

THE JORDAN TIMES



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Sunday, April 12, 2026 | Shawal 24, 1447 Hijri



A view of Jerusalem's Old City with the Dome of the Rock on the left and the two domes of the Holy Sepulchre Church on the right

Jordan condemns Israeli authorities' assault on Christians in Jerusalem

AMMAN (JT) — The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has condemned the Israeli occupation authorities' assault on Christians during a celebration of "Holy Saturday".

In a statement on Saturday, the ministry's spokesperson, Fouad Majali, affirmed the Kingdom's "absolute rejection and condemnation of illegal Israeli restrictive measures targeting Christians".

He stressed the need to end all actions that obstruct Muslims and Christians from practicing their religious rites in their places of worship, according to a Foreign Ministry statement.

The statement called for respecting the historical and legal status quo in Jerusalem and its holy sites, reiterating that Israel has no sovereignty over Jerusalem.

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Global fertiliser prices hike not affecting Jordan — JCI

AMMAN (JT) — Jordan is not expected to be significantly affected by rising global fertiliser prices, due to the availability of key raw materials such as phosphate and potash, according to a Jordan Chamber of Industry (JCI) official.

Ahmed Biss representative of the fertiliser sector at JCI said that nitrogen-based inputs have seen global price increases, but that the impact on the local market would remain limited, citing Jordan's strong ties with suppliers in Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

The official told Al Mamlaka TV that the compound and specialty fertilisers required by farmers are available in the local market without significant price increases, urging against panic buying and stressing that sufficient quantities are in supply.

He also said that rising energy costs and increases in some production inputs could have a limited impact on prices.



Production sites of the Jordan Phosphate Mines Company (JPMC) in Al Shediye

Biss also said that vegetable prices are not primarily linked to fertiliser costs, but rather to global food

demand. He pointed out that lower production levels due to colder weather contributed to

recent price increases, expressing expectations that output will improve as temperatures rise.



Pro-Palestinian activists make final preparations on board boats on the eve of the departure of a new humanitarian flotilla bound for the Gaza Strip, in Barcelona, on April 11, 2026

In Gaza, fibreglass homes aim to offer more 'dignity' for displaced

KHAN YUNIS, Palestinian Territories (AFP) — In southern Gaza, aid workers are meticulously assembling fibreglass homes meant to shelter thousands of Palestinians still displaced six months af-

ter a ceasefire started between Israel and Hamas. Nearly 2 million people in Gaza are living in makeshift shelters, and the humanitarian situation remains dire, according to aid agencies.

The fibreglass units are designed to offer a modicum of relief — homes with slightly more comfort than a tent vulnerable to the coastal winds that hit Gaza.

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Iran war 'deeply' impacts tourism, nearly all planned tours cancelled — stakeholder

AMMAN (JT) — The tourism sector has been sharply affected by the Iran war, with cancellations for March reaching 100 per cent, travel agencies union said.

According to Mahmoud Khasawneh, head of the Jordan Society of Tourism and Travel Agents (JSTA), the sector has been impacted "deeply" affected by the war, adding that tourism activity came to a halt as soon as the conflict began.

Khasawneh told Al Mamlaka TV that several tours to the country have been cancelled as the conflict continued, reaching around 85 per cent for April and 70 per cent for May in inbound tourism.

With inbound tourism to Jordan being largely seasonal, he said that the focus in



The ancient city of Petra

June, July and August, will shift towards regional tourism and expatriates.

He also said that

JSTA was working to maintain existing bookings while seeking to attract tourists from new and "less

sensitive" markets, in addition to the Arab Gulf region, "through strategic plans that could help recover 30

to 40 per cent of losses sustained during the first quarter of 2026".

Khasawneh also said that land borders have remained open despite the war, stressing the importance of focusing on regional tourism.

He called on the government to support the sector by putting in place a plan to attract Arab tourists from nearby countries.

Chairman of the Board of Commissioners of Petra Development and Tourism Region Authority Adnan Sawair said that hotel bookings in Petra dropped by around 80 per cent in April, based on total hotel capacity, while cancellations for May reached approximately 50 per cent as a result of regional developments and their impact on tourism.

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US and Iran envoys meet Pakistani PM as negotiations get under way

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan (AFP) — Senior Iranian and American delegations met Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif in Islamabad on Saturday to begin negotiations towards a deal to end the Middle East war unleashed six weeks earlier by US-Israeli strikes on Tehran.

With the talks under way at Islamabad's Serena Hotel, Iranian media said the negotiating format going forward had yet to be determined, and it was not clear whether the two sides would meet face-to-face or continue to exchange messages via the Pakistanis.



A woman walks past an anti-US mural depicting Iran-US talks near the former US embassy in Tehran on Saturday

But both sides had arrived at the venue when the Iranian delegation led by parliamen-

tary speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf met Sharif, followed by US Vice President JD

Vance, accompanied by White House envoy Steve Witkoff and President Donald Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner.

"Commending the commitment of both delegations to engage constructively, the Prime Minister expressed the hope that these talks would serve as a stepping stone toward durable peace in the region," Sharif's office said.

"The Prime Minister reiterated that Pakistan looks forward to continue its facilitation of both sides in making progress towards sustainable peace in the region."

Iran has previously said that any agreement on a permanent end to fighting must include the unfreezing of sanctioned Iranian assets as well as an end to Israel's war against Hezbollah in Lebanon, which Vance has said will not be up for discussion in Islamabad.

The warring parties still appeared to be far apart on key issues — including sanctions, Lebanon and the opening of the strategic Strait of Hormuz — and made no attempt to hide their mutual suspicion.

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US 'clearing out' the Strait of Hormuz, Trump says

WASHINGTON, United States (AFP) — The United States has started "clearing out" the Strait of Hormuz, US President Donald Trump said Saturday, as US-Iran negotiations towards a deal to end the Middle East war got underway.

The comment came as US media outlet Axios reported that several US navy ships had crossed the Strait on Saturday in a move not coordinated with Iran. A senior Iranian military official — quoted by state television — denied the report. "We're now starting the process



US President Donald Trump steps off Air Force One at Charlottesville-Albemarle Airport, Virginia on Friday

of clearing out the Strait of Hormuz," Trump said on his Truth Social platform, calling it "a favor" to countries such as China, Japan

and France that "don't have the Courage or Will to do this work themselves."

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A march is held after Friday prayers near Al Hussein Mosque, reaffirming Jordan's firm and unwavering stance in defending the Hashemite custodianship over Islamic and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem

Jordanians take to street in support of King's messages on Jerusalem

AMMAN (JT) — A march set off after Friday prayers from Al Hussein Mosque, reaffirming Jordan's firm and unwavering stance, both leadership and people, in defending the Hashemite custodianship over Islamic and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem.

Participants in the Friday march, organised by Jordanian political parties and trade unions, represented various segments of the Jordanian society, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.

They stressed that the Kingdom, which has long made and continues to make significant sacrifices for Jerusalem, will not accept any infringement on Al Aqsa

Mosque and will not allow any measures aimed at its Judaisation or altering its Arab and Islamic character.

Participants also recalled messages delivered by His Majesty King Abdullah during his recent meetings with Arab and international leaders, in which he reiterated that Jordan remains steadfast in its position on the Palestinian cause and that the Hashemite custodianship over Jerusalem's holy sites is a red line that cannot be compromised.

His Majesty rejected any attempts to impose a new reality at Al Aqsa Mosque or undermine the Arab and Islamic identity of Jerusalem,

underscoring that Jordan will continue its historical, political and diplomatic role in defending the holy sites and supporting the steadfastness of the Palestinian people.

Participants expressed their full support for the King's positions, highlighting unity behind the Hashemite leadership and Jordan's unwavering stance on the Palestinian cause, as well as its continued defence of Jerusalem and its Islamic and Christian holy sites, in line with the Kingdom's honourable positions that reflect the principles of the state and the conscience of the Arab and Islamic nations.

Princess Basma Bint Ali attends workshops on promoting sustainability

AMMAN (JT) — HRH Princess Basma Bint Ali on Saturday underlined the importance of scientific research in promoting sustainability during a specialised workshop held in cooperation with the Royal Botanic Garden.

The workshop, organised by the Jordan Society for Scientific Research (JSSR), Entrepreneurship and Creativity, brought together experts and stakeholders to discuss key environmental and development challenges, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.

During the opening session Princess Basma, founder of the Royal Botanic Garden, stressed the garden's role as a national centre for research and environmental awareness, highlighting the need to harness scientific research to preserve natural resources and support sustainable development.

She said that scientific research forms the foundation of meaningful progress and is essential for planning for the future and achieving sustainable growth.

The princess also reviewed key projects implemented by the Royal Botanic Garden, including efforts to conserve plant cover in the Kingdom, promote environmental awareness and engage local communi-



HRH Princess Basma Bint Ali on Saturday underlines the importance of scientific research in promoting sustainability during a specialised workshop held in cooperation with the Royal Botanic Garden

ties in sustainability initiatives.

Among the most prominent initiatives are a national seed bank to preserve plant genetic diversity and a comprehensive plant database serving as a reference for researchers, in addition to an educational garden.

She stressed that environmental protection requires coordinated efforts among institutions to achieve tangible and

lasting impact.

For his part, JSSR President Rida Khalwaleh highlighted the importance of boosting the role of scientific research in addressing environmental and economic challenges through innovative solutions that support sustainable development.

He said that the workshop reflects the importance of institutional cooperation in advancing research and sustain-

ability concepts, particularly amid growing global challenges.

The event featured discussions on several key themes, including the role of the national seed bank in preserving biodiversity, the Economic Modernisation Vision and its impact on food security, and the contribution of agricultural faculties to advancing research and sustainable practices.

Participants also em-

phasised the importance of linking scientific research with economic and industrial programmes to achieve sustainable national development, while promoting collaboration between academic and productive sectors.

The workshop concluded with a field tour of the Royal Botanic Garden, showcasing environmental and agricultural projects supporting sustainability.

Urdunna Jannah attracts 5,400 participants in first week

AMMAN (JT) — The "Urdunna Jannah" programme recorded "strong" indicators in its first week, reflecting the liveliness and inclusiveness of the tourism sector, with 5,400 participants taking part in 168 trips.

According to a Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities statement on Saturday, the trips were operated through 168 buses, with the participation of 168 tour guides, 43 travel agencies, 20 restaurants, and 30 hotels and tourist camps, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.

New destinations saw "notable" demand, with Iraq Al Amir attracting 881 participants, followed by Umm Al Rasas with 400.

