paragraph No. 5 to Clause Four of the same article, stipulating a monthly financial fee of 5 dinars per square meter.

Furthermore, the amendment of the second paragraph of Clause "C" of Article Sixteen was approved. This amendment pertains to billboards and electronic screens, specifying that the height of the lower edge of the advertising box should not be less than 3 meters above the ground and not more than 8.5 meters.



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Kuwait celebrates International Museum Day

Show highlights role of museums in education

KUWAIT CITY, May 19, (KUNA): Kuwait's museums celebrated Saturday International Museum Day (IMD) through organizing different kinds of activities, under the theme of "Museums for Education and Research".

The celebration of Dar Al-Athar Al-Islamiyah at the American Cultural Centre included drawing, photography and education activities as well as artistic workshops, in addition to storytelling for children and organizing tours to help parents discover their children's innovative skills.



KUNA photo Part of the celebration during the International Museum Day (IMD) through organizing different kinds of activities, under the theme of 'Museums for Education and Research'.

Additionally, Sheikh Abdullah Al Salem Cultural Center's celebration included a series of distinguished programs aiming to enhance the role of museums and cultural centers in educational and cultural process.

The festival involved some other activities, interactive workshops, panel discussions of experts and academics in the areas of education, museums and scientific research.

Furthermore, the center had a presentation on the role of Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, the 11th ruler and founder of modern Kuwait, in cultural and education renaissance.

The show highlighted the phases of cultural and educational movement in the country and the key role of museums in disseminating culture and science.

The center further presents interactive and interesting workshops for families and topics about the developed role of museums in backing official educational and innovative approach as well as the future of preserving cultural heritage.

Every year since 1977, the world marks the IMD, which represents a unique moment for the international museum community.

The objective is to raise awareness about the fact that museums are a key means of cultural exchange, enrichment of cultures and development of mutual understanding, cooperation and peace among peoples.

The world marked the IMD for the first time 40 years ago, and more museums participate in IMD across the globe. Last year, more than 37,000 museums took part in the event in about 158 countries and territories.



African ambassadors pose for a photo during a press conference held to announce the launch of Africa Day 2024 activities.

Call for global unity at Africa Day event

African Diplomatic Corps Dean commends Kuwait's support and investment potential

KUWAIT CITY, May 19: The Dean of the African Diplomatic Corps, HE Muhammad Saad Oro, highlighted the longstanding and excellent relations between Kuwait and the African continent and praised Kuwait's support for development efforts in Africa, led by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad, emphasizing the contributions made through loans, grants, and technical assistance from institutions like the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development, reports Al-Jarida daily.

Speaking during a press conference which was organized to announce the launch of Africa Day 2024 activities, Oro noted the significant potential for cooperation between Kuwait and African nations, particularly in investment and trade, as well as the promising opportunities for the Kuwaiti private sector to engage in Africa.

Regarding the celebration of "Africa Day 2024," Oro emphasized its significance, coinciding with 60 years of fruitful cooperation

Kuwait's participation in Rabat book fair added 'cultural value': Moroccan official

RABAT, May 19, (KUNA): The General Director of the International Book and Publishing Fair in Rabat, Latifa Muftaqir said on Sunday that Kuwait's participation in the fair added cultural value to the event.

In a statement to KUNA, during her visit to Kuwait's National Council for Culture, Arts and Literature (NCCAL) pavilion, Muftaqir said that Kuwait's participation has always been highly anticipated by the visitors, as it provides a wide range of publi-

cations in all of the fair's 29 editions.

On his part, NCCAL's representative Mohammad Darwish, during Muftaqir's visit to Kuwait's pavilion, praised Morocco's efforts in organizing and holding the fair and welcoming the participants.

Morocco's Prime Minister Aziz Akhannouch kicked off the 29th International Book and Publishing Fair in Rabat on Thursday with 743 participations from 48 countries.

between Kuwait and Africa. He highlighted Africa's abundant resources and opportunities in various sectors despite facing significant challenges.

Responding to questions about the African Union's stance on the situation in Gaza, Ambassador

Mohamed Ould Sheikh of Mauritania said the world is helpless in the face of the crisis and emphasized the importance of condemning such actions. He commended South Africa for its proactive stance and called for global cooperation to address the issue.

Mishref Fairgrounds set to host 21st gold and jewelry exhibition

KUWAIT CITY, May 19: The Kuwait International Fair Company is gearing up to host the '21st International Gold and Jewelry Exhibition' from May 22 to May 27 at the International Fairgrounds in Mishref sponsored by 'Aisha' Jewelry and 'Emaar' Jewelry, reports Al-Jarida daily.

Basma Al-Dahim, Executive Director of the Marketing and Sales Sector at the Kuwait International Fair Company, announced Hall 4 -- covering an area of 10,000 sq meters of the Fairgrounds has been fully booked.

Al-Dahim emphasized that the "International Gold and Jewelry" exhibition is among the most prestigious and successful specialized gold and jewelry exhibitions in the Middle East.



Basma Al-Dahim

It serves as a platform for entrepreneurs and jewelry designers to showcase the latest designs of diamonds, gold, silver, platinum, precious metals, precious stones, and pearls. The exhibition brings together exhibitors such as wholesalers, suppliers, exporters, manufacturers, distributors, and professionals from various countries worldwide.

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Photo taken during the honoring ceremony.

Al-Basis named UN envoy for community partnership

Hamad Al-Basis, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Mabarar Al-Awazem Charity, has been appointed as a United Nations Ambassador for Community Partnership by the Board of Directors of the Regional Network for Social Responsibility, reports Al-Jarida daily.

In a press statement, Al-Basis expressed his honor and pride in receiving this title, stating his commitment to promoting positive practices that enhance responsibility towards society through collaboration with governmental, pri-

vate, and non-governmental institutions.

As a UN Ambassador for Community Partnership, Al-Basis aims to facilitate effective partnerships between different sectors to achieve sustainable development and address social challenges.

The ceremony appointing him as a UN ambassador took place during the Eighth Partnership and Social Responsibility Conference and Award for Islamic Financial Institutions and Banks, hosted by Kuwait on the 13th of this month.



3D printed water tanks

Faster, greener solutions for infrastructure

Kuwait hits significant milestone with first 3D-printed water tank

KUWAIT CITY, May 19: A significant milestone was achieved by the Abyan Building Construction Company in Kuwait with the successful completion of the first large water tank using 3D printed concrete technology, reports Al-Rai daily.

Measuring 4.5 meters in height and 7 meters in diameter, these tanks were built using low-cost concrete through 3D printing in just five days, showcasing the efficacy of technology in achieving substantial time and labor savings.

Utilizing the COBOD 3D construction printer, the process resulted in a 25 percent

reduction in concrete and reinforcing materials compared to conventional construction methods, leading to significant reductions in resource consumption and material waste.

Unlike traditional tank construction, which is constrained by uniform wall thickness throughout, 3D printing technology offers the advantage of design flexibility.

Engineers can adjust wall thickness as needed, allowing for thicker lower walls and thinner upper walls, thereby optimizing material usage and enhancing construction economy and sustainability.

Top Mideast executives hold coordination meeting in Riyadh

Kuwait joins regional effort to strengthen aviation safety

RIYADH, May 19, (KUNA): Directors of civil aviation in the Middle East are holding a meeting, in Riyadh, due May 19-20, to swap expertise and coordinate efforts for ensuring air transportation safety globally.

The meeting is organized under the umbrella of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), said Abdullah Al-Rajhi, Kuwait's acting deputy director general for aviation safety, transport and security, in remarks to KUNA.

Al-Rajhi, who had already taken part in today's session as head of the Kuwaiti Directorate General of Civil Aviation's delegation, told KUNA that he and his conferring peers addressed issues on aviation safety, proposed strategies for the coming years, adding that recommendations were issued for sake of enhancing safety and security.

On his part, Faisal Al-Asousi, the DGCA aviation supervisor, told the Kuwaiti news agency that the conferees discussed recommendations



The Kuwaiti delegation at the meeting of general directors of civil aviation for Middle Eastern countries.

and decisions that had been taken at the level of committees and technical groups of ICAO's member states.

The State of Kuwait is always interested in partaking in such meetings to contribute to the international

efforts for regulating the sector and staying abreast of latest developments in aviation.

Hussam Al-Rashid, the DGCA aviation safety director, also took part in the meeting.



Part of the meeting of the Directors General of Civil Aviation for the Middle East countries.

Kuwait eases Eid Al-Adha preparations

PAAAFR gives nod to import sheep for Eid Al-Adha from Jordan via Iraq

KUWAIT CITY, May 19: The Public Authority for Agriculture Affairs and Fish Resources has given the green light for the importation of a shipment of sacrificial animals, announcing the arrival of a consignment from Jordan via the Iraqi border through the Abdali port, reports Al-Rai daily.

The purpose behind this move is to supply the local market with sheep and sacrificial animals in preparation for the upcoming blessed Eid Al-Adha.

The PAAAFR emphasized that this decision aims "to curb the increase in prices and ensure that sacrificial animals are available at reasonable prices."

It further highlighted that all necessary measures have been taken to expedite the entry of sheep into the local market after ensuring their safety and complying with all veterinary quarantine requirements, thereby enhancing food security.

Furthermore, the PAAAFR revealed that "the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has agreed to open a transit route to facilitate the import of sacrificial animals from Jordan to Kuwait."

Humanitarian outreach amplifies hope

Haffaz launches Qurbani project

KUWAIT CITY, May 19: The Kuwaiti Charitable Society for the Service of the Holy Qur'an and its Sciences (Haffaz) has initiated the Qurbani project to support the needy in Kuwait and several other countries. This launch is part of a series of charitable initiatives planned to coincide with the upcoming ten days of Dhu al-Hijjah, reports Al-Jarida daily.

Lawyer Abdulaziz Al-Rifai, Chairman of the Association's Board of Directors, stated, "This year, Haffaz has introduced the project under the slogan 'Your Sacrifice is a Rite and a Joy.' We are implementing the project both within Kuwait and in various other countries. Last year, the sacrifices distributed by the Association benefited 28,000 individuals both inside and outside Kuwait."

In addition to the Qurbani project, the association is launching several other initiatives, with the most notable being the project to break the fast for fasting individuals on the day of



Abdulaziz Al-Rifai, Chairman of the Association's Board of Directors.

Arafat. This particular project aims to support Syrian refugees and displaced persons.

Countries excelled

Continued from Page 1

I believe that one of these personalities was the late Nasser bin Abdullah Al-Attiyah who said: "We are at your service, O Amir, and we gladly listen and obey." Sheikh Hamad responded: "I am seeking your opinion." Al-Attiyah stated: "Then you will find a brother cursing his brother. The chaos that Kuwait has reached left everyone divided. We are people whose affairs are governed by the orders of their leader."

On this basis, the Shura Council was created in Qatar, similar to that in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates.

We have witnessed in those countries that development is proceeding according to what was decreed for them and corruption is almost negligible, because their rulers have the ambition and desire to revive their country, not dozens of rulers.

This was not the case in Kuwait when there were 50 rulers in the Assembly, all of whom believed that they had more executive powers than the head of State.

Today, Kuwait is in the hands of a ruler who is faithful to its interests and has the desire to advance his country.

This leader has been grieving due to the chaos and decline of his country, and how things turned out; so he made his big decision to get rid of the nation's illness at whatever cost.

Al-Dagher,

Continued from Page 1

vacant seat in the sixth constituency and eight for the seat in the ninth district. The number of voters in the six and ninth constituencies hit 79,754 and 134,683 respectively.

The election was held after the Municipal Council announced on April 22 the vacancy of seats of Nasser Al-Kaif and Faheed Al-Muwaizri. The polling witnessed inspection tours of Minister of Justice, Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Mohammad Al-Wasmi, and Undersecretary of Minister of Interior Liet, Gen. Sheikh Salem Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah as well as some other senior officials.

Meanwhile, head of emergencies department at Ministry of Health Dr. Ahmad Al-Shati said 26 clinics and nine ambulances have been provided for polling stations.

Kuwait-Philippines

Continued from Page 1

meeting and engage in serious discussions to reach comprehensive agreements that satisfy both sides.

He also expressed gratitude to Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousef, the First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense, and Minister of Interior, for his willingness to facilitate visits to Kuwait within the legal framework.

Furthermore, Al-Ali advocated for the signing of more memorandums of understanding between Kuwait and labor-exporting countries, emphasizing the need for diversity in sourcing domestic workers.

He suggested that having multiple exporting countries would reduce recruitment costs and create market balance in case any country suspends its worker exports for any reason.

Domestic workers in Kuwait are essential to the daily lives of citizens and residents, who rely heavily on them for various household and caregiving tasks. However, the country faces significant challenges due to a limited number of labor-exporting countries, reports Al-Rai daily.

Al-Rai investigated the causes and consequences of this crisis, seeking insights from a labor affairs specialist and two domestic worker recruitment experts. They proposed six solutions to address the crisis:

1. Develop training programs to educate citizens on the rights of domestic workers.
2. Foster government cooperation with labor-exporting countries to improve working conditions and ensure a steady flow of workers.
3. Seek alternative labor-exporting countries.
4. Allow entry of workers from neighboring countries without requiring them to enter from their home country.
5. Adjust recruitment prices to be comparable with those of neighboring countries.
6. Learn from the experiences of neighboring countries in resolving similar issues.

Bassam Al-Shammari, a domestic worker affairs specialist, explained that the crisis is not solely due to the sponsorship system or laws. Changes in immigration policies in labor-exporting countries, driven by international pressures or internal reforms, have led to reduced worker availability. Additionally, improved working conditions in these countries make domestic workers prefer to stay home, Al-Shammari noted that fixed recruitment prices compel agencies to send older workers, whom other countries refuse.

Helicopter carrying

Continued from Page 1

helicopters and one of the helicopters was forced to make a hard landing due to the bad weather and fog." Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi said in comments aired on state TV. "Various

rescue teams are on their way to the region but because of the poor weather and foggy conditions it might take time for them to reach the helicopter."

He added: "The region is a bit (rugged) and it's difficult to make contact. We are waiting for rescue teams to reach the landing site and give us more information." Rescuers were attempting to reach the site, state TV said, but had been hampered by poor weather conditions. There had been heavy rain and fog reported with some wind. IRNA called the area a "forest" and the region is known to be mountainous as well. State TV aired images of SUVs racing through a wooded area.

A rescue helicopter tried to reach the area where authorities believe Raisi's helicopter was, but it couldn't land due to the heavy mist, emergency services spokesman Babak Yektaparast told IRNA.

Raisi had been on the border with Azerbaijan early Sunday to inaugurate a dam with Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev. The dam is the third one that the two nations built on the Aras River. The visit came despite chilly relations between the two nations, including over a gun attack on Azerbaijan's Embassy in Tehran in 2023, and Azerbaijan's diplomatic relations with Israel, which Iran's Shiite theocracy views as its main enemy in the region.

Iran flies a variety of helicopters in the country, but international sanctions make it difficult to obtain parts for them. Its military air fleet also largely dates back to before the 1979 Islamic Revolution. IRNA published images it described as Raisi taking off in what resembled a Bell 412 helicopter, with a blue-and-white paint scheme previously seen in published photographs.

Raisi, 63, is a hard-liner who formerly led the country's judiciary. He is viewed as a protégé of Khamenei and some analysts have suggested he could replace the 85-year-old leader after his death or resignation from the role.

Raisi won Iran's 2021 presidential election, a vote that saw the lowest turnout in the Islamic Republic's history. Raisi is sanctioned by the U.S. in part over his involvement in the mass execution of thousands of political prisoners in 1988 at the end of the bloody Iran-Iraq war.

Under Raisi, Iran now enriches uranium at nearly weapons-grade levels and hampers international inspections. Iran has armed Russia in its war on Ukraine, as well as launched a massive drone-and-missile attack on Israel amid its war against Hamas in the Gaza Strip. It also has continued arming proxy groups in the Mideast, like Yemen's Houthi rebels and Lebanon's Hezbollah.

Meanwhile, mass protests in the country have raged for years. The most recent involved the 2022 death of Mahsa Amini, a woman who had been earlier detained over allegedly not wearing a hijab, or headscarf, to the liking of authorities.

South Africa 'exempts' Kuwaitis from visa fees

Tourism soars by 33.7%

KUWAIT CITY, May 19: The South African Ambassador to Kuwait HE Dr. Manelisi Genge, highlighted the burgeoning tourism sector in his country, noting a significant uptick in travelers from the Middle East, including Kuwait, reports Al-Jarida daily.

In 2023 alone, he said, South Africa welcomed 54,339 travelers from the region, marking a remarkable 33.7% increase compared to the previous year.

Speaking at a celebration organized by the Contemporary Art Platform in collaboration with the South African Embassy, under the title 'We Welcome You to Beautiful South Africa', Genge underscored the growing popularity of South Africa among Kuwaiti and expatriate travelers.

He noted that the number of tourists from Kuwait to South Africa reached 1,477 in 2023, reflecting the rising demand for South Africa as a preferred destination.

The South African envoy emphasized the embassy's commitment to facilitating visa applications for travelers from Kuwait, highlighting that Kuwaiti citizens are exempt from visa fees. He also highlighted South Africa's distinction as a unique tourist destination renowned for its medical tourism and internationally accredited hospitals, offering a wide range of world-class treatments, including advanced surgical procedures and cosmetic enhancements at competitive prices.

Moreover, South Africa attracts many tourists seeking comprehensive therapeutic experiences, with opportunities to recuperate in serene environments. The country boasts health retreats in top-notch resorts, traditional



HE Dr. Manelisi Genge, South African Ambassador to Kuwait.

KGAC activates 'electronic link' with Ministry of Foreign Affairs

KUWAIT CITY, May 19: Director General of Kuwait General Administration of Customs (KGAC) Abdullah Al-Sharhan has approved the activation of the electronic link with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to authenticate documents, as part of its plan to expand the use of modern technology in a way that facilitates and speeds up the completion of customs release procedures, reports Al-Rai daily.

The electronic link will enable brokers to send requests to authenticate documents electronically to the ministry; before creating the customs declaration. This step

includes creating the certification request while specifying the reference used and uploading the documents required to be authenticated (invoice, certificate of origin) — one or both of them.

Other procedures are selecting the company name from the list of companies registered in the automated system, sending the certification request and digital documents to the ministry's electronic certification system, and processing the certification request through the system. Once the broker creates the customs declaration, he should attach the documents certified by the ministry.

treatment centers, and wellness spas. Amer Henedy, the founder of the Contemporary Art Platform (CAP), echoed the sentiments of the South African ambassador, praising South Af-

rica as a vibrant cultural, commercial, and industrial hub.

He emphasized the country's breathtaking natural beauty, urging travelers to explore its diverse offerings.

Ministers approve number of recommendations

Kuwaiti official stresses the importance of GCC Housing Committee meeting in Doha

DOHA, May 19, (KUNA): The Acting Director General of Kuwait's Public Authority for Housing Welfare (PAHW) Rashed Al-Enezi stressed on Thursday the importance of the 22nd edition of the GCC Housing Ministers' meeting in Doha.

In a statement to (KUNA), Al-Enezi said that the conferees discussed several topics listed on the committee's agenda, including the joint Gulf housing action plan for the years 2024-2030 and the initiatives that were worked on by the relevant committees.

They meeting also addressed housing information rules, the GCC award in the field of housing, and the unified general rules for real estate owners. The attendees agreed that Kuwait would host, in May 2025, the third Gulf Housing Week under the slogan (Community Housing) and the activities it includes.

In conclusion, the GCC Housing Ministers approved a number of recommendations related to housing affairs in the Gulf countries, Al-Enezi noted.

In this regard, the Kuwaiti official expressed his thanks and appreciation to the State of Qatar for its good organization and generosity.

The 22nd meeting of the Committee of Ministers concerned with housing affairs in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries began Thursday, in the Qatari capital, Doha, with the participation of the State of Kuwait.

Husseinayat Committee declares unwavering 'support' for Kuwait

KUWAIT CITY, May 19: The Kuwaiti Husseinayat and Councils Committee has affirmed that Kuwait and its interests are above all else; asserting that citizens are exerting tremendous efforts to protect the country, while praising the firm decisions and wise directives of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Al-Anba daily.

In a press statement, the committee stressed that these decisions saved the country and its people from the consequences of disagreement and the darkness of conflict. It affirmed that everyone stands united behind the wise leadership, obeys his command, implements his will, and confident that he will lead everyone to security, peace and stability.

The committee added the people of Kuwait have always been committed to ensuring the security and safety of their nation, even if that requires them to sacrifice their souls. It clarified that the successive rulers of Kuwait and its people have proven throughout history that they represent one body which suffers if one of its organs is hurt. They are like a solid structure that supports each other, it asserted.

"The firm and decisive decisions, and rational directives that His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah issued recently saved the country and the people from the pit of disagreement and the darkness of conflict, and opened the path so that the arguments and conflict do not sweep the nation towards the path of weakness and collapse. They expressed gratitude and appreciation to His Highness."



