

THE JORDAN TIMES



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King discusses regional developments with Kuwait emir, Kurdistan Region PM

AMMAN (JT) — His Majesty King Abdullah and Kuwait Emir Sheikh Meshal Al Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah, during a phone call on Wednesday, discussed the current developments in the region. The call addressed the need to stop Iran's attacks on Jordan, Kuwait, and other countries in the region, and to utilise dialogue and diplomatic channels

to resolve conflicts, according to a Royal Court statement. His Majesty spoke about his recent tour of Gulf states, emphasising that the security of the Gulf is fundamental to the security and stability of the region and the world. The King warned of the danger of the current developments being exploited to restrict worshippers' access to Al Aqsa Mosque and create new facts on the ground in the West Bank and Gaza. His Majesty and Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Region in Iraq Masrour Barzani, during a phone call on Wednesday, discussed the developments in the region. His Majesty called for an immediate end to Iranian aggression against countries in

the region, and for a comprehensive and sustainable de-escalation achieved through dialogue and diplomatic channels. The King also warned of the danger of the current developments being exploited to impact the situation in the West Bank, Jerusalem and Gaza, according to another Royal Court statement.

AMMAN — Three Anti-Narcotics Department (AND) officers were killed at dawn on Wednesday during a raid to capture a dangerous wanted suspect in Amman, according to official sources. The three deceased officers were part of an AND force that was dispatched to arrest a dangerous suspect in an eastern Amman suburb, Police Spokesperson Lt. Col. Amer Sartawi said. "The minute the officers entered the premises, the suspect opened fire, killing three officers at the scene," Sartawi told The Jordan Times. A fourth AND officer was also injured during the raid and was rushed to a nearby hospital for treatment, Sartawi added. The suspect was eventually controlled and arrested by other officers during the raid, according to the police official. The arresting force allegedly seized three firearms, illegal pills, 600 grammes of Hashish, a small amount of Crystal Meth and an undis-

Three officers killed in line of duty during drug raid in Amman — police

By Rana Hussein

AMMAN — Three Anti-Narcotics Department (AND) officers were killed at dawn on Wednesday during a raid to capture a dangerous wanted suspect in Amman, according to official sources. The three deceased officers were part of an AND force that was dispatched to arrest a dangerous suspect in an eastern Amman suburb, Police Spokesperson Lt. Col. Amer Sartawi said. "The minute the officers entered the premises, the suspect opened fire, killing three officers at the scene," Sartawi told The Jordan Times. A fourth AND officer was also injured during the raid and was rushed to a nearby hospital for treatment, Sartawi added. The suspect was eventually controlled and arrested by other officers during the raid, according to the police official. The arresting force allegedly seized three firearms, illegal pills, 600 grammes of Hashish, a small amount of Crystal Meth and an undis-

closed amount of Marijuana, he added. The deceased officers were identified as First Lt. Murad Mawajdeh, Sergeant Khaldoun Ruqeb and Corporal Subhi Deweikat, according to a statement by the Public Security Directorate (PSD). Meanwhile, the PSD

mourned the loss of the "three martyrs who died serving their nation and called for patience, solace, and comfort for their families and colleagues, and for a speedy recovery for the injured officer", according to the PSD statement. The PSD affirms its commitment to fulfilling its duty of maintaining security and public order, and to pursue all those who attempt to undermine it or attempt to spread, trade, and promote these poisons among members of society, while pledging to sacrifice everything precious for this cause, the PSD statement added.



Petra photo

The three Anti-Narcotics Department officers, who were killed during a raid to capture a dangerous wanted suspect in Amman, were laid to rest on Wednesday



Nationwide free school transport project set to launch first phase

AMMAN (JT) — The Cabinet on Wednesday approved the first phase of a nationwide school transport project in partnership with the private sector, marking the Kingdom's

first fully integrated free transport system for public school students. Announced in a Cabinet session chaired by Prime Minister Jafar Hassan, the initiative

aims to ease transport challenges and improve access to education by providing free school travel, with students bearing no costs. Continued on page 5

Gov't addresses crisis on multiple fronts, ensures normal life — Momani

AMMAN (JT) — Minister of Government Communication Mohammad Momani on Wednesday said that the government is addressing the crisis on military, security and economic fronts, emphasising that the main goal is to minimise the impact on Jordan. Speaking to Al Mamlaka, Momani said the situation highlights the resilience of the Kingdom and its institutions in facing challenges, stressing that maintaining normal daily life remains a top priority. Momani, who is also the Government spokesperson, stressed that the Jordanian economy and state institutions are well prepared, with emer-

gency and contingency plans in place to tackle the effects of regional developments. Momani also reiterated that Jordan will continue to uphold its role as a safe and stable nation, avoiding involvement in any external conflict. Momani also said that the Jordan Armed Forces-Arab Army (JAF) intercepted 218 missiles and drones launched directly from Iran towards the Kingdom, targeting vital sites. "Of these attacks, 116 missiles and 102 drones were intercepted, ensuring the Kingdom's ability to tackle any security threats and minimise their impact on society while preserving normal daily life, despite the incidents," he added. He stressed that the JAF continue to carry out their duty to defend the Kingdom and protect it from all forms of aggression, deploying all available resources and efforts to safeguard the Kingdom's security and the safety of its citizens. Continued on page 5



Al Mamlaka photo

Mohammad Momani

DIPLOMACY

War reshapes Middle East balance as regional, global tensions rise

By Mai Anati

AMMAN — The ongoing war involving Iran, Israel and the United States is reshaping the

political landscape of the Middle East, pushing the region into a more complex and unstable phase. The escalation has

moved beyond isolated confrontations. It is now unfolding across multiple fronts, with widening spillover risks and growing in-

volvement of regional and international actors. These developments are not only expanding the conflict, but are also reshaping political, economic and security dynamics across the Middle East. Diplomatic activity across the region is intensifying. Saudi Arabia said it will host a consultative meeting for Arab and Islamic foreign ministers in Riyadh, aimed at strengthening coordination and supporting regional security and stability. Continued on page 5



AFP photo

This file handout released by the US Navy on May 23, 2007 shows the USS John C. Stennis, the USS Nimitz, and the USS Bonhomme Richard along with USS Antietam, USS O'Kane, USS Higgins, USS Denver and USS Rushmore steaming through the Gulf of Oman

On the occasion of Eid El-Fitr Arab Bank is honoured to convey to His Majesty King Abdullah II Ibn Al-Hussein and to his Royal Highness The Crown Prince Al Hussein bin Abdullah II and to the Arab and Islamic nations its felicitations and best wishes

البنك العربي ARAB BANK



File photo

Tourism revenue in Jordan declines by 3.2 per cent during the first two months of 2026, reaching \$1.2 billion, down from \$1.3 billion year-on-year

Tourism revenue dips 3.2%, remittances up 11.9% in early 2026

AMMAN (JT) — Tourism revenue in Jordan declined by 3.2 per cent during the first two months of 2026, reaching \$1.2 billion, down from \$1.3 billion year-on-year.

Data from the Central Bank of Jordan (CBJ) showed that the decline was driven by a 3.6 per cent drop in tourist arrivals, according to the Jordan News Agency, Petra.

The data also showed an increase in tourism income from European visitors (49.8 per cent), as well as from American (13.4 per cent) and Asian (9.6 per cent) tourists.

In contrast, the revenue declined from Jordanian expatriates (9.6 per cent), Arab visitors (6.6 per cent) and other nationalities (8.7 per cent).

Also, spending on

outbound tourism fell by 3.1 per cent during the same period, totaling \$332.2 million.

Tourism revenue in 2025 grew by 7.6 per cent to \$7.790 billion, reversing a 2.3 per cent decline recorded in 2024, when revenues stood at \$7.239 billion, CBJ data showed in January.

The increase in 2025 was driven by a 15.3 per cent rise in the number of tourists, according to the CBJ data.

The data indicated higher tourism revenue in 2025 from European nationalities by 39.8 per cent, Asian nationalities 32.7 per cent, American nationalities 18.8 per cent, Arab nationalities 4 per cent and other nationalities 32.6 per cent.

Meanwhile, preliminary data from CBJ on Wednesday showed that total remittances

to the Kingdom rose by 11.9 per cent in January, reaching \$373.6 million, while outbound remittances increased by 13.3 per cent to \$152.8 million, Petra, reported.

The data indicated that transfers from the United Arab Emirates ranked first among inbound remittances, accounting for 22.6 per cent, followed by Saudi Arabia at 19.6 per cent, the United States at 17.3 per cent and Qatar at 9.1 per cent, while other countries accounted for 31.4 per cent.

As for outbound remittances, Egypt was the main destination, accounting for 38.2 per cent, followed by Bangladesh at 13.8 per cent and the Philippines at 5.1 per cent, while other countries accounted for 42.9 per cent of total outbound transfers.

Issawi checks on Royal initiative projects in Jerash

AMMAN (JT) — Royal Court Chief Yousef Issawi on Wednesday conducted a field tour in Jerash to review progress on a number of Royal initiative projects.

Issawi began his tour by inspecting a housing project in the Burma area, which involves the construction of 15 homes for underprivileged families, implemented under Royal directives as part of a wider programme to build 1,300 housing units across the Kingdom, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.

During the visit, attended by Jerash Governor Malek Khreisat and Burma Municipality Committee head Abbas Mawanis, Issawi was briefed on the project's progress, where the homes, built using prefabricated construction, have reached around 70 per cent completion.

Issawi also checked on the construction of a primary school for boys in the Nahleh area that was established following Royal directives issued during meetings with local residents.

Touring the school's facilities alongside Minister of Education and Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research Azmi Mahafzah, Issawi noted



Petra photo

Royal Court Chief Yousef Issawi on Wednesday conducts a field tour in Jerash to review progress on a number of Royal initiative projects

that work is nearing completion.

The school includes 12 classrooms, laboratories, administrative offices, teachers' rooms, a basketball court, a kindergarten and various public facilities.

The tour also included a visit to Zain Park in Jerash, where Issawi reviewed maintenance works under Royal ini-

tiatives to provide safe recreational spaces for children.

The installation forms part of the "Safe Parks" initiative, through which more than 250 play units meeting international standards have been installed across the Kingdom.

Issawi concluded his tour with a visit to a workshop for flags,

banners and professional garments run by the Jerash Ladies Charity Association, which has been equipped with machinery and tools through Royal initiatives.

The workshop currently employs 10 young women from low-income families who have been trained to work in the facility.

At the end of the tour, Issawi stressed that Royal initiatives will continue across Jerash and all governorates, covering various sectors, addressing citizens' needs and priorities and translating Royal directives into tangible outcomes through partnerships with the government and civil society.

Government allocates JD2.5m to boost food stock stability at CSCC

AMMAN (JT) — The Civil Service Consumer Corporation (CSCC) on Wednesday said that the government has allocated JD2.5 million to support the corporation's strategic stock of essential commodities and enable it to continue providing food items to citizens at competitive prices across its 69 outlets nationwide.

CSCC Director-General Issam Jarrah said that the support comes as part of efforts to enhance the corporation's role in positively intervening in the local market, maintaining price stability and ensuring the availability of essential goods in sufficient quantities to meet public demand, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.

