Published by the Jordan Press Foundation
www.jordantimes.com
THE JORDAN TIMES
500 Fils
Volume 49 | Number 15211

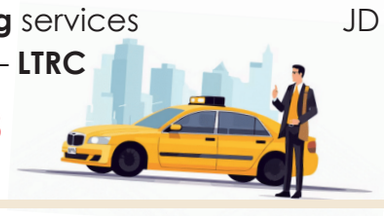
INTERVIEW 2

Jordan seeks to **position national** narrative as global **cultural** message — **minister**

TRANSPORTATION

Around **1.5 million passengers** use **taxis**, ride-**hailing** services daily — **LTRC**

3



GROWTH

313 **investor** cards issued, 92 **projects** launches with JD106m in **investments** in Q1 **2026**

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Happy Holiday

The **Jordan Times** Wishes you a Happy **Independence Day** and **Eid Al Adha**. The Newspaper will not publish until **Sunday** May, 31

Sunday, May 24, 2026 | Dhu al-Hajja 7, 1447 Hijri

Prime Ministry photo

Prime Minister Jafar Hassan inaugurates on Saturday the Dead Sea Corniche and tourist beach projects

Prime minister inaugurates Dead Sea Corniche, tourist beach projects

AMMAN (JT) — Prime Minister Jafar Hassan on Saturday inaugurated the Dead Sea Corniche and tourist beach projects, marking the Kingdom's 80th Independence Day, according to a Prime Ministry statement.

Spanning an area of approximately 600 dunnums, the Corniche development project is part of a series of recreational and walkway projects designed to offer high-standard, diverse tourism options and alternatives for domestic tourists and citizens visiting the Dead Sea area.

The Dead Sea Corniche features a 1.2 kilometre-long walkway, a dedicated cycling track, family seating areas, zones designated for sports and entertainment activities, children's playgrounds and an outdoor theatre with a capacity to host around 2,500 people for cultural and artistic events, the statememnt said.

The site also includes landscaped green spaces, comprehensive service facilities and parking lots capable of accommodating over 1,200 vehicles.

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Crown Prince, Princess Rajwa visit industrial, vocational training centres in Germany

AMMAN (JT) — Their Royal Highnesses Crown Prince Hussein and Princess Rajwa on Friday visited the ABB Training Centre, one of the largest industrial and vocational training centres in Berlin, Germany.

The Crown Prince commended the excellence of the German model in technical and vocational education and training, emphasising the need for an exchange of expertise between the centre and Jordanian institutions, according to a Royal Court statement.

His Royal Highness highlighted the importance of leveraging the expertise gained from the exchange of knowledge between the two countries for the implementation of strategic national projects, such as the National Water Conveyance Project and railway projects, which require qualified and skilled personnel.

During the visit, Their Royal Highnesses were briefed on the centre and the key vocational training programmes it offers, including robotics, automation and digitalisation.

Their Royal Highnesses toured the centre's facilities, which include industrial production lines that enable trainees to simulate production processes and acquire advanced technical skills, the statement said.

Their Royal Highnesses also visited a number of the centre's workshops and heard from students about their experience with technical and vocational education and training.

Germany's Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development Reem Alabali Radovan, Director of the Office of the Crown Prince Zaid Baqain and Jordan's Ambassador to Germany Fayez Khouri accompanied Their Royal Highnesses on the visit.

Photo courtesy of Royal Court

HRH Crown Prince Hussein and HRH Princess Rajwa Hussein visit the ABB Training Centre in Berlin on Friday

Jordan condemns repeated Al Aqsa stormings by Israeli extremists, urges firm int'l action

AMMAN (JT) — The Ministry of Foreign Affairs condemned continued incursions by Israeli extremists into Al Aqsa Mosque/Al Haram Al Sharif, describing them as "provocative" and a violation of international law.

In a statement on Friday, the ministry denounced attempts by Israeli extremists to bring sacrificial offerings into one of the Al Aqsa Compound's courtyards, calling the act a "desecration of the holy site and an unacceptable reckless act".

It stressed that Israel has no sovereignty over Al Aqsa Mosque/Al Haram Al Sharif.

Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Fouad Majali voiced Jordan's rejection of the repeated incursions and provocative practices, describing them as a "flagrant violation" of the historical and legal status quo in Jerusalem and its holy sites.

Majali said Israel, as the occupying power, is attempting to impose new realities aimed at dividing the compound "temporally and spatially".

He also warned of the consequences of continued "illegal and provocative violations" targeting Islamic and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem, urging the international community to take a firm stance and pressure Israel to halt its "ongoing unlawful practices".

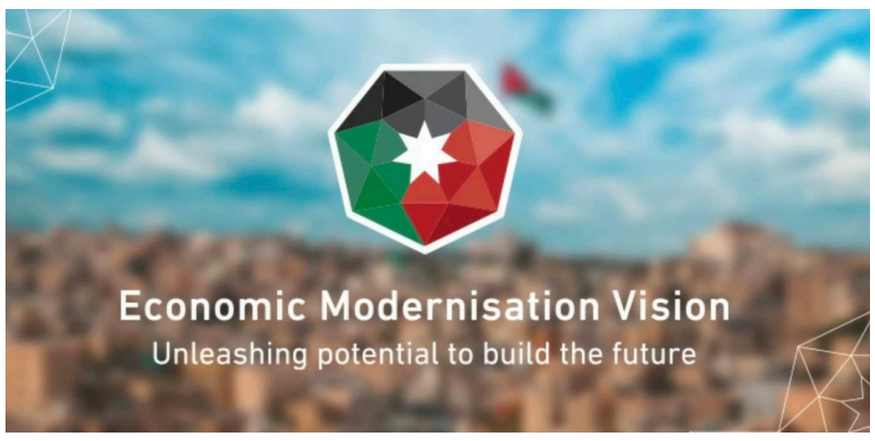
The spokesperson said the violations reflected policies of Israel's "extremist government" aimed at escalating tensions and continuing unilateral measures in the occupied West Bank.

He reiterated Jordan's position that the entire 144 dunnum Al Aqsa Mosque Compound is an exclusive place of worship for Muslims.

He added that the Jerusalem Awqaf Department, which operates under Jordan's Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, remains the sole legal authority responsible for administering the site and regulating access to it.

AFP Photo

The Dome of the Rock shrine is lit up at dusk at the Al Aqsa Mosque Compound in East Jerusalem, March 21, 2023



Jordan attracts JD1.43 billion in Foreign Investment in 2025 — report

AMMAN (JT) — Foreign direct investment inflows into Jordan reached around JD1.43 billion in 2025, according to the executive programme report for the Economic Modernisation Vision (2026–2029), which highlighted significant progress in the investment sector during the first quarter of 2026.

The report, cited by Al Mamlaka, showed that the cumulative satisfaction index for the investment environment stood at 45.4 per cent, reflecting ongoing efforts to improve services and attract investors.