Saud Al-Fulaij

Kuwait mourns Saud Al-Fulaij

KUWAIT CITY, May 19: Kuwait mourns the loss of one of its esteemed figures and champions of its economic progress, Abdulaziz Saud Al-Fulaij, who passed away at the age of 95, reports Al-Jarida daily.

Known as a prominent businessman and a dedicated contributor to social and community causes, Al-Fulaij was a self-made entrepreneur who founded the Abdulaziz Saud Al-Fulaij Establishment for General Trade and Contracting in 1983. Additionally, he served as a member of the Board of Directors of the Gulf Insurance Group.

World News Roundup

Europe

Boat collision kills 2

Russia attack kills 10 in northeast Ukraine

KYIV, Ukraine, May 19, (AP): At least 10 people were reported killed in attacks in Ukraine's war-ravaged northeast on Sunday as Russia pushed ahead with its renewed offensive.

In the Kharkiv region, the focus of the offensive, regional Gov Oleh Syniehubov said five people were killed and 16 wounded in a Russian strike on the outskirts of the regional capital, also called Kharkiv.

He added that five more people were killed and nine wounded in an attack on the region's Kupiansk district, southeast of the regional capital.

Russia's Ministry of Defense said Sunday that its forces in the area were "continuing to advance into the depths of the enemy's defense." Ukraine's General Staff said Russia had stepped up its attacks around Kharkiv and that the situation was "dynamic."

Russia launched an offensive in the Kharkiv region late last week, significantly adding to the pressure on Ukraine's outnumbered and outgunned forces which are waiting for delayed deliveries of crucial weapons and ammunition from Western partners. Ukraine's overstretched forces are trying to slow Russia on the new front by using bomb-laden drones to destroy military vehicles.

Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Friday during a visit to China that Moscow's offensive in the Kharkiv region aims to create a buffer zone but that there are no plans to capture the city.

Meanwhile, Ukraine and Russia continued to exchange drone attacks.

Ukrainian air force officials said Sunday morning that air defenses shot down all 37 Russian drones launched against the country.

A further three drones were shot down over the Belgorod region, which borders Ukraine. According to Gov Vyacheslav Gladkov, a church roof was set on fire by falling drone debris.

Hungary boat collision kills 2: Police say two people have died and five are missing following a boat collision on the Danube River in Hungary.

Hungarian police received a report late Saturday night that a man had been found bleeding from his head on the shore of the Danube near the town of Veroco, around 30 miles (50 kilometers) north of the capital, Budapest. The bodies of a man and a woman were later discovered nearby.

Hours after police began their search, they discovered a damaged boat in the water, which they towed to shore. They are still searching for five adults - three men and two women - who they believe were on the boat.

Police said they determined that a river cruise boat had been in the area at the time of the accident. They stopped a cruise boat with a damaged hull near the town of Komarom, more than 50 miles (80 kilometers) further upriver.

The Danube at Veroco is roughly 1,500 feet (460 meters) wide and is in the center of an area called the Danube Bend where the river makes a sweeping, nearly 90-degree turn to the south. The area is a popular recreational and boating destination and is on a route often used by cruise boats between Budapest and the Austrian capital, Vienna, some 140 miles (230 kilometers) upriver.

The deadly accident comes five years after at least 27 people were killed in Budapest when a river cruise boat collided with a smaller tourist vessel, sinking it in seconds.

The tourist boat Hableany, carrying 35 people who were mostly South Korean tourists, was overtaken from behind by the much larger cruise boat, Viking Sigyn, beneath Budapest's Margit Bridge, in May 2019.

Fico's condition remains serious: Slovakia's populist prime minister, Robert Fico, remained in serious condition on Sunday but has been given a positive prognosis four days after he was shot multiple times in an assassination attempt that has sent shockwaves across the deeply polarized European Union nation, the defense minister said.

"The worst of what we feared has passed, at least for the moment. But his condition remains serious," Robert Kalinak told reporters outside the hospital where Fico is being treated. "His condition is stable with a positive prognosis."

Kalinak added that the hospital treating the Slovak leader in Banská Bystrica, a former coal mining town of 16,000 situated 29 kilometers (17 miles) from where Fico was attacked, will continue to issue updates on his health status.

Milan Urbáni, deputy director of the hospital, told reporters that "Based on the doctors' morning consultation, we can conclude that the patient is currently out of a life-threatening condition. His condition remains very serious, and he needs a long time to rest to recover. We firmly believe that everything will go in a good direction."

Fico, 59, was shot in the abdomen as he greeted supporters on Wednesday outside a cultural center in the town of Handlova, nearly 140 kilometers (85 miles) northeast of the capital, Bratislava.

Forces work to retain control: Using armored vehicles and backhoes to shove aside charred barricades, French security forces worked Sunday to retake control of the highway to the international airport in violence-scorched New Caledonia, shattered because of deadly unrest wracking the French Pacific archipelago where indigenous people have long sought independence from France.

An eventual reopening of the Nouméa-La Tontouta airport to commercial flights could allow stranded tourists to escape the island where armed clashes, arson, looting and other mayhem have prompted France to impose a state of emergency. The airport, with routes to Australia, Singapore, New Zealand and other destinations, closed Tuesday as protests against voting reforms opposed by pro-independence supporters degenerated into widespread violence, leaving a vast trail of destruction.

French Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin, posting on social media platform X, said the "major operation" was "aimed at fully regaining control" of the RT1 highway between the capital, Nouméa, and the airport 60 kilometers (nearly 40 miles) to the northwest. He said more than 600 gendarmes were deployed. The number spoke to the difficulty of clearing roads of charred debris and barricades erected by pro-independence demonstrators and residents who have banded together to try to protect homes and livelihoods against rioters and looters.

Columbus shooting kills 3: Three people died and three others were wounded in an early morning shooting in Ohio's capital over the weekend, authorities said.



Neighborhood children check out an uprooted tree that's blocking East 15th Street near Arlington Street on May 17 at The Heights in Houston. Inset: A Houston police officer walks back to his vehicle after clearing people away from a damaged tire shop at the intersection of Sowden and Bingle in the aftermath of a severe storm on Friday. (AP)

Hot weather poses new risk as thousands remain without power after Houston storm

As the Houston area works to clean up and restore power to hundreds of thousands after deadly storms left at least seven people dead, it will do so amid a smog warning and scorching temperatures that could pose health risks.

National Weather Service meteorologist Marc Chenard said on Saturday that highs of around 90 degrees (32.2 C) were expected through the start of the coming week, with heat indexes likely approaching 100 degrees (38 C) by midweek.

"We expect the impact of the heat to gradually increase ... we will start to see that heat risk increase Tuesday into Wednesday through Friday," Chenard said.

The heat index is what the temperature feels like to the human body when humidity is combined with the air temperature, according to the weather service.

"Don't overdo yourself during the cleanup process," the weather service's Houston office said in a

post on the social platform X.

In addition to the heat, the Houston area could face poor air quality during the weekend.

Heavy rainfall was possible in eastern Louisiana and central Alabama on Saturday, and parts of Louisiana were also at risk for flooding.

The Houston Health Department said it would distribute 400 free portable air conditioners to area seniors, people with disabilities and caregivers of disabled children to contend with the heat. (AP)

Politics

'Missouri candidate can stay on Republican ballot'

NRA endorses Trump at annual meeting

DALLAS, May 19, (AP): Former US president Donald Trump urged gun owners to vote in the 2024 election as he addressed thousands of members of the National Rifle Association, which officially endorsed him just before Trump took the stage at their annual meeting in Texas on Saturday.

"We've got to get gun owners to vote," Trump said. "I think you're a rebellious bunch. But let's be rebellious and vote this time."

Trump, in his speech, said the Second Amendment "is very much on the ballot" in November, alleging that, if Democratic President Joe Biden "gets four more years they are coming for your guns, 100% certain. Crooked Joe has a 40-year-record of trying to rip firearms out of the hands of law-abiding citizens."

The Biden administration has taken a number of steps to try to combat gun violence, including a new rule that aims to close a loophole that has allowed tens of thousands of guns to be sold every year by unlicensed dealers who do not perform background checks.

Pledged

Trump has pledged to continue to defend the Second Amendment, which he claims is "under siege," and has called himself "the best friend gun owners have ever had in the White House" as the United States faces record numbers of deaths due to mass shootings. Last year ended with 42 mass killings and 217 deaths, making it one of the deadliest years on record.

The presumptive Republican presidential nominee has been criticized by Biden, specifically for remarks that Trump made this year after a school shooting in Iowa. Trump called the incident "very terrible" only to later say

that "we have to get over it. We have to move forward."

Trump, during his speech, also laced into independent presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy Jr., calling him "radical left" and "a disaster," and noting that Kennedy had once called the NRA a "terror group."

"Don't think about it. Don't waste your vote," he said. "He calls you a terrorist group, and I call you the backbone of America." (Kennedy later said in a Fox News interview that he didn't remember his 2018 tweet. "I don't consider them a terror group, and I support the Second Amendment," he said.)

Urge

Trump noted he will be speaking next week at the Libertarian Party's convention and said he will urge its members to vote for him.

"We have to join with them," he said. "We have to get that 3% because we can't take a chance on Joe Biden winning."

Earlier Saturday, Trump's campaign and the Republican National Committee announced the creation of a new "Gun Owners for Trump" coalition that includes gun rights activists and those who work in the firearms industry.

Biden has made curtailing gun violence a major part of his administration and reelection campaign, creating the White House Office of Gun Violence Prevention overseen by Vice President Kamala Harris. Biden also has urged Congress to ban so-called assault weapons - something Democrats shied from even just a few years ago.

"Tonight, Donald Trump confirmed that he will do exactly what the NRA tells him to do - even if it means more death, more shootings, and more suffering,"

said Biden spokesman Ammar Moussa.

When Trump was president, there were moments when he pledged to strengthen gun laws. After a high school mass shooting in Parkland, Florida, that killed 17 people and wounded 17 others, Trump told survivors and family members that he would be "very strong on background checks." He claimed he would stand up to the NRA but later he backpedaled, saying there was "not much political support."

On Saturday, Trump also brought up the criminal cases against him as his hush money trial heads into the final stretch next week and accused Democrats of being behind these cases because he is Biden's opponent.

Also:

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo.: A longshot Missouri gubernatorial candidate with ties to the Ku Klux Klan will stay on the Republican ticket, a judge ruled Friday.

Cole County Circuit Court Judge Cotton Walker denied a request by the Missouri GOP to kick Darrell McClanahan out of the August Republican primary.

McClanahan is running against Secretary of State Jay Ashcroft, Lt. Gov. Mike Kehoe, state Sen. Bill Eigel and others for the GOP nomination to replace Gov. Mike Parson, who is barred by term limits from seeking reelection.

McClanahan's lawyer, Dave Roland, said the ruling ensures that party leaders do not have "almost unlimited discretion to choose who's going to be allowed on a primary ballot."

"Their theory of the case arguably would have required courts to remove people from the ballot, maybe even the day before elections," Roland said.



Ukrainian police officers look for fragments of a glide bomb in front of damaged house after a Russian airstrike on a residential neighborhood in Kharkiv, Ukraine, on May 18. Russia said it shot down some 60 drones and several missiles over its territory while Ukraine in turn said it destroyed over 30 Russian drones. (AP)



Bodker



Giuliani

America

Dive team finds 2 bodies: The bodies of two men have been recovered from a plane that was found face down in a lake, Alaska State Troopers said Saturday.

Troopers were notified late Friday of the upside-down aircraft in Six Mile Lake near the Athabaskan community of Nondalton, located about 200 miles (322 kilometers) southwest of Anchorage.

The bodies of Dave Hedgers, 58, and Aaron Fryer, 45, were found by a dive team dead inside the aircraft, troopers said in an online post. No hometowns were provided.

The bodies will be sent to the State Medical Examiner's Office in Anchorage. (AP)

Two-car accident kills 6: Six people were killed Saturday in Idaho in a two-car accident that included a large passenger van, authorities said.

Ten others were injured in the crash on US Highway 20 in Idaho Falls and taken to local hospitals, Idaho State Police said in a statement.

An eastbound pickup crossed the centerline about 5:30 a.m. and hit a westbound passenger van, police said.

The van's driver and five passengers died from their injuries at the scene. Nine other passengers in the van and the pickup's driver were hospitalized, according to police. (AP)

Columbus shooting kills 3: Three people died and three others were wounded in an early morning shooting in Ohio's capital over the weekend, authorities said.

Columbus police said the shooting was reported shortly before 3 am Saturday in the Italian Village neighborhood north of downtown, with what may have been semi-

automatic or automatic gunfire and cars "taking off."

Deputy Chief Gregory Bodker told reporters that officers arriving two minutes



Norway's royal family greets the children's train from the Castle Balcony at the Castle Crown, in Oslo on May 17. From left: Crown Princess Mette-Marit, Princess Ingrid Alexandra and Crown Prince Haakon Magnus. (AP)

later found a "very chaotic scene" with six people shot. Two men were pronounced dead at the scene, and a third man died at a hospital, police said. They were identified later Saturday as 27-year-old Malachi Pee, 26-year-old Garcia Dixon Jr. and 18-year-old Da'ondre Bullock.

Three other people were taken to hospitals, where one was in critical condition and two others were stable, Bodker said. Police said all were expected to survive. (AP)

Giuliani served indictment: Arizona's attorney general says former New York mayor Rudy Giuliani has been served an indictment in the state's fake elector case alongside 17 other defendants for his role in an attempt to overturn former President Donald Trump's loss to Joe Biden in the 2020 election.

Arizona Attorney General Kris Mayes posted the news regarding the Trump-aligned lawyer on her X account late Friday.

"The final defendant was served moments ago. @RudyGiuliani nobody is above the law," Mayes wrote.

The attorney general's spokesman Richie Taylor said in an email to The Associated Press on Saturday that Giuliani faces the same charges as the other defendants, including conspiracy, fraud and forgery charges. (AP)

Africa

Congo foils coup

Former S.Africa prez Zuma promises jobs

JOHANNESBURG, May 19, (AP): Former South African president **Jacob Zuma** Saturday lamented the high levels of poverty among black South Africans and promised to create jobs and tackle crime as he launched his new political party's manifesto ahead of the country's much anticipated elections.

He told thousands of supporters who gathered at Orlando Stadium in Johannesburg that his party would build factories where many people would be employed and provide free education to the country's youth.

"We want our children to study for free, especially those from poor households because the poverty we have was not created by us. It was created by settlers who took everything, including our land. We'll take all those things back, make money and educate our children," he said.



Zuma

He has also pledged to change the country's Constitution to restore more powers to traditional leaders, saying their role in society has been reduced by giving more powers to magistrates and judges.

Zuma's uMkhonto weSizwe party, known as the MK Party, has emerged as a significant player in South Africa's upcoming elections after it was launched in December last year.

He is currently involved in a legal battle with the country's electoral authority, the Independent Electoral Commission. He has appealed against a court judgment which barred him from standing in the election because of his criminal record.

Zuma was sentenced to 15 months in prison for defying a court order to appear before a judicial commission of inquiry which was probing corruption allegations in government and state-owned companies during his presidential term from 2009 to 2018.

Forced

In 2018, he was forced to resign as the country's president following wide-ranging corruption allegations, but he has made a political return and is now seeking to become the country's president again.

"When they talk about unemployment, they are talking about us, there is nobody else. When they talk about people who live in shacks, that is us, there is nobody else who lives in shacks except us," Zuma told his supporters, many of whom had travelled from other provinces like Mpumalanga and KwaZulu-Natal, where he still enjoys significant support.

Poverty among black people is the reason behind South Africa's high levels of crime, according to the former president.

"Our hunger and poverty is what creates a perception that we are criminals, we don't have a brain, we have nothing. That time is over, because we are good people who are giving, but some people are pushing us towards criminality," he said.

Zuma said his party was aiming to get more than 65% of the national vote in the upcoming elections as it would allow them to change many laws in the country's constitution.

Recent polls and analysts have suggested that the ruling African National Congress might get less than 50% of the vote and would need to form a coalition with smaller parties to remain in power.

South Africans will go to the polls on May 29.

Also:

KINSHASA, Congo: Congo's army says it has "foiled a coup" early Sunday morning and arrested the perpetrators, including several foreigners, following a shootout between armed men in military uniform and a top politician's guards that left three people dead in the capital, Kinshasa.

The attempted coup d'état was "nipped in the bud by Congolese defense and security forces (and) the situation is under control," Congolese army spokesperson Brigadier General **Sylvain Ekenge** said at a media briefing. He did not give further details.

Clashes were reported between men in military uniform and guards of a local politician at the politician's house on **Tshatshi Boulevard**, about 2 kilometers (1.2 miles) from the presidential palace and where some embassies are also located.

This came amid a crisis gripping President Felix **Tshisekedi's** ruling party over an election for the parliament's leadership which was supposed to be held Saturday but was postponed.

The armed men attacked the Kinshasa residence of **Vital Kamerhe**, a federal legislator and a candidate for speaker of the National Assembly of Congo, but were stopped by his guards, **Michel Moto Muhima**, his spokesperson said on the X social media platform.

"The Honorable Vital Kamerhe and his family are safe and sound. Their security has been reinforced," he wrote.

Local media identified the men as Congolese soldiers. It wasn't clear if the men in military uniform were trying to arrest the politician.

Two police officers and one of the attackers were killed in the shootout that started around 4:30 a.m. at the house on Tshatshi Boulevard, according to Muhima.

Footage, seemingly from the area, showed military trucks and heavily armed men parading deserted streets in the neighborhood.

On Friday, President **Felix Tshisekedi** met with parliamentarians and leaders of the Sacred Union of the Nation ruling coalition in an attempt to resolve the crisis amid his party which dominates the national assembly.

The United States Embassy in Congo issued a security alert, urging caution after "reports of gunfire."



JEHENIANA, Tunisia: Hundreds of Tunisians marched through the streets of Jeheniana on Saturday to protest the presence of sub-Saharan migrants who have found themselves stranded as the country ramps up border patrol efforts.

Anti-migrant anger is mounting in impoverished towns like Jeheniana along the Tunisian coastline that have emerged as a launchpad for thousands of people hoping to reach Europe by boat.

Chanting slogans to oppose settling migrants in Tunisia, protesters demanded the government act to assist agricultural communities dealing with thousands of migrants living in tarpaulin encampments among their olive groves.

"You brought them here and it's your responsibility to send them back to their home countries," Moamen Salemi, a 63-year old retiree from nearby El Amra, said at the protest. "There is a shortage of food throughout the city of El Amra, including sugar, flour, bread and many other items."



Chinese naval personnel line up in front of their warship docked at the port of Sihanoukville, Cambodia on May 19. Two Chinese warships docked Sunday at a commercial port in Cambodia, in preparation for joint naval exercises between the two countries. (AP)

China's envoy promises friendship, cooperation as 2 Chinese warships dock in Cambodia

Two Chinese warships docked Sunday at a commercial port in Cambodia, in preparation for joint naval exercises between the two countries.

The Jingtangshan amphibious warfare ship and Qijiguang training ship sailed in to the Sihanoukville Port as onlookers waved Cambodian and Chinese flags from the piers.

The port is north of the Ream Naval Base, where China has funded a broad expansion project that has been carefully watched by the United States and others over concerns it could become a new outpost for the Chinese navy on the Gulf of Thailand.

The Gulf is adjacent to the South China Sea, which China claims virtually in its entirety, and would

give easy access to the Malacca Strait, one of the most important shipping lanes in the world.

Wang Wentian, China's ambassador to Cambodia, dismissed concerns about Ream, telling reporters at Sihanoukville that wherever the Chinese navy sails "we bring friendship, we bring cooperation" and nothing else. (AP)

Asia

Japan urges caution after wild bears attack people

Lai inherits strong foreign policy position

TAIPEI, Taiwan, May 19, (AP): In a campaign ad for Taiwan's President-elect **Lai Ching-te**, incumbent President **Tsai Ing-wen** was shown driving with Lai in the passenger seat, exchanging reflections on their years governing together. Tsai later turned over the driving to Lai, who was joined by running mate **Bi-khim Hsiao**.

The message was clear: Lai would steer the island in the direction set by Tsai, who after eight years in power was barred from running again.

Lai, 64, will take office Monday. Continuing Tsai's legacy means aiming to strike a balance between cultivating Taiwan's unofficial alliance with the United States and maintaining peace with China, which claims Taiwan as its own territory, to be retaken by force if necessary.

Lai is also expected to build on some of Tsai's domestic reforms, despite political gridlock. Lai and Tsai's Democratic Progressive Party has lost the majority in the legislature, making it hard for Lai to push through legislation, including the approval of crucial national defense budgets.

Tsai, 67, has been Taiwan's first female president and one of Asia's few female leaders who didn't hail from a political dynasty. Her legacy will be tied to defending the island's sovereignty from China while refashioning it as a credible partner for the US and other democracies. She will also be remembered for overseeing the legalization of same-sex marriage, steering Taiwan through the COVID years and kickstarting the island's military modernization.

Approval

She leaves office with high approval ratings. A recent poll by broadcaster TVBS showed 42% of respondents were satisfied with her eight-year performance. Her predecessor, **Ma Ying-jeou**, left office with approval ratings of around 23%.

