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The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates on Thursday welcomes an agreement reached by Yemeni parties under UN auspices to release more than 1,600 conflict-related detainees

Jordan welcomes agreement to release over 1,600 Yemeni detainees

AMMAN (JT) — The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates on Thursday welcomed an agreement reached by Yemeni parties under UN auspices to release more than 1,600 conflict-related detainees, following talks held in Amman over the past weeks.

Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Fuad Ma-

jali said Jordan's hosting of the talks reflects its continued support for UN, Arab, and international efforts to achieve peace, security, and stability in Yemen, in line with the aspirations of the Yemeni people.

Majali also commended the efforts of UN Special Envoy for Yemen Hans Grundberg in

reaching the humanitarian agreement on the detainee release, according to a ministry statement.

He also commended the role of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the concerned parties in securing what he described as the largest detainee release since the beginning of the Yemeni conflict.

Water carrier project matter of national security — minister

AMMAN (JT) — Minister of Water and Irrigation Raed Abu Saud on Thursday described the National Water Carrier Project as a matter of national security, stressing that water sovereignty represents a sovereign national decision that will strengthen Jordan's water independence.

Speaking during a dialogue session, Abu Saud said the government is committed to launching implementation of the project before the summer of 2026 in partnership with local and international stakeholders, in line with Royal directives. He noted that the Ministry of Water and Irrigation has completed most technical and contractual procedures and is preparing to move into the implementation phase in the near future.

Abu Saud said the government's water strategy extends beyond major infrastructure projects to include reducing water loss, combating violations on water networks and



expanding the use of modern technologies such as cloud seeding and underground dam experiments to confront the Kingdom's unprecedented water challenges.

The minister added that the ministry is increasingly relying on non-traditional water resources, particularly treated wastewater, as part of a sustainable water management ap-

proach. He also stressed the need to consider additional future projects to strengthen the sector. Abu Saud said the government worked extensively to secure a 30 per cent stake in the

project to help lower the cost of water per cubic metre, following the successful model adopted in the Disi Water Conveyance Project.

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Xi warns Trump on Taiwan at Beijing summit

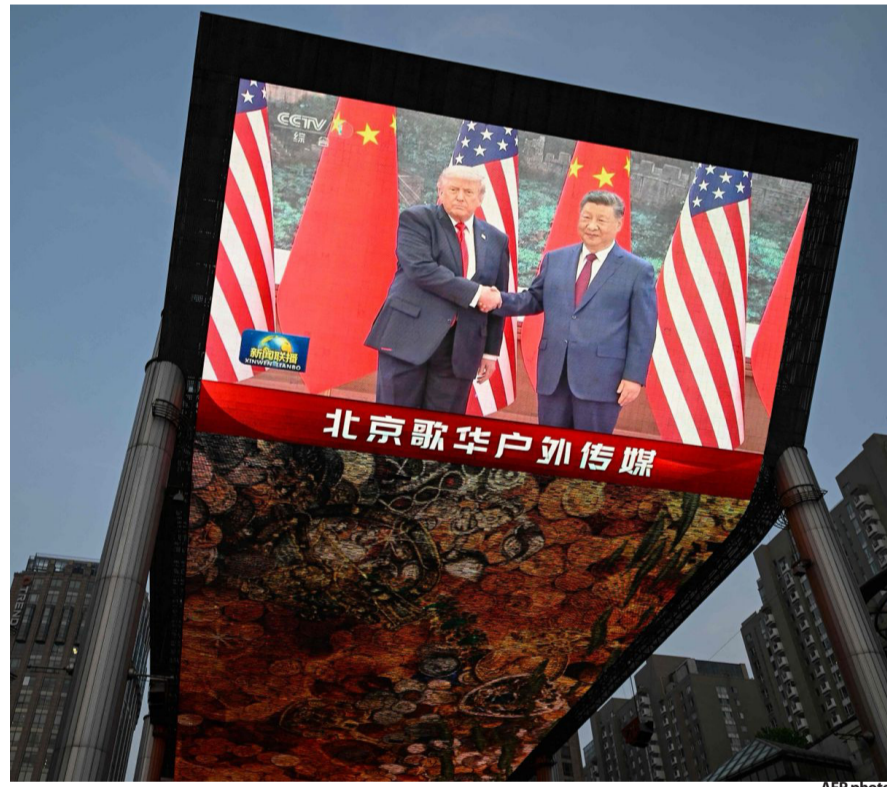
BEIJING (AFP) — Chinese President Xi Jinping warned his US counterpart Donald Trump that missteps on Taiwan could push their two countries into "conflict", a stark opening salvo as they met on Thursday at a superpower summit in Beijing.

Trump arrived in China with accolades for his host, calling Xi a "great leader" and "friend" and extending an invitation to visit the White House in September.

Beyond the pomp as he welcomed Trump, Xi in less effusive tones said the two sides "should be partners and not rivals", and quickly highlighted the issue of Taiwan — which Beijing claims as its territory.

"The Taiwan question is the most important issue in China-US relations," Xi said, according to remarks published by Chinese state media shortly after the start of the talks, which lasted two hours and 15 minutes.

"If mishandled, the two nations could collide or even come into conflict, pushing the entire China-US rela-



A big screen shows a broadcasting of Chinese President Xi Jinping meeting with US President Donald Trump at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing on Thursday

tionship into a highly perilous situation," Xi added.

Trump's trip to Beijing is the first by a US president in nearly a decade, with the grand reception belying a roster of unresolved trade and geopolitical tensions.

Xi greeted Trump with a red-carpet welcome at the opulent Great Hall of the People, with military band fanfare, a 21-gun salute and schoolchildren chanting "Welcome!"

Seemingly enjoying the ceremony, the 79-year-old Trump said

"the relationship between China and the USA is going to be better than ever before".

Xi, who at 72 has led China for more than 13 years, instead referenced a political theory about the risks of war when a rising power rivals a ruling one, in-

spired by an ancient Greek historian.

"Can China and the United States transcend the so-called 'Thucydides Trap' and forge a new paradigm for major-power relations?" Xi asked.

At a state banquet in the evening, the Chinese leader insisted it was possible.

"Achieving the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation and making America great again can totally go hand in hand... and advance the wellbeing of the whole world," Xi said, in reference to Trump's MAGA movement.

'Blunt language'

But there are longstanding hurdles to overcome, with Taiwan looming large.

The United States recognises only Beijing but under US law is required to provide weapons to the self-ruled democracy for its defence.

China has sworn to take the island and has not ruled out using force, ramping up military pressure in recent years.

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German Chancellor Friedrich Merz (right) gives a speech during a ceremony to award the former president of the European Central Bank (ECB) and former Italian prime minister Mario Draghi (centre) on Thursday in Aachen, western Germany

Germany's Merz calls for more investment, less subsidies in EU budget

BERLIN (AFP) — German Chancellor Friedrich Merz urged the European Union on Thursday to reform its budget to include more investments and reduce subsidies, but rejected any joint borrowing by EU nations to do so.

The 27 EU nations are wrangling over the bloc's 2028-2034 budget, with so-called

frugal nations like Germany and The Netherlands opposing a big increase in spending proposed by the bloc's executive Commission.

"We cannot meet the challenges of the 21st century with a 20th-century budget," the conservative leader declared in Aachen, Germany, in a speech at the ceremony awarding the Charlemagne Prize to

former European Central Bank (ECB) president Mario Draghi.

In a hard-hitting report on European competitiveness in 2024, Draghi called for a fundamental change of course by the bloc to stay in the race against the United States and China, notably through joint investments.

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UK minister quits ahead of possible challenge to Starmer

LONDON (AFP) — Britain's health minister Wes Streeting announced on Thursday that he had resigned, plunging Keir Starmer's premiership deeper into crisis as potential challengers positioned themselves for a possible leadership challenge.

Streeting, popular on the right of the ruling centre-left Labour party, stopped short of formally announc-

ing a bid for the top job but called for the "best possible field of candidates" to run to replace Starmer.

It came after ex-deputy prime minister Angela Rayner, a left-wing figurehead amongst Labour's grassroots, announced that she had cleared obstacles preventing her from running in any future race.

Starmer led his Labour Party to victory

in 2024 elections that ended 14 years of Conservative rule but is fighting for his political life after disastrous local and regional polls last week.

After days of calls by Labour lawmakers for the premier to quit or set a date for his departure, Streeting became the first senior minister to break ranks, saying he had "lost confidence" in Starmer's leadership.

"It is now clear that you will not lead the Labour Party into the next general election", scheduled for 2029, Streeting told Starmer in a resignation letter that he published on X. Streeting accused Starmer of lacking vision and said a debate about what comes next for the ruling party "needs to be broad, and it needs to be the best possible field of candidates".

Last Thursday's election results, which saw huge gains for the hard-right Reform UK Party and the left-wing populist Greens.

The polls also saw Labour lose control of the devolved Welsh parliament for the first time and fail to make up ground on the pro-independence Scottish National Party (SNP) in the parliament in Edinburgh.

Four junior minis-

ters have resigned, and more than 80 Labour MPs have urged Starmer to quit, but he has vowed to cling on and at least 100 lawmakers from the ruling party have called for him to stay.

Starmer has vowed to fight any contest, pledging this week to do better and prove his doubters wrong.

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Britain's Health Secretary Wes Streeting arrives at Downing Street to meet with the prime minister in central London on Wednesday



File photo

Minister of Transport Nidal Qatamine says on Thursday that the world is moving towards integrated rail, maritime and land transport networks linking continents and markets

'Jordan advances regional logistics ambitions through railway, transport projects'

AMMAN (JT) — The government is working under the Economic Modernisation Vision to develop the transport and logistics sector as one of the main drivers of economic growth, investment and job creation, Minister of Transport Nidal Qatamine said on Thursday.

Speaking at a Jordan Economic Forum (JEF) session titled "Jordan as a Regional Logistics Hub: Transport Policies as a Driver of Growth and Competitiveness", Qatamine said that the world is moving towards integrated rail, maritime and land transport networks linking continents and markets, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.

He said that Jordan has a strategic opportunity to connect the Gulf region with the Levant, Turkey and Europe, in addition to linking with the Mediterranean through Egypt, noting that the Kingdom's geographical location gives it a "strong" competitive advantage in transport and logistics.

Qatamine stressed that recent geopolitical shifts, especially concerning the Strait of Hormuz, have underscored the critical nature of supply

chains and logistics. Disruptions in this 30-kilometre maritime route significantly impact the global economy, shipping expenses and international trade, the minister added.

He highlighted Jordan's stability amid regional challenges, enhancing global trust in the Kingdom as a secure transit and logistics hub.

'Jordan as a Regional Logistics Hub: Transport Policies as a Driver of Growth and Competitiveness'

Qatamine said that the government has already started implementing strategic railway projects, mainly the Aqaba Port railway project for transporting phosphate and potash, which was signed with the UAE at invest-

ments exceeding \$2.3 billion.

He said that the project would create major economic and development activity in governorates and areas along the railway route through direct jobs and supporting sectors linked to construction, transport and services.

