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Palestinians walk near the Dome of the Rock Mosque at the Al Aqsa Mosque compound in Jerusalem on Wednesday

Israel aims to bring 'permanent demographic change' to West Bank, Gaza — UN

GENEVA (AFP) — Israel's actions in the occupied West Bank and the Gaza Strip seem aimed at creating "permanent demographic change", UN rights chief Volker Turk said on Thursday.

"Taken together, Israel's actions appear aimed at making a permanent demographic change in Gaza and the West Bank, raising concerns about ethnic

cleansing", Turk said in a speech before the UN's Human Rights Council in Geneva.

Turk pointed in particular to an ongoing, year-long Israeli military operation in the West Bank's north that has caused the displacement of 32,000 Palestinians.

Elsewhere in the West Bank, entire Bedouin herder communities have been displaced by increasing harassment

and violence from Israeli settlers, including near Mikhmas to the east of Ramallah, and Ras Ein Al Auja, in the Jordan Valley, since the start of the year.

In addition to roughly 3 million Palestinians, more than 500,000 Israelis live in settlements and outposts in the West Bank, which are considered illegal under international law.

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ESCWA projects 2.8% Jordan growth, lower inflation

AMMAN (JT) — Jordan is projected to achieve economic growth of 2.8 per cent this year, with the same rate expected in 2027, according to a report issued by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA).

The report also forecasts a decline in inflation in the Kingdom, from 2.4 per cent this year to 1.8 per cent in 2027, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.

ESCWA expects Jordanian exports to maintain an upward trajectory, rising from 3.8 per cent last year to 4.8 per cent this year and 6.5 per cent in 2027. The projected performance places Jordan ahead of several middle-income countries, including Tunisia, Egypt, Algeria, Iraq and Palestine, based on the commission's classification.

Published under the title Macroeconomic Outlook for the Arab Region, the report says the Arab region is witnessing a gradual economic recovery despite mounting challenges, with regional



File photo

growth projected to increase from 2.9 per cent in 2025 to 3.7 per cent this year.

ESCWA noted that economic trends continue to be shaped by heightened global uncertainty, driven

by geopolitical tensions and tightening financial conditions, factors that may weigh on efforts to

achieve sustainable and inclusive growth.

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Civilian death toll in Sudan war more than doubled in 2025, UN says

GENEVA (AFP) — Killings of civilians in Sudan's war more than doubled in 2025 compared with the previous year, the United Nations rights chief said on Thursday, warning that thousands more dead are unidentified or remain missing.

Since April 2023, Sudan has been engulfed in a conflict between the army and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) that has killed tens of thousands, displaced 11 million people and triggered one of the world's worst humanitarian crises.

"This war is ugly. It's bloody and it's senseless," Volker Turk told the UN Human Rights Council, blaming both warring sides, which have so far rejected any form of humanitarian truce. He also blamed foreign sponsors funding what he called a "high-tech" conflict.

"In 2025, my office's documentation points to an over two-and-a-half times increase in killings of civilians com-



AFP photo

A displaced Sudanese woman who left El Fasher after its fall with others, walks amid the remains of a fire that broke out at a camp in Tawila on February 11

pared with the previous year. Many thousands are still missing or unidentified," Turk said.

There have been no official figures on the overall death toll in the

conflict.

Turk condemned what he called the "heinous and ruthless" brutalities committed, including sexual violence, summary executions and ar-

bitrary detentions.

He highlighted "carnage" inflicted by the RSF during an attack on the Zamzam displacement camp in April, and again in October in El

Fasher, which was the army's last foothold in western Darfur.

Sexual violence, including rape, gang rape, sexual torture and slavery, has also surged, Turk said, with more than 500 victims documented in 2025. "The bodies of Sudanese women and girls have been weaponised to terrorise communities."

He added that he is "extremely worried these crimes may be repeated".

'Madness'

Since the fall of El Fasher, the fighting has moved deeper into neighbouring Kordofan where drone strikes have killed dozens at a time.

Since January, escalating drone attacks in the southern Kordofan region and beyond have "killed or injured nearly 600 civilians", Turk said, including in attacks on humanitarian aid convoys.

Continued on page 5

Lebanon reports teenager killed as Israel army says struck Hizbollah compounds

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (AFP) — Israeli military strikes in eastern Lebanon killed a Syrian teenager on Thursday, the Lebanese health ministry reported, while the Israeli army said it had struck eight compounds belonging to an elite Hizbollah unit.

"Israeli enemy air strikes on the Bekaa this evening resulted, according to an initial toll, in the killing of a 16-year-old Syrian boy and the injury of another person," the Lebanese health ministry said in a statement.

The Israeli military said it struck eight compounds belonging to the Radwan Force, an elite fighting unit of Hizbollah.

"Earlier today, the [Israeli military] struck eight military compounds belonging to Hizbollah's Radwan Force in the Baalbek area of Lebanon," the military said in a

statement.

It said the compounds were being utilised to prepare and plan for attacks against its troops and Israeli civilians.

'Within the compounds, numerous weapons were stored, including firearms and rockets belonging to Hizbollah'

"Within the compounds, numerous weapons were stored, including firearms and rockets belonging to Hizbollah," it said.

"The terrorists' activities at these compounds and Hizbollah's attempts to rearm

constitute a violation of the ceasefire understandings between Israel and Lebanon, and pose a threat to Israel."

Lebanon state media reported several strikes on mountainous areas in the country's east, mainly in the outskirts of the city of Hermel.

Hizbollah and Israel agreed to a ceasefire in November 2024 after a year of war, but Israel has continued to strike it on a near-daily basis, saying it is enforcing ceasefire provisions against the group rearming.

Last week, an Israeli strike killed eight members of Hizbollah, an official from the group said, adding the attack hit a meeting the militants were holding far from Israel's border.

Hizbollah and the Lebanese government have protested the attacks as ceasefire violations.

US, Ukraine conclude talks in Geneva as Russia says 'no deadlines' to end war

GENEVA (AFP) — US and Ukrainian officials concluded talks in Geneva on Thursday to discuss advancing efforts to end Russia's four-year invasion of Ukraine, just as Moscow signalled it was in no hurry to sign a deal.

An AFP reporter saw the US delegation leaving Geneva's Hotel des Bergues, the venue of the talks, and the Swiss agency ATS-Keystone published a photo of the Ukrainian lead negotiator, Rustem Umerov,

leaving the hotel.

US leader Donald Trump is pushing for an end to Europe's deadliest conflict since World War II, but has so far failed to broker any deal between Moscow and Kyiv.

Previous rounds of US-led negotiations between Russian and Ukrainian officials in Geneva and Abu Dhabi have failed to yield a compromise, including on the key sticking point of territory.

Russia, which has signalled it will not budge

on its demands for full control of Ukraine's eastern Donetsk region, said on Thursday it was too early to forecast when a deal would take place.

"Have you heard anything from us about deadlines? We have no deadlines, we have tasks. We are getting them done," Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov told state media.

Kyiv says the only way of breaking the deadlock is a leaders' meeting between Vladimir Putin

and Volodymyr Zelensky, and that it aims to lay the ground for such a summit during talks on Thursday.

"Today in Geneva we continue our work within the framework of the negotiation process. A bilateral meeting with the American delegation has begun — with Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner," Ukrainian negotiator Umerov said earlier.

Ukraine aims to "synchronise positions" with the US ahead of fresh trilateral talks in March, he

added.

Russian negotiator Kirill Dmitriev was present at the talks venue in Geneva on Thursday, though there was no indication he met with the Ukrainian side, according to Russian state media.

Dmitriev declined to comment when he was met by the press after leaving the negotiations, according to a video circulated in pro-Kremlin outlets.

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AFP photo

Cars drive along the street in a residential area in central Kyiv on February 19



File photo

The Jordan Hashemite Charity Organisation continues to implement its humanitarian initiatives under the food security programme, as part of its Ramadan 2026 campaign

JHCO continues to implement humanitarian initiatives under food security programme

AMMAN (JT) — The Jordan Hashemite Charity Organisation (JHCO) continues to implement its humanitarian initiatives under the food security programme as part of its Ramadan 2026 campaign.

The campaign aims at boosting the social protection system and supporting the most vulnerable families during the holy month, Al Mamlaka TV reported.

The initiative comes in response to current living challenges, aiming to help secure basic needs for beneficiary families during the holy month of Ramadan and to enhance their stability amid prevailing economic conditions.

The JHCO reaffirmed its commitment to carrying out its humanitarian programmes in accordance with field plans based on needs assessments, ensuring that assistance reaches eligible beneficiar-

ies efficiently and in a timely manner.

JHCO launched its annual Ramadan campaign, "Ramadan Belkheir Ghair", for 2026 on Sunday as part of its ongoing humanitarian efforts.

The campaign aims to distribute food parcels across the Kingdom to underprivileged families...

The initiative reflects the values of solidarity and community support that define the holy month and will be carried out through two parallel tracks, one across the

Kingdom and the other aimed at supporting Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.

The campaign aims to distribute food parcels across the Kingdom to underprivileged families and refugee households in various governorates, easing living pressures and ensuring that aid reaches the most vulnerable during the holy month through a structured system that guarantees fairness and upholds human dignity.

In the Gaza Strip, the campaign forms part of an intensified humanitarian response during Ramadan, carrying out a comprehensive set of relief measures that includes the distribution of food parcels, provision of tents and clothing, and the supply of drinking water, as well as providing hot meals amid the challenging humanitarian conditions, aiming to meet the essential needs of affected families.

Cold conditions forecast to prevail in Kingdom until Sunday — JMD

AMMAN (JT) — Cold conditions are forecast to prevail across most regions on Friday, with relatively mild weather expected in the Jordan Valley, the Dead Sea and Aqaba.

The Jordan Meteorological Department (JMD) said that low-altitude clouds will develop, with light showers likely during the morning hours in limited parts of the central and southwestern areas, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.

In the early hours, precipitation over the high southern mountain peaks may occasionally fall as freezing rain. Winds will be northwesterly, moderate and active at times.

Cold weather will persist on Saturday in most areas, while conditions remain mild in the Jordan Valley, the Dead Sea



File photo

Cold conditions are forecast to prevail across most regions on Friday, with relatively mild weather expected in the Jordan Valley, the Dead Sea and Aqaba

and Aqaba, with clouds at various altitudes and moderate northwesterly to northeasterly winds.

A slight rise in tem-

peratures is forecast for Sunday, though it will remain cold in most regions and mild in the Jordan Valley, the Dead Sea

and Aqaba. Winds will be moderate northeasterly, shifting to northwesterly in the evening.

Temperatures in Am-

man on Friday are expected to range between 11°C and 2°C, compared with 22°C to 9°C in Aqaba.

Environment Ministry signs MoU to promote waste sorting, recycling

AMMAN (JT) — The Ministry of Environment on Thursday signed a memorandum of understanding with the Waste Recycling Cooperative Association as part of the executive programme for the cleanliness strategy and anti-indiscriminate waste disposal.