Tsai's popularity partly reflects a shift in Taiwan's identity. A vast majority of residents now identify as Taiwanese as opposed to Chinese and want to be governed separately from

Beijing. Taiwan and China have had different governments since a civil war in 1949 saw the Nationalists flee to the island while China's Communist Party took control of the mainland.

Tsai veered from the more China-friendly policies of the previous ruling party, the Kuomintang. By the end of Ma's tenure, the frequent exchanges with Beijing were making many Taiwanese nervous, said **Shelley Rigger**, a Taiwan expert at Davidson College.

Beijing called Tsai a separatist after she refused to acknowledge the 1992 Consensus, an agreement which says Taiwan is part of "One China." While pulling away from Beijing, however, Tsai left a door open for communication.

"President Tsai has always said that Taiwan, under her leadership, is happy, willing and eager to have dialogue with Beijing, just not on terms unilaterally imposed by Beijing," said **Wen-Ti Sung**, a fellow with Washington-based think tank Atlantic Council.

Pressure

China has not only declined to speak to Tsai but also ramped up military and economic pressure on the island, sending warships and military jets near it daily.

Beijing prevents countries it has diplomatic relations with from having formal ties with Taipei. During Tsai's tenure, it intensified a campaign to lure away the island's few diplomatic partners. During Tsai's years in office, China poached almost half of Taiwan's diplomatic allies, bringing the remaining number to 12.

Tsai pushed back by diversifying trade relationships and increasing military spending including submarine development. She also elevated Taiwan's standing on the international stage, said outgoing Foreign Minister **Joseph Wu**.

"Her leadership style is very moderate, but at the same time very firm in dealing with any kind of international pressure," he said.

"She strengthened awareness of Taiwan around the world and its ties with the international community,"

said **Bonnie Glaser**, the director of the Indo-Pacific program at the German Marshall Fund of the United States.

Lai, who served as vice president during Tsai's second term, came across as more of a firebrand earlier in his career.

Tsai's mixed success on the domestic policy front contributed to historically poor results for the DPP in local elections, said **Sung** with the Atlantic Council. The party's poor performance in the 2022 elections led to Tsai resigning as party chairwoman. And while Lai won the presidential election, DPP lost its majority in the legislature.

Also:

TOKYO: Japanese authorities have warned residents to be aware of wild bears in the country's northeast after several people were attacked, including police officers.

The bears, measuring about 50 centimeters (1.6 feet) in height, were seen in the area, including **Akita** and **Fukushima Prefectures**.

Two police officers were attacked Saturday in the city of **Kazuno** in Akita while recovering the body of a missing man, according to Japanese media reports. The man had gone hunting for bamboo shoots in the mountains a few days earlier where he was found dead in the area with gash wounds. It remains unclear if he died due to a bear attack.

The officers are in serious condition, though not life-threatening, reports said.

In response, some wooded areas have been closed off in Kazuno "for an indefinite time," officials said in a statement.

News footage showed police officers putting up signs warning people to stay out of mountainous areas where the bears were sighted.

Over the weekend, patrol cars were dispatched together with a helicopter search to locate the bears.

Akita Prefectural Police have urged people to keep bells and other noise-producing devices on hand to scare the bears away in case of an encounter, and not to go out at night.



Visitors watch Anhui Opera in a fish-shaped lantern themed cafe in the Huizhou ancient town in Shexian County of Huangshan City, east China's Anhui Province on May 9. (Xinhua)



Yoris



Maduro

Lat/Am

Bolivia road accident kills 4: At least four people were killed and several injured when a truck collided with a minibus on a road connecting Bolivia's departments of Cochabamba and Oruro on Saturday, local police said.

The tragedy occurred in the town of **Lavini** in Cochabamba, according to **Marcelo Gomez**, deputy director of the Cochabamba Transit Operations Unit. He reported that three of the deceased were passengers in the minibus, while the fourth was the driver of the truck.

Police, firefighters and ambulances have rushed to the crash site to rescue the wounded and carry out rescue work.

The cause of the accident is under investigation. (Xinhua)



Venezuela candidate seeks unity:

The presidential candidate of Venezuela's chief opposition coalition on Saturday sought to cultivate a mood of hope and possibility in a large rally that marked the start of a campaign he admittedly never imagined leading.

Edmundo González Urrutia, the former diplomat chosen by the coalition to replace the fiery leader **María Corina Machado** on the ballot, drew thousands of supporters to the streets of **La Victoria**, his hometown.

He urged them to imagine a country where public services are not a luxury, people are not imprisoned for their political beliefs and millions will return after having migrated throughout a decade in search of better economic opportunities.

"I guarantee a peaceful alternation in which all political forces will be able to exercise their rights within the framework of the constitution," González said, addressing an audience of retirees, young adults and residents of the capital who traveled to see him and locals of the once-thriving industrial city.

"I want to call on all Venezuelans to join me in a peaceful and orderly change of government. We will move from division to unity, from abuse by a few to the rule of law for all, and from this undignified present to a dignified future for all."

González was joined on stage by **Machado**, whose candidacy for the July 28 election was barred by the government of President **Nicolás Maduro**. The

crowd cheered for both under sweltering temperatures. Street vendors sold T-shirts and baseball caps promoting the duo for \$10. Venezuelan flags were also on sale.

González is the third candidate that the Unitary Platform opposition coalition has promoted as its own this year.

Machado, a former lawmaker, entered



Venezuelan presidential candidate **Edmundo González Urrutia**, (center) and opposition leader **Mariana Corina Machado**, (second right), attend the launch of his campaign for the upcoming election, in **La Victoria**, Venezuela, on May 18. (AP)

2024 as the group's candidate after easily winning an October presidential primary, but a top court loyal to Venezuela's ruling party affirmed in January an administrative decision to ban her from office. She appointed a substitute in March - former academic **Corina Yoris** - but she, too, was barred from the ballot. Four days later, the coalition picked **González**. (AP)

Dominicans vote in election: Voters in the Dominican Republic are casting ballots Sunday in general elections likely to reinforce the government's crackdown on its shared border with Haiti and the hundreds of thousands of people fleeing the violence-stricken nation.

Leading the presidential race is President **Luis Abinader**, who is seeking reelection as one of the most popular leaders in the Americas. If he tops 50% of the vote he will win another term without proceeding to a second round of voting.

Trailing behind him are President **Leonel Fernández** and mayor **Abel Martínez**. Dominicans will also vote in legislative elections.

Abinader's anti-corruption agenda and push to grow the Dominican Republic's economy has resonated with many of the 8 million voters in the Caribbean nation. (AP)

EGYPT	EGX 30	Change	Closing pts	SAUDI	Tadawul	Change	Closing pts
↑		+1,172.99	27,315.83	↓		-0.06	12,198.38

Business

Innovative solutions to enhance building efficiency and reduce emissions

KEO & Johnson Controls collaborate to spearhead decarbonisation drive in region

KUWAIT CITY, May 19: KEO, a leading provider of multi-disciplinary consultancy services, and Johnson Controls, the global leader in smart, healthy and sustainable buildings, have today announced a strategic collaboration aimed at delivering turnkey decarbonisation services in the region.

Under the collaboration, the two companies will offer an end-to-end decarbonisation action plan and a suite of engineered solutions to drive cost and carbon reductions.

These will help organisations achieve their net zero goals including comprehensive target setting, providing a roadmap, to produce tangible outcomes.

According to the World Green Building Council, buildings are responsible for nearly 40% of global carbon emissions and buildings represent one of the fastest — if not the fastest — paths to meeting global climate targets.

With the UAE and Saudi Arabia spearheading (one of) the world's most ambitious decarbonisation programs, organisations in the region will benefit from such collaborations to more quickly and effectively meet the region's goals.

Founded on a shared vision and complementary expertise, this unique collaboration draws on KEO's 60 years of expertise in engineering, consultation, and advisory services and Johnson Controls 140 years transforming



KEO and Johnson Controls join forces to help achieve net zero goals.

the built environment to reduce energy consumption and emissions, improve building efficiency, increase productivity and wellbeing, and ultimately contribute to a greener and more sustainable future.

"This collaboration represents a significant step forward in our mission to empower organisations to achieve



their sustainability goals," said Greg Karpinski, COO at KEO.

"By combining KEO's sustainability and engineering excellence with Johnson Controls cutting-edge technologies, we are uniquely positioned to deliver impactful solutions that drive real environmental change.

"We understand that managing the bidding for a complex scope decarbonisation project can be a challenging task for organisations, involving significant costs and efforts," remarked Greg Karpinski at KEO.

"Through our collaboration with Johnson Controls, we aim to alleviate these challenges, offering clients a hassle-free experience from start to finish."

"We are delighted to initiate this collaboration with KEO, which will empower our mutual customers to achieve their net zero commitments, added Devrim Tekeli, general manager for Service GCC at Johnson Controls.

"Our comprehensive capabilities across technology manufacturing, HVAC, fire, security, controls, and connectivity via our OpenBlue digital platform are setting a benchmark in the region. These capabilities are already demonstrating tangible environmental and financial benefits.

"Together with KEO, we aim to empower businesses with the tools and expertise needed to drive sustainability leadership in this region and beyond."

The collaboration between KEO and Johnson Controls marks a significant milestone in the pursuit of sustainability, ushering in a new era of innovation and collaboration in the fight against climate change.

Kuwait banks equip for economic boom

Local banks' total assets increase to 87.63 bln dinars

KUWAIT CITY, May 19: It seems that banks are gearing up for upcoming economic activities by bolstering their deposit balances and establishing connections with key clients and liquidity holders to attract more deposits or secure alternative funding sources, reports Al-Jarida daily.

This proactive approach allows banks to secure liquidity ahead of increased demand, potentially at favorable interest rates, as prices tend to rise when demand intensifies, akin to other markets.

Anticipation is building for a surge in economic and commercial activity, with several projects expected to be launched soon and significant advancements anticipated in the appointment procedures for numerous citizens in various government agencies.

Additionally, the reintroduction of listings for some large companies, along with private offerings, including those financed by banks, is expected to require substantial liquidity.

Private sector deposits represent the primary source of bank financing, accounting for 43.6% of total deposits. Government and public institutions' deposits make

up 13.7%, while individuals contribute the remaining 42.7%, with a significant portion coming from individuals with high solvency and liquidity.

Banking sector data indicates a decrease in deposit rates with foreign banks, suggesting a shift in deposit behavior. Despite this, the banking sector exhibits strength, resilience, and growth, instilling confidence in its ability to support the anticipated development surge.

Local banks' total assets increased by 2.6% to reach 87.63 billion dinars by the end of March. The private sector accounts for 52% of total assets, with foreign assets comprising 28.8%. Foreign assets saw growth across various categories, including credit facilities to companies and non-resident parties, foreign investments, loans to foreign banks, and other assets.

Digitally, the banking sector's net foreign assets grew by 35.1% to reach 13.68% of total assets by the end of the first quarter of 2024, reflecting increased international transactions. Notably, credit facilities to the business sector, primarily in cash, amounted to about 60.9% of total credit facilities, totaling approximately 29.29 billion dinars by the end of the first quarter of 2024.

BoE holds interest rates at 5.25% amid inflation fight

US producer prices rise 0.5% in April

By National Bank of Kuwait

United States

Producer Price Index

Producer prices in the US rose more than expected in April, increasing by 0.5% compared to a forecasted 0.3% rise. The increase was largely due to service prices, which jumped 0.6%, with increases in service costs such as portfolio management and hotel stays. This indicates that inflation remains high. The rise comes after surveys showed people expect inflation to increase, leading to less expectation of the Federal Reserve cutting interest rates in September. While inflation rose in the first quarter due to factors like businesses raising prices and service providers catching up on increased costs, economists are hopeful it will go down again this quarter as the job market cools down. However, Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell is not as confident in this prediction. Financial markets reacted to the news with stocks rising, the dollar weakening, and bond prices increasing. The chance of a rate cut in September is now seen as 60%, down from 64% before the PPI data release. Some economists believe the Fed might even cut rates in July.

Fed Chair Powell Speaks

With inflation running faster than anticipated through the first three months of the year, the US Chair of the Federal Reserve Jerome Powell acknowledged that "my confidence in that is not as high as it was," but he still believes it is unlikely that the Fed would have to raise rates further, even if the likelihood of rate cuts has become less certain. "We did not expect this to be a smooth road, but these were higher than I think anybody expected" Powell added referring to recent inflation readings. Despite this, he gave a bullish outlook stating, "I expect that inflation will move back down ... on a monthly basis to levels that were more like the lower readings that we were having last year." Markets are pricing in two rate cuts by year-end

Consumer Price Index

US consumer price index increased less than expected in April, where the month-over-month figure showed a 0.3% increase, lower than the previous figure of 0.4%. The year-over-year figure showed a slight decrease from the previous 3.5% figure at 3.4% for the month. Core CPI was also slightly lower for the month at 0.3%, in line with expectations. The majority of the increase for the figure was attributed to shelter and gasoline costs, where shelter rose 0.4% for the third straight month, and gasoline rose 2.8% following a 1.7% increase in March.

Retail Sales

US retail sales was flat in April, with the month-over-month figure showing no change, well below expectations of a 0.4% increase, and below a downward revised 0.6% increase seen in March. The figure supports the narrative that consumer spending is losing momentum, with gasoline prices ticking higher, and consumers pulling back from spending on goods. Speculation for rate cuts continues to vary greatly among economists, while market expectations for rate cuts to begin in September increased slightly following the data release.

Unemployment Claims

There's a recent rise in unemployment claims in the US, reaching the highest level since late August 2023. This could signal a shift in the previously hot job market. The Labor Department data showed an increase in both new claims (231,000) and continuing claims (1.78 million) compared to the prior week. This comes after a period of strong hiring, but April's numbers fell short of expectations. Additionally, job openings are dropping, suggesting a possible slowdown in the job market throughout the year.

The greenback extended gains over the week, last trading at 104.670

United Kingdom

BoE Monetary Policy Report

The Bank of England decided to hold interest at (5.25%) to fight inflation. Three members wanted to raise rates further. This high interest rate environment is likely to last for a while to ensure inflation gets back down to their target of 2%. The Bank of England Governor emphasized that they are still focused on bringing down inflation and won't be considering lowering rates anytime soon.

Asia-Pacific

Japan's Producer Price Index

Japan's producer prices continued to climb in April 2024, rising 0.9% year-over-year for the second month in a row. This marks the 39th consecutive month of producer prices increases and the highest inflation rate for manufacturers since October 2023. The increase was broad-based, with most categories experiencing rising costs. Notably, transportation equipment, food and beverages, and various machinery sectors saw significant price hikes. However, there were some exceptions: chemicals and iron and steel prices continued to decline. Overall, this data suggests ongoing inflationary pressures for Japanese manufacturers, potentially leading to higher consumer prices in the near future.

The Japanese Yen continues its weakening trend, with the USD/JPY pair closing at 153.52

China's Consumer Price Index

CPI in China grew for the third straight month rising 0.3% y/y versus expectations and previous figure of a 0.1% growth. The reading comes amid stronger than expected Chinese imports data, indicating that local demand in the world's second largest economy is starting to pick up. Despite this, PPI continues to lag, declining 2.5% in April, more than forecasts of a 2.3% fall. Chinese business activity remains under pressure amid weak overseas demand. Additionally, volatile local consumer spending and the continuation of the property slump adds to the problems faced by Chinese policymakers despite introducing a series of easing measures to support the economy.

The USD/CNY currency pair is up on the week, last seen at 7.2219

Kuwait

Kuwaiti Dinar

USD/KWD closed last week at 0.30655



Photos during the event.

NBK Group Operations & Technology hosts IBG Conference and Staff Open Day for '24

KUWAIT CITY, May 19: In line with National Bank of Kuwait (NBK)'s overarching commitment to engage and empower employees being the cornerstone to achieving its strategic goals and furthering its success, Group Operations and Technology hosted the 5th IBG Operations and Technology Conference at NBK HQ on May 1 and 2, 2024.

The conference was attended by Mrs. Shaikha Al Bahar - Deputy Group CEO, Group Operations and Technology Management and International Banking Group Management and as well as Heads of Operations and Technology from different locations worldwide.

On this occasion, Mr. Mohammad Al-Kharafi Chief Operating Officer, Group Operations and Information Technology said, "The IBG Conference underscores our commitment to collaboration and strategic alignment across NBK's diverse international footprint. It's a platform where our employees can engage, share insights, and collectively contribute to our global vision."

"During the conference, Group Operations and Technology Management team in Kuwait presented the IBG Operations performance report, Operating model, IBG Technology Blueprint plan and Roadmap. This was followed by presentations from the Operations and Technology heads of IBG locations, who shared key achievements, roadmap, and challenges," he added.

"Group Operations and Technology play a fundamental role in serving NBK's strategy by providing cutting-edge digital banking solutions. We are always seeking to embrace innovation across all the bank's operations and business models to keep pace with the fast-paced technological advancement in the banking industry," he noted.

NBK has consistently embraced a forward-thinking approach towards international expansion, evidenced by its international branches, some of which have been operational for over 40 years.

The expansion of cross-border transactions within IBG signifies a concerted effort by teams across various locations to cater to the needs of NBK's clients. Through collaborative efforts, these teams have facilitated a seamless NBK approach, ensuring that cli-

ents receive consistent and efficient service regardless of their geographic location. This collaborative approach not only enhances operational efficiency but also promotes our client-centric model, wherein client satisfaction and long-term partnerships are prioritized. By leveraging the collective expertise and resources of teams across different regions, IBG can deliver tailored solutions that meet the diverse needs of clients while upholding NBK's commitment to excellence and innovation in international banking services.

IBG's robust contribution in driving profit growth underscores NBK's forward-looking vision and the success of its diversification strategy, and emphasizes its continued dedication to increasing its presence in international markets and capitalizing on growth opportunities in the markets where it operates.

On a related note, Group Operations and Technology organized a staff Open Day at Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Center (JACC). The event was attended by Mrs. Shaikha Al Bahar, Deputy Group CEO, Mr. Mohammad Al-Kharafi Chief Operating Officer and Mr. Emad Al-Ablani, GM - Group Human Resources, along with IBG locations Operations and Technology representatives and all Operations and Technology Kuwait employees.

"The Open Day is a great opportunity to come together, share Milestones, Strategy, recognize outstanding achievers, participate in team activities, and socialize with colleagues," quoted Al-Kharafi.

Additionally, Al-Kharafi presented a Strategy session along with his team during the event, followed by a staff awarding ceremony, and fun games to emphasize team building.

It is worth mentioning that NBK is committed to making digital and technology investments across its network, which comprises 140 branches, subsidiaries, and representative offices in 13 countries on four continents. These locations encompass major financial hubs like London, New York, Paris, Geneva, and Singapore, as well as Shanghai in China, with regional coverage extending to Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE.

Rates - May 19th, 2024

Currencies	Previous Week Levels				This Week's Expected Range		3-Month Forward
	Open	Low	High	Close	Minimum	Maximum	
EUR	1.0854	1.0836	1.0878	1.0868	1.0780	1.1085	1.0917
GBP	1.2670	1.2653	1.2674	1.2699	1.2600	1.2900	1.2709
JPY	155.38	155.34	155.92	155.82	154.70	156.60	153.52
CHF	0.9093	0.9068	0.9065	0.9098	0.9089	0.9200	0.8996

BUSINESS

S.Korea's employment rises 261,000 in April

South Korea's employment kept rising last month due to a rapid increase in elderly jobs, statistical office data showed Friday. The number of employed people aged 15 or older expanded 261,000 from a year earlier to 28,693,000 in April, according to Statistics Korea. Affected by higher elderly jobs, the figure grew faster last month after going up 173,000 in the previous month. The overall job expansion was

driven by the elderly people. The number of jobs for those aged 60 or older advanced by 292,000 in April on a yearly basis, but the figures for those in their 20s and 40s shrank by 77,000 and 90,000 each. The number of jobs among manufacturers grew by 100,000 last month, keeping an upward trend for the fifth successive month. Employment in the health and

social welfare service, and the information and communications industries picked up 93,000 and 68,000 respectively. Jobs lost in the education service, and the wholesale and retail sectors stood at 49,000 and 39,000 each. The number of regular and irregular employees climbed 293,000 and 200,000 each, but the reading for daily laborers dwindled by 147,000 last month. (Xinhua)

Italy's inflation rate among Europe's lowest in April

Prices in Italy rose last month less than any of the European Union's (EU) large economies, data released Friday by Eurostat showed. Eurostat, the EU's statistics agency, said prices rose in Italy by just 0.9 percent in April compared to a year prior. The equivalent rate for the 20-nation euro currency zone was 2.4 percent while in the EU as a whole it was 2.6 percent. The Eurostat figure was

slightly higher than the revised calculation from ISTAT, Italy's National Statistics Institute, which on Thursday said the consumer price index in the country climbed 0.8 percent in April. Eurostat's data showed that the only countries in the eurozone where prices rose by less were Lithuania (with a 0.4 percent increase) and Finland (with an increase of 0.6 percent). Prices rose by 0.5 percent in Den-

mark, which is a member of the EU, but not of the eurozone. Italy's government has worked hard to bring prices down after a spike that resulted in record-high inflation rates in 2022 and early 2023. It created a governmental "anti-inflation quarter" in the last three months of last year, artificially and temporarily reducing consumer prices on a basket of basic household necessities. (Xinhua)

Earnings per share up by 15%

NAPESCO reports KD 2.38m net profit, an increase of 8% in Q1 of 2024

KUWAIT CITY, May 19: National Petroleum Services Company "NAPESCO", a subsidiary of Kuwait Projects Company (Holding), and one of the leading companies in the energy and oilfield services sector, announced that it has achieved a net profit of 2.38 million Kuwaiti dinars for the first quarter of the fiscal year 2024, with an increase of 8% compared to the same period in 2023.