Jarrah noted that the funds will be used to increase stocks of key commodities, including rice, vegetable oils, sugar, flour, frozen meat and fish, legumes and other staple items, con-



File photo

The Civil Service Consumer Corporation on Wednesday says that the government has allocated JD2.5 million to support the corporation's strategic stock of essential commodities

tributing to enhanced food security and stable prices in the domestic market.

He added that the corporation's outlets continue to operate under a plan that ensures the availability of high-quality goods at affordable prices, often lower than those in other markets, in line with its social and economic role in supporting citizens and easing living costs.

Industry, Trade and Supply Minister Yarub Oudah said on Tuesday that Jordan maintains sufficient stocks of essential food commodities and continues to operate stable supply chains despite heightened regional tensions.

The minister's remarks came during a meeting with the Lower House's Economy and Investment Committee to discuss the govern-

ment's plans to maintain supply chains, address potential disruptions to shipping routes, and manage rising transport costs, while strengthening market monitoring efforts.

Oudah said that the government has taken "precautionary measures to safeguard the Kingdom's food security and ensure continuity of supply amid evolving

regional political and security developments."

According to ministry figures, wheat stocks in silos stood at around 544,000 tonnes as of March 16, enough for over five and a half months of domestic consumption.

Another 356,000 tonnes are on the way, extending coverage to around nine months. Barley stocks currently stand at 368,000 tonnes, with an additional 352,000 tonnes in transit, covering more than eight months.

Stocks of other essential commodities remain stable, including roughly three months of sugar, four months of rice, over three months of vegetable oils, and about three and a half months of feed corn.

Legumes such as chickpeas, lentils, and beans range between two and six months, while powdered milk covers approximately four months, according to the ministry.



File photo

The annual report of the National Aid Fund shows that 248,912 households, comprising 1,159,438 individuals, received monthly transfers totalling some JD21.2 million in 2025

Over 1.15m Jordanians benefit from monthly cash assistance in 2025

AMMAN (JT) — More than 1.15 million Jordanians, constituting around 13.48 per cent of the country's population, benefited from monthly cash assistance programmes in 2025.

The annual report of the National Aid Fund, monitored by Al Mamlaka TV, showed that 248,912 households, comprising 1,159,438 individuals, received monthly transfers totalling approximately JD21.2 million.

The continued expansion of the Unified Cash Support Programme was evident, with 15,000 new households added in 2025 and assistance allocated to around 28,150 families.

A field survey covering 36,866 households was also conducted, with all complaints addressed, underscoring efforts to improve targeting and service delivery.

A total of 198,868 households (1.01 million individuals) benefitted from the unified programme, with the largest share concentrated in Amman (over 28 per cent), followed by Irbid (over 22 per cent) and Zarqa (over 16 per cent).

Monthly support under this programme reached some JD18.3 million.

Meanwhile, 50,044

households (147,195 individuals) received assistance through the monthly financial aid scheme, at a cost of around JD2.95 million per month, with payments ranging between JD45 and JD200. Humanitarian cases accounted for more than 31 per cent of beneficiaries.

The report noted ongoing plans to merge assistance schemes into a unified system by the end of 2026...

The report identified cash transfer programmes as a cornerstone of Jordan's social protection system, aligned with the updated National Social Protection Strategy (2025-2033), aimed at ensuring a minimum income for the most vulnerable groups. Geographically, beneficiaries were concentrated in the most populous governorates, with Amman accounting for 27.54 per cent, followed by Irbid (22.46 per cent) and Zarqa (15.59 per cent),

while Tafleh recorded the lowest share at 1.11 per cent.

The data also showed that female-headed households made up 29.92 per cent of beneficiaries, totalling 74,472 families, with higher shares in governorates such as Maan and Jerash.

Children represented the largest beneficiary group, accounting for over 40 per cent of recipients, with those aged 10-14 topping the list.

In terms of disbursement, assistance was delivered through three main channels: Prepaid cards via the Jordan Post Company (53.96 per cent), bank accounts (23.45 per cent) and e-wallets (22.59 per cent), reflecting growing adoption of digital payment solutions and financial inclusion efforts.

The report noted ongoing plans to merge assistance schemes into a unified system by the end of 2026, aimed at improving efficiency, targeting accuracy and resource management.

Regulations allow households to receive more than one form of assistance where needs overlap, particularly in cases involving disability or chronic illness, ensuring support is provided on a fair and needs-based basis.

South Africa's ambassador urges expanding tourism cooperation with Jordan

AMMAN (JT) — South Africa's Ambassador to Jordan Tselane Mokuena on Tuesday highlighted the "deep" ties between her country and the Kingdom, stressing the importance of building on these relations and expanding cooperation across various sectors, particularly tourism.

Her remarks came during a workshop organised by the South African embassy in Amman to showcase tourism opportunities in South Africa, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.

The event was attended by stakeholders in the tourism and travel sector, along with representatives of Da-



Petra photo

South Africa's Ambassador to Jordan Tselane Mokuena on Tuesday expresses her country's aspiration to broaden cooperation with Jordan in tourism promotion, exchange expertise and encourage joint tourism programmes

hab Travel and Tourism, Ethiopian Airlines, travel agencies and media representatives.

The ambassador expressed her country's aspiration to broaden cooperation with Jordan

in tourism promotion, exchange expertise and encourage joint tourism programmes, in a way that boosts tourist flows between the two nations.

She outlined South Africa's key tourism assets,

noting the wide diversity of offerings, including eco-tourism, safari experiences, adventure tourism and cultural tourism, as well as modern cities and coastal beaches.

The diplomat added that South Africa seeks to enhance its position as a global tourist destination by developing infrastructure, supporting sustainable tourism and increasing international visitor numbers, contributing to economic growth and job creation.

The ambassador noted that South Africa comprises nine provinces, each offering unique tourism experiences, including national parks, heritage sites, nature trails, shopping centres and cultural events.

Participants stressed the importance of expanding tourism cooperation with South Africa in a way that serves the interests of both countries and their peoples.

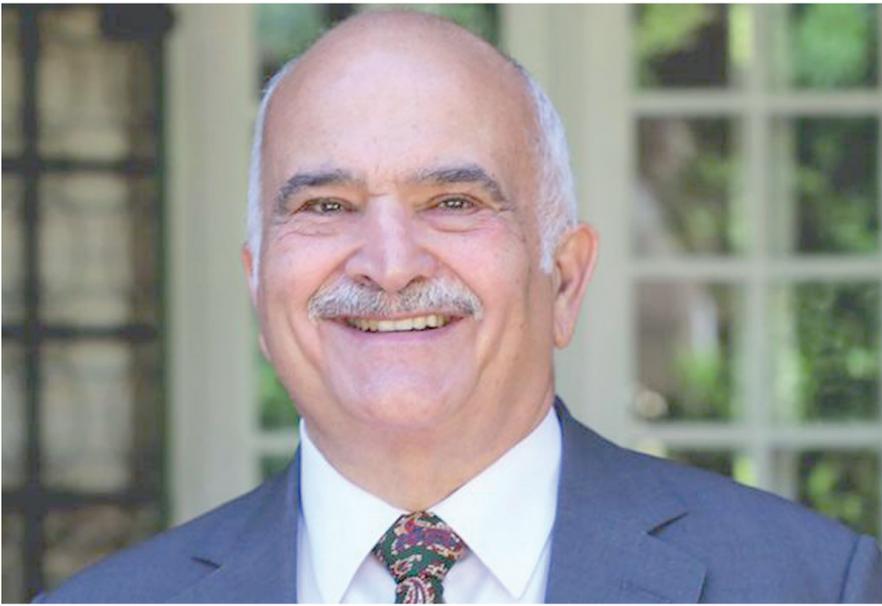
Prince El Hassan launches Hashemite endowment for Jerusalem

AMMAN (JT) — HRH Prince El Hassan Bin Talal has led a major national initiative, under Royal endorsement and oversight, to establish the Hashemite Endowment for Jerusalem.

The initiative builds on the steadfast positions of His Majesty King Abdullah and Jordan's historic Hashemite custodianship of the Islamic and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem, rooted in internationally recognised religious, historical and legal legitimacy, and demonstrated over decades through continuous care, restoration and protection, according to a statement to The Jordan Times.

It reiterated that Jerusalem remains a legal, historical, religious and moral responsibility firmly upheld by the Kingdom.

The initiative is being carried out amid escalating challenges for Jerusalemites, in-



HRH Prince El Hassan Bin Talal

cluding Israeli policies that undermine their basic rights, threaten their property, and restrict their ability to

remain in the city. The Hashemite Endowment for Jerusalem aims to provide two complementary

forms of support, with one focusing on financial and service-oriented assistance to help Jerusalemites

and bolster their resilience, and the other addressing administrative and legal needs to help Palestinians

safeguard their historic and legal rights.

The Hashemite Endowment initiative aims to alleviate the challenges faced by Jerusalemites, including the costs of home restoration and maintenance, while preserving the city's unique religious and cultural identity.

It also strives to protect its Islamic and Christian holy sites, such as Al Aqsa Mosque, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and other sacred landmarks, which are recognised as a shared global heritage for future generations.

Prince El Hassan is leading the foundational efforts, with the participation of official, civil, and Jerusalem-based organisations, reviewing all aspects of the initiative and mobilising the financial and technical resources needed to ensure its success and long-term sustainability.

AT A GLANCE

Tourism income falls 3.2% in first two months of 2026 — CBJ

AMMAN (JT) — The Kingdom's tourism income declined by 3.2 per cent in the first two months of 2026, reaching \$1.2 billion, compared with \$1.3 billion during the same period last year, mainly due to a 3.6 per cent drop in tourist arrivals, according to data released by the Central Bank of Jordan (CBJ). The data showed that tourism revenue from European visitors rose by 49.8 per cent, while receipts from American visitors increased by 13.4 per cent and from Asian visitors by 9.6 per cent. Tourism income from Jordanian expatriates declined by 9.6 per cent, while revenue from Arab visitors fell by 6.6 per cent and from other nationalities dropped by 8.7 per cent. The figures also indicated a 3.1 per cent decline in outbound tourism spending during the same period, which fell to \$332.2 million.



Omari crossing surges as over 10,000 travellers pass in hours

AMMAN (JT) — More than 10,000 travellers crossed Al Omari Border Crossing on Wednesday morning, as traffic continues to surge amid seasonal demand and regional developments. Crossing Director Issam Matouq said that passenger flows have been rising since the start of 2026, driven by regional dynamics, the Umrah season, the return of expatriates and school holidays, according to Al Mamlaka TV. The current period marks a peak travel season for both arrivals and departures through the crossing, he noted. He added that authorities have expanded capacity to cope with increasing demand, deploying additional staff, boosting customs personnel along inspection lanes, and coordinating with the Jordan Insurance Federation to double staffing levels and streamline procedures. More than four million travellers passed through Al Omari crossing in 2025, Matouq said, expecting traffic to continue surging in the lead-up to Eid Al Fitr.



Lower House committee expresses solidarity with Kenya, Ethiopia after floods

AMMAN (JT) — The Lower House Foreign Affairs Committee expressed its sincere condolences to Kenya and Ethiopia over the victims of floods, torrential rains and landslides that struck wide areas in both countries, causing hundreds of deaths and injuries as well as significant material damage. In a statement issued on Wednesday, the committee affirmed the solidarity of the Parliament with the peoples of the two countries, stressing the importance of international cooperation to support nations affected by climate change and rapidly increasing natural disasters. It also wished a speedy recovery to the injured and safety for those missing, expressing hope that the victims would rest in peace and that their families would be granted patience and solace.



