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Independence Day celebrations
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King, Syrian president discuss bilateral ties, regional developments

- His Majesty highlights importance of Jordan-Syria Higher Coordination Council's role in institutionalising, bolstering cooperation
- Two leaders stress importance of stepping up efforts to stabilise southern Syria, enhance the security of two countries' borders

AMMAN (JT) — His Majesty King Abdullah and Syrian President Ahmad Al Sharaa discussed bilateral relations and regional developments during a phone call on Thursday.

His Majesty emphasised the need to expand cooperation between Jordan and Syria and to harness existing opportunities to advance mutual interests in key areas, according to a Royal Court statement.

The King highlighted the importance of the Jordan-Syria Higher Coordination Council's role in institutionalising and bolstering cooperation in vital sectors such as water, energy and trade, the statement said.

His Majesty reiterated Jordan's support for Syrians as they rebuild their country in a way that guarantees Syria's security, stability and territorial integrity.

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INTERVIEW

Jordan ready to 'immediately' send relief assistance into Gaza but Israel restricting aid delivery — Momani

- Some 100 aid trucks in Jordan waiting to be allowed to go to war-torn Gaza
- Since March 4, Jordan has evacuated 114 people from Gaza, 39 patients with 75 family escorts
- All patients who returned to Gaza have completed their treatment

AMMAN (JT) — Minister of Government Communication has said that Jordan is ready to deliver relief aid into Gaza, but Israeli restrictions have not allowed this aid to be sent into the war-torn Strip.

In an interview with The Jordan Times, Momani said, "Jordan is ready to deliver urgently needed relief aid into Gaza, with some 100 aid trucks in Jordan waiting to be allowed to go to Gaza. Israeli restrictions have not allowed this aid to be delivered."

Momani, who is also the government spokesperson, said, "Jordan has always been at the forefront of providing humanitarian assistance to Gaza through all available means since the start of the war, including air drops, land convoys and air bridge".

Responding to the issue of Gazan child patients, who have received medical treatment in Jordan and went back to Gaza on May 13 and whose families spoke about their concerns to go back to Gaza with the war is still ongoing, Momani said, "Jordan announced it clearly from the beginning of the medical evacuation, which started in early March, that patients will go back to Gaza once they conclude their medical treatment as this will allow Jordan to bring more patients. For example, the return of the 17 children [on May 13] who fully completed their treatment allowed Jordan to bring another batch of child patients the next day, all of them were suffering from cancer."



JAF photos

This handout photo released on March 4, by the Jordan Armed Forces, shows a child evacuated from the Gaza Strip arriving in an army helicopter at a hospital compound in Amman



"The 17 child patients who returned with their family escorts were part of a group of 29 patients. Twelve patients are still in Jordan because they still have not completed their treatment," Momani said.

The minister added that the Kingdom's policy is "to support Palestinians' steadfastness on their homeland, and not to contribute in any way to their displacement".

"These patients were brought to Jordan and returned to Gaza under the same circumstances."

Continued on page 5

Bahrain King receives Safadi, reaffirms strong Manama-Amman ties

AMMAN (JT) — Bahrain King Hamad Bin Isa Al Khalifa on Wednesday received Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi, who conveyed a message from His Majesty King Abdullah, reaffirming Jordan's commitment to strengthening bilateral relations.

Safadi delivered King Abdullah's greetings and best wishes to King Hamad, and expressed his appreciation for the long-standing ties between Jordan and Bahrain. He emphasised Jordan's keenness to enhance cooperation with Bahrain in various fields and to strengthen coordination on regional and international issues, according to a Foreign Ministry statement.

In turn, the Bahraini monarch conveyed his greetings to King Abdullah and expressed pride in the "deep-rooted" historic relationship between both kingdoms, praising the ongoing joint efforts to strengthen their partnership and advance shared interests.

During the meeting, regional developments and broader international issues of mutual interest were discussed, with King Hamad expressing his gratitude to King Abdullah for his leadership in promoting joint Arab action and for his support of efforts to achieve peace, security and stability in the region.

Safadi expressed Jordan's appreciation for Bahrain's role in strengthening Arab unity, commending the kingdom's effective leadership during its recent presidency of the Arab League Summit.

Safadi arrived in Manama on Wednesday for an official visit, during which he is scheduled to hold talks with the Bahraini foreign minister, Abdullatif Bin Rashid Al Zayani, on bilateral relations and recent regional developments.

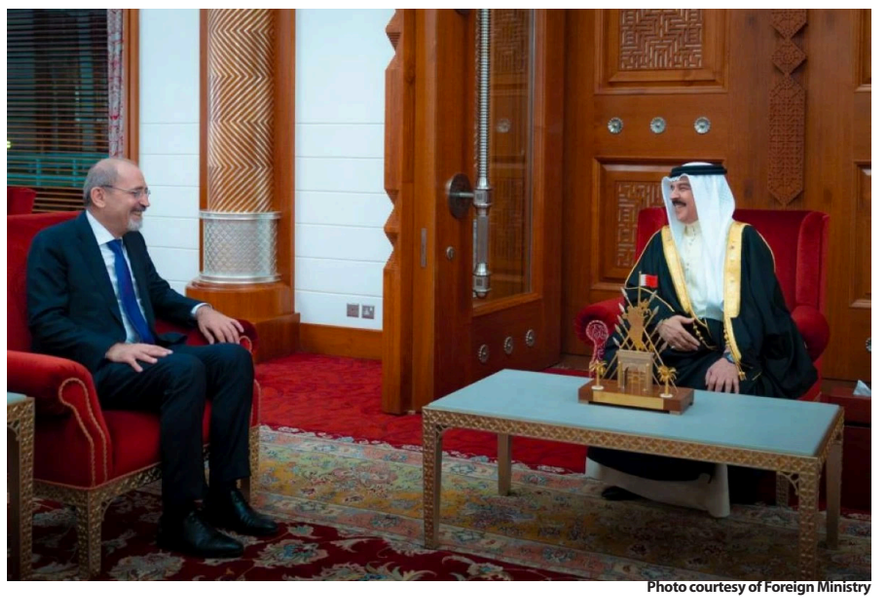


Photo courtesy of Foreign Ministry

Bahrain King Hamad Bin Isa Al Khalifa on Wednesday receives Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi, who conveyed a message from His Majesty King Abdullah, reaffirming Jordan's commitment to strengthening bilateral relations



Photo courtesy of Aqaba Container Terminals

The Department of Statistics says that total exports during the first quarter of 2025 increased by 11.6 per cent to reach JD2.306 billion

National exports rise 11.6% in Q1 2025, value JD 2.306 billion — DoS

AMMAN (JT) — Jordan's total exports increased by 11.6 per cent during the first quarter of 2025 compared with the same period last year, driven by an 11.7 per cent increase in national exports and a 10.4 per cent rise in reexports, according to figures released by the Department of Statistics (DoS).

The DoS monthly report on foreign trade also highlighted a 6.6 per cent rise in imports, which in turn contributed to a 2.2 per cent increase in the trade deficit during the first quarter of 2025 compared to the same period in 2024.

Total exports during this period reached JD2.306 billion, with national exports amounting to JD2.093 billion and reexports totalling JD213 million, while imports stood at JD4.679 billion for the same period.

The trade deficit, defined as the gap between the value of total exports and imports, amounted to JD2.373 billion in the first quarter of 2025, up from JD2.323 billion during the corresponding period of 2024.

Continued on page 5

Ahead of nuclear talks, Iran warns will hold US responsible for Israel attack

TEHRAN (AFP) — Iran warned it would hold the United States responsible for any Israeli attack on its atomic facilities, on the eve of a new round of nuclear talks between Washington and Tehran.

The warning came after CNN, citing unnamed US officials, reported on Tuesday that Israel was making preparations to strike Iranian nuclear sites despite the ongoing US-Iran talks.

"We believe that in the event of any attack on the nuclear facilities of the Islamic Republic of Iran by the Zionist regime, the US government will also be involved and bear legal responsibility," Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said in a letter to the United Nations published on Thursday.

"Iran strongly warns against any adventurism by the Zionist regime and will respond decisively to any threat or unlawful act by this regime," Araghchi added.

The nuclear talks, which began on April 12, are the highest-level contact between the long-time foes since the United States in 2018 pulled out of a landmark deal between Iran and world powers, during President Donald Trump's first term in office.

Oman, which has mediated the talks, said that a fifth round will take place in Rome on Friday.

The US delegation will include Steve Witkoff, Trump's friend and globe-trotting negotiator, and Michael Anton, the head of policy planning at the State Department who has been involved in technical details, according to a source familiar with arrangements.

A key sticking point in the negotiations has been enrichment. The 2015 deal with Iran, which was negotiated by former president Barack Obama, allowed Iran to enrich uranium at low levels solely for civilian energy.

The Islamic republic currently enriches uranium to 60 per cent, far above the 3.67 per cent limit set in the 2015 deal but below the 90 per cent needed for a nuclear warhead.

Sanctions over missiles

Trump, who has vowed to improve on the Obama deal, said last week on a trip to Qatar that he believed Iran had agreed to key conditions and that his diplomacy would avoid military conflict.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, testifying on Wednesday before Congress, again said that the Trump administration would insist on no enrichment.

"Iran cannot have an enrichment capability, because that ultimately makes them a threshold nuclear power," Rubio said.

Iran is looking for relief from sweeping sanctions imposed in 2018 by Trump, which include penalties on all countries to prevent them from purchasing Iran's key export of petrol.

Rubio, questioned by a lawmaker, suggested that the United States would maintain sanctions over Iran's development of ballistic missiles, a topic that was not addressed explicitly under the 2015 agreement.

"There are sanctions related to terrorism, sanctions related to their ballistic missiles programme, and the like. Those sanctions, if they're not part of the deal, they'll remain in place," he said.

Rubio did not comment on the CNN report, but said it was no secret that Israel has been studying military options.

'Devastating response'

Israel, Iran's sworn enemy, has been threatening to use force against Iranian nuclear sites but has faced resistance from Trump.

On Thursday, Ali Mohammad Naini, the spokesman for Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, warned of a "devastating" response in case of an Israeli attack.

"If the delusional Zionist regime commits a foolish act and launches an attack, it will definitely receive a devastating and decisive response in its small and vulnerable geography," said Naini, according to ISNA news agency.

Also on Thursday, the Iranian army's ground forces unveiled three new drones, adding two reconnaissance and one kamikaze drone to to its arsenal, the official IRNA news agency reported.

Earlier in the day, a group of demonstrators gathered near the Fordow nuclear enrichment plant south of Tehran to voice their support for the country's nuclear activities.

The crowd waved Iranian flags and chanted slogans such as "nuclear energy is our inalienable right" and "no compromise, no surrender, only confrontation with America".

Iran does not recognise Israel and generally refers to it as the "Zionist regime", and the two countries have fought a shadow war for years.

The two foes traded direct attacks last year for the first time, against the backdrop of soaring regional tensions triggered by the Gaza war.



Photo by Ahmed Khlifat

The agreement marks a new chapter in cultural diplomacy, bringing together two of the world's most iconic heritage sites

When wonders meet: Petra and Great Wall of China forge global alliance

By Sophie Constantin

PETRA — The ancient city of Petra hosted a historic event on Tuesday as it welcomed a high-level Chinese delegation for the signing of a twinning agreement between Petra and Jiayuguan City, home to the Great Wall of China.

The agreement marks a new chapter in cultural diplomacy, bringing together two of the world's most iconic heritage sites in a strategic partnership to promote international tourism, exchange and cooperation.