Petra welcomed 950 participants in overnight programmes, while Wadi Rum attracted 400 participants and Aqaba 371, in addition to 100 participants who booked directly using private vehicles.



A photo of Umm Qais

The remaining participants were distributed across several destinations in different governorates and areas, particularly Ajloun, Umm Qais, Pella, the Baptism Site, Jerash and Rehab, reflecting the diversity of Jordan's tourism product and its ability to attract various segments.

The ministry said that the programme is part of government efforts to boost the tourism sector

and promote domestic tourism, supporting local communities and motivating economic activity.

The Cabinet decided last week to extend the exemption from entrance fees to archaeological sites under the programme, in addition to continuing to cover the trip costs until December 31.

It added that the programme reflects an inclusive approach to

tourism development by engaging all components of the sector, including travel agencies, transport providers, restaurants, hotels, camps, tour guides and various tourism experiences, helping expand economic impact and support local development across the Kingdom.

This year, the programme targets 220,000 beneficiaries, including, for the first time, Arab

and foreign university students, Gazan residents, and children of Jordanian women. It will feature over 60 tourist trails and involve more than 400 local projects.

The updated programme will expand participation to more than 400 local businesses, including restaurants, hotels and tourism experiences, while offering over 60 tourism routes covering different areas of the Kingdom.

Subsidised by the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities by up to 60 per cent, the programme offers integrated experiences including free transport on modern buses, tour guides and meals, ensuring a smooth and organised trip for participants.

It also features monthly festivals and events across governorates, including cultural activities, bazaars and local products to stimulate tourism and economic activity.

Sanad app users stand at 2.5m as new services roll out

AMMAN (JT) — The Sanad government services app has recorded significant growth, with the number of users reaching around 2.5 million, as part of ongoing efforts to advance Jordan's digital transformation.

The Ministry of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship on Friday said that the activation rate of the digital identity has reached 42 per cent among eligible citizens aged 16 and above, reflecting growing trust in digital government services, according to the Jordan News Agency, Petra.

The app has also attracted more than 400,000 new users since the beginning of 2026, indicating an accelerating shift towards digital channels for completing government transactions.

The ministry noted that recent updates included expanding the range of digital services and introducing new

features to enhance user experience, including seasonal services during Ramadan such as the payment of Zakat Al Fitr, which saw notable uptake.

Additional services include the purchase of special vehicle number plates, payment of traffic fines, and municipal property tax payments for both Jordanians and non-Jordanians.

The Sanad app currently offers a wide range of government services, including the issuance and renewal of passports and family notebook, digital civil status certificates, non-criminal record certificates, military service documents, school certificates, replacement of lost or damaged vehicle licences, certificates of good conduct, tax filing and social security services.

It also enables users to access and pay traffic violations, settle building and land taxes and retrieve personal digital

documents. The ministry added that vehicle licences for residents and non-Jordanians are now directly accessible via the app's main interface, alongside integrated vehicle and traffic-related services.

As part of its digital empowerment efforts, the app now allows users to change their phone numbers and reset passwords through electronic verification, without the need to visit government offices.

The application is also now available on Huawei AppGallery, in addition to the App Store and Google Play, with support extended to tablets and iPads to improve accessibility.

The ministry said that the updates are part of ongoing efforts to expand digital government services in line with the Economic Modernisation Vision, aiming to improve service quality and reduce time and effort for users.

ARCHAEOLOGY

Bronze Age Umm Tuwayrat dolmen site sheds light on ancient rituals

By Saeb Rawashdeh

AMMAN — The Umm Tuwayrat site is a dolmen field probably related to the Bronze Age and it is located near the city of Shobak, on a rocky promontory about 1 kilometre east of the modern town.

The site provides rare information that can be extrapolated to other megalithic sites.

The work was carried out by the Jagiellonian University (JU) of Poland, and the team included preparing a detailed map of the site's geological stratigraphy and lithology.

"The geological layers at this site span from the Late Cretaceous to the Palaeocene. Notably, they include at least a dozen distinct layers of easily accessible

siliceous rocks [mainly cherts], which were a crucial source of raw material for producing lithic assemblages," said Michal Wasilewski from JU.

He added that the geological prospecting revealed a relationship between the local carbonate rocks and the megalithic structures at the site.

To the east and west, the natural boundaries of the site were the valleys of two seasonal rivers. However, several stone structures identified during the research appear to be fragments of two stone walls that probably constituted the original symbolic boundaries of the site from the south and north.

"Within these borders were other stone struc-

tures including 12 dolmens and at least ten stone circles or mounds. The function of stone mounds and circles is often difficult to identify," said Barbara Witkowska from JU.

To the east and west, the natural boundaries of the site were the valleys of two seasonal rivers...

Similar stone circles found throughout the Near East have been linked to a variety of activities (e.g. agricultural, cultic, funerary, land

marking). However, the rocky nature of the Umm Tuwayrat site makes it unsuitable for agriculture, therefore this activity can be ruled out as the original context of the stone structures.

Perhaps, due to the funerary nature of the site, the stone circles were used in rituals or during preparation of corpses prior to secondary burial in the dolmens.

Six out of 12 dolmens were well preserved, while the remaining ones were damaged, Witkowska continued.

Some of the latter appear to have been destroyed by earthquakes judging from the similar direction of their collapse.

"The goal of the fieldwork was to comprehensively document the structures and all the ar-



Umm Tuwayrat site is a dolmen field near the south Jordanian town of Shobak and probably dates from the Bronze Age

tefacts scattered on the surface in their vicinity, as well as to methodical-

ly explore the soil pockets and hollows around and inside the Dolmens,"

Wasilewski pointed out. Within these structures, the JU team iden-

tified deposits resulting mostly from natural erosion processes, especially in the sloping part of the site. Only dolmen No. 8 contained a thin soil layer (5-10 centimetres).

"In this context, the bones were found folded in a non-anatomical position, piled up inside the dolmen along one of its walls," Witkowska said.

Also, several unidentified structures have been found at the site, the most intriguing being a rectangular pool and a well carved into the rock at the top of the hill.

However, the chronological relationship between these structures and the dolmens remains elusive, and the pool and well may have been built at a later date, Wasilewski said.

Jordan, Syria hold second higher coordination council session in Amman

AMMAN (JT) — Jordan on Sunday will host the second session of the Jordanian-Syrian Higher Coordination Council at the ministerial level. The session will be co-chaired by Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates Ayman Safadi and Syrian Foreign Minister Asaad Shaibani, with the participation of ministerial delegations representing 20 sectors, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported. Discussions will focus on strengthening bilateral relations and advancing them towards a comprehensive strategic partnership across a range of vital sectors of mutual interest. Technical committees began holding preparatory meetings on Saturday ahead of the council's session.



Jordan on Sunday will host the second session of the Jordanian-Syrian Higher Coordination Council at the ministerial level

Jordan targeted by 29 inciting rumours in early April — AKEED

AMMAN (JT) — The Jordanian Media Credibility Monitor (AKEED) said that 29 inciting rumours targeting Jordan and its positions were recorded in the first 10 days of April, out of a total of 71 rumours documented during the period. The monitor noted a rise in Jordanians' exposure to misinformation, averaging seven rumours per day, up from five per day in March. In a statement, AKEED said its April report indicates a surge in the circulation of inciting rumours, particularly those promoted by foreign media outlets and accounts across seven social media platforms. According to the monitor, these actors have been disseminating false and mis-

leading information disconnected from reality. It added that such claims have been countered by a steady flow of information from multiple official and credible independent sources, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported. Zaid Momani, a media monitor at AKEED, said that the spreaders of rumours attempt to shift public mood from optimism to negativity and influence how the public perceives events. He added that such actors often manipulate video clips by taking them out of context or spreading inaccurate information in an attempt to deepen negative perceptions among audiences. Momani noted that early April, which saw the announcement of a ceasefire involving

Iran, the United States and Israel, witnessed a rise in inciting rumours circulated by foreign media outlets and user accounts on largely unregulated public platforms. He added that some of this content is later republished as journalistic material by foreign media outlets whose editorial policies and funding sources align with such narratives. "These practices reflect a lack of neutrality, imbalance in reporting and the promotion of hate speech, while disregarding the public's right to accurate information," Momani said, noting that such content ultimately serves specific agendas and seeks to create division among social media audiences in violation of professional media standards.

IEC launches workshop to empower women in political leadership

AMMAN (JT) — The Independent Election Commission (IEC) on Saturday launched a specialised training workshop titled "Empowering Women for Political Leadership and Electoral Participation", with the participation of a group of female party leaders. The first phase targets participants from the northern and central regions of the Kingdom, in cooperation with the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, according to an IEC statement.



The Independent Election Commission (IEC) on Saturday launches a specialised training workshop titled 'Empowering Women for Political Leadership and Electoral Participation'

and building political and personal identity. It also addresses digital reputation management, enhancing public presence and the role of appearance, body language, and non-verbal communication in political work, in addition to strategies for expanding influence through network-building. The workshop also explores pathways for women to reach leadership positions, the distinction between

Energy minister reviews strategic mining projects in southern region

AMMAN (JT) — Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources Saleh Kharabsheh on Saturday conducted an inspection tour of phosphate ore exploration projects, including drilling and exploration sites in the Buwayja area in the south of the Kingdom. During the visit, the minister reviewed the progress of the exploration project carried out by specialised technical personnel from the ministry's Geology and Mining Directorate. The project involves drilling a series of core wells within an exploration area exceeding 50 square kilometres to evaluate the region's phosphate reserves, according to a ministry statement. Kharabsheh emphasised that the ministry's efforts align with Royal directives and the Economic Modernisation Vision, as well as the mining sector



Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources Saleh Kharabsheh on Saturday conducts an inspection tour of phosphate ore exploration projects

strategy. He highlighted the importance of enhancing the geological database and increasing the proven reserves of strategic minerals, including phosphate, base metals and rare earth elements. "Such efforts aim to provide accurate preliminary data to inves-

tors and open new horizons for investment in the mining sector," he said. The minister noted that the ministry's policy focuses on maximising the added value of mineral ores by limiting the export of raw materials and encouraging the expansion of related

manufacturing industries. This approach is intended to achieve the best economic returns and bolster the sector's contribution to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Kharabsheh stressed that these projects represent a fundamental step towards expanding phosphate manu-

facturing industries, including the production of phosphoric acid and fertilisers, as well as materials used in the pharmaceutical and medical industries. "This contributes to supporting the national economy and creating future job opportunities, particularly through the establishment of industrial projects in mining areas." The minister was also briefed on the strategic importance of phosphate ore in Jordan as a vital natural resource for the national economy. Preliminary exploration began in the mid-20th century before expanding across multiple sites. Early indicators show promising extensions of the ore in central and eastern Jordan, which are currently undergoing rigorous scientific evaluation.