Jordan hails Eid ceasefire between Afghanistan, Pakistan

AMMAN (JT) — The Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Wednesday welcomed the announcement of a temporary truce between Afghanistan and Pakistan on the occasion of Eid Al Fitr.

Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Fuad Majali affirmed the Kingdom's support for all diplomatic efforts to resolve conflicts peacefully, according to a Foreign Ministry statement.

He also commended the roles of Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey in facilitating the truce.

Pakistan announced a "temporary pause" in hostilities with Afghanistan to mark the end of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

Information Minister Attaullah Tarar said the pause for Eid Al Fitr had been requested by "brotherly Islamic countries" Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey for five days from Thursday until midnight on Monday.

"Pakistan offers this gesture in good faith and in keeping with the Islamic norms," he

wrote on X, but warned: "In case of any cross-border attack, drone attack or any terrorist incident inside Pakistan, [operations] shall immediately resume with renewed intensity."

Afghanistan Interior Minister Sirajuddin Haqqani promised retribution for this week's Pakistani air strike that killed hundreds at a Kabul drugs rehabilitation centre.

"We will take revenge," the Taliban government minister said at the mass burial of some of the victims in the capital.

Islamabad, which denies deliberately targeting the centre, accuses Kabul of harbouring extremists who have carried out cross-border attacks on its territory.

The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) on Wednesday said hundreds of people were killed and wounded in this week's air strike on a Kabul drug treatment clinic, in the first independent confirmation of the heavy toll.

Pakistan's forces struck Kabul and the eastern border province of Nangarhar on Mon-

day, claiming to have hit military installations and "terrorist support infrastructure".

But the Taliban authorities in the Afghan capital on Tuesday said that around 400 people were killed at a drug rehabilitation centre in the capital, with more than 200 wounded.

NRC Country Director Jacopo Caridi said the NGO had teams on the ground in the immediate aftermath of the strikes to see "what the reality was on the ground".

"From what we saw and what we discussed with the others involved in the [emergency] response, we can say that there were hundreds of killed and wounded," he told AFP.

Afghanistan and Pakistan have faced calls for an immediate end to the conflict, with the overall civilian death toll mounting and concern about those displaced.

The UN said before Monday's strike that at least 76 Afghan civilians had been killed in the fighting, and that more than 115,000 families had been forced from their homes.

NAF disburses JD21.2m in monthly cash aid in 2025

AMMAN (JT) — Around 13.48 per cent of the Kingdom population, or 1.159 million people, benefited from monthly cash transfer programmes in 2025, the National Aid Fund (NAF) annual report revealed.

The report, cited by Al Mamlaka TV, showed that 248,912 households received support, with total monthly transfers of JD21.2 million. In 2025, the Unified Cash Support Programme was expanded to include 15,000 additional households, bringing the total number of families supported to around 28,150.

A field survey covering 36,866 households was conducted, and all complaints were fully addressed, according to the report.

Some 198,868 households, representing 1,012,243 people, received support under the programme, with beneficiaries concentrated mainly in Amman with more than 28 per cent, followed by Irbid with more than 22 per cent and Zarqa with more than 16 per cent.



Monthly payouts for this programme totalled approximately JD18.3 million.

Under the Monthly Financial Assistance Programme, 50,044 households comprising 147,195 people received aid, costing around JD2.95 million per month, with support ranging from JD45 to JD200, and humanitarian cases accounting for more than 31 per cent of beneficiaries.

The figures showed that children accounted for the largest share of recipients, making up more than 40 per cent of the total. The 10 to 14 age group had the highest number of beneficiaries at 185,055, followed by 15 to 19-year-olds with

184,659, and 5 to 9-year-olds with 173,610.

Female-headed households made up 29.9 per cent of recipients, with the highest shares in Maan at 36.9 per cent, Jerash at 36.4 per cent, Karak at 35 per cent and Aqaba at 34.5 per cent, while gender distribution was nearly equal, with females at 49.44 per cent and males at 50.45 per cent.

Cash aid was distributed through prepaid cards, which were used by 53.96 per cent of recipients, bank accounts with 23.45 per cent and e-wallets with 22.59 per cent, reflecting growing reliance on digital payment systems and improved accessibility, the report added.

Deputy speaker urges youth to engage in political, party life

AMMAN (JT) — First Deputy Speaker of the Lower House Khamis Attieh on Wednesday met with participants in the Parliamentary Fellowship Programme of the King Abdullah II Fund for Development at the Lower House.

According to a Lower House statement, Attieh stressed the pivotal role played by His Majesty King Abdullah in addressing regional challenges, highlighting the King's diplomatic outreach to Arab and Gulf capitals aimed at strengthening solidarity and easing tensions through dialogue.

He affirmed that Jordan, under its Hashemite leadership and supported by its armed forces and security agencies, will remain resilient in the face of challenges and

will not tolerate any threat to its security or sovereignty.

Attieh added that the Palestinian cause remains a national priority, stressing that Jerusalem and its Islamic and Christian holy sites are a "red line".

Attieh stressed the pivotal role played by His Majesty King Abdullah in addressing regional challenges...

He noted that the Kingdom is moving steadily along the path

of political modernisation toward building an effective party-based system and a programme-driven parliament, adding that the Lower House is working to develop its internal regulations to strengthen party and bloc work.

Attieh also said that the House is reviewing key legislation, particularly the draft Social Security Law, with a strong sense of responsibility to balance the protection of subscribers' rights with the sustainability of the institution.

He urged young people to actively engage in political and party life, stressing that the current phase requires awareness and forward-thinking youth capable of contributing to the development of political and parliamentary life.

China announces humanitarian assistance for Jordan

AMMAN (JT) — Chinese Ambassador to Jordan Guo Wei on Wednesday announced that China has decided to provide urgent humanitarian assistance to Jordan, alongside three other countries in the region.

The move comes amid the ongoing war in the Middle East and

the resulting humanitarian crises.

Speaking to Petra, Wei expressed China's deep sympathy and condolences to the peoples of the region, noting that the aid aims to ease the humanitarian situation, particularly in Jordan.

"The war was avoidable and its continuation achieves nothing.

It is vital to prevent further loss of life and suffering," he said.

Wei reiterated China's support for regional countries' efforts to safeguard their sovereignty, security and territorial integrity, adding that Beijing will continue diplomatic efforts and mediation to end the war and restore

stability.

He also highlighted that China's humanitarian assistance reflects its commitment to humanitarian values and determination to support the people of the region amid current challenges.

During talks on bilateral relations, the ambassador emphasised that Jordan and

China share a strategic partnership, with China backing Jordan's efforts to maintain security, stability and economic growth. He added that China is ready to expand cooperation across multiple sectors in support of the development and modernisation plans of both countries.

TIES

Agriculture minister, Australian ambassador discuss cooperation

AMMAN (JT) — Minister of Agriculture Saeb Khraisat and Australian Ambassador to Jordan Paula Ganly on Wednesday discussed ways to bolster bilateral cooperation across various agricultural sectors.

Khraisat underscored the "deep-rooted" ties between the two friendly nations, highlighting the im-

portance of building on these relations to expand the horizons of agricultural collaboration in a manner that serves the mutual interests of both nations, according to a ministry statement.

The minister stressed the significance of benefiting from advanced Australian expertise, particularly in agri-

cultural technology and innovation. He affirmed the ministry's commitment to enhancing cooperation in training and building the technical capacities of agricultural personnel.

Jordan offers an attractive environment for agricultural investment, Khraisat noted, calling for increased joint invest-

ment opportunities between the public and private sectors of both countries, he said.

He specifically pointed to livestock and agricultural production inputs as key areas that could support food security and achieve sustainable agricultural development.

For her part, Amba-

sador Ganly expressed pride in the high level of bilateral relations.

She reiterated Australia's keenness to develop cooperation with Jordan, especially in the agricultural sector and to strengthen the partnership through the exchange of expertise, technology transfer and the encouragement of joint investments.



This photo shows a military transport aircraft Airbus A400M Atlas parked at the Incirlik air base in Adana, south-eastern Turkey, on Wednesday

Ankara says NATO deploys new Patriot battery at south Turkey air base

INCIRLIK AIR BASE, Turkey (AFP) — Turkey's defence ministry said Wednesday NATO was deploying a new Patriot missile battery at Incirlik air base, just days after a third ballistic missile from Iran was shot down.

"Another Patriot system... is being deployed... in addition to the existing Spanish Patriot system stationed there," a ministry official told reporters at the Turkish air base, just outside the southern city of Adana.

The ministry did not say which country's troops would be operating the new PAC-3 system.

Last Friday, Turkey confirmed a third ballistic missile from Iran was shot down in Turkish airspace by NATO forces, the third such incident since the Middle East war started.

After the second interception, NATO deployed Patriot defences in the central Malatya region, where the Kurecik air base is located, which houses a NATO early-

warning radar system manned by US troops that can detect Iranian missile launches.

The Patriot is a mobile air-defence system designed to intercept tactical ballistic missiles, low-flying cruise missiles and aircraft.

The PAC-2 version has an interception range of up to 70 kilometres against aircraft and cruise missiles, while the PAC-3 has a range of 20 to 35 kilometres against ballistic missiles, according to US army data.

Lebanon says Israel strikes on central Beirut kill at least six

BEIRUT, Lebanon (AFP) — Lebanon said Israel struck central Beirut early Wednesday without warning, killing at least six people, as the Israeli military announced it was targeting the country's south.

Lebanon was drawn into the Middle East war on March 2 when Iran-backed militant group Hizbollah launched rockets towards Israel in response to US-Israeli strikes that killed Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Israel has responded with intense strikes in multiple Lebanese regions and ground operations in the south, and has hit central Beirut several times, with and without warning.

Lebanon's official National News Agency (NNA) said a strike in the early hours of Wednesday hit an apartment in the central Zouq Al Blat neighbourhood, a densely populated area close to the government's headquarters and several embassies.

It said the strike occurred near where the Israeli military last week hit a Beirut branch of the Hizbollah-linked financial firm Al Qard Al Hassan.

In last week's strike, the Israeli military issued an evacuation warning in advance, but no such warning was given before the latest raid.

The NNA said two other strikes targeted two apartments in the central Basta district, another densely populated area that Israel struck during a 2024 war with Hizbollah.

An AFP correspondent saw first responders at the scene in Basta where the walls of apartments on two adjacent floors appeared to have been blasted off.

Lebanon's health ministry reported a preliminary toll for both strikes of six dead and 24 wounded.



The rubble of a destroyed building is pictured after overnight Israeli bombardment on a civil defence station in Lebanon's southern city of Nabatieh on Wednesday

Human remains at the scenes would require DNA testing to determine their identity, the ministry added.

Panic after warning

The NNA later said that a building in central Beirut's Bashoura neighbourhood was hit after an evacuation warning, as AFP correspondents heard a blast and AFPTV footage showed smoke billowing from the area.

A map shared by the Israeli military indicated the target building was already struck last week also after an evacuation warning, causing damage but without destroying it.