The minister noted that railway projects require thousands of engineers, technicians and workers, adding that such projects create an integrated economic system rather than serving only as transport projects.

He added that the government is also completing studies for railway links with Saudi Arabia and Syria, extending to Turkey, as part of plans to establish an integrated regional railway network.

JEF President Khair Abu Saileik stressed that transport and logistics infrastructure projects are long-term strategic projects that require a far-reaching government vision, noting that successive governments recognised early the importance of this sector, particularly with regard to railway connectivity projects with neighbouring countries.

Zaha centre, French Institute expand youth cultural programmes nationwide

AMMAN (JT) — In the presence of HRH Princess Alia Tabbaa, chairperson of the Zaha Cultural Centre, the centre and the French Institute in Jordan have signed a cooperation agreement to expand cultural and educational programmes for children and youth across the Kingdom.

The agreement was signed by Zaha Cultural Centre Executive Director Rania Sbeih and French Institute in Jordan Director Luc Chevalier, in the presence of French Ambassador to Jordan Franck Gellet and several officials, Al Mamlaka TV reported.

The agreement builds on more than a year of cooperation between the two institutions.

During that period, the Zaha Cultural Centre partnered with the French Institute in Jordan in organising activities under the "IFJ Nomade" project, which aims to provide interactive and cultural programmes for Jordanian youth and promote awareness of French language and culture.



Photo courtesy of Zaha Cultural Centre

In the presence of HRH Princess Alia Tabbaa, chairperson of the Zaha Cultural Centre, the centre and the French Institute in Jordan sign a cooperation agreement to expand cultural and educational programmes for children and youth

The agreement includes organising a joint summer tour that was launched in 2024 in Madaba before expanding to 10 centres across the Kingdom.

The activities focus on Francophone cul-

tures, environmental awareness, arts and digital technology through interactive programmes targeting children and teenagers.

The partnership also includes cooperation during "Environment

Month", organised by the French embassy in Jordan in cooperation with the Ministry of Environment, through awareness sessions and youth activities at Zaha centres.

The agreement fur-

ther includes launching pilot French language courses at the Zaha Cultural Centre in Amman for children and youth, with plans to expand the programme based on demand.

Culture minister highlights ties with Qatar at Doha International Book Fair

AMMAN (JT) — Jordan's participation in the 35th Doha International Book Fair reflects the "deep" ties between Jordan and Qatar and highlights the "strong" cultural relations supported by His Majesty King Abdullah and Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani, Culture Minister Mustafa Rawashdeh said on Thursday.

Rawashdeh expressed appreciation for Qatar for its hospitality and cooperation during the opening of the fair, which was attended by Qatari Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed Bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, praising Qatar's role as a cultural centre in the region,



Ministry of Culture photo

Culture Minister Mustafa Rawashdeh (second left) and Qatari Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed Bin Abdulrahman Al Thani (third left) during the opening of the 35th Doha International Book Fair

according to a ministry statement.

Rawashdeh expressed pride in the participation of Jordanian publishing houses in the exhibition, held

at the Doha Exhibition and Convention Centre, noting that Jordan's publishing industry is among the Kingdom's leading cultural and creative sectors.

Accompanied by National Library Director General Firas Darabah, the minister toured the exhibition and visited Jordanian publishers' stands, stressing the

ministry's support for Jordanian publishers and writers at international events.

He said that book fairs provide an important space for cultural dialogue and communication between peoples, noting that knowledge helps build civilisations and boosts ties between nations.

The 35th edition of the fair, which runs until May 23, includes 515 publishing houses from 37 countries, including around 50 Jordanian publishers.

Held under the slogan "From Engraving to Writing", the Doha International Book Fair is one of the region's oldest and largest book fairs, first launched in 1972.

Inflation up by 1.65% in first fourth months of 2026 — DoS

AMMAN (JT) — The Department of Statistics (DoS) on Thursday issued its monthly report on the Consumer Price Index (CPI), showing that inflation stood at 2.49 per cent in April 2026 compared with the same month last year, and at 0.70 per cent compared with March 2026.

Cumulative inflation during the first four months of 2026 reached 1.65 per cent, compared with 1.97 per cent during the same period in 2025, Al Mamlaka TV reported.

According to the report, the rise in the CPI for April 2026, compared with April 2025, was mainly driven by increases in the prices of personal belongings by 23.64 per cent, oils and fats by 15.26 per cent,



Photo by Ahmad Khilafat

The Department of Statistics on Thursday says that the inflation stood at 2.49 per cent in April 2026 compared with the same month last year

and vegetables, legumes and canned goods by 7.40 per cent.

Other contributors to the increase include tea, coffee and cocoa by 7.25

per cent, and spices, and food enhancers and other food items by 4.71 per cent.

Prices of household appliances dropped by 2.95

per cent, beverages and refreshments by 2.09 per cent, fruits and nuts by 1.53 per cent, and housing maintenance services by 1.09 per cent.

Comparing the cumulative CPI for the first four months of 2026 with the same period last year, the report showed that prices of personal belongings increased by 34.06 per cent, and oils and fats by 14.39 per cent.

Also, the prices of tea, coffee and cocoa went up by 10.74 per cent, vegetables, legumes and canned goods by 4.73 per cent, and tobacco and cigarettes by 3.99 per cent.

On the other hand, prices of meat and poultry, household appliances, and beverages and refreshments declined by 4.85 per cent, 3.04 per cent, 1.11 per cent and 1.11 per cent, respectively, according to the DoS report.



File photo

Assistant Secretary-General for Livestock at the Ministry of Agriculture Misbah Tarawneh on Thursday expects the price of locally bred sheep to range between JD5 and JD5.5 per kilogramme live weight

772,000 sheep head available for Eid Al Adha season — Agriculture Ministry

AMMAN (JT) — The Ministry of Agriculture has begun early preparations for the upcoming Eid Al Adha season through a plan aimed at securing sufficient meat supplies and maintaining market stability in the coming period, Assistant Secretary-General for Livestock at the Ministry Misbah Tarawneh said on Thursday.

Speaking to the Jordan News Agency, Petra, Tarawneh said that around 500,000 local sacrificial sheep are available this year, a figure similar to last year's supply.

The holiday, which falls on the 10th day of the Hijri calendar, Dhul Hijja, is the feast marking the end of the annual

pilgrimage to Mecca, which Muslims of sufficient means are required to perform at least once in their lifetime.

Eid Al Adha means "feast of sacrifice", and during the holiday Muslims slaughter livestock, cattle or camels and distribute the meat to underprivileged people.

Tarawneh said that the price of locally bred sheep is expected to remain close to last year's levels, ranging between JD5 and JD5.5 per kilogramme live weight.

He said that daily slaughter rates during Eid are expected to range between 100,000 and 120,000 sheep, with the number potentially reaching a maximum of 150,000.

that Jordan has imported 250,000 sheep from 21 approved countries of origin, including Romania and Ukraine, in addition to importing 22,000 calves from Brazil, Colombia, Romania and Australia.

According to Tarawneh, the imports aim to increase market supply, prevent shortages of meat products, help stabilise prices and ease the financial burden on consumers while meeting heightened demand for meat and sacrificial livestock during the Eid. Regarding import costs, Tarawneh said that expenses vary depending on the country of origin and related shipping, insurance and transport charges imposed on consignments.

'Freedoms' launches as first integrated Jordanian social media platform

AMMAN (JT) — Executive manager of Freedoms platform Akram Katout on Thursday announced the official launch of the platform as the first integrated Jordanian social media site and digital ecosystem.

The platform is specifically designed to ensure the highest standards of privacy protection and address security vulnerabilities and inappropriate content prevalent on global platforms, Katout told the Jordan News Agency, Petra.

Katout noted that the platform, which originated in Jordan with regional ambitions, serves as a "secure" digital environment that adheres to Jordanian laws and preserves Arab culture.

The official launch follows a three-month pilot phase, he added.

The idea for the platform emerged in response to the community's need for protection against offensive content and intrusive advertisements.

Freedoms offers mul-

iple levels of privacy protection, granting users full control over the content categories they engage with, ranging from news and science to entertainment.

Katout also noted that the platform places a "high" priority on combating rumours and misinformation.

A specialised team checks on circulated content to ensure it remains free from profanity, legal violations, or misleading news, while actively pro-

moting high-quality content in the fields of science and culture.

Regarding technical services, Katout highlighted that the system includes advanced page management tools to support content creators, along with features for stories and reels.

It also provides dedicated business tools for media outlets to enhance their audience reach, he added.

The platform is available free of charge on

Google Play, the Apple App Store, and via its web version.

It is currently witnessing "rapid" growth, with thousands of daily active users and tens of thousands of registered accounts from across the Arab world.

Katout said that the project represents a step towards achieving "Arab digital sovereignty" and building national technical models capable of competing on a global scale.



Freight movement through the Karamah Border Crossing has surged following a decision to extend operating hours at the crossing

'Truck movement at Karamah up 262% following operating hours extension'

AMMAN (JT) — Freight movement through the Karamah Border Crossing has surged following a decision to extend operating hours at the crossing, amid increased Iraqi transit traffic arriving through Aqaba and heading to Iraq, the Ministry of Interior said on Thursday.

The ministry said that between May 4 and May 11, 2026, a total of 5,885 inbound trucks and 4,515 outbound trucks passed through the crossing, bringing total freight traffic during the period to 10,400 trucks.

According to the ministry, the average daily inbound and outbound truck movement rose to around 1,300 trucks after the extension of operating hours, compared with about 600 trucks per day previously, marking an increase of approximately 262 percent.

The ministry added that around 3,971 trucks crossed Karamah during the same period in 2025...

The ministry stressed that the decision has helped ease congestion at the crossing, improve operational efficiency, accelerate customs clearance procedures and prevent delays to Jordanian exports despite the sharp rise in truck traffic.

It attributed the increase to the diversion of part of Iraqi freight traffic through Aqaba Port and onward via the Karamah crossing, prompting authorities to extend operating hours to facilitate the smooth flow of Jordanian exports into the Iraqi market.

tions at the crossing are being conducted under strict organizational procedures and operational regulations, contributing to smoother freight movement and improved service delivery.

The ministry noted that the measures have also strengthened confidence in Jordanian-Iraqi commercial agreements and contracts, encouraging greater reliance on the Jordanian market to meet Iraq's demand for various goods.

It also revealed that work is underway on a master plan for a comprehensive border facility at Karamah aimed at improving the working environment and enhancing the efficiency of logistical and administrative services at the crossing.

Risha gas output rises from 7.5m to 80m cubic metres — NPC

AMMAN (JT) — Production at Risha gas field has increased from 7.5 million cubic metres to 80 million cubic metres following efforts to expand production capacity and drill new wells after years of slowdown, the National Petroleum Company (NPC) said on Thursday.

The remarks came during a visit by the Lower House Energy and Mineral Resources Committee to the company, headed by MP Ayman Abu Hanieh, to review its operations and future plans in the energy sector.