The earnings per share also increased by 15% during the first quarter of the current year to reach 26.37 fils per share, compared to 22.84 fils per share dur-

ing the same period in 2023.

On this occasion, Sheikh Sabah Mohammed Abdulaziz Al-Sabah, Chairman of the Board of Directors of NAPESCO, stated that the positive results of the first quarter of the current year reflect the efforts made to enhance the efficiency of our operations to ensure the company's continued achievement of its strategic objectives in the oil services sector, and to enhance revenues specifically, within a framework of integrated governance and a forward-looking vision aimed at diversifying income streams

to mitigate risks.

Mr. Muhaiman Ali Al-Behbehani, Vice Chairman and CEO added in his statement that the efforts to implement strategic development and expansion plans, along with diversifying products and services, will enhance the company's performance and achieve its goals. This aligns with the company's developmental vision and follows a prudent policy aimed at reducing risks, effectively meeting the requirements of sustainable development, and maximizing profits and shareholders' value."

There are risks involved

Companies trying to attract more smartphone users across Africa

ACCRA, Ghana, May 19. (AP) Anita Akpeere prepared fried rice in her kitchen in Ghana's capital as a flurry of notifications for restaurant orders lit up apps on her phone. "I don't think I could work without a phone in my line of business," she said, as requests came in for her signature dish, a traditional fermented dumpling.

Internet-enabled phones have transformed many lives, but they can play a unique role in sub-Saharan Africa, where infrastructure and public services are among the world's least developed, said Jenny Aker, a professor who studies the issue at Tufts University. At times, technology in Africa has leapfrogged gaps, including providing access to mobile money for people without bank accounts.

Despite growing mobile internet coverage on the continent of 1.3 billion people, just 25% of adults in sub-Saharan Africa have access to it, according to Claire Sibthorpe, head of digital inclusion at the U.K.-based mobile phone lobbying group GSMA. Expense is the main barrier. The cheapest smartphone costs up to 95% of the monthly salary for the poorest 20% of the region's population, Sibthorpe said.

Literacy rates that are below the global average, and lack of services in many African languages - some 2,000 are spoken across the continent, according to The African Language Program at Harvard University - are other reasons why a smartphone isn't a compelling investment for some.

"If you buy a car, it's because you can drive it," said Alain Capo-Chichi, chief executive of CERCO Group, a company that has developed a smartphone that functions through voice command and is available in 50 African languages such as Yoruba, Swahili and Wolof.

Even in Ghana, where the lingua franca is English, knowing how to use smartphones and apps can be a challenge for newcomers.

One new company in Ghana is trying to change the digital gap. Uniti Networks offers financing to help make smartphones more affordable and coaches users to navigate its platform of apps.

For Cyril Fiany, a 64-year-old

farmer in Ghana's eastern Volta region, the phone has expanded his activities beyond calls and texts. Using his identity card, he registered with Uniti, putting down a deposit worth 340 Ghanaian Cedis (\$25) for a smartphone and will pay the remaining 910 Cedis (\$66) in installments.

He was shown how to navigate apps that interested him, including a third-party farming app called Cocoa Link that offers videos of planting techniques, weather information and details about the challenges of climate change that have affected cocoa and other crops.

Fiany, who previously planted according to his intuition and rarely interacts with farming advisors, was optimistic that the technology would increase his yields.

"I will know the exact time to plant because of the weather forecast," he said.

Kami Dar, chief executive of Uniti Networks, said the mobile internet could help address other challenges including accessing health care. The company has launched in five communities across Ghana with 650 participants and wants to reach 100,000 users within five years.

Aker, the scholar, noted that the potential impact of mobile phones across Africa is immense but said there is limited evidence that paid health or agriculture apps are benefiting people there. She asserted that the only beneficial impacts are reminders to take medicine or get vaccinated.

Having studied agricultural apps and their impact, she said it doesn't seem that farmers are getting better prices or improving their income.

Capo-Chichi from CERCO Group said a dearth of useful apps and content is another reason why more people in Africa aren't buying smartphones.

Dar said Uniti Networks learns from mistakes. In a pilot in northern Ghana designed to help cocoa farmers contribute to their pensions, there was high engagement but farmers didn't find the app user-friendly and needed extra coaching. After the feedback, the pension provider changed the interface to improve navigation.

end of 2023, the lowest since 1992. Russia can become the fourth-largest economy in the world, provided it maintains sustainable growth of at least 2 percent per year with a gradual acceleration to 3 percent, said Andrei Belousov, Russia's new defense minister and former first deputy prime minister.

Economic restructuring

As a major global producer of oil and gas resources, Russia heavily relies on energy exports for its fiscal revenue. The worsening geopolitical situation and the sharp increase in sanctions have compelled Russia to adjust its economic structure, aiming to boost the contribution of non-energy sectors to its GDP.

Since 2015, Russia has implemented an import substitution strategy. Initially focused on agro-industrial complexes, this strategy later expanded to areas such as information technology and mechanical engineering.

The sanctions imposed by the West on Russia since 2022 have prompted Russia to expand its countermeasures, said Mikhail Kuznyk, deputy director of the Centre for Industrial Policy Studies of the HSE University in Moscow.

Today, Russian domestic manufacturers have effectively replaced many foreign suppliers that have left the Russian market, especially in sectors like the food industry, heavy machinery and shipbuilding.

Last week, Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin announced plans to increase the volume of non-resource, non-energy exports by two-thirds.

"The share of local high-tech goods and services created based on our own developments will increase 1.5 times in six years," he was quoted as saying by Tass news agency.

To counter Western isolation and containment, Russia is also fostering economic and trade cooperation with regional organizations such as BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

Retail sales unchanged last month from March

Inflation, interest rates in US curb spending

NEW YORK, May 19, (AP) Americans unexpectedly paused their spending in April from March as inflation continued to sting and elevated interest rates made taking on debt more burdensome.

Retail sales were unchanged, coming in well below economists' expectations, and follow a revised 0.6% pace in March, according to Commerce Department data released recently. Sales rose 0.9% in February. That comes after sales fell 1.1% in January, dragged down in part by inclement weather. Excluding gas prices and auto sales, retail sales fell 0.1%.

Retail sales were also dragged down by a 1.2% drop in online business, reflecting a new sales event at Amazon and the earlier timing of Easter this year, according to Michael Pearce, deputy chief U.S. economist at Capital Economics. Business at electronics stores was up 1.5%. Sales at home furnishings stores slipped 0.5%. Sales at clothing and accessories stores posted a 1.6% gain.

The retail sales figure came out on the same day that the government issued its report on consumer inflation, which showed it cooled slightly last month after three elevated readings, likely offering a tentative sigh of relief for officials at the Federal Reserve as well as President Joe Biden's re-election team.

"Consumer spending is slowing as elevated interest rates weigh on rate-sensitive spending and as the labor market cools," Pearce wrote in a report published Wednesday. But he said he's not concerned.

"The resilience of the economy frees the Fed to focus on the incoming inflation data to guide its rate decisions, which we think will improve over the coming months and prompt the Fed to begin gradually easing rates beginning in September," he continued.

The retail sales data offers only a partial look at consumer spending be-

cause it excludes things like travel and lodging. However at restaurants, the lone service category tracked in the monthly retail sales report, sales rose 0.2% from March.

There have been some hints that the Federal Reserve's campaign to cool inflation by reining in spending may be taking hold. Employers pulled back on hiring in April adding 175,000 jobs, still a solid number, but down sharply from the surprisingly strong 315,000 hires in March.

Still, inflation remains an issue. Prices rose 0.3% from March to April, the Labor Department said Wednesday, down slightly from 0.4% the previous month. Measured year-over-year, inflation ticked down from 3.5% to 3.4%. And a measure of underlying inflation, which excludes volatile food and energy costs, also eased in April.

Inflation had been unexpectedly high in the first three months of this year after having steadily dropped in

levels since millions of jobs were lost when the COVID-19 pandemic hit the U.S. in the spring of 2020.

In April, U.S. employers added just 175,000 jobs, the fewest in six months and a sign that the labor market may be finally cooling off. The unemployment rate inched back up to 3.9% from 3.8% and has now remained below 4% for 27 straight months, the longest such streak since the 1960s. The government also recently reported 8.5 million job openings in March, the lowest number of vacancies in three years.

Moderation in the pace of hiring, along with a slowdown in wage growth, could give the Fed the data it's been seeking in order to finally issue a cut to interest rates. A cooler reading on consumer inflation in April could also play into the Fed's next rate decision.

The Federal Reserve raised its

benchmark borrowing rate 11 times beginning in March of 2022 in a bid to stifle the four-decade high inflation that took hold after the economy rebounded from the COVID-19 recession of 2020. The Fed's intention was to loosen the labor market and cool wage growth, which can fuel inflation.

Many economists thought there was a chance the rapid rate hikes could cause a recession, but jobs remain plentiful and the economy still broadly healthy thanks to strong consumer spending.

Though layoffs remain at low levels, companies have been announcing more job cuts recently, mostly across technology and media. Google parent company Alphabet, Apple and eBay have all recently announced layoffs.

Outside of tech and media, Walmart, Peloton, Stellantis, Nike and Tesla have recently announced job cuts.

The share of sales for the cheapest apparel online jumped from 36% in April 2019 to 53% in the same month this year, according to Adobe, while the market share of the most expensive apparel was more than halved, making up just 9% in the same time frame.

Arie Kotler, chairman, president and CEO of Arko Corp., a large operator of convenience stores in rural areas and small towns, said that higher gas prices and the cumulative effect on inflation in other areas is making shoppers hold back more than a year ago.

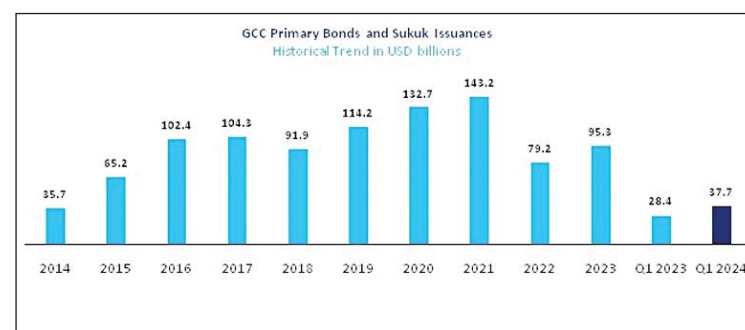
Heading into the Memorial Day weekend, the chain has stepped up discounts and is offering bundle deals for the 2 million members of its free loyalty program. That's widening the spending gap between loyalty members and non-members. Kotler said loyalty members are spending 32% more than non-members. Among the discounts: members can buy two 12-packs of Pepsi drinks and get a free pizza.

Amt represents a 33% increase from the same period last year

GCC Fixed Income markets see \$37.7b in primary issuances during Q1 2024

KUWAIT CITY, May 19: In its Fixed Income Report, Kuwait Financial Centre "Markaz" states that primary debt issuances of Bonds and Sukuk in the Gulf Cooperation Council ("GCC") Countries amounted to USD 37.7 billion during Q1 2024 compared to USD 28.4 billion raised in Q1 2023, representing a 33% increase. During the quarter, there were 77 primary debt issuances including fixed and floating rate tranches compared to 68 issuances in Q1 2023.

Issuances by Geography: Saudi-based issuers led the GCC Bonds and Sukuk market during the quarter, raising a total of USD 23.2 billion through 22 issuances, representing 62% of the total value raised in the GCC, followed by UAE issuers which raised USD 6.2 billion with 28 issuances, representing 16%. Qatar entities raised a total of USD 4.2 billion representing 11% while Bahraini entities witness 2 issuances raising USD 2.0 billion representing 5% of the market. Omani entities raised a total of USD 1.3 billion representing 3% of the total new amount issued during the quarter. Kuwaiti entities raised a total of USD 1.0 billion through 1 issuance representing



3% of the market.

Sovereign vs. Corporate: Issuances by Sovereign entities in the GCC made up 48% of the total value of GCC primary issuances during Q1 2024, amounting to USD 18.1 billion and up 57.2% from Q1 2023. Primary issuances by Corporates amounted to USD 19.6 billion during the quarter constituting 52% of the total value of GCC primary issuances and marking a growth of 16.3% compared to Q1 2023.

Conventional vs. Sukuk: Conventional issuances increased by 20.4% in Q1 2024 compared to the same period last year, raising a total of USD 27.9 billion representing 74% of the total value of primary issuances in the GCC. On the other

hand, Sukuk issuances amounting to USD 9.9 billion made up 26% of the total value of primary issuances during Q1 2024 and recording a 87.9% increase from the same period last year.

Sector Segmentation: The Government Sector accounted for the largest amount of primary debt issuances by value, raising a total of USD 18.1 billion or 48% of the total value of issuances in the GCC in Q1 2024, closely followed by the financial sector (including quasi-government entities) that raised a total value of USD 16.7 billion, representing 44% of the total amount issued.

Maturity Profile: Issuances with tenors of less than 5 years (LT 5 years) dominated the GCC debt

capital markets by total value, with a total of USD 16.5 billion, or 44% of the total value of issuances. Issuances with tenors of 5-10 years came in second with a total value raised of USD 13.4 billion, or 36% of the total value of issuances.

Issue Size Profile: The size of GCC Bonds and Sukuk primary issuances during the quarter ranged from USD 4.0 million to USD 4.8 billion. Issuances with principal amounts greater than or equal to USD 1 billion raised the largest amount totaling USD 23.7 billion, representing 63% of the total primary issuances.

Currency Profile: US Dollar-denominated issuances led the GCC Bonds and Sukuk primary market in Q1 2024, raising a total of USD 32.6 billion or 86% of the total value of GCC primary issuances. This was followed by Saudi Riyal denominated issuances that raised a total of USD 2.0 billion or 5% of the total value of issuances in the GCC.

Rating: In Q1 2024, a total of 85% of GCC primary Bonds and Sukuk issuances (in terms of value) were rated by either one of the following Rating agencies. Standard & Poor's, Moody's, Fitch and/or Capital Intelligence, of which 76% were rated within the Investment Grade.

Qualified teams will represent Kuwait at VEX Robotics World Championship in US

Zain and SACGC recognize winners of National Robotics Competition

KUWAIT CITY, May 19: Zain and Sabah Al Ahmad Center for Giftedness and Creativity (SACGC) – a center of the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS), awarded the winning students of the Kuwait National Robotics Competition (KNRC) held earlier this year. After qualifying from the competition, the students proudly represented Kuwait at the VEX Robotics World Championship 2024 held recently in the United States, where Kuwait University's team achieved the Build Award.

The awarding ceremony was hosted by the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences at its headquarters in Kuwait City. In attendance were KFAS Deputy Director General for Support Programs and SACGC Vice Chairman Dr. Saleh Al Aqely, Zain Kuwait Chief Corporate Affairs and Relations Officer Waleed Al Khashti, Sabah Al Ahmad Center for Giftedness and Creativity General Manager Neda Al Dehani, Acting Dean of the College of Science and Assistant Dean for Student Affairs at Kuwait University Dr. Mohammed Hussain bin Sabt, and KNRC supervisor Dr. Noura Al Jeri. The students, along with their parents and teachers, were also present.

During the event, the winning teams from middle school, high school, and university levels were awarded. The teams won at KNRC and later qualified to represent Kuwait at the VEX Robotics World Championship in the US. The awarded teams were Kuwait University's team, American Baccalaureate School (ABS)'s team, SACGC Academy's team, Kuwait International English School (KIES)'s team, and Ibn Al Ameer School's team.

From the above, the team from the Computer Science

Department, College of Science, Kuwait University, achieved the Build Award at the World Championship. It was the first university-level team from the Middle East to claim an award at the VEX Robotics World Championship 2024 (out of 15 awards). The team was among 120 university-level teams participating in the competition from around the world.

Zain, SACGC, and Kuwait University expressed their pride in all the teams that qualified from KNRC and represented Kuwait in the World Championship in the US. Reaching this international arena is a testament to Kuwaiti young people's talent and creativity and affirms the fact that they are more than capable to compete with their peers from around the globe.

This international experience has also contributed to growing the students' passion for technology, and will encourage them to pursue careers in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). In addition, this step was a direct outcome of the fruitful partnership between the local public and private sectors to empower the next generation of innovators in Kuwait.

The Kuwait National Robotics Competition was held early this year, organized by the Computer Science Department, College of Science, Kuwait University in partnership with Zain and Sabah Al Ahmad Center for Giftedness and Creativity, and in collaboration with the Ministry of Education.

This partnership came under the umbrella of Innovation Nation, the initiative under which all of Zain's innovation and entrepreneurship programs fall, with a focus on STEM areas. The initiative mainly targets young people and entrepreneurs and aims to foster a digitally capable generation.



Al Aqely, Al Khashti, Al Dehani, bin Sabt, and Al Jeri honor Kuwait University's team.



Awarding one of the high school teams.



Awarding one of the middle school teams.

Company building strategies for 'Weyak' success

stc Kuwait 'collaborates' with content creator Waleed Al Saleem for entrepreneur workshop

KUWAIT CITY, May 19: Kuwait Telecommunications Company – stc, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers, enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, held a workshop for entrepreneurs in collaboration with the popular Kuwaiti content creator, Waleed Al Saleem.

The initiative was organized as part of stc's extensive corporate social responsibility framework, through the Company's 'weyak' initiative that was launched to support entrepreneurs and start-ups in Kuwait. The workshop covered various topics that would support entrepreneurs in managing their social media content.

The workshop organized in collaboration with Al Saleem was open to entrepreneurs who were interested in learning more about managing their social media accounts and creating engaging content for their target audiences.

With over 300k followers, Al Saleem provided the entrepreneurs with tips and recommendations on how to enhance their business profiles and target the right audience to increase their following base. Participants also got a chance to speak to ask Al Saleem questions related to the topic at hand, as well as explore possible solutions that could assist them to further enhance marketing their businesses.

In a statement, stc highlighted its ongoing commitment to supporting the younger generation and entrepreneurs through various activities and initiatives. These efforts aim to raise awareness and instill a culture among the younger generation regarding the importance of managing their social media content and enhancing their businesses using purposeful and educational content.

Having Kuwaiti content creator Waleed Al-Saleem lead a workshop at the Company's headquarters, aligns with stc's vision of supporting successful entrepreneurs across different fields and sectors under the "weyak" initiative.

stc further expressed that the workshop is part of a broader series of initiatives aimed to strengthen the level of support and engagement with the local community. Additionally, stc launched several activities and workshops tailored for entrepreneurs in Kuwait, all under the "weyak" initiative.

This ongoing commitment aims to support ambitious entrepreneurs, who are seen as the backbone of the Kuwaiti economy. stc's initiative is designed to help startups and ambitious entrepreneurs in turning their creative ideas into successful and unique projects that can add value to the community. Through such programs, stc aspires these companies in succeeding, thereby fostering economic growth and innovation.

stc thanked Al Saleem for the valuable insights and information that he provided participants with during the workshop. The Company also thanked all participating entrepreneurs for attending the workshop. As witnessed by the level of engagement and enthusiasm, stc expressed that the Company will continue to introduce informative and educational programs and workshops that aim to support the community in various ways.

To find out more about stc's sponsorships, promotions, and events, follow stc's official social media platforms, visit one of stc's branches, download mystc mobile application, visit www.stc.com.kw or contact the customer service center by dialing 102 for around the clock assistance.



A group photo of the participants in the workshop with the content creator and influencer Waleed Al Saleem.

AUK panel discusses AI's role in 'enhancing' digital accessibility

KUWAIT CITY, May 19: The Office of Research and Grants (ORG) at the American University of Kuwait (AUK) recently hosted a panel discussion titled, "How Artificial Intelligence Can Enhance Digital Accessibility." The event, held in the AUK Auditorium, aimed to highlight AI advancements and their potential to improve digital accessibility for all, including those with disabilities.

Dr. Ahmad Alsaber, assistant professor of management and ORG assistant director, opened the event, with Ms. Afsah Abdullah moderating the discussion. Experts in AI and digital accessibility included Dr.

Zainab Al-Meraj, associate professor in computing at Kuwait University (KU); Mr. Ahmad Tawfiq Albahar, radio producer and host at the Ministry of Information in Kuwait; Dr. Iyad Abu Doush, ORG director and professor of computer science at AUK; and Mrs. Al-Khansa Al-Husseini, director of planning and research at the Public Authority for Disability Affairs.