The NNA also reported strikes on Beirut's southern suburbs, a Hizbollah stronghold which Israel has pounded in recent

weeks.

Also early Wednesday, the Israeli military said it had "begun striking Hizbollah terror targets in southern Lebanon" including in the Tyre area, where the NNA reported at least four strikes including on a house.

The Israeli military issued another warning on Wednesday, signaling imminent strikes on four towns in the Tyre area and near the border.

Late Tuesday, Israel's army had issued an evacuation order for most of the southern city of Tyre as well as swathes of surrounding areas, saying it planned to "act forcefully" against Hizbollah.

Bilal Kashmar, media coordinator for Tyre's disaster management unit, told AFP there

was panic after the warning.

A map shared by the Israeli military indicated the target building was already struck last week also after an evacuation warning...

Many families remained put, including in several Palestinian refugee camps, despite previous Israeli army evacuation calls for swathes of south Lebanon, he said, while around 11,000 displaced people have taken refuge in the

area.

On Tuesday, the health ministry reported four dead in a strike in the eastern city of Baalbek, and four Syrians dead in a strike on Jibsheet in the country's south.

The NNA said a strike on the southern town of Habboush killed at least three people.

Israel said late Tuesday it struck Hizbollah sites "throughout Lebanon" after a series of air raid sirens in northern Israel, with Hizbollah saying it had launched a wave of attacks.

According to Lebanese authorities, Israeli strikes have killed at least 912 people since March 2, while more than one million people have registered as displaced, with more than 130,000 staying in official shelters.

Facts about Strait of Hormuz war blockage

LONDON (AFP) — Here are key facts and figures about the blockage of the Strait of Hormuz, a crucial shipping route virtually paralysed by the Middle East war.

Around a fifth of global crude oil and liquefied natural gas pass through the waterway in peacetime.

The war erupted on February 28 when the US and Israel began bombing Iran, prompting it to retaliate with strikes across the region and restrict access to the strait.

Since March 1, 2026, 21 commercial vessels, including 10 tankers, have been attacked or reported incidents in the Gulf, the Strait of Hormuz or the Gulf of Oman, according to the British naval maritime

security agency UKMTO.

Across all types of vessels, an additional four attacks claimed by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard have not been confirmed by international authorities.

Since the conflict began at least eight seafarers or dock workers have died in incidents in the region, according to the International Maritime Organisation (IMO).

A further four remain missing and 10 were injured.

Traffic through the strait has dropped by 97 percent from before the war, according to analysis published on Tuesday by marine intelligence group Windward.

The channel typically sees around 120 daily transits, but there were

just 77 in the two weeks following the outbreak of the war, according to shipping industry intelligence site Lloyd's List.

Around 20,000 seafarers, along with cruise ship passengers, port workers and offshore crews, are affected in the region, according to the UN's IMO.

The IMO estimates at least 3,000 vessels are currently there, up to two thirds of them "large commercial vessels engaged in international commerce".

Researchers at HSBC bank said in a report on March 14 that ship fuel prices had risen 87 per cent since the start of the conflict to levels last seen after Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Cuba vows 'unbreakable resistance' as US pressure mounts

HAVANA (AFP) — Cuba's leader on Tuesday said the US would face "unbreakable resistance" if it tries to take over the impoverished island nation, as communist authorities scrambled to fix a nationwide electricity blackout.

Cuba's government is under increasingly crushing pressure, with Washington enforcing an oil blockade and openly stating it wants to end the nearly seven-decade-old US stand-off with the one-party communist state.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said Cuba's decision announced this week to let exiles invest and own businesses did not go far enough to allow free-market reforms that the Trump administration demands.

"What they announced yesterday is not dramatic enough. It's not going to fix it. So they've got some



AFP photo

A rainbow is pictured over Havana on Tuesday. Cuba scrambled on Tuesday, to restore power after a nationwide blackout that hit the communist-run island just as US President Donald Trump proclaimed he will 'take' it over

big decisions to make," Rubio, a Cuban-American and vociferous critic of the country's ruling party, told reporters at the White House.

President Donald Trump, who has heaped pressure on Cuba's communist government, said Monday he would "take" Cuba, adding: "We'll be doing something with Cuba very soon."

But his Cuban counter-

part Miguel Diaz-Canel was defiant in the face of Washington's threats.

"Faced with the worst-case scenario, Cuba has one guarantee: Any external aggressor will encounter an unbreakable resistance," he wrote in a statement on X.

Cuba is open to broad talks with Washington and allowing more investment, but it will not discuss changing its political system, an envoy told AFP on Tuesday.

Tanieris Dieguez, Cuba's deputy chief of mission in Washington, said the two neighbouring countries "have a lot of things to put on the table" but that neither should ask the other to change its government.

"Nothing related with our political system, nothing with our political model, our constitutional model, is part of the negotiations, and never will it be part of

that," she said.

"The only thing that Cuba asks for any conversation is respect to our sovereignty and to our right to self-determination."

The New York Times, quoting unnamed US officials, said the Trump administration has called for Cuba to sack Diaz-Canel, who is seen as resistant to change.

Rubio denied the report late Tuesday, writing on X that the article was "fake" and was among media reports that relied on "charlatans and liars claiming to be in the know" as sources.

'Taking Cuba'

A total electricity breakdown Monday underscored the parlous state of Cuba's economy.

The country lost Venezuela as its chief regional ally and oil supplier this January after a US military operation toppled Venezuela's socialist leader Nicolas Maduro.

Power was restored to two-thirds of the country early Tuesday, including to 45 per cent of the capital Havana, home to 1.7 million people.

"What we fear all the time is that the blackout will drag on and we will lose the little bit that we have in the fridge, because everything is so expensive," said Olga Suarez, a 64-year-old retiree. "Otherwise we are used

to it because here almost all the time you go to bed and wake up without electricity," she told AFP.

Adding another scare, a 5.8-magnitude earthquake struck off Cuba's coast early Tuesday. There were no immediate reports of casualties or damage.

Cuba's ageing electricity generation system is in shambles, with daily power outages of up to 20 hours the norm in parts of the island, which lacks the fuel needed to generate power.

But since Maduro's January 3 ousting, the island's economy has been further hammered by a de facto US oil blockade.

No oil has been imported to Cuba since January 9, hitting the power sector while also forcing airlines to curtail flights to the island, a blow to its all-important tourism sector.

And Trump is explicitly saying he wants the Cuban government to fall.

"You know, all my life I've been hearing about the United States and Cuba. When will the United States do it?" Trump told reporters on Monday.

"I do believe I'll be... having the honour of taking Cuba," Trump said. "Whether I free it, take it, think I could do anything I want with it, you want to know the truth. They're a very weakened nation right now."

DELAY

Mideast war blocking vital aid to over 400,000 children — charity

GENEVA (AFP) — The Middle East conflict is obstructing key delivery routes for humanitarian supplies, delaying shipments of lifesaving aid for nearly half-a-million children far beyond the region, Save the Children said on Wednesday.

The charity warned that the war was disrupting key air, sea and land routes, with dire ripple effects on global aid supplies.

Since US-Israeli forces launched the war against Iran on February 28, Tehran has responded with attacks throughout the Middle East and threats that have nearly halted shipping in the Strait of Hormuz, through which one-fifth of global oil supplies normally passes.

Aid deliveries have been heavily impacted, with shipping costs soaring up to 50 per cent in some cases as the shipments are rerouted, Save the Children said.

This has left lifesaving aid intended for at least 410,000 children and their families in crisis-ravaged Sudan, Afghanistan and Yemen stuck in the Middle East.

"The escalating con-

flict is having grave ripple effects for children far beyond the region," Willem Zuidema, the NGO's head of global supply chains, said in a statement.

One shipment of medical supplies bound for Sudan is stuck in Dubai due to the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, the charity said.

This was putting more than 90 primary health care facilities across Sudan at risk of running out of essential medicines, it added.

Those medical supplies included antibiotics, antimalarials, deworming treatments and pain and fever medicines intended to support over 400,000 children in Sudan, it said.

The charity said it was exploring alternative routes to Sudan, including by road across Saudi Arabia to Jeddah and then by sea to Port Sudan.

This, it warned "could add \$1,000-\$2,000 per container in costs".

'Grave ramifications'

Critical nutrition supplies intended to support 5,000 children and 1,400 pregnant and

breastfeeding women in Afghanistan had also been impacted, Save the Children said.

That aid had been meant to be shipped from India via Iran, but will now have to be flown in, "at a cost over \$240,000 — more than the value of the supplies", it said.

The charity said it also had a shipment of medicines, including antibiotics, for around 5,000 children in Yemen.

"For the first time ever, Save the Children will transport these supplies via road, doubling the transport cost," it said. Zuidema called on all parties to the conflict to "facilitate the safe passage of humanitarian assistance to children".

"There should be no barriers to life-saving supplies: Exemptions should be put in place to allow humanitarian supplies, fertiliser and food to be able to move through the Strait of Hormuz," he said.

"With global humanitarian needs already at record levels, further escalation of the conflict in the Middle East and wider region will have grave ramifications for crises across the world."

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Israel says killed Iran intel chief, tells military to hunt down officials

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (AFP) — Israel killed another top Iranian official, intelligence minister Esmail Khatib, and declared on Wednesday that its military is authorised to kill any senior Islamic republic figure it gets in its sights.

Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian branded Khatib's death a "cowardly assassination".

The war erupted on February 28 when US and Israeli forces attacked Iran, killing supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and has since been marked by several high-profile killings.

News of Khatib's death came the day after Iranian security chief Ali Larijani was confirmed killed in an Israeli strike.

"Prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu and I have authorised the IDF to eliminate any senior Iranian official for whom the intelligence and operational circle has been closed, without the need for additional approval," Israel's Defence Minister Israel Katz announced. "We will continue to thwart them and to hunt them all down."

Israel has also vowed to hunt down Iran's new supreme leader, Mojtaba Khamenei, who has not appeared in public since he succeeded his father.

Large crowds gathered in central Tehran on Wednesday for the funerals of Larijani and



An image taken from an undated video released on social media by the Iranian Red Crescent Society on Wednesday, and filmed at an undisclosed location, shows rescuers working at a site the organisation says was hit by US-Israeli strikes

Gholamreza Soleimani, the head of the Basij paramilitary force who was also killed in a strike in Iran this week, according to images broadcast by Iranian state television.

They were held alongside the funerals of more than 80 Iranian sailors killed in a US torpedoing of their frigate off Sri Lanka earlier this month.

Trucks carrying coffins draped in Iranian flags moved through

the procession, as mourners walked alongside carrying portraits of the slain supreme leader and beating their chests, a sign of mourning in Shia culture.

In contrast to Mojtaba Khamenei, Larijani, 68, had walked openly with crowds at a pro-government rally last week in Tehran.

He had "effectively been the figure in charge of the regime's survival, its regional

policy and its defence strategy," David Khalifa, co-founder of the Atlantic Middle East Forum, told AFP.

Israel has pursued what analysts have described as a policy of decapitation against Iran and the militant movements it backs in the region.

It killed Hassan Nasrallah, the longtime leader of Hizbollah, in 2024 as well Hamas's top figures since the Palestinian group's Oc-

tober 7, 2023 surprise attack that sparked the Gaza war.