NPC Technical Adviser Hazem Dmour said the company, established in 1995, is continuing efforts through its technical teams to further boost production capacity.

He noted that NPC signed a contract with Kuwait Drilling Company and is also working to increase the quantities of gas extracted from the field while diversifying its customer base for natural gas.



The National Petroleum Company (NPC) says on Thursday that production at Risha gas field has increased from 7.5 million cubic metres to 80 million cubic metres following efforts to expand production capacity and drill new wells after years of slowdown

Dmour added that the company is seeking investments in gas compression and liquefaction projects, in addition to signing memoranda of understanding with investors interested in purchasing natural gas.

For his part, Abu Hanieh said the gas project has contributed to attracting investment to Jordan, praising the company's role in strengthening the Kingdom's energy sector and securing fuel supplies, particularly amid ongoing regional challenges.

He stressed the strategic importance of the Risha field in supporting Jordan's energy security and boosting domestic gas production, noting that the company was built on Jordanian expertise and operates in line with national interests.

NPC Director General Mohammad Khasawneh said around 120 technical employees are currently working in the field, while also outlining the company's concession areas and its role in the Kingdom's energy sector.

Senate president visits Bahrain Constitutional Court

AMMAN (JT) — Senate President Faisal Fayeze and an accompanying delegation visited the Constitutional Court of Bahrain during an official visit to the Kingdom, at the invitation of the Speaker of the Bahraini Shura Council.

The delegation was received by Constitutional Court President Counsellor Abdullah Bin Hassan Al Buainain, who welcomed the Jordanian delegation and underscored the deep-rooted fraternal ties between Bahrain and Jordan, as well as the continued development of relations across various sectors

under the leadership of His Majesty King Abdullah and King Hamad Bin Isa Al Khalifa.

During the visit, the delegation was briefed on the court's establishment in 2002 as part of the reform project launched by King Hamad Bin Isa Al Khalifa, and its role in strengthening the legal and constitutional framework in the Kingdom.

Al Buainain also expressed his wishes for Jordan's continued security, stability, and prosperity.

As part of the official programme, Fayeze and the delegation also visited the Bahrain Defence

Force Military Museum, where Brig. Gen. Mohammed Oatami Al Kaabi, Director of Media and Moral Guidance, briefed them on the halls and sections, which feature a collection of artefacts, military paintings, and models documenting Bahrain's modern and contemporary military history.

The visit also included the Bahraini National Museum and the National Charter Monument.

Fayeze also met with Bahraini social and community figures at the Al Rumaihi family majlis in the Jaw area, at the invitation of Ali Bin Mohammed Al Rumaihi,

chairman of the Foreign Affairs, Defence and National Security Committee at the Bahraini Shura Council. The meeting was attended by several senators and Jordan's Ambassador to Bahrain Rami Wreikat.

Fayeze highlighted the strong Jordanian-Bahraini relations and the commitment of both leaderships to further strengthen cooperation across various sectors, noting continued coordination and consultation on Arab and Islamic issues.

He affirmed that the security and stability of Bahrain and the Gulf

states are integral to Jordan's national security, reiterating Amman's rejection of any interference in the internal affairs of Gulf countries.

He added that Jordan and Bahrain continue to stand side by side in addressing regional challenges and promoting security, stability, and peace, stressing that bilateral relations represent a strategic partnership grounded in mutual trust and cooperation.

Fayeze expressed hope for further expanding cooperation in ways that serve the interests of both countries and their peoples.

Police arrest dangerous drug suspect, seize 2m Captagon pills in Ruwaished

By Rana Hussein

AMMAN — Police on Thursday said they have arrested a dangerous wanted suspect, who allegedly has ties with a regional illicit drugs gang, in Ruwaished.

In a joint operation between the Anti-Narcotics Department (AND) and specialised raid teams, law-enforcement officers arrested the suspect in a farm following weeks of monitoring, Police Spokesperson Lt. Col Amer Sartawi said.



"The suspect's son, who is a minor, was also arrested because

he tried to help his father evade capture," Sartawi told The Jordan Times.

Officers seized over 2 million Captagon pills, weapons, smuggling balloons and a large amount of cash that were allegedly hidden in a farm that belonged to the suspect, Sartawi maintained.

The police official said that AND officers received a tip that the suspect was "in close contact with regional gang members and that he was receiving illicit drugs via balloons that were crossing the Jordanian border".

"The suspect was closely monitored by law-enforcement officers, who raided the farm to arrest him," according to Sartawi.

The suspect resisted arrest and "used his minor son to help him escape but the two were arrested by officers", he added.

The two suspects were referred to the State Security Court prosecution office for further questioning and indictment, according to a statement by the Public Security Directorate.

Army thwarts drug smuggling attempt using balloons

AMMAN (JT) — The Eastern Military Region command on Thursday foiled an attempt to smuggle narcotics using electronically guided balloons along its border front, according to Jordan Armed Forces-Arab Army.

The balloons were detected by Border Guard units and brought down, along with their cargo, inside Jordanian territory in coordination with security agencies and the Anti-Narcotics Department.



The Eastern Military Region command on Thursday foils an attempt to smuggle narcotics using electronically guided balloons

The seized materials were handed over to the relevant au-

thorities to complete the necessary legal procedures.

Ministers discuss improving transport to industrial cities to boost local employment

AMMAN (JT) — Minister of Transport Nidal Qatamin, Minister of Local Administration Waleed Masri, and Minister of Industry, Trade and Supply Yarub Qudah on Wednesday discussed mechanisms to improve public transport services to industrial cities and development zones.

During a meeting held at the Ministry of Transport, the ministers stressed the importance of integrating industrial cities and development zones into future inter-governorate transport connectivity projects, with particular focus on Al Hassan Industrial

City, to ensure regular and safe transport services for workers, students and visitors, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.

The meeting, which was attended by senior officials from relevant institutions, also reviewed proposals to enhance transport efficiency and sustainability in Irbid Governorate, including improved access to Al Hassan Industrial City.

Officials highlighted that Al Hassan Industrial City hosts 134 factories employing more than 30,000 workers, including around 6,000 Jordanians, underscoring the need to expand

transport services as a means of increasing local employment and improving operational efficiency.

The Land Transport Regulatory Commission presented a briefing on the current state of transport services in Irbid and options to improve connectivity to the industrial city.

The ministers affirmed that enhancing transport services to industrial cities aligns with the Economic Modernisation Vision, particularly in relation to job creation, increasing the participation of Jordanian labour, and improving public transport across the Kingdom.

JEBA, Romanian embassy discuss cooperation

AMMAN (JT) — The Jordan-Europe Business Association (JEBA) on Thursday discussed with Romanian embassy Economic Counsellor Ovidiu Costea ways to enhance economic and trade cooperation between Jordan and Romania, and expand partnership and investment opportunities that support bilateral ties and strengthen Jordan's economic relations with the EU.

According to a JEBA statement, both sides underscored the importance of such meetings in fostering trust, encouraging cooperation and deepening ties between Jordan and EU member states.



The Jordan-Europe Business Association (JEBA) on Thursday discusses with Romanian embassy Economic Counsellor Ovidiu Costea cooperation

economic relations in the coming period.

JEBA board members Anwar Obeidat and Bilal Shawar stressed the im-

portance of maintaining dialogue and effective communication to reinforce bilateral relations and create new avenues

for cooperation between Jordan and Romania, particularly within the broader framework of Jordan's partnership

with the EU. They highlighted several sectors that offer promising opportunities for expanding economic cooperation and exchanging expertise, reflecting the potential for mutually beneficial partnerships between the two countries.

Costea, during the meeting attended by JEBA Director General Husam Saleh, praised the association's role in advancing Jordanian-Romanian economic relations.

He also stressed the importance of building sustainable partnerships and exploring new opportunities in trade and investment to further enhance cooperation with EU countries.



Delegates of partner countries during the BRICS Foreign Ministers' meeting at the Bharat Mandapam in New Delhi on Thursday

Iran war and oil dominate BRICS meet in India

NEW DELHI (AFP) — BRICS foreign ministers, including from Iran and Russia, met in New Delhi on Thursday, where India warned of "considerable flux" with conflict driving economic uncertainty and energy insecurity.

War in Iran and the related fuel crisis are dominating discussions in the two-day gathering.

India, which holds the BRICS chair this year, was hosting the foreign ministers from the expanded bloc, which now includes Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates — countries at odds over the conflict launched by the United States and Israel on February 28.

"We meet at a time of considerable flux in international relations," India's Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar said, in his opening speech, before closed meetings began.

Among the foreign ministers attending were Iran's Abbas Araghchi and Russia's Sergei Lavrov.

"Ongoing conflicts, economic uncertainties, and challenges in trade, technology, and climate are shaping the global landscape," Jaishankar added.

"There is a growing expectation, particularly from emerging markets and developing countries, that BRICS will play a constructive and stabilising role."

Disruptions around Gulf shipping routes and

the Strait of Hormuz continue to drive volatility in oil and gas markets, increasing pressure on energy-importing economies, including India.

"Development issues remain central," Jaishankar added. "Many countries continue to face challenges on energy, food, fertiliser and health security, as well as access to finance."

'Volatile global environment'

The conflict involving Iran has added strain to India's economy, heavily reliant on Middle Eastern energy supplies and fertiliser imports, and has cast uncertainty over New Delhi's growth outlook.

India, the world's third-largest oil buyer, normally sources about half of its crude through the Strait of Hormuz, a vital waterway that has been repeatedly blocked since war began.

Ship-tracking and import data show that India has partially plugged the gap by turning to old allies, expanding promising ties and reviving suppliers it had not tapped in years.

The biggest backstop has been Russian crude — a fuel source New Delhi spent much of the past year trying to pivot away from under stiff US tariffs.

Jaishankar met with Lavrov on Wednesday evening.

"Our political coopera-

tion is even more valuable in an uncertain and volatile global environment," Jaishankar said in remarks at the meeting, adding that discussions included "trade and investment, energy and connectivity".

BRICS was created in 2009 as a forum for major emerging economies seeking greater influence in institutions dominated by Western powers.

The grouping, originally comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, has since expanded, as members sought to boost the bloc's global political and economic influence.

It now includes Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia and the United Arab Emirates.

China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi was not attending — with US President Donald Trump in Beijing on Thursday. India will hold a leaders' summit later this year, and the foreign ministers will also meet with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the foreign ministry said.

With deep divisions among some members, including over the Middle East war and criticism of Western powers, it was not clear whether a joint statement would be released at the meeting's end.

"We will let you know as things progress," India's Foreign Ministry spokesman Randhir Jaiswal told reporters.

Israel hammers Lebanon with strikes, killing 22

BEIRUT, Lebanon (AFP) — Lebanon's health ministry said 22 people including eight children were killed on Wednesday as Israel intensified strikes on the country, with several deadly raids hitting south of Beirut.

The state-run National News Agency (NNA) said Israeli air strikes had pounded around 40 locations in Lebanon's south and east.