The ceremony, held in front of Petra's Treasure, was led by Fares Braizat, chief commissioner of the Petra development and tourism region authority, Zhao Shumin, director of the culture and tourism bureau of Jiayuguan municipality, and was attended by Chen Chuandong, Chinese ambassador to Jordan, as well as representatives from Jordan's tourism and local development sectors.

"This is a historical moment," Braizat said, "We are not just connecting two landmarks — we are connecting two great cultures from the Middle East and East Asia.

This partnership promotes dialogue, fosters mutual respect, and raises global awareness of the values we share."

The agreement outlines a roadmap for collaboration in tourism marketing, cultural exchange, education, investment, and joint events.

It includes plans for hosting exhibitions, supporting community-based initiatives, and sharing expertise in heritage preservation, traditional industries and crafts.

Ambassador Chen highlighted the broader significance of the partnership: "Jordan has long stood at the crossroads of civilisations.

By uniting Petra and the Great Wall, we celebrate peace, prosperity, and humanity's shared legacy.

We hope to see more Chinese tourists walking through the wonders of Petra."

This initiative follows a growing trend by the Petra authority to build global cultural bridges: Similar twinning agreements have already been signed with the Colosseum in Rome and the Alhambra in Grenada, all aimed at reinforcing Petra's position as a global tourism hub.

Petra, a masterpiece of Nabatean architecture carved into rosered rock more than 2,000 years ago, remains a symbol of resilience, trade, and intercultural exchange.

Likewise, the Great Wall, an architectural marvel and strategic fortress at the edge of China's ancient Silk Road — stands as a testament to China's imperial ingenuity and historic connectivity with the West.

"This agreement will enhance the Great Wall's standing on the global tourism map while creating exciting new opportunities for Petra in the Chinese market," Zhao Shumin said.

"It opens the door to long-term cooperation rooted in cultural appreciation and mutual respect."

As two marvels of ancient civilization join hands in a modern pact, the Petra-Jiayuguan partnership sets a new precedent for how heritage sites can collaborate across borders — not just to attract visitors, but to inspire cultural understanding in a deeply interconnected world.

Jordan, French Development Agency discuss accelerating key water projects



Petra photo

Minister of Water and Irrigation Raed Abu Soud on Thursday meets with a delegation from the French Development Agency to explore strategies for expediting several vital water sector initiatives

AMMAN (JT) — Minister of Water and Irrigation Raed Abu Soud on Thursday met with a delegation from the French Development Agency (AFD), led by its Middle East Regional Director Yves Guicquéro, to explore strategies for expediting several vital water sector initiatives.

The discussions focused on advancing projects crucial to Jordan's Water Sector Strategy 2023-2040.

Abu Soud highlighted the ministry's ongoing efforts to fast-track projects aimed at enhancing services for citizens, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.

He pointed to the strategic National Carrier Project, alongside key developments including the Balqa wastewater treatment plant, valued at 75 million euros, and the Madaba wastewater treatment plant and networks, valued at 100 million euros.

Other critical projects discussed were Al Sukhna and Qasabat Maan wastewater systems.

The minister also referred to a project focused on improving and rehabilitating wells at the Faisal Nursery in Jerash, designed to bolster water supply in the Jerash Governorate.

Discussions covered the latest progress on these undertakings, with the minister expressing anticipation for continued constructive cooperation.

The AFD delegation provided an overview of the agency's contributions to financing these projects and their current work trajectory.

They conveyed their satisfaction with the "constructive and fruitful cooperation" between their team and the Jordanian water sector staff.

The AFD representatives stressed the agency's readiness to collaborate and coordinate with Jordan's water sector on all issues aimed at improving water and wastewater services throughout the Kingdom.

Amman Beach reopens, welcomes visitors for Independence Day

AMMAN (JT) — As part of the Kingdom's celebrations of its 79th Independence Day, Amman Beach at the Dead Sea reopened to visitors on Thursday following the completion of rehabilitation works.

Amman Mayor Yousef Shawarbeh directed municipal staff at the site to welcome visitors, as part of efforts to promote domestic tourism and provide a safe recreational environment for citizens, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.

Three food carts are now operating at the site as part of the second phase of the Royal Food Cart Initiative, which aims to enhance tourism and development across the Kingdom.

The initiative includes 25 food carts stationed at key touristic locations, operated by young culinary and hospitality graduates from specialised institutions.

The Greater Amman Municipality (GAM) said that the Amman Beach rehabilitation project spans a total area of 450 dunums. The first phase, covering 120 dunums, can accommodate up to 2,500 visitors.

Around 15,000 tonnes of sand were used to address the receding shoreline, expanding the beach area and improving visitor experience.

Enhancements include the installation of 40 solar-powered lighting poles, 150 beach umbrellas, de-salinated water showers, and designated parking areas.

The beach is managed by GAM staff with logistical support from the Public Security Directorate and Civil Defence Department.

Amman Beach, designed as a "safe and eco-friendly" recreational destination, will be open to the public during Independence Day and Eid Al Adha, with extended hours until 1:00am during the holidays.

TIES

SSC, Palestinian labour minister talk social protection cooperation

AMMAN (JT) — Acting Director General of the Social Security Corporation (SSC) Jadallah Khalayleh stressed the corporation's "full readiness" to provide its expertise and capabilities to help Palestine develop retirement and social security mechanisms and improve their benefits and procedures.

Khalayleh's remarks came during a meeting with an official Palestinian delegation, headed by Palestinian Minister of Labour Inas Attari, to review the SSC's experience in the fields of social protection, insurance and programmes, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.

Khalayleh said the SSC has contacted the Palestine Pension Fund Authority (PPFA) over the past years to highlight its experiences in this field, stressing the corporation's "continued" efforts to boost and sustain its partnership with the Palestinian side and offer insurance and technical expertise.

Khalayleh added that the SSC has "kept pace" with developments regionally and globally and has made "remarkable" strides in social insurance and e-services areas to insured persons and retirees.

Attari said that the "brotherly and historic" bilateral relations are paving the way for "more effective" cooperation in the social protection field.

Expressing gratitude for the SSC's support and training provided under the previous partnership agreement with PPFA, she expressed hope to maintain implementation of the two bodies' memorandum of understanding to benefit from their "rich" expertise in the social insurance area.

After reviewing the SSC's "rich" experience, she said the main focus is setting the appropriate date for launching a Palestinian social security body, as well as the stages and factors that would facilitate its promotion drive and mechanisms for planning, implementation and follow-up.

2 new drug addiction treatment centres under way to expand services — PSD



Petra photo

Minister of Interior Mazen Farraya and Director of Public Security Directorate Maj. Gen. Obeidallah Maaytah on Thursday visit the addiction treatment centre of the Anti-Narcotics Department

AMMAN (JT) — Minister of Interior Mazen Farraya and Director of Public Security Directorate (PSD) Maj. Gen. Obeidallah Maaytah on Thursday visited the addiction treatment centre of the Anti-Narcotics Department (AND).

The two officials were briefed on the centre's efforts in medical, therapeutic and social services provided to all addicts seeking to receive treatment, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.

During the visit, Farraya highlighted importance of following up on Royal directives to intensify efforts and enhance national cooperation to combat drugs, curb its spread, and encourage and assist addicts in overcoming their addiction crisis.

The minister praised the PSD's "pioneering" and social role in establishing a specialised centre for addiction treatment, providing "advanced" addict-cantered therapeutic and psychological services and following up aftercare programmes for beneficiaries, who received free treatment at the PSD's expense.

Farraya also valued the centre's systems, as well as the "strict confidentiality" that dominates treatment procedures and practices.

The minister added that this policy encourages individuals and their families to "voluntarily" seek treatment without legal repercussions, which enhances their chances of recovery and reintegration into society.

Maaytah stressed the PSD's continued field, awareness and treatment efforts, as part of the national strategy to combat drugs.

He noted that the PSD works in an integrated manner with various institutions to provide the necessary support to the centre to ensure continued services, in accordance with the "highest" international standards.

Maaytah said that the PSD continues to fulfil its social and humanitarian responsibilities and "prioritises" establishment of two new addiction treatment centres in the northern and southern regions.

He noted the PSD also plans to launch special treatment facilities within Jordan's correctional and rehabilitation centres, similar to Birin Correctional and Rehabilitation Centre.

Touring the treatment centre and checking on its therapeutic, rehabilitation and recreational facilities, the minister was briefed by the AND director on the facility's operating procedures, treatment and rehabilitation programmes and the stages to achieve recovery.

The minister said the centre has already provided services to hundreds of cases and contributed to improving lives of many families.

HISTORY

Scholar highlights Ayyubid legacy, challenges of distinguishing it from Mamluk period

By Saeb Rawashdeh

AMMAN — For Professor Bethany Walker from Bonn University, it is a true challenge to differentiate some pottery objects whether they belong to Ayyubid (1171-1260) or Mamluk (1250-1517) period.

Walker wants to separate two periods that are often called Ayyubit-Mamluk and belong to Middle Islamic era.

"Ayyubid period was much shorter than Mamluk period," Walker said during the lecture "Jordan in the Ayyubid Age" held at the Department of Antiquities of Jordan on Wednesday, adding that if one excavates on the Mamluk site they will not find many remains older than the Mamluk period.

Mamluk's powerful visual presence in Jordan also underlines Ayyubid Sultanate contribution, Walker continued, adding that Mamluks reused Ayyubid buildings.

"Vernacular buildings didn't change much from 12th until early 20th century in Jordan," Walker said, noting that to differentiate between these two periods became a challenge.

The Ayyubids laid foundation for administrative buildings, fortresses and castles, as well as way stations for pilgrims and store houses for agricultural produce.

They invested in network of roads and castles, reviving the world economy.

One of the achievements of the Ayyubids was the beginning of the sugar industry in Jordan Valley and the Dead Sea area, where the sugar technology was brought from the Indian Subcontinent (sugar canes).

"The major achievement of the Ayyubids in Jordan was economic," Walker stressed, adding that agricultural sector flourished during their reign.

Rural area was economically stimulated to produce certain types of crops during that period.

"The most active of the Ayyubid rulers was AlMu'azzam [1218-1227] who ruled from Damascus," Walker said, noting that in the early decades of the 13th century Karak became a scientific and educational centre.

However, there are no architectural traces of these activities as no remains of madrasas and hospitals survived to our days.

Al Mu'azzam built villages and the state stimulated different types of migrations to urban and rural centres.

Nasser Dawoud in 1244/1245 renovate the Karak Castle, adding that palatine halls at Karak and Shobal castles represent the Ayyubid architecture.

Regarding the Ayyubid bathhouse, Walker said: "It's relatively small, with three to four rooms."

The Mamluks would tear down old, decrepit buildings and reuse the material for new structures, and that is one of the reasons why it is often difficult to distinguish which building belonged to the Ayyubid and which to the Mamluk period.

"In some textual documentation there is evidence of these demolitions, like in chronicles, where villages around the Shobak Castle are mentioned.

Here we have accounts what still functions and what is in ruins," Walker said, adding that ruins had a commercial value as a building material.



Petra photo

Senate President Faisal Fayez met with Palestinian Minister of Labour Enas Attari over enhancing cooperation in labour legislation and social protection frameworks

Senate reaffirms support for Palestinian labour and legislative development

AMMAN (JT) — Senate President Faisal Fayez on Thursday underlined the Upper House's commitment to supporting the Palestinian people through legislative and parliamentary expertise, particularly in labour-related matters and legislative development across key sectors.

Fayez's remarks came during a meeting with Palestinian Minister of Labour Enas Attari and representatives from the tripartite labour partnership: Government, workers, and employers, according to the Jordan News Agency, Petra.

Fayez underscored the readiness of the Senate's Labour Committee to extend legal and technical advisory support to the Palestinian side, especially on labour rights and social security legalisation.