Cassation Court upholds over 3-year sentence for drug dealer

By Rana Hussein
AMMAN — The Court of Cassation has upheld a June 2023 State Security Court (SSC) ruling, sentencing a drug dealer to over three years in prison after convicting him of selling a small stash of hashish to an undercover agent in January 2023. The court declared the defendant guilty of obtaining illegal narcotics with the intent of selling the drugs to an undercover agent on January 21. The SSC handed the defendant five years in prison for the offence of possessing illegal

narcotics and ordered him to pay JD5,000 in fines. However, the court decided to reduce the fine to JD3,500 and the prison term to three years and four months in prison to give the defendant a second chance at life. Court documents said the Anti-Narcotics Department (AND) learnt the defendant was in possession of illegal narcotics and sent one of its agents to pose as a buyer. "The AND agent got in touch with the defendant and asked him for a stash of Hashish in return for JD30," court documents said.



When the two met, AND agents immediately arrested the suspect, court papers added. The defendant contested the SSC's ruling through his lawyer, who argued that the court "did not provide solid evidence to implicate his client for drug trafficking". The lawyer also argued that the "sentence was too harsh since the defendant is young and deserves a lenient sentence". Meanwhile, the SSC

prosecution office asked the higher court to uphold the sentence and the fine imposed on the defendant. The higher court maintained that the SSC had followed the proper procedures in issuing the sentence against the defendant. "It was clear to the court that the defendant confessed willingly to possessing the illegal drugs to sell in the local market," the higher court said. The Court of Cassation judges were Yassin Abdullat, Nayef Samarat, Mohammad Khashashneh, Qassem Dughmi and Hammad Ghzawi.

Army thwarts drug smuggling attempts using drones

AMMAN (JT) — The Northern Military Zone on Friday thwarted an attempt to smuggle a quantity of narcotics using a drone along its northern border. Border Guard forces applied the rules of engagement after detecting the drone and successfully brought it down inside Jordanian territory. The seized materials were handed over to the relevant authorities, according to a JAF statement. Also on Friday, the Southern Military Zone personnel thwarted an attempt to smuggle a large quantity of narcotics using three drones on



The Northern Military Zone on Friday thwarts an attempt to smuggle a quantity of narcotics using a drone along its northern border

its western border. In coordination with the Military Security Agency and the Anti-Narcotics Department, the border guard units spotted them and ap-

plied the rules of engagement to bring them down inside the Jordanian territories. The seized materials were transferred to the relevant authorities.

FORECAST

Fair weather to prevail across Kingdom in coming days — JMD

AMMAN (JT) — The weather on Sunday will be relatively cool almost countrywide and warm in the Jordan Valley, the Dead Sea, and Aqaba, according to the Jordan Meteorological

Department (JMD). The JMD said the winds will be north-westerly and moderate, often becoming active and stirring up dust in the eastern regions, the Jordan News Agency

Petra, reported. On Monday, temperatures will rise slightly to around their seasonal average and the weather will be sunny and pleasant nationwide. The JMD noted tem-

peratures will further rise again on Tuesday. Today's maximum and minimum temperatures in Amman will range between 16 and 8 degrees Celsius and the northern moun-

tains will see a range of 17-9C. The JMD stated the desert regions will experience a level of 20-8C, while the Gulf of Aqaba will see a warm 30C, dropping to 16C.



Photo by Ahmad Khleifat



A local resident walks past a destroyed house following an air attack in Yasynuvata, Russia-controlled Donetsk region of Ukraine, on Saturday

Russia and Ukraine trade prisoners, drone strikes ahead of Easter truce

KYIV, Ukraine (AFP) — Russia and Ukraine exchanged prisoners on Saturday but also fired waves of drones at each other overnight, just hours before a temporary ceasefire was set to take effect for Orthodox Easter, according to officials.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said his country would respond “in kind” to any Russian violations of the ceasefire.

The warring sides exchanged 175 prisoners of war each, both countries said, in one of their few areas of cooperation.

The United Arab Emirates helped mediate the exchange, the Russian defence ministry said.

Hours before the truce was due to start, Russia launched at least 160 drones at Ukraine, killing four people in the country’s east and south and wounding dozens of others, Ukrainian authorities said.

The southern Odesa region was among the hardest hit, with authorities reporting two dead and damage to civilian infrastructure.

A wave of Ukrainian drones sparked a fire at an oil depot and damaged apartment buildings in Russia’s southern Krasnodar region, authorities said.

Two people died in a Ukrainian drone strike on the Russian-occupied part of Ukraine’s eastern Donetsk region, Russian-installed authorities said.

The Kremlin ordered a temporary truce from Saturday at 4:00

pm (13:00 GMT) until the end of Sunday, a 32-hour period.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said Kyiv had “repeatedly stated” it was ready for a ceasefire over Easter, and was willing to reciprocate.

But Ukrainians have expressed scepticism about whether the truce will hold.

The two sides held a ceasefire for Orthodox Easter last year, but both accused the other of hundreds of violations.

US-led talks aimed at ending the four-year conflict have stalled in recent weeks because of the war in the Middle East.

The war has cost hundreds of thousands of lives and forced millions to flee their homes...

Even before the Iran war, progress towards a peace deal in Ukraine had been slow, due to differences over the issue of territory.

Ukraine has proposed freezing the conflict along the current front lines.

But Russia has rejected this, saying it wants Ukraine to give up all the territory in the Donetsk region that it currently con-

trols — a demand Kyiv says is unacceptable.

Several rounds of US-led talks have failed to bring the warring sides closer to an agreement.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov denied Russia had discussed the ceasefire with Ukraine or the United States in advance and said it was not linked to negotiations to end the war.

The war has cost hundreds of thousands of lives and forced millions to flee their homes, making it Europe’s deadliest conflict since World War II.

After four years, fighting on the front has come to a near standstill.

Russia has made small territorial gains at a high cost.

But Kyiv recently managed to push back in the southeast and Russian advances have been slowing since late 2025, according to the US-based Institute for the Study of War (ISW).

Apart from Ukrainian counter-attacks, analysts attributed the slowdown to Russia being banned from using SpaceX’s Starlink satellites and Moscow’s own efforts to block the Telegram messaging app.

But the situation is unfavourable for Ukraine in the Donetsk region, near the cities of Kramatorsk and Sloviansk, according to the ISW.

Moscow occupies just over 19 per cent of Ukraine, most of which was seized during the first weeks of the conflict.

Macron meets Pope Leo to talk Mideast war

VATICAN CITY (AFP) — French President Emmanuel Macron arrived on Friday at the Vatican for his first meeting with Pope Leo XIV, a private audience expected to be dominated by the Iran war.

The French leader, who arrived with his wife Brigitte after flying to Rome on Thursday, will meet the US pontiff and the Vatican’s secretary of state, Pietro Parolin.

Macron and the leader of the world’s 1.4 billion Catholics were due above all to discuss “the resolution of the crisis in the Middle East”, a spokesman for Macron’s office told reporters.

They are particularly focused on Lebanon, where deadly Israeli strikes threatened this week’s temporary truce between the US and Iran.

Leo XIV visited Lebanon late last year as part of his first trip abroad, which also included Turkey, and has repeatedly prayed for the victims of conflict there.

Macron has also made numerous appeals for Lebanon to be included in the ceasefire.

He discussed the conflict on Thursday evening with representatives of the Catholic community of Sant’Egidio, an informal diplomatic channel of the Holy See that is very active on Middle Eastern and humanitarian issues.

“Macron is a man of peace,” and “can do



This photo taken and handout on Friday by The Vatican Media shows Pope Leo XIV during a private audience with France’s President Emmanuel Macron in The Vatican

a lot” to “support” the Lebanese authorities, the community’s founder, Andrea Riccardi, told reporters, adding that Lebanon “must not be left alone”.

In recent days, both Macron and the Chicago-born Pontiff have spoken out against US President Donald Trump over the war, which began with Israel-US attacks on Iran.

Leo condemned as “unacceptable” threats to civilian targets — while not citing Trump by name — while Ma-

cron said there was “too much talk, and it’s all over the place”.

Both welcomed the truce and have urged a diplomatic solution to the war, which has expanded across the Middle East and roiled the global economy.

The US government on Thursday denied a report that the Vatican’s US envoy was summoned in January for a “bitter” dressing down over a speech by the Pope condemning “diplomacy based on force”, in remarks

widely viewed as aimed at the Trump administration.

Macron is not a practising Catholic but had a good relationship with Leo’s predecessor, Pope Francis, meeting him three times and discussing with him both global crises and spirituality.

Their relationship also had its tensions, with the late Argentine criticising the inclusion of abortion in the French constitution, and Macron’s proposal to introduce assisted

dying in France.

The president is expected to invite Leo, a more reserved character than his predecessor, to visit France soon.

Francis never made a state visit to France and declined to attend the opening of the Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris in 2024, five years after its devastation by fire.

Friday’s meeting at the Vatican comes three days before the Pope’s visit to the former French colony of Algeria, the first ever by a pontiff.

Ocean temperatures near record high in March — EU monitor

PARIS, France (AFP) — Ocean temperatures hit near-record highs for March, the Copernicus Climate Change Service said on Friday, signalling a likely shift toward El Nino conditions that can amplify heat extremes on an already warming planet.

Copernicus said average sea surface temperatures were 20.97°C in March, the second-highest value ever for the month, and the hottest since 2024 during the last El Nino, when global heat records toppled.

This reflected “a likely transition towards El Nino conditions”, said Copernicus, the European Union’s glo-

bal warming monitor.

Several meteorological agencies had predicted the return this year of El Nino, a natural climate cycle that warms Pacific waters and can bring higher global temperatures and extreme weather.

The World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) said last month an opposite, cooling La Nina cycle was tipped to give way to neutral conditions before swinging into El Nino later this year.

The most recent El Nino in 2023-2024 was one of the five strongest ever measured and contributed to making those years the second-hottest and hottest on

record, respectively.

Scientists say La Nina and El Nino are natural cycles that cause short-term temperature swings, against a backdrop of human-driven climate change that is raising global temperatures and worsening extreme weather over the long term.

Oceans absorb most of the excess heat caused by humanity’s carbon emissions and therefore play a key role in regulating the global climate.