Despite losing its supreme leader of nearly four decades and now Larijani, a key pillar of the Islamic republic, the powerful Revolutionary Guard and the leadership as a whole have remained defiant.

US intelligence chief Tulsi Gabbard to a senate hearing that Washington "assesses the regime in Iran to be intact but largely degraded

due to attacks on its leadership and military capabilities".

The Guard, the ideological arm of the military, said they had launched missiles at central Israel in retaliation for Larijani's death and warned of more to come.

The "pure blood of this great martyr... will be a source of honour, power and national awakening against the front of global arrogance", they said.

An Iranian missile barrage killed two people near Israel's commercial hub of Tel Aviv, medics said on Wednesday, while authorities said falling munitions hit multiple sites in central Israel overnight.

Police said a cluster bomb hit a residential building in Ramat Gan, a city just outside Tel Aviv, and the roof collapsed on an elderly couple.

Iranian media meanwhile said Israel and the United States had launched fresh strikes across several areas of the country, including Tehran.

Tasnim news agency said "seven people were killed and 56 were injured in an American-Zionist attack on residential areas in Dorud town" in Lorestan province.

AFP could not independently verify the figures.

The war has engulfed the region, from Gulf nations to Iraq and nearby Lebanon.

In Lebanon, Israel struck central Beirut multiple times Wednesday, with authorities reporting at least 12 people dead.

The country was drawn into the conflict when the Iran-backed group Hizbollah launched rockets towards Israel over the ayatollah's death.

A line of cars stretched as far as the eye could see along the country's southern coast as residents of areas bombarded in the war fled to the ancient city of Sidon in search of safety.

Nidal Ahmad Chokr initially intended to stay put but finally decided on Tuesday to leave his village of Jibchit, as the air strikes intensified.

"Bakers died while making bread" in the village square and "municipal workers were martyred while using bulldozers", the 55-year-old said.

In addition to the human toll of the war, with hundreds killed and millions displaced, the conflict has hit the global economy.

Oil prices surged again Wednesday after Israeli strikes hit Iranian facilities at a major gas field in the oil-rich Gulf, prompting Tehran to call for retaliatory attacks on energy infrastructure.

The conflict has led to the near total closure of the Strait of Hormuz, a waterway through which a fifth of global oil and LNG travels in peacetime.

EU signs defence deal with Iceland

BRUSSELS, Belgium (AFP) — The European Union signed a defence pact with Iceland on Wednesday, ahead of an August referendum in the North Atlantic island on resuming the country's EU membership talks.

The agreement aims to strengthen security cooperation, particularly in the Arctic, which has become of increasing strategic interest as sea ice melts with global warming.

"In the current volatile security context, this important milestone for the EU and Iceland brings an impulse to their already deep relations," the 27-nation EU said in a statement.

The deal was signed in Brussels by EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas and Iceland Foreign Minister Thorgerdur Katrin Gunnarsdottir.

It is the last in a series of accords Brussels recently inked with countries including Canada, Britain, India and others.

Iceland's government proposed this month that a referendum be held on August 29 on resuming the country's EU membership talks, which were shelved in 2015.

US President Donald Trump's push to take over Greenland has sparked concern in nearby Iceland. Its defence is currently provided by the United States and NATO, as it has no military of its own.

Iran was not rebuilding nuclear enrichment, US intelligence finds

WASHINGTON, United States (AFP) — US intelligence concluded on Wednesday that Iran was not rebuilding nuclear enrichment capacities destroyed last year by the United States and Israel, contradicting a key justification by President Donald Trump for his ongoing war.

Tulsi Gabbard, a Trump ally who is director of national intelligence, offered mixed signals on the backdrop and outcomes of three weeks of war as she and other officials appeared before Congress.

She also assessed that Iran's leadership remained intact.

"As a result of Opera-

tion Midnight Hammer, Iran's nuclear enrichment programme was obliterated," Gabbard said in prepared testimony to the Senate intelligence committee, referring to the June 2025 US attack.

"There has been no efforts since then to try to rebuild their enrichment capability," Gabbard wrote.

She did not repeat the conclusion before cameras. Pressed by a Democratic senator, Gabbard said that she did not have enough time to read the full testimony at the hearing but did not refute the assessment.

Trump has repeatedly said he ordered the at-

tack on Iran alongside Israel on February 28 because of an "imminent threat".

Trump said after the June 2025 bombing that the United States had completely destroyed Iran's nuclear sites, but since his latest war he has maintained that Tehran was nonetheless weeks away from a nuclear bomb and that he had to act.

The UN nuclear watchdog and most observers have not supported the finding of an imminent nuclear bomb by Iran, which was negotiating with Trump's envoys on a deal in the days before the attack.

John Ratcliffe, director the CIA, told sena-

tors when asked about the negotiations: "It was very clear that Iran, while they were talking, they had no intentions of following through."

Gabbard herself had been an outspoken opponent of war with Iran as a Democratic congresswoman.

One of her senior aides, Joseph Kent, resigned in protest on Tuesday as director of the National Counterterrorism Centre, saying that Iran posed no "imminent threat" and that Trump was misled by Israel and media outlets.

Democrats attacked Gabbard over the war, saying she had not proven that Iran posed

any threat beyond what it has since the 1979 Islamic revolution.

"President Trump said, we are not the policemen of the world. He ran on that," Democratic Senator Michael Bennet said.

"Now he's turned us into the world's policeman, into its jury, into its judge, into its executioner," he said.

In her remarks to senators, Gabbard said Iran had been suffering heavy blows in the weeks of attacks — which included the killing of the long-time supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei — but that the Islamic republic was still functioning.

Three officers killed in line of duty during drug raid in Amman — police

Continued from page 1

The PSD affirms its commitment to fulfilling its duty of maintaining security and

public order, and to pursue all those who attempt to undermine it or attempt to spread, trade, and promote these poisons among

members of society, while pledging to sacrifice everything precious for this cause, the PSD statement added.

War reshapes Middle East balance as regional, global tensions rise

Continued from page 1

The move reflects rising concern that the conflict is entering a more sensitive stage, with implications extending beyond the immediate battlefield.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said in a post on X on Wednesday that the consequences of the war would not be contained within the region.

He warned that the global impact had yet to fully unfold and would affect all countries regardless of economic or political standing.

"Wave of global repercussions has only begun and will hit all — regardless of wealth, faith or race," Araghchi said.

"A rising number of voices — [including] European and US officials — exclaim that the war on Iran is unjust. More members of the international community should follow suit," the post added.

The escalation has also drawn mixed international reactions, ranging from calls to contain the crisis to warnings over its impact on regional stability and global energy markets, particularly amid rising military tensions around the Strait of Hormuz.

Military developments are also shaping the route of the conflict.

US Central Command said on Tuesday it had hit Iranian missile sites near the strategic Strait of Hormuz using multiple 5,000-pound deep penetrator munitions, among the most powerful bombs in its arsenal.

The move signals growing concern over the security of key maritime routes.

It also underscores the role of major powers in the unfolding crisis, with Washington emerging as a decisive actor in shaping both its military and strategic direction.

At the same time, the economic impact is becoming more visible. Fuel prices in the United States have risen, with average gasoline costs exceeding \$3.75 per gallon for the first time since October 2023, reflecting disruptions in global energy markets linked to the war.

These developments highlight how the conflict is intersecting with global economic stability, particularly through energy supply chains and strategic chokepoints.

Political analyst Amer Sabailah said the current trajectory points to a deeper structural

shift in the region.

"After October 7, the region will not return to what it was [before]," he said. "The previous model of fragmented control, militias and loose territorial authority is unlikely to persist."

He added that the developments could push towards a broader reconfiguration of the regional order.

"This may lead to a period of instability," he said. "But it also creates pressure on states to address the issue of non-state actors and restore more centralised control."

Across the region, the trajectory points to shifts in political and security dynamics. The conflict is extending beyond direct confrontation and placing increased pressure on regional coordination and diplomatic efforts.

The current moment reflects a departure from earlier attempts at de-escalation, as governments navigate a more complex and uncertain environment.

As tensions rise, the key question is whether diplomatic efforts can keep pace with the speed of military developments.

Gov't addresses crisis on multiple fronts, ensures normal life — Momani

Continued from page 1

Momani noted that citizens are carrying on with their daily routines, attending schools and universities and working in factories and businesses, while the Armed Forces and security agencies handled over 500 fragments from the missiles and drones to ensure public safety and maintain normal life.

The minister said the direct cost of the regional events in Jordan this month reached around JD150 million, largely invested in supporting the energy sector, noting that these figures cover only direct expenses.

He added that the government has activated the floating ship at Aqaba Port and secured alternative energy supplies, while

also taking measures to ensure the continuity of supply chains, including lifting exclusivity at Aqaba Port and exempting fees and taxes resulting from rising prices.

Momani also confirmed coordination with Syria to facilitate transport between Aqaba and Latakia ports, ensuring the flow of goods from both the Mediterranean and the

Red Sea, and stressed the importance of maintaining smooth delivery of goods to the Jordanian market despite the challenges.

Momani said that the extremist right-wing Israeli government is exploiting current circumstances to violate international law.

Momani said that the first violation was preventing worshippers from accessing Al Aqsa

Mosque and restricting freedom of worship during the holy month of Ramadan and on Laylat Al Qadr, noting that this act is offensive to every Arab and Muslim.

Momani added that Al Aqsa Mosque holds deep religious significance and is cherished by every Muslim, stressing that Israel's actions are unacceptable and strongly condemned.

Nationwide free school transport project set to launch first phase

Continued from page 1

The first phase will cover 60 schools in the southern Badia, spanning Karak, Tafleeh, Ma'an and Aqaba, serving nearly 8,000 students, and will be implemented over two years starting with the 2026 school year in August, deploying 120 modern buses equipped with

cameras, tracking systems and a mobile app that allows parents to monitor the journeys of the students.

The project will also create 220 jobs for drivers, technicians and maintenance staff, who will receive specialised training, according to the Jordan News Agency, Petra.

The agreement for the

first phase of the project is set to be signed in the second half of April at a cost of around JD1.32 million, funded by the Treasury, while a coalition of Singaporean, Chinese and local firms will supply the buses and oversee implementation, drawing on experience from similar projects in Qatar, Oman and other countries.

The government plans gradual expansion to include all governorates, particularly central and northern Badia regions, as part of broader efforts to modernise transport systems alongside the Bus Rapid Transit network.

A second phase, scheduled for mid-June, will add seven inter-governorate routes linking Am-

man with other governorates through 180 smart buses, with a capacity of 13,500 passengers daily.

Recent BRT expansions within Amman and to Madaba, Al Balqa Applied University and Zarqa have already increased usage to more than 64 million since 2021, including 24 million last year, Petra added.

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American hegemony is collapsing before our eyes

By **Carla Norrlöf**

WASHINGTON, DC — The messy crisis in the Strait of Hormuz has clarified how power works in the 21st century. It reminds us that the greatest long-term threat to the United States is not China's military buildup or Russian aggression, but the gradual fragmentation of the alliance system that has underwritten its global leadership since World War II.