He reiterated Jordan's support for the Palestinian people amid the ongoing Israeli aggression on Gaza and the occupied West Bank, noting that under the leadership of His Majesty King Abdullah, Jordan continues to defend Palestinian rights and intensify diplomatic efforts to halt the aggression and advance a political resolution to the Palestinian cause.

Fayez also highlighted His Majesty's direct involvement in Jordan's humanitarian response, including aid delivery to Gaza, the operation of military field hospitals in Palestine, and firm opposition to Israeli expansionist policies and forced displacement.

He called for enhanced coordination among Arab trade unions to protect Palestinian workers and urged the international community, including the International Labour Organisation, to fulfil their moral and legal obligations.

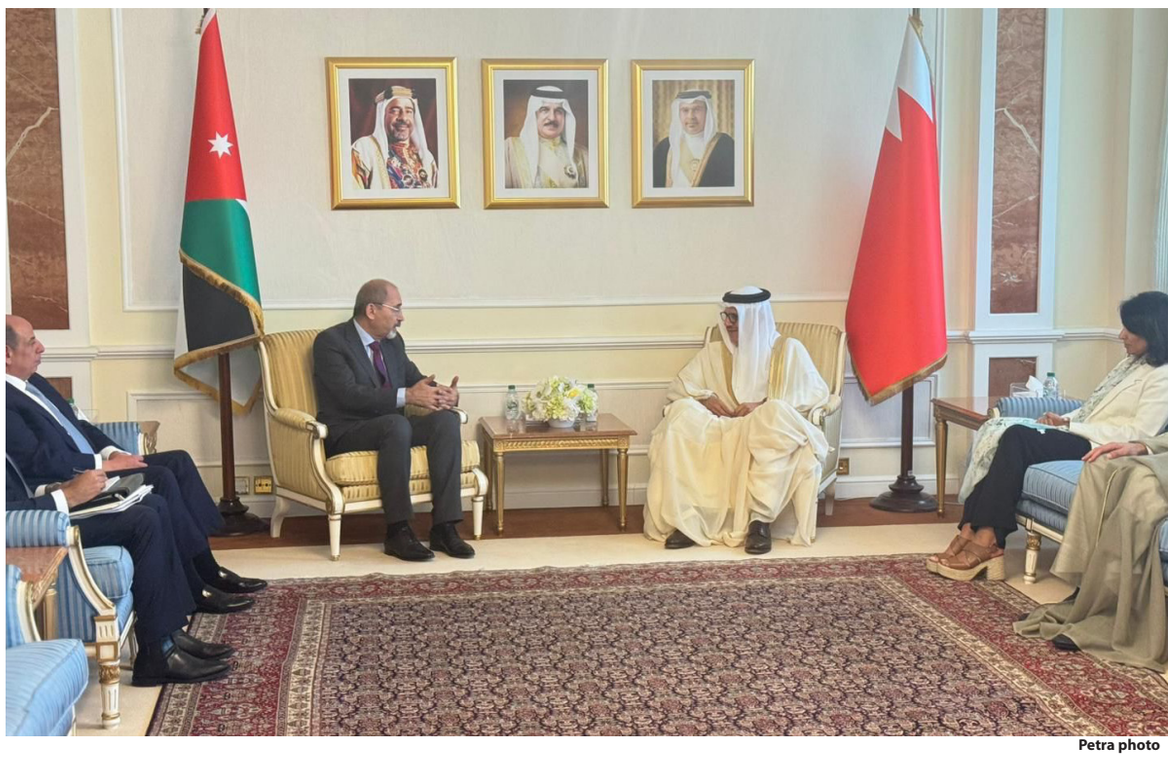
Fayez stressed the need to pressure Israel to abide by international conventions protecting workers' rights and ensure a just and safe working environment for Palestinian labourers.

Attari praised Jordan's support of the Palestinian cause, affirming the significance of the Kingdom's role in strengthening Palestinian resilience and welcomed continued cooperation.

She also acknowledged Jordan's technical expertise, particularly in labour and social security, and underscored the value of benefitting from Jordanian experience in legislation and training.

She also commended the Senate's Labour and Social Development Committee for its guidance in developing a Palestinian social security framework and broader measures to protect and empower Palestinian workers.

Foreign minister, Bahraini counterpart discuss ties, sign MoU on diplomatic training



Petra photo

Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi on Thursday holds extensive talks with Bahrain's Foreign Minister Abdullatif Bin Rashid Al Zayani

AMMAN (JT) — Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi on Thursday held extensive talks with Bahrain's Foreign Minister Abdullatif Bin Rashid Al Zayani, focusing on boosting the deep-rooted relations between Jordan and Bahrain and addressing regional developments.

Discussions centred on enhancing cooperation across various sectors, in line with the directives of His Majesty King Abdullah and Bahraini King Hamad Bin Isa Al Khalifa.

The two ministers also reviewed existing agreements and memoranda of understanding (MoUs), exploring mechanisms to activate and expand them to promote broader and more effective cooperation, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.

Safadi reiterated Jordan's pride in its close ties with Bahrain and expressed appreciation for the care and support extended to Jordanian citizens living and working in Bahrain.

On regional developments, the ministers focused on efforts to reach a lasting ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, facilitate a prisoner exchange deal and ensure the sustained delivery of humanitarian aid.

They also underscored the importance of achieving a just and comprehensive peace based on the two-state solution as the only path to regional security and stability, and stressed the need for a clear political horizon to advance that goal.

Regarding Syria, the top diplomats reiterated their support for efforts to rebuild the country based on preserving its unity, sovereignty, security and stability, while protecting the rights of its people.

The talks also touched on Bahrain's progress in electronic and digital transformation, particularly the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' e-services, digital systems, and training programmes under the National Human Rights Plan.

They also agreed to institutionalise cooperation in these areas.

Safadi and Al Zayani also signed an MoU between the Jordanian Diplomatic Institute and the Mohammed Bin Mubarak Al Khalifa Academy for Diplomatic Studies to enhance cooperation in diplomatic training, research, and academic exchange.

Authorities seize 45kg of crystal meth hidden in heavy machinery

AMMAN (JT) — Authorities have thwarted one of the largest crystal meth smuggling attempts in recent years, uncovering 45 kilogrammes of the drug hidden inside heavy machinery, the Public Security Directorate (PSD) announced on Wednesday.

According to a PSD spokesperson, the Anti-Narcotics Department (AND), in cooperation with other security agencies, launched a multi-week investigation after receiving intelligence that a foreign national was planning to smuggle a substantial quantity of the highly addictive drug into the Kingdom.

A joint operational team was formed to verify the intelligence and track the suspect's activities.

Surveillance confirmed that the individual had entered Jordan specifically to carry out the smuggling operation, the spokesperson said.

The suspect reportedly concealed the narcotics within components of heavy equipment, which were transported in a travel vehicle through the Karameh border crossing. Security personnel tracked the vehicle to the capital, where the suspect was apprehended.

Upon inspection, authorities discovered the crystal meth hidden within the machinery, he said.

The PSD stressed that the successful operation reflects the continued dedication of Jordanian security forces to combating drug trafficking and protecting national security.

New lending model offers lifeline to Jordan Valley's small-scale farmers

By Maria Weldali



JT file

Grappling with mounting economic pressures and consecutive seasons of financial loss, small-scale farmers in the Jordan Valley are struggling to sustain their agricultural livelihoods

AMMAN — Grappling with mounting economic pressures and consecutive seasons of financial loss, small-scale farmers in the Jordan Valley are struggling to sustain their agricultural livelihoods. Amid these challenges, a new cooperative lending model is offering renewed hope for revitalising the sector, according to stakeholders.

The initiative was launched under a tripartite memorandum of understanding signed between the Ministry of Agriculture and partner institutions as part of the Netherlands' second Agricultural Support Project in Jordan.

The system was designed to provide low-interest loans to smallholder farmers, enabling them to invest in farm development and adopt sustainable agricultural technologies, according to a ministry statement.

Speaking to The Jordan Times, President of the Jordan Valley Farmers Union Adnan Khaddam described the initiative as "a significant step towards promoting sustainable agriculture and strengthening food security in the country".

Khaddam stressed that the introduction of a cooperative lending system offers more than just financial relief; it instils a renewed sense of hope among farmers.

He emphasised that developing a credit framework tailored to smallholder farmers is key to transforming the country's agricultural landscape by increasing access to financing and encouraging investment in modern, sustainable practices.

Farmer Nawash Yazjeen noted that "by leveraging the collective strength of agricultural cooperatives, the system creates a revolving fund that can be reinvested into members' farming activities". He added that this approach could help break the cycle of financial exclusion that has long constrained small-scale farmers.

Yazjeen also underscored the importance of ensuring the lending model is aligned with the sector's actual needs, cautioning that the initiative's success hinges on its ability to address on-the-ground realities.

Stakeholders across the sector view the Sustainable Agriculture Cooperative (SACO) model as a critical tool for enhancing the resilience and economic independence of small farmers.

As Jordan Valley farmers continue to navigate growing economic and environmental challenges, SACO presents a structured, community-driven pathway, one that may help them not only survive but thrive in an increasingly competitive agricultural environment.



Petra photo

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Maj. Gen. Yousef Huneiti on Thursday meets with a delegation from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Jordan

Army chief, ICRC discuss cooperation

AMMAN (JT) — Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Maj. Gen. Yousef Huneiti on Thursday met with a delegation from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Jordan, headed by Sarah Avrillaud, to discuss ways to enhance cooperation and coordination in humanitarian efforts.

The meeting, held at the General Command of the Jordan Armed Forces-Arab Army (JAF), focused on advancing cooperation in the delivery of humanitarian aid, the implementation of relief programs, and the exchange of expertise in international humanitarian law.

Huneiti highlighted the ICRC's vital role in providing support to communities affected by conflicts and disasters and commended the ongoing partnership between JAF and the ICRC across various humanitarian domains, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.

Avrillaud, in turn, expressed appreciation for the JAF's contributions to humanitarian work and emphasised the importance of continued collaboration to achieve shared humanitarian objectives.

CRIME

Cassation Court upholds over 3-year sentence for drug dealer

By Rana Husseini

AMMAN — The Court of Cassation has upheld a February 2024 State Security Court (SSC) ruling, sentencing a drug dealer to over three years in prison after convicting him of selling 18 Captagon pills to an undercover agent.

The court declared the defendant guilty of obtaining illegal narcotics with the intent of selling the drugs to an undercover agent in Amman in August 2023.

The SSC handed the defendant five years in prison for the offence of possessing illegal narcotics and ordered him to pay JD5,000 in fines.

However, the court decided to reduce the fine to JD3,500 and the prison term to three years and four months in prison to give the defendant a second chance in life.

Court documents said the Anti-Narcotics Department (AND) learnt the defendant was in possession of illegal narcotics and sent one of its agents to pose as a buyer.

"The AND agent got in touch with the defendant and asked him for 18 Captagon pills in return for JD20," court documents said.

When the two met, AND agents immediately arrested the suspect, court papers added.

Upon searching the defendant, court papers said, AND personnel found a small quantity of illegal narcotics on him".

The defendant contested the SSC's ruling through his lawyer, who argued that the court "did not provide solid evidence to implicate his client".