During 2025, the Ministry of Investment processed 7,568 transactions related to investment incentives and facilities and engaged with 628 companies and investors, besides issuing 4,203 investor cards across categories A, B and C to investors and their family members.

Continued on page 5

Israel hits Lebanon as Hizbollah says Iran won't abandon group

BEIRUT, Lebanon (AFP) — Israel struck south Lebanon on Saturday despite a ceasefire as Hizbollah said its backer Tehran had pledged not to abandon the group.

Hizbollah said its chief Naim Qassem had received a message from Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, saying the latest proposal through Pakistani mediators aimed ending the regional war emphasised "the demand to include Lebanon" in the broader ceasefire.

Lebanese authorities, however, have insisted the country's ongoing talks with Israel under US auspices must be independent from the Iran-US negotiations.

AFP photo

Smoke rises from the site of an Israeli strike that targeted an area in the southern Lebanon coastal city of Tyre on Saturday

Israel's military has been pounding Lebanon despite an April 17 ceasefire in the country announced by US President Donald Trump, and which was recently extended for several weeks.

Hizbollah has also kept up attacks on Israeli targets in south Lebanon and in northern Israel, including targeting Israeli air defence platforms across the border on Saturday.

The group said Araghchi's message indicated Iran "will not give up its support" for Hizbollah.

Lebanon's state-run National News Agency (NNA) reported Israeli airstrikes on multiple south Lebanon locations, some after Israel issued evacuation warnings to around 15 villages.

Lebanon's military said one strike targeted an army barracks in the city of Nabatieh, wounding a soldier.

Continued on page 5

AFP photo

Palestinians make their way through makeshift shelters in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip on May 21

UN warns Gaza recovery efforts hindered by aid restrictions, collapse of services

By Osama Alkafri

AMMAN — Seven months after the October 2025 ceasefire, Gaza remains trapped in a worsening humanitarian crisis marked by collapsing healthcare services, mass displacement and severe shortages of essential supplies.

Although large-scale violence has declined, shortages of medical supplies, widespread displacement, and collapsing infrastructure continue to threaten the lives of civilians across the Strip, according to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in its Humanitarian Situation Report issued on May 15.

The report said that living conditions in Gaza remain dire, with the majority of the population still displaced and exposed to mounting health and environmental risks.

Reports of attacks striking residential areas also continue, while most residents are sheltering in overcrowded tents or damaged buildings.

World Health Organisation (WHO) Representative in the Occupied Palestinian Territory Renee Van de Weerdt recently returned from Gaza and delivered a briefing at the UN in Geneva on Friday.

"Nothing prepares you for Gaza," she said, describing the scale of devastation witnessed across the strip.

Despite the ceasefire, violence has not fully subsided. According to WHO figures cited during the briefing, at least 880 Palestinians have been killed and more than 2,600 injured since October 2025.

Gaza's healthcare system remains on the brink of collapse. Barely half of the territory's hospitals are partially functional, while none are operating at full capacity.

Attacks on healthcare facilities continue, alongside severe shortages of medicines, laboratory equipment, oxygen concentrators, reagents, and orthopaedic supplies, WHO added.

Van de Weerdt stressed that many of the blocked items are not "dual-use" materials but essential medical supplies included on WHO's international lists.

She warned that without laboratory reagents, detecting outbreaks of diseases such as hantavirus becomes increasingly difficult amid overcrowding, rodent infestations, poor sanitation and limited access to clean water.

Meanwhile, rehabilitation needs continue to grow. WHO estimates that more than 43,000 people in Gaza, including thousands of children, have suffered life-changing injuries such as amputations, spinal cord damage, severe burns and traumatic brain injuries.

> Around 5,000 amputees are still awaiting prosthetics and corrective surgeries...

Around 5,000 amputees are still awaiting prosthetics and corrective surgeries, services that remain largely unavailable inside the enclave. Many patients also face lengthy delays in obtaining medical evacuation permits.

UNRWA, which provided roughly 40 per cent of medical consultations in Gaza before the war, is also facing major operational challenges.

Director of Health at UNRWA Akihiro Seita told the UN briefing that Israeli restrictions have significantly affected the agency's ability to import medicines and medical equipment.

Nearly 400 UNRWA staff members were killed during the war, while many surviving employees are themselves living in tents and under extremely difficult conditions.

"One staff member told me: 'I feel like I've become an orphan of the world,'" Seita said during the briefing.

Beyond the healthcare crisis, OCHA warned that Gaza's sewage systems are deteriorating due to shortages of fuel, oil, and spare parts, increasing the risk of flooding and disease outbreaks.

Although humanitarian agencies continue to distribute food assistance to hundreds of thousands of people daily, funding shortages and access restrictions continue to hamper relief operations.

Humanitarian aid deliveries also face significant bottlenecks.

In early May 2026, only around half of aid trucks arriving from Egypt were able to offload successfully at Israeli-controlled crossings, according to OCHA. While some commercial goods have entered Gaza, many critical humanitarian supplies remain restricted.

The long-term scale of destruction remains staggering. A joint Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment released in April 2026 by the European Union, the UN, and the World Bank estimated that Gaza will require $71.4 billion for recovery and reconstruction over the coming decade.

The assessment warned that human development indicators in the Strip have regressed by decades.

UN officials have repeatedly warned that delays in implementing recovery and transition plans risk trapping Gaza in a prolonged state of instability.

International agencies continue to call for unimpeded humanitarian access, protection for civilians and aid workers, the removal of unnecessary import restrictions and Palestinian-led recovery efforts.

As summer temperatures rise and the threat of disease outbreaks grows, humanitarian organisations warn that the window for meaningful intervention is narrowing.

While the ceasefire brought an end to the most intense phase of the fighting, UN agencies stress that lasting recovery will require sustained humanitarian access, adequate funding, and long-term reconstruction efforts.

INTERVIEW

Jordan seeks to position national narrative as global cultural message — minister

Rawashdeh says technology, digital platforms central to preserving Jordan's historical, cultural story

By Mai Anati

Photo by Ahmad Khlaifat

Minister of Culture Mustafa Rawashdeh speaks to The Jordan Times, during an interview conducted by journalist Mai Anati

AMMAN — Minister of Culture Mustafa Rawashdeh has said that the Kingdom is working to transform its national narrative into a global cultural message that reflects Jordan's historical, human and civilisational identity.

In an interview with The Jordan Times at the Royal Cultural Palace on Thursday, Rawashdeh said that the "Narrative of Land and People" project represents a major national effort aimed at documenting Jordan's story from prehistoric times to the present day.

He described Jordan's image as historically rooted in "civilisation, culture, beauty and humanity", stressing that the project seeks to preserve and communicate that legacy to future generations and international audiences.

"We are talking about documenting a Jordanian narrative that includes our stories, our values, our history and the story of land and people," Rawashdeh said.