Hotter seas can have damaging knock-on effects on the planet, fuelling stronger storms and rainfall, bleaching coral reefs,

and contribute to sea-level rise through thermal expansion.

More broadly, Copernicus said that last month was the fourth-hottest March on record, with global average temperatures 1.48°C above the pre-industrial benchmark.

Almost the whole of Europe experienced warmer-than-average temperatures in March but the most pronounced extremes were in the United States where a prolonged heatwave gripped the west.

Much of the Arctic, and parts of Russia and Antarctica, also saw above-average temperatures.

Last month also saw the lowest Arctic sea ice cover on record for the month, another bellwether of climate change.

“Copernicus data for March 2026 tells a sobering story,” Copernicus director Carlo Buontempo said in a statement.

“Each figure is striking on its own — together, they paint a picture of a climate system under sustained and accelerating pressure.”

Copernicus takes measurements using billions of satellite and weather readings, both on land and at sea, and their data extends back to 1940.

US-Iran: More than four decades of enmity

PARIS, France (AFP) — The United States and Iran have been sworn enemies since the 1979 Islamic revolution and the hostage crisis at the US embassy in Tehran.

On Saturday, the arch-foes are set to hold talks in Islamabad to end more than a month of war in the Middle East, as a fragile ceasefire holds despite deep mutual mistrust.

1979: Hostage crisis

On November 4, 1979, student activists demanding the extradition of Iran’s deposed monarch — Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, who was undergoing medical treatment in the US — take staff hostage at the US embassy in Tehran.

The move comes seven months after the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Some 52 hostages are held for 444 days.

In April 1980, Washington breaks off diplomatic relations with Iran and imposes restrictions on commerce and travel. Nine months later, the last



A woman walks past a banner with a photo of slain Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, installed along the roadside in Tehran on Saturday

hostages are released.

2002: ‘Axis of evil’

On April 30, 1995, US president Bill Clinton announces a complete ban on trade and investment with Iran, accusing it of supporting terrorism.

The US cites Iran’s backing of regional militant groups including Hizbollah, Hamas and Palestinian Islamic

Jihad.

Foreign companies that invest in Iran’s oil and gas sector are targeted.

On January 29, 2002, US president George W. Bush says Iran, Iraq and North Korea belong to a terror-supporting “axis of evil”.

In April 2019, the US designates Iran’s Revolutionary Guard Corps, the ideological arm of

its military, a “terrorist organisation”.

2018: US walks out of nuclear deal

In the early 2000s, revelations of undeclared nuclear sites in Iran spark fears Tehran is trying to make nuclear weapons, claims it denies.

A 2011 report by the UN nuclear watchdog

IAEA, collating “broadly credible” intelligence, says that Iran “carried out activities relevant to the development of a nuclear explosive device” until at least 2003.

In 2005, Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad ends a freeze on uranium enrichment. Tehran insists its nuclear programme is solely for civilian purposes.

A decade later, an accord with six world powers — China, France, Germany, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States — on Iran’s nuclear programme is reached in Vienna.

It gives Tehran relief from crippling economic sanctions in exchange for guarantees that it will not make an atomic bomb. The deal is endorsed by the United Nations.

US President Donald Trump pulls out of the pact in 2018, reinstating sanctions on Iran and companies with ties to it.

A year later Iran starts to backtrack on some of its commit-

ments under the deal.

Diplomatic efforts fail to bear fruit. UN sanctions are reimposed on September 28, 2025. The accord lapses in October.

2020: Top general killed

On January 3, 2020, the US kills top Iranian general Qassem Soleimani in Baghdad.

Trump says Soleimani had been planning an “imminent” attack on US diplomats and forces in Iraq.

Iran retaliates with missile strikes on bases in Iraq hosting American forces.

2025: Nuclear sites bombed

During the 12-day war between Israel and Iran, the US strikes three major Iranian nuclear sites on June 21, 2025.

Trump says the sites have been “obliterated”, but the true extent of the damage is not known.

February 2026: Khamenei killed

Trump threatens to

strike Iran in response to its deadly crackdown on a massive protest movement that began in late December 2025, though the focus of his threats soon shifts to Tehran’s nuclear programme.

He sends a US “armada” to the region. The two countries resume indirect talks under Omani mediation in early February 2026.

Trump says Soleimani had been planning an ‘imminent’ attack on US diplomats and forces in Iraq

infrastructure.

The Islamic republic vows to avenge Khamenei’s death, launching waves of missiles at its Gulf neighbours hosting US forces and effectively closing the vital Strait of Hormuz, through which one-fifth of the world’s crude flows.

April 2026: High-level talks amid shaky truce

The US and Iran reach a fragile two-week ceasefire at the start of April, with thousands killed and displaced, and the global economy severely disrupted after over a month of war.

Top delegations from the two countries are to meet on Saturday in Islamabad, Pakistan, which brokered the truce.

The teams led by US Vice President JD Vance and Iranian parliamentary speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf express mutual distrust, and remain at odds on key demands.

The ceasefire is set to expire April 22 unless the talks reach an agreement.



Over the past 12 months, Brazil has seized more than half a tonne of weaponry originating from the United States

Brazil, US reach deal to combat organised crime

BRASÍLIA (AFP) — Brazil announced on Friday an agreement with the United States to step up information sharing to combat arms and drug trafficking, as Washington intensifies its efforts to crack down on these crimes.

The new deal will see customs authorities in both countries exchange information to identify potential drugs and weapons shipments travelling from the United States to Brazil. Brazilian Finance Minister Dario Durigan said the initiative was the "first significant step" to boost co-operation in fighting criminal organisations, following a meeting between President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva and his US counterpart Donald Trump last October.

Over the past 12 months, Brazil has seized more than half a ton of weaponry originating from the United States, Robinson Sakiyama of Brazil's customs agency told a press conference.

Authorities also recovered more than a ton of drugs — specifically synthetics and hashish — in the first three months of the year.

The agreement was announced amid a de-

bate over whether the United States plans to designate Brazil's powerful organised crime gangs Comando Vermelho (Red Command) and Primeiro Comando da Capital as terrorist groups.

Brazilian Finance Minister Dario Durigan said the initiative was the 'first significant step' to boost co-operation in fighting criminal organisations...

Brazil's Foreign Minister Mauro Vieira told the Globonews broadcaster last month that he had made clear to his US counterpart Marco Rubio that the govern-

ment "opposes that classification".

Brasilia considers the organised crime factions to be criminal and not terrorist organisations.

Durigan said this question was not raised in a meeting with US officials in Brasilia on Friday before the deal was announced.

A State Department spokesperson told AFP last month that advance notice was not given on such designations.

Customs agency official Sakiyama said that the Brazilian delegation had urged that the new cooperation be conducted "with respect for the sovereignty of both countries".

In March, Trump and allies in Latin America launched a joint initiative named "Shield of the Americas", focused on combating organised crime, illegal immigration and foreign interference on the continent.

Brazil, Mexico and Colombia did not attend the meeting.

Relations between Brasilia and Washington remain strained despite the meeting between Lula and Trump last year which smoothed some diplomatic tensions and led to a reduction in trade tariffs.

Scores arrested at pro-Palestinian rally in London

LONDON (AFP) — Police in London on Saturday arrested nearly 100 pro-Palestinian protesters at a demonstration in support of the banned group Palestine Action.

Officers carried away activists to cheers and clapping from other demonstrators who gathered for the sit-down demonstration in the capital's Trafalgar Square.

The protesters held placards in support of the banned group Palestine Action, making them liable for arrest.

Palestine Action was proscribed as a terrorist organisation last July, making it a criminal offence to belong to or support the group, punishable by up to 14 years in prison.

The High Court in London in mid-February upheld a challenge to the ban, saying it had interfered with the right to freedom of speech.

London's Metropolitan Police paused arrests in the wake of the High Court ruling before announcing in late March that it would resume them.

The government has been granted leave to appeal the decision.

"It's really important to continue to show up," said Freya, 28, manager of a London environmental organisation, one of those sitting towards the front of the crowd of protesters.

"It's important that



Protesters gather to call for the lifting of the ban on the Palestine Action group during a demonstration in Trafalgar Square in central London on Saturday

we all continue to oppose genocide... The government might flip-flop in their legal argument but the morals of these people [here] do not change," she added.

Posting on X, London's Metropolitan Police said by early evening they had made 92 arrests of people

aged between 27 and 82 with the protesters still in place.

'Misguided crackdown'

Since the ban on Palestine Action was imposed there have been nearly 3,000 arrests, mainly for carrying placards defying it. Hundreds of

people are facing charges. Another protester, Denis MacDermot, 73, from Edinburgh, said he had been arrested before and had no hesitation about turning out again.

"I'm a supporter of these great people," he said waving towards other protesters, adding

that if the court process was definitive "there would be no need for all this".

Protest organisers Defend Our Juries said around 500 people had taken part in Saturday's demonstration, protesting "the UK Government's complicity in Israel's genocide in Gaza and the misguided crackdown on peaceful protest at home".

Police were "choosing to make arrests despite the government's ban on the group being ruled unlawful by the High Court, and leading lawyers warning that any arrests would be unlawful", it added in a statement.

The ban, which put Palestine Action on a blacklist that also includes Palestinian militants Hamas and the Lebanese Iran-backed group Hizbollah, has sparked a severe backlash. A judge has put on hold all trials of people charged with supporting Palestine Action, scheduling a blanket review of cases for July 30.

Set up in 2020, Palestine Action's stated goal on its now-blocked website is to end "global participation in Israel's genocidal and apartheid regime".

It has mainly targeted weapons factories, especially those belonging to the Israeli defence group Elbit Systems.

Slovenia parliament elects anti-system lawmaker as speaker

LJUBLJANA (AFP) — The Slovenian parliament's inaugural session on Friday elected a lawmaker from an anti-establishment party as speaker with the backing of conservatives, following a tight election last month.

Slovenia does still not have a government. Talks led by outgoing prime minister Robert Golob, whose liberals won the election by a razor-thin margin, have not yielded results.

Lawmakers elected Resnica leader Zoran Stevanovic as speaker of the 90-seat parliament, with 48 votes.

The conservatives, led by Janez Jansa, an admirer of US President Donald Trump, and a smaller ally had nominated Stevanovic.

Outgoing defence minister Borut Sajovic of the liberals slammed the vote as "a clear example of political corruption".

Stevanovic, 44, said in a statement that his party

rejected joining a Jansa-led government, but would back any government that sets "a programme that will meet our main principles".