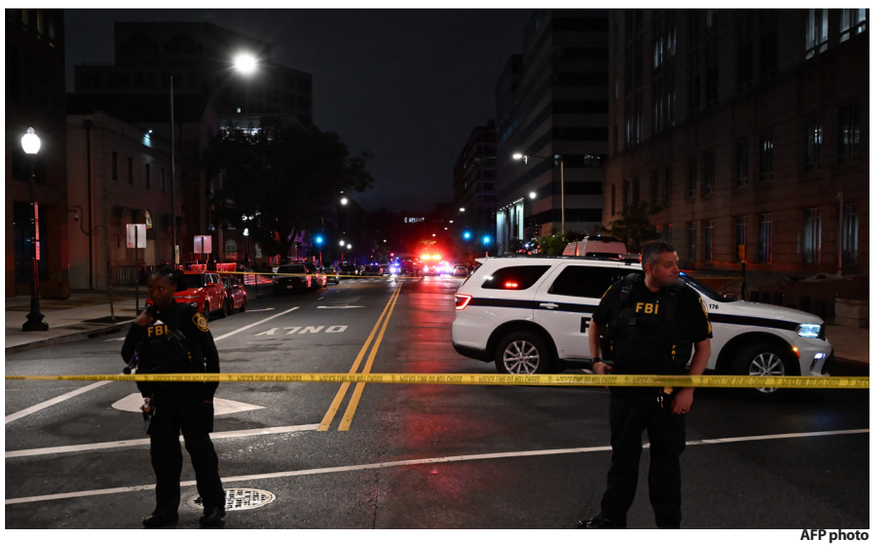
The lawyer argued that the court relied on contradictory statements by the prosecution witnesses.

Meanwhile, the SSC prosecution office asked the higher court to uphold the sentence and the fine imposed on the defendant.

The higher court maintained that the SSC had followed the proper procedures in issuing the sentence against the defendant.

"It was clear to the court that the defendant confessed willingly to possessing the illegal drugs to sell in the local market," the higher court said.

The Court of Cassation judges presiding were Yassin Abdullat, Nayef Samarat, Mohammad Khashashneh, Qassem Dughmi and Hammad Ghzawi.



AFP photo

FBI agents cordon off the scene outside the Capital Jewish Museum following a shooting that left two people dead, in Washington, DC, on Wednesday. Two Israeli embassy staff members were killed near a Jewish museum in Washington late Wednesday, US Homeland Security chief Kristi Noem said

Two Israeli embassy staff shot dead outside Jewish museum in Washington

WASHINGTON (AFP) — Two Israeli embassy staffers were shot dead late Wednesday outside a Jewish museum in Washington by a gunman who shouted "free Palestine", authorities said, with US, Israeli and other world leaders expressing outrage over the killings.

President Donald Trump condemned the attack in the heart of the US capital, saying: "These horrible D.C. killings, based obviously on antisemitism, must end, NOW!"

Shots rang out on the sidewalk outside the Capital Jewish Museum as it held an event for young professionals and diplomatic staff.

The victims were a young couple who planned to get married, the Israeli ambassador said.

Israel's foreign ministry identified them as Yaron Lischinsky, an Israeli citizen, and Sarah Lynn Milgrim, an American.

Lischinsky was a research assistant at the Israeli embassy, while Milgrim worked for its public diplomacy department, according to their LinkedIn profiles.

The attack came days after the museum was awarded a grant to boost security, as anti-Semitism surges worldwide following the outbreak of Israel's war in Gaza.

A video clip circulating on social media after the attack showed a bearded young man in a jacket and white shirt shouting "free, free Palestine" as he was led away by police.

Police confirmed the suspected shooter walked into the museum after the attack and had been detained.

Witnesses said that security personnel appeared to mistake the man for a victim of the shooting and allowed him into the building, where he was comforted by bystanders before claiming responsibility for the attack.

"Some of the people at the event brought him water. They sat him down. 'Are you OK? Were you shot? What happened?' And he's like 'somebody call the cops'," Yoni Kalin, who was in the museum, told US media.

Washington Police Chief Pamela Smith told reporters that the suspect was observed pacing back and forth outside of the museum before the shooting.

"He approached a group of four people, produced a handgun and opened fire," she said.

"After the shooting, the suspect then entered the museum and was detained by event security."

She said the handcuffed man — whom she identified as Elias Rodriguez, 30, from Chicago — told them where he discarded the gun.

'This senseless hate and violence must stop'

'Despicable antisemitic murderer'

"We are witnessing the terrible price of antisemitism and the wild incitement against the State of Israel," Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said in a statement, announcing extra security arrangements at Israeli missions around the world.

"Blood libels against Israel are paid in blood — and they must be fought relentlessly," he said.

"My heart aches for the families of the beloved young man and woman, whose lives were abruptly cut short by a despicable antisemitic murderer."

Britain, France and Germany were among those who joined in condemning the shooting.

The targeted event was an annual reception hosted by the American Jewish Committee (AJC) for young Jewish professionals and the Washington diplomatic community.

The evening was "dedicated to fostering unity and celebrating Jewish heritage", with an invitation to the event saying the location would be "shared upon registration".

"We are devastated that two cherished friends and partners from the Israeli embassy were shot and killed as they left an American Jewish Committee event," AJC CEO Ted Deutch said in a statement.

"It strongly appears that this was an attack motivated by hate against the Jewish people and the Jewish state.

This senseless hate and violence must stop."

The museum in downtown Washington is just over 1.6 kilometres from the White House.

Police Chief Smith said officers responded to multiple calls about a shooting near the museum at around 9:00pm on Wednesday (01:00 GMT Thursday).

First responders found a man and a woman unconscious and not breathing. Despite life-saving efforts, both were pronounced dead.

Young couple

Israel's Ambassador to the United States Yechiel Leiter told reporters the young staffers were a couple about to get engaged.

"The young man purchased a ring this week with the intention of proposing to his girlfriend next week in Jerusalem," Leiter said.

"They were a beautiful couple."

He said he spoke to Trump by telephone, with the president assuring him that the United States would "do everything it can possibly do to fight and end anti-Semitism".

Emergency vehicles remained at the scene in the early hours of Thursday after police taped off the area.

"We're going to stand together as a community in the coming days and weeks to send the clear message that we will not tolerate anti-Semitism," Washington Mayor Muriel Bowser told reporters.

"The horrific incident is going to frighten a lot of people in our city, and in our country. I want to be clear that we will not tolerate this violence or hate."

CONFLICT

Israel issues evacuation warning for parts of Gaza



AFP photo

A Palestinian youth walks amid the rubble following Israeli strikes in Jabalia's Saftawi neighbourhood in the northern Gaza Strip on Wednesday

GAZA CITY, PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES (AFP) — The Israeli army issued an evacuation warning on Thursday for 14 neighbourhoods of northern Gaza, as it pressed a renewed offensive that has drawn international condemnation.

The warning came hours after the United Nations said it had collected and begun distributing around 90 truckloads of aid in Gaza, the first such delivery since Israel imposed a total blockade on the territory on March 2.

Under global pressure for an end to the blockade and the violence, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he was open to a "temporary ceasefire" in Gaza, but reaffirmed the military aimed to bring the entire territory under its control.

In an Arabic-language statement on Thursday, the military said it was "operating with intense force" in 14 areas in the northern Gaza Strip, accusing "terrorist organisations" of operating there.

The army issued a similar warning for northern Gaza on Wednesday evening in what the army said was a response to rocket fire.

It later announced three more launches from northern Gaza, but said the projectiles had fallen inside the Palestinian territory.

After Israel announced it would allow in limited aid, the United Nations "collected around 90 truckloads of goods from the Kerem Shalom crossing and dispatched them into Gaza", said Stephane Dujarric, spokesman for UN chief Antonio Guterres.

In Gaza, the Hamas government media office reported the arrival of 87 aid trucks, which it said were allocated to international and local organisations to meet "urgent humanitarian needs".

Netanyahu said it was necessary to "avoid a humanitarian crisis in order to preserve our freedom of operational action" in Gaza.

Palestinians have been scrambling for basic supplies, with Israel's blockade leading to critical food and medicine shortages.

Israel has meanwhile kept up its bombardment, with Gaza's civil defence agency reporting at least 19 people had been killed in Israeli attacks on Thursday.

Umm Talal Al Masri, 53, a displaced Palestinian in Gaza City, described the situation as "unbearable".

"No one is distributing anything to us. Everyone is waiting for aid, but we haven't received anything," she said.

"We barely manage to prepare one meal a day."

UN agencies have said that the amount of aid entering Gaza falls far short of what is required to ease the crisis.

"I am tormented for my children," Hossam Abu Aida, another resident of the Gaza Strip, told AFP.

"For them, I fear hunger and disease more than I do Israeli bombardment," the 38-year-old added.

'Complex reality'

The army stepped up its offensive at the weekend, vowing to defeat Gaza's Hamas rulers, whose October 2023 attack on Israel triggered the war.

Israel has faced mounting pressure, including from traditional allies, to halt its expanded offensive and allow aid into Gaza.

European Union foreign ministers agreed on Tuesday to review the bloc's cooperation accord with Israel.

Israel's foreign ministry has said the EU action "reflects a total misunderstanding of the complex reality Israel is facing".

Sweden said it would press the 27-nation bloc to impose sanctions on Israeli ministers, while Britain suspended free-trade negotiations with Israel and summoned the Israeli ambassador.

Hamas's 2023 surprise attack resulted in the deaths of 1,218 people in Israel, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally based on official figures.

Militants also took 251 hostages, 57 of whom remain in Gaza including 34 the military says are dead.

There has been a global spike in anti-Semitic attacks since Hamas's attack, with a gunman shouting "free Palestine" as he shot dead two Israeli embassy staffers outside a Jewish museum in Washington.

Britain, France, Germany, the United States and other countries around the world all condemned the shooting.

Netanyahu said Wednesday Israel would be ready "if there is an option for a temporary ceasefire to free hostages", noting that at least 20 held by Hamas and its allies were still believed to be alive.

Gaza's health ministry said Thursday at least 3,613 people have been killed since Israel resumed strikes on March 18, taking the war's overall toll to 53,762, mostly civilians.

Massive floods strand over 50,000 in eastern Australia

SYDNEY (AFP) — Record floods stranded more than 50,000 people in eastern Australia on Thursday, killing three as a muddy tide swept through towns and swollen rivers cut off roads.

Police have pulled three bodies from rising floodwaters on the Mid North Coast, a river-braided region of rugged hills and fertile valleys about 400 kilometres north of Sydney.

Authorities launched a major search-and-rescue mission as people clambered atop cars, houses and highway bridges to escape fast-moving flash floods.

The storms have dumped more than half a year's worth of rain over just three days, the government weather bureau said, smashing flood-height records in some areas.

"We are seeing levels in local tributaries, creeks and rivers that we haven't seen since 1920," New South Wales (NSW) state premier Chris Minns told reporters.

"Many people will have never seen this level of inundation or flooding in their communities."

The town of Kempsey, a farming hub on the banks of the Macleay River, had been cut off with little warning, Mayor Kinne Ring told AFP.

"You often think of rain on a tin roof as relaxing, but at the moment it is deafening and horrible," Ring said.

"The downpours are torrential and every time it rains, you wonder what is going to happen next."

Ring said more than 20,000 people were isolated in her local government area alone.

About 140 kilometres south in the town of Taree, business owner Jeremy Thornton said the "gut-wrenching" flood was among the worst he had seen.

"It is pretty tough, we've had a few moments but you have to suck it up and push on," he told AFP.

"We are reliving it every second — hearing the rain, hearing the helicopters, hearing the siren."

Authorities said more than 50,000 people were cut off, with some rivers still to reach peak levels late on Thursday.

An elderly couple climbed on to the roof of their car to escape a fast-rising flash flood before a rescue helicopter winched them to safety, NSW police in Taree said in a statement.

Others sought sanctuary on a raised highway bridge before they were spotted and rescued by a navy Seahawk chopper.

Locals spotted dead cows washing up on beaches after swollen rivers swept them from their pastures inland.