The fresh raids came on the eve of a new round of direct negotiations between Lebanon and Israel in Washington brokered by the United States, as Iran-backed militant group Hezbollah remains strongly opposed to the move.

The health ministry said late Wednesday that 10 people including six children had been killed in strikes on three south Lebanon villages.

Earlier, it reported that three strikes on cars along or near the coastal highway around 20 to 30 kilometres from Beirut had "resulted in eight martyrs, including two children".

The NNA said two strikes had hit cars on the busy highway linking the capital to the country's south, while a third struck nearby.

An AFP photographer saw a burnt-out car and rescuers carrying a body at one of the sites, near the town of Jiyeh.

The ministry also reported four more people killed in strikes on four cars in south Lebanon's Tyre district and in Sidon, located around 40 kilometres south of Beirut.

Drone attacks

Since US President Donald Trump announced on April 16 that the leaders of Israel and Lebanon had agreed to a ceasefire, Israeli strikes have killed more than 400 people in Lebanon, ac-



Smoke rises from the site of an Israeli air strike that targeted the southern village of Al Halloussiyah on Wednesday

cording to an AFP tally of health ministry figures.

The head of Lebanon's National Council for Scientific Research, Chadi Abdallah, said more than 10,000 homes had been damaged or destroyed since the truce began.

Under the terms of the ceasefire released by Washington, Israel reserves the right to act against "planned, imminent or ongoing attacks".

In addition to launching heavy airstrikes, Israeli soldiers are operating inside an Israeli-declared "yellow line", which runs around 10 kilometres north of the Israel-Lebanon border, carrying out broad demolition operations there.

Israel's army said it had struck Hezbollah infrastructure, weapons storage facilities

and rocket launchers in south Lebanon on Wednesday.

An AFP correspondent saw thick smoke from Burj Al Shemali, one of nine areas where Israel's army issued evacuation warnings.

Hezbollah claimed several attacks on Israeli troops in south Lebanon, including with drones, and said its fighters had "ambushed" and clashed with Israeli forces in one area.

The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) said it was "increasingly concerned" about the activities of Hezbollah fighters and Israeli soldiers near UN positions in south Lebanon.

That includes "the increased use of drones, which has resulted in explosions in and around our bases and put peacekeepers at

risk", a UNIFIL statement said.

It noted several recent incidents in which drones presumed to belong to Hezbollah detonated in or near UN positions, including the force's Naqura headquarters.

Hezbollah has increasingly been using cheap fibre-optic drones for its attacks on Israeli forces.

Civil defence funeral

In Sidon, an AFP correspondent saw dozens of mourners at the funeral for two Lebanese civil defence personnel killed in an Israeli strike a day earlier.

Fellow civil defence personnel holding Lebanese flags lined up for an honour guard as the coffins passed, also draped in the national flag, with a rescue helmet and flak jacket

placed on top.

This week, Beirut asked Washington to pressure Israel to halt its strikes ahead of the talks on Thursday and Friday.

Veteran diplomat Simon Karam will head the talks for Lebanon for the first time, as Washington seeks a historic breakthrough between the two sides despite the ongoing hostilities.

On Tuesday, Hezbollah leader Naim Qassem warned that his fighters would turn the battlefield into "hell" for Israel.

Since Hezbollah drew Lebanon into the wider Middle East war in early March, authorities say more than 2,800 people have been killed, including more than 200 children.

Hezbollah says the toll includes its fighters.

Rubio says Cuba leaders must go as US dangles \$100 million

WASHINGTON, United States (AFP) — US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said that crisis-hit Cuba's leadership must change as Washington renewed an offer on Wednesday of \$100 million in aid if the communist-run island agrees to cooperate.

Cuba has been suffering severe economic turmoil led by an energy shortage that plunged 65 percent of the country into darkness on Tuesday.

Cuba's leaders have blamed US sanctions but Rubio, a Cuban-American and vociferous critic of the government established by Fidel Castro, said the system was to blame including corruption by the military.

"It's a broken, nonfunctional economy, and it's impossible to change it. I wish it were different," he told Fox News host Sean Hannity on Air Force One as he traveled with President Donald Trump to China.

"We'll give them a chance. But I don't think it's going to happen," Rubio said.

"I don't think we're going to be able to change the trajectory of Cuba as long as these people are in charge in that regime."

Trump — who since the start of the year has



A man cooks with firewood during a blackout in Havana on Wednesday

deposed Venezuela's leftist leader but seen less success in a war on Iran — has mused that Cuba could be next and that the United States could take over the island 145 kilometres off Florida.

Rubio said last week after talks at the Vatican that Cuba had rejected a US offer for \$100 million in assistance, an assertion denied by Havana.

The State Department publicly renewed the proposal on Wednesday, a week after new US sanctions targeted key actors in Cuba's state-controlled economy and their foreign partners.

"The regime refuses to allow the United States to provide this assistance

to the Cuban people, who are in desperate need of assistance due to the failures of Cuba's corrupt regime," the State Department said in a statement.

"The decision rests with the Cuban regime to accept our offer of assistance or deny critical [life]-saving aid and ultimately be accountable to the Cuban people for standing in the way of critical assistance," it said.

It said the support would include direct humanitarian assistance and funding for "fast and free" internet access — which presumably would benefit dissidents in the one-party state that restricts media.

Cuba has seen a se-

ries of rare protests as economic misery grips the island of 9.6 million people.

On Wednesday, several dozen people, some banging pots and pans, protested against power outages in the San Miguel del Padron neighbourhood on Havana's outskirts, a resident told AFP.

Several other neighbourhoods saw similar protests by evening, with residents in Playa shouting, "Turn on the lights!", witnesses told AFP.

Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel acknowledged the "particularly tense" situation but pinned blame squarely on the United States.

"This dramatic worsening has a single cause: the genocidal energy blockade to which the United States subjects our country, threatening irrational tariffs against any nation that supplies us with fuel," he wrote Wednesday on X.

Cuba lost the source for around half its fuel needs when US forces snatched Venezuelan leader Nicolas Maduro in a stunning raid in January, with his successor complying with US pressure not to aid Cuba.

Since then, only one oil tanker, from Russia, has reached Cuba.

The Trump administration already provided \$6 million in humanitarian aid to Cuba but channeled it through the charity of the Catholic Church, which has long played a go-between role for the two countries.

After Rubio's initial comments on the \$100 million offer, Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez said it was a "lie" that "no one here knows anything about".

"Will it be a donation, a deception or a dirty deal to curtail our independence? Wouldn't it be easier to lift the fuel blockade?" Rodriguez wrote on X.

At least 59 children reportedly killed or injured in Lebanon in past week despite ceasefire

Ongoing violence, displacement pushing over 770,000 children towards chronic mental health conditions

AMMAN/BEIRUT (JT) — Children in Lebanon continue to be at the sharp end of ongoing violence, displacement and exposure to traumatic events, with at least 59 children have reportedly been killed or injured in the past week despite an agreed ceasefire on April 17, according to UNICEF.

"In the past seven days alone, despite an agreed ceasefire on 17 April 2026, at least 59 children have reportedly been killed or injured. This includes two children from the same family who were killed this morning, along with their mother, in a strike that hit their car, a stark reminder of the ongoing risks children continue to face," UNICEF said in a statement, citing figures from Lebanon's ministry of health.

In total, at least 23 children have been killed and 93 injured since the ceasefire, according to the ministry, bringing the total to 200 children killed and 806 injured since March 2, the equivalent of nearly 14 children killed or injured every day.

"Children are being killed and injured when they should be returning to classrooms, playing with friends, and recovering from months of fear and upheaval," said UNICEF Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa, Edouard Beigbeder.

"Nearly a month ago, an agreement was reached to silence the weapons and stop the violence. Reality is proving to be very different. Continued attacks are killing and injuring children, deepening their exposure to trauma and leaving devastating consequences that could last a lifetime."

According to UNICEF, estimated 770,000 children are experiencing heightened distress from repeated exposure to violence, loss and displacement. "Children and caregivers report symptoms linked to traumatic stress and grief, including extreme fear and worry, nightmares, sleeplessness and feelings of hopelessness. Without mental health and psychosocial support in safe and secure settings, these children

are at serious risk of developing chronic or lifelong mental health issues."

Evidence from UNICEF's 2025 Child-focused Rapid Assessment (CfRA) has pointed to a sharp deterioration in children's mental health following the 2024 military escalation, with 72 per cent of caregivers reporting their children were anxious or nervous and 62 per cent depressed or sad. "Continued violence and instability have since deepened these impacts, leaving children without the time, safety, or support needed to recover."

"The impact of repeated exposure to conflict on children's mental health can be profound and long-lasting," said Beigbeder. "Children in Lebanon have endured waves of violence, displacement, and uncertainty, often with little or no time to recover. Without urgent support, the psychological scars of this compounded crisis may stay with them for years, affecting not only their well-being, but their future and the future of the country."

S.Africa's president fires minister after corruption claims

JOHANNESBURG (AFP) — South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa fired on Thursday his social development minister, a leading member of his ANC Party, after weeks of mounting corruption claims.

Sisisi Tolashe is the second senior official in weeks to be pushed aside by the president on graft allegations after the national police chief was suspended last month.

The case adds to a slew of corruption scandals eroding public trust in the ANC Party, which took power at the end of apartheid in 1994 but has since shed support.

Ramaphosa announced the dismissal of 66-year-old Tolashe, also president of the ANC's influential Women's League, in a statement that gave no reasons for the decision.

It followed calls from other parties in the unity government for her removal following media reports of irregularities, which she denies.

Among the claims revealed by the Daily Maverick is that she failed to declare two vehicles donated to the Women's League by Chinese officials, and passed them on to her children.

Other allegations involve irregularities over appointments in the ministry and claims that a state-funded employee at one of her homes was re-



South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa (centre) answers questions in Parliament in Cape Town on Thursday

quired to pay half her salary to Tolashe's daughter.

Her dismissal came hours after the Democratic Alliance — the second-largest party in the unity government — called for her removal and said the ANC "too often protects compromised leaders".

Claims of corruption against senior ANC officials have been a major

black mark against the party which was forced into a unity government after losing its majority in the 2024 general elections.

Local elections in November will be another test of its support.

In July 2025, Ramaphosa suspended police minister Senzo Mchunu, who had been seen as

a possible future party leader, after a provincial police chief alleged he colluded with organised crime.

The claims are part of investigations which led Ramaphosa to suspend national police chief Fanie Masemola last month in a scandal that has drawn in other senior officers.

Ramaphosa is himself facing claims of misconduct by hiding from police and tax authorities a 2020 break-in at one of his homes and theft of large sums of foreign currency.

He has denied wrongdoing in the scandal but parliament is planning impeachment proceedings.

'Not all countries' in Europe take defence 'seriously' — Lithuanian FM to AFP

VILNIUS (AFP) — Lithuanian Foreign Minister Kestutis Budrys criticised European countries who do not spend enough to support Ukraine and strengthen NATO, in an interview for AFP in Vilnius on Thursday.

