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Photo courtesy of Royal Court

Crown Prince, German chancellor discuss cooperation, regional developments

AMMAN (JT) — HRH Crown Prince Hussein and Germany Chancellor Friedrich Merz, during a meeting in Berlin on Thursday, discussed ways to enhance cooperation between Jordan and Germany, as well as key regional developments.

The Crown Prince highlighted the deep-rooted ties between the two countries, and the importance of building upon them within the framework of the European Union-Jordan Strategic and Comprehensive Partnership, according to a Royal Court statement.

His Royal Highness expressed Jordan's readiness to expand partnerships with Germany in technology, training, education and defence, highlighting a number of vital economic projects in the region.

The Crown Prince commended Germany's support to the Kingdom, particularly in the areas of technical education, refugee and host-community support, and to the National Water Conveyance Project.

The meeting also



Photo courtesy of Royal Court

HRH Crown Prince Hussein and Germany Chancellor Friedrich Merz hold a meeting in Berlin on Thursday to discuss ways to enhance cooperation between Jordan and Germany, as well as key regional developments

touched on efforts to sustain calm in the region, with His Royal Highness emphasising that any agreement to end the war must guarantee the security of

Arab states, the statement said.

The Crown Prince stressed the need to prevent the situation in the region from being exploited to create new

facts on the ground in Jerusalem and the West Bank, stressing the importance of ensuring unrestricted access for humanitarian aid to Gaza.

Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi, and Director of the Office of the Crown Prince Zaid Baqain attended the meeting.

Crown Prince meets with Germany Bundestag president

AMMAN (JT) — HRH Crown Prince Hussein met with President of the German Bundestag Julia Klöckner in Berlin on Thursday.

The Crown Prince expressed his appreciation for the long-standing partnership between Jordan and Germany, emphasising Jordan's readiness to bolster the growing ties between the two countries in various fields, thereby contributing to strengthening the Strategic and Comprehensive Partnership between Jordan and the European Union, ac-

ording to a Royal Court statement.

His Royal Highness highlighted the importance of enhancing ties between the two peoples, particularly through cultural exchanges and tourism programmes.

Speaking about regional developments, the Crown Prince warned of the dangers of renewed conflict in the Middle East, underscoring the need to reach comprehensive calm that ends the crisis, ensures the restoration of freedom of navigation in maritime corridors and safeguards the

security of Arab nations.

His Royal Highness also emphasised the need for the international community to step up efforts to counter Israel's unilateral measures in the West Bank and Jerusalem, and to ensure restrictions preventing humanitarian aid from entering Gaza are lifted, the statement said.

The meeting was attended by Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi, Director of the Office of the Crown Prince Zaid Baqain and Jordan's Ambassador to Germany Fayez Khouri.

Foreign Ministry confirms return of Jordanians held in Gaza flotilla

AMMAN (JT) — Two Jordanian citizens who had participated in the Gaza-bound Global Sumud Flotilla returned to Jordan on Thursday through the Kingdom's southern border crossing, the Foreign Ministry said.

Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Fouad Majali said the ministry, through the Jordanian Embassy in Tel Aviv, closely followed the situation of the two Jordanians from the moment of their detention until their release and return home.

Majali said the ministry worked to ensure their safety, secure their release and facili-



tate their return to the Kingdom.

He reiterated the ministry's commitment to monitoring

the affairs of Jordanians abroad and providing them with the necessary support and assistance, ac-

ording to a ministry statement.

Meanwhile, hundreds of activists detained by Israeli forces

after participating in the flotilla were awaiting deportation on Thursday amid growing international criticism over their treatment in custody.

The flotilla, consisting of around 50 vessels, departed from Turkey on May 14 in an attempt to break Israel's blockade on the Gaza Strip. Several additional boats later joined the convoy at sea.

Israeli forces began intercepting the vessels near Cyprus on Tuesday. Israeli officials and flotilla organisers said about 430 activists were detained.



JHCO photo

In this photo, provided by the Jordan Hashemite Charity Organisation, trucks are seen carrying aid to Lebanon as part of the fifth humanitarian relief convoy to the war-torn country

JHCO dispatches fifth relief convoy to Lebanon

AMMAN (JT) — The Jordan Hashemite Charity Organisation (JHCO) said on Thursday it had dispatched its fifth humanitarian relief convoy to Lebanon in coordination with the Ministry of

Foreign Affairs, the Jordan Armed Forces - Arab Army and the World Food Programme.

The convoy, JHCO said, consisted 25 trucks that carried medicines, infant formula and food

supplies as part of Jordan's ongoing humanitarian efforts to support Lebanon, amid worsening humanitarian conditions.

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Gaza flotilla activists await deportation from Israel

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (AFP) — Hundreds of activists seized by Israel from a Gaza-bound flotilla were awaiting deportation on Thursday, as global outcry grows over their treatment in custody.

More than 430 activists from countries around the world were in custody in Israel after they were detained at sea while making the latest in a string of attempts to break the blockade of the Palestinian territory.

Israel's far-right national security minister Itamar Ben Gvir sparked condemnation on Wednesday by posting a video showing the detained activists with their hands tied and foreheads on the ground.



AFP photo

This screen grab taken from footage released on Israeli national security minister Itamar Ben Gvir's X account on Wednesday shows dozens of detained activists from the Gaza-bound aid flotilla kneeling with their hands tied behind their backs and their foreheads on the ground on the deck of a military boat in Israel

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Jordan condemns Israeli plans to confiscate properties near Al Aqsa

AMMAN (JT) — The Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Thursday condemned Israeli plans and measures aimed at confiscating Palestinian properties and Islamic endowments in the Bab Al Silsila neighbourhood adjacent to Al Aqsa Mosque/Al Haram Al Sharif.

In a statement, the ministry described these measures as a "flagrant" violation of international law and the historical and legal status quo in occupied Jerusalem.

Foreign Ministry spokesperson Fuad Majali reiterated Jordan's "absolute" rejection and condemnation of Israeli measures aimed at evicting Palestinians from their homes and businesses, seizing endowment and historical properties, and altering the demographic composition,



AFP photo

Al Aqsa Mosque Compound and its Dome of the Rock in the Old City in occupied East Jerusalem, October 22, 2024

tion, character and legal status of occupied Jerusalem.

He warned of the consequences of escalating measures target-

ing the surroundings of Al Aqsa Mosque/Al Haram Al Sharif and the routes leading to it, stressing that such actions constitute a

"direct violation" of the existing historical and legal status quo.

Majali stressed that all Israeli measures are "null and void" and

carry no legal legitimacy, adding that the continued policies of the Israeli government, which entrench the occupation and violate international law and relevant UN Security Council resolutions, undermine prospects for peace based on the two-state solution.

He said the two-state solution remains the only path to guaranteeing the Palestinian people's right to establish an independent and sovereign state along the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The spokesperson also called on the international community to uphold its legal and moral responsibilities by compelling Israel, as the occupying power, to halt its "dangerous" escalation and "unilateral illegal" measures.

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GAM photo

The Greater Amman Municipality has been awarded the British Standards Institution Kitemark for Smart Cities and Communities, making Amman the first capital city globally to achieve this independent certification

Amman becomes first capital to earn global smart cities certification

AMMAN (JT) — The Greater Amman Municipality (GAM) has been awarded the British Standards Institution (BSI) Kitemark for Smart Cities and Communities, making Amman the first capital city globally to achieve this independent certification.

The milestone follows GAM's compliance with the international standard for sustainable cities and communities (ISO 37106), which supports a citizen-centric approach to designing and developing smart cities, according to a GAM statement.

The standard outlines an agile "smart" operating model that enables municipalities to execute long-term strategies at a faster pace, with greater flexibility and lower operational risks.

GAM Committee Chairman Yousef Shawarbeh said that the achievement reflects the municipality's commitment to developing smart, sustainable services that place citizens at the heart of municipal priorities, ultimately enhancing the quality of life across the capital. Shawarbeh pointed out that the certification underscores GAM's dedication to adopting innovative, technology- and data-driven solutions to optimise institutional efficiency and elevate the standard of services provided to residents.

The municipality secured the certification following an independent,

rigorous assessment conducted by BSI, a global business improvement and standards firm.

The municipality noted that the achievement reflects the maturity and excellence of GAM's broader strategies in sustainability and smart city development.

The milestone takes on heightened significance given global urban challenges.

Today, more than half of the world's population lives in urban areas, a figure projected to rise to 68 per cent by 2050...

Today, more than half of the world's population lives in urban areas, a figure projected to rise to 68 per cent by 2050, putting immense pressure on transportation, energy and housing sectors worldwide.

Smart cities serve as a vital tool to ensure efficient resource management for sustainable development, leveraging technology integration and data-driven decision-making to boost efficiency and improve overall liveability, GAM said.

Head of Commercial for Product Certification across Continental Europe, the Middle East,

India, Turkey, and Africa at BSI Samuel Thwaites said that GAM is moving at a rapid pace towards becoming a smart, sustainable city by enhancing the execution of core city-wide processes and leveraging an open, service-oriented technological architecture.

Thwaites added that GAM has expanded its digital infrastructure to incorporate solutions powered by Artificial Intelligence, the Internet of Things and cloud computing across municipal services.

This includes state-of-the-art data centres, command and control platforms, and an integrated system of interoperable applications, such as real-time traffic management systems and SCADA-based environmental quality monitoring.

By deploying a scalable, service-oriented technological architecture, GAM enables seamless data flow, empowers real-time decision-making and improves citizen services, positioning Amman as an emerging regional leader in smart city innovation, Thwaites added.

BSI is a global business improvement and standards company that helps organisations address critical societal challenges, including climate change and artificial intelligence development, with the goal of accelerating progress toward a fair society and a sustainable world, the statement added.

Deputising for King, Prince Feisal attends graduation of pilot cadets

AMMAN (JT) — Deputising for His Majesty King Abdullah, the Supreme Commander of the Jordan Armed Forces-Arab Army (JAF), HRH Prince Feisal on Thursday attended the graduation ceremony of aviation cadets/55 at the King Hussein Air College.

Upon arrival at the ceremony venue, Prince Feisal was received by Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Maj. Gen. Yousef Huneiti and the commander of the Royal Jordanian Air Force, according to the Jordan News Agency, Petra.

The ceremony commenced with the Royal Anthem, after which Prince Feisal inspected the parade of graduates, who marched past the main stage in both slow and regular formations.

The commandant of King Hussein Air College said, "Today, we present a new group of guardians of the homeland and falcons of the skies, after receiving training that qualifies them to carry out the duties and missions entrusted to them, equipped with knowledge, expertise and practical training under the supervision of distinguished instructors and academic staff."