He added that the ministry aims to translate the narrative into multiple languages to reach audiences worldwide.

"This land is the land of history, civilisation, culture and beauty, and it is Jordan," he said.

Rawashdeh also highlighted the ministry's efforts to strengthen cultural engagement through digital platforms and modern technologies.

He said that Jordan continues keeping pace with developments in technology, digital media and artificial intelligence to modernise cultural outreach and communication tools.

The minister noted that the Ministry of Culture is continuously updating its digital platforms and social media channels while integrating artificial intelligence into several cultural initiatives, including the national narrative project.

"We are addressing a new generation, a generation of the future," he said.

Rawashdeh stressed that the national narrative must reflect the language, concepts and priorities of younger generations.

"The narrative will not be presented in a traditional way or as an academic text," he explained. "It must speak to emotion and intellect at the same time."

Beyond digital outreach, Rawashdeh said the ministry is linking cultural programmes with local development through the "Culture Districts" initiative.

Under the programme, three districts are selected annually through a competitive process focused on cultural and developmental projects.

The minister said the initiative goes beyond festivals and artistic events to include long-term cultural infrastructure projects tied to local identity and economic empowerment.

He noted that several sculptures and murals representing the identity of local communities and historical heritage were implemented in previous projects.

Rawashdeh added that the initiative also supports handicrafts, mosaics, arts and small cultural industries to help generate economic opportunities for local families.

"We want the cultural sector to become part of the economic sector as well," he said.

The minister also described the upcoming 80th Independence Day celebrations as an important national moment linked directly to Jordan's broader national narrative.

"Independence is an important part of our Jordanian narrative and one of the central chapters of our national story," Rawashdeh said.

He stressed that Jordan's cultural message to the world remains centred on humanity, diversity, creativity and openness.

Rawashdeh pointed to events such as the Jerash Festival as evidence of Jordan's role as a regional and international hub for culture, arts and cultural dialogue.

Black Desert inscriptions reveal ancient voices and rich regional history

By Saeb Rawashdeh

Photo courtesy of Ali Manaser

Inscription written during the reign of Hisham b. Abd Al Malik, discovered in Wadi Shuwayti

AMMAN — Thousands of inscriptions from different historical periods can be detected in the Eastern Black Desert.

Inscriptions of people who lived in the Black Desert represent their voice, said Ali Manaser from the Hashemite University during a lecture titled "Insights from the Badia Epigraphic Survey [BES]: Preliminary Findings and Field Perspectives", held at American Centre of Research on Thursday.

These inscriptions and petroglyphs are tales of love, life and sadness, Manaser said, noting that most of them are short but very important for studying the regional past.

"Inscriptions are one of the oldest ways to transmit communication," said the professor, adding that they were tweets written on rocks for people of different eras.

It was a kind of ancient network covered not in digital code, but stones.

The area of Black Desert covers 40 square kilometres stretching from the south Syria to northern Saudi Arabia.

The major epigraphic project the Online Corpus of the Inscriptions of Ancient North Arabia [OCIANA] aims to help transform the knowledge of the history, languages and cultures of ancient Arabia by creating a digital corpus of all known Ancient North Arabian inscriptions in North and Central Arabia, and elsewhere.

"For each inscription, it provides a reading the text in roman transliteration, together with a translation in English, references to earlier readings, commentary where necessary, bibliography, and all known information about the inscription [provenance, relationship to other texts or to rock drawings and/or symbols, structures, etc.]," Manaser added.

The OCIANA team faced a setback that most images were without the GPS information, the scholar explained, adding that the OCIANA database is essential for understanding of the BES.

Images of game animals and horsemen are often depicted on stones and researchers operated in the four areas of the Black Desert. In one of them epigraphists discovered more than 5,000 images, Manaser said.

"A Syriac inscription was found and was dated to 11the century AD," he continued, adding that some early Islamic inscriptions from the Umayyad Period were also discovered.

These inscriptions are significant for studies of the early Arabic writing.

"In our data base we have almost 2000 inscriptions from the 13th century," Manaser highlighted, noting that most recent messages were written as well by the local Bedouins.

Scholars also found a grave when they cleaned the area, discovering a human skeleton and at the end the team was lucky to document the damage of the inscriptions.

"Unfortunately, the desert is affected by the urban development, looting and agriculture," said Manaser, noting that locals use stones from ancient tombs as building material.

According to the scholar, two types of mosques were built in the desert, short and long term structures.

"Our main objective was to add inscriptions from the Black Desert to the World heritage list," Manaser underscored.

TOURISM

Petra welcomes over 155,000 tourists in four months

AMMAN (JT) — A total of 155,855 tourists visited Petra in the first four months of 2026, with most of them being non-Arabs, according to official figures.

The figures, cited by Al Mamlaka TV on Saturday, showed that there were 119,043 non-Arab visitors, 29,218 Jordanian visitors, and 7,594 non-Jordanian Arabs to the rose-red city.

During the same period of 2025, Petra welcomed 161,006 visitors, including 122,821 non-Arabs, 27,480 Jordanians and 10,705 non-Jordanian Arabs.

Comparing the two periods shows that the total number of visitors dropped by 3.2 per cent, which is a decrease of 5,151 tourists.

Previous statistics from the Petra Development and Tourism Region Authority (PDTRA) showed that Petra had 582,550 total visitors in 2025, which marked a 27 per cent increase compared to 2024, which recorded 457,215 visitors.

According to the PDTRA website, Petra is one of the most important archaeological sites in the world and one of the New Seven Wonders of the World. Located in southern Jordan, it is famous for its unique architecture carved entirely into pink rocks, earning it the name "the rose-red city".

The Nabataeans, a "powerful" Arab people with wide regional influence, established the city and lived there from the fourth century BC until the second century AD.

Petra stands out because its main structures, including royal tombs, massive facades, temples and the famous Treasury, were carved directly into sandstone mountains.

This design highlights incredible engineering skills and a unique ability to turn nature into a complete city.

File photo

A total of 155,855 tourists visit Petra in the first four months of 2026, with most of them being non-Arabs

Crown Prince meets with Germany minister for economic cooperation, development

AMMAN (JT) — HRH Crown Prince Hussein, during a meeting with Germany's Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development Reem Alabali Radovan in Berlin on Friday, expressed Jordan's appreciation for the strong partnership with Germany in the fields of economic and humanitarian development.

The Crown Prince emphasised Jordan's interest in increasing the exchange of expertise with Germany, in order to benefit from its advanced experience in vocational and technical training, according to a Royal Court statement.

His Royal Highness highlighted the importance of Germany's participation in the Jordan-EU Investment Conference, scheduled to take place in Jordan at the end of this year.

The Crown Prince expressed appreciation for Germany's support to a number of national projects across various fields, foremost among which are the National Water Conveyance Project and advanced technical education.