The government has declared the emergency a natural disaster, unlocking greater resources for affected areas.

Police said they were still searching for one person reported missing.

Flood modelling expert Mahdi Sedighkia said the unfolding disaster provided "compelling evidence" showing how climate change could affect regional rainfall patterns.

"These events demonstrate that our understanding of flood probability — based on past hydrological studies — is no longer adequate in the face of present-day climate realities," said the Australian National University's Sedighkia.

Swaths of Australia from the arid outback to the tropical coast have been pummelled by wild weather in recent months.

The oceans surrounding Australia have been "abnormally warm" in recent months, according to the weather bureau.

Warmer seas evaporate more moisture into the atmosphere, which can eventually lead to more intense rains.

Although difficult to link to specific disasters, scientists warn that climate change is already fuelling more extreme weather patterns.

"I don't think there is a question that climate change is having a significant impact on weather events right across the world," Australian Emergency Management Minister Kristy McBain told reporters.

"In Australia, we're not immune to that. We're seeing more devastating events like this happen more frequently."

About 2,500 emergency workers have been deployed to the region, alongside rescue boats, a fleet of helicopters and hundreds of search drones.

Bureau of Meteorology spokesman Steve Bernasconi said some towns had recorded more than half-a-metre of rain in the space of three days.

But he said rain was expected to slowly taper off from late Thursday night as the weather system moved south.

6.1-magnitude quake hits off Greek island of Crete — USGS

ATHENS (AFP) — A 6.1-magnitude earthquake rattled the Greek islands of Crete and Santorini on Thursday, the US Geological Survey (USGS) said, with no major damage immediately reported.

The strong quake struck 82 kilometres northeast of Crete's capital Heraklion at 03:19 GMT at a depth of 68 kilometres, the USGS said.

AFP journalists said it was felt as far away as Athens and Egypt.

State television ERT said many residents in the Cretan regions of Rethymno and Lasithi were woken by the quake just after 6:00am and quickly exited their homes as a precaution.

The tremor "occurred at a great depth and there is no particular reason for residents to worry", Athanassios Ganas, general director of Research at the Geodynamics Institute of the National Observatory of Athens, told the station.

State news agency ANA said fire department units in Crete had been placed on general alert, with vehicles patrolling to assess the situation.

The mayor of Heraklion, Alexis Kalokerinos, told ERT that there were no particular problems in the city and that closing schools would not be necessary.

The quake struck just over a week after a 6.1-magnitude tremor hit near the island of Kasos near Crete, and was felt in the outlying area.

The region, popular with tourists, has been hit with multiple tremors in recent months, prompting schools in Santorini and neighbouring islands to temporarily close.

Thousands of earthquakes, mainly of low magnitude, have been recorded since January between the islands of Santorini, Amorgos, Ios and Anafi in the Cyclades group southeast of the Greek mainland.

They have not caused casualties or significant damage.

Located where the African and Anatolian tectonic plates converge, the Aegean Sea is often hit by quakes.

But the region had not experienced a phenomenon of such magnitude since records began in 1964, experts say.

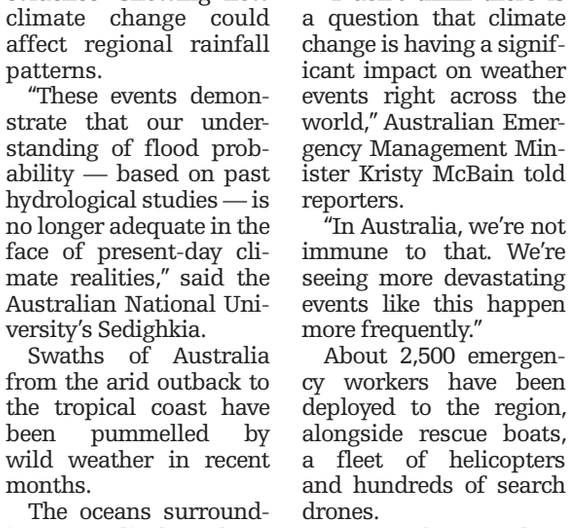


Photo AFP

A beach on Crete island



AFP photo

Iraqi youths cheer as they cool off in the waters of Euphrates River in the city of Nasiriyah, in Iraq's southern Dhi Qar province on Thursday

Summer comes early for Iraq with 49 degrees Celsius in Basra

BAGHDAD (AFP) — Summer has come early for Iraq this year with temperatures hitting 49°C in the southern city of Basra on Thursday, the national weather centre said.

"It is the highest temperature recorded in Iraq this year," weather centre spokesperson Amer Al Jabiri told AFP.

He said the early heat was in contrast to last year, when the temperature was "relatively good" in May and "it only began to rise in June".

In Iraq, summer temperatures often exceed 50°C, especially in July and August, and sometimes reach these levels earlier.

On Sunday, two cadets died and others were admitted to hospital with heat stroke at a military academy in the southern province of Dhi Qar, authorities said.

The defence ministry said nine cadets "showed signs of fatigue and exhaustion due to sun exposure" while waiting to be assigned to battalions.

Prime Minister Mohammed Shia Al Sudani ordered an investigation into the deaths of the two cadets.

Iraq is one of the five countries most impacted by some effects of climate change, according to the United Nations. It has also seen a prolonged drought and frequent dust storms.

Israel strikes south Lebanon, army says Hizbollah fighter killed

BEIRUT, Lebanon (AFP) — Lebanese state media said an Israeli air strike hit a building in southern Lebanon on Thursday after Israel's military issued an evacuation call warning of imminent action against Hizbollah militants.

Israel has kept up its air strikes in neighbouring Lebanon despite a November truce aimed at halting more than a year of hostilities with Hizbollah that included two months of full-blown war.

Without confirming the reported attack on the southern town of Toul, the Israeli military said its forces had carried out several strikes targeting Hizbollah sites and killed one militant.

Lebanon's official National News Agency (NNA) said that "the Israeli enemy" struck a building in Toul, where the army had warned residents to evacuate the area around a building it said was used by Hizbollah militants.

The "urgent warning" was accompanied by a map showing a structure and the 500-metre radius around it marked in red.

"You are located near facilities belonging to the terrorist [group] Hizbollah," the statement said in Arabic, urging people "to evacuate these buildings immediately and move away from them".



AFP photo

Firefighters and first responders stand next to destroyed vehicles at the scene of an Israeli air strike that targeted a building in the southern Lebanese town of Toul on Thursday

There were no immediate reports of casualties in Toul.

In a separate statement, the military said it had "struck and eliminated a Hizbollah Radwan Force terrorist in the area of Rab El Thalathine", about 17 kilometres to the southeast.

The NNA reported a "martyr" in an air strike in the same area, without identifying them.

The Israeli military said its forces also "struck a Hizbollah military site containing rocket launchers and weapons" in the Bekaa Valley as well as "terrorist infrastructure sites and rocket launchers belonging to the Hizbollah terrorist organisation... in southern Lebanon".

A military statement said that "the presence of weapons in the area and Hizbollah activities at the site constitute blatant violations of the understandings between Israel and Lebanon" under the November ceasefire agreement.

Israel will "continue to operate to remove any threat... and will prevent any attempt by Hizbollah to re-establish its terror capabilities", it said.

Under the ceasefire, Hizbollah fighters were to pull back north of the Litani River and dismantle military infrastructure south of it.

Israel was to withdraw all forces from Lebanon, but it has kept troops in five areas that it deems "strategic".

The Lebanese army has deployed in the south and has been dismantling Hezbollah infrastructure.

The truce was based on a UN Security Council resolution that says Lebanese troops and UN peacekeepers should be the only people to bear arms in south Lebanon, and calls for the disarmament of all non-state groups.

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'Abnormally warm'

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AFP photo

This frame grab taken from UGC video handout footage by Instagram account user @Woodshieldposts on Wednesday and released on Thursday shows houses partly submerged in a flooded area in the NSW town of Taree

King, Syrian president discuss bilateral ties, regional developments

Continued from page 1

For his part, the Syrian president praised Jordan's positions, under the leadership of the King, in supporting Syria to regain its international presence.

The two leaders stressed the importance of stepping up efforts to stabilise southern Syria and enhance the security of the two countries' borders.

Jordan ready to 'immediately' send relief assistance into Gaza but Israel restricting aid delivery — Momani

Continued from page 1

Some families have claimed on videos circulated on social media that they were sent back to Gaza before their children completed treatment.

"These claims are completely false. Medical reports confirm that all the patients who returned to Gaza have completed their treatment. They all received the best medical care at Jordan's top hospitals, and their families were provided with the best possible accommodations. Some of these patients underwent delicate surgeries, and they are all in good health now."

He also said that patients "receive high quality medical treatment at Jordan's top private and public hospitals. Jordan is well-recognised as a regional leader in medical care. For example, dozens of cancer patients from Gaza are being treated at the King Hussein Cancer Centre, which is a leading institution in the region that has gained international recognition for its state-of-the-art facilities and quality care."

In response to what the families who returned to Gaza said about Israeli authorities seizing their money, medicines, and personal belongings, Momani said, "This is unfortunately true. Israeli authorities seized at the border crossing with Gaza the belongings, money, mobile phones and even the food items carried by the people who returned from Jordan. This was on Kerem Shalom crossing."

The minister said that Jordan seeks to evacuate more children from Gaza and to expedite the process but "Israeli authorities still put hurdles".

"Jordan has always sought to evacuate child patients from Gaza by air but Israeli authorities have never agreed to such an arrangement."

Despite the challenges, Momani said that Jordan, since March 4, 2025, has evacuated 114 people from Gaza (39 patients with 75 family escorts) in three batches in cooperation with the World Health Organisation (WHO).

"The first batch was on March 29 when 29 children, accompanied by 44 of their family members, were brought into the Kingdom, and the second and third batches were on May 14 and May 20 when four cancer patients, accompanied by 12 family members, and six child cancer patients, with 19 family members, came to Jordan," he said.

"Jordanian field hospitals in Gaza continue to provide critical medical care to the wounded and sick at a time when the health sector in Gaza has completely broken down due to the ongoing war."

Jordan runs two military field hospitals in Gaza, one in the Strip's north, which was established in 2009 following the war in 2008.

The second was established in Khan Younis in the south in November 2023 at the peak of the Israeli war of aggression on the coastal enclave that erupted on October 7, 2023.

"Jordan has also evacuated several cases to receive necessary life-saving medical care in Jordanian hospitals before," Momani said.

National exports rise 11.6% in Q1 2025, value JD 2.306 billion — DoS

Continued from page 1

In March 2025 alone, total exports amounted to JD 856 million, including JD 784 million in national exports and JD 72 million in re-exports, while Imports valued at JD 1.614 billion, resulting in a trade deficit of JD 758 million for March 2025.

These figures reflect a notable improvement, with total exports increasing by 16 per cent compared to March 2024, and national exports rising by 18.4 per cent.

Imports also grew by 4.2 per cent, while re-exports declined by 5.3 per cent, leading to a 6.5 per cent decrease in the trade deficit.

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The Ambush Office: Trump's Oval becomes test of nerve for world leaders

By Danny Kemp
Agence France-Presse

WASHINGTON — For world leaders an invitation to the Oval Office used to be a coveted prize. Under Donald Trump it's become a ticket to a brutal political ambush.

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa became the latest victim in a long line that started with Trump's notorious row with Ukraine's Volodymyr Zelensky in February.

Trump has turned what were staid diplomatic "photo sprays" under his predecessor Joe Biden into punishing, hour-long tests of nerve in the heart of the US presidency, played out on live television.

The sight has become all too familiar — a world leader perched nervously on the edge of their gold-upholstered chair in front of the famed fireplace, waiting to see what happens.