"This new cohort



Petra photo

Deputising for His Majesty King Abdullah, the Supreme Commander of the Jordan Armed Forces-Arab Army, HRH Prince Feisal on Thursday attends the graduation ceremony of aviation cadets/55

joins those who preceded them in defending the skies and security of Jordan," the commander said.

He added that the college continues to keep pace with developments in aviation sciences and technical training, noting that aviation curricula have been updated

in line with current requirements.

The JAF mufti addressed the graduates, urging them to uphold sincerity and dedication in defending the homeland, protecting the faith and safeguarding the land.

Prince Feisal presented the wings to

the graduates and distributed awards to top-performing cadets in their respective specialisations.

The ceremony also featured an aerial display by Royal Jordanian Air Force fighter, helicopter and training aircraft, which carried out a series of formations and combat demonstrations.

The event was attended by a number of senior civilian and high-ranking military officials, as well as military and civilian representatives from other countries, and accredited military attachés to the Kingdom.

Princess Alia participates in World Animal Health Conference in Paris

AMMAN (JT) — HRH Princess Alia Bint Al Hussein, president of the Royal Jordanian Equestrian Federation, has underscored the importance of enhancing international cooperation in animal welfare and health, alongside the exchange of knowledge and expertise among nations.

Participating in the opening session of the World Animal Health Conference and the 93rd General Session of the World Assembly of Delegates of the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH),

held in Paris between May 18 and 21, Princess Alia commended the organisation's role in safeguarding livestock and curbing the spread of transboundary diseases.

The conference saw the participation of representatives from 119 countries, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported on Thursday.

Princess Alia highlighted the scale of challenges facing Jordan in the field of animal health, given its strategic geographical location bridging continents.

The princess noted that this unique position presents specific challenges related to transboundary diseases and the mechanisms required for their prevention and control, stressing the critical link between animal health, food security and the sustainability of food supply chains.

A high-level ministerial meeting, bringing together more than 17 ministers from across the globe, was also held on the sidelines of the assembly.

According to a Ministry of Agriculture

statement released on Thursday, cited by Petra, Agriculture Minister Saeb Khreisat participated in the conference's proceedings and accompanying panel discussions.

During the sessions, Khreisat outlined the precautionary measures implemented by the Kingdom to curb the spread of animal diseases, emphasising the role of protection programmes and early warning systems in boosting food security frameworks and preserving livestock safety.

Khreisat pointed to the necessity of securing sustainable funding for animal health programmes and boosting partnerships with the private sector to elevate response efficiency and disease control.

He also stressed the need to reinforce global food security, facilitate the seamless flow of agricultural and food commodities among nations, and increase bilateral trade volumes to guarantee the sustainability of supply chains and maintain the stability of food markets.

WFP seeks urgent funding to sustain refugee operations in Jordan

By Osama Alkafri

AMMAN — The World Food Programme (WFP) has been forced to scale back food assistance for thousands of refugees in Jordan due to severe funding shortages, according to its latest Country Brief released on Tuesday.

The UN agency said that it phased out general food assistance for around 135,000 Syrian refugees living in Jordanian host communities in April, while continuing support for some 85,000 refugees residing in the Za'atari and Azraq refugee camps.

Overall, WFP assisted an estimated 585,000 people during the month, transferring around \$2 million in cash-based aid. The agency warned that it requires \$20 million between May and October 2026 to sustain its critical operations in the Kingdom.

A separate assessment by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) highlighted the mounting financial pressures facing refugee households in Jordan.

The UNHCR's Basic Needs Cash Assistance Jordan Programme Assessment 2025 found that cash assistance remains a vital lifeline



AFP photo

People walk down a street at the Za'atari camp for Syrian refugees, near Mafraq, about 80 kilometres north of Amman on January 13, 2025

for refugees, although it continues to fall short of covering essential living costs.

According to the report, Jordan hosts more than 450,000 registered refugees, 93 per cent of whom are Syrian.

Around 81 per cent live in host communities, while nearly two-thirds of refugee households are classified as poor and heavily reliant on humanitarian support.

Despite continued assistance from WFP and UNHCR, many refugees remain unable to meet their basic needs.

In 2025, UNHCR's cash assistance programme distributed some \$37.6 million to 214,503 individuals, yet 63 per cent of recipients said that the aid covered less than

half of their essential expenses.

The situation was found to be more severe inside refugee camps, where 67 per cent of households reported being able to meet only half or less of their basic requirements.

The UNHCR report also noted that many refugee families continue to rely on debt and harmful coping mechanisms, including child labour and begging, amid worsening economic conditions.

Jordan, which hosts one of the world's largest refugee populations relative to its population size, continues to face growing economic and social pressures linked to the prolonged refugee crisis.

Despite cuts to general food assistance, WFP maintained support for education and child nutrition programmes.

The agency said that more than half a million vulnerable students benefited from school feeding initiatives in April, including healthy meals for around 106,000 students and the distribution of 480 metric tonnes of fortified date bars to 400,000 students in host communities.

WFP also highlighted progress in promoting refugee self-reliance.

The agency said that it completed the first cohort of its vocational skills training programme in the camps, equipping 230 refugee youth with practical

skills in fields including information technology, carpentry, welding and tailoring.

The programme forms part of broader efforts aimed at enhancing long-term resilience and livelihood opportunities for refugees and vulnerable communities.

In addition, WFP said that it is supporting Jordan's National Aid Fund by training social workers on advanced monitoring tools and is partnering with the Agricultural Credit Corporation to assist smallholder farmers through climate-adaptive technologies.

On regional refugee movements, WFP reported that around 192,000 Syrian refugees returned to Syria between December 2024 and April 2026.

Under its 2023-2027 Country Strategic Plan, WFP said that it is seeking to balance immediate humanitarian assistance with longer-term programmes focused on nutrition, education, social protection and resilience-building.

However, the agency warned that widening funding gaps threaten to undermine these efforts at a time when both refugees and host communities are facing increasing economic hardship.

Enumeration stage of 2026 census reaches 60% —DoS

AMMAN (JT) — The completion rate of the enumeration stage of the 2026 Population and Housing Census has reached 60 per cent, with the phase expected to conclude by mid-July, ahead of preparations for the actual count scheduled for the final third of the year, Director General of the Department of Statistics (DoS) Haidar Freihah said on Thursday.

Freihat made the remarks during a coordination meeting held at the Permanent Productive Exhibition Hall for Rural Products in Irbid to review progress on the 2026 Population and Housing Census, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.

During a comprehensive presentation on the census, Freihah stressed its importance and "vital" role in supporting planning and decision-making processes, as well as its contribution to shaping economic and social development policies at the national and local levels.

He said that the JD24 million census project, preparations for which



Photo by Ahmad Khlifaf

Director General of the Department of Statistics Haidar Freihah on Thursday says that the 2026 Population and Housing Census has a 'vital' role in supporting planning and decision-making processes

began in 2025, includes securing equipment and providing logistical support across all phases to ensure accuracy and successful implementation.

The director general also underlined the importance of cooperation with field researchers involved in the census to ensure accurate results that support the formulation of population, housing, economic, social and health development policies through the provision of comprehensive data.

He stressed that all data provided to re-

searchers is protected under the law and remains strictly confidential, noting that the identity of census researchers can be verified through identification cards bearing a QR code.

The meeting comes as part of ongoing efforts to enhance coordination and integration among official entities to ensure the successful implementation of the census stages, with discussions covering key preparations and measures aimed at ensuring the accuracy and comprehensiveness of statistical data.

Civil service commission launches online grievance platform for public employees

AMMAN (JT) — Chairman of the Civil Service and Public Administration Commission Fayeze Nahar on Thursday announced the launch of an electronic grievance submission service for public sector employees, noting that paper-based grievances will no longer be accepted following the introduction of the dedicated online platform.

Nahar said the service is part of the commission's efforts to implement its strategic plan, which focuses on digital transformation to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of procedures, simplify processes, strengthen governance and facilitate grievance submissions in line with the Human Resources Management System.

He noted that the service will be available through the commission's official website, ensuring easy access around the clock, according to the Jordan News Agency, Petra.

Nahar said that, under the Public Sector Modernisation Roadmap, the Human Resources Management System establishes a clear governance



framework for handling grievances in a way that promotes transparency and fairness while safeguarding employees' rights.

He added that employees are entitled to file grievances against administrative decisions or measures affecting their employment rights.

According to Nahar, grievances must first be submitted to the employee's department within 10 working days of becoming aware of the contested decision or measure. The department is then required to review the grievance and issue a response within 30 days, informing the employee of the outcome.

If no response is issued within the speci-

fied period, the employee may escalate the grievance to the Civil Service and Public Administration Commission.

Nahar said the commission will review the grievance, examine all relevant documents and circumstances, and submit its recommendations to the competent minister for a decision in accordance with legal procedures.

He noted that assigning these responsibilities to the commission aligns with its regulatory and oversight role under its founding legislation and forms part of the broader transformation of human resources management in the public sector under the Public Sector Modernisation Roadmap.

World Urban Forum 13 concludes in Baku with focus on sustainable cities, governance

AMMAN (JT) — The 13th Session of the World Urban Forum (WUF13) concluded in Baku, bringing together more than 45,000 participants from 182 countries for a major global forum on urban development and sustainability.

Held under the theme "Housing the World: Safe and Resilient Cities and Communities", the forum brought together policymakers, experts and representatives of international organisations to discuss key challenges facing cities, including housing, climate resilience, digital transformation and urban governance.

Extensive preparations were undertaken ahead of the event, with a special organising committee overseeing infrastructure, logistics, security, transport, digital systems and media operations, according to an Azerbaijani embassy statement.

The main venue around the Baku Olympic Stadium was developed into an integrated operational zone that covers registration, exhibitions, techni-



Photo courtesy of Azerbaijani embassy

Held under the theme 'Housing the World: Safe and Resilient Cities and Communities', the forum brings together policymakers, experts and representatives of international organisations to discuss key challenges facing cities

cal services, volunteer coordination and hospitality facilities, the statement said.

The event also featured hundreds of parallel sessions and discussions, alongside a large exhibition space showcasing urban development projects and innovative solutions from participating countries and organisations.

Azerbaijan also used the forum to highlight reconstruction efforts in Karabakh and East Zangezur under the "Great Return" programme, presenting "smart city" and "smart village" initiatives as part of broader post-conflict redevelopment plans.