This step aims to enhance the ecosystem for managing non-hazardous solid waste and establish principles of the circular economy, as a means of supporting sustainable development in the Kingdom, the Jordan News Agency,

Petra, reported.

The MoU which was signed by Minister of Environment Ayman Suleiman and Association Chairman Hussein Abu Jabal, in the presence of Ministry Secretary-General Omar Arabiyat, and a number of officials and stakeholders from both sides.

Under the MoU, the two sides will expand cooperation and coordination in raising ecological awareness and promoting a culture of source-based waste sorting practices and recycling activities.

This process would

contribute to cutting amount of waste sent to landfills, preserve natural resources, and achieve "optimal" use of recyclable materials within the framework of the circular economy that is based on reintroducing resources into the production cycle.

During the signing ceremony, Suleiman said that this step reflects the ministry's commitment to enhancing its partnership with civil society organisations and the cooperative sector, noting that the transition to a circular economy is a "national priority."

Suleiman noted that this vision contributes to creating "quality" job opportunities, promoting innovation in the waste management sector, and increasing resource efficiency.

He added that the ministry will provide the necessary technical and awareness support and oversee the implementation of joint programmes, in line with goals of the National Cleanliness and Anti-Indiscriminate Waste Dumping Strategy.

In turn, Abu Jabal expressed his pride in cooperating with the

ministry, voicing its commitment to distributing waste sorting containers (for paper, cardboard, plastic, and metal) to schools, institutions, and various sectors in coordination with the ministry departments.

He also stressed the association's commitment to monitoring collection, transportation, and recycling processes, based on "organised and sustainable" mechanisms, as well as providing the ministry with periodic reports on recycled quantities and future development plans.

Labour Ministry launches satellite branch in Maan's Husseinia District

AMMAN (JT) — The Ministry of Labour on Thursday signed an agreement to establish and operate a new satellite branch in Husseinia District, Maan Governorate, to manufacture workwear and traditional Arab garments, creating 100 jobs for local men and women in its first phase.

According to a ministry statement, the opening of the new branch brings the total number of satellite branches across the Kingdom to 37, collectively providing employment for around 10,000 Jordanians.

The agreement was signed by Labour Minister Khaled Bakkar and the company general manager Mohammad Adwan, in the



Ministry of Labour photo

The Ministry of Labour on Thursday signs an agreement to establish and operate a new satellite branch in Husseinia District, Maan, to manufacture workwear and traditional Arab garments

presence of senior ministry officials.

Bakkar said that the satellite branches initiative, launched in 2008 under a Royal directive, is implemented by the ministry to localise development in rural ar-

reas, Badia regions and camps across the governorates, and to provide young Jordanians with job opportunities close to their homes.

He noted that operational support is provided to investors

through the Vocational and Technical Skills Development Fund, covering 50 per cent of the minimum wage per employee, JD25 for transportation and JD25 per month towards Social Security contributions.

The minister stressed that the private sector remains the key partner in expanding the initiative, with the government working to empower businesses to generate further employment opportunities for Jordanian youth.

Adwan commended the ministry's role in enabling the private sector to create jobs in districts across the Kingdom, noting that recruitment at the factory will take place in three phases, with 100 employees to be hired initially.

Since the beginning of 2026, the ministry has signed three agreements to establish satellite branches in Ma'raq, Maan and another in Irbid, all under the Royal satellite branches initiative.

بنك الدواء الخيري الأردني Jordanian Charity Medicine Bank



Medicine bank to provide secure medicine storage boxes

AMMAN (JT) — Chairman of the Board of the Jordanian Charity Medicine Bank Ashraf Kilani said on Thursday that the bank will implement a project to provide secure medicine storage boxes.

In remarks to Al Mamlaka TV, Kilani highlighted the importance of supplying safe storage boxes to help reduce medication waste in households and ensure drugs are preserved for the longest possible period while maintaining

required quality and safety standards.

He added that the bank will continue organising free medical days, in addition to holding the third edition of a conference showcasing the story of the Charity Medicine Bank since its establishment.

Commenting on His Majesty King Abdullah's recent meeting with national humanitarian initiative leaders, Kilani said that Royal support serves as a strong incentive to continue the

bank's humanitarian mission.

The bank is a Jordanian non-profit health institution established under the Societies Law No. 51 of 2008 and its amendments, operating under the umbrella of the Ministry of Health.

It follows the model of charitable medicine banks in many countries worldwide and across the Arab region, providing free medications to patients in need who are unable to afford their treatment.

Scholar highlights research gaps, tourism potential of Gadara

By Saeb Rawashdeh

AMMAN — Talking at a conference about ancient Gadara (Umm Qais), which was recently organised by the Department of Antiquity of Jordan and the German Protestant Institute of Archaeology, Professor Patric-Alexander Kreuz from the University of Kiel said that for a long time, the focus was on the monumental buildings; only in recent years have residential quarters been investigated.

"The topographical plan still shows large white areas where it is not known to what

extent and in which phases they were actually settled," Kreuz said, adding that there are also gaps in the understanding of urban development.

"What happened after the Hasmonean conquest, and what was the scope of Pompey's reconstruction measures?" Kreuz asked.

In addition to these questions about the early years of the city, there are also many uncertainties about its downfall: did the heavy earthquake of 749 AD really lead to the city's decline, or are the existing gaps a result of the current state of

research?

As a member of the Decapolis, Gadara achieved great prosperity through trade. In Augustan times, it was already famous for the productivity of its agricultural goods, Kreuz continued, adding that during that period Gadara gave its own intellectuals.

"With the recent town twinning of Umm Qays with Herculaneum in Italy, a connection is rightly being made between this cosmopolitan city in Transjordan and the central Mediterranean world," Kreuz highlighted, noting that the Epicurean Philo-

demos was born in Gadara around 110 BC.

He later moved first to Athens, where he studied, and then to Herculaneum near Pompeii, where he became something of a celebrity in his time, and where he died around 40-35 BC.

"Many of his manuscripts were found in the Villa dei Papiri," the professor said.

Other famous figures came from Gadara, including the poet Meleagros, who called his homeland the "Attica in the land of the Assyrians".

"The town twinning with Herculaneum is an excellent way to high-



Photo courtesy of ACOR

The statue of Tyche in Gadara while Professor Thomas Weber-Karyotakis stands by

light Gadara's great past as a Greek-Roman city and make the place, which has long been a

bit of a Sleeping Beauty, more appealing to visitors. And so, there have been increasing efforts

lately to develop Gadara more and more for tourism," Kreuz underlined. According to Kreuz,

Kreuz said.



Minister of Health Ibrahim Badour, accompanied by Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex, Meghan Markle, Duchess of Sussex and Director General of the World Health Organisation Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, on Thursday tour the National Centre for Rehabilitation of Addicts in Shafa Badran

Health minister, Prince Harry, WHO chief tour addiction rehab centre in Amman

AMMAN (JT) — Minister of Health Ibrahim Badour, accompanied by Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex, Meghan Markle, Duchess of Sussex and Director General of the World Health Organisation (WHO) Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, on Thursday toured the National Centre for Rehabilitation of Addicts in Shafa Badran.

Badour said that mental health and addiction treatment have become national priorities in Jordan, reflecting the state's growing recognition that mental well-being is a cornerstone of public health, social stability and sustainable development, according to a Health Ministry statement.

Badour noted the ministry has adopted a comprehensive national framework focusing on prevention, expanding treatment services and integrating physical, psychological and social care within a unified system to enhance responsiveness to patients' needs and improve service quality.

He stressed that community-based services have been

strengthened, with 73 mental health clinics currently operating across the Kingdom's governorates, contributing to improved access and greater equity in mental healthcare delivery.

The minister added that one of the ministry's key achievements in addiction treatment has been the establishment of a new inpatient rehabilitation facility with support from the WHO.

He pointed out that the National Centre for Mental Health provides short-term residential care and outpatient services, including medically supervised detoxification, psychological support and social counselling.

On Wednesday, Ghebreyesus, accompanied by Prince Harry and Meghan, visited the Speciality Hospital in Amman, where they were briefed on the conditions of a number of children from Gaza recently evacuated to Jordan for treatment.

The delegation listened to testimonies from the children and their companions about the health challenges they faced over

the past two years amid limited medical resources due to the blockade and ongoing hostilities in the Gaza Strip, which led to delays in receiving life-saving treatment.

Cases included severe war injuries, blood disorders and other critical and complex conditions requiring specialised medical interventions. The hospital's medical team outlined the comprehensive treatment pathway provided to patients, from their reception at the Jordanian border, through multidisciplinary treatment plans, to the stabilisation of their physical and psychological conditions.

CEO of the Speciality Hospital Fawzi Hammouri said the efforts align with Royal directives to launch the "Jordanian Medical Corridor" initiative to treat 2,000 children from Gaza, stressing that the hospital is dedicating all its medical and human resources to this humanitarian mission.

He praised cooperation with the World Health Organisation, the Jordan Armed Forces-Arab Army, the

Ministry of Health and the crisis cell in coordinating medical evacuations from Gaza to Jordan.

For his part, Ghebreyesus expressed deep appreciation for Jordan's role, under the leadership of His Majesty King Abdullah, in hosting refugees and treating patients from Gaza, as well as for the pivotal role played by Jordanian field hospitals in the enclave.

He commended the advanced level of medical care provided to the children, the professionalism of medical, nursing and administrative staff, and the holistic approach that takes into account humanitarian and psychological aspects alongside clinical treatment.

Prince Harry and Meghan also expressed their deep sympathy for the children and their families, offering messages of hope and encouragement, and reaffirming their continued support for humanitarian and medical efforts aimed at improving the lives of children affected by the health crisis in Gaza.

Gov't launches 'Aoun' to regulate, digitise charitable donations

AMMAN (JT) — The Ministry of Social Development, in partnership with the Ministry of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship, on Thursday launched the official website of the "Aoun" platform.

The launch ceremony was attended by Minister of Social Development Wafa Bani Mustafa, Minister of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship Sami Smeirat, and several officials from both ministries, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.

Bani Mustafa said that the "Aoun" platform represents a significant step towards the governance of aid provided to social service beneficiaries. She noted that the electronic portal will provide data on associations authorised to collect donations, including their objectives, programmes and details regarding the underprivileged groups they serve.

The minister said that the platform, developed in collaboration with the Ministry of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship, allows for direct donations and electronic payments by Jordanian donors through



The Ministry of Social Development, in partnership with the Ministry of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship, on Thursday launches the official website of the 'Aoun' platform

the "Sanad" application without any deductions. This mechanism ensures that support reaches target groups effectively, she said, noting that the platform currently features data for 34 licensed charitable associations.

Bani Mustafa added that the initiative aligns with the ministry's ongoing efforts to ensure the optimal allocation of resources and further the digital transformation of social services.

For his part, Smeirat stressed that the "Aoun" national donation platform con-

stitutes a qualitative leap in the Kingdom's digital transformation journey. He noted that the project embodies government directives to harness technology for community service and bolster social solidarity.