Will the 78-year-old Republican lay on the charm? Will he show off the new gold-plated decor he has been proudly installing in the Oval? Will he challenge his guest on tariffs or trade or US military assistance?

Or will he simply tear into them?

Nobody knows before they get there. All they know is that when the cameras are allowed into the most exclusive room in the White House, they will be treading the most perilous of political tightropes.

And the hot, confined space of the Oval Office adds to the pressure-cooker environment as the unpredictable billionaire seeks to wrongfoot his guests and gain the upper hand.

'Turn the lights down'

Trump set the benchmark when he hosted Zelensky on February 28.

Tensions over Trump's sudden pivot towards Russia spilled into the open as a red-faced US president berated the Ukrainian leader and accused him of being ungrateful for US military aid against Russia.

Many wondered if it was a deliberate ambush, especially as Vice President JD Vance appeared to step in to trigger the row.

Whether or not it was on purpose, the goal in foreign capitals ever since has been to "avoid a Zelensky".

But Ramaphosa's visit to the Oval on Wednesday was the closest yet to a repeat, and this time it was clearly planned.

Ramaphosa arrived with top South African golfers Ernie Els and Retief Goosen in tow, hoping to take the edge off the golf-mad Trump's unfounded claims of a "genocide" against white South African farmers.

But his face was a picture of bemusement when after a question on the issue, Trump suddenly said to aides and said: "Turn the lights down, and just put this on."

A video of South African politicians chanting "kill the farmer" began to play on a screen set up at the side of the room. A stunned Ramaphosa looked at the screen, then at Trump, and then back at the screen.

Yet unlike Zelensky, who argued back with an increasingly enraged Trump, the South African president largely stayed calm as he argued his case.

Nor was he asked to leave the White House as Zelensky was, causing the Ukrainian to miss lunch.

'Ratings GOLD!'

Other leaders have also done their homework. Some have emerged mostly unscathed, or even with some credit.

Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney, despite some nervous body language, stood his ground against Trump's calls for his country to become the 51st US state and insisted that his country was "never for sale."

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer won over Trump with a letter from King Charles III, while French President Emmanuel Macron kept up his touch-feely bromance with the US president.

Trump's ideological allies have often fared even better. El Salvador's Nayib Bukele had a major Oval Office love-fest after agreeing to take migrants at a mega-prison in the Central American country.

But even some close allies have been wrongfooted.

Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu received a warm welcome as the first foreign guest of Trump's second term, but it was a different story when he returned in April.

Cameras in the Oval Office caught his stunned face when Trump announced that Washington was starting direct talks with Iran.

For Trump, though, it's all part of a presidency that he increasingly treats like a reality show.

Trump himself quipped after the Zelensky meeting that it was "going to be great television", and one of his advisers was just as explicit after the Ramaphosa meeting.

"This is literally being watched globally right now," Jason Miller said on X, along with a picture of the encounter on multiple screens. "Ratings GOLD!"

Deference and disputes: How leaders get on with Trump

Agence France-Presse

WASHINGTON — When foreign leaders meet with Donald Trump, they are walking a tightrope: They can be welcomed with open arms or be publicly belittled.

It all depends on the rapport they have built with the US president.

South African ambush

President Cyril Ramaphosa of South Africa knew he would be entering a tense White House meeting on Wednesday with Trump.

But what awaited him surprised everyone: Trump dimmed the lights and played a video he claimed proves genocide is being committed against white farmers in South Africa — not your typical welcome for a head of state.

Trump and his allies have been spreading the baseless claims, which the government in Pretoria has dismissed as false.

"You do allow them to take land, and then when they take the land, they kill the white farmer, and when they kill the white farmer, nothing happens to them," Trump said.

Ramaphosa struggled to get a word in as he listened to the claims. But he remained calm as he denied that his country confiscates land from white farmers, and pushed his calls for improved relations after Trump offered refuge to dozens of Afrikaners of South Africa's largest white minority.

Netanyahu and Gaza 'Riviera'

Israel's premier was the first foreign leader to visit the White House since Trump's second-term inauguration on January 20.

"You are the greatest friend Israel has ever had in the White House," Benjamin Netanyahu told Trump, after the US president suggested redeveloping war-ravaged Gaza into the "Riviera of the Middle East".

Following the visit, Trump shared an AI-generated video showing him and Netanyahu sipping cocktails at the imaginary resort.

King's letter

UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer tried to woo Trump amid growing concerns in Europe that the US leader would sell Kyiv short and take Russia's position on its three-year war on Ukraine.

During a White House meeting in February, Starmer handed Trump, a long-term fan of Britain's royals, a letter from King Charles III inviting him for an unprecedented second state visit by a US president.

Carney: 'Never for sale'

But not even the staunchest US ally is assured a warm reception. When Canada's newly elected Prime Minister Mark Carney traveled south of the border in early May, he was met by a US leader bristling over international trade.

"We don't really want cars from Canada," or its steel or aluminum, Trump told Carney, adding it was hard to justify the United States subsidising its northern neighbor through a trade imbalance or military assistance.

Carney called the talks "very constructive," but appeared to stand firm when Trump repeated his antagonistic call for Canada to become the 51st US state.

"There are some places that are never for sale," Carney told Trump. Canada "won't be for sale, ever."

Mar-a-Lago invite for Milei

Argentina's Javier Milei is cut from the same cloth as his US counterpart: an anti-woke climate change sceptic who loves social media and is a fan of both Elon Musk and Israel.

After winning November's US election, Trump called Milei and described him as his "favourite president", according to the Argentine presidency.

Milei was also the first foreign leader received by then president-elect Trump at his Mar-a-Lago estate, and later attended his inauguration.

Stubb plays golf

The Finnish president spent seven hours with Trump in Florida on March 29, for a round of golf.

"He's a very good player," Trump said of Stubb on his Truth Social platform in which he also spoke of buying ice-breaker vessels from Finland.

Stubb later said it was thanks to his father's claim that golf "will be useful in your life at some stage" that he got to spend so much time with the US president.

'Smart customer' Macron

Jokes, virile handshakes, compliments and amicable gestures were on display when French President Emmanuel Macron visited Washington in February.

"He's a smart customer," Trump said of Macron, who has made it his mission to be firm but friendly with the US commander in chief.

'Special bond' with Modi

When Narendra Modi visited in February, Trump said they shared a "special bond" and complimented the Indian prime minister on being a "much tougher negotiator" than he is.

Trump, as he unveiled his tariffs, cemented his praise for Modi, whom he called a "great friend", though he added India had not been "treating us right".

Rough welcome for Zelensky

Ukraine's president has been on the receiving end of the most public humiliations doled out by Trump this year, being labeled a "dictator" who "has done a terrible job" leading his war-torn country.

Their Oval Office clash in late February stunned US allies. Since then, Volodymyr Zelensky has been at pains to try to mend the relationship.

Trump's 'Golden Dome' US missile defence plan faces major challenges

By W.G. Dunlop and Mathieu Rabechault
Agence France-Presse

WASHINGTON — US President Donald Trump's plan for a nationwide missile defence system — dubbed "Golden Dome" — faces significant technical and political challenges, and it could cost far more than he has estimated to achieve its goals.

Trump wants a system that can defend against a wide array of enemy weapons — from intercontinental ballistic missiles to hypersonic and cruise missiles and drones — and he wants it ready in about three years, or as he nears the end of his second term in office.

Four months after Trump initially ordered the Pentagon to develop options for the system, however, little in the way of further details have emerged.

"The main challenges will be cost, the defense industrial base, and political will.

They can all be overcome, but it will take focus and prioritisation," said Melanie Marlowe, a nonresident senior associate in the Missile Defence Project at Washington's Centre for Strategic and International Studies.

"The White House and Congress are going to have to agree on how much to spend and where the money will come from," Marlowe said, noting that "our defense industrial base has atrophied", though "we have begun to revive it".

She also cited the need for more progress on sensors, interceptors and other components of the project.

Trump on Tuesday announced an initial $25 billion in funding for Golden Dome, saying its eventual cost would be about $175 billion.

That figure is likely far lower than the actual price of such a system.

Thomas Roberts, assistant professor of international affairs and aerospace engineering at the Georgia Institute of Technology, said the price estimate was "not realistic".

"The challenge with the statements from yesterday is that they lack the details needed to develop a model of what this constellation would really look like," he said.

Earlier this month, the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimated the cost of space-based interceptors to defeat a limited number of intercontinental ballistic missiles at between $161 billion and $542 billion over 20 years.

A system such as that envisaged by Trump "could require a more expansive SBI (space-based interceptor) capability than the systems examined in the previous studies.

Quantifying those recent changes will require further analysis", the CBO said.

The Golden Dome concept — and name — stem from Israel's Iron Dome air defence system.

But the United States' missile threats differ significantly from the short-range weapons that Iron Dome is designed to counter.

Beijing is closing the gap with Washington when it comes to ballistic and hypersonic missile technology, while Moscow is modernising its intercontinental-range missile systems and developing advanced precision strike missiles, according to the Pentagon's 2022 Missile Defence Review.

The document also said the threat of drones — which have played a key role in the Ukraine war — is likely to grow, and warned of the danger of ballistic missiles from North Korea and Iran, as well as rocket and missile threats from non-state actors.

Countering all those myriad threats would be a major undertaking, and there are various issues that would need to be overcome for such a system to come online.

Germany's infrastructure push needs more than money

By Clement Kasser
Agence France-Presse

BERLIN — As construction crews using heavy excavators demolished a major highway bridge in Berlin, pensioner Guido, like many Germans, greeted the dusty spectacle with grim satisfaction.

"For once, it was very quick, it took about a month," said the 65-year-old, who only gave his first name, adding that "we're not used to our projects going according to plan".

A crack first appeared a decade ago in a support structure of the concrete and steel bridge built in 1963 that forms part of the capital city's busy A100 ring road.

After the crack recently widened alarmingly, work to take down the bridge finally started in March, leaving piles of rubble below.

Thousands watching the demolition on an Internet livestream were happy to see the start of a multi-million-euro renovation project but were upset it took so long.

The case is symptomatic of a problem facing the world's third-biggest economy: an enormous backlog of crumbling infrastructure that needs replacing at a cost of hundreds of billions.

Thousands of roads and bridges, many from the 1960s and 1970s, are reaching the end of their lifespans, and little has been done for years as governments have shied away from major spending.

Germany's new Chancellor Friedrich Merz has pledged to give Europe's top economy a facelift that is also set to include new railway tracks, school buildings and telecom lines.

Even before he took office, his coalition managed to have the previous parliament pass a gigantic 500-billion-euro infrastructure fund dubbed a spending "bazooka".

Wake-up call

After years of fiscal restraint, Germans are crying out for action: an end to patchy mobile phone signals, late trains, slow internet and potholed roads.

A dramatic wake-up call came in September, when a 400-metre-long bridge collapsed in the eastern city of Dresden, with large sections crashing into the Elbe river.

Luckily it happened overnight, averting a potentially deadly disaster, but the incident made Germany's infrastructure malaise a major election campaign theme.

Germany's bridges need 100 billion euros' worth of repairs and upgrades, according to the European Federation for Transport and Environment (T&E).

Along German motorways and major roads, one third of bridges need to be reconstructed entirely, said the Brussels-based group.

The need is all the more pressing since the last government "embellished" progress, according to a report from the Federal Court of Audit, which found that just 40 per cent of bridge renovations planned for 2024 were actually completed.

The new government's fund, intended to be spent over 12 years, should help, but many local politicians aren't holding their breath.

"Money alone solves nothing," scoffed Steffen Scheller, mayor of the eastern town of Brandenburg an der Havel, an hour's drive from Berlin.