Resnica — which translates as "truth" — was created during the Covid-19 pandemic as an anti-vaccine and pro-Russian civil group. It entered parliament in the March vote.

Golob, 59, whose party won 29 seats, last month proposed the formation of a national unity coalition to face

the potential global economic crisis caused by the Middle East war.

But even his closest allies have been reluctant.

Three-time premier Jansa, 67, whose party got 28 seats, has publicly rejected any coalition talks.

But analysts believe a deal with Resnica and another conservative ally likely although this would be a "very weak, unpredictable government", according to Ljubljana Uni-

versity Professor Vlado Miheljaj.

President Nataša Pirc Musar has to propose a prime minister designate to parliament within 30 days of its inaugural session.

If the candidate does not get a majority, the law sets a 10-day deadline for parties to propose a new candidate.

The speaker is Slovenia's second highest ranking official who replaces the president in case of inability to fulfil duties.

In Gaza, fibreglass homes aim to offer more 'dignity' for displaced

Continued from page 1

Alessandro Markic, head of the United Nations Development Programme office in Gaza, initiated the plan. He said families "are facing extremely difficult conditions".

Roughly 4,000 units are planned in the al-Mohararat area, west of Khan Younis.

Workers assemble walls, install small windows, and lay roofs for families who try to settle in with rugs and cushions inside.

"These are very basic and temporary solutions, while we continue to plan for recovery and reconstruction," Markic said. The homes, he added, "provide more dignity, privacy, and protec-

tion during the winter".

Some Gazans were visibly relieved to have an alternative to the tents where most displaced people continue to live.

Nasma Sharab has moved into one unit with her sons, and affirmed it was "better" than a tent.

The fibreglass homes "don't constantly blow

away in the wind," she said.

But, she added, "It's a temporary solution while we wait for reconstruction to begin and for people to be able to go back to their homes."

Among those who remain in a tent is Ali Abu Nahl, in Beit Lahia in northern Gaza, after being displaced to the centre and south of the ter-

ritory with his children and grandchildren.

His house was destroyed during the devastating conflict that erupted with the Hamas attacks on Israel in October 2023.

"It's been half-a-year since the bombing stopped, but in Gaza, the war doesn't end when the strikes stop," he said.

Jordan condemns Israeli authorities' assault on Christians in Jerusalem

Continued from page 1

It also called on the international community to uphold its legal and moral responsibilities by compelling Israel to stop its viola-

tions against Islamic and Christian sanctities in Jerusalem.

The statement also called on the international community to ensure respect for the city's historical and

legal status and fulfill the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people to establish their independent, sovereign state on their national soil based on the two-state solution.

US and Iran envoys meet Pakistani PM as negotiations get under way

Continued from page 1

"Our experience in negotiating with the Americans has always been met with failure and broken promises," Ghalibaf said shortly after landing in Pakistan, according to Iran's state broadcaster.

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, who is also part of the delegation, told his German counterpart in a call on Saturday that "Iran enters negotiations with complete distrust due to repeated breaches of commitments and betrayals by the United States", the Tasnim news agency reported.

Vance said before leaving the US that if the other side was "willing to negotiate in good faith, we're certainly willing to extend the open hand".

But "if they're going to go to find the negotiating team is not that receptive", he added.

The ceasefire is already under strain, notably from Israel's continued strikes in Lebanon, which Iran and Pakistan insist is covered under the current truce.

Prime Minister Sharif, whose country's down-to-the-wire mediation got both sides to the negotiating table this week, said

talks would not be easy.

"An even more difficult stage lies ahead," he said, referring to efforts to permanently end fighting that began with US-Israeli strikes on Iran on February 28, sparking Iranian retaliation against Israel and across the Gulf.

"This is that stage which, in English, is called the equivalent of 'make or break'."

On the US side, Trump has demanded the opening of the Strait of Hormuz as a condition for the two-week ceasefire.

The strait, through which one-fifth of the world's crude passes, has not reopened to nor-

mal traffic, however, and Trump vowed on Friday to have it open soon "with or without" Iran's cooperation.

He added that his top priority at the Islamabad talks was to ensure the Islamic republic had "no nuclear weapon. That's 99 per cent of it".

Security was tight in the Pakistani capital on Saturday, with a heavy police and paramilitary presence on the streets and road diversions around the "red zone" where government and diplomatic buildings are located.

Pakistan has formulated a team of experts to

facilitate the two sides in negotiations on navigation, nuclear and other key matters, a diplomatic source familiar with the matter told AFP.

The negotiations will be closely watched by other key regional players, with Egypt and Turkey having helped with mediation, along with China, all of which Pakistan was still coordinating closely with for the talks, the source said.

In Tehran, a 30-year-old resident told AFP he was sceptical negotiations would be successful, describing most of what Trump says as "pure noise and nonsense".

Iran war 'deeply' impacts tourism, nearly all planned tours cancelled — stakeholder

Continued from page 1

In remarks to Al Mamlaka TV, Sawair said that the tourism sector in Petra started 2026 with positive in-

dicators in terms of visitor numbers, but those gains later declined sharply, reaching near-zero levels at some times amid escalating regional

tensions. He stressed that Petra is among the most affected areas, given its heavy reliance on tourism as a primary driver of the local economy.

US 'clearing out' the Strait of Hormuz, Trump says

Continued from page 1

He insisted that Iran is "LOSING BIG!" in the conflict, while acknowledging that Iranian mines in the strategic strait — through which a fifth of the world's crude passes — still pose a threat.

"The only thing they have going is the threat that a ship may 'bunk' into one of their sea mines,"

Trump wrote.

The key shipping lane off the coast of Iran has been virtually blocked by Tehran since the United States and Israel started bombing Iran on February 28, though reopening the strait was ostensibly a condition of the shaky ceasefire put in place earlier this week.

Senior Iranian and American officials began negotiations in

Pakistan on Saturday, Iranian media reported, in a bid to bring to an end a conflict that has plunged the Middle East into violence and sent shockwaves through the world economy.

In an earlier post, Trump said that empty tankers were headed to the United States from around the world to purchase oil, without providing details.

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Proactive policies to avoid the cost of crisis

By Raad Mahmoud Al Tal

The Central Bank of Jordan announced a package worth JD760 million with a clear objective. Act early to avoid bigger problems later. This step reflects a shift in economic management. Instead of waiting for a crisis and reacting to it, the bank is trying to prevent the crisis from happening in the first place.

This approach comes at a time of rising regional uncertainty. Geopolitical tensions in the region, especially the Iran-Israel war, create indirect pressures on the Jordanian economy. These pressures do not need to be direct to have real effects. Tourism can decline quickly. Supply chains can be disrupted. Import costs can rise. All of this can slow economic activity. This is why early action matters.

One of the main decisions was to inject liquidity into the banking system. The Central Bank reduced the required reserve ratio and lowered certificates of deposit. This move released significant funds for banks to use in lending. The goal is simple. Keep credit flowing in the economy.

In uncertain times, banks tend to be cautious. They reduce lending to protect themselves. This behavior can create a credit squeeze. When businesses cannot access financing, they delay investment. When investment slows, growth weakens and jobs are affected. By providing liquidity now, the Central Bank is preventing this chain reaction before it starts.

The support for the tourism sector is another important part of the package. Tourism is one of the most sensitive sectors to regional developments. Even if Jordan remains stable, perceptions of instability in the region can reduce the number of visitors.

The measures taken aim to help tourism businesses cover their operating costs, especially wages. This is not only about supporting companies. It is about protecting jobs and skills. If workers leave the sector, rebuilding it later becomes more difficult and more expensive. Keeping businesses running today reduces the cost of recovery tomorrow.

Food security is also a key focus. The Central Bank allocated funding to support the import of essential goods. Global food markets are highly volatile. Any disruption can lead to sudden price increases or shortages. These shocks can quickly turn into economic and social challenges.

By ensuring access to financing for food imports, the bank is reducing the risk of such shocks. This is a preventive measure. It is easier and cheaper to secure supplies in advance than to deal with a crisis later.

The continuation of the financing program for economic sectors also sends a strong signal. Since its launch, this program has supported thousands of projects and created many jobs. Maintaining this support is important, especially during uncertain times.

Confidence plays a major role in economic activity. When investors and businesses feel that financing will remain available, they are more likely to continue investing. Without this confidence, many would delay decisions, which would slow the economy.

The main message behind all these measures is clear. The Central Bank is not reacting to a crisis. It is acting to prevent one. This is a key principle in economic policy. The cost of early action is always lower than the cost of delayed response.

Economic history shows that waiting can be very expensive. When problems are ignored, they grow. Unemployment rises. Growth declines. Fixing the situation later requires more resources and more time.

By taking these steps now, the Central Bank of Jordan is choosing the less costly path. It is investing in stability and protecting the economy from future shocks. This is not just good policy. It is necessary in a world where risks are increasing and uncertainty is the new normal.

Jerusalem red line: Jordan united behind Hashemite leadership

By Hasan Dajah

The recent popular marches in Amman represent a profound expression of national collective consciousness and a vivid embodiment of the unified Jordanian stance on the Palestinian cause, particularly concerning the city of Jerusalem and its Islamic and Christian holy sites. Following Friday prayers, crowds from across the political and social spectrum, including political parties and unions, gathered in front of the Al-Husseini Mosque in a unifying national scene reflecting a high level of cohesion between the people and their leadership. Participation was not merely symbolic; it was a demonstration of a unified political and popular position rejecting any infringement upon the holy sites or Palestinian rights. These marches also affirmed that defending Jerusalem is not simply a circumstantial stance, but a firm and deeply rooted commitment in the Jordanian conscience, reflecting the state's fundamental principles and strengthening its political and diplomatic position at both the regional and international levels.

These marches come within the context of clear and unwavering support for the positions of His Majesty King Abdullah, who has dedicated his political and diplomatic efforts to defending the holy sites and preserving the historical and legal status quo in the Holy City. Participants expressed their deep pride in the King's role, affirming that Jordan, under its Hashemite leadership, represents the first line of defence for Al Aqsa Mosque, and that the Hashemite custodianship is not merely a political title, but a historical commitment deeply rooted in religious

and political legitimacy. They also emphasised that this role enhances Jordan's regional and international standing, granting it significant influence in protecting the holy sites and supporting the steadfastness of the Palestinian people in the face of current challenges.