Smeirat described the platform as a "reliable national digital channel" that organises the donation process and links donors with licensed charitable institutions across the Kingdom's governorates, ensuring efficiency and transparency.

The minister further underlined that his

ministry is committed to providing a secure and reliable technical infrastructure that enables individuals and companies to donate easily via digital payment methods, adding that the platform allows for the electronic tracking of the impact of donations within a clear governance framework that enhances trust and accountability.

Smeirat expressed pride that the platform was developed entirely through a donation from a Jordanian startup, highlighting it as a model for genuine public-private partnership.

Jordan expresses solidarity with Brazil over flood victims

AMMAN (JT) — The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates on Thursday expressed its deepest condolences and sympathy to the government and people of Brazil over the victims of floods and landslides triggered by heavy rainfall in the south-eastern state of Minas Gerais.

Ministry Spokesperson Ambassador Fouad Majali affirmed the Kingdom's full solidarity with the Brazilian government and people. Majali extended his



heartfelt condolences to the families of the victims, wishing the in-

jured a speedy recovery and expressing hope for the safety of those re-

ported missing, according to a Foreign Ministry statement.

CRIME

Cassation Court upholds over 3-year sentence for drug dealer

By Rana Hussein

AMMAN — The Court of Cassation has upheld a March 2023 State Security Court (SSC) ruling, sentencing a drug dealer to over three years in prison after convicting him of selling illegal narcotics to an undercover agent in February 2022.

The court declared the defendant guilty of obtaining illegal narcotics with the intent of selling the drugs to an undercover agent on February 15.

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 at 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 a small stash of Hashish in return for JD10," court documents said.

The lawyer argued that his client possessed the illegal narcotics for his personal use

When the two met, the defendant realised that he was dealing with an undercover AND agent, court papers added.

He started to run away and threw an item while escaping, the court stated.

"The defendant was immediately arrested and investiga-

tors determined that the thrown item was a small stash of hashish," according to court documents.

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

The lawyer argued that his client possessed the illegal narcotics for his personal use.

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 were Yassin Abdullat, Nayef Samarat, Mohammad Khashashneh, Gassem Dughmi and Hammad Ghzawi.

All parties required to amend bylaws under governance standards — IEC

AMMAN (JT) — Secretary-General of the Parties Registry at the Independent Election Commission (IEC) Ahmad Abu Zaid said on Thursday that all political parties were required to amend their bylaws in line with governance standards issued under the Political Parties Law.

Speaking to Al Mamlaka, Abu Zaid said the IEC began corresponding with parties in June last year, noting that compliance varied in timing and degree.

The process, he added, is now nearing completion. Of the six parties that had not finalised the required amendments, four have since complied, while the Labour Party and the Islamic Action Front (IAF) have yet to complete the revisions.

Abu Zaid stressed that the observations differed from one party to another, noting that the IAF failed to address all of the Commission's remarks despite being granted an additional one-week extension to finalise amendments to its bylaws.

Regarding the Labour Party, Abu Zaid said it formally accepted some amendments but rejected others that were



The Independent Election Commission says on Thursday that all political parties were required to amend their bylaws in line with the Political Parties Law

requested under standards applied equally to all political parties, noting that several observations concerned provisions regulating internal party courts and disciplinary powers.

According to Abu Zaid, the party's draft bylaws granted the general secretariat and the secretary-general authority to impose penalties, including warnings, suspensions and recommendations for dismissal, independently of the party court, the body tasked with adjudicating internal disputes.

Such arrangements, he said, contradict principles of good governance, which require an inde-

pendent party court empowered to review disciplinary decisions.

He also cited concerns over the delegation of powers from the general secretariat to a non-elected executive office, as well as provisions allowing financial bonuses to be granted to the secretary-general from party funds in certain cases, which he said contravenes Article 25(a) of the Political Parties Law.

Addressing the Islamic Action Front, Abu Zaid rejected claims that the violation concerned only the party's name. He clarified that the name constituted just one of several issues raised under Articles 5(a)

and 5(b) of the law, adding that the Commission has repeatedly clarified its legal interpretation of those provisions. Other observations, he said, related to the mechanism for forming and electing party courts. "Governance standards require that the general conference elect party courts, the highest authority within a party, to ensure their independence and shield them from influence by any appointing or dissolving body.

He also pointed to discrepancies in draft provisions governing the liquidation of party assets in cases of voluntary or court-ordered dissolution. While one draft stipulated that remaining funds would be transferred to charitable associations, Article 7(k) of the law requires that such funds revert to the political parties' fund within the state treasury.

Additional remarks concerned the formation of the executive office. "The regulations mandate that all organisational structures be elected, whereas the draft granted the secretary-general full authority to appoint members of the executive office, which serves as the par-

ty's executive leadership and primary decision-making body." Abu Zaid said that, to date, no amended bylaws have been submitted by either the Labour Party or the Islamic Action Front.

He also said that the IEC's Board of Commissioners recently convened and formally deemed the two parties in violation of the law, despite the extensions and official notifications previously issued. The decision was based on Article 33 of the Political Parties Law, which requires parties to rectify violations within 60 days of notification.

He noted that this legal timeframe constitutes an additional opportunity for compliance, similar to the process followed with other parties to ensure alignment with institutional governance standards and constitutional provisions. Abu Zaid also emphasised that the Commission remains open to dialogue with any political party seeking clarification regarding the required amendments. However, he stressed that the IEC is legally obligated to enforce the law fairly and equally across all parties.

Danish PM calls general election for March 24

COPENHAGEN (AFP) — Denmark's Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen said on Thursday that she had scheduled this year's general election for March 24, against a backdrop of tensions with both the United States and Russia.

The vote comes at a time when Denmark's relationship with the United States — which Copenhagen considers its closest ally — has been strained over US President Donald Trump's desire to acquire Greenland.

"Dear Danes, today I have asked His Majesty the King to call an election for the Folketing," Denmark's parliament, Frederiksen told the house.

"Whether I will continue to be your prime minister depends on how strong a mandate you give the Social Democrats in the parliamentary election to be held on March 24, 2026," she added.

Under the Danish system, Frederiksen had to call an election within four years of the



Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen (centre) hands out red roses in Copenhagen, on Thursday

AFP photo

last, which was held on November 1, 2022.

Frederiksen took the opportunity to present the outlines of her election platform, which included a reform of

the retirement age and the introduction of a wealth tax.

She also stressed that Denmark must continue to rearm and help protect Europe from

Russia, as Europe grapples with the new geopolitical realities in the wake of Trump's return to the White House.

"Security policy is and will remain the

very foundation of Danish politics for many, many years to come," Frederiksen said.

Copenhagen is among Ukraine's most ardent military and civilian

backers.

The Nordic country would also need to face "threats from the west and the risk of terror from the south", Frederiksen said.

"We must stand united in Europe," she insisted.

Over the next four years, Denmark will also have to "stand on our own feet", she declared, adding that relations with Washington would have to be redefined.

Tense US relations

Denmark and Greenland are currently holding talks with the United States about the future of Greenland, an autonomous Arctic territory which Trump has argued is crucial for US "national security".

Earlier threats he made to seize the island, by force if necessary, have ebbed since he struck a "framework" deal with NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte to ensure greater US influence.

Copenhagen has nev-

ertheless insisted that only Greenland and Denmark can make decisions on the island's fate.

In the wake of the dispute, NATO launched a mission, dubbed Arctic Sentry, to strengthen its presence in the Arctic.

"Even though there is now an election campaign in Denmark, the world out there is not waiting for us. Its unrest continues unabated and, as everyone knows, for example the dispute over Greenland is not over yet," Frederiksen said.

Frederiksen, who hails from a long-standing Social Democratic family, became Denmark's youngest-ever head of government when she was elected in 2019, aged 41.

The daughter of a typesetter and a child-care assistant won reelection in 2022 by forming a coalition government across the aisle with centre-right parties.

While Frederiksen's popularity has been

boosted by the recent diplomatic tensions over Greenland, her Social Democrats suffered setbacks in both the European and local elections last year.

The party lost nearly half of the municipalities under its control, including the capital, Copenhagen, ending more than a century of Social Democrat rule.

According to a poll published last week by broadcaster TV2, 21 per cent of voters intended to vote for the Social Democrats.

While the party would remain Denmark's largest if true, that would represent a 6.5 per cent drop on its 2022 general election haul.

Foreign Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen, who leads government coalition partner the Moderates, told reporters that "if it were up to us, we would have waited a bit" on calling the election.

"We had not planned for there to be elections, but now there are, and of course we are ready," he said.

Kazakhstan to hold March 15 referendum on new Constitution

AMMAN (JT) — Kazakhstan will hold a nationwide referendum on March 15 on a new Constitution that would significantly reshape the country's political system and governance structure.

President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev signed a decree on February 11 calling the vote, formally launching what officials describe as a comprehensive constitutional transformation. More than 12.4 million citizens are eligible to participate.

The campaign period runs for 32 days and will conclude at midnight on March 14, which has been declared a day of silence.

Campaigning is permitted through media platforms and public assemblies in accordance with national legislation, while anonymous materials and violations on referendum day are subject to fines.

If approved, the new Constitution will enter into force on July 1. The current Parliament will continue to function until that date. Within one month of adoption, the president must announce elections for a newly established representative body known as the Kurultai, which must be held within two months.

The draft text consists of 96 articles and reflects what authorities call a transition from targeted amendments to a full constitutional reset. It



was prepared over six months and incorporates proposals submitted by citizens and experts through digital government platforms.

A Constitutional Commission comprising 130 members representing different regions and sectors led the drafting process, with meetings broadcast publicly.

The reform follows President Tokayev's proposal last September to move away from a super-presidential model and rebalance the political system.

Under the draft, the existing bicameral legislature would be replaced by a unicameral Parliament, the Kurultai, composed of 145 deputies elected under a proportional system.

Parliamentary oversight powers would be expanded, including the authority to issue a vote of no confidence in the government and to review ministerial appointments.

The draft also es-

establishes the constitutional position of vice president, appointed by the President with parliamentary consent, and defines a clear line of succession.

Beyond institutional restructuring, the proposed Constitution strengthens rule-of-law guarantees.

It reinforces fair trial safeguards, affirms the presumption of innocence, prohibits retroactive laws that increase liability and recognises the Human Rights Commissioner as constitutionally independent.

Human rights and freedoms are declared in the preamble as the highest priority of the state. The text also reaffirms sovereignty, territorial integrity and the secular nature of Kazakhstan.

The March 15 referendum will determine whether the country embarks on this new constitutional framework and a broader political transition set to begin in July.

Cuba vows to counter 'terrorist' attacks after clashing with US-based boat

HAVANA (AFP) — Cuba vowed on Thursday to defend against "terrorist and mercenary" attacks after reporting it had killed four gunmen on a US-registered boat — a bloody incident that added to deepening tensions between Havana and Washington.

President Miguel Diaz-Canel denounced Wednesday's incident as an attempted "infiltration" and said "Cuba will defend itself with determination and firmness against any terrorist and mercenary aggression against its sovereignty and national stability."