"I see no other way than to go with the strong transatlantic relations and strengthening NATO, showing that we are united," the minister said.

"We see that not all countries in Europe take this responsibility seriously," he added, referring to southern Europe, but without mentioning any specific country.

Positioned along NATO's Eastern flank, Lithuania has been a close ally of Ukraine since the beginning of the full-scale Russian invasion in 2022.

The former Soviet-occupied Baltic state has invested 5.4 per cent of its GDP in defence — higher than NATO's 5 per cent target for member states to reach by 2035.

"That's the largest in the whole of NATO and the whole free world, what we are spending," Budrys said.

Earlier this week, NATO's top commander, US Air Force General Alexus Grynkevic, called Lithuania a "wonderful example to follow" in terms of its contributions towards defence.

Lithuania has com-



Lithuanian Foreign Minister Kestutis Budrys speaks during an interview with AFP in Vilnius, Lithuania, on Thursday

mitted to cross-European defence — being the second country in the EU after Poland to sign a European loan programme allocating over 6.3 billion euros (\$7.35 billion) in funds to its military, and permanently stationing a brigade of 4,800 German soldiers on its territory.

But Budrys — a former senior inspector in Lithuania's State Security Department — emphasised that such actions cannot replace the transatlantic alliance.

European security measures are "an important element, complementary to NATO, but not as a substitute to NATO", he said.

"All these other ideas that are coming about

the autonomous Europe doing whatever on our own, I'm surprised that they are most often coming from the capitals that are doing least concerning defence," he added.

A political independent invested heavily in security, Budrys, who is also a former advisor to the president, has made NATO and maintaining relations with the United States his top priorities since beginning his tenure in 2024.

"The lesson from the Cold War is that we can deter. So the Soviets were deterred, and Russia can be deterred, and not with talks," he said.

"So spend and show how you're building your capabilities," he added.

Myanmar proposes death sentence for cyberscam offences

YANGON, Myanmar (AFP) — Myanmar published a parliamentary bill on Thursday proposing the death sentence for those who detain or violently coerce victims into working in online scam centres.

Internet fraud factories have flourished in war-torn Myanmar, part of Southeast Asia's thriving scam economy, targeting web users worldwide with romance and cryptocurrency investment cons.

The multibillion-dollar black market attracts many willing employees, but repatriated foreigners have also reported being trafficked to sites in Myanmar and tortured by scam centre operators.

The draft legislation would allow capital punishment for "violence, torture, unlawful arrest and detention, or cruel treatment against another person for the purpose of forcing them to commit online scams".

The "Anti-Online Scam Bill" also includes

a maximum sentence of life in prison for those who "run an online scam centre" and those who "commit digital currency scams (crypto scams)".

Myanmar's military-backed parliament — which many analysts describe as a rubber-stamp legislature — is next scheduled to sit in the first week of June.

Scam hotspot

The civil war triggered by a 2021 military coup has seeded instability across Myanmar, which monitors say has created fertile ground for organised crime groups to set up shop in fortified compounds.

Victims in the United States alone were scammed out of more than \$20 billion through such schemes last year, according to the US Federal Bureau of Investigation.

It has favoured the military recently, backing a junta-run election that shut out opposition parties including the National League

for Democracy of Aung San Suu Kyi, who has been detained since the coup.

The "Anti-Online Scam Bill" is the first legislation presented by the new government that is headed by coup leader Min Aung Hlaing, who assumed the role of civilian president last month.

Democracy watchdogs dismiss the government transition as a bid to rebrand military rule and put an end to the pariah status Myanmar's leadership has endured since the coup. The new government has touted concessions, including announcing Suu Kyi's move from prison to house arrest two weeks ago, although critics dismiss such measures as an attempt to launder its image.

The anti-scam bill promises a new committee to cooperate with other countries to combat the illicit industry, another apparent invitation for foreign engagement with the new government.

Water carrier project matter of national security — minister

Continued from page 1

He added that pumping from the Disi project has reached its maximum annual capacity of 120 million cubic metres, noting that both the level and quality of water in the Disi aquifer improved significantly following

the latest rainy season.

The minister also warned that the Water Authority's debt, currently estimated at JD4.5 billion, continues to rise due to water subsidies.

He stressed that any future adjustments to water tariffs would protect low-consumption

households, with increases expected to affect mainly higher-consumption categories.

Meanwhile, Meridian Investment Director Jad Hreibe said the government's participation in the project would help reduce financing costs through the involvement of Jordanian

banks and the Social Security Corporation.

Hreibe explained that Meridian is a French long-term infrastructure investment fund, adding that implementation of the project is expected to begin within two months with broad participation from Jordanian contractors and

companies.

He said the project is scheduled for completion within four years and will operate for 26 years.

Hreibe also noted that a solar power plant, expected to be the largest in Jordan, will provide 30 per cent of the project's energy needs.

Xi warns Trump on Taiwan at Beijing summit

Continued from page 1

Following Xi's Thursday comments, Taipei called China the "sole risk" to regional peace, and insisted "the US side has repeatedly reaffirmed its clear and firm support".

Trump had said Monday he would speak to Xi about US arms sales to Taiwan, a departure from Washington's previous insistence that it will not consult Beijing on the matter.

The White House said Thursday's initial talks had been "good", though it did not mention Tai-

wan in the readout.

Adam Ni, editor of newsletter China Neican, told AFP that while Xi's "blunt language" was not uncommon in party state media, it was unusual coming from the leader himself. China has been "signalling a desire for US compromise on Taiwan", the National University of Singapore's Chong Ja Ian told AFP.

Xi's demand could suggest "they see some opportunity to convince Trump", he said.

US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent told CNBC the president would say

more on Taiwan "in the coming days".

Iran overshadows

Trump told Fox News that Xi had offered China's help to open the Hormuz Strait — the key oil route largely blocked since the US-Iran war erupted — and that Xi had also pledged not to send military equipment to aid Iran.

"He said he's not going to give military equipment... he said that strongly," Trump told the "Hannity" show. "He'd like to see the Hormuz Strait open, and said 'if I

can be of any help whatsoever, I would like to help."

Meanwhile Iran's Revolutionary Guards said naval forces had allowed multiple Chinese ships to pass through the strait since Wednesday night.

China's foreign ministry said the Middle East had been discussed but did not give further details.

The two leaders also discussed economic cooperation, with Trump hoping for business deals on agriculture and other sectors.

He told Fox that China had agreed to purchase

200 Boeing jets, a deal that would equate to "a lot of jobs."

US media had described a possible China order of 600 jets, however.

Boeing's CEO Kelly Orberg was among the elite businessmen in the US delegation, which also included Nvidia's Jensen Huang and Tesla's Elon Musk.

At the state banquet Trump said the talks had been "extremely positive", describing the evening ahead as "another cherished opportunity to discuss among friends".

Germany's Merz calls for more investment, less subsidies in EU budget

Continued from page 1

Merz supported Draghi's call, criticising the fact that the EU's budget "has remained, in its content and structure, practically unchanged over the past decades".

He lashed out at the fact that "more than two-thirds of European funds go to redistribution and subsidies".

The EU has long relied upon subsidies and redistribution to assuage the impact from disruptions caused by reducing internal trade barriers, as well as to

help integrate poorer nations as the bloc has expanded east.

Merz called on the bloc to cut its budget and step up investments meant to boost competitiveness and defence.

However the German leader reiterated his opposition to the mechanism advocated by Draghi to fund the investments: joint borrowing by EU nations.

"Excessive indebtedness threatens sovereignty and limits the capacity to act," said Merz, whose comments were likely also direct-

ed to a domestic political audience.

Last year, after years of inaction, Germany reluctantly relaxed its strict constitutional borrowing limits to bolster investment in defence and infrastructure.

'Unfinished work at home'

In his speech accepting the Charlemagne prize, awarded to someone who advances European unity, Draghi expressed scepticism of the EU's drive to sign multilateral free-trade deals to lift

growth, a policy strongly supported by Germany.

"New trade deals are easier to agree than confronting the unfinished work at home, because that work forces choices Europe has long preferred to avoid: To confront the established rent positions and the vested interests that gain from an incomplete single market and fragmented energy markets," Draghi said.

The former Italian premier, who led the ECB from 2011 to 2019, is widely seen having saved the euro during the bloc's debt crisis.

Draghi's replacement at the head of the ECB, Christine Lagarde, delivered a similar message about the European single market being unfulfilled and the responsibility of national leaders to act upon Draghi's report.

"The United States and China have entered a new age of industrial strategy and geopolitical competition — intensified by tariff wars and rare-earth battles — and all this amid the worst energy crisis on record," Lagarde said in a speech delivered the previous evening.

UK minister quits ahead of possible challenge to Starmer

Continued from page 1

Starmer has been backed by several senior cabinet ministers, including Finance Minister Rachel Reeves who urged colleagues on Thursday not to put the economy "at risk" by "plunging the country into chaos" with a leadership challenge.

It is unclear whether Streeing has the required support of 81 Labour MPs — 20 per cent of the party in parliament — to trigger a contest.

A source close to

him insisted to AFP that he does but would prefer that Starmer set out a detailed timetable to step down instead.

A timetable could allow Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham, popular on the party's so-called soft left, to also run.

He is currently unable to do so as he does not have a seat in the Westminster parliament.

Rayner announced that UK tax authorities had "cleared" her of deliberate wrongdoing in a tax affair, opening the way for

her to compete in any potential contest.

She had been forced to quit in September for underpaying a property duty.

The 46-year-old insisted she would not be the one to trigger a race but told the Guardian newspaper she would play "whatever role I can" to "deliver the change".

Rayner has stopped short of calling for Starmer to resign but called on him to "reflect" on his position, having said voters are frustrated with the way the government is being run.

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Adapt or be left behind

When Nokia announced the sale of its mobile phone division to Microsoft, a painful quote widely attributed to its then-CEO Stephen Elop spread across the world:

"We didn't do anything wrong... but somehow, we lost."

Whether the quote was said exactly in those words or not, it reflects a profound managerial lesson: Avoiding mistakes alone is not enough for survival if an organisation fails to keep pace with change.

What was never openly stated was that the company failed to adapt to the technological transformation sweeping the world. It remained attached to yesterday's mindset while the world was racing toward tomorrow.

The result was clear: Nokia lost its leadership position, and eventually lost itself.

Learning and development are not luxuries; they are essential conditions for survival. In a world where scientific and technological transformation is accelerating rapidly, keeping up with progress has become an urgent necessity for individuals, institutions and societies — not merely an optional choice.

The knowledge gap we experience today, particularly in education, media, economics and management, highlights the urgent need for a radical transformation in both thinking and practice.

Yet, some still fear change and cling to outdated models that have already proven their limitations. Institutions using yesterday's tools to confront today's challenges will inevitably fall behind in the rankings of progress.

Keeping pace with development does not mean abandoning identity; rather, it means reintegrating identity into a modern system that is more capable of influence and future-building.