His Royal Highness also commended Germany's humanitarian efforts and support for refugee affairs in the region, noting Jordan's readiness to continue cooperating with Germany in this regard, the statement said.

Director of the Office of the Crown Prince Zaid Baqain and Jordan's Ambassador to Germany Fayez Khouri attended the meeting.

Photo courtesy of Royal Court

HRH Crown Prince Hussein meets with Germany's Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development Reem Alabali Radovan in Berlin on Friday

Foreign minister, Kuwaiti, Qatari counterparts discuss cooperation, regional developments

AMMAN (JT) — Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates Ayman Safadi on Saturday received a phone call from Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al Ahmad Al Sabah.

During the call, the two ministers discussed the latest regional developments, ongoing efforts to de-escalate tensions, and ways to strengthen regional and international security and stability.

Ayman Safadi

Sheikh Mohammed Bin Abdulrahman Al Thani

Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al Ahmad Al Sabah

The ministers also stressed the importance of the success of current mediation efforts aimed at ending the crisis and reaching a comprehensive solution that addresses the root causes of tension, ensuring lasting peace and stability in the region.

Safadi and Sheikh Jarrah also discussed prospects for enhancing bilateral cooperation between the two brotherly countries.

Also on Friday, Safadi received a phone call from Qatar's Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed Bin Abdulrahman Al Thani.

The two ministers discussed ways to enhance cooperation between Jordan and Qatar, reviewed regional developments, and examined Pakistani mediation efforts between the US and Iran.

Safadi and Sheikh Mohammed reiterated the continuation of coordinated efforts to support mediation aimed at ending de-escalation in the region and restoring security and stability.

The two ministers also stressed the necessity of concerted action to ensure the success of mediation efforts to reach a sustainable solution that addresses the root causes of the crisis and prevents renewed escalation.

AT A GLANCE

JHCO distributes Eid clothing to displaced families in Gaza

AMMAN (JT) — The Jordanian Campaign, an initiative launched by the Jordan Hashemite Charity Organisation (JHCO), distributed clothing to displaced families and children in the Al Mawasi area in southern Gaza as part of efforts to ease humanitarian suffering ahead of Eid Al Adha. Hundreds of beneficiaries received clothing through an organised distribution process that prioritised the most vulnerable families to ensure aid reached those in greatest need, according to JHCO statement. Campaign organisers said the initiative forms part of JHCO's ongoing humanitarian and relief efforts in the Gaza Strip, where the organisation continues to implement projects aimed at supporting displaced people and helping them preserve dignified living conditions amid the ongoing crisis. Beneficiaries expressed appreciation for Jordan's continued support for the Palestinian people, praising the humanitarian initiative for bringing relief and joy to children and families during difficult circumstances.

Jordan expresses condolences to Morocco over building collapse victims

AMMAN (JT) — The Foreign Ministry on Friday expressed its deepest condolences and sympathy to the government and people of Morocco over the victims of a residential building collapse in the city of Fez. Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Fouad Majali affirmed the Kingdom's full solidarity with the government and people of Morocco, according to a ministry statement. Majali extended sincere condolences to the families of the victims, wishing the injured a speedy recovery.

Around 1.5 million passengers use taxis, ride-hailing services daily — LTRC

AMMAN (JT) — Around 1.5 million passengers in the Kingdom use yellow taxis and smart ride-hailing applications on a daily basis, Land Transport Regulatory Commission (LTRC) Director General Riyad Kharabsheh said on Friday.

In remarks to Al Mamlaka TV, Kharabsheh said the ride-hailing sector includes around 60,000 vehicles, each completing an estimated 20 to 30 trips per day.

He noted that Jordan has about 18,000 traditional yellow taxis, while the number of active ride-hailing vehicles is estimated to range between 36,000 and 54,000.

He said this aligns with global trends, where app-based transport services typically outnumber conventional taxis by two to three times.

Kharabsheh added that five ride-hailing applications have been officially licensed, while around 20 other companies have submitted applications and received preliminary approvals.

Under current regulations, companies are granted a six-month grace period to complete regulatory, technical and operational requirements before obtaining final licences.

> He added that some unlicensed drivers are being given opportunities to regularise their status...

Those that fail to comply within the deadline are considered unlicensed, he said, noting that the sector is currently in a transitional phase toward full regulation.

He also addressed price disparities between licensed and unlicensed applications, saying the gap was previously wider when the number of drivers was limited, but has since narrowed significantly as the number of licensed drivers has risen to about 16,000.

Kharabsheh said obtaining legal permits for ride-hailing services now takes only a few days, helping to further stabilise market prices.

He added that some unlicensed drivers are being given opportunities to regularise their status, with regulatory committees issuing notices or requiring pledges for first-time violations to encourage compliance.

Meanwhile, the LTRC has issued 409 fines since the beginning of the year against vehicles operating in violation of transport regulations, according to LTRC Spokesperson Abla Washah.

Efforts ongoing to strengthen media independence, modernise legislation — Momani

Minister says Kingdom advancing media freedom, digital transformation, information literacy initiatives

By Ahmad Khatatneh

AMMAN — Minister of Government Communication Mohammad Momani on Saturday highlighted government's continued efforts to strengthen media independence, modernise legislation, and expand its digital and institutional capacities.

In remarks to The Jordan Times marking the 80th anniversary of the Kingdom's independence, Momani extended congratulations to His Majesty King Abdullah, HRH Crown Prince Hussein and Jordanians, stressing that the occasion reflects national progress across various sectors, including media.

"His Majesty has always given attention to the media sector and to protecting Jordanians' right to express themselves in different ways, which reflects ongoing Royal support for the sector and its role," he said.

Momani, who is also the Government spokesperson, said that Jordan continues to protect the independence of media institutions, noting that this has had a direct and positive impact on the media landscape in both the public and private sectors.

He also highlighted ongoing efforts to modernise legislation related to the sector, which have contributed to expanding the number and diversity of licensed media institutions.

He also pointed to improvements in Jordan's ranking in various media freedom indices, saying this reflects the Kingdom's continued focus on strengthening the independence and resilience of the sector.

The minister noted continued work on building the capacity of human resources in media institutions across both public and private sectors, as well as emphasising the digitisation of the media sector, including print newspapers and major media outlets.

Mohammad Momani

Momani also highlighted initiatives led by the Ministry of Government Communication in cooperation with other institutions, particularly media and information literacy projects aimed at countering misinformation and disinformation.

"This is the strategic solution to increasing social awareness regarding misinformation and disinformation and protecting society from these challenges," he said.

He also said that Jordan is ranked third in UNESCO's media and information literacy scenarios and is approaching the fourth level, which he described as the highest.

Momani also said the ministry continues to support spokespersons in various ministries and institutions by developing their capacities, noting the importance of equipping them with different skill sets to engage with the media at various levels.