Cuban authorities said their forces responded after coming under fire from a Florida-registered speedboat just off the communist island's north coast.

Four of the alleged assailants were killed and six wounded, the interior ministry said. All aboard were Cubans living in the United States, according to the ministry.

The survivors were detained and are accused of intending to "carry out an infiltration for the purposes of terrorism", the ministry said, reporting that assault rifles, handguns, Molotov cocktails and other military-style gear were seized.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said Washington had noth-



Cuban coast guard ships docked at the port of Havana on Wednesday

AFP photo

ing to do with the clash and would "respond accordingly" after investigating.

The attorney general of Florida, which lies about 160 kilometre from Cuba across the Florida Straits, also ordered an investigation into the killings.

The Cuban interior ministry has released what it says are the names of seven of the people on the boat and said most of the 10 aboard had records in Cuba for "criminal and violent activity".

Another man sent from the United States to take part in this operation was arrested on Cuban soil and confessed, it added.

The Cuban government frequently reports incursions by speedboats from the United States into its territorial waters but deadly clashes are rarer.

Incursion incidents are often related to people-smuggling to the United States or drug trafficking, and have included chases, shootouts and armed attacks on border guards.

Venezuelan oil

The latest clash comes as Cuba is reeling from US economic pressure.

Cuba's communist government lost one of its key diplomatic supporters — and a vital

source of fuel for the country — in January when US forces toppled Venezuelan leader Nicolas Maduro, effectively taking control of Venezuelan oil exports.

The country had relied on Venezuela for about half of its fuel needs.

Amid an outcry from Caribbean leaders, worried that starving 9.6 million Cubans of oil would cause the economy to collapse, the Trump administration said it would allow limited shipments of Venezuelan oil for "commercial and humanitarian use".

The announcement came during a summit of Caribbean nations

attended by Rubio, a Cuban-American who has spent his career calling for the downfall of Havana's communist leadership.

The US Treasury Department said the Venezuelan oil would need to go through private businesses and not the Cuban government or the military apparatus that controls much of the island's economy.

Mexico on Tuesday dispatched two military vessels carrying nearly 2,200 tonnes of aid to the island — its second aid shipment in under a month.

Canada also announced Can\$8 million (\$5.8 million) in aid on Wednesday.

MIGRATIONS

Asylum seeker claims in UK drop slightly in 2025

LONDON (AFP) — The number of people claiming asylum in the UK in 2025 fell slightly compared to the previous record year, government figures showed on Thursday, despite small boat arrivals jumping 13 per cent.

The interior ministry data showed 100,625 people applied for asylum in Britain last year, down 4 per cent on 2024, but still more than double pre-pandemic levels.

Just over half — 52 per cent — had arrived in the UK through ille-

gal entry routes, typically on small boats bound for the shores of southeast England from France.

The cross-Channel journeys have become politically toxic in Britain, helping to fuel the rise of eurosceptic Nigel Farage's anti-immigration Reform UK Party, which has led in the polls for the last year.

The latest such arrivals were photographed being brought ashore on Wednesday by Border Force, in a visible reminder that Prime

Minister Keir Starmer's government has failed to stop the crossings.

Eritreans accounted for nearly 20 per cent of those arriving via small boats in 2025...

Interior ministry figures confirmed Thursday that 605 migrants

had been intercepted the previous day, the largest number in a 24-hour period so far this year.

French authorities also said they had rescued 119 people attempting the crossing.

The new annual statistics showed 41,472 people arrived on small boats last year, compared to 36,816 in 2024, a 13 per cent rise despite Starmer taking power in July that year vowing to "smash the gangs" facilitating the journeys.

However, arrival numbers are below the 2022 record figure of 45,774.

'Bearing down'

Meanwhile, the number of asylum seekers being housed temporarily in UK hotels dropped to 30,657, its lowest level for 18 months.

The issue of so-called "asylum hotels" has triggered widespread protests and Starmer's government has pledged to end their use by the end of this parliament in 2029.

However, some of the alternatives, including the use of former army barracks, have themselves triggered controversy and opposition in local areas.

Eritreans accounted for nearly 20 per cent of those arriving via small boats in 2025, with the other most common nationalities being Afghans with 12 per cent and Iranians and Sudanese, both on 11 per cent.

The data also showed that the backlog of people waiting for an initial

decision on their asylum application at the end of 2025 dropped sharply to its lowest level in more than five years.

Some 64,426 people were waiting for an initial decision on an asylum application, down nearly half from a year earlier and well below the peak of 175,457 at the end of June 2023.

The interior ministry said the government is "bearing down" on the asylum backlog but "must go further".

"The number of peo-

ple crossing the Channel is too high, and too many hotels remain in use," the spokesperson added.

"That is why the home secretary is introducing sweeping reforms to tackle the pull factors drawing illegal migrants to Britain," the spokesperson said, referring to Interior Minister Shabana Mahmood.

The ministry also noted the government is "ramping up removals of those with no right to be here".

Mother of Greek train tragedy victim takes on politicians in bid for 'justice'

THESSALONIKI, Greece (AFP) — Three years after Greece's deadliest-ever train crash, the mother of one of the tragedy's 57 victims told AFP she hopes her new political party will force the country's governing elite to accept responsibility.

Maria Karystianou has emerged as a figurehead for the families campaigning for justice for their loved ones killed in the February 2023 train crash in Tempe, central Greece. The disaster sparked immense anger across the Mediterranean nation.

Like many Greeks, the 53-year-old paediatrician has accused the government of Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis of an attempted cover-up. She launched her party to combat the "corruption and cronyism" many see as omnipresent in Greek political life.

"There is absolutely no chance that the situation in Greece will improve if citizens do not enter parliament to put in place the necessary changes," she said.

Along with tens of thousands of other protesters, Karystianou will take to the streets again on Saturday for the third anniversary of the tragedy, in which she lost her teenage



Students chant slogans during a rally two days before the third anniversary of Tempi railway collision in February 2023, in Athens on Thursday

AFP photo

daughter. More than 300,000 people rallied to mark last year's anniversary, one of the biggest demonstrations the country has seen since the financial crisis. "For three years,

we have been out on the streets, not just to organise protests, but also to file countless legal appeals to obtain justice for our loved ones," she told AFP in her apartment in the northern city of

Thessaloniki. "Unfortunately, everywhere we go we have ended up running into brick walls."

'Closing ranks'

Most of those killed in

the crash on February 28, 2023, were young students aboard a passenger locomotive carrying some 350 people from Athens to Thessaloniki that hit a freight train in the dead of the night.

Karystianou's 19-year-old daughter, Marthi, was returning home from carnival when she died in the crash.

The two trains were allowed to run on the same track for more

than 10 minutes without triggering any alarm, laying bare the parlous state of the Greek railway network's security fail-safes, despite European Union grants for their modernisation.

While Mitsotakis blamed the collision on "fatal human errors", the prime minister also admitted to "chronic failures of the state".

Nearly 40 people will go on trial over the tragedy on March 23, including railway executives and the station master on duty that night. They risk prison sentences of up to 20 years.

Yet, not a single politician will be in the dock, despite the chorus of criticism of Mitsotakis's conservative government over its disastrous handling of the accident.

The victims' families have also protested that valuable clues were lost when the crash site was bulldozed soon after the accident. That incident led to allegations the government was literally trying to bury the evidence.

"We know how things work in Greece," Karystianou insisted, taking aim at "collusion" in a "system of closing ranks... that often works against citizens while protecting politicians".

'Hushed up'

"Besides the pain of losing our loved ones, we have this feeling of being scorned, looked down on," she said, worrying that "that this crime, like many others, will be hushed up".

In early January, Karystianou — whose approval ratings far outstrip Mitsotakis's — made waves with the announcement that she was forming a political party.

Even after sparking a heated debate by wading into the hot-button issue of the right to abortion, one opinion poll suggests more than 30 per cent of Greeks could vote for Karystianou's new movement, just behind Mitsotakis's ruling conservatives.

This, despite the fact that Karystianou has yet to reveal what the new party might be called.

"The cornerstone is the establishment of the rule of law," said Karystianou, nicknamed "The Mother of Tempi" by the Greek press.

A devout woman who is also mother to a son, Karystianou insists that she has made the fight for the truth her life's "mission".

"I have to see this through to the very end because I swore to my child that I would," she said.

ESCWA projects 2.8% Jordan growth, lower inflation

Continued from page 1

Regional inflation is expected to ease from 8.2 per cent last year to 5.4 per cent by 2027, supported by declining commodity prices and the normalisation of supply chains, while overall exports across the Arab region are also forecast to expand, aided by stronger non-oil trade, according to the report.

High-income Arab economies are projected to record GDP growth of 4.2 per cent in 2026, up from 3.3 per cent last year, reflecting the impact of economic diversification efforts.

Growth in middle-income Arab countries is expected to rise from 2.8 per cent last year to 3.3 per cent this year, with gradual improvement anticipated despite continued debt and inflation pressures.

ESCWA added that low-income countries are facing persistent fiscal and humanitarian strains, with only limited recovery projected following a contraction of 0.9 per cent in 2025.

Highlighting the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, the report estimated reconstruction costs at nearly \$70 billion amid widespread destruction

affecting approximately 78 per cent of buildings.

ESCWA calls on Arab states to continue economic diversification, reduce reliance on hydrocarbons, strengthen investment in human capital and technology, enhance public financial management, and align aid and investment flows with national priorities, particularly in conflict-affected countries.

ESCWA is one of five regional commissions of the United Nations, working to support inclusive and sustainable development across the Arab region while promoting regional integration.

Tunisia court blocks closure of factory blamed for pollution

TUNIS (AFP) — A Tunisian court on Thursday rejected demands to suspend operations at a fertiliser factory, a lawyer told AFP, after thousands of protesters blamed the plant for a rise in health problems.

The facility in the city of Gabes emits sulphur gases, nitrogen and fluorine, according to an audit last July for the African Development Bank, which reported "major non-compliance" on air and marine pollution.

Mounir Adouni, head of the Gabes bar association that launched the legal action, said Thursday's decision was an emergency rul-

ing and a final verdict was pending.

"The court ruled that there was no sufficient proof of harm, saying allegations of pollution lacked technical and scientific evidence," Adouni said.

A major Tunisian civil rights group condemned the ruling, calling it a "serious setback in the treatment of the country's biggest environmental pollution case".

"The argument that there is no evidence of harm can only be seen as a blatant disregard of established and documented facts," the Tunisian Forum for Social and Economic Rights added.

It said the pollution was not an allegation but "confirmed by official reports".

Locals in Gabes have for years rallied against the phosphate-processing factory, which makes fertilisers mainly for export.

The bar association lodged its complaint after thousands protested against the plant in October, blaming it for an increase in health problems in the local community.

This month local campaign group Stop Pollution said 12 of its members had been sentenced to a year in prison over a 2020 protest at the plant.