The opening ceremony featured an address by President Ilham

Aliyev, who outlined Azerbaijan's vision for urban development and modernisation, stressing the country's role as a bridge between East and West and highlighting ongoing reconstruction and environmental rehabilitation projects.

He also referred to national efforts to expand green spaces, modernise infrastruc-

ture and promote sustainable public transport in Baku as part of wider urban renewal policies.

WUF13 concluded with broad international participation and discussions focused on strengthening cooperation in sustainable urban development and addressing the challenges of rapid urbanisation.

AI learning assistant 'Siraj' featured among leading global education models

AMMAN (JT) — OpenAI has highlighted Jordan's AI-powered educational assistant "Siraj" as a leading national model for integrating artificial intelligence into education during the Global Education Forum held in London.

The initiative, developed under the National Council for Future Technology, aims to harness AI tools to improve the quality of teaching and learning in schools across the Kingdom, Al Mamlaka TV reported.

"Siraj" was featured among prominent in-

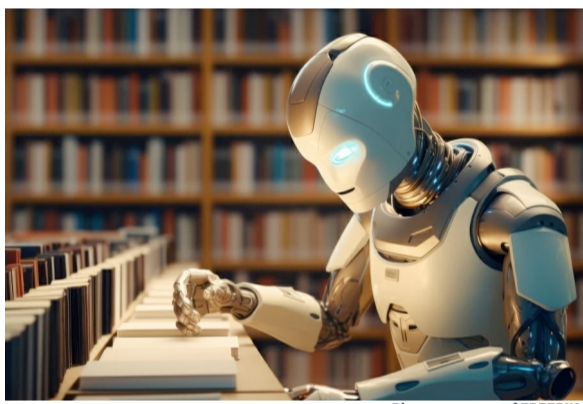


Photo courtesy of FREEPIK

The initiative, developed under the National Council for Future Technology, aims to harness AI tools to improve the quality of teaching and learning in schools across the Kingdom

ternational experi-

ences in the use of AI to support education systems and expand

access to advanced digital learning solutions.

Its inclusion reflects Jordan's progress in developing technology-driven education initiatives aligned with a national vision focused on future skills and strengthening the education sector's readiness for rapid technological change.

Work is under way to further expand and integrate the project into the Ministry of Education's learning management systems, with the aim of enhancing support for

students and teachers, improving the learning experience, and broadening access to digital education tools.

The Global Education Forum, held annually in London, is the world's largest gathering dedicated to education and skills, bringing together ministers, policymakers and international organisations to discuss the future of learning, digital transformation and AI in education.

Since its launch last year, "Siraj" has engaged more than one million students and over 100,000 teachers.

SECURITY

Army foils drug smuggling attempt using drone

AMMAN (JT) — The Southern Military Region command, in coordination with military security agencies and the Anti-Narcotics Department, on Thursday thwarted an attempt to smuggle a large quantity of narcotics using a drone along its western front.

A military source said that border guard forces detected the drone and applied the rules of engagement, successfully shooting it down inside Jordanian territory, according to a Jordan Armed Forces-Arab Army statement.



National operetta 'Jordan, Home of Love' launched to mark 80th Independence anniversary

AMMAN (JT) — The Orthodox Media Centre of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem-Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Jordan has announced the launch of a major national operetta titled "Jordan, Home of Love", marking the 80th anniversary of the independence of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

The production blends historical, spiritual and humanitarian themes, presenting Jordan as a land of divine messages, tolerance and coexistence.

It aims to reflect the Kingdom's identity through a contempo-

rary artistic and musical vision that connects heritage with modern expression, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.

According to the organisers, the operetta highlights Jordan's spiritual and historical significance by revisiting key milestones associated with its holy sites, while emphasising the enduring values of dignity, peace and mutual respect that have long shaped the country's national character and humanitarian role.

The operetta is scheduled to premiere on Sunday, May 24, following Independence

Day celebrations at the Church of the Ascension in Khalda.

The event will be held in the presence of His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos III, alongside senior officials and national figures, including ministers, senators, members of parliament and diplomats, as well as representatives of the Jordan Armed Forces-Arab Army and the Public Security Directorate.

The production is considered one of the largest national artistic works by a church in Jordan. It features 16 Jordanian artists from various governorates, in addition to children,

musicians and technical teams, reflecting broad participation across different segments of society.

More than 300 volunteers contributed to the preparation and execution of the operetta, alongside official, security, cultural and artistic institutions that supported the production process.

Organisers said that the scale of collaboration reflects the work's national character and its emphasis on collective cultural expression.

The operetta features lyrics and music by Mousa Al Naber, orchestration by Maestro Murad Demerjian and



direction by Father Sophronius Hanna.

It was produced under the supervision of His Eminence Archbishop Christoforos, Archbishop of Jordan

for the Greek Orthodox Church and Chairman of the Council of Church Leaders in Jordan.

The production was funded by the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate

eretta is composed of a series of musical and dramatic scenes that trace religious, historical and humanitarian narratives associated with Jordan.

It presents the country as a land traversed by prophets, a cradle of divine messages and a homeland defined by humanity, dignity and peace.

The production seeks to present a modern artistic portrayal of Jordan that integrates spiritual heritage, national identity and humanitarian values, combining music, poetry and dramatic performance into a unified cultural narrative.

Criminal Court sentences defendant to death in Mutah University professor killing case

By Rana Hussein

AMMAN — The Criminal Court sentenced a 21-year-old former Mutah University student to death after convicting him of murdering a university professor in October 2024.

The court declared the student guilty of stabbing and murdering the head of the Arabic Language Department at Mutah University Ahmad Zu'by, 60, at dawn

on October 5.

Court documents said that the defendant monitored Zu'by's movements for a short period.

On the day of the incident, the court maintained, the defendant waited for the victim who exited a mosque at dawn and "stabbed him 13 times".

The defendant then turned himself in to police shortly following the incident and "handed officers on duty the weap-

on used in the murder", court documents added.

The victim was rushed to Karak Government Hospital but died shortly after being admitted, court papers stated.

According to the victim's CV, which was published online, he graduated from Yarmouk University with a BA and a Master's in the Arabic language.

He continued his higher education in Iraq at Mustansiriyah Uni-

versity and obtained his PhD in Pre-Islamic Literature.

The court referred the defendant to the National Institute of Psychiatric Medicine, where government physicians evaluated his mental status and determined that "he was mentally sane and can stand trial".

The verdict will automatically be reviewed by the Court of Cassation within the next 30 days.

Cassation Court upholds 8-year sentence in attempted murder case

By Rana Hussein

AMMAN — The Court of Cassation has upheld a February 2024 Criminal Court ruling, sentencing a man to eight years in prison after convicting him of attempting to murder a man in Jerash in August 2023.

The Criminal Court declared the defendant guilty of attempting to murder a man during a brawl on August 25.

The defendant was

handed a 12-year prison term for the attempted murder charges.

However, the court decided to reduce the sentence to eight years because the victim dropped charges against the defendant.

Court papers said the victim was heading to a nearby supermarket when he saw several men fighting in the street.

"The victim was rushed to separate the

group but was stabbed and attacked with an iron bar by the defendant," court documents said.

The victim was rushed to a nearby hospital, where he survived the stabbing incident, the court maintained.

The defendant contested his ruling via his lawyer, arguing that there were "legal errors in the investigation procedures".

The Criminal Court's

attorney general asked the higher court to uphold the eight-year sentence.

The higher court ruled that the Criminal Court proceedings were accurate and that the defendant was given the appropriate punishment.

The Cassation Court bench comprised judges Naji Zubi, Nayef Samarat, Hammad Ghzawi, Gassem Dughmi and Mohammad Khashashneh.

Pakistan army chief due in Iran as Trump says talks on 'borderline'

TEHRAN (AFP) — Pakistan's army chief was due in Iran on Thursday, Iranian media reported, with Islamabad mediating as the Islamic republic examines a new US proposal to end the Middle East war.

The expected visit by Field Marshal Asim Munir, a powerful figure with a growing role in Pakistan's foreign relations, comes a day after US President Donald Trump warned that negotiations to end the war were on the "borderline" between a deal and renewed strikes.

A ceasefire on April 8 halted the war launched weeks earlier by the US and Israel, but negotiation efforts have so far failed to yield a lasting peace agreement.

A war of words has taken the place of open conflict but the impasse continues to weigh on the world economy, leaving everyone from investors to farmers in a painful state of uncertainty.

On Thursday, Iran's ISNA news agency



Field Marshal Asim Munir's visit comes after Pakistan's Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi travelled to Iran on Wednesday and met President Masoud Pezeshkian

said Munir's visit was aimed at continuing "talks and consultations" with Iranian au-

thorities, without providing details. Other Iranian media carried the same report.

Pakistan hosted in April the only direct negotiations between US and Iranian officials to

take place since February 28, the day the war began.

Munir was at the cen-

tre of the action during that round of talks, greeting both delegations on their arrival and displaying remarkable bonhomie with US Vice President JD Vance.

But the talks ultimately failed, with Iran accusing the US of making "excessive demands".

Since then, the two sides have sent each other multiple proposals, with the threat of renewed war looming all along.

"It's right on the borderline, believe me," Trump told reporters Wednesday. "If we don't get the right answers, it goes very quickly. We're all ready to go."

He said a deal could come "very quickly" or "in a few days", but warned Tehran would have to provide "100 per cent good answers".

Tehran's Chief Negotiator Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf on Wednesday accused Washington of seeking to restart the war, warning of a "forceful response" if Iran were

to be attacked.

"The enemy's movements, both overt and clandestine, show that despite economic and political pressure, it has not abandoned its military objectives and is seeking to start a new war," Ghalibaf said.

Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei said the Islamic republic was examining points received from Washington, while repeating Tehran's demands for the release of its assets frozen abroad and an end to a US naval blockade.

Trump is under political pressure at home as energy costs rise.

The ceasefire halted the fighting but has not reopened the Strait of Hormuz, the vital waterway that normally carries about a fifth of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas.

The future of Hormuz remains a key sticking point in the negotiations, with fears growing that the global economy will feel more

pain as pre-war oil stockpiles run down.

Iran imposed the blockade of Hormuz as part of its retaliation in the war, allowing only a trickle of vessels through in recent weeks while introducing a toll system.

Iran's new body overseeing Hormuz said its claimed area of control extends to Emirati waters, drawing a sharp rebuke from Abu Dhabi.

Relations between Iran and the United Arab Emirates have been severely strained since the war, after Tehran launched missile and drone strikes against Gulf countries in response to US-Israeli attacks.