The popular support for the Hashemite leadership at this critical juncture carries strategic implications that transcend the domestic sphere, reflecting a regional and international message that Jordan stands united against any attempts to alter the identity of Jerusalem or impose a new reality there. The slogans raised, such as "Jerusalem is a red line", were not mere passing remarks, but rather a clear expression of profound political awareness and national consensus on the fundamental principles of the Jordanian state. These slogans also reflect a firm rejection of any compromise on Palestinian rights and a commitment to Jordan's historical role in protecting Islamic and Christian holy sites. This unity underscores the cohesion of the Jordanian home front and its ability to support political decisions, thus strengthening Jordan's position in regional and international forums.

Furthermore, these marches confirm that the Jordanian position is not detached from the pulse of the street, but rather nourished and supported by it. This reinforces the strength of the political and diplomatic efforts led by Jordan on the international stage. When popular will is aligned with political decision-making, the message becomes more impactful and clear, especially in light of the growing challenges facing the Palestinian cause and attempts to impose new realities on the

ground in Jerusalem. This dynamic interaction between the state and society reflects an advanced level of political awareness, where Jordanian citizens understand the importance of their role in supporting and consolidating national principles. This harmony also grants Jordanian decision-makers additional strength in international forums, as they speak on behalf of a unified position based on broad popular legitimacy. In this context, the marches become a tool of moral and political pressure, reinforcing Jordan's position as a pivotal state defending Arab rights and steadfastly confronting attempts to undermine the historical and religious identity of the Holy City.

The Hashemite custodianship stands out as one of the most important pillars of this stance, viewed by Jordanians as a historical responsibility and a religious trust that cannot be relinquished. Participants emphasised that this custodianship serves as a safeguard for protecting the holy sites from repeated violations, and that Jordan will remain committed to defending them by all possible political and diplomatic means. In this regard, the King's efforts to reopen Al Aqsa Mosque to worshippers after a period of closure reflect the effectiveness of this role and its ability to achieve tangible results.

From a broader perspective, these marches reflect a high level of political awareness within Jordanian society, which understands the dimensions of the conflict over Jerusalem, not only as a religious issue, but also as a matter of sovereignty, identity and historical rights. These massive demonstrations also reflect a deep understanding of the importance of maintaining internal

stability and strengthening the national front in the face of regional challenges, as evidenced by the unified discourse that unites the various segments of society.

These popular movements cannot be separated from the broader regional context, as the region is witnessing rapid transformations and escalating challenges that demand clear and decisive stances. Within this framework, Jordan's role stands out as a stabilising force, grounded in historical legitimacy and accumulated political credibility. This role reinforces Jordan's position as an active and influential player in defending Arab and Islamic rights, particularly concerning Jerusalem and its holy sites, and underscores its diplomatic presence as a voice of reason seeking de-escalation and safeguarding fundamental principles.

Ultimately, the popular marches in Amman represent a living example of national unity and embody the deep bond between the people and their leadership. They are not merely expressions of protest, but rather a strategic message affirming that Jordan, both its leadership and its people, is committed to defending Jerusalem and its holy sites, and that the Hashemite custodianship will remain a red line that cannot be crossed or compromised under any circumstances. In light of this national cohesion, Jordan continues to play its historical role with steadfastness and confidence, relying on a solid popular will and a wise leadership vision that understands the nature and complexities of the challenges and has the ability to deal with them with political acumen and high responsibility.

Hasan Dajah — professor of strategic studies at Al-Hussein Bin Talal University

In times of crisis, we remain resilient

By Nicolas Deviller

There is a specific kind of gravity that comes with operating an international gateway in the Middle East. Running an airport during a regional crisis is a test of both infrastructure and nerve. Even as commercial corridors narrow and regional skies carry a collective heaviness, our responsibility to remain open and functional becomes absolute. At Airport International Group (AIG), we do not view this landscape as a series of disruptions to be survived, but as a test of the systems we have spent years refining. In this context, Queen Alia International Airport (QAIA) stands as the prime gateway to Jordan, a critical instrument of connectivity with the world that must remain unyielding.

Looking at the reality without ignoring the numbers, this cri-

sis has taken a clear toll on our industry. Our passenger traffic is down by roughly 42 per cent compared with the same period last year. Aircraft movements have dropped by 37 per cent and cargo volumes have decreased by over 53 per cent. In our industry, reliability is the only currency that matters. These figures reflect a regional reality, but they also highlight a crucial truth: Our ability to remain fully operational despite these headwinds is a testament to a system designed to stand during the tough times.

What happens within our gates every day plays a much bigger part of the narrative. While 19 airlines have temporarily suspended their flights, 13 others have continued to fly in and out of our airport without interruption. Our cargo is moving, our flights are operating, and our load factor has held

steady at 63 per cent. By remaining fully capable of absorbing shifts in flight paths and passenger needs, we provide a sense of continuity that is vital for both the economy and the spirit of the Kingdom.

While we cannot control the external environment, we can control our response. Our teams are fully deployed and responsive around the clock, maintaining a constant presence on the ground. Equally important is the close coordination with all of our airport partners and stakeholders, which ensures every operational decision is aligned and executed seamlessly. This is the calm amid the storm that defines our leadership philosophy. Beyond the runways and the complex logistics, there is a dedicated team that keeps the connection human and reassuring. When the gateway remains

strong, the country's economic outlook does too. This actively builds the confidence of travelers looking to visit and investors assessing Jordan's future business environment. Because we are maintaining our standards now, we are exceptionally well positioned to recover swiftly the moment regional conditions stabilize. Our robust infrastructure, experienced teams, and strong airline partnerships are the foundation that will allow us to get back on track. Our efforts here stand as a testament to the broader resilience of Jordan, proving that even in the face of immense regional challenges, the Kingdom endures as it prepares to thrive again. Thus, AIG and QAIA remain ready, focused and determinedly operational.

Nicolas Deviller is CEO of Airport International Group

'Howl at the Moon': NASA's bid to boost space enthusiasm

By Maggy Donaldson

Agence France-Presse

HOUSTON — When NASA flight director Zebulon Scoville was working a shift during the uncrewed Artemis I test flight, he realized the US space agency wasn't consistently livestreaming the spacecraft's journey to Earth.

"They said, well, we don't have bandwidth, we've got to get all this vehicle and engineering data down," Scoville recalled. "I was like, wrong."

"This programme will be over if people don't buy it and they don't come with us."

NASA eventually got a low-bandwidth live stream up for that 2022 uncrewed mission.

And once it was over, senior officials named the NASA veteran "imagery czar" to boost engagement.

He told AFP he spent two years working across the agency to figure out how better to take the public on NASA's new Moon missions.

That included adding an optical communications system onto the Orion spacecraft, a laser that transmitted to a ground station on Earth, sending streaming video in higher resolution.

Throughout the more than nine-day Artemis II crewed test flight, which ended Friday with an emotional splashdown off the California coast, NASA has

maintained live programming on its own streaming platform and across social media.

That, combined with third-party streamers and broadcast news, has earned millions of views.

And as NASA official Lori Glaze said Friday: "To all of our new followers out there, please stay tuned."

NASA on Twitch

From social media posts clipped from livestreamed events with the astronauts to an extraordinary portfolio of celestial photographs, viewers caught an eye-ful of Artemis II.

Institutions including museums held Artemis splashdown parties, and some teachers integrated the launch into their lessons.

Alex Roethler, a Wisconsin physics teacher, said watching the mission helped his students get "more engaged", and made lessons "feel more real".

"I love having the livestream available, and I also think it's cool that they use Twitch," Roethler said, referring to a video streamer site favoured by gamers. "That is a platform more of our students use."

The crew themselves have been integral to the storytelling. During the nearly seven-hour lunar flyby, astronauts Christy Koch, Victor Glover, Jeremy

Hansen and Reid Weisman gave near-literary descriptions of lunar surface features and left scientists in Houston awe-struck.

With Artemis II, there have been "just smiles and actually showing emotion through NASA, where we have sometimes had a history of being a little bit dry", Scoville said.

"It's okay to jump up and down and howl at the moon," he added.

Apollo-Artemis parallels

Before Artemis II, the United States hadn't sent astronauts around the Moon since 1972 for the Apollo 17 mission, the last of that famed space programme that saw humans walk on the lunar surface.

In the lead-up to the 10-day test flight, NASA faced both a blaze populace and a fractured media environment.

The space agency had to battle for attention across traditional and social media in a way the three-TV-channel era of Apollo never experienced. The Apollo 11 Moon landing in 1969 saw approximately one-fifth of the global population tune in.

Yet for all the mythical qualities of Apollo, Jack Kiraly, director of government relations at the Planetary Society, said "nostalgia" perhaps "glosses over some of the issues that the program at the time faced".

"Everything that led up to that was actually broadly unpopular with the American electorate, with the public writ large," Kiraly told AFP.

Still, even with that in account, the analyst said "I don't think this moment is living up to the hype" of most Apollo missions, and added he hopes NASA's communications strategies continue to improve.

'Longing for something good'

Ahead of Artemis II, Scoville had conversations with mission commander Reid Wiseman in which they reflected on parallels between the Apollo 8 lunar mission and this most recent Moon flyby.

The United States in 1968 was politically fractured and at war. Nearly 60 years later, not so much has changed.

"We're watching the news today, with wars, with division, and, like, how much everyone is just so longing for something good to happen," Scoville said.

In a recent space-to-Earth press conference, Wiseman said their only news source during the mission was their families, who said Artemis has captivated people worldwide, though he admitted they are "biased".

Wiseman said he hoped the trip could "have the world pause" to take in the beauty of our planet and universe.

BUSINESS

Sunday, April 12, 2026



Signage for the upcoming International Monetary Fund 2026 Spring Meetings are seen outside of the IMF headquarters in Washington, DC on Thursday

IMF to cut global growth forecast due to Mideast war

WASHINGTON, United States (AFP) — The International Monetary Fund (IMF) will lower global growth forecasts due to the Middle East war, its chief said last week, warning of the conflict's "scarring effects" despite a fragile ceasefire.

"Even in a best case, there will be no neat and clean return to the status quo ante," IMF managing director Kristalina Georgieva said.

Georgieva said that — even in the fund's "most hopeful scenario" — spiralling energy costs, infrastructure damage, supply disruptions and a loss of market confidence meant growth would be less than expected.

The IMF also anticipates having to provide up to \$50 billion in immediate financial assistance to countries affected by the war, with food insecurity set to affect at least 45 million people.

"Given the spillovers from the war, we expect near-term demand for IMF balance-of-payments support to rise by somewhere between \$20 billion and \$50 billion, with the lower bound prevailing if ceasefire holds," Georgieva said.

The IMF chief was kicking off the annual Spring Meetings co-hosted by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank in Washington, which bring together top economic policymakers from around the world.