Dr. Zainab underscored the importance of proactive measures that individuals and organizations can implement to foster inclusivity in digital environments, whilst Mr. Ahmad shared personal insights into improving digital accessibility for individuals with visual impairment.

On the other hand, Dr. Iyad emphasized the significance of integrating digital accessibility guidelines into the core curriculum of computer science programs to ensure future generations of developers prioritize inclusivity. Mrs. Al-Khansa also shed light on common barriers hindering the widespread adoption of digital accessibility standards among government agencies. She proposed strategies to overcome these obstacles, thus creating a more inclusive digital environment.

This panel discussion exemplified the institution's dedication to promoting inclusivity in the digital sphere. By convening experts from various fields, including academia, government, and media, AUK showcased its commitment to addressing the challenges faced by individuals with disabilities in accessing digital content.



Group photo of panelists.

Managing Director expresses pride in winning BMW Award

Ali Alghanim & Sons BMW Parts division wins 2023 Parts Sales Champion award

KUWAIT CITY, May 19: Ali Alghanim & Sons Automotive BMW Parts division has clinched the coveted 2023 Parts Sales Champion BMW award at the recent BMW Group Middle East Importer Awards ceremony.

The event which took place in Dubai, saw BMW Parts being honored for its exceptional performance, winning the acknowledgement among several other BMW importers from around the Gulf region.

BMW Parts ensures that each customer receives the highest standard of after-sales service and genuine BMW parts, highlighting the division's commitment to upholding the brand's legacy of excellence and premium quality.

Yousef Mustafa, Managing Director at Ali Alghanim & Sons Automotive, the authorized importer for BMW Group vehicles in Kuwait, expressed his pride, stating: "Winning the 2023 Parts Sales Champion BMW award is an achievement that not only recognizes our team's consistency and dedication but also reinforces our promise to deliver only the best automotive experience to our

customers. BMW Parts ensures that our clientele only receive a premium, 360-degree after-sales experience, and we are thrilled to be setting benchmarks and winning accolades in the region's automotive industry."

Ali Alghanim & Sons Automotive has been at the forefront of introducing BMW's newest marvels to Kuwait. In recent months, the company launched the much-anticipated BMW X2 model celebrated for its cutting-edge design, technology, and dynamic driving experience.

In the second half of 2023, the iconic BMW X5 and X6 models, which underwent meticulous upgrades in design and standard features, were made available to discerning clientele.

As the authorized importer and service provider for BMW in the country, Ali Alghanim & Sons recent success at the BMW Group Middle East Importer Awards only cements its legacy of providing Kuwait with world-class vehicles and services.

For more information on BMW vehicles in Kuwait, visit one of Ali Alghanim & Sons Automotive's showrooms or www.alialghanimsons.com.kw.



BMW Parts award ceremony

Cage the Elephant emerge from loss with 'Neon Pill'

NEW YORK, May 19, (AP) — To say Cage the Elephant's latest album had a turbulent birth would be an understatement. The band dealt with the deaths of loved ones, the pandemic and their lead singer's arrest and hospitalization.

"It's no secret that I had a medical crisis," Matt Shultz tells The Associated Press from Nashville on the eve of the Friday release of the 12-track "Neon Pill." "I'm fully recovered. It definitely left a scar, but it's one that can be walked away from."

In January 2023, the Kentucky raised singer-songwriter was charged with criminal possession of firearms after police found Shultz's guns inside his room at the Bowery Hotel in Lower Manhattan.

Shultz says that in the aftermath he discovered that for the previous three years or so he'd been having a bad reaction to a set of prescribed medications (Shultz didn't specify which), leading to episodes of psychosis.

"It's shocking how night and day the difference is from being on whatever medication is causing psychosis and being off of it," he says. "As I got off the medication, I went back to my normal self. And that was very odd because it was like having your life hijacked by another person."

That so-called other person had contributed to the five-year recording of "Neon Pill" and it was up to Shultz — who was hospitalized for two months and had about six months of outpatient therapy — to untangle the music.

"I went back to the lyrics, obviously to finish the album, and it was like reading the words of a totally different person and trying to decode

what they meant," he says. "A lot of it was going back and trying to find the sentiment of what I was trying to communicate."

Shultz avoided jail time by pleading guilty to three weapons charges. "I'm so blessed it wasn't worse than it was," he says. "And blessed that I got the medical attention I needed. I'm incredibly blessed to be surrounded by my family, my wife. Definitely, God got me through it for sure. I would be dead several times over."

"Neon Pill" sees the band reunited with producer John Hill, who worked on their last 2019's Grammy-winning "Social Cues," and offers a kaleidoscope of rock, from the strutting glam of "Ball and Chain" to the piano ballad of "Out Loud" and the airy alt-rock of "Float Into the Sky." One song, "Rainbow," is infectiously poppy, as if Cage did a Dead or Alive track.

Impact

"It was very much like a culmination of all the Cage records combined," says Shultz. "John Hill definitely had a greater impact on this album, for sure. Not that he didn't have an impact on 'Social Cues,' but with this one, he definitely was pushing us harder to reach within ourselves and to write the best material that we possibly could."

The album doesn't shy away from Shultz's experiences and the title track drives straight into them, with the lyrics "Double-crossed by a neon pill/Like a loaded gun, my love, I lost control of the wheel." The song has become the band's 11th No. 1 on Billboard's Alternative Airplay chart.

"We definitely felt like that was the title track once everything came to be," says Shultz, whose bandmates are his guitarist brother, Brad; bassist Daniel Tichenor; drummer Jared Champion; guitarist Nick Bockrath; and keyboardist Matthan Minster.

Two songs connect to Matt and Brad's father, Brad Shultz Sr., including "Out Loud," which is based on the time the elder Shultz and his father had a terrible fight and their dad ran away, hitchhiking all the way to Florida. Feeling remorseful after a year, the younger man wrote a song of apology and hitchhiked back to Kentucky to play it for his father.

Matt Shultz says he was moved by the story and "so I wrote a song about the song he wrote." That song has the lines: "Man, I really messed up now/Clipped those wings and I came back home/Tried my best just to carry on."

The album's last track, "Over Your Shoulder," mourns his father's death in 2020. The Shultz brothers inherited milk crates with hundreds of their dad's songs on old cassette tapes. A new original Cage song emerged, similar to their dad's style, with the lyrics: "Don't look back over your shoulder/I'm not saying don't ask/When it feels like it gets colder/Every season will pass."

Matt Shultz says the entire album marks a bit of a departure for a band who he admits often in the past wore their influences on their sleeves.

"We would be in the studio and definitely at times trying to imitate and emulate. But with this record, I think, we were just really relaxed into ourselves and reaching to make something that we love."

Music

Variety



Selena Gomez poses for photographers upon departure from the premiere of the film 'Emilia Perez' at the 77th international film festival, Cannes, southern France, Saturday, May 18. (AP)

Film

A tale of vision and courage

'Megalopolis': Coppola's cinematic leap

CANNES, France, May 19, (AP) — Of the many quotations and slogans that flutter through Francis Ford Coppola's idea-stuffed, open-hearted, unabashedly optimistic "Megalopolis," one that particularly resonates with the director is: "When we leap into the unknown, we prove that we're free."

"That's me making this film," Coppola says, speaking on a hotel terrace in Cannes the day after "Megalopolis" premiered at the French festival. "To all of the studio big shots, I proved that I'm free and they're not. Because they don't dare leap into the unknown. And I do. That's the only way to prove that you're free."

Coppola pauses and then adds, with a grin. "I don't recommend it." "Megalopolis," Coppola's first film in 13 years, has been called many things since it was unveiled in Cannes. A folly. A disaster. An audacious, self-financed gamble. What it is, regardless of whether all its strange parts function smoothly together, is a colossal personal statement by one of America's most visionary filmmakers, about having the daring to be visionary.

It's no small step but another giant leap by Coppola, 85, who feels so strongly about what "Megalopolis" encapsulates that he's spent some four decades pursuing it. After the credits rolled at the premiere and the crowd stood applauding, Coppola grabbed the microphone to extend its message, pleading for "one human family" and "the children."

"My dream would be that this movie could be seen on New Year's Eve and people would — instead of saying I'm going to lose weight or I'm not going to smoke anymore or I'm not going to cheat on my wife — talk about: Is the society we're living in the only one available?" Coppola says. "How can we make it better? And if they talk about it, they will. That's my dream."

In "Megalopolis," Adam Driver plays Cesar Catilina, a Roman emperor-like figure with the power to stop time in a futuristic New York. He's an inventor who wants to build a new New York metropolis with a material he's created called Megalon. In sensibility, he's more like an artist, though. Cesar quotes "Hamlet," as well as Emerson, Marcus Aurelius and Ovid. He is, you can't help but notice, a little like Coppola, himself.

At the press conference in Cannes, Laurence Fish-

burne, who co-starred all the way back in Coppola's "Apocalypse Now," recalled that Coppola "has always talked about stopping time."

"Even before he was talking about the movie, he would say, 'I can stop time. I'll show you,'" said Fishburne. "I used to sit and overhear conversations you had with Eleanor about that."

Coppola, who leaned on a cane or his granddaughter Romy Mars wherever he went in Cannes, is now more acutely aware of his limitations when it comes to time. Eleanor Coppola, his wife, died in April. "Megalopolis" is dedicated to her. "Sixty years we were together," he said, shaking his head. "Can you believe it?"

Experimental

Time is much the subject of "Megalopolis," a movie 40 years in the making which Coppola says he first began seriously thinking about, he says, after completing 1997's "The Rainmaker." He wanted to withdraw from his career and devote himself to more experimental pursuits.

"During that time, my thought was that I had used many styles, 'Apocalypse' was a wild style, 'The Godfather' was very classic — I wondered what my style might be in the future," Coppola says. "I had curiosity for what kind of film I might make when I was older. I kept a scrap book of things I read. I made a collection of political cartoons. Those say a whole story in one image. That ultimately led to make a Roman epic set in modern America."

Coppola rewrote "Megalopolis" many times over in the years that followed. Not unlike Orson Welles, another American filmmaker who experienced unexpectedly enormous success early in his career who turned increasingly experimental as a filmmaker later in life, Coppola became fascinated with new possibilities for movies. He published some of his findings in the 2017 book "Live Cinema and its Techniques." Midway through "Megalopolis" screenings at Cannes, a man has walked onto the stage and, before a microphone, addresses a question to Cesar who looms above on the screen. It's like an injection of Megalon into the fabric of the film.

Driver was particularly invested in Coppola's pro-

ject, and the director considers him an important collaborator. Driver, who sat next to Coppola on the terrace, recalled that on the first day of shooting, Coppola told the cast: "We're not being brave enough."

"For him to make a film like that at this point in his life I thought was a beautiful thing," Driver says. "He has conviction and it's so ballsy. Why is it that he's doing that at this point in his career and other people aren't following that example?"

"Megalopolis" has had plenty of detractors. After Coppola screened it privately last month in Los Angeles, it was said to have no commercial prospects. Even the film's defenders grant that "Megalopolis" is juggling a lot, not always adroitly, in marrying Roman past with sci-fi future, debauched reverie and ultra sincerity.

But Coppola didn't hesitate to, again, push his own money into "Megalopolis," investing some \$120 million from his wine business to produce it. He's been here before. Coppola famously put millions into "Apocalypse Now," a movie that also premiered in Cannes hounded by skepticism and rumors of production turmoil.

Is there something in Coppola that always needs to be going for broke?

"There are many times I've heard that Francis can only perform when he's really up against it," Coppola says. "I don't think that's the case but maybe it is."

When Coppola and Driver first met to discuss the film several years ago, "We talked a lot about babies," Driver says. "That they're constantly at work doing complex things even though it looks like they're doing nothing."

"Every baby that's being killed today in Sudan or Palestine — and a lot of them are being killed — it's a potential Archimedes, a potential Einstein, a potential Mozart," says Coppola.

Here, Coppola returns to the subject of time. We aren't fully comprehending our potential to change the world, he says. Though many today are plagued by apocalyptic and ecological anxieties, Coppola sees marvels all around. Electricity isn't that old, he says. The internet was created in his lifetime. Fusion, Coppola muses, has enormous possibilities. We're geniuses, he says.

Features

ARABIC TIMES

MONDAY, MAY 20, 2024

NEW YORK: Alice Stewart, a CNN political commentator and veteran political adviser who worked on a number of GOP presidential campaigns, has died at age 58, the news network reported Saturday.

Police in northern Virginia told CNN that Stewart's body was found outdoors in the Bellevue neighborhood early Saturday morning and that no foul play was suspected. Officials believe Stewart suffered a medical episode, according to CNN.

In an email to staff, the network's CEO Mark Thompson called Stewart "a very dear friend and colleague to all of us at CNN."

"A political veteran and an Emmy Award-winning journalist who brought an incomparable spark to CNN's coverage, known across our bureaus not only for her political savvy, but for her unwavering kindness," he wrote. "Our hearts are heavy as we mourn such an extraordinary loss."

No further information about the cause of death or survivors was available Saturday.

Stewart was born on March 11, 1966, in Atlanta, and began her career as a local reporter in Georgia before moving to Little Rock, Arkansas to be a news anchor. She went on to serve as the communications director in then-Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee's office. She assumed similar roles during Huckabee's presidential run in 2008 and served as communications director for the 2012 presidential bids of Minnesota Rep. Michele Bachmann and then former Pennsylvania Sen. Rick Santorum. Most recently, Stewart was the communications director for Texas Sen. Ted Cruz's 2016 campaign.

"Heartbreaking," Cruz posted Saturday on X, formerly Twitter. "Alice was wonderful and talented and a dear friend. And she loved America fiercely. She lived every day to the fullest, and she will be deeply missed. May God's comfort and peace be upon her loved ones. RIP." (AP)

BEIJING: Chinese comedy "The Last Frenzy" claimed the top spot on the daily box office chart in the Chinese mainland on Saturday, data from the China Movie Data Information Network showed. The film, exploring life's choices in the face of death, raked

in 20.11 million yuan (about 2.83 million US dollars) on the 18th day of its release.

It was followed by domestic crime thriller "Hovering Blade" with 18.55 million yuan of daily box office sales.

Hong Kong action crime thriller "Twilight of the Warriors: Walled In" came in third with a



Kuang



Stewart

daily earning of 17.2 million yuan. The Chinese mainland's box office revenue totaled 111.49 million yuan on Saturday. (Xinhua)

CHENGDU: "Babel: An Arcane History," a novel written by R. F. Kuang from the United States, won an award at the 15th Xingyun

(Nebula) Awards for Chinese Science Fiction on Saturday.

It was awarded the best translated work by a unanimous vote at a ceremony held in Chengdu, capital city of southwest China's Sichuan Province.

Translated by Chen Yang, the book builds a world where reality and fiction interact with each other

in an imaginary mode of linguistic system, historical event and multi-dimensional universe.

At the event, "City in the Well," written by Liu Yang, won the best novel. "Weightless Language" by Zhou Wen won the best novella, and Cheng Jingbo's "Pasture White Stags" won best short story. (Xinhua)

People & Places

Music

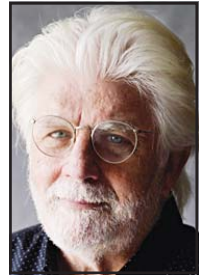
Unvarnished, humble

McDonald's memoir offers wisdom & wit

NEW YORK, May 19. (AP): Something stopped **Michael McDonald** from telling his story publicly - him. The Rock & Roll Hall of Famer with multiple Grammys just didn't think he had one.

McDonald, a member of both Steely Dan and The Doobie Brothers who became a singular soul solo artist with such hits as "On My Own" and "Sweet Freedom," believed he was just a small player in the history of rock.

"I was afraid that, 'Well, how much of a story is here, really?' My experience is pretty much me living vicariously through other people's accomplishments," McDonald said in an interview.



McDonald

Prodded by a friend - actor and comedian Paul Reiser - McDonald is finally owning his story this spring in the unvarnished and humble memoir "What a Fool Believes," out May 21.

It's the portrait of a remarkable singer-songwriter who had career highs and terrible lows, who battled alcoholism and self-doubt, endured popularity, mocking and then rejuvenation.

"I think we both discovered that this is really just a story about how random life really is - no matter how much we think we have a plan, and no matter how much we think we have a direction we want to go," he said. "What we really have to do is be ready to let life change on a dime and go with the flow."

Reiser said in a separate interview that the book grew from conversations the two had, mainly him asking lots of questions about McDonald's life. "It's entirely selfish. I just wanted to read it," Reiser said.

"Everybody's in awe of his voice. Everybody loves the music he's done. But I don't think anybody knows anything about him," he added. "He just sort of floats on this frequency that doesn't get a lot of attention."

The book opens in 1971 with the author hungover in county jail. A 19-year-old McDonald has been arrested after falling asleep in a pancake house following a 48-hour cocaine- and Jack Daniels-binge. It is a foreshadowing.

Choices

It then goes chronologically, tracing the path McDonald took from humble roots in St. Louis, Missouri, to touring around the world with two classic rock outfits despite a "propensity for making poor choices."

McDonald went from his first band at 12 playing picnics and civic events with a homemade guitar, to the local pro band Jerry Jay and the Sheratons and then the touring The Delays. At 18, RCA Records gave him \$3,000 and flew him to Los Angeles, but his debut album was scrapped and he was dropped from the label. "My quickly rising star came crashing down to earth," he writes.

He would return to California a few months later - by car this time - with a more secure offer of session work. "I was determined not to return to St. Louis until I had something to show for my efforts," he writes.

His career took an upswing when he was asked to sing backing vocals and play keys for Steely Dan. His distinctive, soulful voice graced memorable tracks on classic Steely Dan albums, including "Katy Lied," "The Royal Scam," "Aja" and "Gaucho." (That's him singing background on "Peg.")

When Steely Dan stopped touring, McDonald jumped to another '70s icon, The Doobie Brothers. In 1975 - on the eve of the release of their fifth album - their original lead singer, Tom Johnston, was hospitalized and unable to tour. The band drafted McDonald into the line-up to replace him, giving him 48 hours to learn their entire set.

McDonald was asked to join the Doobies permanently - \$1,500 a week plus a \$100 per diem - and would become somewhat divisive for changing their direction from country rock and blues boogie to a smoother, more soulful sound.

"There was an undeniable atmosphere of internal strife building within our ranks. And I will be the first to claim my share of the blame in that department," McDonald writes.

Lessons

McDonald isn't shy about showing life's ugly parts - from having crabs as a young man to acid reflux as an older one. He admits to showing up drunk to a rehab support group two days in a row and once could be found in a bathrobe, a joint in his mouth and a salad bowl full of Lucky Charms on his chest.

"If you're going to tell a story, tell the whole story," he says in the interview. "We all get where we're going in spite of ourselves, you know? And I think that's what the story is kind of about."

Musicians who read the book will get lessons in touring etiquette and songwriting, including hyper-specific details like chromatically descending II-V passing chord progressions.

Fans will also get stories about playing basketball with James Taylor and some good advice about opening for Cher: "Generally speaking, when you see some guy all made up in a Cher wig and gown standing on a chair giving you the finger, it's time to go."

In addition to his solo albums, McDonald sang on songs by Elton John, Luther Vandross, Kenny Loggins and Christopher Cross (That's McDonald singing "Such a long way to go" on Cross' "Ride Like the Wind.") He earned a Grammy nod for "Sweet Freedom" from the movie "Running Scared" and teamed up with James Ingram on "Yah Mo B There" and Patti LaBelle on "On My Own."

Eventually, McDonald became a butt of jokes for his propensity to show up on other artists' tracks. "No one wanted to hear another Michael McDonald background vocal - I had dipped into that well perhaps once too often, somewhere between 50 and a thousand times," he writes.

Redemption occurred in the 2000s when McDonald began issuing well-received albums of Motown covers. He recorded with Solange Knowles and Grizzly Bear and showed up at the Coachella festival in 2017 with the jazz-funk bassist Thundercat.

McDonald, 72, says that writing the book gave him the chance to look back and let go of resentments to people he long perceived as standing in his way. "I probably owe those people more than I have a reason to hold a grudge," he says.



Cate Blanchett poses for photographers at the photo call for the film 'Rumours' at the 77th international film festival, Cannes, southern France, Sunday, May 19. (AP)

Music

Vocal range shines in 'Hit Me Hard and Soft'

Eilish's bold surprises in new album

By Maria Sherman

"Am I acting my age now?" Billie Eilish, 22, wonders aloud on the opening track to her ambitious third album, "Hit Me Hard and Soft."

"Am I already on the way out?" The 10-track release sees a once-in-a-generation pop performer once again rewriting the rules: If Eilish's first record introduced the world to her brilliant horror-pop, with its macabre humor, off-kilter beats and teenage Invisalig slurs, and her second wiped away those black tears for pop crooning and bossa nova ruminations on the expectations of fame, her third is an amalgamation of both, with bold new surprises.