Hormuz carries around a third of global fertiliser shipments, raising concerns of higher food prices and shortages if the closure drags on.

The UN Food and Agriculture Organisation said the closure could trigger "a severe global food price crisis" and a "systemic agrifood shock".

'Boko Haram extremists kill 33 fishermen, loggers in Nigeria'

KANO, Nigeria (AFP) — Boko Haram extremists have killed 33 fishermen and loggers in two attacks in Nigeria's restive Borno state in the country's northeast, two sources told AFP on Wednesday.

Monday's attacks killed 27 fishermen in Mafa district and six loggers in Dikwa district, according to an anti-extremist militia and a fishermen union official in the region.

"The fishermen were intercepted by Boko Haram fighters on motorcycles 2 kilometres from Mafa town," Babakura Kolo, an anti-extremist militia assisting the military said.

"All the 27 fishermen were shot dead," Kolo said.

They were returning

with a catch of lungfish from a dried up pond, said Abdullahi Sani, an official of a fishermen's union in the state capital Maiduguri, 52 kilometres away.

Sani gave the same figure of 27.

Earlier, six loggers were shot dead by Boko Haram fighters while collecting firewood in the bush outside Malam Maja village in nearby Dikwa district, Kolo said.

They were displaced by extremist violence and were living in makeshift camps in Dikwa town, 90 kilometres from Maiduguri, Kolo said.

Boko Haram and the rival Islamic State West Africa Province have increasing targeted loggers, farmers,

fishermen, herders and metal scrap collectors in the region, accusing them of spying on them and passing on information to the military.

Two weeks ago, Boko Haram fighters shot dead 18 loggers who had gone into the bush outside Abaram village in Borno state's Bama district, according to anti-extremist militia and residents.

Tens of thousands have been killed and millions displaced in the 17-year-old insurgency.

Most of the displaced live in makeshift camps, relying on food handouts from international charities.

But with the drying up of aid due to funding cuts, the displaced are left to fend for themselves.

Iran's Hormuz authority claims control of waters south of UAE port

TEHRAN (AFP) — Iran's new body overseeing the Strait of Hormuz said its claimed area of control extends to Emirati waters, drawing a sharp rebuke from the Gulf neighbour.

Traffic through Hormuz, a vital global shipping conduit, has come under Iranian control since the outbreak of war with Israel and the United States on February 28.

Iran, which has blockaded the strait since the war and is charging ships for passage, has insisted that vessels must obtain permission from its armed forces.

The United Arab Emirates' Fujairah port hosts oil infrastructure designed to bypass the strategic waterway.



Vessels are seen anchored in the Strait of Hormuz, off the port city of Khasab on Oman's northern Musandam Peninsula on Sunday

Emirati Presidential Adviser Anwar Gargash on Thursday slammed the Iranian announcement.

"The regime is trying to establish a new

reality born from a clear military defeat, but attempts to control the Strait of Hormuz or infringe on the UAE's maritime sovereignty are nothing but pipe

dreams," he posted on X.

The UAE has also strongly opposed Iran's control of the strait and called for joint action to ensure

freedom of navigation through the waterway.

On Friday, the UAE announced it was fast-tracking construction of a new oil pipeline bypassing Hormuz through Fujairah Port.

The Abu Dhabi Media Office said the West-East Pipeline would double state oil giant ADNOC's export capacity through Fujairah, adding that it was expected to become operational next year.

On Wednesday, Iran's Revolutionary Guard said they had allowed 26 ships including oil tankers and other vessels to pass through the strait over the previous 24 hours.

Last week, Iran said "more than 30 ships" had been allowed to pass, including some Chinese vessels.

CRISIS

Deadly DRC Ebola outbreak spreads to M23-held South Kivu

BUKAVU, DRC (AFP) — An Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has spread to eastern South Kivu province in an area under the control of the Rwanda-backed M23 militia, the group's spokesman said on Thursday, heightening fears of the deadly disease's growing reach.

Efforts to get a grip on the latest outbreak of the highly contagious haemorrhagic fever, which the World Health Organisation (WHO), has declared an international emergency, have been hampered by the DRC's long-running conflicts, including between the Congolese army and the M23.

Having seized swathes of land in the mineral-rich east with Rwanda's help, the M23 has installed a parallel administration to the Congolese government in areas under its control.

But the armed group has never had to manage the response to a



Workers from Kanyaruchinya, in Nyiragongo territory, take part in sanitation, renovation, and levelling work at the former Ebola treatment centre, in Goma on Tuesday

serious epidemic of a disease like Ebola, which has killed more than 15,000 people in Africa in the past half-century.

The virus is suspected to have claimed 160 lives out of nearly 671 probable cases, according to figures pub-

lished by the National Institute for Public Health on Thursday.

There are 64 confirmed Ebola cases and six confirmed deaths, INSP said.

Tests "confirm a new positive case" in Kabare territory in South Kivu, M23 spokesman

Lawrence Kanyuka said in a statement.

Parts of South Kivu including the provincial capital Bukavu fell to the M23 in February 2025 after fierce clashes.

The case involved a "person coming from Kisangani", a major

city in the eastern Tshopo province where no Ebola infections from the current outbreak have so far been recorded.

Congolese authorities, in a statement on Thursday, reported two cases identified in South Kivu province — one suspected case and one confirmed.

Riot at hospital

The outbreak's epicentre is in north-eastern Ituri province, with many cases in hard-to-access areas plagued by the Congolese east's litany of armed groups and where measures to respond to the crisis have been slow to get off the ground.

"We have no sanitary facilities at all, not even a handwashing station, for 16,000 displaced people," said Desire Grody, an official at a site for displaced people in Kigoye on the outskirts of Bunia, Ituri's provincial capital.

"We're really

cramped in here; it's total overcrowding... If the outbreak starts on the site, it will be catastrophic," he warned.

On Thursday, a brief riot erupted at the hospital in Rwampara, one of the outbreak's focal points located about 12 kilometres from Bunia.

Young people who "wanted to retrieve the body" of a deceased patient "entered the hospital and burned down the two isolation tents", a hospital official told AFP.

A healthcare worker was also injured by stone-throwing before law enforcement intervened, the official said.

The isolation tents had only just been put up at the hospital.

The outbreak comes at a time when humanitarian organisations have seen their budgets slashed, particularly as a result of US aid spending cuts under President Donald Trump.

Cases have also been recorded in North Kivu province and neigh-

bouring Uganda, where one person has died.

Split by front lines

Both North and South Kivu are split in two by the front lines dividing the Congolese army from the M23 armed group and its Rwandan allies.

No vaccine or clinical treatment exists for the Bundibugyo strain of the Ebovirus responsible for the current epidemic.

"Every passenger who arrives here, whether at the airport entry point or elsewhere, is subject to a temperature check," said Aime Prospere, head of border hygiene at Bunia airport, in a statement.

Tons of equipment have been delivered at the airport by the WHO and NGOs since Monday.

In the city "we're not allowed to carry two people on the same motorcycle", Paulin Kibondo, a motorcycle taxi driver, said.

Schools and churches are still open, an AFP correspondent saw.

A US citizen who contracted Ebola while working in the DRC is currently in hospital in Germany.

While the WHO believes the risk from the Ebola outbreak is high both in the DRC and the wider central African region, it considers the risk of a worldwide pandemic to be "low".

In response to the outbreak, the United States on Monday announced stepped-up screening procedures for air passengers coming from the DRC, Uganda and South Sudan. A day after, Bahrain announced a month-long ban on visitors from the three countries.

The DRC football team has cancelled a training camp in Kinshasa in preparation for the World Cup in the United States, which is co-hosting the tournament with Canada and Mexico, a team official told AFP on Wednesday.



This view from the airplane window before landing in Ushuaia, Tierra del Fuego, Antartida e Islas del Atlantico Sur, Argentina, on Sunday

US expects 'below normal' Atlantic hurricane season

WASHINGTON, United States (AFP) — US forecasters on Thursday predicted the Atlantic hurricane season is likely to be "below normal" in 2026, but cautioned that "it only takes one".

Data on the eastern and central Pacific meanwhile shows a 70 per cent chance of "above normal" activity.

An expected El Nino weather pattern is largely driving the forecast, said National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) head Neil Jacobs.

Atlantic hurricanes are more dangerous to human life and property as they are generally closer to more heavily populated areas.

Even a "below normal" season could include eight to 14 named storms, Jacobs said, and at least one to three are likely to be considered major, meaning with winds above 111 miles per hour.

"Don't let words like below average... change the way you're prepared," urged Ken Gra-

ham, National Weather Service director.

The forecast does not include predictions on whether or not storms might make landfall.

NOAA officials said the last time they put out a similar forecast was in 2015.

The Atlantic hurricane season runs from June through November. The Pacific season began in mid-May and also runs through November.

El Nino — a natural climate cycle phase — influences global weather and increases the likelihood of drought, heavy rainfall and other climate extremes.

It generally supports fewer tropical storms and hurricanes in the Atlantic, because it can create strong vertical winds there that can tilt or tear tropical storms before they strengthen.

El Nino has the opposite effect in the Pacific.

In a world warmed by fossil fuel pollution, however, sea surface temperatures could

play spoiler to El Nino's shifts.

Following the briefing, Graham said in a statement "there is still uncertainty in how each season will unfold".

The 2025 Atlantic hurricane season included four major hurricanes ending with Melissa, which struck Jamaica as one of the most powerful storms ever recorded.

Fueled by abnormally warm Caribbean waters, it exploded into a Category 5 storm and moved across the region at little more than a strolling pace, amplifying the danger of relentless rain, storm surge and wind while unleashing catastrophic damage.

A study from the Imperial College London said the massive storm was made four times more likely because of human-caused climate change.

Scientists say both rapid intensification and stalling storms are on the rise in a warming climate.

UN members reinforce nations' climate change obligations

UNITED NATIONS, United States (AFP) — The United Nations General Assembly on Wednesday adopted a resolution reinforcing states' obligations to combat climate change, a long-awaited move toned down under pressure from major greenhouse gas emitters.

The General Assembly, driven by the Pacific island nation of Vanuatu, previously asked the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for an advisory opinion on states' responsibility to honour their climate commitments.

The opinion issued last summer exceeded the expectations of climate advocates, with the court ruling it was "unlawful" for countries to neglect their climate commitments, opening the door to "reparations" for affected countries.

"The states and peoples bearing the heaviest burden are very often those who contributed least to the problem," said Vanuatu's ambassador to the UN, Odo Tevi, ahead of the vote.