Adouni said the bar

will file an appeal on Friday because no date had been set for a hearing on a final ruling.

'The argument that there is no evidence of harm can only be seen as a blatant disregard of established and documented facts'

Despite a 2017 promise to gradually shut

the plant down, authorities last year said they were ramping up production.

Taking advantage of rising prices for fertiliser on global markets, Tunisia now wants its output to increase more than fourfold by 2030.

The African Development Bank last month said it would provide Tunisia with \$110 million to "support the environmental upgrading and rehabilitation" of the factory.

President Kais Saied has long vowed to revive Tunisia's phosphate sector, hindered by years of underinvestment and unrest, calling it a "pillar of the national economy".

Israel aims to bring 'permanent demographic change' to West Bank, Gaza — UN

Continued from page 1

Israel has approved a series of initiatives this month backed by far-right ministers, including launching a process to register land in the West Bank as "state property" and allowing Israelis to purchase land there directly, in a move condemned by several countries as well as Hamas.

Israel's current government has accelerated

settlement expansion, approving a record 54 settlements in 2025, according to Israeli settlement watchdog NGO Peace Now.

Israel has occupied the West Bank since 1967.

'Maximum land, minimum Arabs'

In the Gaza Strip, most of the territory's 2.2 million inhabitants have been displaced at least

once since the start of the war sparked by Hamas' unprecedented surprise attack against Israel on October 7, 2023.

"Intensified attacks, the methodical destruction of entire neighbourhoods and the denial of humanitarian assistance appeared to aim at a permanent demographic shift in Gaza," the UN human rights office said in a report last week.

Israeli far-right Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich also vowed to encourage "emigration" from the Palestinian territories in February.

"We will finally, formally and in practical terms nullify the cursed Oslo Accords and embark on a path toward sovereignty, while encouraging emigration from both Gaza and Judea and Samaria," he said, using the Biblical

term for the West Bank.

"There is no other long-term solution," added Smotrich, who himself lives in a settlement in the West Bank.

"They want maximum land and minimum Arabs," Fathi Nimer, a researcher with Palestinian think tank Al Shabaka, told AFP, referring to a commonly used phrase used to describe Israeli settlement tactics.

Civilian death toll in Sudan war more than doubled in 2025, UN says

Continued from page 1

The UN's resident and humanitarian coordinator for Sudan, Denise Brown, said on Thursday that access to the cities of Kadugli and Dilling in South Kordofan — long cut off by an RSF siege until the army recently lifted it — had been effectively impossible.

"We were not able to get supplies in. We had to remove our staff for their own safety," she said, after stepping off the first UN flight to Khartoum since the war began on Thursday.

Famine was declared last November in the North Darfur capital El Fasher and in Kadugli, the capital of South Kordofan, according to a UN-backed assessment. The same assessment said Dilling in South Kordofan is also likely facing famine conditions.

Turk said both the army and the RSF continued to use "explosive weapons in densely populated areas, often without warning — showing utter disre-

gard for human life".

Turk highlighted the "increased use of advanced long-range drones", which has "expanded harm to civilians in areas far from the front lines that were previously peaceful".

The United Arab Emirates has been accused of arming the RSF — allegations it denies. Egypt, Iran, Turkey and Saudi Arabia have backed army chief Abdel Fattah Al Burhan.

Turk urged "diplomatic and political pressure" to push the parties towards a humanitarian truce that leads to a permanent ceasefire.

Efforts to secure a ceasefire have repeatedly collapsed.

Burhan vowed this week to fight "until the end" and said he plans to build a "smart army" investing in technology and research.

In January, a government source told AFP the army was studying a new ceasefire proposal from the United States and Saudi Arabia.

Talks mediated by the Quad — the US, UAE, Saudi Arabia and Egypt — have stalled for months, with Burhan accusing mediators of favouring the UAE.

US, Ukraine conclude talks in Geneva as Russia says 'no deadlines' to end war

Continued from page 1

Hours before the meeting, Russian forces launched some 420 drones and 39 missiles at Ukraine, wounding more than two dozen people in at least six different regions, according to authorities.

AFP journalists heard several explosions in central Kyiv shortly after authorities warned Russia had launched its attack. The strikes hit an

electricity substation in the southern Odesa region, as well as a school building in the southern Zaporizhzhia region, according to officials.

"Destruction has been recorded in eight regions, with many private homes and apartment buildings damaged," Zelensky said.

Also ahead of the meeting, Russia announced that it had returned the bodies of 1,000 killed Ukrainian soldiers to Ukraine, while Moscow

received 35 Russian bodies in exchange.

The two sides regularly exchange the remains of killed servicemen, one of the few areas of cooperation between the warring countries.

Zelensky spoke with Trump on Wednesday ahead of the talks, with US envoys Witkoff and Kushner part of the 30-minute call.

"We expect this meeting [in Geneva] to create an opportunity to move

talks to the leaders' level. President Trump supports this sequence of steps," Zelensky said.

After first refusing to negotiate with Russia, Zelensky has repeatedly said that the only way of resolving difficult issues, including territory, is through a meeting with Putin.

Talks between Moscow and Kyiv remain deadlocked over the fate of the Donbas — the industrial region in east-

ern Ukraine that has been the epicentre of the fighting.

Russia is pushing for full control of Ukraine's eastern Donetsk region, and has threatened to take it by force if Kyiv does not cave at the negotiating table.

But Ukraine has rejected the demand and signalled it would not sign a deal without security guarantees that deter Russia from invading again.

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About the
3-day weekend

A debate erupted last week between proponents and opponents of extending the weekend to three days. This article examines the advantages and disadvantages of this proposal.

Historically, the weekend vacation evolved in stages. Regular days off were absent in agrarian societies. In Europe, Sunday was a day of religious rest, while in Islamic countries, Friday was a day of congregational prayer, not necessarily a day of rest.

In the 19th century, with the Industrial Revolution, the idea of a six-day work week emerged, and labor unions began to advocate for reduced working hours. This culminated in Britain adopting a half-day Saturday and a full-day Sunday as its weekend.

At the beginning of the 20th century, in 1908, some factories adopted Saturday and Sunday as working days in response to the wishes of Jewish and Christian workers. This was followed by the passage of the American Labour Act of 1938, which established a 40-hour work week and mandated a two-day weekend. After World War II, the two-day weekend became the global standard.

Countries have chosen different days of the week for the two-day weekend, for economic and social reasons (such as protecting workers' health and increasing productivity, boosting consumer spending through increased shopping and entertainment, promoting domestic tourism, and strengthening family and social bonds).

Consequently, in Europe, the United States, East Asia and most of the rest of the world the weekend is Saturday and Sunday. The Friday-Saturday weekend is often the preferred model in Islamic countries like Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain and Jordan. There are also hybrid models, such as in the UAE, where the weekend is half-day on Friday and the full weekend (Saturday and Sunday).

Moreover, there are recent global experiments with adopting a three-day weekend, especially since economic research and studies by the International Labour Organisation indicate that reducing working hours increases productivity and reduces absenteeism and stress. Iceland reduced working hours without cutting wages, and productivity did not decline; in some cases, it even improved, and employee well-being was enhanced. In 2022, the UK conducted a national trial of a three-day weekend, and 92 per cent of companies continued to implement it after the trial, which resulted in reduced burnout and increased job satisfaction. In Japan, Microsoft adopted this practice, resulting in a 40 per cent increase in productivity, along with a decrease in energy consumption and production costs. Pilot projects are underway in countries like Spain and Belgium. Ultimately, most experiments implementing a four-day workweek maintain the number of working hours and focus on increasing efficiency.

Regarding the number of working days per year, Jordan's is lower than in some developed countries. Germany has 230 working days annually, Japan 245, and the United States 249. The actual number of working days per year for the private sector in Jordan is approximately 240-250, after deducting weekends, annual leave (14-21 days), and official and religious holidays, which are not counted as part of annual leave. The actual number of working days may be as low as 235 due to unforeseen official holidays. Therefore, the economic cost of any increase in holidays must be carefully considered.

The economic cost of a three-day weekend can be calculated by dividing the GDP by the number of daily working hours and subtracting potential productivity gains, increased tourism and spending, and savings in operating costs.

The benefits of a three-day weekend include increased productivity (reduced fatigue and improved performance, increased focus during workdays), a boost to the local economy (increased domestic tourism, increased spending on entertainment and restaurants), reduced unemployment (distributing work among a larger workforce, increasing part-time jobs), improved mental and social well-being (reduced burnout, improved work-life balance), and lower operating costs (reduced energy and transportation consumption).

On the other hand, the disadvantages of a three-day weekend include a decrease in total working hours (if productivity is not increased), a negative impact on service sectors (e.g., banks, government agencies, international trade), a loss of competitiveness if competing countries are working harder and producing more, and potential difficulties in implementation in the industrial sector.

In conclusion, Jordan operates within the global average for working days, and a three-day holiday may raise welfare and productivity, but it also carries economic risks. Therefore, the benefits and drawbacks of such a trend, which stems from the desire to improve the citizens' welfare, must be calculated.

The writer is a former minister of State for Government Affairs.



**ECONOMIC
REVIEW**

Yusuf Mansur

The Hashemite roadmap: From diplomatic initiative to sustainable development

By Hassan Da'jah

In the realm of contemporary international politics, the diplomatic initiatives of His Majesty King Abdullah, coupled with the dynamic and youthful vision of His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hussein, stand out as a solid model of strategic diplomacy aimed at safeguarding Jordan's supreme national interests and consolidating stability in a region rife with turmoil. Anyone observing the recent intensive royal activity will realise that Jordan is playing a proactive and leading role, seeking to redefine regional balances, based on historical legitimacy and broad international acceptance. This was clearly demonstrated in the series of meetings and summits hosted by Amman with leaders from various continents and political orientations, from Indonesia in the east to Germany and Albania in the west. The Crown Prince's accompaniment of His Majesty the King on these tours not only reflects the continuity of the Hashemite approach but also infuses Jordan's "soft power" with digital and youthful dynamism. This enhances the Kingdom's ability to engage with global powers in contemporary terms and transforms Amman into a hub for decision-makers seeking to build cross-border partnerships that ensure sustainable security and peace in a volatile region.

Based on a deep-rooted Hashemite historical legacy and a high level of international trust, Jordan has successfully positioned Amman as a destination for decision-makers from across the globe. From the rising economic power of Indonesia in the east to the industrial and political weight of Germany and Albania in the west, Jordan is weaving the threads of strategic cross-border partnerships. These partnerships aim to build robust regional balances that safeguard national sovereignty, open up broad horizons for quality investment, and establish a unique model of "positive engagement"

with the international community.

This ensures the sustainability of security and peace in a volatile region, while consistently emphasising that Jordan's stability is the cornerstone of the stability of the entire region. The high-level talks with Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto at Basman Palace marked a strategic turning point in Jordan's diversification of international partnerships.