Maher Al-Hourani

Education: The foundation of change

No genuine progress can be discussed without rebuilding the educational system. The goal is not merely updating curricula, but a comprehensive transformation based on modern technology — turning education from a process of memorisation into one of active, interactive, and practice-oriented learning.

This includes updating methods, tools and educational technologies, linking academic disciplines to labour market needs, developing critical thinking, digital capabilities and innovation skills, supporting scientific research and technological innovation as drivers of development, guiding young people toward in-demand scientific fields such as artificial intelligence, data science, biotechnology, energy and engineering.

Today, curricula are no longer frameworks for traditional knowledge alone, but systems that empower learners to adapt to a rapidly changing world.

The economy: A race against time

The modern global economy is constantly reshaping itself. Those who fail to adopt technologies such as automation, artificial intelligence, 3D printing and advanced computing will eventually find themselves outside the circle of competition. These technologies increase productivity, reduce costs, open new markets, improve decision-making, create technological environments that require new human skills and capabilities.

Understanding today's technological tools, from generative AI models like GPT to virtual reality, quantum computing and cybersecurity, is no longer an advantage, but a fundamental requirement for keeping pace with global transformation.

A new generation: Designed for the future

Building a generation capable of critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, and adaptation to change is the true investment of societies.

A generation equipped with digital skills and confident in dealing with modern technologies will lead transformation rather than merely be affected by it.

Amid this rapid wave of change, the world appears to be rewriting itself. Those who do not move steadily toward the future will eventually be forced to run behind it, too late.

The world will not wait for the hesitant. Those who fail to renew their knowledge and technological tools will find themselves outside the scene. Because whoever stops learning is overtaken by time.

Italy in the Hormuz crisis: Diplomacy, naval missions and food security



Antonio Tajani

Since the outbreak of the war between Iran and the United States, Italy has acted together with its European partners, the G-7 and multilateral organisations to promote a cessation of hostilities, ensure the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz and restore stability in the Middle East. Within this framework, our country has expressed its willingness to take part, once the conflict has ended, in an international defensive coalition aimed at restoring freedom of navigation in the Strait.

As I recalled in recent hours in my address to a parliamentary committee in Italy, for our Government the blockade of Hormuz is not a mere regional crisis, but a global shock destined to affect energy security, industrial competitiveness and international economic balances. This is a particularly significant risk for all countries in the region, but also for an exporting country such as Italy, whose exports account for around 40 per cent of GDP.

The Strait of Hormuz, as we know, is a strategic hub of global trade: Around 20 per cent of global oil, a quarter of liquefied natural gas exports and a significant share of raw materials essential to international supply chains pass through it. The insecurity of trade routes and rising energy prices have already begun to affect European households and businesses. Despite the slowdown in global trade and the impact of tariffs, in 2025 Italian exports still grew by 3.3 per cent, confirming how essential the stability of maritime routes is to the national economy.

What concerns us, however, is not only the impact on domestic industry. Alarm is also growing over the consequences for the most fragile countries in Africa and the wider Mediterranean region. Around 30 per cent of global fertiliser exports pass through the Strait of Hormuz, and these are essential for the food security of many vulnerable economies. The case of Sudan, where one of the world's most serious humanitarian crises continues to unfold, is emblematic. Rising energy and fertiliser prices risk reducing agricultural production, fuelling inflation and worsening instability, famine and migratory flows towards Europe.

For this reason, at the be-

ginning of May we convened a meeting together with my Croatian counterpart — the current president of the MED9 — inviting thirty countries from the Mediterranean, the Middle East and the Balkans, as well as the FAO, to launch the "Rome Coalition for Food Security and Access to Fertilisers", a permanent forum to identify immediate and concrete solutions.

On the diplomatic front, I have maintained constant contact with my friend the US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, whom I met in Rome in recent days. We agreed on the need to preserve the transatlantic bond...

Our assessment is that the Hormuz crisis reflects a broader conflict rooted in decades of tensions between the United States, Israel and Iran. In this context, we continue to maintain that diplomacy remains the only viable path, and we reiterate that Tehran must not acquire nuclear weapons or missile systems capable of further destabilising the region.

We cannot forget the repression of youth protests in

Iran, brutally suppressed by the regime. This repression continues today through arrests and capital executions against opponents. In recent weeks, Tehran has indiscriminately struck residential areas, hotels, hospitals and energy infrastructure in several Gulf countries. These ongoing attacks have been firmly condemned by us, and we have expressed solidarity with the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman and Saudi Arabia.

On the diplomatic front, I have maintained constant contact with my friend the US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, whom I met in Rome in recent days. We agreed on the need to preserve the transatlantic bond and to work jointly for international peace and stability. I also confirmed support for ongoing negotiations in Pakistan, which we consider essential to keeping a diplomatic perspective open.

I have continued dialogue with the Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, stressing the need for Tehran to negotiate in "good faith" and resume cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency, while at the same time rebuilding positive relations with Gulf countries.

In recent weeks I also travelled to China, where I met Foreign Minister Wang Yi, whom I urged to play a more active role for Beijing in mediating with Tehran. At the same time, Rome maintains a direct channel with Gulf regional partners, considered indispensable interlocutors for any lasting diplomatic solution and for the future restoration of freedom of navigation in the Strait.

On the operational level, Italy stands ready to make available the experience gained in European naval missions in the Red Sea, the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean. In particular, we consider it necessary to strengthen the European mission ASPIDES, which currently sees only Italy and Greece engaged in patrols in the Red Sea to ensure maritime transport security.

In the multinational mission that will be launched in the Strait of Hormuz, Italy could contribute to mine-clearing operations and to the safety of commercial navigation.

We nevertheless believe that lasting peace in the Middle

East cannot be achieved without stability in Lebanon.

The Italian Government supports the dialogue between Israel and Beirut mediated by the United States and has offered its willingness to host direct talks between the parties. During my mission to Lebanon last April, I reiterated to President Joseph Aoun Italy's support for a process that turns the current ceasefire into a genuine peace process.

Italy is also working with Lebanon and the United States on initiatives to strengthen the capacity of Lebanese security forces, particularly in combating money laundering and illicit trafficking. Washington and Brussels increasingly look to Rome as a key actor in strengthening the statehood of Beirut, an issue I also addressed during my recent meeting at the Farnesina with the Lebanese Foreign Minister.

We also remain fully attentive to the security of our military personnel engaged in the UNIFIL mission, the bilateral MIBIL mission and the Italian-led Military Technical Committee for Lebanon. At the same time, we will continue to call for the protection of Christian communities in the country, following violence by extremist Israeli settlers against villages in southern Lebanon, including those with Christian majorities.

The issue of violence by extremist Israeli settlers was also addressed in Brussels, where European ministers have just approved new, significant sanctions against them. In the same session, further sanctions were approved against Hamas terrorists, whose disarmament remains an absolute priority. Italy continues to closely monitor the situation in Gaza and the Palestinian Territories, maintaining an active role in humanitarian assistance and in future reconstruction efforts, with the aim of achieving two states able to live side by side in peace and security.

In this context also falls the arrival in Italy, in recent days, of 72 Palestinian students awarded scholarships at Italian universities: an investment we consider part of the training of the future Palestinian ruling class.

The author is Italy's deputy prime minister and foreign minister

No 'Day After' in the Middle East

By **Mohammad Abu Rumman**

H. A. Hellyer offers an important analysis of the regional situation in his recent article published in Foreign Affairs, titled "The Gulf and Israel Have Different Visions for a New Middle East" (May 4, 2026). He examines the strategic implications and consequences of the ongoing US-Iran war, as well as the war in Gaza that preceded it, and how both conflicts have reshaped Gulf perceptions of regional security. More importantly, the war has exposed a growing divergence between the vision held by most Gulf states and that advanced by the Trump administration regarding the future of the Middle East.

According to Hellyer — and I agree with him on this point — Trump's vision rests on a regional order built around the Abraham Accords, one that seeks to integrate Israel into the region's political, economic and security structures while consolidating Israeli military and security dominance. Yet, such a vision is not acceptable to most Gulf countries, nor to many states across the region. This makes discussions about the so-called "day after", or the postwar regional order, deeply uncertain and increasingly questionable.

Hellyer arrives at an important conclusion: Gulf states are unlikely to abandon their strategic partnership with Washington, and the recent war has reinforced their perception of Iran as a major threat. At the same time, however, these states have also begun to view Israel's expanding military and security ambitions as a new source of regional instability.

As a result, many Gulf countries are increasingly moving toward diversifying their security and military partnerships with other international powers.

While Hellyer's article focuses on the Gulf perspective regarding the coming phase — the "day after" the current war — there is another question that goes beyond this discussion altogether. Political scientist Nathan Brown has raised it repeatedly in his writings on both the Gaza war and the ongoing regional conflict: Is there even a "day after" anymore? Or have we entered an era of endless wars, unresolved conflicts, and prolonged instability in the Middle East?

This question reflects the deeper crisis produced by the policies of President Donald Trump, whose approach has revealed a striking absence of strategic vision or carefully considered long-term thinking regarding the region and its crises. The current confrontation with Iran has exposed the scale of the trap into which Trump has led not only the United States, but also the wider international system. And, as always, the peoples of the region remain the primary victims of these dynamics.

Today, major questions surround the possible end of the current war and the strategic deadlock into which all parties have fallen. Iran is nowhere near surrender — despite Trump's repeated predictions and assumptions — and the ability of the United States to fully secure the Strait of Hormuz remains uncertain. Even if the current negotiations succeed, they are unlikely to produce genuine stability. At best,

they may end the immediate military confrontation while leaving unresolved the deeper struggle over the shape of a new regional order.

If Trump has brought anything to the region, it has been the expansion of conflicts, the deepening of crises...

More importantly, the Palestinian question — which remains one of the central sources of regional instability — is becoming even more urgent. It is likely to intensify further under current Israeli right-wing policies, alongside the quiet war unfolding in the West Bank against Palestinian rights and political existence. The issue of Jerusalem and the holy sites also remains highly explosive, despite Trump's persistent attempts to downplay its significance.

At the same time, current indications suggest that the so-called "Peace Council" announced by Trump is effectively in a state of political paralysis, while conditions in Gaza continue to deteriorate dramatically. Israeli-American plans — still under discussion and partially under implementation — aimed at dividing Gaza, promoting forced displacement, and completely eliminating Hamas are unlikely to produce anything other than further cycles of conflict and instability.

In light of all this, the profound failure of the notion of "peace through strength" becomes increasingly visible. In Middle Eastern terms, the implicit meaning of that doctrine has been the Abraham Accords combined with Israeli regional dominance following the defeat or marginalisation of opposing actors, while pressuring hesitant or resistant states into joining this new order.

If Trump has brought anything to the region, it has been the expansion of conflicts, the deepening of crises and the disappearance of any clear political horizon for what comes next in the Middle East.



Industrial production quantities rise by 2.5 per cent in March according to the Department of Statistics

Industrial production rises 2.5% in March of 2026

PPI increases by 1.17% in March

AMMAN (JT) — Industrial production quantities rose by 2.5 per cent in March 2026 compared with February of the same year, and increased by 1.1 per cent compared with March 2025.