"Hit Me Hard and Soft" proves Eilish to be an outsider in contemporary pop in a few ways: This is an album meant to be heard and enjoyed in full, working contrary to the current single-centric model of the music industry. And she earns that distinction, with a fuller sound, courtesy her brother, producer, and lifelong collaborator Finneas O'Connell, now joined by Andrew Marshall on drums and the Attacca Quartet on strings.

Opener "Skinny" launches into the saccharine falsetto of her award-winning "Barbie" ballad "What Was I Made For?" The song's messaging, too, has a similar kind of resonance - she tackles body image, singing "People say I look happy / Just because I got skinny" - echoing her short film and spoken word interlude "Not My Responsibility" from 2021's "Happier Than Ever."

A string section carries "Skinny" to its coda, harking back to Eilish's performance of her "Barbie" song at the 2024 Oscars, where she was joined by an orchestra.

From that point onward, everything changes. Fake outs define "Hit Me Hard and Soft." Think a song is going

in one direction? Guess again. In the last five seconds of "Skinny," pulsating drums enter the equation, a beat that carries into the sapphire anthem "Lunch" - a soon-to-be fan favorite.

Then there's the languid bass and airy refrain of "away from me" on the midtempo "Chihiro," likely named after the 10-year-old protagonist in Hayao Miyazaki's Studio Ghibli classic, "Spirited Away." That song, like many on the album, begins soft and ends hard. An erotic crescendo of thumping techno-house reaches "Challengers"-level of aural elation.

Vocals

"The Greatest" could be considered a thematic sequel to "everything I wanted" from her 2019 album, "When We All Fall Asleep, Where Do We Go?" now with a plucky, nylon string guitar. Three and a half minutes in, it turns into atmospheric, arena rock. Blown-out guitars are executed in a way that feels familiar to the 2021 title track, "Happier Than Ever."

The deceptively cheery sounding "L'amour De Ma Vie," too, is true to the sort of the jazzy, lounge moments of her last album. "But I need to confess / I told you a lie," a clear-eyed Eilish sings. "I said you / you were the love of my life."

Later, the song ascends into synth-pop bliss - autotuned, distorted vocals in a hyperpop, Eurodance rave - lest anyone forget this is the same pop performer who wrote the industrial track "Oxytocin."

So where did the "bad guy" singer go? "The Diner," duh. Here, her haunted carnival ride sound returns. "Don't be afraid of me," she opens her gothic vaudeville (now a command rather than the inquiry "Why aren't you scared of me?" from 2019's "bury a friend.") She teases, "Bet I could

change your life / You could be my wife."

Where other artists might pull from their past to make derivative, impressionistic portraits of who they used to be, Eilish evolves her ghosts.

That's true in the breathy closer "Blue," a sonic reminder of Eilish's long love of Lana Del Rey records, until it takes a Massive Attack-style trip-hop detour. Two things can be true - and blue - at once.

"Hit Me Hard and Soft" is the loudest Eilish has ever been on record - no longer singing almost exclusively in gorgeous, hushed tones just above an ASMR whisper, buried underneath sweeping, innovative production. Clearly, she's gained the self-assurance to belt above the mix.

The only skip may be the penultimate track "Bittersuite," which suffers under its own subtlety - something she manages to avoid on the largely-acoustic "Wildflower." There, her sonic sweetness muddles after a crisp drum fill somewhere in the middle. It's understated, but effectual. Lyrically, Eilish details a preoccupation with a current partner's former lover: "Every time you touch me," she sings. "I just wonder how she felt."

Throughout the album, Eilish is a bird: She's a bird in a cage in "Skinny"; she wants to stick together on the baroque pop track "Birds of a Feather," and by the album's closer "Blue," she realizes they were not "birds of a feather," after all - and she's back in a cage.

It's a welcomed change from the tarantulas that defined "When We All Fall Asleep, Where Do We Go?," but it also serves as the ideal metaphor for Eilish's third album. She's motivated by a desire for freedom. And on "Hit Me Hard and Soft," she's allowed herself to communicate the tension - and let it take flight. (AP)



Billie Eilish arrives at the 30th annual Screen Actors Guild Awards on Saturday, Feb. 24, 2024 in Los Angeles. (AP)



Shindle



Sparks

Variety

ANAHEIM, Calif.: Disneyland performers who help bring Mickey Mouse, Cinderella and other beloved characters to life at the Southern California resort chose to unionize following a three-day vote culminating on Saturday.

The Actors' Equity Association labor union said in a statement Saturday that cast members for the parades and characters departments at Disney's theme parks near Los Angeles voted by a wide margin for the union to become the bargaining agent for the group of roughly 1,700 workers.

An association website tracking the balloting among cast members indicated passage by 78.7% (953 votes) in favor and 21.3% (258 votes) opposed.

"They say that Disneyland is 'the place where dreams come true,' and for the Disney Cast Members who have worked to organize a union, their dream came true today," Actors' Equity Association President **Kate Shindle** said in a statement Saturday night.

Shindle called the workers the "front lines" of the Disneyland guest experience. The association and cast members will discuss improvements to health and safety, wages, benefits, working conditions and job security before meeting with Walt Disney Company representatives about negotiating the staff priorities into a contract, she said.

The union already represents theatrical performers at Disney's Florida parks. (AP)

TEHRAN: Iran on Saturday unveiled a selection of ancient clay tablets brought back to the country last year from the United States.

The public display came at the end of a ceremony held at the National Museum of Iran in the capital Tehran to mark International Museum Day on May 18 and the beginning of the National Cultural Heritage Week.

The returned 3,506 clay tablets date back to the era of the Achaemenid Empire which ruled from the 6th to 4th centuries BC. Those tablets returned to Iran after Iranian President **Ebrahim Raisi's** visit to New York last September, where he had taken part in the 78th session of the United Nations General Assembly.

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of the ceremony, Director of the National Museum of Iran **Jebrael Nokandeh** said the clay tablets, of which 162 pieces had been displayed at the museum, pertained to the reign of Darius I (522-486 BC), and provided "valuable, detailed and precise" information about a part of people's lives and their society during the Achaemenid era. (Xinhua)

LOS ANGELES: The sports streaming platform planned by ESPN, Fox and Warner Bros. Discovery finally has a name.

The joint venture will be known as Venu (pronounced "venue") Sports. The companies announced plans in February for the platform, which some consider to be the equivalent of Hulu for sports.

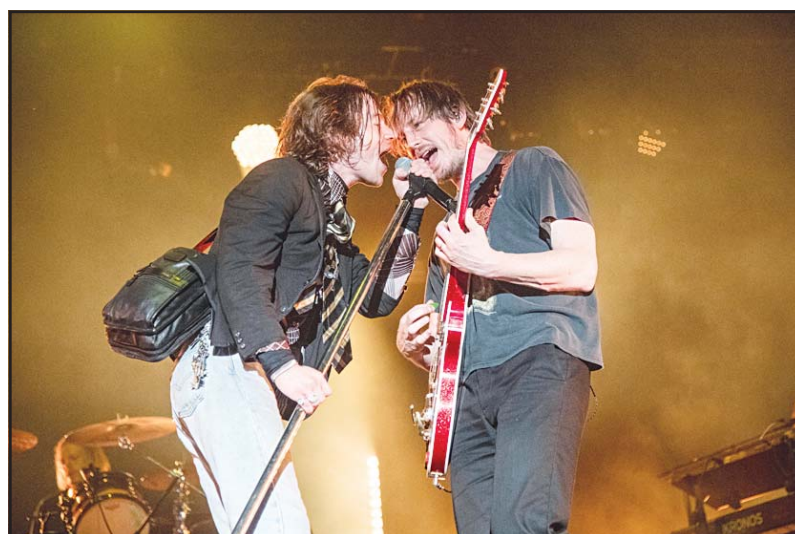
"As preparations for the platform continue to accelerate, we are singularly focused on delivering a best-in-class product for our target audience, built from the ground up using the latest technologies to engage and entertain discerning sports fans wanting one-stop access to live games," Venu Sports CEO **Pete Distad** said in a statement.

Further details, including pricing and launch timing, will be announced later. Venu Sports still has many hurdles to

clear, including regulatory approval, before it launches.

FuboTV filed an antitrust lawsuit shortly after the joint venture was announced. In its filing, FuboTV said it has tried for years to offer a sports-only streaming service but has been prevented from doing so because ESPN, Fox and Warner Bros. Discovery have imposed bundling requirements. (AP)

INDIANAPOLIS: Jordin Sparks, the singer-songwriter who shot to stardom on "American Idol," will perform the national anthem before the 108th running of the Indianapolis 500 on Memorial Day weekend.



Matt Shultz (left) and Nick Bockrath of Cage The Elephant perform at the All In Music & Arts Festival on Sept. 4, 2022, in Indianapolis. The band has a new album called 'Neon Pill.' (AP) — Details Page 11

Sparks also performed the anthem before "The Greatest Spectacle in Racing" in 2015.

"We know that Jordin's voice and performance will deliver an emotional and stirring rendition of the national anthem as part of pre-race ceremonies for the Indy 500," Indianapolis Motor Speedway president **J. Douglas Boles** said Wednesday.

"The national anthem moment pays honor to the country we love, sets the stage for the hair-raising US Air Force Thunderbirds flyover, and gets us one step closer to those final, dramatic and electric moments leading up to the start of the Indianapolis 500." (AP)

NEW YORK: "Judge Judy" Sheindlin sued the parent company of the National Enquirer and InTouch Weekly recently for a story that she said falsely claimed that she was trying to help the Menendez brothers get a retrial after they were convicted of murdering their parents.

The story was first published on InTouch Weekly's website on April 10 under the headline "Inside Judge Judy's Quest to Save the Menendez Brothers Nearly 35 Years After Their Parents' Murder," according to the lawsuit, filed in circuit court in Collier County, Florida.

A version of the story later appeared in the National Enquirer, a sister publication to InTouch Weekly also owned by Accelerate360 Media. The 1989 Menendez murders in Beverly Hills, California, was a case of some tabloid renown.

Sheindlin said she's had nothing to say about the case. Her lawsuit speculated that the news outlets used statements in a Fox Nation docuseries made by "Judi Ramos," a woman identified as an alternate juror in the first Menendez trial, and misattributed them to the television judge. (AP)

The Conversation

Decoding viral functions with protein language models

AI helps experts unravel virus mysteries in oceans and gut

By Libusha Kelly

Albert Einstein College of Medicine

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

Viruses are a mysterious and poorly understood force in microbial ecosystems. Researchers know they can infect, kill and manipulate human and bacterial cells in nearly every environment, from the oceans to your gut. But scientists don't yet have a full picture of how viruses affect their surrounding environments in large part because of their extraordinary diversity and ability to rapidly evolve.

Communities of microbes are difficult to study in a laboratory setting. Many microbes are challenging to cultivate, and their natural environment has many more features influencing their success or failure than scientists can replicate in a lab.

So systems biologists like me often sequence all the DNA present in a sample - for example, a fecal sample from a patient - separate out the viral DNA sequences, then annotate the sections of the viral genome that code for proteins. These notes on the location, structure and other features of genes help researchers understand the functions viruses might carry out in the environment and help identify different kinds of viruses. Researchers annotate viruses by matching viral sequences in a sample to previously annotated sequences available in public databases of viral genetic sequences.

However, scientists are identifying viral sequences in DNA collected from the environment at a rate that far outpaces our ability to annotate those genes. This means researchers are publishing findings about viruses in microbial ecosystems using unacceptably small fractions of available data.

Models

To improve researchers' ability to study viruses around the globe, my team and I have developed a novel approach to annotate viral sequences using artificial intelligence. Through protein language models akin to large language models like ChatGPT but specific to proteins, we were able to classify previously unseen viral sequences. This opens the door for researchers to not only learn more about viruses, but also to address biological questions that are difficult to answer with current techniques.

Large language models use relationships between words in large datasets of text to provide potential answers to questions they are not explicitly "taught" the answer to. When you ask a chatbot "What is the capital of France?" for example, the model is not looking up the answer in a table of capital cities. Rather, it is using its training on huge datasets of documents and information to infer the answer: "The capital of France is Paris."

Similarly, protein language models are AI algorithms that are trained to recognize relationships between billions of protein sequences from environments around the world. Through this training, they may be able to infer something about the essence of viral proteins and their functions.

We wondered whether protein language models could answer this

question: "Given all annotated viral genetic sequences, what is this new sequence's function?"

In our proof of concept, we trained neural networks on previously annotated viral protein sequences in pre-trained protein language models and then used them to predict the annotation of new viral protein sequences. Our approach allows us to probe what the model is "seeing" in a particular viral sequence that leads to a particular annotation. This helps identify candidate proteins of interest either based on their specific functions or how their genome is arranged, winnowing down the search space of vast datasets.

Protein

By identifying more distantly related viral gene functions, protein language models can complement current methods to provide new insights into microbiology. For example, my team and I were able to use our model to discover a previously unrecognized integrase - a type of protein that can move genetic information in and out of cells - in the globally abundant marine picocyanobacteria *Prochlorococcus* and *Synechococcus*. Notably, this integrase may be able to move genes in and out of these populations of bacteria in the oceans and enable these microbes to better adapt to changing environments.

Our language model also identified a novel viral capsid protein that is widespread in the global oceans. We produced the first picture of how its genes are arranged, showing it can contain different sets of genes that we believe indicates this virus serves different functions in its environment.

These preliminary findings represent only two of thousands of annotations our approach has provided.

Most of the hundreds of thousands of newly discovered viruses remain unclassified. Many viral genetic sequences match protein families with no known function or have never been seen before. Our work shows that similar protein language models could help study the threat and promise of our planet's many uncharacterized viruses.

While our study focused on viruses in the global oceans, improved annotation of viral proteins is critical for better understanding the role viruses play in health and disease in the human body. We and other researchers have hypothesized that viral activity in the human gut microbiome might be altered when you're sick. This means that viruses may help identify stress in microbial communities.

However, our approach is also limited because it requires high-quality annotations. Researchers are developing newer protein language models that incorporate other "tasks" as part of their training, particularly predicting protein structures to detect similar proteins, to make them more powerful.

Making all AI tools available via FAIR Data Principles - data that is findable, accessible, interoperable and reusable - can help researchers at large realize the potential of these new ways of annotating protein sequences leading to discoveries that benefit human health. (AP)

2023 northern summer was the warmest since year 1

Global coral bleaching nears record levels amid 'crazy' ocean heat: study

NEW YORK, May 19, (AP) - Ocean temperatures that have gone "crazy haywire" hot, especially in the Atlantic, are close to making the current global coral bleaching event the worst in history. It's so bad that scientists are hoping for a few hurricanes to cool things off.

More than three-fifths - 62.9% - of the world's coral reefs are badly hurting from a bleaching event that began last year and is continuing. That's nearing the record of 65.7% in 2017, when from 2009 to 2017 about one-seventh of the world's coral died, said Derek Manzello, coordinator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Coral Reef Watch Program.

When water gets too hot, coral, which are living creatures, bleach and sometimes die.

In the Atlantic, off the Florida coast and in the Caribbean, about 99.7% of the coral reefs have been hit with "very very severe" losses in staghorn and elkhorn species, Manzello said Thursday in NOAA's monthly climate briefing. Sixty-two countries are seeing damaged coral, with Thailand shutting off a tourist-laden island to try to save the coral there.

Meteorologists say a La Nina - a natural cooling of parts of the Pacific that changes the weather worldwide - is forecast to develop soon and perhaps cool oceans a bit, but Manzello said it may be too little and too late.

"I still am very worried about the state of the world's coral reefs just because we're seeing things play out right now that are just very unexpected and extreme," Manzello said.

"This wouldn't be happening without climate change. That's basically the cornerstone of all the ocean warming we're seeing," Manzello said. But on top of that are changes in El Nino, the reverse of La Nina and a natural warming of ocean waters; reduced sulfur pollution from ships and



Bleached coral is visible at the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary, off the coast of Galveston, Texas, in the Gulf of Mexico, Sept. 16. (AP)

an undersea volcano eruption.

Former top NASA climate scientist James Hansen said "acceleration of global warming is now hard to deny" in a new analysis and statement Thursday.

For coral, it comes down to how hot the water is and "things have just gone crazy haywire with ocean temperatures in the last year," Manzello said. He said hurricanes bring up cool water from deep and benefit coral reefs if they don't hit them directly.

"Hurricanes can be devastating for reefs," Manzello. "But in the grand scheme of things and given the current situation we are in on planet Earth, they're now a good thing essentially, which is kind of mind-blowing."

On Wednesday, parts of the Atlantic where hurricanes often develop had an ocean heat content - which measures water warmth at depths - equivalent to mid-August, said hurricane researchers Brian McNoldy at the University of Miami and Phil Klotzbach at Colorado State University.

The world's oceans last month broke a record for the hottest April on record. It was the 13th straight month global seas broke records, and because the oceans are slow to cool or warm, more records are likely, said Karin Gleason, NOAA's climate monitoring chief.

Coral reefs are key to seafood production and tourism worldwide. Scientific reports have long said loss of coral is one of the big tipping points of future warming as the world nears 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) of warming since pre-industrial time. That's a limit that countries agreed to try to hold to in the 2015 Paris climate agreement.

Also:

NEW YORK: The broiling summer of 2023 was the hottest in the Northern Hemisphere in more than 2,000 years, a new study found.

When the temperatures spiked last year, numerous weather agencies said it was the hottest month, summer and year on record. But those records

only go back to 1850 at best because it's based on thermometers. Now scientists can go back to the modern western calendar's year 1, when the Bible says Jesus of Nazareth walked the Earth, but have found no hotter northern summer than last year's.

A study in the journal *Nature* uses a well-established method and record of more than 10,000 tree rings to calculate summertime temperatures for each year since the year 1. No year came even close to last summer's high heat, said lead author Jan Esper, a climate geographer at the Gutenberg Research College in Germany.

Before humans started pumping heat-trapping gases into the atmosphere by burning coal, oil and natural gas, the hottest year was the year 246, Esper said. That was the beginning of the medieval period of history, when Roman Emperor Philip the Arab fought Germans along the Danube River.

Esper's paper showed that in the Northern Hemisphere, the summer of 2023 was as much as 2.1 degrees Fahrenheit (1.2 degrees Celsius) warmer than the summer of 246. In fact 25 of the last 28 years have been hotter than that early medieval summer, said study co-author Max Torbenon.

"That gives us a good idea of how extreme 2023 is," Esper told *The Associated Press*.

The team used thousands of trees in 15 different sites in the Northern Hemisphere, north of the tropics, where there was enough data to get a good figure going back to year 1, Esper said. There was not quite enough tree data in the Southern Hemisphere to publish, but the sparse data showed something similar, he said.

Scientists look at the rings of annual tree growth and "we can match them almost like a puzzle back in time so we can assign annual dates to every ring," Torbenon said.

X-59 aircraft achieves milestone for first flight

NASA delays again launch for Boeing Starliner to ISS

LOS ANGELES, May 19, (Xinhua) - NASA and Boeing delayed again the launch of the first crewed mission of the Starliner spacecraft to the International Space Station (ISS) to no earlier than Tuesday, May 25, the agency said on Friday.

The spacecraft was previously scheduled to launch on a United Launch Alliance (ULA) Atlas V rocket on May 6 from Cape Canaveral Space Force Station in the US state of Florida.

The launch attempt was scrubbed due to technical issues. Later, the teams postponed the new launch date several times.

NASA, Boeing, and ULA teams will take additional time to work through spacecraft closeout processes and flight rationale before proceeding

with the launch, according to NASA.

The additional time allows teams to further assess a small helium leak in the Boeing Starliner spacecraft's service module traced to a flange on a single reaction control system thruster.

The flight test will carry NASA astronauts Butch Wilmore and Suni Williams to the ISS. The duo are the first to launch aboard Boeing's Starliner to the space station as part of the agency's Commercial Crew Program.

The astronauts will spend about a week at the orbiting laboratory before returning to Earth and making a parachute and airbag-assisted landing in the southwestern United States, according to NASA.

After successful completion of the mission, NASA will begin the final

process of certifying Starliner and its systems for crewed rotation missions to the space station.

Also:

LOS ANGELES: The US National Aeronautics and Space Administration's (NASA) supersonic X-59 aircraft has completed a milestone review that will allow it to progress toward first flight, NASA said on Friday.

A Flight Readiness Review board composed of independent experts from across NASA has completed a study of the X-59 project team's approach to safety for the public and staff during ground and flight testing.

The review board looked in detail at the project team's analysis of potential hazards, focusing on safety and

risk identification.

LOS ANGELES: High-definition images from NASA's Juno mission suggest that Europa's outer ice shell is essentially free-floating, NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) said.

Images from the JunoCam visible-light camera aboard NASA's Juno spacecraft support the theory that the icy crust at the north and south poles of Jupiter's moon Europa is not where it used to be, according to JPL.

Another high-resolution picture of the icy moon, by the spacecraft's Stellar Reference Unit, reveals signs of possible plume activity and an area of ice shell disruption where brine may have recently bubbled to the surface.

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Pole heads to the French Open as favorite

Swiatek dominates to earn her 3rd Italian Open title

ROME, May 19, (AP) — If Iga Swiatek can keep up her form, it's hard to imagine anyone preventing her from winning a fourth French Open title.