"We are aware that some would prefer this assembly to say less or nothing at all...the harm is real, and it is already here."

The vote was 141 votes in favour and only eight against — uniting the United States, Russia and Iran which are all major gas and oil exporters and sought to strike down the initiative.

To add momentum to the ICJ's non-binding opinion, on which courts around the world can nevertheless rely, Vanuatu presented a draft resolution in January aimed at putting it into practice.

But the text was altered significantly after negotiations among states, with climate change taking a back seat to national security or industrial interests in many countries. The resolution wel-



This photo taken on Tuesday shows a view of the Mediano reservoir amid high water level, in Mediano, Huesca province. This long-term project shows an inventory of several sites in Spain which are suffering from drought. Photos of the same places are taken every month over a very long period

comed the ICJ opinion "as an authoritative contribution to the clarification of existing international law" and calls on states to "comply with their respective obligations" to protect the climate.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres praised the move in a statement on Wednesday, commending the leadership of island leaders and "the young people whose moral clarity helped bring the world to this moment".

"This is a powerful affirmation of international law, climate justice, science and the responsibility of states to protect people from the escalating climate crisis," Guterres said.

No damage register

It also emphasises the measures needed to keep global warming limited to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, particularly "transitioning away from fossil fuels in energy systems".

That would be in keeping with a goal adopted by nearly 200 countries during a global climate meeting in 2023.

However, the creation of an "International Register of Damage" to compile evidence of "damage, loss or injury attributable to climate change" vanished from the adopted text.

The biggest contributors to greenhouse gas emissions routinely oppose any mechanism

that could force them to pay reparations to victims of climate disruption.

The resolution nonetheless states that according to the ICJ, a state in violation of its climate obligations may be required to pay "full reparation to injured states".

Washington's representative to the meeting, Tammy Bruce, said "the resolution includes inappropriate political demands relating to fossil fuels and on other climate topics."

Climate advocates now hope the idea of a damage registry will be reconsidered, bolstered by a report from the UN chief.

"This must be a turning point in account-

ability for damaging the climate," said Vishal Prasad, director at Pacific Islands Students Fighting Climate Change, the NGO that started the push championed by Vanuatu.

"Communities on the frontlines, like in the Pacific, have been waiting far too long and continue to pay too high a price for the actions of others."

Oil-producing Saudi Arabia and Kuwait sought to make amendments that removed some references cementing the ICJ's opinion as a guiding framework for climate action — which Vanuatu said weakened the effort.

They also used procedural tactics to delay the vote.

Rubio denounces NATO refusal to help on Iran ahead of alliance talks

MIAMI (AFP) — US Secretary of State Marco Rubio on Thursday renewed criticism of NATO for not supporting the US war on Iran, as he headed to alliance talks in Sweden.

"There are many countries in NATO that agree with us that Iran can't have a nuclear weapon,

that Iran is a threat to the world," Rubio told reporters in Miami before leaving for the talks among NATO foreign ministers in Helsingborg, Sweden.

President Donald Trump "said, fine, I'm going to do something about it", Rubio said.

"He's not asking them to commit troops. He's not asking them to send their fighter jets in. But they refuse to do anything," he said.

"We were very upset about that."

The United States and Israel jointly attacked Iran on February 28.

Trump did not consult NATO ahead of time and key European allies have voiced skepticism over the need for war, with US and Israeli claims of an imminent Iranian nuclear threat highly disputed and Tehran's retaliation sending global oil prices soaring.

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez denounced the war as illegal and refused to let US jets use bases in his country.

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz said Iran was "humiliating" the United States in negotiations, infuriating Trump

whose administration quickly announced that the United States was pulling 5,000 troops from bases in Germany.

"I've been a strong supporter of NATO my entire career," said Rubio, a former senator.

But he continued: "I know why NATO is good

for Europe, but why is NATO good for America? Because it gives us bases in the region that allow us to project power during a contingency in the Middle East or somewhere else."

"So when that is the key rationale for why you're in NATO, and then

you have countries like Spain denying us the use of these bases, well then, why are you in NATO? That's a very fair question," he said.

He added that other countries were more helpful, previously singling out Portugal for praise.

Gaza flotilla activists await deportation from Israel

Continued from page 1

Captioned "Welcome to Israel", the footage showed Ben Gvir heckling and waving an Israeli flag among the detained activists.

In the latest diplomatic backlash, Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani said he had asked the European Union to sanction Ben Gvir "for the unacceptable acts committed against the flotilla".

The United Kingdom announced it had summoned Israel's most senior diplomat in Britain following "the inflammatory video".

On Thursday, the legal centre representing the activists said the flotilla members were "en route for deportation" from Ramon Airport in Israel's far south.

"The majority of the participants are being transferred to Ramon Airport to be flown out of the country," Adalah said in a statement,

adding that the activists had been held at Israel's Ktziot prison, in the Negev Desert near Gaza.

Turkey said it was sending planes to Israel to "bring our citizens and participants from third countries to Turkey via special charter flights we will organise today".

Foreign ministry sources said "three flights" with a capacity for "more than 400 passengers" were being sent to Ramon airport.

Around 50 vessels under the Global Sumud Flotilla set sail from Turkey last week in the latest attempt by activists to breach Israel's blockade of Gaza, after Israeli forces intercepted a previous convoy last month.

'They kicked us'

Adalah said one of the flotilla participants who holds Israeli citizenship had a court hearing Thursday, and faced

"absurd" charges.

"Israeli authorities are holding her under unfounded and contradictory accusations of 'illegal entry into Israel', 'unlawful stay', and for an attempt to break the blockade on Gaza," Adalah said.

Adalah's legal director Suhad Bishara told AFP on Wednesday that the group's lawyers had been able to give legal counsel to "many" of the hundreds of activists, though she added that others had faced court hearings without legal assistance.

"We know of at least two participants who were hospitalised... both of them were shot by rubber bullets," Bishara said, adding that others said they feared they had broken ribs.

Alessandro Mantovani, an Italian journalist detained with the flotilla activists and deported before the others, told reporters at Rome's Fiumicino air-

port on Thursday that he and others had been "taken to Ben Gurion airport in handcuffs and with chains on our feet and put on a flight to Athens".

"They beat us up. They kicked us and punched us and shouted 'Welcome to Israel'," he said of his treatment by Israeli security forces.

Dario Carotenuto, an Italian MP who was also detained and deported, said: "It was really tough... They called us by number... with rifles pointed at us... I think those were the longest seconds in my life."

The video posted by Ben Gvir sparked re-sounding condemnation by governments around the world, from Italy to Spain and Australia to Canada.

He was also criticised at home by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Foreign Minister Gideon Saar, as well as by US ambassador to Israel Mike Huckabee.

Francesca Albanese, an outspoken UN expert on the Palestinian territories, called on Italy, where she is from, to take action.

"Words do not suffice: Let Italy stop opposing the suspension" of the EU-Israel Association Agreement, she wrote on X.

Fragile truce

Israel controls all entry points into Gaza, under blockade since 2007.

Since the start of the Gaza war, the territory has suffered severe shortages of food, medicine and other essential supplies, with Israel at times halting aid deliveries entirely.

A previous flotilla was intercepted last month in international waters off Greece, with most activists expelled to Europe.

Two were brought to Israel, detained for several days and then deported.

JHCO dispatches fifth relief convoy to Lebanon

Continued from page 1

According to a statement issued by the organisation, the aid shipment included essential medical and food assistance aimed at supporting the healthcare sector, enhancing food security and meeting the needs of children and the families most affected by the crisis.

JHCO Secretary-General Hussein Shibli said the continued dis-

patch of relief convoys reflects Jordan's long-standing humanitarian commitment.

"Jordan, under its Hashemite leadership and with the support of its people, will remain present alongside its brothers and sisters during all circumstances," Shibli said, adding that the convoys represent a sustained humanitarian effort based on rapid response and coordinated institutional work to ensure aid

reaches the most vulnerable communities.

He added that the organisation continues to work closely with partners and relevant authorities to strengthen humanitarian response efforts and expand relief operations in line with field needs and humanitarian priorities.

The organisation expressed appreciation to the Syrian authorities for facilitating the passage of humanitarian convoys into Lebanon.

Jordan condemns Israeli plans to confiscate properties near Al Aqsa

Continued from page 1

fulfilling the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, foremost among them the establishment of an independent state on their national soil,

remains the only path towards achieving a just and comprehensive peace that guarantees security and stability in the region.

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Safer gaming, safer childhoods

Jordan's launch of a national campaign to address the digital risks linked to electronic gaming recognises a reality that many families already live with every day and that is children are no longer only playing games. They are entering digital spaces where entertainment, social interaction, commercial pressure, competition and risk often meet.

This reality requires a serious national response. It is no longer enough to treat electronic gaming as a private matter left entirely to families, or as harmless entertainment outside the concern of public policy. The digital environment has become part of childhood itself. That means child protection must extend into that environment with the same seriousness applied to schools, playgrounds and public spaces.

The campaign launched by Generations For Peace under the slogan "Gaming Is Their Right, Their Safety Is Our Responsibility", carries the right message. It does not demonise gaming, nor should it. Electronic games have become part of childhood and youth culture across the world. They can develop coordination, problem-solving, teamwork and digital skills. For many children, they are also a form of leisure, friendship and belonging.

But rights must be matched with protection. The question is not whether children should play. The question is whether they are playing in environments that are safe, age-appropriate and properly supervised.

Too often, public discussions around digital platforms move between two extremes: Either panic that calls for blanket restrictions or indifference that leaves children alone in spaces they are not equipped to navigate. Neither approach is enough. Jordan needs a balanced national response that respects children's right to digital participation while reducing the risks that come with it.

Those risks are not theoretical because online gaming can expose children to harmful content, cyberbullying, addictive patterns of use, inappropriate contact with strangers, aggressive communication, scams, in-game spending pressures and unhealthy sleep habits. Some risks affect behaviour; others affect emotional well-being, school performance and family relationships. When children are young, impulsive or socially vulnerable, the risks become even more serious.

This is why the campaign's focus on awareness, behavioural change and community protection is important. Parents need practical guidance on how to set privacy controls, how to recognise warning signs, how to talk to children without creating fear or secrecy and how to distinguish between healthy gaming and harmful overuse. Schools also play an important role in this effort to protect our children from the risks of online gaming. Schools need tools to teach digital safety as part of life skills, not as an occasional lecture and they need to educate children that online spaces have rules, consequences and boundaries, just like physical spaces.