According to the monthly report issued by the Department of Statistics (DoS), the cumulative industrial production index for the first three months of 2026 increased by 0.33 per cent compared with the same period in 2025.

The report noted that the base year has been updated to 2018=100 instead of 2010=100, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.

The industrial production index for the first quarter of 2026 reached 87.98 points, compared with 87.69 points during the same period last year, the Jordan News Agency, Petra reported.

On a monthly basis, the index reached 88.77 points in March 2026, compared with 87.81 points in March 2025. The index also stood at 88.77 points in March 2026, up from 86.61 points in February 2026.

Comparing the cumulative index for the first quarter of 2026 with the same period in 2025, output in the manufacturing sector, which accounts for 88.7 per cent of the index, increased by 0.05 per cent.

Output in the extractive industries sector, which carries a relative importance of 5.4 per cent, rose by 2.67 per cent, while electricity production, accounting for 5.9 per cent of the index, increased by 2.94 per cent.

On a year-on-year basis, the overall industrial production index for March 2026 increased compared with the same month of 2025, driven by a 0.67 per cent rise in manufacturing output and a 10.32 per cent increase in electricity production.

Meanwhile, output in the extractive industries sector declined by 1.42 per cent.

The quarterly decline was primarily driven by a 2.93 per cent drop in manufacturing prices, which account for 88.74 per cent of the index weighting

Compared with February 2026, manufacturing output in March rose by 1.59 per cent, extractive industries output increased by 5.95 per cent and electricity production climbed by 13.57 per cent, Petra reported.

Industrial producer prices

Jordan's industrial producer price index (PPI) rose by 1.17 per cent in March from February, despite recording an annual decline of 1.66 per cent compared with March 2025, according to data released Thurs-

day by the Department of Statistics (DoS).

The department's monthly report showed the cumulative industrial producer price index for the first quarter of 2026 declined by 2.48 per cent compared with the same period last year, based on 2018 as the reference year. The index averaged 104.55 points during the January-March period of 2026, compared with 107.21 points in the corresponding period of 2025, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.

On a monthly basis, the industrial producer price index reached 105.43 points in March 2026, up from 104.21 points recorded in February, while remaining below the 107.21 points registered in March 2025.

The quarterly decline was primarily driven by a 2.93 per cent drop in manufacturing prices, which account for 88.74 per cent of the index weighting. Meanwhile, prices in the extractive industries sector rose by 1.3 per cent, and electricity prices increased by 1.05 per cent.

Year-on-year, the March decline reflected a 1.87 per cent decrease in manufacturing prices and a 1.13 per cent decline in extractive industries prices, while electricity prices posted a 1.01 per cent increase.

Month-on-month, the March increase in the overall index was attributed to a 1.46 per cent rise in manufacturing prices, despite declines of 1.94 per cent in extractive industries prices and 0.24 per cent in electricity prices, Petra reported.

Audit Bureau, NCSC sign MoU on cybersecurity, digital governance in public sector

MoU emphasises auditor training, digital governance, safeguarding critical information

AMMAN (JT) — The Audit Bureau and the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) on Thursday signed a strategic Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) aimed at enhancing joint cooperation, expertise exchange and national compliance with cyber security standards across public sector institutions.

Audit Bureau President Radhi Al Hamadeen commended the NCSC's efforts in developing the national digital security framework, noting that these advancements have secured Jordan a leading regional position in managing sophisticated and reliable security systems, according to an Audit Bureau statement.

Al Hamadeen emphasised that the agreement aligns with the Bureau's 2024-2027 strategic plan, which focuses on modernising institutional capabilities and adopting smart digital solutions, includes; leveraging advanced technologies for auditing computerised systems and managing big data to reinforce financial and administrative oversight.

He said that the strategic plan involves building partnerships with international and national bodies to empower auditors in electronic auditing, adding that these initiatives



توقيع مذكرة تفاهم بين ديوان المحاسبة والمركز الوطني للأمن السيبراني 14/05/2026



Photo Courtesy of Audit Bureau

The Audit Bureau and the National Cyber Security Centre on Thursday sign a strategic Memorandum of Understanding

aim to help staff obtain professional certifications in information systems evaluation, data protection and risk management.

These professional certifications ensure transparency and operational continuity in accordance with global benchmarks and the National Cyber Security Framework.

For his part, NCSC President Mohammad Smadi said that the MoU represents a "qualitative" step toward integrating the

national oversight and compliance system with cyber security frameworks.

He added that such cooperation is vital for protecting government systems and improving cyber risk management within the public sector.

Smadi noted that rapid digital transformation necessitates the integration of cyber security concepts into auditing processes.

The president highlighted that the partnership will support

efforts to verify adherence to national policies and bolster the ability of government entities to detect vulnerabilities before they impact data integrity or business continuity.

The collaboration reflects a national direction to enhance digital governance and raise cyber readiness through technical cooperation and capacity building.

This also supports the protection of digital infrastructure while promoting principles

of transparency, accountability and institutional efficiency.

The MoU seeks to enable public sector institutions to address accelerating digital challenges professionally, with a focus on human resource development through "specialised" training and workshops, fostering a culture of digital governance and sustainability to safeguard the Kingdom's "vital" information assets, according to the Audit Bureau statement.

Indian capital announces work-from-home days to weather fuel shortage

NEW DELHI (AFP) — India's capital announced fuel-saving measures on Thursday, including work-from-home days for government employees, after Prime Minister Narendra Modi called for reduced consumption as the Middle East war disrupts supply chains.

India is one of the few countries in the region that has not increased prices of petrol and diesel for domestic consumers or rationed supplies.

However, it has increased prices of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) — a primary cooking fuel in India — after disruptions following the US-Israeli strikes on Iran that led to Iran's near-total blockade of the strategic Strait of Hormuz. Delhi Chief Minister



A delivery person carrying liquefied petroleum gas cylinders walks past a gas station in Chennai on March 11

Rekha Gupta said the 90-day drive will entail reduced official fuel use and travel, and a push for residents to cut back on private vehicle use and shift to public transport in the sprawling megacity.

Government offices will have two work-from-home days a week for those able to work remotely, Gupta said, adding that the private sector was expected to follow suit voluntarily. "Our appeal to the peo-

ple of Delhi is that once a week, each of us should have a no-vehicle day", Gupta told reporters.

Other austerity measures will include the cancellation of large official public events over the next three months and

foreign travel for a year, she said.

The Delhi government will also halt purchases of new petrol, diesel, compressed natural gas (CNG) or hybrid vehicles for six months, the chief minister said.

Modi said on Sunday that restrictions on fuel use were also necessary to save foreign currency spent on fuel imports.

"We must also place a strong emphasis on saving foreign exchange, as petrol and diesel have become so expensive globally," he said.

New Delhi has also boosted its import tariffs on gold and silver in an effort to shore up the sagging value of the rupee and bolster foreign currency reserves hit by the war.

Asia stocks uneven as investors assess high-stakes Trump-Xi talks, AI rally

HONG KONG (AFP) — Asian markets were mixed on Thursday as investors weighed high-stakes US-China talks and persistent inflation concerns, which tempered optimism fuelled by record highs on Wall Street.

"China's doors to the outside world will open wider and wider... American companies will enjoy even brighter prospects in China," Xi told the business executives, according to Chinese state media.

SPI Asset Management's Stephen Innes said in a comment that Beijing used the summit to project "stabil-

ity, strategic coexistence, and economic interdependence".

"The presence of top US corporate leaders highlighted how deeply connected the American and Chinese economic systems still remain," he added.

He warned the key risks facing markets were increasingly intertwined.

The meeting in Beijing took place against the backdrop of conflict in the Middle East, which has disrupted shipping through the Strait of Hormuz and driven energy prices higher.

International benchmark Brent crude hov-

ered just above \$105 a barrel on Thursday.

Across Asia, Seoul led gains as the Kospi climbed 1.75 per cent, nearing the 8,000 mark. Hong Kong, Taipei, Mumbai, Bangkok and Manila also advanced.

Shanghai, Tokyo, Jakarta, Wellington and Singapore slid.

Following Wall Street's lead, Taiwanese tech giant Foxconn reported a 19-per cent jump in quarterly net profit, fuelled by booming demand for AI servers, and forecast strong growth in shipments this year.

Japanese automaker Honda announced a \$2.6 billion operating loss, its

first since 1957, after a sweeping overhaul of its electric vehicle strategy in the United States, citing heavy charges and policy shifts under the Trump administration.

Honda blamed tariffs and the removal of EV incentives, as well as intensifying competition in China.

London, Paris and Frankfurt opened on the front foot, tracking the positive lead from Wall Street.

The Nasdaq led major US indices Wednesday, piling on 1.2 per cent behind big gains in most tech giants, including Nvidia and Google parent Alphabet.

AMMAN STOCK EXCHANGE

AMMAN (JT) — Amman Stock Exchange (ASE) trading value for Thursday amounted to JD14.6 million spread over 6.9 million shares that traded through 5,019 transactions.

The ASE share price index shed 0.18 per cent, closing at 3905.25 points.

Out of 105 companies whose shares were traded, the share price of 42 companies rose while the share price of another 31 declined.

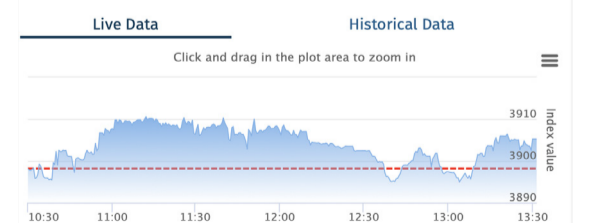
Topping the list of the companies whose shares gained the most were Petra Education Company by 6.98 per cent, Jerusalem Insurance by 6.45 per cent, Amad Investment and Real Estate Development by 6.12 per cent, Darat Jordan Holdings by 5.26 per cent, and International Arabian Development and Investment Trading Company by 5.26 per cent.

The companies whose shares dropped the most were Salam International Transport and Trading by 6.35 per cent, Ready Mix Concrete and Construction Supplies by 6.12 per cent, Contempro for Housing Projects by 4.49 per cent, Al-Dawliyah for Hotels and Malls by 4.26 per cent, and Al Shamekha for Real Estate and Financial Investments by 3.85 per cent.



THE MARKET TODAY

ASE Index: ↑ 3905.25 0.18% May 14, 2026



DAILY SUMMARY

Regular Market		OTC Market	
Trading Value (JDs)	14,612,751		
Trading volume	6,855,854		
No. of Transactions	5,019		
No. of Securities	105		

Losers: 31
Gainers: 42
Unchanged: 32

THE JORDAN TIMES

SPORTS

AT A GLANCE

FOOTBALL

Iran says no US visas issued yet for 2026 World Cup

TEHRAN (AFP) — Iran's football federation chief said on Thursday that no visas had yet been issued for the national team to participate in the 2026 World Cup in the United States, state media reported. "Tomorrow or the day after tomorrow, we will have a decisive meeting with FIFA. They must give us guarantees, because the visa issue has still not been resolved," the state news agency IRNA quoted federation chief Mehdi Taj as saying. "We have not received any account from the other side regarding who has been granted visas. No visas have been issued yet," he added. According to Taj, the players were expected to travel to the Turkish capital Ankara for fingerprinting as part of the visa process. "The players must travel to Ankara for fingerprinting, but we are trying to arrange for this to be done in Antalya so there will be no need to travel to Ankara," he said.