The top-ranked Swiatek dominated in her latest meeting with No. 2 Aryna Sabalenka, winning the Italian Open final 6-2, 6-3 to earn her third trophy on Rome's red clay.

Swiatek didn't drop a set at the Foro Italico and extended her tour winning streak to 12 matches. In the semifinals, she was almost as dominant in a 6-4, 6-3 win over No. 3 Coco Gauff.

Roland Garros starts next weekend and Swiatek will be aiming for a third straight title in Paris and fourth overall.

"Obviously I am confident. I feel like I'm playing great tennis," Swiatek said. "But it doesn't change the fact that I really want to stay humble and really focused on getting everything step by step. Grand Slams are different. There is different pressure on the court and off the court."

"These are hard seven matches that

you need to win, so I don't take anything for granted. I'll just work hard as I did in Madrid and Rome and we'll see."

After congratulating Swiatek during the trophy ceremony, Sabalenka told her rival: "I hope we're going to make it to the final in Roland Garros, and I'm going to get you there."

TENNIS

Then Sabalenka added, "Just kidding. I'm just going to try to do better than today."

During her speech, Swiatek replied, "We'll see about that Roland Garros final."

Swiatek became the first woman to complete the "dirt double" of winning Madrid and Rome back to back since Serena Williams in 2013.

The final was quite a contrast from when Swiatek had to save three match points before beating Sabalenka in a

third-set tiebreaker in the Madrid Open final two weeks ago.

"Madrid, I didn't feel like I could do everything. Here I kind of did," Swiatek said. "I felt like I can really use this surface and this feeling to play even better."

Swiatek applied so much pressure early on that Sabalenka slammed her racket onto the clay in the fourth game and then had to grab a new stick from her bag.

Even on points when the hard-hitting Sabalenka seemed in control, Swiatek used her superb footspeed and accurate groundstrokes to turn the dynamics around and force Sabalenka into errors.

"Her movement is incredible. You always know that you have to build the point and you have to finish the point," Sabalenka said. "That's why sometimes I try to overhit balls, knowing she's going to get to it. ... She's really good in every facet of the game."

Sabalenka stepped up her game at

the start of the second set but Swiatek saved seven break points in her opening two service games.

Swiatek produced only 11 winners to Sabalenka's 18 but also had just eight unforced errors to Sabalenka's whopping 28.

Swiatek crushed a backhand return up the line on her second match point and when Sabalenka's weak reply landed in the net, Swiatek dropped her white racket to the clay and then began jumping around in celebration after shaking hands with Sabalenka.

Adding to her titles from 2021 and 2022, Swiatek improved her career record in Rome to 20-2. At 22, the Polish player could approach the women's record of five Italian Open titles held by Chris Evert.

Rafael Nadal, Swiatek's idol, holds the overall record with 10 Rome trophies.

"If I win next time, there is going to be a tiramisu in here," Swiatek said as she took the lid off the trophy cup.



Iga Swiatek of Poland holds her trophy after defeating Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus in the Italian Open tennis tournament final match at Rome's Foro Italico. Swiatek won 6-2, 6-3. (AP)

Champ misses chance to defend title

Bengaluru knocks out Chennai and squeezes into IPL playoffs

BENGALURU, India, May 19, (AP) — Royal Challengers Bengaluru knocked out defending champions the Chennai Super Kings by 27 runs and snuck into the Indian Premier League playoffs by 10 runs.

Bengaluru achieved an amazing comeback by rising off the bottom of the table and winning six straight games to qualify for the playoffs. The Royal Challengers have taken the fourth and last spot - only just.

Chennai needed 219 runs for an outright win but needed only 201 to reach the playoffs, but it was 10 runs short as

CRICKET

left-arm pacer Yash Dayal held his nerve while bowling the last over. Bengaluru sneaked through on net run rate ahead of three other teams with the same 7-7 win-loss records.

Who meets who in the playoffs starting on Tuesday will be determined after the last round-robin games on Sunday.

Bengaluru posted an imposing 218-5 thanks to captain Faf du Plessis' 54 off 39 balls and Cameron Green's unbeaten 38 off 17.

Chennai's chase ended at 191-7 with a possibly last appearance by team standard-bearer Mahendra Singh Dhoni, who was out in the last over for 25 off 13.

Du Plessis and Virat Kohli opened with 78 off 58 balls. Kohli scored 47 off 29, including four sixes, while du Plessis hit three fours and three sixes.

Mitchell Santner had Kohli caught and then ran out du Plessis. Bengaluru was 113-2 after 13 overs.

But Rajat Patidar smacked 41 off 23 with four sixes. Together with Green, they smashed 71 off only 28 balls for the third wicket. The duo hit five fours and seven sixes between them.

Cameos from Dinesh Karthik (14) and Glenn Maxwell (16) gave the total luster.

The defending champions made a poor start to the chase: Skipper Ruturaj



Royal Challengers Bengaluru's Virat Kohli plays a shot during the Indian Premier League cricket match between Royal Challengers Bengaluru and Chennai Super Kings in Bengaluru, India. (AP)

Gaikwad was caught off Maxwell for a golden duck.

Dayal caught the in-form Gaikwad and dismissed Daryl Mitchell for 4.

The comeback was started by Rachin Ravindra, 61 off 37, and Ajinkya Rahane, 33 off 22.

Lockie Ferguson broke their 66-run partnership after a strategic timeout.

Ravindra hit five fours and three sixes in his maiden IPL half-century but he was run out against the run of play, stranded after a mix-up with Shivam Dube.

The hard-hitting Dube couldn't compensate and was caught on 7.

Chennai's playoffs chances looked bleak but Ravindra Jadeja hit an unbeaten 42 off 22 and 61 off 27 with Dhoni.

Dhoni smashed six off Dayal's first ball in the final over to ramp up the drama. Then he was out caught the very next ball and Chennai crashed out moments later.

Willoughby, Daudet bag BMX racing world titles

SOUTH CAROLINA, May 19, (AP) — Alise Willoughby won her third BMX racing world championship on Saturday, the American standout taking the lead out of the starting gate, pulling away down the stretch and then throwing up her fist in triumph as she crossed over the finish line.

Willoughby was followed by Zoe Claessens of Switzerland and U.S. teammate Delany Vaughn, who also will be nominated for the American team that will head to the Paris Olympics by finishing on the world championship podium.

"Honestly, I always say this place has a special place in my heart," said Willoughby, who won her first world title in 2017 over the same course in Rock Hill, South Carolina. "I wanted to deliver here - the U.S. fans, U.S.-based everything."

Felicia Stancil finished fourth in a strong showing by the Americans, who also had Carly Kane in the finals.

In the men's race, Joris Daudet of France took the lead through the first corner and held off reigning Olympic champion Niek Kimmann of the Netherlands to win his third world title. French countryman Sylvain Andre was third.

Willoughby told The Associated Press before worlds that she valued her titles on that stage just as much as she would value Olympic gold, which has so far eluded her. Willoughby barely missed the Olympics in 2008 because of age limits, crashed out in the semifinal round four years later in London, and again crashed out in the semifinals three years ago in Tokyo.

Her only Olympic medal so far has been the silver that she took home from the 2016 Rio Games.

Now, Willoughby will get another opportunity at gold this July in Paris.

"It's such an honor to deliver on the

day when you dream of it," said the 33-year-old Willoughby, who waved an American flag during her celebration before finding her husband, coach and former BMX star Sam Willoughby and giving him a big hug.

"You hope for it," she added, "but doing it is a whole other thing. So this feeling is so special. My family, friends, coaches, husband - they have been with me this whole, long ride, and it continues, and I'm still rising to my potential."

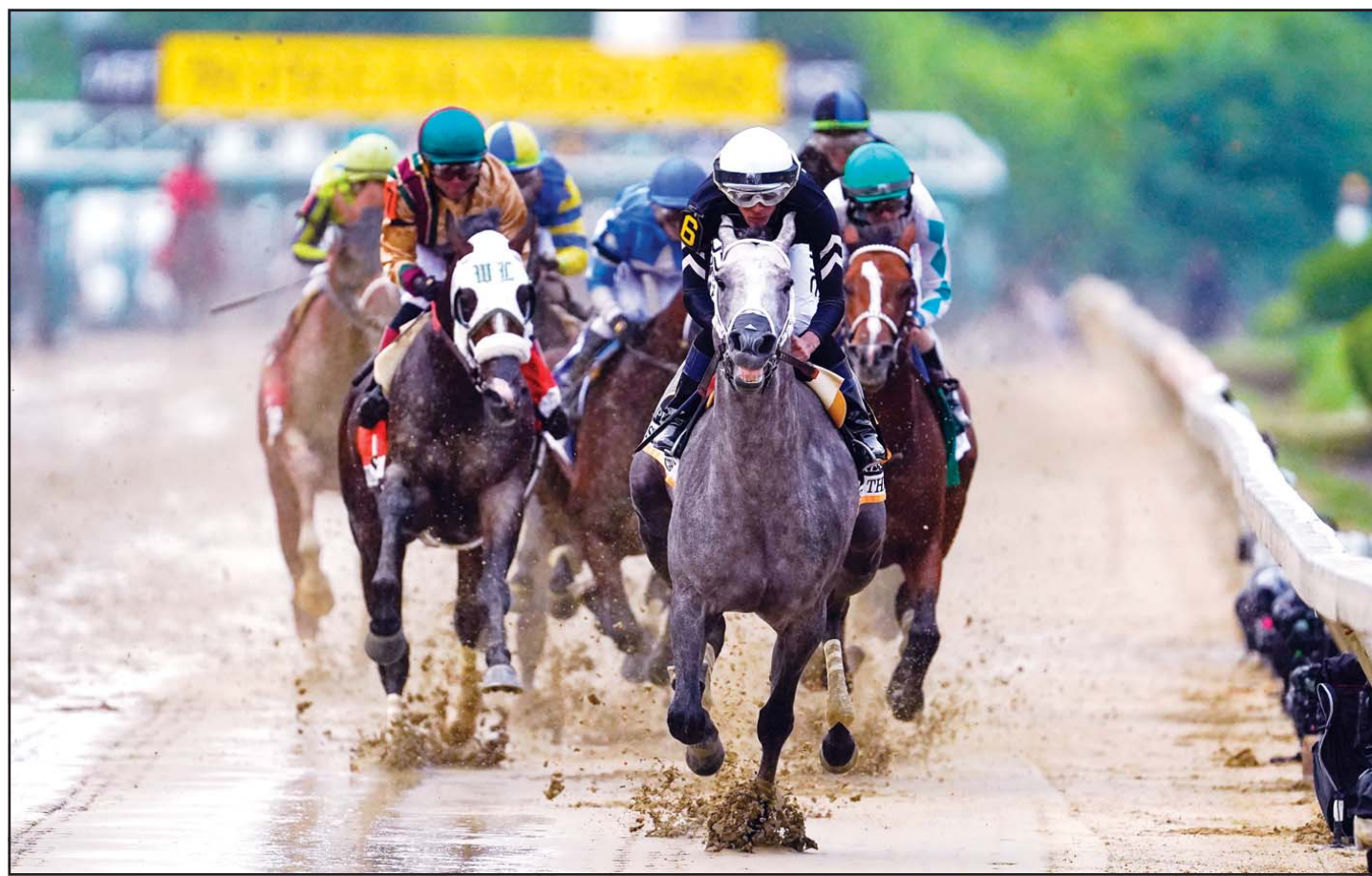
CYCLING

Reigning Olympic gold medalist Bethany Schriever of Britain and two-time Olympic champ Mariana Pajon of Colombia crashed out of the semifinal round Saturday. World Cup champion Saya Sakakibara of Australia finished eighth in the finals.

In the men's final, Kimmann got out of the gate fastest, but Daudet had the inside position and was able to get under him going through the first left-hand turn. That forced Kimmann higher through the corner and he had to settle into second place, and the two-time world champion was never able to catch up the rest of the way.

Daudet, the 2011 and 2106 world champ, has been on the comeback from a February crash that left him with a broken collarbone.

"I thought I could do it, of course," Daudet said, "but it's been a hard beginning of the season. But I always believed the job was done, and every time I line up at the gate I know I can do it. It's amazing. I'm a bit speechless. It's so many hours of work and dedication and it all comes down to one lap and 30 seconds, and it's pretty intense. What a day."



Jaime Torres, (front, atop) Seize The Grey, leads the pack heading into the first turn before winning the Preakness Stakes horse race at Pimlico Race Course in Baltimore. (AP)

Mystik Dan's Triple Crown bid ended

BALTIMORE, May 19, (AP) — D. Wayne Lukas worked his way to Seize the Grey after his horse won the Preakness Stakes and kept getting interrupted by well-wishes offering congratulations.

"I think they're trying to get rid of me," Lukas said. "They probably want me to retire. I don't think that'll happen."

Not when the 88-year-old Hall of Fame trainer keeps winning.

HORSE RACING

Seize the Grey ended Kentucky Derby winner Mystik Dan's Triple Crown bid by going wire to wire to win the Preakness on Saturday, giving Lukas his seventh victory in the race, one short of the record held by good friend Bob Baffert.

"I'm only one behind him - I warned him already," Lukas said. "It never gets old at this level, and I love the competition. I love to get in here with the rest of them."

The strapping grey colt took advantage of the muddy track just as Lukas hoped he would, pulling off the upset in a second consecutive impressive start two weeks after romping in a race on the Derby undercard at Churchill Downs. Going off at 9-1 as one of the longest shots on the board, Seize the Grey moved to the lead immediately out of the starting gate and never looked back, finishing in 1:56.82.

"I thought his action down the backside was beautiful, and I knew that he was handling the

track," Lukas said. "I said, 'Watch out, he's not going to quit.'"

Mystik Dan finished second in the field of eight horses running in the \$2 million, 1 3/16-mile race. After falling short of going back to back following his win by a nose in the Kentucky Derby, it would be a surprise if he runs in the Belmont Stakes on June 8 at Saratoga Race Course.

"My colt's a fantastic colt and proud of him," trainer Kenny McPeck said. "It just wasn't his day, but he'll live to race again."

Seize the Grey was a surprise Preakness winner facing tougher competition than in the Pat Day Mile on May 4. Though given the Lukas connection, it should never be a surprise when one of his horses is covered in a blanket of Black-Eyed Susan flowers.

No one in the race's 149-year

history has saddled more horses in the Preakness than Lukas with 48 since debuting in 1980 and winning that one with Codex. He had two in this time, with Just Steel finishing fifth, but Seize the Grey - owned by 2,570 people involved in the MyRacehorse group - delivered the victory.

"I just couldn't be happier for every single one of them," MyRacehorse founder and CEO Michael Behrens said. "We had some big expectations, but this exceeds all those expectations."

Seize the Grey paid \$21.60 to win, \$8.40 to place and \$4.40 to show. Mystik Dan paid \$4.20 and \$2.80, while third-place Catching Freedom paid \$3.20 to show.

Baffert, who was looking for a record-extending ninth Preakness victory, was supposed to have two horses in the field, but morning

line favorite Muth was scratched earlier in the week because of a fever. Baffert's Imagination finished seventh.

"He is still learning," Baffert said. "I think we are learning his style. I saw a lot today that I can change going forward. I don't think he wants to run like that. We didn't really have a plan. We thought it would be Wayne or us."

Muth's absence made Mystik Dan the 2-1 favorite, but he and jockey Brian Hernandez Jr. could not replicate their perfect Derby trip to win that race's first three-way photo finish since 1947. Instead, Jaime Torres rode Seize the Grey to a win in his first Triple Crown race of any kind.

"I have no words," said Torres, a native of Puerto Rico who did not begin racing until seeing it on TV in late 2019. "I'm very excited, very excited and very thankful to all the people that have been behind me, helping me."

This was the last Preakness held at Pimlico Race Course as it stands before demolition begins on the historic but deteriorating track, which will still hold the 150th running of it next year mid-construction.

That process is already well underway at Belmont Park, which is why the final leg of the Triple Crown is happening at Saratoga for the first time and is being shortened to 1 1/4 miles because of the shape of the course. Kentucky Derby second-place finisher Sierra Leone, a half step from winning, is expected to headline that field, though Lukas said he'd wait to see about Seize the Grey also running.



Michael Behrens (center), founder and CEO of MyRacehorse and part owner of Seize The Grey, holds the Woodlawn Vase after jockey Jaime Torres (left), won the Preakness Stakes horse race at Pimlico Race Course, in Baltimore. Standing next to them is Maryland Gov. Wes Moore (right). (AP)

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Resilient Mavericks through to West finals

Dallas wraps up series in Game 6 against Thunder

DALLAS, May 19, (AP): Kyrie Irving probably wondered if his uncanny run of closeout victories without a loss in his career was finally near an end.

The streak lives, and the Dallas Mavericks are through to the Western Conference semifinals for the second time in three seasons.

P.J. Washington Jr. made two free throws before an intentional miss with 2.5 seconds left as the Mavs rallied from 17 points down in the second half for a 117-

116 victory over the Oklahoma City Thunder to finish the second-round series Saturday night.

The Mavericks wrapped up the series in Game 6 at home against the top-seeded Thunder, just as they did in the first round against the Los Angeles Clippers.

Dallas - which trailed by 17 early in the third quarter and by nine early in the fourth - will start the West finals at the Denver-Minnesota winner on Wednesday night.

"Being down 17 in a closeout game isn't a position you want to be in," said Irving, who is now 14-0 in such games and will play in the conference finals for the first

time since 2017 with Cleveland. "But that's where we found ourselves. We had to respond the way we've been responding all season."

Washington was fouled by Shai Gilgeous-Alexander on a 3-point attempt after Chet Holmgren put the Thunder in front 116-115 with a dunk on an assist from his star guard with 20 seconds remaining.

Luka Doncic, who had 29 points, 10 rebounds and 10 assists for his fourth triple-double this postseason, worked his way to the basket in the final seconds before passing

BASKETBALL

to Washington in the corner. Washington pump-faked to get Gilgeous-Alexander in the air and the whistle blew as the shot fell short.

Oklahoma City challenged the call, but replay showed Gilgeous-Alexander making contact with Washington's arm as he went up to shoot.

"Obviously if I had the moment back I wouldn't have fouled him," said Gilgeous-Alexander, who had a playoff career high with 36 points. "I would have just let him miss the shot. You wish you would take the moment back. Just have to learn from it, and I will."

After making the first two free throws to put Dallas in front, Washington missed on purpose with the Thunder out of timeouts after the challenge. Holmgren passed to Jalen Williams, whose desperation shot from well behind half court wasn't close.

"If it was a clear-as-day foul, I obviously wouldn't have challenged it and held the timeout," Oklahoma City coach Mark Daigneault said. "Even if you advance the ball with 2.5 seconds at a deficit, your chances are very low."

The final sequence capped a riveting fourth quarter with five lead changes and two ties in the final five minutes after the Thunder led for all but one minute until then.

Irving and Derrick Jones Jr. scored 22 points apiece for Dallas. It was the second consecutive game with a playoff career high for Jones.

"It wasn't Luka or Kai making the game-winner," Dallas coach Jason Kidd said. "It was the trust of Luka and the ball touches the paint, they collapse, he trusted P.J. We find a way to win."

Washington - the second-leading scorer for Dallas in this series, ahead of Irving - didn't have a point until the fourth quarter. He scored nine, with tying and go-ahead 3s before the winning free throws.

"I think we just stay together," Doncic said. "We always talk on the bench, stay together, positive energy. And today was a good example of it."

Doncic didn't have Irving in leading the Mavs to the West finals in 2022, when Dallas lost to defending champ Golden State in five games.

The first two months of the Doncic-Irving pairing after the blockbuster deal last year were a dud for the players now with 13 All-Star appearances between them. More trade-deadline moves this year from general manager Nico Harrison worked this time.

The Mavericks finished 24-9 to rise to fifth in the West and ousted the Clippers in the first round with the same sequence of wins and losses that beat Oklahoma City.

The Thunder lost four out of five games following a 5-0 start to the playoffs.

Led by the MVP runner-up in Gilgeous-Alexander and two more key pieces of a young core in Williams and Holmgren, Oklahoma City tied defending champion Denver for the best record in the West at 57-25.

Williams had 22 points, nine rebounds and eight assists as the Thunder were ousted. Holmgren scored 21.

Just two seasons ago, the Thunder finished 24-58 in a second consecutive year of fewer than 25 victories.

Daigneault's playoff debut came in his fourth season, and the first-round sweep of New Orleans was the franchise's first series victory since reaching the West finals in 2016.

"You don't accomplish what we accomplished without tremendous resilience and the ability to throw punches with our talent, with the way we play and then take punches," Daigneault said. "And tonight we took a lot of punches, and we did ... and we took a lead into the last 20 seconds of that game."



Dallas Mavericks forward P.J. Washington (right), works to the basket against Oklahoma City Thunder's Shai Gilgeous-Alexander (2) in the second half of Game 6 of an NBA basketball second-round playoff series in Dallas. (AP)



Players fighting for the ball.