His Majesty is leading an international moral and legal front to confront Israel's systematic expansionism, which aims to undermine the two-state solution by consolidating its control over the West Bank

The move towards a rising economic power like Indonesia reflects an awareness of the need to build transcultural alliances that transcend traditional models. The two leaders focused on elevating the relationship, which spans more than 75 years, and developing it in promising sectors such as business, investment, energy, science and technology, health, and defence cooperation. This shared economic and secu-

urity vision was not divorced from regional concerns, as the Indonesian President warned of the dangers of escalation in the West Bank and its impact on efforts to restore stability in Gaza. He affirmed his country's support for implementing the ceasefire agreement and establishing an independent Palestinian state, based on the outcomes of His Majesty King Abdullah II's visit to Indonesia last November.

This eastward orientation is complemented by the deepening of ties with Europe, exemplified by the visit of German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier and the First Lady to the Kingdom. Germany represents a key strategic partner for Jordan in the fields of development and diplomacy. His Majesty King Abdullah's talks with Albanian President Bajram Begaj at Al Husseinia Palace further solidified Jordan's position as a hub for security and political coordination. His Majesty commended the outcomes of the Aqaba Meetings, held in partnership with Albania, emphasising that these gatherings represent an opportunity to further strengthen friendship and international cooperation in the face of shared challenges.

From an analytical perspective, these European and Asian visits were not merely protocol-driven political meetings, but rather strategic initiatives aimed at bolstering Jordan's economic security and attracting foreign direct investment. The focus on Indonesia opens doors for Asian capital to invest in vital sectors such as phosphates, fertilisers, and renewable energy, leveraging Jordan's strategic location as a logistics hub and its free trade agreements with the West. Conversely, strengthening ties with Germany and Albania reinforces European investor confidence in the Jordanian business environment, positioning the Kingdom as an island of stability and a secure Launchpad for major projects in technology, digital transformation and green hydrogen. This diversification reduces reliance on traditional sources of funding and gives the national economy

greater flexibility in the face of global fluctuations, transforming political agreements into joint projects that create jobs and support the "vision of economic modernisation".

At the heart of this flurry of diplomatic activity, the Palestinian cause remains the unwavering principle guiding the King's actions. His Majesty is leading an international moral and legal front to confront Israel's systematic expansionism, which aims to undermine the two-state solution by consolidating its control over the West Bank. His Majesty's repeated warnings against the ongoing violations of Islamic and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem, which are under Hashemite custodianship, place the international community before its historical responsibilities, clarifying that disregarding Palestinian rights is a blatant violation of international law and the UN Charter. This role extends to a comprehensive vision for the security of neighbouring countries, where His Majesty emphasises the need to support the efforts of Syria and Lebanon to maintain their security and sovereignty, while stressing the importance of dialogue and diplomacy in reducing tensions related to Iran.

The King's intensive engagement with the leaders of Indonesia, Germany and Albania, with the active participation of His Royal Highness the Crown Prince, is part of a comprehensive strategy aimed at protecting Jordanian sovereignty and safeguarding the interests of the Jordanian people. By diversifying partnerships and adhering to international law, Jordan proves that despite the challenges of the region, it possesses a political and moral weight that makes it a pivotal player that cannot be ignored, stressing that the true strength of countries lies in the clarity of their vision and the ability of their leadership to shape the future in the language of peace and humanitarian cooperation.

Hassan Da'jah — professor of Strategic Studies at Al-Hussein Bin Talal University

Beyond slogans: Making environmental rights measurable reality in Jordan

By Lubna Hanna Ammari

In recent years, the global recognition of the right to a healthy and sustainable environment has gained significant momentum. In 2022, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution affirming that every person is entitled to live in a clean, healthy and sustainable environment a milestone in the evolution of environmental human rights that obliges states to transform commitments into measurable action. This global framework underscores the importance of not only articulating environmental rights but also building the systems and tools to measure and enforce them effectively.

For Jordan, a country grappling with water scarcity, air quality challenges and pressure on natural resources, the journey from rhetoric to measurable reality requires a multifaceted approach. In this context, the Ministry of Environment has placed this issue at the forefront of its strategic priorities, demonstrating a strong and consistent commitment to advancing environmental protection and sustainability. National laws such as the Environmental Protection Law (No. 6 of 2017) and subsequent frameworks establish the legal basis for environmental stewardship and assign responsibility to the Ministry of Environment to protect air, water, soil and biodiversity. These laws mandate scientific monitoring, setting standards for pollutants and requiring environmental impact assessments for development projects, offering a legal foundation for accountability and measurement.

Jordan's institutional architecture includes the Ministry of Environment's strategic plans, such as the 2023-2025 strategy, which sets out objectives for green growth, climate action and improved environmental quality while embed-

ding monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to track progress. The strategy reflects an understanding that environmental protection must be anchored in measurable indicators and systematic review rather than aspirational plans alone.

Despite these legal and strategic frameworks, the real test lies in implementation. Reports on environmental performance in Jordan reveal mixed results: Strides in governance structures and local environmental initiatives coexist with persistent challenges such as low renewable energy uptake and resource inefficiencies. According to recent assessments, while Jordan ranks relatively high in local environmental governance, its performance in material productivity and renewable energy consumption signals a gap between policy frameworks and on-the-ground outcomes, highlighting the need for measurable and transparent evaluation tools.

To make environmental rights a measurable reality, Jordan must invest in robust data systems that capture environmental conditions in real time and make information available to policymakers, civil society and citizens alike. Here, artificial intelligence (AI) can play a transformative role. The Jordanian Artificial Intelligence Strategy (2023-2027) outlines a comprehensive framework to mainstream AI across public sectors, emphasising data-driven governance, secure data sharing and performance monitoring. By harnessing AI, Jordan can enhance its capacity to analyse complex environmental data, detect emerging threats and improve the precision of policy interventions.

Practical applications of AI are particularly promising in areas such as air quality monitoring and waste management. For example, AI-enabled sensor networks can provide continuous, high-resolution air quality data across urban and rural

areas, allowing authorities and communities to assess pollution trends and enforce regulatory standards more effectively. Similarly, AI algorithms can optimise waste collection routes, predict peak waste generation times and improve recycling efficiency, turning previously anecdotal observations into quantifiable performance metrics.

To make environmental rights a measurable reality, Jordan must invest in robust data systems that capture environmental conditions in real time and make information available to policymakers, civil society and citizens alike

AI can also support water resource management, a critical area for Jordan given its extreme water scarcity. By analysing consumption patterns with machine learning, authorities can detect leaks, forecast demand and allocate water resources more sustainably. Integrating AI in environmental impact assessment models can further enhance the accuracy of predictions about how new

infrastructure or industrial projects will affect ecosystems, biodiversity and human health, enabling policy decisions grounded in data rather than assumption.

However, integrating AI into environmental governance is not without challenges. Technical capacity, infrastructure investment, ethical concerns around data privacy and clear legal frameworks for AI deployment are essential prerequisites for success. Policymakers must ensure that AI systems are transparent, inclusive, and aligned with national priorities, so that they empower stakeholders rather than entrench inequalities.

Civil society organisations also have a vital role to play in this transformation. Entities such as Jordan's National Center for Environmental Justice work to strengthen environmental rule of law and promote evidence-based advocacy, serving as watchdogs that bridge the gap between policy commitments and community realities. Collaboration between government, academia, industry and civil society can harness AI's potential in ways that are accountable and aligned with the public interest.

Turning environmental rights from slogans into measurable reality in Jordan demands a cultural shift towards transparency, innovation and data-driven governance. It calls for a commitment to invest in technologies, build institutional capabilities and empower citizens with access to reliable information. By embedding AI into environmental monitoring and decision-making, Jordan can not only measure its progress more effectively but also create a model of sustainable governance where environmental rights are respected, enforced and experienced in everyday life.

The author is a specialist in educational technology

BUSINESS

Friday-Saturday, February 27-28, 2026



Innovative Startups and SMEs Fund takes part in the Investors Summit organised by the Middle East Venture Capital Association at Abu Dhabi Global Market

ISSF Calls for 'smarter' sovereign capital to catalyse venture investment at MEVCA summit

AMMAN (JT) — The Innovative Startups and SMEs Fund (ISSF) on Thursday, participated in the Investors Summit organised by the Middle East Venture Capital Association (MEVCA) at the Abu Dhabi Global Market (ADGM), according to an ISSF statement.

ISSF CEO Mohammed Muhtaseb highlighted the pivotal role of sovereign funds as primary engines for the innovation economy and effective catalysts for entrepreneurship ecosystems, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.

Addressing the summit, a premier annual gathering for funds and investors in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, Muhtaseb noted that amidst rapid global and regional economic shifts, it is essential to redefine the roles of sovereign funds through "smarter capi-

tal engineering". He argued that these funds should evolve beyond traditional investment tools governed by a "grant-based" mentality, transforming instead into enablers for the entrepreneurship and innovation economy in Jordan and the wider region, driven by feasibility and sustainability.

He affirmed that investment yield and economic development are complementary objectives, rather than conflicting ones, within the fund's policy

Muhtaseb presented a vision to shift sovereign investment funds from symbolic invest-

ing to becoming a "driving and catalytic force" capable of mobilising venture capital through profitable, sustainable investments that circulate within the economy over the long term.

He stressed that the objective is not merely to inject capital or increase the number of beneficiary companies regardless of economic viability, but to build an integrated investment ecosystem that leads the MENA innovation economy on foundations of financial sustainability.

The CEO further explained that the ISSF's current investment strategy balances achieving financial returns for continuity with maximising economic impact.

He affirmed that investment yield and economic development are complementary objectives, rather than conflicting ones, within the fund's policy.

Hikma posts 7% revenue rise at \$3.349b in 2025

AMMAN (JT) — Hikma Pharmaceuticals on Thursday announced its audited financial results for 2025, reporting a 7 per cent increase in revenues (6 per cent in constant currency) to \$3.349 billion, compared with \$3.127 billion in 2024.

The company said growth was achieved across its three geographic regions, North America, the Middle East and North Africa and Europe, driven by strong performance in its branded medicines and Hikma Rx segments, alongside growth across regions, enabled the group to deliver increases in revenues and profits in

line with expectations while maintaining resilient margins. He added that the company is taking measured steps to address challenges in the injectables segment, expressing confidence



File photo

in the sector's long-term prospects and in the 2026 outlook, which is based on sustained operational momentum and increased investment to support sustainable growth, according to Jordan

News Agency, Petra. Hikma also announced a 5 per cent increase in total dividend distributions and the launch of a share buyback programme of up to \$250 million during 2026, reflect-

ing the strength of its financial position and its ability to generate cash. The company expects group revenues to grow by between 2 per cent and 4 per cent in 2026.

ADC rolls out upgrade package at Aqaba Airport

AMMAN (JT) — The Aqaba Development Corporation (ADC) is implementing a package of upgrades at Aqaba's King Hussein International Airport to enhance passenger comfort and streamline arrival and departure procedures in line with growing air traffic.

The works include infrastructure and service-system upgrades, improved facilitation measures, and architectural enhancements to the terminal's exterior and interior to support Aqaba's positioning as a regional

tourism hub, according to a statement.