For eight decades, this strategic asset has mattered more than raw military power, because no US rival has been able to match it. With more than 50 treaty allies and formal security partners, the US built the first truly global security system in history. China has trading partners but only one security ally (North Korea) and Russia's five allies are bound by dependence and coercion. The US alone leads a worldwide coalition of countries that have, for generations, voluntarily chosen to tie their security to it.

To be sure, several presidents, especially Donald Trump, have voiced concerns about the alliance system's costs. But what they see as a liability has repeatedly enabled the US to mobilise coalitions when crises erupt. In 1991, for example, the US assembled a vast multinational force to expel Iraqi troops from Kuwait. NATO allies, Arab partners, and Asian states contributed forces, funding, and logistics.

Even during the far more divisive Iraq war in the 2000s, the US was able to attract partners. Four countries participated in the initial invasion and nearly 40 deployed troops at some point during the war. Many contributions were small, with some consisting of a few hundred soldiers or specialised support units. But the political and military reality remained the same: even in controversial wars, US power operated through coalitions rather than unilateralism.

The contrast with the present moment is striking. As tensions rise around Iran and oil prices spike, the Trump administration has pleaded with allies to help secure shipping through the Strait of Hormuz, one of the most important waterways in the global economy. Nearly one-fifth of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas passes through the narrow channel connecting the Persian Gulf to international markets, giving allies a direct stake in keeping it open.

Yet, the response from America's security partners has been muted, hesitant, or negative. Several major allies — including Spain, Italy and Germany — have rejected participation. Australia has said it will not send ships, while Canada has ruled out offensive operations. France, Japan and South Korea have not committed warships to the US-led mission. Britain says it is discussing options with partners, but it has not yet announced a deployment.

The pattern is unmistakable: Allies that once mobilised alongside the US now appear increasingly reluctant to bear security risks under its leadership. Part of this hesitation reflects the cumulative cost of years in which Trump and his MAGA followers have publicly disparaged allies, questioned security commitments and treated the alliance system as a burden rather than America's most valuable strategic asset.

Disagreements within alliances are not new. NATO has survived divisive crises, from the Suez conflict in 1956 to the Iraq war and the first Trump administration's withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal. But this time, the story is not limited to allied reluctance. A deeper shift is under way. Key partners such as France and Italy have reportedly begun exploring direct discussions with Iran to secure safe passage for their own commercial shipping through the Strait of Hormuz. Although such talks remain tentative, the fact that they are even happening is historically significant.

Energy markets help explain the urgency. Oil prices have surged above \$100 per barrel, and European gas prices have risen sharply as shipping collapses. European governments fear that a prolonged closure of the strait could deepen the economic strains already weighing on their economies. But instead of coordinating a collective response through the alliance system, several allies are exploring independent arrangements with the very state the US has gone to war against.

For decades, US leadership discouraged precisely this behaviour, because it was based on the understanding that separate bargains with adversaries would erode the cohesion that alliances require. Alliances rest on collective security, with members confronting threats jointly. Once governments begin negotiating their own carve-outs with adversaries, the alliance ceases to function as a coordinated security network and becomes a loose aggregation of national strategies.

Alliances rarely collapse abruptly. More often, they erode gradually as members begin hedging their security outside the system. If European states succeed in negotiating separate guarantees with Iran rather than acting through the alliance system, the implications will extend far beyond the Persian Gulf. Such an outcome would strike at the heart of American power and could mark the beginning of a broader breakdown in the US-centred global security architecture.

Carla Norrlöf is professor of Political Science at the University of Toronto.

Reimagining Gulf security

By **Jamal Ibrahim Haidar and Adeel Malik**

BEIRUT/OXFORD — For decades, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries have exported oil and recycled petrodollars through Western markets and received military protection from the United States. This arrangement has often been described as a strategic alliance. In reality, it is more like a system of "protection for sale", in which the GCC has effectively purchased security guarantees through arms contracts, basing rights, and geopolitical alignment.

The US-Israeli war with Iran has exposed the inherent fragility of this model and called into question the credibility of the entire deterrence architecture. Despite the massive US military presence in the region, Iran's ability to close the Strait of Hormuz and unleash a barrage of strikes across the GCC has demonstrated that the US cannot guarantee the security of its own installations, let alone that of the Gulf countries. American bases and personnel have become vulnerable assets, even as the US projects power globally.

The reason for this asymmetry is clear: Missile and drone warfare have fundamentally changed the cost structure of conflict. Low-cost drones, in particular, have enabled Iran to pose a credible threat to extremely expensive assets such as air bases, ports, and oil facilities. The marginal cost of disruption is now far lower than the marginal cost of defence.

This shift erodes the economic logic behind the longstanding

GCC-US security contract. GCC countries allocate a significant share of public spending toward purchasing advanced weapons systems from the US. But the Iran war has demonstrated that technological superiority alone cannot guarantee safety. A \$30,000 drone can disable infrastructure protected by billions of dollars' worth of military equipment. Massive outlays offer diminishing returns in terms of actual safety.

More importantly, the militarization of the Middle East means that each new weapons purchase by one side is interpreted as a provocation by the other, exacerbating the very threat they are responding to. The Gulf's arms race, among the most expensive in the world, generates massive profits for external suppliers but has failed to produce stability at home.

But there is a way to reduce the probability of conflict by raising the opportunity cost of war: economic interdependence. When countries are deeply integrated through trade, infrastructure, and financial networks, the economic losses from confrontation become too large to ignore. Mutual gains from cooperation begin to outweigh the perceived benefits of coercion.

For the GCC and Iran, the potential for such integration is substantial. While it may appear unrealistic in the short term, economic integration is ultimately the most viable path to reducing conflict in the long run. Iran has a large domestic market, significant industrial capacity and vast

energy resources. GCC economies, meanwhile, possess financial capital, logistics infrastructure and global trade connectivity. Instead of living in a permanent state of suspicion, the two sides could form the backbone of a regional economic bloc spanning energy, transportation and finance.

The possibilities include integrated electricity grids, cross-Gulf shipping corridors, coordinated energy markets and joint infrastructure development linking the Arabian Peninsula with Iran and Central Asia. These forms of cooperation would not eliminate political disagreements, but they would change regional actors' incentive structure.

Attacking a trade partner's infrastructure is economically irrational because it means disrupting one's own supply chains, investment returns and energy flows. This is the same logic that underpinned Europe's reconstruction and long-term stability after World War II: Economic interdependence transformed former rivals into mutually dependent partners.

By contrast, the current Gulf security architecture outsources the task of protection to a distant power whose strategic priorities do not always align with those of GCC countries. We now see the limits of this arrangement. Even the strongest external military actor cannot fully shield geographically exposed partners from the realities of modern warfare.

Moreover, reliance on foreign protection can produce what econ-

omists call moral hazard. When governments believe that a powerful ally will ultimately guarantee their safety, they may have less incentive to pursue diplomatic negotiations with regional rivals — a dynamic that sustains, rather than mitigates or resolves, conflict.

The GCC faces a strategic choice. It can either continue to rely on external military guarantees that leave it structurally vulnerable, or it can pursue a shift towards security rooted in regional economic integration. Of course, such a shift does not imply abandoning defense capabilities or strategic partnerships. Instead, it means recognising that durable peace cannot be imported; it must be produced locally through shared economic interests.

The Iran 2026 war may prove a turning point, exposing the limits of the "protection for sale" system that has defined Gulf geopolitics for decades. No amount of foreign weaponry can substitute for a stable regional order built on cooperation, interdependence, and rational economic incentives. Security purchased from abroad will always remain conditional and incomplete. Security built through economic integration, however, has the potential to become self-sustaining.

Jamal Ibrahim Haidar is assistant professor and chairperson of the Department of Economics at the Lebanese American University. Adeel Malik is associate professor of Development Economics and globe fellow in the Economics of Muslim Societies at the University of Oxford.

Jordan's strategic stocks: Ensuring stability in times of crisis

By **Raad Mahmoud Al-Tal**

Jordan's strategic stocks play a key role in maintaining economic stability. They test the country's ability to secure essential goods in a complex regional environment, focusing on two main areas: Food and energy. Since Jordan relies heavily on imports, the challenge is not just to have supplies available but also to manage shocks and prevent crises from affecting the population.

Last week, King Abdullah chaired a critical meeting at the National Centre for Security and Crisis Management. The discussion focused on three main priorities: Being prepared for any emergency, ensuring basic goods are available through secure stockpiles and supply chains, and guaranteeing sufficient energy and raw materials to stabilise prices and prevent market manipulation.

On the food side, Jordan is well-prepared. Wheat stock covers five to six months of consumption, rising to about nine months when including pre-contracted supplies. Barley stock lasts around eight months, while other essential food items cover three to four months. These reserves not only ensure availability but also give the country the ability to absorb sudden disruptions in global markets. Strategic stock allows authorities to release supplies when needed, prevent shortages, control sharp price spikes and reduce monopolistic practices.

Energy presents more challenges, especially with interruptions in gas supply. Jordan responded quickly by activating emergency plans and using alternatives like liquefied gas, diesel and heavy fuel, despite the high cost of around 1.8 million Jordanian dinars per day. The national electricity company can use the strategic

stock to maintain electricity during emergencies, helping industries stabilise production costs and preserve the competitiveness of Jordanian products.

According to the Ministry of Energy, petroleum derivatives last about 30 days, gasoline covers around 90 days, crude oil about 45 days, and natural gas roughly 30 days. These reserves provide a buffer against temporary supply disruptions. They also help manage prices: Fuel purchased in advance delays global price increases from reaching local markets, giving decision-makers time to respond and stabilising industrial costs.

Government measures further strengthen resilience. Policies include multiple fuel import channels, flexible use of strategic stocks and exemptions from some taxes and fees for electricity imports. These steps aim to protect electricity supply locally from

global energy price fluctuations, a crucial factor for continuous industrial production.

Despite this preparedness, external challenges remain. Rising oil prices, higher shipping costs, "war insurance" fees, and disruptions in vital shipping routes, like the Strait of Hormuz, put additional pressure on the economy. Strategic stock acts as a first line of defense, preventing shortages and sudden price spikes, but it cannot completely shield the economy from global inflation during prolonged crises.

Jordan's strategic reserves delay the impact of shocks and provide critical flexibility. However, they are not a permanent solution. Continuous hedging policies, diversifying energy sources (like solar energy for homes and factories), and expanding import options are essential to ensure the economy remains resilient in an unpredictable region.

Africa isn't the world's 'climate solution'

By **Martha Bekele**

ADDIS ABABA — When politicians nowadays talk about Africa and climate change, they tend to use the same words: "leadership", "opportunity" and "solutions". Africa is no longer presented primarily as vulnerable to the effects of rising temperatures, but rather as indispensable to the global response to climate change, with a focus on the continent's renewable-energy potential, natural carbon sinks, critical minerals and young workforce.

This reframing has been welcomed as a corrective to older narratives of Africa's victimisation. But, on closer inspection, the growing recognition of the continent's role as a global climate leader reflects an effort to shift responsibility for the climate crisis away from historical emitters and towards those now expected to "deliver solutions".

With the 2027 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP32) in Addis Ababa already dominating political discussions across the continent, African leaders must choose their language more carefully than they have in the past. If the "solutions" narrative is adopted uncritically, it will reinforce structural arrangements that sustain Africa's continued exploitation.