The gaming industry, technology platforms and local content communities also have responsibilities. Safety cannot be placed entirely on families after the harm has already entered the home. Age ratings, reporting mechanisms, moderation, spending limits, privacy settings and clear Arabic-language guidance should be part of any serious child-safety framework. Where children are targeted as users, their protection should not be treated as optional.

Jordan also has an opportunity to connect this campaign to a wider digital literacy agenda. The country is investing in youth, innovation, entrepreneurship and the digital economy. That ambition requires not only technical skills, but responsible digital citizenship. A generation that can code, create and compete online must also be able to recognise manipulation, protect privacy, manage screen time and engage respectfully in digital communities.

Children's digital environments shape their attention, behaviour, confidence, language, values and sense of safety, therefore protecting them does not mean isolating them from technology. Protecting children means preparing them to use technology wisely and ensuring that the systems around them do not exploit their vulnerability.

Tawasol and the future Jordan's youth are building

By Mwaffaq Otoom

Jordan wants to create a more confident future in a region where many people have uncertainty about the future. This will not happen only with a government programme but by giving youth and others a sense of ownership of their ideas, and by including them in the national dialogue.

For this reason, Tawasol Forum, one of the Crown Prince Foundation's projects, is worthy of more than just attention the day of its sessions, Tawasol is more than just an annual event, it's an effort to institutionalise a culture Jordan requires urgently — that includes open communication, constructive dialogue and collective shared responsibility towards creating a better future.

Words matter. The term "Tawasol" means communication, but its true meaning is "to connect". Connecting the divide of the decision maker with the citizen, the institution with the youth and national challenges with practical solutions. The Forum also states that it is the result of the National Dialogue Platform formed by the Crown Prince Foundation, A place where you can interactively exchange your views and ideas with others who also have views and ideas on national issues that reflect the current state and desires of both the Jordanian youth and societies. The goals of the Forum are to promote dialogue and participation, encourage public responsibility, build mutual trust and encourage innovation amongst all stakeholders.

"Visions for Tomorrow's Opportunities" is the theme for this year's edition. These words hold profound significance in the face of humanity as it continues to evolve at an alarming rate. Changes in all facets of life, from economics, to the workplace, to the way we engage with the media, are occurring faster than we can comprehend. As freelancers and multiple streams of income become the new reality in today's labour force, new technologies are continuing to redefine the landscape of the world. As a result, lifestyles, cities, institutions and even the way we determine progress, are all changing as well.

HRH Crown Prince Hussein sees youth as not just recipients of developmental opportunities, but as active contributors to creating that development. Through economic opportunities, prospects for leadership, and creating sustainable communities, the Crown Prince Foundation strives to prepare

young Jordanians for tomorrow.

Tawasol is valuable because it doesn't just treat youth empowerment as a ceremonial term, it actually provides youth with a chance to listen to, question, interact with, and envision themselves as part of the next stage of Jordan's evolution on its path towards success. This was clearly demonstrated in the discussions held at the 2026 agenda regarding Jordan's opportunities within the new technology and/or digital media sectors, how much content has been created by the world of media, the rise of the "freelance economy", changing lifestyles, national aptitude to acquire deeper technical and strategic skills, how the youth perceive the coming decade, AI's productivity potential to improve work culture and Jordan's future in sport.

What strategies will assist small countries in competing in high value-added/high technology new industries? What alternatives exist for youth to earn income outside of traditional jobs?

This is not about theoretical issues, these are everyday challenges confronting Jordanian families, educational institutions, the private sector and other governmental bodies. For instance: What's the 5-10 year forecast for job opportunities? What strategies will assist small countries in competing in high value-added/high technology new industries? What alternatives exist for youth to earn income outside of traditional jobs? How should existing education systems adapt to technological advances related to artificial intelligence (AI)? How do we enhance the quality and extent of public discourse? What role does national pride play in creating value, and encouraging innovation and pro-

moting excellence?

The importance of Tawasol is to facilitate dialogue amongst a wider audience to address these vital issues. The way forward, is to prepare for the future, not as an event that occurs suddenly, but rather through communication, planning, skills and courage. Tawasol, also provides evidence to reinforce that communication is not a weak issue; rather, in this modern world, communication is seen as an effective development tool. Nation states that have developed stronger capacities to listen to one another, coordinate with one another or build confidence with one another, are therefore in a better position to respond to changes in their environment.

For decades, Jordan has depended largely on the skills, determination, and drive of its population in order to succeed. Talent itself will only take you so far, however, for young Jordanian's to realise their potential, they require access to opportunities through connections with information, mentors, institutions, market-places and the policy-making process. Young people must be able to visualise a path from their ideas to opportunities, from problems to projects, and from participation to impact. Through its work bridging the gap between young people and influential figures, Tawasol provides young people with this access.

The value of these forums does not stop when the sessions are over. The next step is to develop the relationship between dialogue and action. Universities, schools, municipalities, businesses and public institutions must use the ideas generated by Tawasol to create their own things. To achieve this, we must ask ourselves: How do we create the next level of discussion? How do we turn these ideas into training programmes, startup support, research, job creation, improved policies and youth initiatives?

To strengthen its efforts, Tawasol 2027 needs to focus on using a much clearer directive. How do we transform today's vision into measurable national actions? The Tawasol 2026 Forum has opened up many discussions in areas such as AI, productivity, digital media, freelancing, emerging technologies, programming and the future of Jordanian sports. Young Jordanians require not only inspiration, but pathways and tools to success, networks and opportunities. And future events like Tawasol 2026 will continue to highlight HRH Crown Prince Hussein's

commitment to keep pace with technology, utilising AI to enhance productivity and efficiency, and developing educational programmes that meet the needs of a modernised global society.

Transitioning from an open-ended and informal conversation about opportunities for youth to a defined and formalised agenda that includes actionable recommendations, youth-led projects and specific commitments from institutions developing out of Tawasol Forum is one potential avenue for Tawasol 2027. The Tawasol Youth Agenda may feature a list of priority focus areas for youth over the next year e.g. AI Education, Digital Entrepreneurship, Technical/Vocational Skills, Innovation in the Public Sector, Media Literacy, Green Opportunities, Creative Economy, etc. In addition, the Tawasol Youth Agenda may provide continuing mechanisms for follow ups through universities, schools, governorates, businesses and the Crown Prince Foundation's branches throughout the Kingdom. Thus, the conversation that started during the Tawasol Forum can continue beyond the boundaries of the forum itself.

An additional key element is to allow young people enough room to not just contribute, but also to generate ideas, be creative, and facilitate action. The Tawasol 2027 edition can be made up of various ways to participate including: Youth challenges, policy labs, showcasing startups, innovation teams from universities, and engaging in regional dialogues through the governorate prior to and following the main forum. Tawasol will not only serve as a venue for young people to hear from experts, but will also serve as a medium through which expert and decision-making institutions receive feedback from young people with regard to solutions they have created.

No single area can create the future of Jordan. There must be collaboration between all stakeholders: Government, private sector, universities, civil society, media and youth. Thus, Tawasol's model is an important concept — it imparts to us that progress is not made through one decision but through a shared journey. It fosters an environment where institutions hear the voice of youth, young people are involved in decision-making, and society thinks collectively about what lies ahead.

Mwaffaq Otoom, former vice president, Yarmouk University

The Apprentice? Vance sticks to business at White House podium

By Danny Kemp

Agence France-Presse

WASHINGTON, United States — If it was an audition to succeed Donald Trump in 2028, US Vice President JD Vance was keeping it low-key as he held a briefing at the White House on Tuesday.

"I'm not a potential future candidate, I'm a vice president," the 41-year-old said when a reporter suggested that he would be aiming for the presidency in two years.

"And I really like my job, and I'm going to try to do as good of a job as I can."

But no one could ignore the elephant in the room.

Just two weeks earlier the same podium was occupied by Secretary of State Marco Rubio, widely viewed as Vance's most likely rival for the 2028 Republican presidential nomination.

The situation increasingly resembles an episode from *The Apprentice*, the blockbuster reality show that made Trump a TV star and helped pave his way to the presidency.

Last week Vance even joked about the similarity himself, when asked about reports that Trump has been polling within

the Republican Party on whether they prefer Vance or Rubio.

"I just don't think it sounds like the president of the United States to have a televised competition for who would succeed him as his apprentice," Vance said during a May 13 press conference, sparking some laughs.

Rubio has also repeatedly played down talk of a rivalry to head the Republican ticket in 2028.

'Marco's right'

Yet there is growing speculation of a battle ahead.

Vance's role as the Republican National Committee's finance chair has given him grassroots connections and links to potential donors, while Rubio's high-profile foreign policy role under Trump could also be an asset.

And on Tuesday all eyes were certainly on whether Vance could repeat Rubio's relaxed performance as a stand-in for White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt, who is on maternity leave.

The vice president even recycled some of Rubio's jokes, saying "Marco's right, this really is chaos!" as reporters clamored to get his attention.

He also joked about Leavitt, saying he would take her place on the condition "she would be vice president for a couple weeks" when his wife Usha gives birth to their fourth child in July.

But Vance didn't always seem as comfortable as Rubio, repeatedly relying on a seating chart for reporters in the briefing room and often turning to right-wing outlets.

Rubio, by contrast, had freestyled his picks of who got to ask questions, and even dropped in some classic rap lyrics.

Vance stuck to business, and spent much of his time being forced to defend the creation of a nearly \$1.8 billion fund to compensate Trump allies who believe they were unfairly prosecuted under the Biden administration.

He joked at one point that even Hunter Biden, who was convicted of a gun crime before being pardoned by his father Joe Biden shortly before the Democrat left office last year, could avail himself of the fund.

'There for the president'

Vance also talked about the Iran war, saying talks were

making "good progress" but that Trump was "locked and loaded" to restart military action if needed. Vance led a delegation to Pakistan last month to meet Iranian officials.

But like Rubio before him, some of Vance's answers also appeared to be aimed at potential voters for 2028.

Catholic convert Vance repeatedly referenced his religion and referred to "our Christian heritage as a civilisation", echoing his previous endorsement of a Christian nationalist agenda under Trump.

As a message it was tailor-made to appeal to Trump's Make America Great Again (MAGA) movement, parts of which still seem to regard Vance with suspicion.

And Vance also appeared to hint at the importance of loyalty to the 79-year-old second-term president who will soon have to anoint his chosen MAGA successor.

Vance was asked about Trump's endorsement of scandal-plagued but loyalist Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton in a high-stakes Senate primary run-off.

"When it really counted," Vance said, "Ken Paxton...was there for the president."