Al-Ayoun dominate Burgan 7-0

The KTech Women's Futsal League Championship continued with two matches. In the first match, held in the girls' club hall, the Al-Ayoun achieved a decisive 7-0 victory over Burgan. This match was part of the second week of the tournament's sixth edition, which began on May 10 with the participation of four local clubs.

In the second match, also held in the same hall, Fatat defeated Salwa Al-Sabah 6-0, marking their second victory in the tournament. This competition is exclusive to Kuwaiti female players, without the participation of international professionals, to highlight and showcase local talent.

Crew sweep Fire

Messi held scoreless but Inter Miami extends unbeaten streak with victory over DC United

FORT LAUDERDALE, May 19, (AP): Lionel Messi was kept off the scoresheet for the second consecutive match, but Inter Miami extended its unbeaten string with a 1-0 win over DC United on Saturday night.

Leo Campana scored four minutes into second half stoppage time as Miami, 6-0-3 since a 4-0 loss at the New York Red Bulls on March 23, avoided a second consecutive scoreless draw. Campana, who entered the match a minute earlier, received a pass from Sergio Busquets on the right wing and converted on a shot that landed inside the left post.

Miami had used its allotted five substitutions but was allowed an additional replacement when United's Martin Rodriguez left the match because of a concussion. Second half stoppage lasted 10 minutes.

"I know that lately I have not been getting too many minutes but it is my responsibility to be ready," Campana said in Spanish. "Whether it's 30, 20, 15 or one minute you have to be ready. Thankfully, we had the time to score the goal."

For a team known for its high-powered offense that has produced a league-high 36 goals, Miami secured its second straight shutout.

"We were not as fluid offensively and they formed a solid defense," Miami coach Gerardo "Tata" Martino said. "Defensively we worked very well."

The win improved Eastern Conference-leading Miami to 9-2-4 with 31 points. DC United dropped to 4-5-5 and 17 points.

Messi returned to the lineup after missing Wednesday's match at Orlando because of knee soreness.

The Argentine star forward had at least one goal and assist in five consecutive matches until a 3-2 win at Montreal on May 11. Messi began Saturday with a league-leading 12 assists.

Tightly marked for most of the match, Messi found a slight opening in the 71st minute, but his shot from 22 yards sailed high above the crossbar.

Miami goalkeeper Drake Callender



Vancouver Whitecaps defender Javain Brown, (top), collides with Seattle Sounders midfielder Albert Rusnak while going up for the ball during the first half of an MLS soccer match in Seattle. (AP)

preserved the shutout when he stopped a shot from United's Jacob Murrell in the 86th minute and then denied Cristian Dajome's inside the box four minutes later.

"He is a goalkeeper that saves games like he did tonight," Martino said.

The start of the match was delayed 25 minutes after thunderstorms hit Chase Stadium before the clubs' pregame drills. The rain intensified again shortly after kickoff and then subsided in the 30th minute.

Messi had two free kicks blocked by a wall of United defenders in the 21st and 39th minutes.

Diego Rossi gave Columbus the lead for good with a first-half goal and added an assist as the Crew notched their second straight road win with a 3-1 victory over the Chicago Fire on Saturday night. The Crew sweep the series after beat the Fire 2-1 in Columbus on March 9.

Defending champion Columbus (5-2-6) has posted back-to-back victories away from home following a seven-match winless streak.

Chicago (2-8-4) saw its winless streak reach seven and scored just its

second goal during the skid. The Crew took a 1-0 lead in the 30th minute when Rossi corralled his own missed shot and scored. It was Rossi's second goal of the season and his second in as many matches.

Columbus took a two-goal lead in the 55th minute when Christian Ramirez used assists from Rossi and defender Mohamed Farsi to find the net for the first time in his third start and seventh appearance of the season.

The Fire pulled within 2-1 on defender Carlos Terán's first goal of the campaign, using a pass from Georgios Koutsias in the 85th minute. Terán scored one goal in each of the previous three seasons.

Robin Lod scored the equalizer in the second half and notched an assist Sang-Bin Jeong's winner as Minnesota United rallied for a 2-1 victory over the Portland Timbers.

Portland (3-7-4) jumped in front in

SOCCER

the 17th minute and took a 1-0 lead into halftime after Jonathan Rodríguez used an assist from David Ayala to find the net for the fifth time this season. Rodríguez scored two of the Timbers' four goals after the 70th minute in a come-from-behind 4-2 victory over the San Jose Earthquakes on Wednesday.

Lod pulled Minnesota United (7-2-3) even in the 65th minute with his fourth goal - to go along with nine assists - this season. Joseph Rosales picked up an assist on the equalizer.

Jeong came through with the go-ahead goal in the 82nd minute, using assists from Lod and DJ Taylor to score his first of the campaign. Jeong, a second-year forward, had one goal and one assist in nine starts and 23 appearances last season.

Dayne St. Clair turned away five shots on target for Minnesota United. Maxime Crépeau had four saves for the Timbers.

Minnesota United, coming off a 2-2 draw with the Los Angeles Galaxy, improves to 4-0-1 in its last five matches.



D.C. United midfielder Mateusz Klich (left), goes for the ball against Inter Miami forward Lionel Messi (10) during the first half of an MLS soccer match in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. (AP)



Khaled Melhem, assistant coach of the first handball team.

Kuwait Club bids to host the Arab League and Cup Champions Club Championship

By Khaled El Anzi

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, May 19: The Kuwait Club is set to put forward a bid to host the 39th Arab League and Cup Champions Club Championship in 2024, scheduled from September 15 to 25. Earlier this month, on the 5th, Al-Arabi Club also expressed its interest in hosting the tournament in its newly constructed hall.

HANDBALL

The Arab Handball Federation recently invited applications to organize the tournament, with the previous edition hosted by the Kuwait Club. If Kuwait Club wins the bid, there's a possibility that the number of Kuwaiti teams participating in the tournament may increase to three, pending approval from the General Sports Authority. The Kuwait Club has already secured its place in the tournament as the defending champion.

Meanwhile, Khaled Melhem, assistant coach of the first handball team at Burgan National

Club, tendered his resignation to the governing body following the conclusion of the general handball league, "The Merger." Melhem cited personal circumstances beyond his control as the reason for his resignation, expressing gratitude to the Burgan Club's Board of Directors for their trust during his ten-year tenure.

In other news, the Referees Committee of the Handball Federation has opted to enlist the services of Gulf and foreign referees for Premier League matches, which commenced yesterday and will run until June 9th. This decision aims to foster collaboration between the Kuwaiti Handball Federation and its counterparts in the Gulf and abroad to enhance the game's development across all aspects.

Today, the first division will feature two matches: Khaiteh will face Yarmouk at 5:00 pm, followed by Al-Fahaheel against Al-Qurain at 6:30 Ppm. The inaugural round of the first division saw Al-Sulaibikhat defeat Al-Sahel 41-18 and Al-Tadamon secure victory over Al-Tadamon 35-25.

Best of the Rest

Atalanta back into CL: Atalanta booked a spot for next season's Champions League after three years as they beat Lecce 2-0 away in Serie A on Saturday.

After a goalless tie in the first half, the away side broke the deadlock straight after the break when Charles De Ketelaere ran onto a through ball and lobbed it over an on-rushing goalkeeper.

Minutes later, Aleksei Miranchuk's corner set up Gianluca Scamacca for a twisting header to seal the win. (Xinhua)



Scamacca

River Plate stay perfect: River Plate continued their impressive start to Argentina's Primera Division season with a 3-0 home win over Belgrano on Saturday.

Claudio Echeverri put the hosts ahead at the Monumental stadium with a 35th-minute strike before Facundo Colidio and Pablo Solari added late goals to secure River Plate's second win from as many games.

The Buenos Aires giants now have a two-point lead over second-placed Gimnasia in the 28-team Primera Division standings while Belgrano are 17th. (Xinhua)

America advance to final: Mexico international defender Israel Reyes struck a second-half winner as reigning champions America advanced to the Liga MX final with a 1-0 aggregate victory over Guadalajara.

Following a 0-0 draw in Wednesday's first leg in Guadalajara, Reyes broke the deadlock with a looping header on the hour at Azteca stadium.

"They [the fans] stuck with us throughout the match even after a first half in which things didn't go well for us. We hope that they can help us to ensure a memorable final. We're all in this together," the 23-year-old center-back added.

America will play the winner of the other semifinal between Cruz Azul and Monterrey in the final, to be played over two legs on May 23 and 26.

Cruz Azul hold a 1-0 lead ahead of Sunday's second leg of their semifinal at Ciudad de los Deportes stadium in Mexico City. (Xinhua)

Montero replaces Allegri: Juventus Under-19 coach Paolo Montero will take charge of the senior team for the final two matches of the season after Massimiliano Allegri was fired last week.

The 52-year-old Montero, who played for the Bianconeri, has never coached a Serie A team but Juventus announced on Sunday that he would make the step up for the final two league matches.

Montero will take charge of his first training session on Sunday before the team plays at Bologna the following day. (AP)



Red Bull driver Max Verstappen of the Netherlands, (center), leads the field after the start during the Italy's Emilia Romagna Formula One Grand Prix race at the Dino and Enzo Ferrari race-track in Imola, Italy. (AP)

Sports

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Dr. Amthal Hadi Al-Hewaila commends Al-Rajhi's remarkable achievement

Kuwait's Al-Rajhi qualifies for 400m T54 final in Japan

JAPAN, Kobe, May 19. (Agencies): Kuwait's Faisal Al-Rajhi secured third place in the men's 400 meters T54 heat 1 at the Para Athletics World Championships, earning him a spot in Monday's final. Al-Rajhi clocked in at 49.17 in the preliminary round, trailing behind Australia's Samuel Carter and Britain's Nathan Maguire, both of whom secured automatic qualification to the final. This event took place in the western Japanese city of Kobe.

On the preceding Saturday, Al-Rajhi clinched the gold medal in the 5,000-meter race. The Kobe World Para Athletics Championships, held in East Asia for the first time, also serves as a qualifier for the upcoming Paris 2024 Paralympic Games. Organizers reported the participation of approximately 1,000 athletes from 100 countries and regions.

The Minister of Social Affairs, La-

PARA ATHLETICS

bour, Family, and Childhood Affairs, and Minister of State for Youth Affairs, Dr. Amthal Hadi Al-Hewaila, has extended heartfelt congratulations to the runner Faisal Al-Rajhi for clinching the gold medal in the 5,000-meter wheelchair race at the Para World Athletics Championships in Japan.

Dr. Al-Hewaila personally reached out to the delegation's head and the athlete, commending Al-Rajhi's outstanding performance throughout the championship.

Furthermore, she reiterated the government's unwavering support for disabled sports, aligning with the directives of the political leadership. The government remains dedicated to nurturing and backing both male and female athletes across all domains, with the aim of securing further triumphs for Kuwait on the global stage.

China pocketed four gold medals at



Dr. Amthal Hadi Al-Hewaila.

Verstappen edges Norris for Emilia Romagna GP victory

BEIJING, May 19. (Xinhua): Red Bull's Max Verstappen survived a late onslaught from McLaren's Lando Norris to take victory in Sunday's Formula 1 Emilia Romagna Grand Prix in Imola, Italy.

Starting from pole position, Verstappen held off the challenge from Norris at the start, and for much of the race, appeared set for a routine win.

However, a late charge from Norris saw the Briton close the gap to Verstappen from 5.7 seconds on lap 50 to 1.6 seconds by lap 58 of 63.

Though it seemed as if Norris might be set to challenge for his second consecutive win, after having broken his duck last time out in Miami, Verstappen had just enough to keep the McLaren at bay, and duly

MOTOR RACING

took his 59th Grand Prix win by just 0.7 seconds.

"The whole race I had to push flat out to try and make a gap initially," said Verstappen, whose team had made several changes to the setup of his RB20 after having struggled in Friday's practice sessions.

"On the Medium tyres we were quite strong. On the Hard tyres it was more difficult to manage, especially the last 10 to 15 laps.

"I had no grip anymore. I was sliding a lot. I saw Lando closing in. The last 10 laps were flat out. It's difficult when the tyres were not working anymore and you have to go flat out. I couldn't afford to make too many mistakes. Luckily we didn't."

"From where we started the weekend to now, we can be incredibly

pleased with pole and the win." For his part, Norris maintained that he could have overtaken Verstappen had the race lasted a little longer.

"It hurts me to say, but one or two more laps I think I would have had him," said Norris.

"Tough. A shame. I fought hard right until the very last lap but just lost out a little bit too much to Max in the beginning, he was much better in the first stint. In the second stint we were stronger.

"It was a tough first half and a much better second half and one or two more laps and it would have been beautiful, but just not today." Behind the top two, Charles Leclerc gave the home fans something to cheer by taking the final podium place for Ferrari, with Norris' teammate Oscar Piastri finishing fourth.

Leclerc's teammate Carlos Sainz took fifth, ahead of the twin Mercedes of Lewis Hamilton and George Russell.

Verstappen's teammate Sergio Perez had an underwhelming run to eighth after a poor qualifying performance on Saturday, with Lance Stroll ninth for Aston Martin, and Yuki Tsunoda rounding out the top ten for RB.

Verstappen's win sees him extend his lead at the top of the Drivers' Championship, and the Dutchman now has 161 points. Leclerc moves up to second with 113, demoting Perez to third on 107 points.

In the Constructors' standings, Red Bull remain top with 268 points. Ferrari are second with 212, with McLaren third on 154 points.

The eighth round of the 2024 F1 season is next weekend's Monaco Grand Prix.

the Para Athletics Championships on Sunday.

In the women's javelin throw F34 final, China's Zou Lijuan retained her world title with a championship record throw of 21.22m, while her teammate Zuo Caiyun took silver with her seasonal best of 17.75m.

Chinese para thrower Yao Juan, another defending world champion, won the women's discus throw F64 final with a season's best of 43.09 meters at the Universiade Memorial Stadium in the central Japanese port city of Kobe.

Despite the drizzly weather, Chinese racers spared no effort during the day. Zhou Xia defended her world title in the women's 200m T35 final with a seasonal best of 29.45 seconds, after wheelchair runner Zhou Hongzhan won gold in the women's 800m T53 final by clocking her seasonal best of 1:56.54.

Other medalists on Sunday included Gao Fang, Zhou Zhaoqian, Liu Cuiqing and Guo Qianqian, who took silver medals in the women's finals of 800m T53, 800m T54, 400m T11 and 200m T35, respectively.

Among the bronze medalists were China's Yang Yue in the women's discus throw F64 final and Tian Yajuan in the women's 800m T54 final.

Day 3 of the nine-day event saw China topping the medal tally with 10 golds, eight silvers, and eight bronzes. The World Championships, held in East Asia for the first time, serve as a qualifier for the Paris 2024 Paralympic Games. The championships have attracted over 1,000 athletes from 100 countries and regions competing in 168 events.

A total of 73 Chinese para-athletes are competing in the championships, which run until May 25. Originally scheduled for 2021, the event was postponed twice due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Cheung Ka Long of Hong Kong, China prevailed in the men's singles event at the 2024 Shanghai Foil Grand Prix here on Sunday, while Martina Favaretto of Italy claimed the women's title.

Cheung, the reigning Olympic champion, was hardly challenged before reaching the men's final, where he met Gerek Meinhardt of the United States who beat Japan's Kazuki Iimura in the semifinal.

Cheung took the initiative in the fast-paced final and dominated with accurate flicks on Meinhardt's back and shoulder en route to a 15-7 victory, winning his second Grand Prix title following Turin, Italy this February.

On the women's side, Favaretto secured her first-ever Grand Prix gold after beating Julia Walczyk-Klimaszuk of Poland in the final, while world No. 1 Lee Kiefer and Pauline Ranvier of France settled for bronze.

Usyk becomes first undisputed heavyweight champion in 24 yrs

Ukrainian beats Fury by split decision



Britain's Tyson Fury (right), takes a blow from Ukraine's Oleksandr Usyk during their undisputed heavyweight world championship boxing fight at the Kingdom Arena in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. (AP)

RIYADH, Saudi Arabia, May 19, (AP): Oleksandr Usyk has been shorter, lighter and older than all of his opponents since he moved up to the heavyweight division.

Usyk's heart and skill are enormous, and he overcame a major size disadvantage against Tyson Fury to become the world's first undisputed heavyweight boxing champion in 24 years.

Usyk defeated Fury by split decision on Sunday, knocking down his hulking opponent in the ninth round and eventually earning a narrow win on two scorecards. The 37-year-old Ukrainian is the first heavyweight to hold every major title belt since Lennox Lewis.

Usyk (22-0) added Fury's WBC title to his own WBA, IBF and WBO belts with a spectacular late-round rally in a back-and-forth matchup between two previously unbeaten champions from a strong era of heavyweight boxing. Two judges favored Usyk, 115-112 and 114-113, while the third gave it to Fury, 114-113.

"It's a great time. It's a great day," said Usyk, who is 6 inches shorter than Fury and weighed in 30 pounds lighter this week.

BOXING

Usyk started quickly, but then had to survive while the confident, charismatic Fury dominated the middle rounds. Usyk surged in the final rounds, just as the Olympic gold medalist has done so many times in his career, taking control with a dominant eighth and nearly stopping Fury in the ninth.

Usyk hurt the 6-foot-9 Fury (34-1-1) with a left hand and eventually sent him sprawling into a corner in the final seconds of the round, getting credit for a knockdown right before Fury was saved by the bell. Fury struggled to mount a consistent attack after nearly getting stopped, and the knockdown turned out to be the decisive factor in the decision.

"Thank you so much to my team," Usyk said while fighting back tears in the ring. "It's a big opportunity for me, for my family, for my country. Slava Ukraini!"

Fury kissed Usyk on the head after the final bell, and Usyk hugged Fury several moments after the decision was read. Fury also said he wants the rematch in October.

"I believe I won that fight," Fury

Al-Mutawa chances of playing promising

Al-Qadisiya, Al-Salmiya gear up for Amir Cup final clash

By Hassan Musa

Al-Seyassah/Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, May 19: Al-Qadisiya and Al-Salmiya have intensified their preparations ahead of tomorrow's final match of His Highness the Amir's Cup. Both teams have organized training camps to ensure their players are highly focused and ready to compete for the championship.

At Al-Qadisiya, the administration has imposed strict secrecy on the training sessions, prohibiting media access and interviews with the technical and administrative staff, as well as the players. This measure aims to enhance concentration and keep the starting formation and game plan of Coach Muhammad Al-Mishaan confidential.

Meanwhile, tests conducted on Al-Qadisiya star Badr Al-Mutawa revealed a leg bruise. Although his chances of participating in the final are promising, the final decision rests with the technical staff. Al-Mutawa exited last Thursday's derby match against Al-Arabi, which ended in a 1-1 draw in the Zain Premier League. The medical team opted for physical therapy and excluded him from training the day before yesterday to prevent aggravating the injury.

On the other hand, Al-Salmiya's lineup appears complete, with no key players missing. Croatian coach Ante Misha expressed confidence in his team's readiness during training the day before yesterday. He stated, "We have trained for this type of match and



In this file photo, Badr Al-Mutawa is substituted after suffering an injury.

fore yesterday to prevent aggravating the injury.

are very prepared."

Addressing Al-Mutawa's impact on Al-Qadisiya, Misha acknowledged, "Badr is the most famous player in the league championship and the best ever. He is a very influential player for Al-Qadisiya." He added, "Our focus has been on preparing for the match against Al-Qadisiya. I have confidence

SOCCER

in my team, and we will do everything to win the title."

Regarding the influence of Al-Qadisiya fans, Misha noted, "In this type of match, the most important factor is the stadium, not the fans."

A press conference for the Amir Cup final will be held at 12:30 pm at the Football Association's headquarters in Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium, with a coach and a player from each team in attendance. The press conference will be preceded by a technical meeting at 12:00 pm, also at the Federation's headquarters, with representatives from both teams present.

said. "I believe he won a few of the rounds, but I won the majority of them, and I believe it was one of those what-can-you-do, one of them ... decisions

in boxing. We both put on a good fight, best we can do.

"You know, his country is at war, so people are siding with a country at



Ukraine's Oleksandr Usyk celebrates after beating Britain's Tyson Fury in their undisputed heavyweight world championship boxing fight at the Kingdom Arena in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. (AP)

war. But make no mistake, I won that fight, in my opinion, and I'll be back. I've got a rematch clause."

Usyk is the first undisputed heavyweight champion since Lennox Lewis held the honor for five months in 1999 and 2000. He is also now the lineal heavyweight champion by beating Fury, who beat Wladimir Klitschko to earn that distinction in 2015.

After moving up from cruiserweight, Usyk upset Anthony Joshua to win three title belts in 2021. He kept them through a rematch and another defense while angling for the ultimate payday of a fight against Fury in Saudi Arabia.

Usyk landed 41% of his 407 punches, while Fury landed just 31.7% of his 496 punches, according to Compu-Box statistics. Usyk both threw (260 to 210) and landed (122 to 95) more power punches.

Usyk has now joined the elite club of fighters who held every major world championship belt at heavyweight - and he is the first to do it in the four-belt era, which began in 2007.