The African Union's communications have helped legitimise this framing, as have declarations from the first two Africa Climate Summits. The latter paired the language of climate justice with the goal of attracting investment,

as if addressing Africa's climate challenges is simply a matter of demonstrating the continent's investability, rather than redressing historical injustices.

While the language of "leadership" appears empowering, it transfers the burden of climate action from developed countries' budgets to private markets and developing countries' balance sheets. It rearranges reality — to borrow a phrase from critics of development discourse — and renders climate change an ahistorical and apolitical problem.

Unpacking this narrative exposes its contradictions. First, Africa is framed as a potential provider of renewable solutions that will accelerate the global energy transition. But data show that while investment in clean energy is rising, consumption of energy from all sources — including fossil fuels — continues to grow. African countries therefore risk adopting a framework that ignores the need to reduce fossil-fuel consumption and to support countries in adapting to climate change.

Second, Africa's forests, particularly the Congo Basin, are increasingly positioned as critical infrastructure for carbon offsets, which allow rich-country polluters to continue pumping out greenhouse-gas emissions. Questions that should be political — which entities pay for these credits and whose land and livelihoods are reorganised as a result — are reduced to the technicalities of valuation and verification.

Third, the "solutions" framework tends to focus on Africa's abun-

dant supply of critical minerals, which are required for the batteries and other clean technologies driving the green transition. But this follows a familiar pattern: Officials present extraction as an indispensable "contribution" that can boost exports, even though African countries often have little to no control over processing or pricing, resulting in limited value capture.

Fourth, African leaders have started referring to the continent's population as an economic asset. Thus, Africans are regarded as inputs for green industrialisation and clean manufacturing, rather than as citizens whose dignity must be secured through fair wages and decent work. This framing obscures who benefits from these transitions and whose labor ultimately becomes expendable.

When climate justice is no longer a question of liability and obligation, but instead is regarded as a technical financing challenge, Africa's supposed leadership on climate solutions is channeled through the same market logic underlying its long history of exploitation (and which helped create the climate crisis). Africa risks falling into an old trap: Serving the interests of wealthy countries while remaining structurally disadvantaged.

The continent's leaders must develop an Afrocentric climate position rooted in the principle of special needs and special circumstances, which reflects the continent's structural inequalities caused by slavery, colonialism, genocide, and ecocide; marginali-

sation in the global economy; and heightened vulnerability to climate change. Such a position must insist that Africa's low emissions, limited capacity to adapt and historical underdevelopment justify differentiated treatment, unconditional public finance, preservation of policy space and access to affordable and adaptable non-proprietary technologies.

Ahead of COP32, African policymakers must recognise that climate governance increasingly prioritises capital mobilisation over redistribution. As a result, they should be prepared to defend justice-based claims while avoiding dependence on debt-creating climate-finance instruments, including concessional loans. Their longer-term focus should be on strategically delinking from a system that consistently frames Africa as mainly a supplier of carbon sinks, critical minerals and mitigation assets for decarbonisation elsewhere.

Wealthy countries are responsible for the bulk of historic emissions. This reality must form the backbone of Africa's climate stance, without apology or dilution. The continent's leaders should recognise "climate leadership" for what it really is: A symbolic move motivated by the desire of some of the largest global emitters to avoid the consequences of their actions.

Martha Bekele is director and co-founder of Development Transformations (DevTransform), a pan-African NGO devoted to improving development practices.

BUSINESS

Thursday, March 19, 2026



Minister of Agriculture Saeb Khreisat and Bulgarian Ambassador Metin Kazak (left) on Wednesday discuss prospects of cooperation across a range of agricultural fields

Jordan, Bulgaria explore agricultural cooperation

AMMAN (JT) — Minister of Agriculture Saeb Khreisat and Bulgarian Ambassador Metin Kazak on Wednesday discussed prospects of cooperation across a range of agricultural fields.

The minister underscored the deep Jordanian-Bulgarian ties and stressed the need to build on these to advance cooperation in the agricultural sector to achieve shared interests, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.

The minister said, Jordan is a "favourable" environment for agricultural investment, urging "expand-

ed" joint investment opportunities between the public and private sectors in both countries.

The Bulgarian ambassador commended the level of relations with Jordan...

He highlighted the importance of exchanging agricultural products and cooperating in agricultural production inputs to support sustain-

able agricultural development.

Khreisat also discussed the possibility of Bulgarian agricultural companies taking part in events and activities held in Jordan, particularly those linked to European partnership frameworks.

The Bulgarian ambassador commended the level of relations with Jordan, and reaffirmed his country's commitment to expanding cooperation across various sectors, particularly agriculture, through promoting expertise-sharing, technology transfer and joint investment.

Trump administration takes steps to curb energy cost hikes

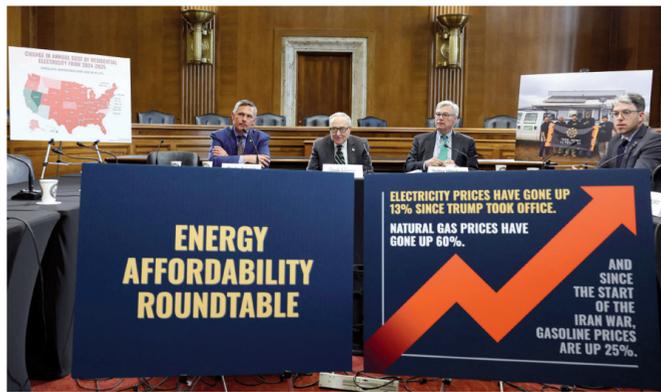
WASHINGTON, United States (AFP) — US President Donald Trump's administration scrambled on Wednesday to rein in surging energy costs from war in the Middle East, temporarily waiving a century-old shipping law and easing Venezuela sanctions.

The moves came after oil prices rocketed following US-Israeli strikes on Iran on February 28. Tehran's retaliation brought commercial shipping through the Strait of Hormuz to a virtual halt, snarling energy supply chains.

Around a fifth of global crude oil and liquefied natural gas pass through the critical waterway during peacetime, and Brent North Sea crude advanced over 5 per cent earlier Wednesday.

Average US gasoline prices have jumped more than 27 per cent since the start of the war, according to data from the AAA motor club.

This strains American household budgets further — with consumers already facing high costs of living — piling pressure on the Trump administration as key midterm elections



U.S. Sen. Martin Heinrich, Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, and Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse speak to reporters after a roundtable on rising energy costs on Capitol Hill on Tuesday in Washington, DC

approach.

For now, Trump's announcement of a 60-day Jones Act waiver would lift a ban on foreign-flagged vessels transporting cargo between US ports over this period.

The 1920 law was aimed at promoting American shipbuilding, but critics argue that it hampers free trade and has raised costs for consumers.

The move is "just another step to mitigate the short-term disruption

to the oil market as the US military continues meeting the objectives of Operation Epic Fury", said White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt in a statement, referring to the US campaign against Iran.

"This action will allow vital resources like oil, natural gas, fertiliser and coal to flow freely to US ports for 60 days," she added.

She vowed that the Trump administration "remains committed to continuing to strength-

en our critical supply chains".

The US Treasury Department separately issued a license Wednesday to authorise certain transactions between established US entities and Venezuela's state-owned oil company PDVSA.

"This licence will benefit both the United States and Venezuela, while supporting the global energy market by increasing the supply of available oil," said a Treasury spokesperson.

Vice President JD Vance touched on the issue on Wednesday during a visit to a manufacturing facility in Michigan: "We've got a rough road ahead of us for the next few weeks, but it's temporary."

The Jones Act requires that cargo transported by water between US ports be moved on vessels that are US-built, US-owned and registered under the US flag.

Just a fraction of the world's tankers comply with the Act, said Colin Grabow, an associate director at the libertarian Cato Institute.

"So this is a dramatic expansion in the number of ships that are able to be used" in transporting goods within the world's biggest economy, he told AFP, referring to Trump's temporary waiver.

He said it is nearly five times as expensive to build a medium-range tanker in the United States than in Asia, which could explain why there are not many such vessels globally.

Grabow believes the measure will bolster US supply chains, but warned that effects on prices could be limited if the war rages on.

Stocks extend gains and oil dips as US, Israel, Iran continue strikes

HONG KONG (AFP) — Oil prices sank on Wednesday after Iraq said it had resumed exports through Turkey, avoiding the effectively closed Strait of Hormuz, while equities rose following another tech-led advance on Wall Street.

The drop in crude, which saw WTI sink more than four per cent, came even as the United States hit Iranian missile sites near the key Strait of Hormuz and Tehran struck crude-producing Gulf neighbours.

While the war in the Middle East shows no sign of ending and oil has stuck around \$100 a barrel — threatening to fuel a fresh inflation spike — equity traders have shifted back into the market after the steep losses suffered at the outset of the conflict.

However, analysts warned the positive mood could fade if the crisis drags on and energy costs spiral with Hormuz — through which a fifth of global oil and gas flow — effectively closed by Iran as an economic weapon.

That comes with central banks weighing the need for lower interest rates to support the economy and the prospect of rising prices, which would need higher borrowing costs.

In a bid to ease traffic through the crucial Strait, US forces dropped several 2,250kg bombs on "hardened Iranian missile sites" near the coast, Central Command said.

US President Donald Trump on Tuesday fumed that allies, which have largely distanced themselves from his war, were not lining up to help escort tankers through the waterway.



Pedestrians walk past a display with the prices in Hong Kong dollars at a petrol station in Hong Kong on Tuesday

The attacks came as Israel announced it had killed security chief Ali Larjani, a key force leading Iran since the death of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in the war.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia intercepted six drones and Kuwait's air defences responded to a rocket and drone attack, two people were killed by missiles near Tel Aviv, and Qatar said it intercepted a missile attack as blasts were heard in Doha.

Israel also hit a central Beirut neighbourhood as it looks to take out the Iran-backed Hizbollah.

Rystad Energy estimated just 12.5 million barrels per day of Middle Eastern oil remains online, down from the 21 million per day pre-war base.

"But the 12.5 million bpd figure is not secure," Rystad said. "If the [Hormuz] situation persists, the drop in departures could start feeding through into additional export losses in the weeks ahead, as producers face growing difficulty moving crude out of

the Gulf."

Still, oil prices fell as Iraq said it had resumed limited oil exports through Turkey.

State-owned North Oil Company said it "has begun operating the Sarlo pumping station to resume pumping and exporting Kirkuk oil to the port of Ceyhan with an initial capacity of 250,000 barrels per day".

West Texas Intermediate lost more than 4 per cent to strike just below \$92, while Brent shed almost 3 per cent to just above \$100.

Stocks continued to defy gravity following gains on Wall Street that were helped by tech giants including Apple and Amazon.

Seoul jumped more than 5 per cent thanks to a surge in chip giants Samsung and SK hynix. The Kospi, however, is still more than 6 per cent down from the record highs touched before the war broke out.

Tokyo was up 2.9 per cent, while Hong Kong, Shanghai, Taipei, Sydney, Singapore, Mumbai, Bangkok and Wellington also rallied.

"Asia is picking up the baton with a cau-

tiously constructive tone... all of it leaning on the signal from Wall Street where the S&P and Nasdaq have now strung together a second day of gains, suggesting the market is actively choosing to look through the geopolitical noise," wrote SPI Asset Management's Stephen Innes.