He stressed that Jordan views strong, independent, and credible media as a key tool in combating rumours and false information, adding that this aligns with citizens' rights to access accurate information and is an essential component of human rights.

Clothing prices to remain stable during Eid season — syndicate

AMMAN (JT) — President of the Textile, Readymade Clothes and Footwear Syndicate Sultan Allan said on Friday that local markets are not expected to witness price increases during the Eid season, attributing stable prices to strong competition among traders that helps keep goods affordable for consumers.

Speaking to Al Mamlaka TV, Allan described commercial activity ahead of Eid Al Adha as ranging from moderate to weak, though he noted that market movement began to improve midweek following the disbursement of salaries.

He expressed hope that the final week before Eid would provide a stronger boost to sales, noting that the holiday season accounts for around 15 per cent of the sector's annual sales.

On e-commerce, Allan said its expansion over the past 15 years has largely been driven by tax disparities between local traditional trade and international online shopping platforms.

While he described the taxation of online commerce as a positive step, Allan said it remains insufficient to ensure fair competition, stressing that local traders continue to face an uneven playing field despite many adopting online platforms and delivery services.

He added that regional political conditions have caused air shipment costs to surge by 300 to 400 per cent, narrowing the price gap between international online retailers and local markets.

Allan advised consumers to compare prices carefully before purchasing from foreign websites, noting that international postal shipments are not subjected to the same strict laboratory quality inspections imposed on locally imported goods.

He also urged the government to reduce taxes, particularly sales tax, instead of imposing additional financial burdens on traders, arguing that weaker consumer purchasing power continues to weigh on the market.

According to Allan, temporary tax reductions during major shopping seasons could have stimulated commercial activity, especially amid ongoing regional geopolitical challenges.

He added that the syndicate monitors all clothing outlets, including branded stores, outlet shops and second-hand retailers.

Allan said the overall performance of the Eid season will only become clear after the holiday concludes.

Cassation Court upholds over 3-year sentence for drug dealer

By Rana Husseini

AMMAN — The Court of Cassation has upheld a June 2022 State Security Court (SSC) ruling, sentencing a drug dealer to over three years in prison after convicting him of possessing illegal narcotics in Balqa Governorate in January 2022.

The court declared the defendant guilty of obtaining illegal narcotics with the intent of selling the drugs to an undercover agent in Ein Basha area on Jan. 20.

The SSC handed the defendant five years in prison for the offence of possessing illegal narcotics and ordered him to pay JD5,000 in fines.

However, the court decided to reduce the fine to JD3,500 and the prison term to three years and four months in prison to give the defendant a second chance in life.

Court documents said the Anti-Narcotics Department (AND) learnt the defendant was in possession of illegal narcotics and sent one of its agents to pose as a buyer.

"The AND agent got in touch with the defendant and asked him for Hashish powder in return for JD10," court documents said.

When the two met, AND agents immediately arrested the suspect, court papers added.

> 'The AND agent got in touch with the defendant and asked him for Hashish powder in return for JD10'

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

Meanwhile, the SSC prosecution office asked the higher court to uphold the sentence and the fine imposed on the defendant.

The higher court maintained that the SSC had followed the proper procedures in issuing the sentence against the defendant.

"It was clear to the court that the defendant confessed willingly to possessing the illegal drugs to sell in the local market," the higher court said.

The Court of Cassation judges were Mohammad Ibrahim, Yassin Abdullat, Nayef Samarat, Mohammad Khashashneh and Hammad Ghzawi.

AFP photo

A general view of rescue team members and emergency vehicles arriving at the Liushenyu coal mine after a gas explosion in Changzhi, in northern China's Shanxi province on Saturday

Eight dead, dozens trapped in China coal mine blast

BEIJING (AFP) — At least eight people have died and dozens are trapped underground after a gas explosion at a coal mine in northern China, state media reported on Saturday.

The blast occurred at 7:29pm on Friday at the Liushenyu coal mine in Shanxi province, according to state news agency Xinhua.

A total of 247 workers were underground at the time, of whom 201 had been brought to the surface safely as of 6:00am on Saturday, Xinhua said.

Eight people have been confirmed dead, while 38 remain trapped underground, the agency reported, citing local emergency management authorities.

President Xi Jinping urged "all-out efforts" to treat the injured and called for thorough investigations into the incident, Xinhua said.

He "emphasised that all regions and departments must draw lessons from this accident, remain constantly vigilant regarding workplace safety... and resolutely prevent and curb the occurrence of major and catastrophic accidents".

Rescue efforts were ongoing, Xinhua said.

Xinhua reported earlier that levels of carbon monoxide, a highly toxic, odourless gas, had "exceeded limits" at the mine.

Some of those trapped underground were in "critical condition", the earlier report said.

Shanxi, one of China's poorer provinces, is the country's coal-mining capital.

Mine safety in the country has improved in recent decades, but accidents still occur frequently in an industry where safety protocols are often lax.

China is the world's top consumer of coal and the largest greenhouse gas emitter, despite installing renewable energy capacity at record speed.

Pakistan PM arrives for China visit overshadowed by Iran war

BEIJING (AFP) — Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif arrived in China on Saturday, Chinese state media said, kicking off a four-day trip overshadowed by the Iran war.

The Chinese foreign ministry has yet to confirm whether the pair will discuss the conflict in the Middle East, which Islamabad and Beijing have both sought to mediate in.

US President Donald Trump has described the stop-start negotiations with Iran as teetering on the "borderline" between renewed attacks and a deal to end the war, which began with US-Israeli strikes on Iran in February and has engulfed the Middle East and roiled the global economy.

Sharif "arrived in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, on Saturday to begin a our-day official visit to China", state news agency Xinhua said, without elaborating.

Earlier in the week, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Guo Jiakun said only that "issues of common concern" would be discussed.

Guo has said that China would work with Pakistan to "make positive contributions to the early restoration of peace and stability in the Middle East".

"China supports Pakistan in playing a fair and balanced mediating role in promoting peace and ending the war," he said.

Pakistan has emerged as a central mediator between the United States and Iran, hosting historic face-to-face talks last month that failed to yield a lasting agreement.

Its army chief Field Marshal Asim Munir was due in Tehran on Thursday, Iranian media reported.

China has played a quieter role, shepherding phone calls and meetings with officials of affected Gulf countries.

After high-profile talks with Chinese President Xi Jinping in Beijing last week, Trump told Fox News the Chinese leader had offered Beijing's help to reopen the Strait of Hormuz , a key oil route largely blocked since the war erupted.

China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi urged Islamabad this month to "step up mediation efforts" in the Middle East, speaking to his Pakistani counterpart Ishaq Dar in a call.

In the past two weeks, Bejing has hosted visits from Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin.