BUSINESS

Friday-Saturday, May 22-23, 2026



People walk in to the headquarters of the European Central Bank in Frankfurt am Main, western Germany, past a giant Euro logo on April 17, 2025

EU slashes eurozone 2026 growth forecast on Mideast war

BRUSSELS, Belgium (AFP) — The euro zone economy will expand less than expected this year, the EU said on Thursday, as the Middle East war and subsequent energy shock take their toll.

The European Commission said the single currency area's economy is expected to grow 0.9 per cent in 2026, down from a previous prediction of 1.2 per cent.

The EU also sharply raised its prediction for inflation in the 21-nation eurozone this year to 3 per cent, up from 1.9 per cent in the last forecast and well above the European Central Bank's (ECB's) target of two per cent.

EU economy chief Valdis Dombrovskis pointed to the conflict in the Middle East, which "triggered a major energy shock, further testing Europe as it navigates an already volatile geopolitical and trade environment".

Households and businesses will have to pay more for energy because of the spike in fuel prices, the EU said, pushing the bloc's economic output down.

Energy prices surged after Tehran retaliated to US-Israeli strikes with attacks on neighbouring countries and effectively closed the Strait of Hormuz, through which a fifth of the world's oil supply transited before the war.

Since the European Union is a net energy importer, the 27-nation bloc is extremely vulnerable to any fluctuations in energy prices.

Many EU states including Poland and Spain have sought to contain energy costs for consumers and businesses with tax

reductions, caps on fuel prices and other measures, but Brussels has urged countries to take temporary and targeted steps.

The EU is facing its second energy shock after a first crisis following Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, which led to double-digit highs in inflation.

Dombrovskis said the EU had to learn from the shocks by "further reducing its reliance on imported fossil fuels".

'Stagflationary shock'

The forecasts come after the EU warned the war was causing a "stagflationary shock" in Europe, when slower growth coincides with higher inflation.

'Under this scenario, inflation would not ease and economic activity would fail to rebound in 2027'

The commission predicted growth in 2026 will be 1.1 per cent for the European Union as a whole, another downward revision to the previous forecast of 1.4 per cent.

But with uncertainty over how long the Middle East conflict will last, Brussels warned that Europe could face a worse scenario if energy prices keep rising until the end of the year.

"Under this scenario, inflation would not ease and economic activity would fail to rebound in 2027," the commission said.

Assuming gas prices and oil prices rise further, with oil peaking at \$180 per barrel by the end of the year, Dombrovskis told journalists that inflation would exceed the EU's forecast by 0.3 percentage points in 2026, and 1.1 percentage points in 2027.

He added the economy would grow roughly half of what Brussels forecast.

The announcement reflects a marked change from how the EU thought the European economy would fare, with expectations that it would expand — albeit at a moderate pace — and that inflation would remain in line with the ECB's 2 per cent target.

There had also been high hopes in November that Germany, the EU's largest economy, would rebound this year and grow by 1.2 per cent overall, but that was sharply cut to 0.6 per cent on Thursday.

France, the second-biggest EU economy, is set to do better, with growth of 0.8 per cent expected this year.

The EU executive expects 2027 will be a better year, though it still cut its forecast for economic growth in the eurozone to 1.2 per cent, after predicting in November it would reach 1.4 per cent.

For the EU as a whole, Brussels trimmed its 2027 growth forecast to 1.4 per cent from 1.5 per cent.

Brussels expects energy prices to fall gradually and eurozone inflation to reach 2.3 per cent in 2027, up from the previous prediction of 2 per cent.

10 Jordanian companies showcase products at private label show in Amsterdam

AMMAN (JT) — Jordan Export (JE) organised Jordan's participation in the 2026 World of Private Label International Trade Show, which opened on Tuesday in Amsterdam, with the participation of 10 Jordanian companies specialising in food industries, packaging and detergents.

The Jordanian pavilion was inaugurated by chairman of the Jordan and Amman Chambers of Industry, Fathi Jaghbir, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.

According to the JE statement, the pavilion attracted "strong" interest from international visitors and buyers, reflecting "growing" demand for Jordanian products due to their quality, diversity and competitiveness in global markets.

The exhibition is considered one of the leading international events specialising in private labels and serves as a strategic platform connecting



Jordan Export organises Jordan's participation in the 2026 World of Private Label International Trade Show, which opened Tuesday in Amsterdam, specialising in food industries, packaging and detergents

manufacturers and suppliers with major retailers and international buyers.

This engagement would create opportunities for Jordanian companies to expand their presence in European and global markets.

Jordan's participation was organised in cooperation with the Economic Reform Activity (ERA) and Competence Management Consulting.

During the activities, bilateral business meetings were held for participating compa-

nies and buyers from The Netherlands and several European countries to explore new trade opportunities and build sustainable export partnerships.

The presence comes as part of efforts by JE to support national exports, strengthen

competitiveness of Jordanian products and help local companies access new markets, in line with the Economic Modernisation Vision goals of increasing export growth and expanding the base of Jordanian exporters, Petra reported.

COOPERATION

Jordanian fintech firms join trade mission to Money 20/20 Europe in Amsterdam

AMMAN (JT) — Information and Communications Technology Association of Jordan (int@j) and the embassy of the Kingdom of The Netherlands announced organising a Jordanian trade mission to participate in the Money 20/20 Europe conference, scheduled to take place in Amsterdam from 2 to 4 June.

According to an int@j statement issued on Thursday, the Jordanian trade mission, which comprising of 11 companies in financial technology and advanced digital solutions, taking part in this conference as one of the world's leading events in financial technology, digital banking, electronic payments and financial innovation.

The event is expected to attract more than 7,400 participants, 2,300 companies and 450 speakers representing over 100 countries, making it a major global platform bringing together technology firms, financial institutions, banks, investors and decision makers from



Information and Communications Technology Association of Jordan and the embassy of the Kingdom of The Netherlands announce organising a Jordanian trade mission to participate in the coming Money 20/20 Europe conference

international markets, with Jordan.

The association said the trade mission is among the activities funded by the Dutch embassy as part of celebrations marking the 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Jordan and The Netherlands.

Dutch Ambassador Stella Kloth, said The Netherlands is committed to strengthening bilateral trade and investment relations

The event is expected to attract more than 7,400 participants, 2,300 companies...

She expressed hope that opening opportunities for Jordanian

markets and expand strategic partnerships with European financial and technology institutions.

Outaishat added that the mission will enable Jordanian firms to explore the latest global developments in financial technology, artificial intelligence in financial services, digital payments, open banking and regulatory technology. While holding direct meetings with international companies, investors, and specialised financial and technology entities.

The chairman noted the conference represents an important global platform for exploring the future of the digital financial sector and showcasing innovations driving transformation in financial services worldwide.

The conference offers Jordanian companies direct opportunities to build quality business relations and enhance investment and cooperation prospects with international partners, Petra reported.

Asian stocks surge on Iran hopes, Samsung union talks

TOKYO (AFP) — Shares surged in Seoul, Tokyo and other Asian markets on Thursday, fuelled by hopes of a Middle East peace accord and by negotiations averting a planned strike at Samsung Electronics.

Rallies in tech equities also drove gains, as Elon Musk's SpaceX filed for what could be the largest initial public offering in history.

South Korea's benchmark Kospi index closed 8.4 per cent higher and Japan's Nikkei index ended the day 3.1 per cent up, after Iran said it was examining a new US proposal to end the war.

President Donald Trump described on Wednesday the talks as being on the "borderline" between a deal and re-

newed attacks. Cautious hopes rippled quickly through financial markets, although investors remained wary after weeks of false starts.

Oil prices had fallen five per cent on Wednesday, but on Thursday were trading up around 0.7 per cent. "Today's rally is being driven by a genuine confluence of positive catalysts rather than any single headline," Dilin Wu, research strategist at Pepperstone, told AFP. Blowout quarterly results from US chip titan Nvidia "has validated the AI infrastructure buildout thesis", sending Asian chip-related shares higher, Wu said.

However, "the Iran situation remains highly fluid," she added. "Trump's window for a

deal expires in days, and if talks collapse, you get the reverse of today very quickly."

Samsung Electronics closed 8.5 per cent higher, after its labour union said late Wednesday that an 18-day strike had been put on hold.

The dispute takes place against the backdrop of a global AI boom that has turbocharged Samsung's business, while boosting national growth and the stock market.

Around 50,500 workers had been set to walk off production lines as anger flared over how the company distributes its massive profits.

Under the tentative deal, to be voted on by union members, special bonuses will partly be paid in company stock

over 10 years. Around the region on Thursday, Taipei jumped 3.4 per cent, Sydney gained 1.5 per cent, with Bangkok and Wellington also up. However Shanghai shed 2 per cent, Jakarta tumbled 3.5 per cent and Hong Kong closed down 1 per cent.

Adding to tech investors' excitement over the IPO for US rocket and satellite giant SpaceX was a Wall Street Journal report that ChatGPT maker OpenAI could be next.

Citing people familiar with the matter, the newspaper said OpenAI was preparing to file for a stock market listing in the coming days, possibly as early as Friday.

OpenAI did not immediately reply to a request for comment.

AMMAN STOCK EXCHANGE

AMMAN (JT) — Amman Stock Exchange (ASE) trading value for Thursday amounted to JD20.2 million spread over 5.8 million shares that traded through 5,274 transactions. The ASE share price index shed 0.38 per cent, closing at 3993.58 points. Out of 98 companies whose shares were traded, the share price of 40 companies rose while the share price of another 28 declined.

Topping the list of the companies whose shares gained the most were Masafat for Specialised Transport by 6.17 per cent, Arab Investors Union Company for Real Estates Developing by 5 per cent, Jordan Dairy by 4.93 per cent, Euro Arab Insurance Group by 4.92 per cent and Arab Aluminum Industry/Aral by 4.80 per cent.

The companies whose shares dropped the most were Northern Cement Company by 7.07 per cent, Jordan Masaken for Land and Industrial Development Projects by 4.35 per cent, Petra Education Company by 3.38 per cent, Comprehensive Multiple Transportations Company by 3.13 per cent, and Shira Real Estate Development and Investments by 2.56 per cent.