Scheller is hoping for 90 million euros from the fund but said there is another, major problem: "We have a shortage of qualified project managers and engineers."

Bureaucracy can also slow down the process, he said.

A new bridge was built in 2023 over a congested level crossing outside of the city, but has stood unused since. Before it can open, safety barriers must be built.

But the project was pushed back to 2026 after some companies complained that proper procedure had not been followed in the tender process.

'Fanciful projects'

"I've given up all hope of ever using the bridge," said motorist Fransiska, stuck in a traffic jam caused by the closure.

The 38-year-old hospital worker said her commute takes about an hour longer than it used to.

Most of the town's 70 bridges were built back in East Germany's communist days, using substandard steel. Several of them are now closed to heavy goods vehicles, causing problems as they reroute.

Brandenburgers are particularly distraught at the delay in rebuilding a bridge in the town centre that had been promised for 2022.

The delay means "local business really struggles with transport" while the town faces higher pollution, Scheller said.

Benedikt Heyl, author of the T&E report, said Merz had demonstrated "ambition" to tackle the problem.

But Heyl said the new transport minister, Patrick Schnieder, should do better than renovate the 4,000 bridges he has promised by 2030.

Merz should put "fanciful projects" for new motorways on pause, Heyl said, and work on the basics, such as making sure construction companies have long-term contracts that allow them to plan for the future.

First of all, he said, the central government must take a thorough stocktake of the scale of the problem.

"The data is often very poor," Heyl said. "Local authorities often know how bridges are doing. But nobody has an overview at the national level."

Foreign grants down 93.2% in Q1 2025; $2.1b in new pledges secured



File photo

The Ministry of Finance on Thursday says that foreign grants to Jordan plummeted to JD3.4 million in the first quarter of 2025, marking a 'sharp' decline from JD49.6 million during the same period last year

AMMAN (JT) — Foreign grants to Jordan plummeted to JD3.4 million in the first quarter of 2025, marking a "sharp" decline from JD49.6 million during the same period last year, marking a drop of JD46.2 million, or 93.2 per cent, according to the Ministry of Finance.

Despite this downturn, the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation secured over $2.1 billion in new funding commitments in April to finance major national projects, Al Mamlaka TV reported.

A government performance report for April revealed that the Planning Ministry had signed agreements and received pledges from key development partners, including the World Bank, the German Development Bank , the Dutch embassy, and the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development.

Locally, government revenues increased by JD150 million in the first quarter of 2025, reaching JD2.16 billion compared with JD2.01 billion in the same period last year.

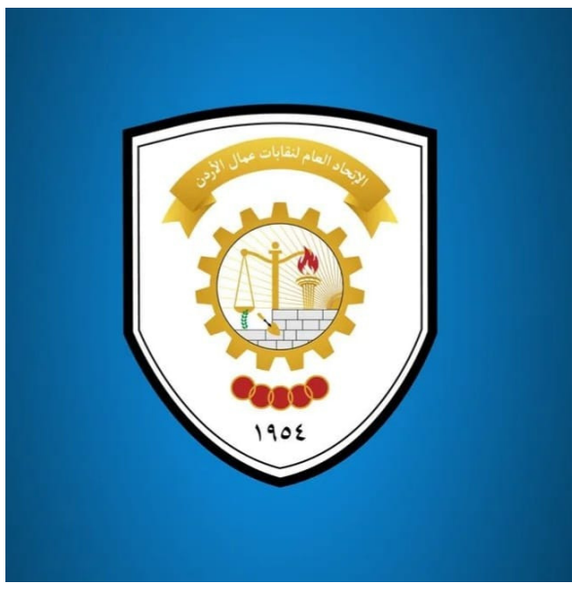
Tax revenues totalled JD1.582 billion, comprising JD1.076 billion from general sales tax on goods and services, JD419 million from income and profit taxes, JD24 million from real estate sales tax, and JD63 million from taxes on international trade and transactions.

Non-tax revenues for the same period amounted to JD578 million, the data revealed.

Jordan's gross public debt, including liabilities held by the Social Security Investment Fund , reached 118.4 per cent of GDP by the end of the first quarter.

Excluding SSIF-held debt, the figure drops to 91.5 per cent, declining further to 90.9 per cent when a Central Bank of Jordan deposit allocated for repaying Eurobonds due in June is subtracted.

GFJTU, ILO launch new media plan to defend worker rights



AMMAN (JT) — The General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions (GFJTU) , with the support of the International Labour Organisation , on Wednesday concluded a workshop to establish the overall framework for the GFJTU's communications plan (2025-2027).

GFJTU President Khaled Fanatseh said that the media aspect is a "key" axis of the federation's strategic plan, which was launched last year, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported on Thursday.

Fanatseh noted that the implementation of the plan's provisions began within its executive programme, adding that the plan's phases will be carried over the coming years until 2027.

Addressing the closing session, he said that the plan aims to develop the GFJTU's communications processes, enhance its role in defending workers' rights and boost the federation's presence as the umbrella for Jordanian workers in the public arena.

Fanatseh highlighted the importance of enhancing the role of women and youth during the current phase of the GFJTU's work, affirming their "active" engagement in the success of the federation's reform vision.

Fanatseh also stressed the importance of open dialogue to prepare union leaders to assume responsibility in relevant activities and bring about the desired change.

The federation said that the new vision builds on the GFJTU's media achievements over the past year, in terms of addressing labour issues, integrating digital media tools to engage with the public through the federation's digital platforms, and developing the "institutional" relations with various media outlets.

The vision also provides support and advice to the press to address labour-related issues via media platforms and streamline media access to information sources.

It added that the move seeks to highlight the GFJTU's "successful" experiences in liaising with the public and engaging with labour bases.

Kingdom's oil bill drops 6.4% in Q1 2025



File photo

The Department of Statistics on Thursday says that the value of the Kingdom's imports of crude oil, petroleum products and mineral oils reached JD770 million during the first quarter of this year

AMMAN (JT) — The Kingdom's oil bill declined by 6.4 per cent in the first quarter of 2025, according to foreign trade data released by the Department of Statistics (DoS) on Thursday.

The report, cited by Al Mamlaka TV, showed that the value of the Kingdom's imports of crude oil, petroleum products and mineral oils reached JD770 million during the first quarter of this year, down from JD821 million in the same period of 2024.

The figures showed that national exports rose by 11.7 per cent and re-exports by 10.4 per cent, resulting in overall export growth of 11.6 per cent compared with the first quarter of last year.

The DoS' monthly foreign trade report noted that this export growth was accompanied by a 6.6 per cent increase in imports, which led to a 2.2 per cent rise in the trade deficit in Q1 2025 compared to the same period in 2024.

Total exports during the first three months of the year amounted to JD2.306 billion, including JD2.093 billion in national exports and JD213 million in re-exports.

Imports reached JD4.679 billion for the same period.

Jordan's trade deficit, the difference between total exports and imports, increased to JD2.373 billion in Q1 2025, up from JD2.323 billion in the same period of 2024.

Jordan, Italy chambers discuss trade, youth training, investment promotion



Petra photo

President of the Jordan Chamber of Commerce Khalil Haj Tawfiq and President of the Arab-Italian Chamber of Commerce Pietro Rampino on Thursday discuss means to enhance trade and investment ties between Jordan and Italy

AMMAN (JT) — President of the Jordan Chamber of Commerce (JCC) Khalil Haj Tawfiq and President of the Arab-Italian Chamber of Commerce Pietro Rampino on Thursday discussed means to enhance trade and investment ties between Jordan and Italy, and initiatives targeting youth training and employment.

The discussions took place on the sidelines of the Arab-German Forum in Berlin and focused on expanding cooperation across various sectors, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.

Haj Tawfiq said that both sides agreed to launch remote training courses for Jordanian youth in select professional fields through Italian companies, which will deliver their expertise via virtual platforms.

Participants will receive certificates accredited by the European Union and issued in cooperation with the Arab-Italian Chamber of Commerce.

He further noted that the Arab-Italian Chamber, in collaboration with the Italian ministry of education, will offer 25 fully funded scholarships for Jordanian students to study at specialised institutes in Italy for two years.

The students will receive recognised qualifications enabling them to enter the Italian labour market, Haj Tawfiq said, welcoming the initiative and stressing its value in building a skilled workforce.

The two sides agreed that the JCC would serve as the official point of contact for Italian investors and business representatives seeking opportunities in Jordan, where the chamber would also provide detailed information on legislation, investment incentives, and the overall business environment in the Kingdom.

The Arab-Italian Chamber will act as a platform to assist Jordanian companies looking to expand into the Italian market or establish commercial partnerships.

Haj Tawfiq stressed that these efforts would enhance trade flows, especially by boosting Jordanian exports to Italy.

Established in 2015, the Arab-Italian Chamber of Commerce is supported by key institutions, professional bodies, and Italian banks. It aims to boost Arab-Italian trade and investment relations and promote broader economic cooperation.

Asian equities track Wall St sell-off as US deficit fears grow

HONG KONG, (AFP) — Asian equities sank and Treasuries remained under pressure following sharp losses on Wall Street fuelled by US economy fears as Donald Trump tries to push through fresh tax cuts that could balloon the already huge deficit.

A weak auction of 20-year US government debt flashed a warning sign that the bond market was worried about the country's finances, days after Moody's lowered its top-tier credit rating.

The news brought an end to a healthy run-up in recent weeks that was stoked by the China-US tariff detente and signs of progress between the United States and other countries on trade.

Bond yields spiked across the board as investors demanded more interest for holding government debt, signalling their fears about the world's biggest economy — 30-year Treasuries hit their highest level since late 2023.

The selling came after the auction of 20-year bonds attracted tepid interest, and brought back memories of the sell-off that followed US President Trump's "Liberation Day" tariff blitz last month, which was followed by the White House taking a less aggressive approach.

All three main indexes on Wall Street ended sharply lower.

A tax bill pushed by Trump that is currently going through Congress pairs an extension of the tax cuts from Trump's first presidential term with steep savings in government spending to pay for them.

But many market watchers do not expect the spending cuts in the package to be sufficient to offset the tax cuts, lifting the deficit.

"The proposed tax cuts are raising concerns from economists about the US's fiscal position and there are signs of anxiety in the bond markets about the country's debt burden," said National Australia Bank's Tapas Strickland.

Trump's first-term Treasury Secretary, Steven Mnuchin, warned that "the budget deficit is a larger concern to me than the trade deficit" and called for more spending cuts.

Asian equities also sank, with Tokyo, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Sydney, Seoul, Taipei, Wellington and Manila all in the red.

The dollar also held losses on growing concerns about the US economy, while the uncertainty helped revive demand for safe-haven gold, which was sitting around $3,340 an ounce.

And there are now fears that stocks could be in for another rough ride.

"These higher long-end yields make it a whole lot harder to justify today's equity valuations," said Stephen Innes at SPI Asset Management.

"Tech and growth names — already stretched — are staring down the barrel of a tangible equity to rates market repricing, and this could cap the rally fuel that's been driving risk assets since the April tariff detente."

AMMAN STOCK EXCHANGE

بورصة عمان
Amman Stock Exchange

AMMAN (JT) — Amman Stock Exchange(ASE) trading value for Thursday reached JD18.4 million, while 10.5 million shares were traded through 3,018 transaction.