AFP photo

In this handout picture provided by the Iranian presidency, Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian receives Pakistan's Army Chief Syed Asim Munir (centre-right) in Tehran on Saturday

Thousands ordered to evacuate around leaking California chemical tank

LOS ANGELES (AFP) — Tens of thousands of people were ordered to leave their homes in California on Friday after a huge chemical tank began leaking, with warnings it might blow up, sending toxic fumes over a heavily populated area.

The tank contained 7,000 gallons of methyl methacrylate, a volatile and flammable liquid used to make plastics, with firefighters warning the situation was looking grim.

"There are literally two options left," Incident Commander Craig Covey said.

"The tank fails and spills a total of about 6-7,000 gallons of very bad chemicals into the parking lot in that area or, two, the tank goes into a thermal runaway and blows up, affecting the tanks around them that have fuel or chemicals in them as well.

"We are setting up these evacuations in preparation for these two options: It fails, or it blows up.

"Please follow our requests and orders for evacuations," he emphasised.

The incident was unfolding in the Garden Grove area of Orange County, southeast of Los Angeles.

Garden Grove Police Chief Amir El Farra said about 40,000 people were affected by the evacuation order, with several thousand refusing to leave their homes.

Aerial footage filmed by local TV stations showed jets of water being sprayed at the tank, which has a capacity of 34,000 gallons.

'Best-case scenario'

Orange County Health Officer Regina Chinsio Kwong said the large exclusion zone around the tank was a necessary precaution.

"If it does explode and there is a vapor, you are all safe as long as you are out of the zone that was determined to be an evacuation zone," she said in a video update.

She appealled for anyone who might notice "a fruity and heavy smell" to alert authorities.

"Smelling it doesn't mean you've reached a level that causes symptoms. But we don't want you to smell that. So we need to know if you're smelling it."

No injuries had been reported by Friday afternoon and there was no immediate indication as to what caused the leak, which was initially reported on Thursday.

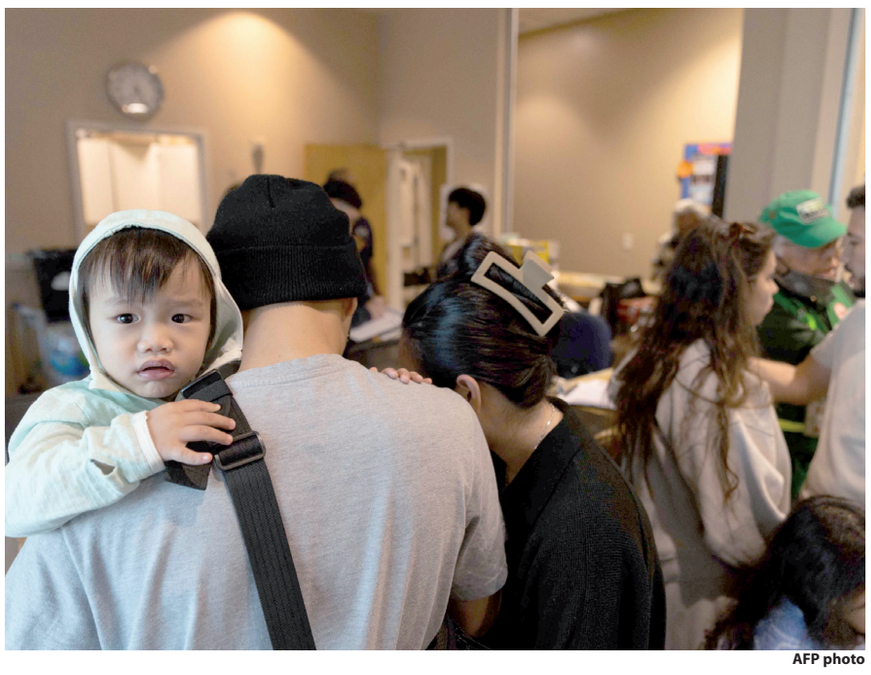
Covey said crews were preparing for a chemical spill, which he described as a "best-case scenario" and far preferable to an explosion and toxic plume.

Responders were working to put containment barriers in place to prevent any spilled material from reaching storm drains or river channels that funnel into the ocean.

The US Environmental Protection Agency says methyl methacrylate is irritating to the skin, eyes and mucous membranes in humans.

"Respiratory effects have been reported in humans following acute [short-term] and chronic [long-term] inhalation exposures," a fact sheet on the agency's website says.

"Neurological symptoms have also been reported in humans following acute exposure."



AFP photo

Evacuees check-in at a shelter after a chemical leak from a large storage tank threatened residents in Garden Grove, California on Friday

WHO members note Argentina's withdrawal letter

GENEVA (AFP) — The World Health Organisation's (WHO's) member states on Friday noted Argentina's notification of withdrawal from the UN agency and said they would always welcome full cooperation from Buenos Aires.

At the 79th annual World Health Assembly of member states, the WHO's decision-making body, countries had to consider Argentina's wish to follow the United States and leave the body.

The assembly considered several proposals regarding Argentina's withdrawal notification, and agreed a compromise text by consensus.

The assembly "noted" the communication received by UN chief Antonio Guterres on March 17, 2025 notifying him that Argentina withdraws from the WHO, "effective one year after the receipt of that letter".

The assembly "resolves that while the World Health Organisation will always welcome the Argentine Republic's full co-operation... it is not considered that any further action at this stage is desirable", the approved, brief resolution said.

Norway and Paraguay were the main drivers behind the compromise.

Buenos Aires was a minor contributor to the WHO's budget. The G20 country's membership fees for 2024 and 2025 were around $4.1 million a year.

A report by WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus in January recalled that in 1949-1950, seven member states — including the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria , issued notice saying they no longer considered themselves members.

When they resumed participation, the assembly decided they would pay a "token payment" for the period when their membership was inactive.

The resolution adopted Friday used exactly the same language as member states did in 1950.

Sigrid Kranawetter, the WHO's governing bodies director, said: "I don't like to use the word withdrawal because it's legally not correct".

The WHO is "not a social club" and "you don't stop your membership", Kranawetter said.

"There is no need for anyone who accepts the WHO constitution to withdraw from it, because you do not give up any part of your sovereignty when you accept the WHO constitution.

If you stop engaging, if you stop working, that is the prerogative of a sovereign state. You can do that any time."

She noted that with the recent hantavirus outbreak, "WHO is there to support", and had been "working with Argentina on hantavirus very closely".

In the assembly, China asked whether departing members could still participate in WHO frameworks.

"Global public health is a whole and cannot be divided; no country can stay out of it," its representative said.

The African group, represented by Sierra Leone, said it "regrets any development that diminishes WHO's universality and encourages continued dialogue with the member states concerned".

Argentina's neighbours Bolivia and Chile said they recognised and respected Buenos Aires' sovereign decision.

AFP photo

The WHO said the outbreak was a risk in the country and surrounding region but not worldwide

INCIDENT

New explosive drone crash in Latvia

WARSAW (AFP) — A new drone incident in Latvia — in which the errant flying device exploded when it crashed into a lake on Saturday — added to anxiety and political ructions in the Baltic country that borders Russia.