RUGBY

Boks prop Ntlabakanye handed 18-month drugs ban

JOHANNESBURG (AFP) — South Africa prop Asenathi Ntlabakanye has been banned for 18 months for doping, his Johannesburg-based club, the Lions, announced on Thursday. The ban, which commenced on May 13, starts with the Lions' United Rugby Championship match against Munster on Saturday and will rule Ntlabakanye out of contention for a place in the Springbok squad for the Rugby World Cup which kicks off in October 2027. The 27-year-old made his debut for South Africa against Italy in July 2025 but tested positive in a random test carried out by the South African Institute for a Drug-Free Sport (SAIDS) on the Springbok tour of New Zealand last August. He was dropped from the squad but recalled by head coach Rassie Erasmus for the autumn internationals and played half an hour during the 73-0 rout of Wales on November 29 for the last of his three caps. The South African Rugby Football Union said at the time that the substance, "which does not enhance performance", had been prescribed by "a specialist doctor in early 2025 for medical reasons" and "at no time" did the player "seek to gain an unfair advantage".

Jordan Rally gets under way at Hover-Up Park at Dead Sea

AMMAN (JT) — The Jordan Rally gets under way on Thursday evening at the Hover-Up Park on the shores of the Dead Sea.

Seventeen crews from 10 nations will contest the third round of the FIA Middle East Rally Championship (MERC), alongside 21 additional teams entered in the national rallies taking place across Friday and Saturday. Competitors will tackle 12 special stages covering 196.80 competitive kilometres in a total route of 557.11km through the Jordan Valley and Dead Sea regions, according to a statement from Jordan Motorsport.

Twenty-time regional champion Al Attiyah heads the field alongside Spanish co-driver Candido Carrera in an Autotek Motorsport Škoda Fabia RS. The Qatari currently sits fourth in the championship standings following victory in Oman and a surprise retirement on home soil in Qatar.

Five Rally2 rivals are expected to challenge Al Attiyah on Jordan's demanding gravel stages, where high temperatures and punishing terrain often test both drivers and machinery. Among the leading contenders is Saudi Arabia's Hamza Bakhashab, who has impressed during his first full MERC campaign. The 22-year-old from Jeddah recovered from suspension damage in Oman to score points before claiming a career-best second overall in Qatar behind Al Attiyah.

Driving a Toyota GR Yaris Rally2 with



Competitors will tackle 12 special stages covering 196.80 competitive kilometres in a total route of 557.11km through the Jordan Valley and Dead Sea regions

Irish co-driver Lorcan Moore, Bakhashab has accumulated 42 championship points, leaving him just five behind championship leader Nasser Khalifa Al Atya and Lebanese co-driver Ziad Chehab in a Mottortune Ford Fiesta.

"Qatar was an important result for us and gave me and the whole team a lot of confidence," Bakhashab said. "Every rally in MERC is a learning experience for me and Jordan will be another big challenge. The championship is very competitive this season, so the priority is

to stay consistent, keep improving and score strong points."

Oman's Abdullah Al Rawahi, winner of the Jordan Rally in 2023, also returns as one of the favourites. Al-Rawahi finished second behind Al-Attiyah in Oman earlier this season but retired in Qatar, leaving him in need of a strong result to revive his title hopes. He will again partner Jordanian co-driver Ata Al-Hmoud in an Oman Rally Team Škoda Fabia RS.

Jordanian driver Sheikh Bader Al-Fayez returns to action after

engine problems forced him out of the opening round in Oman and ruled him out of the Qatar event. He will compete alongside Lebanese co-driver Joseph Matar in another Škoda, while Bassel Abu Hamdan and Firas Elias complete the Rally2 field in a Volkswagen Polo.

In the FIA MERC2 category, Jordan's Shaker Jweihan has dominated the season so far and will be aiming for a third successive class victory with co-driver Mustafa Juma in a Mitsubishi Lancer Evolution X.

Jweihan recently capitalised on a puncture suffered by Bakhashab to claim victory in a Jordan national rally.

Competition in MERC2 comes from Oman's Zakariya Al-Aamri in a Subaru and Jordan's Sami Fleifel in a Mitsubishi.

Lebanese driver Shadi El Fakih is targeting a third maximum points haul in FIA MERC4 aboard his Renault Clio RS. Jordanian female driver Farah Zakaria, partnered by Lebanon's DolyneSchlink, is also entered for championship points in the SSV

category driving a Can-Am Maverick X3.

The rally, once again based at the Mövenpick Resort and Spa Dead Sea, begins with a new 4.83km Shakedown stage on Thursday.

Friday's action includes two runs through the Shuna, Baptism and Ma'in stages, separated by a midday service at the Dead Sea.

Saturday's schedule features repeated passages through the Panorama, Suwayma and Rawda stages before the ceremonial finish at Hover-Up Park from 6.30pm.

Bone appetite: Paris pups lap up treats at dog-centric spots

By Erin Flanagan
Agence France-Presse

PARIS, France — An elegant, white-haired Parisian savours a biscuity cloud of cream and apple down to the last crumb at one of the French capital's many bakeries — but this client has four legs, not two.

Loulou, a fluffy Pomeranian, lets out a satisfied "woof" after polishing off a five-euro (\$5.9) "Le Merveilleux" made from banana puree, cream cheese, apple and beef.

The one-year-old pup is a regular at this dog bakery, where the treats lined up under a glass counter — like the heart-shaped "Le Mignon" made with sweet potato, cream cheese and blueberry — look almost good enough for humans to eat.

French owner Clara Zambuto said that adopting Hulk, her three-year-old Pomeranian, inspired her to open the canine-friendly patisserie, where dogs and their humans can indulge side-by-side.

"I'd often go for walks with him... pop into a cafe like a proper Parisian, but he'd soon get bored," said the 26-year-old owner of Casa del Doggo.

"I thought it was a shame there weren't places in Paris where,



A trained pastry chef prepares the treats at this Paris dog bakery

while you're having a quick coffee, you can also treat your pet," she added.

"Nowadays our dog is really like our child... we want to be able to take him everywhere," she said.

The bakery is one of several dog-centric establishments popping up in the French capital — home to an estimated 100,000 canines — where some say pets' needs remain overlooked.

'No chocolate'

Zambuto started preparing the treats at home herself, before enlisting the help of a trained pastry chef.

"No chocolate, no avo-

cado, no grapes and no onion," she said, as they are toxic to dogs.

Like for humans, moderation also remains key to avoid excessive weight gain, said Lolita Sommaire, a veterinarian specialising in canine and feline nutrition.

"If they've been to a patisserie, you need to adjust their next meal, cut back a little, or get them doing more exercise," she said.

"But if it's once a month, it's not a big deal," she added.

At another dog cafe, pups roam on a bench-lined terrace, some munching on four-euro croissant- and baguette-shaped treats.

Marley, a beret-wear-

ing American shepherd, laps up the remnants of a chantilly-based "pup cup" from the pavement.

For Rebecca Anhalt, the decision to open her "dog-first" cafe came after being hit with a hefty fine for letting Napoleon, her five-year-old whippet, off-leash in a park.

"I wanted to create a place where people could come and not fear... being scolded for having your dog," said the US-born owner of Le Bone Appart, a play on French emperor Napoleon Bonaparte's last name.

'Really good connector'

While Paris has more than 40 off-leash spaces for dogs, one advocacy

group, Paris Condition Canine, argues that those on offer are "insufficient, unevenly distributed, and sometimes ill-suited".

Dogs even emerged as a niche issue ahead of March's mayoral race, with new Paris mayor Emmanuel Gregoire dedicating an Instagram account to photos with canine companions, while rival Rachida Dati organised a dog-centric "apero".

For Loulou the Pomeranian's owner and self-described "mother", Sarah Elgamal, trips to the Casa del Doggo bakery offer more than just treats but an opportunity to bond with her pooch.

It "improves our connection, because we're both in a third place that's neither work nor home", said the 32-year-old pharmacist.

And though dogs come first at her cafe, Anhalt said many visitors also come for the chance to socialise with fellow pet owners.

"Dogs are a really good connector," she said.

One regular and his 17-year-old dachshund, newly arrived in Paris, now come every day to "be part of the group and meet people", she added.

After all, "you'll talk to anybody about your dog."

Emotional Vin Diesel leads 'Fast and Furious' tribute in Cannes

CANNES, France (AFP) — An emotional Vin Diesel and teary "The Fast and the Furious" co-stars Michelle Rodriguez and Jordana Brewster soaked up applause at a special cast reunion at the Cannes Film Festival Wednesday on the 25th anniversary of the original movie.

Speaking at a raucous midnight screening of the 2001 street-racing blockbuster, which Cannes supreme Thierry Fremaux hailed as a "classic", Diesel paid tribute to late fellow driver Paul Walker.

Walker, who died in a car crash in 2013, was represented by his daughter, the actress and model Meadow Rain Walker, who shared a long hug with Diesel on the red carpet.

"The person who was not going to let me come alone here, to represent that brotherhood, was Meadow Rain," Diesel said inside the full-capacity main cinema in Cannes.

"I'm going to go shed a tear real quick," he added. The Fast franchise, now an 11-movie series that has grossed more than 7 billion dollars at the box office, is set to end with "Fast Forever" in 2028.

Diesel, 58, sounded surprised at the warmth of the tribute from Cannes



US actor Vin Diesel reacts as he arrives for the screening of the film 'The Fast and the Furious' at the 79th edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southern France, on Wednesday

tastemaker Fremaux who said the series "had become a classic" and had "left an enormous mark on the history of cinema".

"To come with a film, that you, the head of the most prestigious film festival in the world, where every artist in the world wants to be recognised, that you are calling this film we did 25 years ago a classic, how profound is that?" Diesel said.

Fremaux, who made bringing big American films to Cannes an early priority of his two-decade tenure, has been left without a major Hollywood blockbuster premiere for the 2026 edition.

Cannes typically relies on US studios providing some A-list razzle-dazzle to the event which otherwise focuses on independent, auteur cinema

in its main competition. But Hollywood majors such as Disney, Sony and Warner, as well as streaming giants Netflix and Amazon, have decided against launching films at Cannes this year.

The special screening of "The Fast and the Furious", owned by Universal, was a late addition to the programme.

Reasons for the studios' absence include cost-cutting, a growing preference for tightly controlled social media-led launches for their films and the risk that a mauling from the Cannes critics can doom a movie.

Diesel announced on Monday that "The Fast and the Furious" concept is being adapted into a television series by Universal without giving details about its release date.



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