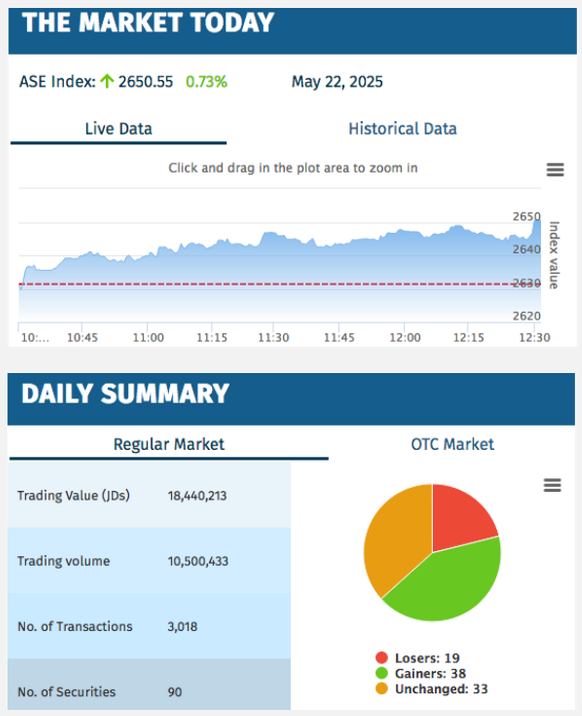
The ASE shares price index closed at 2650.55 point, an increase of 0.73 per cent.

The shares of 90 companies were traded, the shares prices of 38 companies rose, and the shares prices of 19 declined.

At the sector level, the Industrial index increased by 2.77 per cent, the Services index increased by 1.03 per cent and the Financial index decreased by 0.05 per cent.

The top five gainers were, the Irbid District Electricity by 7.49 per cent, The Arab Potash by 7.47 per cent, Alentkaeya For Investment&realestate Development Company Plc by 4.88 per cent, Zara Investement Holding by 4.65 per cent and Comprehensive Multiple Transportations Co. by 4.49 per cent.

The top five losers were, Afaq Holding For Investment & Real Estate Development Co. P.l.c by 4.92 per cent, Tuhama For Financial Investments by 4.49 per cent, Contempro For Housing Projects by 3.85 per cent, First Jordan Investment Company Plc by 3.57 per cent and High Performance Real Estate Investments by 3.45 per cent.



SPORTS AT A GLANCE

MARTIAL ARTS

Jordan bids to host 2025 Asian youth and U21 karate championships

AMMAN (JT) — Jordan has officially submitted a bid to host the 2026 Asian Cadet, Junior, and U21 Karate Championships, the Jordan Karate Federation announced on Thursday. The bid was presented by Federation President Hassan Masoud during the Asian Karate Federation's General Assembly, held in Uzbekistan on the sidelines of the ongoing Asian Senior Championships, which kick off on Friday with participation from Jordan's national team, according to the Jordan News Agency, Petra. Jordan faces competition from Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan, who have also submitted hosting bids. The final decision on the host country will be determined through a vote by the General Assembly members at a later date.

CRICKET

England openers share unbeaten century stand in lone Zimbabwe Test

NOTTINGHAM, United Kingdom (AFP) — Ben Duckett and Zak Crawley both made fifties as they launched England's home season with an unbeaten century opening stand in a one-off four-day Test against Zimbabwe in Nottingham on Thursday. Zimbabwe captain Craig Ervine, in his side's first Test in England in 22 years, won the toss in overcast conditions and decided to bowl in the hope his four-man pace attack could make the most of the cloud cover above Trent Bridge, a ground renowned for aiding swing and seam bowlers. But despite the grey skies and a green-tinged pitch, England reached lunch on the first day of four in a strong position at 130 without loss from 26 overs. Left-hander Duckett, on his Nottinghamshire home ground, was 75 not out and Crawley, who had a woeful average of under nine during England's preceding Test series in New Zealand, 53 not out. Ervine's decision to field was all the more understandable given Zimbabwe had suffered a 138-run thrashing at the hands of a youthful County Select XI in their lone warm-up match last week.

Tottenham clinch Europa League title with narrow win over Man United

By Osama Alkafri



AFP photo

Tottenham players celebrate with the Europa League trophy after their win at San Mames Stadium

AMMAN — Tottenham Hotspur were crowned UEFA Europa League champions after a narrow 1-0 victory over Manchester United at San Mames Stadium in Spain Wednesday night.

Brennan Johnson scored the decisive goal in the 42nd minute, sealing Spurs' third Europa League title in their history and securing their place in next season's UEFA Champions League.

The match began cautiously, with both teams hesitant to take early risks.

Manchester United had the first notable opportunity through Amad Diallo, whose close-range effort narrowly missed the left post.

The Red Devils dominated possession in the first half, controlling the tempo of the game with 65 per cent of the ball.

However, despite their control, it was Tottenham who found the breakthrough.

In the 42nd minute, Johnson capitalised on a chaotic scramble in the six-yard box, slotting home the only goal of the night from Spurs' first major chance.

The second half followed a similar pattern, with United pushing for an equaliser and Tottenham defending in numbers.

Rasmus Hojlund came close to levelling the score with a powerful header, only for Van De Ven to clear it off the line in a dramatic moment.

Van De Ven acrobatics save the day and proved to be a decisive moment of the match.

United manager Ruben Amorim brought on Garnacho, Zirkzee and Dalot in a final attempt to turn the tide, but Ange Postecoglou's men held firm. Goalkeeper Guglielmo Vicario preserved the clean sheet with a crucial stop from Luke Shaw's header in a stoppage time.

Cristian Romero, who was instrumental in Tottenham's resolute defensive performance, was named man of the match.

This win marks a historic milestone for manager Postecoglou, who becomes the first Australian coach to win a European competition.

Speaking after the match, the Tottenham coach said: "We haven't tasted victory in this competition for far too long.

I'm immensely proud of the players and thrilled for our fans. It's an honour to be part of this club's journey."

Manchester United, meanwhile, end the season empty-handed, having failed to secure a spot in European competition. Amorim reflected on the result with disappointment: "I truly feel for our supporters.

We played with ambition and were the better team throughout.

It's heartbreaking that the result didn't reflect our performance, and I share this disappointment with our fans."

Online or on stage, C.African comics try to break through

By Harmony Pondy Nyaga and Marietou Ba
Agence France-Presse



AFP photo

Gervais Symphorien Kpignonin (centre), a member of the Bangui Parrots, performs during their comedy sketch at the Missy Momo cultural centre as part of an event marking the beginning of the cultural season in Bangui, on March 2

BANGUI, Central African Republic — Under a mango tree in a residential area of Bangui, the filming of "Problem Booth" is under way, a series of skits imagined by Lemuel Luther-King Godonam and a few fellow comedians.

Filming, then uploading the videos to build a following is an uphill struggle in the Central African Republic (CAR), a war-scarred country that is one of the world's poorest and where Internet penetration is just 15.5 per cent.

But Godonam, a 19-year-old high school student, is undeterred. As "Luther LG" he leads the troupe, playing the harassed owner of a shop dealing with problem customers and the girl selling peanuts next door.

He just wants to make a name for himself.

"It's a new thing for us," he said, explaining the lack of scripts and dialogue, and the use of a simple sign as scenery.

"You can count comedians here on the fingers of one hand," he added.

'People need this'

A few curious locals stopped to see how it was all done.

"I thought they just did this on the phone but there's real effort behind it," said 21-year-old student Kharl Malibangar, marvelling at the booms, mics and cameras.

"I want to encourage them, like their channels, subscribe and give them likes," he added.

"Humour helps a lot of people.

We've been through war and people need this to escape and relax."

Godonam said he wants to take comedy from the CAR "to another level" and win fame outside the country.

That is why the young performers, aged between 19 and 24, speak in French rather than Sango, one of the country's official languages.

"It's not just Central Africans who follow me," said Godonam, who dreams of being as popular as Cameroonians, Ivorians or Beninese on YouTube, TikTok or Instagram.

"Foreigners also need to understand what's being said, so I have to do it in French."

Posting the videos online however is a challenge.

"There isn't good internet connection here, which stops me from posting on certain networks," said one of the other comedians, Jessie Pavelle.

"It stops me from getting noticed."

Sometimes, the 2,000 CFA francs ($3.40) that 19-year-old Pavelle puts on her phone as credit is used up even before her video is online.

Such problems mean they cannot rely on an online presence alone.

Professionalise

But the Central African capital is sorely lacking in the kind of comedy venues or events that Ivory Coast, a launchpad for comedians, enjoys.

Niger's Mamane, whose "very, very democratic Republic of Gondwana" mocks dictatorial tendencies in Africa, has run the "Abidjan: Capital of laughter" festival for the last 10 years.

Ivory Coast's economic capital also boasts filming locations, where production companies create comedy shows, bars where stand-up nights are held regularly — and even, in recent years, comedy schools.

"Ivory Coast is the country of comedy," Mamane told AFP as he recorded his "Parliament of Laughter" show, broadcast on French channel Canal+.

"You've just got to arrive at the airport in Abidjan and get off the plane... the Ivorian sense of humour is everywhere, it's become legendary and spread across west Africa and all of central Africa."

Mamane said he could have spent his career in France.

But he wanted to come back to help develop professional comedy in Africa.

Next generation

The Central African Republic is not quite there yet, said Gervais Symphorien Kpignon, from the famous Bangui Parrots troupe.

Comedy spots are often limited to official political ceremonies or events organised by NGOs where the aim is to "raise awareness, sensitise and educate the population" through humour, he said.

That's a far cry from the new wave, which is focused on more lightweight topics such as romantic relationships.

To bridge a gap and ensure the future of Central African comedy, Yvon Cyrille Gone — also known as Dr Mandjeke — created the "Bangui Laughs" festival seven years ago.

He also trains a new generation of young Central African comedians.

"The young people who are coming up are good but they don't have enough experience so I decided to give them a hand," he said.

That night, he added Jessie Pavelle's name at the last minute to perform alongside more experienced comedians.

It was only her second time in front of an audience.

The white plastic chairs at the Missy-Momo cultural space in Bangui were all taken and the audience burst out laughing when she joked about big guys being generous and skinny ones being stingy.

"I really want to become the best-known Central African comedian in the world," she said after finishing her set.

Oasis fans could spend £1bn on UK concerts — study

LONDON (AFP) — Oasis fans attending the band's upcoming UK reunion concerts could spend more than £1 billion ($1.3 billion) combined on tickets and outgoings such as transportation and accommodation, Barclays bank estimated on Wednesday.

The study found each fan would spend an average of around £766 to attend one of the British rock group's 17 sold-out UK concerts this summer.

The total outlay, which Barclays estimates to be nearly £1.06 billion, also takes into account purchases of new outfits, merchandise, food and drink.

"The experience economy is no longer a trend, it's a fundamental shift in how consumers determine their financial priorities," said Rich Robinson, the British bank's head of hospitality and leisure.

A chaotic scramble for the prized tickets followed the announcement in August that brothers Noel and Liam Gallagher had ended their infamous 15-year feud and were reuniting for a worldwide tour.

Oasis — whose hits include "Wonderwall", "Don't Look Back In Anger" and "Champagne Supernova" — kick off the reunion tour on July 4 in Cardiff before playing in their home city, Manchester, the following week.

Almost 1.4 million people combined are expected to attend the UK concerts.

Other venues include Buenos Aires, Chicago, London, Sydney, Tokyo and Toronto.

British bank Lloyds last month reported that fans had collectively lost more than £2 million from UK ticket scams, mostly on Facebook.

> 'The experience economy is no longer a trend, it's a fundamental shift in how consumers determine their financial priorities'

Britain's competition watchdog has meanwhile said Oasis fans may have been tricked into buying "platinum" seats that offered no additional advantage during the much-criticised ticket sale.

The Competition and Markets Authority launched an investigation into agent Ticketmaster following widespread public anger over the exorbitant cost of some tickets.

Ticketmaster sold more than 900,000 tickets for the gigs.