The drone came down in Lake Dridza, 15 kilometres from Latvia's border with Belarus, according to police, who recovered its remains after being alerted by locals.

Belarus is Russia's ally in Moscow's war against Ukraine.

Several Russian and Ukrainian drones have crashed in Latvia over the course of the Russia-Ukraine war, in which both sides have been using drone-jamming technology to send the devices off-course. Incidents have been multiplying in recent months.

Outgoing Prime Minister Evika Silina confirmed the latest crash on X, saying that she was awaiting "the most detailed information possible" on it.

The drone menace has cost Silina her job.

In early May, she sacked her defence minister after saying Latvia's anti-drone defences were not being deployed fast enough to track and bring down intruding drones.

Other members of the defence minister's party then resigned, bringing down her ruling coalition.

Latvia's president a week ago tapped an opposition lawmaker, Andris Kulbergs, to try to form a new government.

Tender Invitation

The General Headquarters of the Jordan Armed Forces/Royal Medical Services hereby announces Tender

P43/2026/1

(CAPSULE ENDOSCOPY)

Bidders who desire to participate therein can obtain a copy of the tender documentation against a fee of **75JD** non-refundable, provided that they bring along a valid trade licence.

Closing date sharp 1:00 P.M., SUN 21th of JUNE 2026. Non conditional bid bond equal to (**3%**) of the total value of quotation must be submitted along with the quotations.

Any quotations/offers will not be accepted after above mentioned closing date and sharp time.

(The winning bidder is responsible for paying advertisement fees, regardless how often the bid is announced.)

For more details please contact us at www.jrms.jaf.mil.jo

Tender Reinvitation

The General Headquarters of the Jordan Armed Forces/Royal Medical Services hereby announces Tender

P45/2026/A/4

(مستهلكات الأربطة والضمادات العامة)

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Closing date sharp 1:00 P.M., THU 11th of JUNE 2026. Non conditional bid bond equal to (**3%**) of the total value of quotation must be submitted along with the quotations.

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For more details please contact us at www.jrms.jaf.mil.jo

US mulls new strikes on Iran — US media reports

WASHINGTON (AFP) — The United States is weighing new military strikes on Iran, US media outlets reported on Friday.

The reports, from CBS and Axios, come just hours after US President Donald Trump said he would not travel to attend his son's wedding this weekend due to "circumstances pertaining to government" and his "love for the United States of America".

Trump said that it was "important for me to remain in Washington, D.C., at the White House during this important period of time".

Both Axios and CBS said that a final decision on new strikes hasn't been made.

Negotiations are said to be ongoing, with Pakistan , which is mediating between the US and Iran , sending its military chief to Tehran in an attempt to seal a deal.

The White House did not comment on the reports when AFP inquired about them.

CBS said that a White House spokesperson, Anna Kelly, told them that "the President has been clear about the consequences if Iran fails to make a deal".

The White House earlier on Friday announced a change in Trump's weekend plans, saying he would not travel to his New Jersey golf resort as planned but would stay in the US capital instead.

Returning from a trip to New York state where he gave a speech on Friday, Trump did not take questions from reporters who travel with him as he often does.

Axios reported , citing two unnamed sources , that Trump has "grown increasingly frustrated about the negotiations with Iran over the past several days".

Axios said that his position through the week had shifted from favoring diplomacy toward ordering a strike.

CBS reported, citing unnamed sources, that members of the US military and intelligence apparatus were cancelling holiday weekend plans in anticipation of possible strikes.

AFP photo

Vessels are seen off the coast of Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates on Thursday

Iran and US say could be close to talks breakthrough

TEHRAN (AFP) — Senior US and Iranian officials said on Saturday they could be close to a breakthrough in talks to strike a draft deal, while remaining cautious about the chances of ending the war in the Middle East.

US President Donald Trump told CBS in a phone interview the two sides were "getting a lot closer" to a deal, but also warned that if they do not reach an agreement "we're going to have a situation where no country will ever be hit as hard as they're about to be hit".

Iran said gaps remain between the parties, and the dispute over its nuclear programme would not be part of the initial talks, but that it was finalising a 14-point framework for a deal.

In a sign of the uncertainty surrounding the outcome of the talks, Trump also told another US outlet, Axios, on Saturday the chances of a deal were a "solid 50/50".

Iranian foreign ministry spokesman Esmaeil Baqaei noted what he called "a trend towards rapprochement", but said "it does not necessarily mean that we and the United States will reach an agreement on the important issues".

"Our intention was first to draft a memorandum of understanding, a kind of framework agreement composed of 14 clauses," he said on state television.

Baqaei added that he hoped the details of a final agreement could be worked out "within a reasonable timeframe between 30 to 60 days" after the framework is finalised.

'There is a chance'

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio also expressed optimism.

"There is a chance that, whether it's later today, tomorrow, in a couple days, we may have something to say," Rubio told reporters on Saturday in New Delhi, adding that he hoped he would soon be able to announce "good news".

Iran's chief negotiator Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf had warned earlier that Washington would face a tough response if it resumes hostilities, after US media reports raised the prospect of new strikes and Iranian officials accused the US side of making "excessive demands".

"Our armed forces have rebuilt themselves during the ceasefire period in such a way that if Trump commits another act of folly and restarts the war, it will certainly be more crushing and bitter for the United States than on the first day of the war," Ghalibaf said.

He issued the warning after meeting in Tehran with Pakistan's army chief Field Marshal Asim Munir, a leading figure in international efforts to negotiate an end to the war, which broke out after the United States and Israel attacked the Islamic republic on February 28.

Weeks of negotiations, including historic face-to-face talks hosted by Islamabad, have still not produced a permanent resolution or restored full access to the Strait of Hormuz, choking vast quantities of global oil supply.

'Neither war nor peace'

The impasse has left ordinary Iranians in limbo.

"The state of 'neither war nor peace' is far filthier than war itself," 39-year-old Tehran resident Shahrzad told AFP.

"I'm about to start a new job, and I'm scared war might break out again — that I'll end up leaving the job like before, running off to another city out of fear," she said.

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said in a call with UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres that Tehran was engaged despite "repeated betrayals of diplomacy and military aggression against Iran, along with contradictory positions and repeated excessive demands" by Washington.

Araghchi held a bevy of diplomatic calls, speaking with his counterparts from Turkey, Iraq, Qatar and Oman, Iran's official IRNA news agency said.

Tens of thousands rally in Serbian capital demanding elections

BELGRADE (AFP) — Tens of thousands of demonstrators massed in central Belgrade on Saturday to renew calls for early elections that grew out of the anti-corruption movement sparked by a deadly rail station disaster.