THE MARKET TODAY



DAILY SUMMARY

Regular Market		OTC Market	
Trading Value (JDs)	20,239,035		
Trading volume	5,788,448		
No. of Transactions	5,274		
No. of Securities	98		

Losers: 28
Gainers: 40
Unchanged: 30

THE JORDAN TIMES SPORTS AT A GLANCE

FOOTBALL

FA launches Southampton probe over 'spygate' scandal

LONDON (AFP) — The Football Association is investigating Southampton over the "spygate" scandal that resulted in the club's expulsion from Saturday's Championship play-off final. Saints admitted observing a training session held by semi-final opponents Middlesbrough earlier this month, as well as two other similar incidents during the season. The FA is looking at whether charges should be brought, following the decision by an English Football League independent disciplinary commission to kick Southampton out of the play-offs and dock the club four points for next season. An FA spokesperson said on Thursday: "We will now investigate and won't comment further until we have assessed the evidence." The club's appeal against their punishment was dismissed on Wednesday, with Middlesbrough replacing them in the Wembley final against Hull. Southampton beat Middlesbrough 2-1 over two legs in the play-off semifinals.

TENNIS

Sinner, Djokovic kept apart in French Open draw

PARIS, France (AFP) — Jannik Sinner and Novak Djokovic will not be able to meet until the French Open final after the pair were placed in opposite halves of the draw on Thursday. Sinner, the red-hot title favourite in the absence of injured rival Carlos Alcaraz, will start his bid for a maiden Roland Garros crown against French wildcard Clement Tabur, the world number 165. World number one Sinner is slated to meet big-hitting American fifth seed Ben Shelton in the quarter-finals. Daniil Medvedev is a possible semifinal opponent for the Italian. The Russian gave Sinner a rare scare in the Italian Open semis earlier this month before eventually succumbing in three sets. Djokovic will kick off his latest tilt at a record-breaking 25th Grand Slam title against home player Giovanni Mpetshi Perriard. Second seed Alexander Zverev is a potential semi-final opponent for Djokovic. The German has played Djokovic twice before at Roland Garros, suffering quarter-final defeats against the Serb in 2019 and last year. The stand-out first-round tie sees inform French number one Arthur Fils take on former champion Stan Wawrinka, featuring at the tournament for the last time before retirement.

By Aline Bannayan

AMMAN — With Jordan heading into a long break for Independence Day and Eid Al Adha holidays, celebrations and national pride are in high gear as the national football team regrouped on Thursday starting the countdown for the 2026 World Cup — the biggest sporting event of the game.

Stars playing abroad who have ended club duty have started to converge home to join teammates in their final phase of preparations for the World Cup opening on June 11 in Canada, the US and Mexico.

Currently World 63rd Jordan, whose squad is dubbed "Al Nashama", will leave home May 28 to play Switzerland on May 31 and Columbia on June 7 in two friendlies ahead of the World Cup Group J matches kicking off June 17 against soccer greats and reigning world champions Argentina ranked FIFA 3rd, Algeria 28th and Austria 24th.

Jordan's Moroccan Coach Jamal Sellami announced the lineup that will be finalised next week dropping four more players by May 30. Faced with the absences of key players including star striker Yazan Nue'imat and Adham Qurashi, both recuperating from ACL surgery, Mousa Ta'mari, Yazan Al Arab and Ali Alwan, lead the pack together with the return of team captain Ehsan Haddad who has been out for the season. Others on the latest injury list include Isam Smeiri, who excelled in the Arab Cup as well as Tamer Bani Odeh who plays in the UK.

Other key absentees not



Yazan Nue'imat, Adham Qurashi, Isam Smeiri, Tamer Bani Odeh — key players missing the Jordan lineup for the World Cup

recalled include Yousef Abu Jalboush "Sisa", whose team Hussein captured the League, Cup and Super Cup; Baha'a Faisal who made a return to the squad after over 4 years of absence in the March regroup, as well as Jordan league top scorer Faisali's Ahmad Ersan, among others. Sellami opted for younger players like Ibrahim Sabra, Ali Azaizeh, Odeh Fakhoury, Mohammad Abu Gosh and Yousef Oashi teaming up with Mohammad Abu Zreiq "Sharara" as the average age of the national team has been significantly reduced to include a younger lineup to serve the team for the future.

Despite the difficulty of

Jordan's group, Sellami, a World Cup player with Morocco at France 1998, believes his side are capable of making a strong impression. In an exclusive interview with FIFA, the Jordan coach reflected on the emotions of qualification. He noted, although as a coach he was part of the accomplishment in this historic achievement, he underlined "my feelings were relief and happiness... I got the national team and the Jordanian people to feel pride and turning this dream to a reality". FIFA further quoted Sellami "Participating in the World Cup is a major accomplishment in itself. It's an opportunity for any player, for any coach, and

for any country, to show their personality, culture and ambition. Being at the World Cup is an opportunity for us to show that we qualified from Asia, and that we deserve to showcase Jordanian football."

In the past few months in their World Cup preparations agenda, Jordan held Nigeria and Costa Rica 2-2 friendlies in March. Earlier, they held Russia 0-0, beat the Dominican Republic 3-0, lost 1-0 to Bolivia and 4-2 to Albania, held Mali 0-0, and lost to 7-time World Cup qualifiers Tunisia 3-2. Since 1986, Jordan participated in the World Cup qualifiers 7 times. They nearly qualified to the 2014 World Cup and



Moroccan Coach Jamal Sellami leads Jordan's squad at the 2026 World Cup

played then FIFA 6th ranked Uruguay in an intercontinental qualifying tie before exiting. Round 3 was the furthest they reached in earlier editions. At look back at Jordan's past achievements saw their best ever FIFA ranking was 37th in 2004 after advancing to the Asian Cup quarterfinals and losing to eventual champs Japan. Jordan's World Cup qualification seems to have started with the 2023 Asian Cup, when

the team reached the final before losing to hosts Qatar. In December 2025, Jordan finished runner-up to eventual champions Morocco at the 2025 FIFA Arab Cup, despite missing many key players on the injury list or club duty. By finishing runner-up at the 2023 Asian Cup, followed by a historic first-time qualification to the 2026 edition of the World Cup, Jordan booked their spot in the next edition of the 2027 Asian Cup as well.

SpaceX, the sprawling company targeting the stars, Mars and an IPO

By Maggy Donaldson
Agence France-Presse

NEW YORK — Elon Musk founded SpaceX in 2002 with the lofty goal of ferrying humans to Mars and colonising Earth's neighboring planet.

Today the company is sprawling, a dominant force in the commercial space industry that is contracting with NASA in a bid to send a crewed mission to the Moon.

It's also behind the satellite Internet business Starlink, the enterprise's financial engine. Its reusable rocket technology has reduced the cost of launching payloads to orbit.

The company is developing its mammoth Starship rocket — which has a test launch slated for as soon as Thursday — for Moon exploration and the much grander aim of taking humans to Mars, though it must demonstrate significantly more progress before either of those ambitions come to fruition.

Earlier this year, Musk merged his company xAI into SpaceX and is now racing to build out space data centers.

And now the world's richest man has laid out plans to US regulators in



A SpaceX Falcon Heavy rocket carrying the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's weather satellite Geostationary Operational Environmental Satellite U lifts off from Launch Complex 39A at NASA's Kennedy Space Centre, Florida, June 25, 2024

what could become the largest initial public offering in history, as the company seeks to raise up to \$75 billion in the stock market.

Musk, the South African-born serial entrepreneur, founded SpaceX when he was 30 years old.

His venture followed the sale of his dot-com business Zip2, after which he founded the online payments company that merged into the entity that would become PayPal, which eBay later acquired.

He found himself flush with cash and disappointed that NASA didn't have a Mars mission on deck.

In an effort meant in part to excite the public about space travel, Musk developed a plan to send seeds in a glass-enclosed greenhouse to the surface of Mars and grow plants, but was thwarted in his bid to find a means to send it there.

So he founded a rocket company. The early days were rife with failure and the operation hemorrhaged money.

In 2008, SpaceX finally got the Falcon 1 off the ground.

The company eventually created partially reusable rockets and landed contracts including with

NASA.

The Falcon 9 rocket became the company's workhorse, and has carried out hundreds of missions.

The company's next milestone was space station delivery: Its Dragon spacecraft reached the International Space Station in 2012, later becoming the first private space-flight company to send a crew to space.

And the enormous Starship rocket is under development with the ambitious goal of becoming the first reusable orbital rocket, with an upper stage that could carry both crew and cargo.

If completed as de-

signed, it would require complicated and still unproven in-orbit refueling.

SpaceX is under contract with NASA to produce a modified variant of Starship that would serve as a human landing system.

The company is poised to complete its 12th Starship test on Thursday, the debut mission of its third-generation model.

And ultimately, colonizing Mars is still the SpaceX dream.

The company is not afraid of breezing past deadlines. It's also used to fiery explosions, which several of its Starship test flights have ended in.

Yet SpaceX's "fail fast, learn fast" ethos has helped it become the world's dominant launch services provider.

But with a blockbuster IPO and a lucrative commitment to NASA to deliver on, astronautics expert G. Scott Hubbard said the ante is up.

"I think swashbuckling, you know 'move fast and break things', has kind of come out of favour," the physicist told AFP.

It's one thing when "you're not risking anybody's life" with space-flight and "you're doing it on your own nickel, more or less," he said.



Children chase pigeons as they play on the seaside promenade in the southern Lebanese coastal city of Tyre on April 21

'Their story is our story': Pigeons and humans, 3,500 years together

By Frederic Bourigault
Agence France-Presse

PARIS, France — They have been our meat and our messengers, a source of fertiliser and a religious symbol: While pigeons are now mostly reviled as dirty city pests, they long played an important role in human society.

Now, research published on Thursday has revealed that the humble birds were first domesticated 3,500 years ago, meaning they have been enmeshed in our lives for nearly a millennium longer than previously thought.


"Humans forgetting about pigeons happened relatively recently in human history," Anderson Carter, a bioarchaeologist at the University of Groningen in The Netherlands, told AFP.

Pigeons were still a useful part of society as recently as the 19th and 20th centuries, explained the lead author of a new study in the journal *Antiquity*.


"They were still being used to carry messages and even had an important role in wars in particular," she added.


"But then a lot of technological advancements happened, the telegraph was invented and then the telephone, and pigeons were out of a job". However, because we had spent thousands of years conditioning them to live alongside us, the birds stayed nearby.

It was only when huge cities emerged after the industrial revolution that "there was a rising view that they were pests, dirty and spreading diseases", Carter said. Now, "anti-pigeon architecture such as spikes on top of buildings" are a common sight, she added. The common pigeon — or rock dove — originally came from the Mediterranean region. Genomic analysis has shown that today's city-dwellers are closely related to wild doves from the Middle East. For the new research, a Dutch-led team of scientists went to the Hala Sultan Tekke archaeological site on the shores of the Lamaca salt lake in southeast Cyprus.



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