The ADC is updating external facades and site landscaping, developing entrances and canopies, and upgrading lighting systems to improve operational efficiency and the airport's overall appearance.

The project also includes an external service facility to support airport operations, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.

Operational systems are being modernised through the introduction of SITA check-in

and upgraded baggage sorting and handling, aimed at accelerating processing and improving service reliability.

Safety and security capabilities are also being strengthened by supporting the fire-fighting and rapid-response fleet and establishing dedicated accommodation for security personnel.

ADC CEO Hussein Safadi said the airport upgrades are part of a broader development program across Aqaba's key sectors, adding that the airport shapes

first impressions for visitors and investors.

He noted the initiative is designed to raise infrastructure efficiency and service quality in step with Aqaba's tourism and investment growth, while ensuring a smooth and secure travel experience.

The upgrades are expected to improve operational readiness and service levels, particularly as charter, low-cost, and seasonal flights expand Aqaba's connectivity with European and global markets, he added.

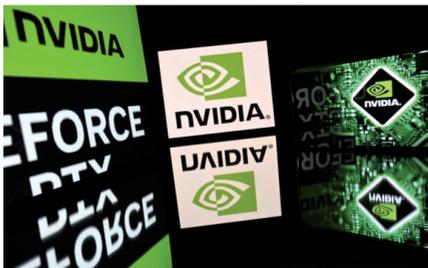
The ADC and the airport's management have also launched the "Here To Help" guidance service, staffed by trained local residents who support travellers through procedures, provide information on available services, share tourism guidance on Aqaba and nearby destinations, and offer support for older passengers and people with disabilities.

The service also provides access to tourism content via a QR code linked to visitaqaba.com.

Nvidia smashes forecasts with record quarter as AI boom rolls on

SAN FRANCISCO, United States (AFP) — Nvidia on Wednesday reported blockbuster quarterly results that blew past Wall Street expectations, posting record revenue of \$68.1 billion as insatiable demand for its artificial intelligence chips showed no sign of cooling.

The figures — up 73 per cent from a year ago and well above the \$65.7 billion analysts had forecast — sent a powerful signal that the technology build out dominated by Nvidia that underpins the global AI boom remains in full swing.



This illustration photograph shows screens displaying the logo of US chipmaker Nvidia in Toulouse, south-western France, on February 18

Net income for the quarter more than doubled year-on-year to \$42.96 billion, causing a share price bump that

was quickly erased by apparent investor profit taking.

Nvidia designs the graphics processing

units (GPUs) that have become the backbone of the global artificial intelligence boom.

Founded in 1993 by Jensen Huang, who remains CEO, the Santa Clara, California-based company commands a market capitalisation exceeding \$4.7 trillion, making it the world's most valuable publicly traded company.

Combined capital expenditure from the four major AI builders — Google, Amazon, Meta and Microsoft — could approach \$700 billion this year as the tech giants race to stay ahead in the crucial technology.

A large share of that spending land at Nvidia, which remains the dominant supplier of the AI chips and technology used to train and deliver generative AI capability.

Huang said the AI industry had reached a decisive turning point driven by the rise of so-called agentic AI - systems that can take decisions and act autonomously on behalf of humans.

"We have now seen the inflection of agentic AI and the usefulness of agents across the world," he said, adding that enterprises everywhere were seeing "incredible" demand because of it.

'Gone to AI'

He pointed to the rapid adoption of AI coding and productivity tools — including Anthropic's Claude and OpenAI's Codex — as evidence that AI was now delivering tangible returns for both customers and cloud providers.

Speaking to analysts, he warned that the traditional software industry was being fundamentally transformed by this adoption, an argument that has seen shares in enterprise software companies spiral lower in recent sessions on Wall Street.

"What used to be soft-

ware running on computers has now gone into AI," he said, "and that translates directly to growth, and that translates directly to revenues" for companies deploying AI solutions.

The company's data centre division, which sells the high-powered chips used to train and run AI models, was once again the engine of growth.

Revenue from that segment hit a record \$62.3 billion in the quarter, up 75 per cent from a year earlier and up 22 per cent from the prior quarter.

For the full fiscal year ending January 25, 2026,

Nvidia reported revenue of \$215.9 billion, up 65 per cent from the previous year, with data centre revenue reaching \$193.7 billion — a 68 per cent annual gain.

Perhaps more significant for investors was Nvidia's guidance for the current quarter.

The company forecast the current quarter's revenue at \$78 billion, plus or minus 2 per cent — comfortably above the roughly \$72 billion Wall Street had been expecting, and a figure that analysts said would go a long way toward silencing doubts about the durability of AI infrastructure spending.

IMF urges US to work with partners to ease trade restrictions

WASHINGTON, United States (AFP) — The IMF on Wednesday called on the United States to work with trading partners and find ways to mutually ease trade curbs, as it issued a review of the world's biggest economy.

The International Monetary Fund's findings covered the first year of Donald Trump's second presidency, in which he unleashed wide-ranging tariffs on allies and competitors alike as he sought to shrink the US trade deficit and boost domestic manufacturing.

But his on-again, off-again tariffs have roiled supply chains and financial markets.

During the year, the

Trump administration also sought to lower reliance on unauthorised immigrant workers and reduce the federal government's role in the economy, the IMF noted.

But the fund said Wednesday that Washington should work constructively with partners "to address concerns over unfair trade practices and agree on a coordinated reduction in trade restrictions and industrial policy distortions that have negative cross-border effects".

"Where trade and investment measures [including tariffs and export controls] are put in place for national security reasons, such policies should be applied

narrowly," it urged.

IMF Chief Kristalina Georgieva told journalists that the report was prepared before the Supreme Court struck down many of Trump's tariffs last Friday, adding that it would digest this development.

She noted that the fund shares the Trump administration's concern about the size of the US trade and current account deficit.

Georgieva added that the country's current account gap is "too big."

'Stability risk'

The continuing rise in public debt also "remains a major issue" to be attentive to, Geor-

gieva said.

The IMF statement said that "while the risk of sovereign stress in the US is low, the upward path for the public debt-GDP ratio and increasing levels of short-term debt-GDP represent a growing stability risk to the US and global economy".

Overall, the fund projects US GDP growth to come in at 2.6 per cent in 2026, picking up from 2.2 per cent last year.

It also flagged "two-sided risks from tariffs, taxes, and labour market dynamics".

Broadly speaking, the IMF said the US economy "performed well in 2025" in the concluding statement of its "Article IV" consultation.

AMMAN STOCK EXCHANGE

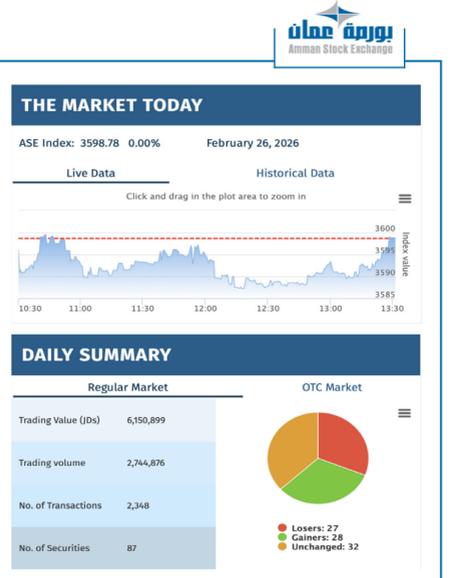
AMMAN (JT) — Amman Stock Exchange (ASE) trading value for Thursday amounted to JD6.2 million spread over 2.7 million shares that traded through 2,348 transactions.

The ASE share price index closed at 3598.78 points, same as the previous closed price

Out of 87 companies whose shares were traded, the share price of 28 companies rose while the share price of another 27 declined.

Topping the list of the companies whose shares gained the most were Union Investment Corporation by 12.50 per cent, Jordan Express Tourist Transport by 5.91 per cent, Real Estate Development by 3.17 per cent, Shareco Brokerage Company by 3.13 per cent and Kafaa for Financial and Economical Investments Plc. by 2.86 per cent.

The companies whose shares dropped the most were Union Tobacco and Cigarette Industries by 10.00 per cent, Mediterranean and Gulf Insurance Company in Jordan Plc. by 9.09 per cent, Jordanian Real Estate Company for Development by 4.23 per cent, Dimensions in Jordan and Emirates Commercial Investments Corporation by 2.99 per cent and Al Manara Islamic Insurance Company by 2.94 per cent.



THE JORDAN TIMES

SPORTS

AT A GLANCE

NBA

Harden fractures thumb in blow to in-form Cavaliers

LOS ANGELES, United States (AFP) — Cleveland Cavaliers guard James Harden fractured his thumb against the New York Knicks and is questionable to play their next game, the team said on Wednesday. The news comes as a blow to the in-form Cavs, who acquired former NBA Most Valuable Player Harden this month and have won six of seven games since. "Cavaliers guard James Harden injured his right thumb in last night's 109-94 win over New York," said a team statement. "A postgame examination by the Cavaliers' medical staff, followed by X-rays taken today, confirmed a non-displaced fracture of the distal phalanx. Harden will undergo treatment and continued evaluation and will be listed as QUESTIONABLE for tonight's game against Milwaukee. An update on his status will be provided as appropriate." The Cavaliers are currently joint-third in the Eastern Conference, and are among the top contenders for this year's NBA title. The 36-year-old has never won a championship despite being one of the most decorated players in the league. "We're working to build something special," said Harden after his new side's most recent win on Tuesday night.

RUGBY

Wallabies skipper Wilson back from injury in clash of heavyweight coaches

BRISBANE, Australia (AFP) — Wallabies skipper Harry Wilson returns from injury to reinforce the Queensland Reds against the Otago Highlanders on Friday in a clash pitting the incoming Australia coach against a top contender to be his All Blacks counterpart. Wilson underwent minor surgery last month after damaging his knee in August when leading Australia to victory over South Africa at Ellis Park. He is one of five Wallabies back in the Reds' matchday 23 for the Brisbane showdown, along with fly-half Carter Gordon, hooker Josh Nasser, scrum-half Kalani Thomas and utility back Filipo Daugunu. "This is our home and we always want to put out a performance worthy of the Queensland jersey," said Reds coach Les Kiss, who will take over from Joe Schmidt as Australia coach in July. "We have been working hard on areas that will be important against the Highlanders. We know how getting all those little moments right do add up in rugby." The Reds crashed 36-12 to the NSW Waratahs a fortnight ago to open their season before a round-two bye.

PARIS, France (AFP) — Vinicius Junior sealed Real Madrid's progress to the Champions League last 16 on Wednesday with the clincher against Benfica as holders Paris Saint-Germain edged out 10-man Ligue 1 rivals Monaco.

Italian giants Juventus almost pulled off a stunning comeback from their 5-2 first leg deficit against Galatasaray, but extra-time goals from Victor Osimhen and Baris Yilmaz gave the Turks a 7-5 aggregate victory, while Lazar Samardzic's injury-time spot-kick put Atalanta through 4-3 on aggregate against Borussia Dortmund.