However, Fawad Razaqada at Forex.com warned traders might rethink their positions the longer the conflict rumbles on.

"If the war continues then the US and Israel will have to continue alone, because other NATO members have decided against joining the conflict," he wrote.

"This may work in favour of Iran keeping the Strait of Hormuz closed for longer."

Focus is also on the Federal Reserve's policy meeting that concludes later Wednesday.

The bank is expected to keep borrowing costs on hold but it will release its "dot plot" forecast for rates in the coming months, amid speculation it could be forced to hike again.

Oil surges as Iran gas facilities hit, stocks slide

LONDON (AFP) — Oil prices surged on Wednesday following a strike on one of Iran's gas facilities that raised the spectre of a further escalation of attacks on energy infrastructure in the Gulf region.

Stocks markets slid after a closely watched US inflation gauge came in hotter than expected, as the US Federal Reserve was holding an interest rate meeting.

"Markets are back in panic mode," said XTB research director Kathleen Brooks.

Brent oil rose over six percent at one point to nearly \$110 a barrel after Iran vowed to hit energy facilities throughout the Gulf in retaliation to what it said was an Israeli attack on a facility serving a massive gas field it shares with Qatar.

"The risk is that an oil shipping crisis is morphing into an oil supply crisis," said Brooks.

"Unsurprisingly, this has spooked a market that was willing to grasp hopeful signs that tankers were slowly getting through the Strait of Hormuz, and that countries like Saudi Arabia and Iraq could get oil into the market through alterna-



A picture shows a view of the phase 12 of the South Pars gas field facilities near the southern Iranian town of Kangan on the shore of the Gulf on January 22, 2014

tive routes," she added.

Earlier Wednesday, oil prices had fallen slightly after Iraq said it had resumed limited oil exports through the Turkish port of Ceyhan, using a pipeline that avoids the Strait of Hormuz.

The strategic waterway usually sees a fifth of global oil pass through it but Iran has effectively shut it since the outbreak of the war, with attacks on ships.

The three main US stock indices were all lower in early afternoon trading, and European stock markets ended the day in the red.

The US Labor Department reported before the start of trading in New York that the Producer Price Index (PPI) rose 0.7

per cent in February from the previous month.

That was much faster than the 0.3 per cent increase expected by analysts, and further clouded the outlook for interest rate cuts.

"The key takeaway from the report is that the uptick in producer prices was seen in both goods and services, and the added point is that this higher inflation occurred before the war with Iran and subsequent surge in energy prices, which will foment concerns about a worsening inflation situation," said Patrick J. O'Hare, an analyst at Briefing.com.

Following the US Federal Reserve meeting, on Thursday the European Central Bank, the Bank

of England and the Bank of Japan will all hold meetings.

While they were all expected to keep rates steady, the latest inflation reports could lead to more hawkish comments from the central bankers.

"The [ECB's] Governing Council will not want to risk a repeat of 2022 when inflation risks were initially underestimated and perhaps contributed to the eventual surge to double digit inflation," said Gian Luigi Mandruzato, senior economist at EFG Asset Management.

Markets have been pricing in one rate cut this year in the United States, but could be forced to shift positions if Fed policymakers do so given the surge in energy prices.

The dollar, which had been little changed ahead of the Fed meeting, rose along with oil on news of the latest attacks on energy infrastructure.

Earlier in the day, shares in Seoul jumped more than five percent, driven by chip giants Samsung and SK hynix. The Kospi, however, remains more than six percent down from the record highs touched before the war broke out.

AMMAN STOCK EXCHANGE

AMMAN (JT) — Amman Stock Exchange (ASE) trading value for Wednesday amounted to JD17.3 million spread over 5.3 million shares that traded through 2,816 transactions.

The ASE share price index shed 0.43 per cent, closing at 3687.66 points.

Out of 83 companies whose shares were traded, the share price of 37 companies rose while the share price of another 27 declined.

Topping the list of the companies whose shares gained the most were Union Tobacco and Cigarette Industries by 10 per cent, Arab Phoenix Holdings by 4.76 per cent, Injaz for Development and Projects by 4.55 per cent, Al Faris National Company for Investment and Export by 4 per cent, and Arab Banking Corporation in Jordan by 3.8 per cent.

The companies whose shares dropped the most were United Financial Investments by 4.65 per cent, Jordan International Investment Company by 4.55 per cent, Amwaj Properties by 4.35 per cent, Jordanian Expatriates Investment Holding by 2.7 per cent, and Philadelphia Pharmaceuticals by 2.52 per cent.

THE MARKET TODAY

ASE Index: ↑ 3687.66 0.43% March 18, 2026

Live Data | Historical Data

Click and drag in the plot area to zoom in

10:30 11:00 11:30 12:00 12:30 13:00 13:30

DAILY SUMMARY

Regular Market		OTC Market
Trading Value (JDs)	17,294,969	
Trading volume	5,352,714	
No. of Transactions	2,833	
No. of Securities	84	

Losers: 27

Gainners: 38

Unchanged: 19

WHEN GAMES TURN DARK: THE HIDDEN DANGERS LURKING IN CHILDREN'S VIDEO GAMES

By Hadeel El Bis

Gaming experts and specialist doctors are warning that some video games, which appear innocent and entertaining for children, may carry complex psychological content that poses a serious risk to their mental health.

Mohammed Kanakri, founder of JEG Esports and head of the technical committee at the Jordanian Esports Federation, puts it bluntly: "Some games are not mere entertainment — they are dangerous content disguised as appealing games. They deceive children and expose them to significant psychological and behavioural risks."

Dr. Jamal Al Akhras, a consultant neurologist, warns that excessive gaming can lead to sleep disorders, social isolation, aggressive behaviour, and loss of concentration — particularly in children aged between eight and 14. He cautions that in some cases, the effects of certain games can extend to depression or suicidal ideation.

The Public Security Directorate has also issued alerts to parents about games that may appear suitable for children on the surface, but contain deeply troubling psychological content. The warnings followed the spread of the game "Doki Doki Literature Club" across the internet and video-sharing platforms. The game begins as a lighthearted school-based cartoon story before gradually shifting into dark psychological territory, touching on themes of depression, self-harm, suicide, and mental illness — making it entirely unsuitable for children and adolescents.

These warnings raise urgent questions about the neurological and psychological effects of excessive gaming, the dangers of inappropriate content for young users, and the respective responsibilities of parents and game developers in safeguarding children.

A 2024 study by Save the Children Jordan, titled "Behind the Screens: Children's Safety in the Digital Space", found that 15.8 per cent of Jordanian children aged between 10 and 17 had experienced some form of digital abuse — including cyberbullying, account hacking, or online blackmail. The study also found that 76.7 per cent of children in this age group connect to the internet daily, rising to 86.5 per cent among 16- and 17-year-olds.

The impact on children

Kanakri says the recent warnings are well-founded. He explains that certain games cannot be classified as games at all — they are inappropriate content on every level, dressed up to look like attractive games for children. This gives parents a false sense of reassurance, whilst the games themselves carry harmful and dangerous messages. "These games use images and graph-

ic elements that are designed to be addictive. However, excessive use — particularly among children aged eight to 14 — is a different matter entirely. Children spending more than eight hours daily in front of a screen risk what he describes as a social catastrophe: addiction, loss of social connection, academic decline, sleep disorders, isolation, and aggressive behaviour. In some cases, children may also be at risk of epileptic seizures.

Dr. Akhras highlights the importance of early identification of warning signs, including withdrawal, excessive time spent gaming, and declining social interaction. Treatment involves gradually reducing gaming hours, sessions with behavioural and psychological specialists, regulated sleep schedules, and close parental supervision. Where sleep is severely disrupted, melatonin may be considered to regulate sleep cycles — without resorting to sedatives.

The parental gap

The Save the Children study reveals a striking awareness gap: 75 per cent of parents were unaware that their children had been exposed to digital violence online, and only 9 per cent use parental control tools.

Kanakri argues that the focus must be on instilling religious, moral, and social values from an early age. Parents need to know which games their children are playing and regulate gaming time to maintain a healthy balance between study, daily life, and physical activity. He also encourages parents to play alongside their children and discuss the content they are consuming, including monitoring voice and text chat, since leaving children unsupervised online can expose them to inappropriate content or irresponsible individuals.

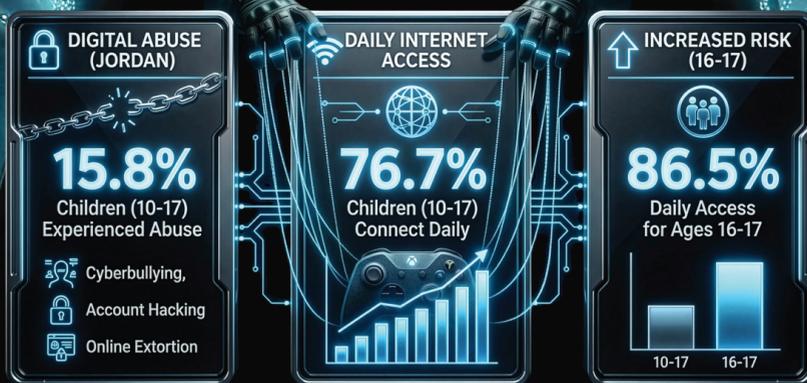
He is also careful to note that awareness must precede any policies of prohibition or restriction, to avoid inadvertently lending inappropriate content an undesired appeal.

The research

A large-scale American study involving more than 100,000 children found that the optimal daily limit for electronic device use is 1 hour on weekdays and 2 hours at weekends — totalling 9 hours per week. This is considerably less than what is typical in Jordan and many other countries.

A local study of 807 parents found that 61.3 per cent of children use electronic devices unsupervised, and that 72.7 per cent of parents believe excessive screen time negatively affects their children's psychological and emotional health. Behavioural assessments showed that 51.4 per cent of children fell within the normal behavioural range, 25.3 per cent were in the borderline category, and 23.3 per cent were in the abnormal range — associated with high device usage.

THE HIDDEN DANGERS: DIGITAL ABUSE IN JORDAN



ics that initially appear innocent," he says, "but quickly transition into harmful psychological content — content that at times promotes depression or suicide, and which can harm the player or those around them." He stresses that the core problem is the exploitation of gaming's popularity to spread inappropriate content: "This is different from gaming addiction or poor time management. The issue here is deceptive content concealed beneath the guise of play."

Kanakri outlines the main tactics game designers use to target young players. Some resort to inappropriate online content to attract audiences and generate revenue or engagement — particularly in role-playing games, which allow players to inhabit alternative identities in virtual reality. Players are stimulated through elevated dopamine responses triggered by challenges and virtual rewards. "All

of these positive mechanisms are being hijacked for deeply negative purposes," he says.

Benefits vs risks

Despite these dangers, Kanakri acknowledges that esports have become a legitimate part of many people's lives, offering benefits such as improved neuromuscular coordination, teamwork, and physical and mental well-being. The industry has also grown into an economic force exceeding the global film industry in value. Moderate gaming, he says, allows children to enjoy these benefits without being exposed to the associated risks.

Dr. Al Akhras agrees, noting that playing for 1 to 1.5 hours per day can enhance concentration, memory, and hand-eye coordination, providing genuine cognitive benefits for children.

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