Speaking on Bloomberg TV on Thursday, World Bank President Ajay Banga said his institution could put

up as much as \$25 billion "very quickly" in financing to developing countries affected by the war. He said as much as \$60 billion may be made available over the longer term, if countries need it.

The US-Israel war on Iran, launched on February 28, has engulfed the Middle East in violence, snarled supply chains and sent oil prices surging after Tehran virtually blocked the Strait of Hormuz.

Tehran and Washington have traded accusations of violations of the ceasefire terms, with talks aimed at a more durable peace slated for Saturday.

Georgieva highlighted the "asymmetric" effects of the crisis, hitting low-income energy importers much harder than others.

"Spare a thought for the Pacific Island nations at the end of a long supply chain, wondering if fuel still reaches them in the wake of such a severe disruption," she said.

On Wednesday, the World Bank said the Middle East — which has seen retaliatory Iranian strikes hit countries across the Gulf and Israeli attacks in Lebanon — saw "a serious and immediate economic toll" from the war.

Excluding Iran, overall regional economic growth was expected to slow to just 1.8 per cent in 2026 — a downgrade of 2.4 percentage points from before the war, the bank said.

The IMF is also expected to revise global headline inflation upwards due to the oil price and supply chain

shocks associated with the war.

On Wednesday, the heads of the IMF, World Bank and World Food Programme (WFP) met in Washington to discuss the economic and food security impacts of the conflict.

"Sharp increases in oil, gas, and fertiliser prices, together with transport bottlenecks, will inevitably lead to rising food prices and food insecurity," said a joint statement on the meeting.

The IMF and World Bank have also formed a coordination group to address the energy market impacts of the war. A top-level meeting of that body will take place on Monday.

As part of the meetings, the IMF will release its annual Fiscal Monitor report, which is expected to flag rising government debt as countries tackle repeated economic shocks.

In a new report this week, the IMF detailed the economic costs of war, estimating that output in countries where fighting takes place drops by 3 per cent at the outset, and continues falling for years.

An earlier report on the Iran war said "all roads lead to higher prices and slower growth", and highlighted the impact of a severely disrupted fertiliser supply chain on food security.

"Low-income countries are especially at risk of food insecurity; some may need more external support — even as such assistance has been declining," the report said.

Aqaba Ports completes crane upgrades to raise operational efficiency

AMMAN (JT) — Aqaba Company for Ports Operation and Management Director-General Mahmoud Khleifat announced the completion of a project to upgrade and overhaul two mobile cranes, in cooperation with the German manufacturer Konecranes Retrofit, at a cost of JD600,000.

In a statement issued on Saturday, Khleifat said that purchasing two new cranes would have cost the company more than JD12 million, highlighting the cost-efficiency of the upgrade project, the Jordan News Agency, Petra reported.

He noted that the maintenance project was carried out in line with the company's procurement system, given that the machinery is over 20 years old, and in a bid to maintain the highest levels of safety and operational reliability at the port.

The upgrade works included the steel structure, lifting systems, as well as hydraulic and electrical systems, in addition to control systems and



Aqaba Ports Company announces on Saturday the completion of a project to upgrade two mobile cranes, with the German manufacturer Konecranes Retrofit, at a cost of JD600,000

software, Khleifat said. He added that these upgrades brought the two cranes up to specifications equivalent to a 2023 model, despite the manufacturer having previously classified them as out of service.

Khleifat said each crane has an operational capacity of around 100 tonnes per hour, noting that comprehensive technical inspections were conducted under the supervision of experts from the manufacturing compa-

ny, in addition to an independent inspection firm to ensure safety procedures and operational efficiency before commissioning.

He added that the project began with the tender process in 2023, with upgrade works

launched last October and lasting four months, before being completed last month.

Mobile cranes are movable lifting equipment used in ports for handling, loading and unloading heavy cargo from and onto ships.

ADB predicts slowing Asia growth as MidEast war takes toll

MANILA (AFP) — The Middle East war is expected to drag on Asia's economies over this year and next, the Asian Development Bank warned recently, as it predicted growth to slow to 5.1 per cent across the world's most populous region.

That prediction could prove optimistic, however, if new evidence suggesting a "more prolonged conflict and more persistent disruptions" bore out, it said.

Growth predictions could fall to as low as 4.7 per cent for 2026 and 4.8 per cent in 2027 should the US-Israeli war with Iran drag into the third quarter.

"Most economies in developing Asia and the Pacific will see their growth outlook worsen this year and in 2027," was the bank's stark assessment.

The region's status as a net energy importer left it particularly vulnerable to the war's



This amount has been repurposed from the National Disaster Risk Management Fund

fallout, ADB chief economist Albert Park told reporters at an embargoed on Thursday new briefing.

"Higher energy prices can generate significant income losses," Park said.

"Even after energy prices normalise, supply-chain disruptions, higher producer prices, and tighter financial

conditions would prolong stagflationary pressures," he added.

A more drawn-out conflict in the Middle East could also see inflation spike by as much as 5.6 per cent, the ADB said Friday.

Completed in March, the bank's report had predicted price jumps of 3.6 per cent in 2026 and 3.4 per cent in 2027

under what it dubbed an "early stabilisation scenario".

Park noted that Iran's squeeze on shipping in the Strait of Hormuz had ripple effects far beyond the gas pump, including regional food security.

"Although rice prices still remain relatively low ... high fertiliser and diesel prices raise

agricultural costs, which could lead to less input use and lower yields later in the year, and that could contribute to food insecurity," Park said.

In Manila on Friday lines stretched around the block in some neighbourhoods as residents flocked to take advantage of a government-backed programme providing rice for just 20 pesos (33 cents) per kilo.

The new ADB report also said continued trade uncertainty in the face of US President Donald Trump's tariff regime could be expected to weigh on regional investment.

Global powerhouse China was expected to see growth dip to 4.6 per cent this year and 4.5 per cent next, down from 5 per cent, on the back of continued weakness in its property market and slower export growth, the report said.

US inflation surges to 3.3% as Iran war impact bites

WASHINGTON, United States (AFP) — Inflation in the United States rose sharply in March, government data showed on Friday, as higher energy prices due to the war in the Middle East hit Americans hard.

The nationwide sticker shock put pressure on President Donald Trump, who has ordered peace talks with Iran and faces mid-term elections in November.

The rate of inflation rose to 3.3 per cent year-on-year in March, the US Bureau of Labour Statistics (BLS). By comparison, this same consumer price index (CPI) was 2.4 per cent year-on-year a month earlier.

Gasoline prices surged by 21.2 per cent between February and March — the largest monthly increase since the government began

publishing a related index in 1967, the US Bureau of Labour Statistics said.

Markets had anticipated the surge, according to the consensus published by MarketWatch.

The United States and Israel began bombing Iran on February 28 and Tehran retaliated by blocking traffic in the Strait of Hormuz, a waterway used to carry a fifth of the world's oil and gas deliveries.

Despite being the world's top producer of crude oil, the United States also felt the pain, as prices at the gas pump shot up.

A gallon (3.78 litres) of regular gasoline currently costs an average of \$4.15 in the United States, compared to approximately \$3 just before the war.

The Trump administration — elected in part on a promise to quash inflation — maintains that the war's economic disruptions will be temporary.

More price pain ahead

Reacting to the data, White House spokesperson Kush Desai said the US economy "remains on a solid trajectory".

Economic advisor Kevin Hassett claimed some wins for the White House, citing drops in the price of eggs, beef and concert tickets on Fox News.

US Vice President JD Vance said he hoped for a "positive" outcome as he departed Washington for US-Iran peace talks in Pakistan this weekend.

But experts predicted

more economic pain ahead due to the war in Iran, especially for middle and lower-income households already squeezed by rising energy and airfare prices.

Heather Long, chief economist at Navy Federal Credit Union, said that inflation soared in March to the highest level in almost two years.

"This is only the beginning. Food prices, travel and shipping costs are all going up in April and will exacerbate the pain," she said.

"March CPI was as expected, so no surprises. But there is a huge increase in fuel prices, boosting inflation," Christopher Low of FHN Financial told AFP.

"And we got the news last night that the ceasefire is not being honoured by either

side, apparently," he said. "There's still very little traffic through the Strait of Hormuz."

Some economists calculate the oil price surge will cost each US household at least \$350 per household.

Consumer sentiment also dipped sharply — 11 per cent — this month, according to a University of Michigan survey.

During the Federal Reserve's most recent meeting in mid-March, Chairman Jerome Powell said that the war risked delaying efforts to bring inflation under control in the United States.

The US central bank's target for inflation is 2 per cent — an objective it has not met in five years due to the Covid pandemic, the war in Ukraine and tariffs.

TREASURY

US budget deficit remains steady in Q1 2026

WASHINGTON, United States (AFP) — The US budget deficit remained virtually stable during the first three months of 2026, as increased revenue — primarily from income taxes and customs duties — offset an acceleration in spending.

Between January and March, the deficit stood at \$164 billion, \$4 billion higher than in the same period a year earlier, according to data released Friday by the Treasury Department.

In the United States, these months constitute the second quarter of the 2026 fiscal

year.

Between January and March, the deficit stood at \$164 billion, \$4 billion higher than in the same period a year earlier...

Over the first six months of this staggered fiscal year, the deficit fell by 11 per cent, or \$139 billion, thanks to the increase in revenue that oc-

curred between October and December due to customs duties.

However, the Supreme Court struck down a significant portion of these duties earlier this year, which is expected to require the Treasury to reimburse companies for the surcharges collected.

Several lawsuits have been filed by companies in response, which could eventually weigh on the federal budget.

For now, revenue rose over the quarter thanks to a 7 per cent increase in income tax revenue, amounting to \$26 billion.

Faisali face Hussein invital postponed match

By Aline Bannayan

AMMAN — Week 24 of the CFI Jordan Pro League kicks off this week starting with a highly anticipated postponed match grouping holders Hussein vs Faisali on Sunday as the competition enters its final weeks.

Standings remained unchanged after the past week, with Hussein maintaining their lead after beating Ahli 1-0, Ramtha scoring a 1-0 win over Shabab Urdun, Faisali beating Jazira 3-0, Wihdat scoring the biggest win 5-1 over Baqa'a and Salt beating Sama Al-Sarhan 1-0.

Week 24 matches could impact the lead and overall standings: Faisali need to win to keep alive any chances for the title; Wihdat play Shabab Urdun, Sarhan play Ahli, Jazira face Baqa'a and Salt play Faisali and Ramtha take on Hussein.