Vinicius scored the winning goal in a 2-1 victory on the night to secure a 3-1 aggregate success for Real in the play-off tie in Madrid. "Ivini had a great game," Real Madrid coach Alvaro Arbeloa told Movistar.

"Unbalancing them, scoring, creating a lot of danger every time he took them on." A week on from the racism furore in the first leg in Lisbon, Vinicius provided the perfect riposte as the man he accused of racial abuse, Argentine midfielder Gianluca Prestianni sat out the match with a provisional ban imposed by UEFA.

Benfica coach Jose Mourinho was also suspended for the match against his former employers but his side



Galatasaray's Nigerian forward #45 Victor Osimhen scores his team's first goal during the UEFA Champions League, knockout round play-off second leg, football match between Juventus FC and Galatasaray SK at the Allianz stadium in Turin, on Wednesday

briefly gave him hope of a shock result.

Rafa Silva gave Benfica a deserved lead on 14 minutes, but two minutes later, Aurelien Tchouameni levelled things up on the night with a crisp finish from Federico Valverde's cutback.

With strike-partner Kylian Mbappe injured, Vinicius then stole the limelight, breaking clear 11 minutes from time to fire across goalkeeper Anatoly Trubin and into the far corner.

Tchouameni called it "a victory over racism". PSG overcame a first-half scare to beat Mo-

naco 5-4 on aggregate after a 2-2 draw at the Parc des Princes.

"What we've shown this season is our resilience, our ability to solve problems," PSG coach Luis Enrique said of his team.

With Morocco full-back Achraf Hakimi picked to start despite facing trial for alleged rape, PSG made a sluggish opening.

Monaco pulled level on aggregate just before half-time as Maghnes Aklouché finished smartly from Mamadou Coulibaly's clever pass. But Coulibaly picked

up two yellow cards in quick succession early in the second half and almost immediately, Desire Doue teed up Marquinhos to finish from close range.

Six minutes later, Hakimi let fly from distance, Monaco goalkeeper Philipp Koehn parried, and Khvicha Kvaratskhelia slammed home the rebound to all but crush the visitors' hopes before Jordan Teze scored in injury time.

Ten-man Juventus' hopes of pulling off a stunning comeback came up short despite

beating Galatasaray 3-2 after extra time in Turin.

Captain Manuel Locatelli gave Juve a lifeline with a first-half penalty as the Italians dominated.

But their hopes of progressing took a huge blow when English centre-back Lloyd Kelly was harshly dismissed early in the second half after catching Yilmaz with his studs as he jumped for a header.

Federico Gatti turned home right-back Pierre Kalulu's wicked cross and US midfielder Weston McKennie levelled up the tie eight minutes

from time with a back-post header from barely a yard out to force extra time.

But Osimhen and Yilmaz's extra period goals sent the Turks through.

"It almost makes me want to cry for how much we believed. I think we gave our heart, and more," Locatelli told Prime Video.

"The lads delivered an incredible performance, but we threw the qualification away in the first leg," added Gatti.

Serbian midfielder Samardzic's last-gasp penalty earned Atalanta a 4-1 victory on the night at home to Dortmund.

Algerian centre-back Rami Bensebaini gave away the penalty deep into time added on after catching Nikola Krstovic in the face with a high boot.

It earned him a second yellow card on a nightmare evening in which he inadvertently contributed to Atalanta's first two goals as well.

The Italians had wiped out their 2-0 first leg deficit by half-time thanks to goals by striker Gianluca Scamacca and veteran wing-back Davide Zappacosta, both aided by Bensebaini deviations.

Croatian midfielder Mario Pasalic headed home from inside the six-yard box to give the Italians the aggregate lead but Karim Adeyemi's brilliant individual goal had looked set to send the game into extra time.

LIFE

THE JORDAN TIMES

Alexandria bids farewell to historic tram in latest urban upheaval

By Bahira Amin
Agence France-Presse

ALEXANDRIA, Egypt — Along Egypt's Mediterranean coast, the oldest tram in Africa and the Middle East rumbles for a final few weeks before its removal — the latest urban upheaval Alexandrians say is hollowing out their city's identity.

Government plans to replace the colourful streetcars on one of the city's routes with a partially elevated light rail line have angered Alexandrians, for whom the 163-year-old track is "heritage, not just a means of transport", local urban researcher Nahla Saleh told AFP.

Inaugurated in 1863, the tram is one of the world's oldest, and among only a few to operate double-decker cars.

In the 19th and 20th centuries, it helped the city become a bustling metropolis, home to sizable European diasporas and a distinct cosmopolitan culture.

Now, Egyptians young and old have flocked for farewell rides, before the streetcars come to a halt in April.

As one locomotive screeches into the old El Raml Station, commuters and visitors crane their necks out of giant windows at the historic neo-Venetian buildings overhead.

"We're not against progress," psychologist and writer on culture Mona Lamoum told AFP.

She and other Alexandrians agree the tramway needs work: Inside the hand-calligraphed blue exterior, grime covers every surface. Underfoot, the rubber



Commuters step off a tram in the coastal city of Alexandria on February 18

flooring is torn and strewn with trash.

"We just have bad experiences of everything they call 'progress' becoming synonymous with destruction," Lamoum said.

In recent years, development projects in Egypt's second city have razed historic parks and — most egregiously to locals — privatised and obstructed much of its Mediterranean coastline.

Heart of Alexandria

For over 160 years, the tram has cut through Alexandria's heart, in an 11-kilometre stretch that includes many of the city's schools and main universities.

The new project, led by Egyptian and international companies including Systra, Hyundai and Hitachi, promises to double speed and triple capacity.

Over half of it will be elevated — a major concern for Alexandrians who fear the tree-lined

track will be replaced by eyesore concrete stilts.

Ahead of the first phase of suspension, the transport ministry said the new project was the "only solution to the city's traffic problems".

Locals like Saleh and Lamoum disagree, saying government plans are making the city more car-dependent and worsening traffic.

Already, because so many students rely on the tram, the city has staggered school and university hours to pick up the slack of the partial shutdown.

"Traffic's getting worse, people can't get anywhere, when we've already lost the inner-city train," said Saleh, referring to another project under construction for the past two years, the new Alexandria Metro Line.

"Besides, it being slow was always an advantage," she added, making it safe for "the most vulnerable in so-

ciety: Children and the elderly".

Retired science teacher Hisham Abdelwahab, 64, has been riding the tram since he was a child.

"I don't want it to go fast, I like watching the world go by," he told AFP on a station bench.

"Our parents never thought twice about sending us out on the tram alone. Now I have a car. I just like leaving it parked to come ride the tram."

When the next streetcar rolls in, the upper deck fills with a gaggle of schoolgirls, squabbling over who gets the window seat closest to the sea breeze.

The old tram and the sea

"This tram is our heritage," Abdelwahab said, his sentiment shared by those several decades younger.

Engineering student Mahmoud Bassam, 24, has visited Alexandria just to ride the streetcar "since our tram in

Cairo was removed", he told AFP.

With a controversial slew of bridges and widened streets completed in 2020, Cairo's historic Heliopolis neighbourhood lost its last tram tracks, along with many of its trees.

"Now the same is happening here," Basam lamented.

Many Alexandrians are feeling the loss, intermingled with their other most treasured heritage.

"It's like the sea. We used to go for long scenic drives on the corniche, but now we're losing both the sea and the tram," Abdelwahab said.

Parallel to the tramway, much of Alexandria's iconic corniche is now hidden behind overpasses, private businesses and beachside food courts.

By 2024, over half of the city's Mediterranean coastline had disappeared from view, according to a study by the Human and the City for Social Research centre.

Four-lane highways now dominate long stretches of the seaside, where the landmark sight of fishermen perched over the waves grows ever-rarer.

For many, the waterfront that Lebanese singer Fairouz immortalised in 1961 — crooning about "the coast of Alexandria, coast of love" — is no more.

"Now all you see is concrete," said Lamoum.

Saleh calls it "short-sighted" that the city could lose its charm to sprawling concrete.

"Tourists used to love coming to see the tram and sit by the sea, why take away both?"

France appoints new president at Louvre after jewellery heist

By Francesco Fontemaggi
and Jeremy Tordjman
Agence France-Presse

PARIS, France — The president of France's famed Palace of Versailles took over as head of the Louvre following a litany of problems at the world's most-visited museum including a \$100-million jewellery robbery.

Christophe Leribault, who replaced Laurence des Cars, was appointed president of the iconic museum by the Council of Ministers on Wednesday.

Government spokesperson Maud Bregeon said he will "lead major projects for the institution's future" such as security and modernisation. Leribault will also have to "restore a climate of trust", added the culture ministry.

As director of the Louvre, Leribault will be in charge of the vast former royal palace that apart from the hugely embarrassing theft of French crown jewels in October has struggled with a litany of problems including union strikes, a ticket fraud scandal, a water leak and structural, maintenance and security issues.

The museum has been forced to close four times due to strikes since mid-December, costing around 2 million euros in lost revenue.

Leribault, 62, is an art historian and museum director specialising in 18th century art. He has led major Paris institutions, including the Petit Palais, and the Musee d'Orsay, which hosts the largest collection of Impressionist paintings in the world.

On Tuesday, des Cars handed in her resignation to President Emmanuel Macron, which was



French Culture Minister Rachida Dati (left) and Louvre Director Laurence des Cars at the Louvre Museum in Paris, on April 30, 2024

accepted.

Des Cars was appointed as director of the Louvre Museum in 2021, becoming the first woman to lead the iconic institution. She had been under rising pressure since the October robbery, which is currently the subject of an inquiry.

Lawmaker Alexandre Portier, who heads a commission of inquiry, said the Louvre had over the years become a "state within a state" over which the authorities no longer have sufficient control.

Four suspects are in police custody, including the two suspected thieves, but the eight stolen items have not been found.

French daily Le Monde said the departure of des Cars became "inevitable" following the burglary as well as trade union strikes pressing for more recruitment, pay and better maintenance of the museum.

"Since the theft on October 19, 2025, we have been caught up in a media and political storm of unprecedented proportions," she told Le Figaro in an interview.

She said she was proud of the work she had ac-

complished at the Louvre. "But staying the course is not enough," the 59-year-old added. "You also need to be able to move forward. And the conditions for moving forward are no longer in place."

The Louvre, which is home to some of the world's most iconic pieces of art, including Leonardo Da Vinci's "Mona Lisa", receives around nine million visitors a year.

Leribault was appointed president of the Palace of Versailles, one of the most coveted jobs in French culture, in 2024.

Under his leadership, the palace, which was built by Louis XIV in the 17th century, hosted competitions for the 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

The mayor of Versailles said he was sorry to see Leribault go.

"He is arriving in a difficult situation, but he has the qualities to deal with it," said Francois de Mazieres. Separately, Annick Lemoine, who heads the Petit Palais, will take over as director of the Musee d'Orsay, according to the official journal published on Wednesday.