Last week, Wihdat moved to second spot after an important 1-0 win over Faisali, which followed an earlier 3-1 win over Hussein who hope to maintain their lead with two postponed matches ahead put on hold for the Asian Champions League Two.

Ramtha, champions three seasons ago, led Round 1 defeating Wihdat 1-0,



Jordan's team captain Ehsan Haddad (left) joined his team Hussein as he made his return after a long absence due to injury

holding Hussein 0-0, 1-1 with Wihdat and team was inconsistent as well as drawing Faisali. However, the in Round 2 after lead

CFI Pro League standings (previous rank in brackets)

Team	P	W	D	L	GF	GA	Pts
1) Hussein (1)	21	15	4	2	59	15	49
2) Wihdat (2)	23	14	4	5	38	17	46
3) Faisali (3)	22	14	4	4	45	20	46
4) Ramtha (4)	23	11	9	3	31	18	42
5) Jazira (5)	23	8	5	10	24	38	29
6) Salt (6)	23	8	5	10	28	31	29
7) Baqa'a (7)	23	6	7	10	35	55	25
8) Sh. Urdun (8)	23	5	7	11	16	32	22
9) Ahli (9)	23	3	8	12	19	37	17
10) Sarhan (10)	22	1	3	18	13	45	6

Photo courtesy of Jordan Pro League

Sarhan are the newcomers from the First Division after Ma'an, Sarih, Aqaba, and Mughayer Sarhan were relegated last season.

So far in the season, League champs Hussein won the 42nd Jordan Super Cup beating Wihdat on aggregate; Faisali won their 10th Jordan Football Association (JFA) Shield title with Salt runner-up. The Jordan Cup has reached the quarterfinals with Ramtha defeating Ahli 1-0 and Faisali beating Shabab Urdun 5-4 on penalties to advance to the semis. Hussein vs Jazira and Wihdat vs Salt are yet to be played.

Last season, Hussein combined the Pro League as well as Jordan Super Cup titles, while Wihdat won the Jordan Cup for the 13th time, and Salt won their first ever major title — the Jordan Football Association Shield. Hussein were crowned League champions for the past two seasons joining the elite group of Pro League champs as the 9th club to win the title since 1944. Together with neighbors Ramtha, they have changed the usual Faisali-Wihdat title dominance. Ramtha won the 2021/22 League crown for the third time in their history after 39 years, while Hussein won the 2023/24 and 2024/25 seasons.

NBA

Hawks clinch play-off berth with win over Cavs

LOS ANGELES, United States (AFP) — The Atlanta Hawks secured an NBA play-off berth with a 124-102 victory over the Cleveland Cavaliers on Friday as the Boston Celtics locked up the Eastern Conference second seed with a lopsided win of their own. CJ McCollum scored a game-high 29 points for the Hawks, who came into the contest at sixth in the East and still in danger of falling into the play-in tournament that will see the seventh- through 10th-placed teams battle for the last two play-off berths in each conference. Nickeil Alexander-Walker and Jalen Johnson scored 18 points apiece and Dyson Daniels added a triple-double of 13 points, 10 rebounds and 12 assists for the Hawks, who led 61-48 at halftime and surged away with a 16-0 scoring run late in the third quarter. The Cavaliers, assured of the fourth seed in the East and home court advantage in the first round, rested Donovan Mitchell and Jarrett Allen. The Celtics, who had missed a chance to secure the second seed with a loss to the New York Knicks on Thursday, got the job done with a record-equaling 29 three-pointers in a 144-118 victory over the New Orleans Pelicans.

Sixers' Embiid out of hospital after appendectomy

HOUSTON (AFP) — Philadelphia 76ers star Joel Embiid was discharged from hospital on Friday after an appendectomy, the NBA team said. The Cameroonian-born big man, who won Olympic gold with the United States in 2024, was diagnosed with appendicitis and underwent surgery in Houston, where the 76ers played the Rockets on Thursday. The Sixers said Embiid's surgery was successful and his recovery will be managed by team doctors in consultation with his surgeon. "A timeline for his return to basketball activities has not yet been determined," the team said in a statement. With Embiid out, the 76ers fell to the Rockets on Thursday. They are eighth in the Eastern Conference with two games to play and have a mathematical chance of rising as high as sixth — and avoiding the play-in tournament altogether — or falling as low as 10th — which would require them to win two play-in games in order to reach the playoffs proper. Embiid, the NBA Most Valuable Player in 2023, is averaging 26.9 points and 7.7 rebounds in 38 games this season.

Tripoli zoo reopens to offer Libyans rare respite from violence

TRIPOLI (AFP) — It was supposed to be a temporary closure for renovations, but for 17 long years, Tripoli's zoo — like the city itself — was embroiled in the violence of Libya's brutal conflict.

Only now, during a spell of tenuous calm, has the zoo managed to reemerge from a bloody past, reopening its doors last month to offer rare relief in a city that still bears the scars of fighting.

On the first day of Eid Al-Fitr in March, hundreds of families queued to enter the facility, despite the pouring rain.

Decked out in their best new Eid clothes, children stared wide-eyed at the bears, lions, Bengal tigers and white oryxes with their long, slender horns.

Several local species were also on display, including fennec foxes, rhin gazelles and waddans, or Barbary sheep — a goat-like animal with curved horns, native to Libya's Waddan region.

Each of these indigenous species is at risk of poaching.

Dressed in a traditional embroidered robe, Mohammed Erbeh, 44, said he was "very happy" about the reopening of the zoo, as he visited with his three children.



Tripoli's zoo has reopened after 17 years

"At last, a place to take children for outings after they were deprived of them for nearly 20 years," said the civil servant.

Lions killed

Built in 1985, the Tripoli Zoo sprawls on 45 hectares of parkland in the Libyan capital.

It was closed in 2009 for renovations under the administration of former leader Muammar Qadhafi, less than two years before a NATO-backed uprising ousted and killed him.

The North African country has since been gripped by violence and bouts of fighting, with oc-

casional short-lived lulls of relative calm.

Now, the country remains divided between a UN-recognised government in Tripoli and a rival administration in the east backed by strongman Khalifa Haftar.

In 2011, Tripoli Zoo staff had to flee the fighting, as the park is located close to Bab Al Aziziya, Gaddafi's fortified compound.

Even the animals were not spared the grinding violence, many of them having been traumatised by the sounds of fighting and stray bullets that swept through the zoo and littered its grounds that year.

Charities sent food and

medicine to help the abandoned animals, as the zoo remained for years closed and held by militias, with a migrant sorting centre in its surroundings at one stage.

Last year, fighting flared again between pro-government forces and the militia that controlled that part of Tripoli.

Gunmen opened fire on the animals, killing dozens of them, including lions, according to a zoo management official who requested anonymity.

Dozens of others, including rare species, were stolen, the official added.

Out of its population of 1,100 animals, only 700 remained at the time of

reopening, but the management is seeking to rebuild the herd.

At the time, pictures and video circulated online showing lions shot dead and armed men hauling away gazelles in trucks.

An escape

For years, the authorities steered clear of this area, controlled since 2011 by the militia led by Abdelghani "Gheniwa" Al Kikli, who had been accused of human trafficking, torture and killing prisoners.

After Kikli's death last year, a mass grave was discovered in the vicinity of the zoo.

It was only last summer that the Tripoli-based Government of National Unity was able to retake the area, allowing authorities to begin work to bring the zoo up to international standards and refurbish the enclosures.

Abdullah Aoun, a 62-year-old airline pilot, said he was proud of the progress made to reopen the zoo, describing it as an ideal escape from "crises and financial worries".

"It's another side to our country, far removed from pessimism and disagreements," he said.

Sabrina Carpenter transforms Coachella into her own 'Sabrinawood'

INDIO, United States (AFP) — Pop princess Sabrina Carpenter took fans on a nostalgic journey through a Hollywood-themed fantasy world dubbed "Sabrinawood" on Friday as Coachella wrapped up its first day in the California desert.

The 26-year-old headliner packed 20 songs into a Tinseltown-inspired set complete with A-listers cameos, vintage film props and a "Sabrinawood" billboard in huge white letters evoking the Hollywood sign.

The "Manchild" singer made her Coachella debut in 2024, the year she released her catchy summer smash "Espresso".

"Two years ago, I wanted to put on a little song for Coachella," Carpenter said on Friday as fans belted out the words to the megahit.

Her performance also included live debuts from her latest album "Man's Best Friend" as well as appearances from Susan Sarandon and Will Ferrell.

The star-studded Coachella line-up — which also features headliners Justin Bieber and Colombia's Karol G — will grace the stage in Indio on two consecutive weekends, kicking off the US music festival circuit for 2026.

Under Coachella's

desert sun, with temperatures reaching 30°C on Friday, music fans donned cowboy boots, short shorts and glitter galore for the festivities.

Two-time Grammy nominee Teddy Swims took to the festival's main stage at dusk with an enthusiastic set that included hits such as "The Door" and "Bad Dreams", before closing out with "Lose Control".

Soon after, thousands of fans packed another stage to sing, dance and cheer the much-anticipated Coachella debut of girl group KATSEYE.

Italian DJ Anyma cancelled his set due to "strong wind conditions" that affected stage build, organisers said in a statement.

Bieber Fever

The party continues across Coachella's nine stages on Saturday, with a heavy dose of yesterday's biggest stars.

The 90s are back with industrial rock band Nine Inch Nails, who will team up with German producer Boys Noize for a performance, and the aughts will be repped by New York City rockers The Strokes — who are slated to release a new album in June after a six-year hiatus.

But peak nostalgia may hit like a bout of "Bieber

fever," on the heels of the 32-year-old singer's comeback at the Grammy Awards this year, with hits such as "Sorry" and "Where Are U Now".

The night will also feature performances by techno stalwarts like Armin van Buuren and Adam Beyer, K-pop stars such as Taemin and British dance sensation PinkPantheress.

French DJ and producer David Guetta returns to the desert in Indio and David Byrne, the legendary co-founder of Talking Heads, will make an appearance.

As a testament to the diversity of genres on display at Coachella, the festival's main stage will host influencer-turned-singer Addison Rae.

Tropicoqueta

Sunday's cherry on top will be reggaeton star Karol G, the first Latina to headline the festival.

The winner of eight Latin Grammy Awards made her Coachella debut in 2022 with a performance that paid tribute to Latin music icons such as Selena, Celia Cruz, and Daddy Yankee.

For this year's show, the "Provenza" singer is expected to embrace the "Caribbean showgirl" aesthetic of her latest project, "Tropicoqueta".

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