Since the station canopy collapse in November 2024 in Novi Sad, which killed 16 people, calls for a transparent investigation into what happened have snowballed into a push for early polls.

Yelling the movement's signature slogan, "The students are winning," to the din of drums and whistles, crowds streamed through the city to Slavija Square in the centre. Large banners hanging from trees, T-shirts, badges and stickers also bore the slogan.

The organisers had called for a rally between 6:00 pm (16:00 GMT) and 8:00 pm.

> 'And Serbia must be part of the democratic, European community'

"The goal of today's protest is for all of us to gather again and to make it clear to people that we are still here, that we are fighting and working, that we have not and will not stop," 24-year-old architecture student Andjela told AFP.

Some marchers carried Serbian flags or ones representing their university faculty, while others who had travelled from around the country held banners with the names of their towns.

Students in high-vis tops served as stewards while war veterans and bikers were also present to protect the crowd.

Police chief Dragan Vasiljevic told a news conference the force estimated the turnout at 34,000. No independent estimate was available.

"Today, a clear message is being sent," said another marcher, pensioner Zoran Savic.

"Change must come, Serbia must become a democratic state, the rule of law must be present for everyone, meaning the rule of law equally for everyone," he said.

"And Serbia must be part of the democratic, European community."

Election demand

The protests have not stopped since the Novi Sad disaster, with one demonstration in March 2025 bringing as many as 300,000 together.

The students leading the movement hope Saturday's demonstration will relaunch their campaign to push nationalist President Aleksandar Vucic to call early elections. Vucic, who regularly raises the issue, suggested on Thursday that they could take place in autumn.

While the protests have passed off peacefully for the most part, some have been marred by clashes in recent months, with several protesters saying they were attacked by masked government supporters.

"So far, we have had no significant or serious incidents," police chief Vasiljevic said early on Saturday evening.

"We hope that the remainder of this public gathering will proceed peacefully and safely, and that the dispersal at the end of the gathering will pass just as peacefully as the arrival."

On Friday, the Council of Europe's human rights commissioner warned that Serbia's rights situation had worsened, citing attacks on activists and journalists, shrinking civic space and alleged police abuses at protests.

"After a year and a half of protests, people have not given up and have not lost their strength," said Ivan Milosavljevic, a demonstrator who came from eastern Serbia.

"The strength of the protests can be seen in the number of people here today. We will continue until this anti-people regime is removed."

Prime minister inaugurates Dead Sea Corniche, tourist beach projects

Continued from page 1

During the inauguration, the prime minister directed officials to expedite the completion of additional sports courts within the corniche grounds to complement existing facilities, ensuring they are open to the public ahead of the summer season.

The Dead Sea tourist beach project, the statement said, is part of ongoing efforts to upgrade the Kingdom's domestic tourism infrastructure and enhance public services.

Located seven kilometres from the newly opened Dead Sea Corniche, the project spans an area of approximately 240 dunams. The site features a sandy beach, four swimming pools, restaurants, comprehensive service facilities, retail shops offering visitor essentials and parking lots with a capacity to accommodate over 650 vehicles.

The public beach was fully upgraded, comprehensively developed and reopened to the public after being closed for more than seven years. The site currently welcomes an average of 35,000 visitors per month, reflecting high public demand and the positive impact of recent modernization efforts.

In addition to the Dead Sea Corniche and the tourist beach, the newly completed developments include an 8-kilometre-long round-trip cycling track designed to support sports and recreational activities in the Dead Sea area.

The development also features a 3-kilometre-long walkway running along the main road of the Dead Sea region.

Serving as an extension of the primary tourism waterfront, the pedestrian walkway is fully equipped to receive visitors, offering spaces for various activities and services. It also includes 20 commercial kiosks allocated to members of the local community, aimed at meeting visitor needs while boosting local economic opportunities.

Jordan attracts JD1.43 billion in Foreign Investment in 2025 — report

Continued from page 1

In addition, relevant government institutions made 81 recommendations to grant citizenship or passports through investment programmes and issued 38 construction licences for new projects within development zones, according to the report.

As part of efforts to strengthen the investment climate, the government upgraded the Invest.Jo platform to serve as a unified digital gateway promoting priority sectors and strategic projects to local and foreign investors.

The report also noted that amendments to the Investment Environment Bylaw have been prepared and submitted to the Cabinet, aiming to streamline procedures and enhance Jordan's competitiveness.

Meanwhile, the ministry prepared terms of reference and invited bids for the establishment of a National Strategic Investment Fund (NSIF). It also developed compliance certificate regulations and investment packages for public-private partnership projects, including the Amman Bridge toll road and the South Amman water loss reduction project.

The government has also announced prequalification bids for several major projects, the report said, including the Amman Bridge, the water loss reduction project and the Bus Rapid Transit fare collection system.

> The report added that the government issued a tender for a feasibility study...

In parallel, the government has developed 100 investment opportunities across the Kingdom's governorates and completed preliminary feasibility studies for upgrading the Jaber Border Crossing and the logistics zone within the King Hussein bin Talal Development Zone in Mafraq.

The Public-Private Partnership Higher Committee has also approved the feasibility study for the South Amman water project, the report said.

To improve investor services, the report said that the ministry introduced a unified framework for handling complaints more efficiently and transparently, while also updating reform matrices linked to business readiness indicators and foreign investment regulations.

The report added that the government issued a tender for a feasibility study on establishing a green industrial development zone.

Four new strategic projects were also added to the National Registry of Government Investment Projects, namely the Amman Bridge project, the Jaber Border Crossing upgrade, a hydroelectric energy storage project near Wadi Mujib Dam, and an electronic drug tracking system.

Israel hits Lebanon as Hizbollah says Iran won't abandon group

Continued from page 1

The military stressed this week that its soldiers were loyal to the institution after Washington announced sanctions that included an officer accused of sharing information with Hizbollah.

The sanctions came after the United States hosted three rounds of landmark direct talks between Lebanon and Israel aimed at ending the latest conflict.

Hizbollah drew Lebanon into the Middle East war on March 2 with rocket fire at Israel in retaliation for the killing of Iran's supreme leader in US-Israeli strikes.

Security talks with Israel are scheduled at the Pentagon for May 29, while a fourth round of negotiations is planned for June.

Hizbollah has vehemently rejected the direct talks.

On Saturday, Lebanon's health ministry said Israeli attacks had killed 3,123 people since March 2, decrying an overnight strike that damaged a hospital in the southern city of Tyre as "further proof of the Israeli enemy's violation of humanitarian law".

Israel had issued overnight evacuation warnings for two sites in Tyre.

An AFP correspondent saw shattered glass, ceiling panels blown out and damaged medical equipment at the Hiram hospital, near one of the locations.

The hospital's CEO, Salman Aydibi, told AFP that around 40 patients were in the facility when the warning came.

'Doomsday'

"We took the patients to a safer location" elsewhere inside the hospital, he said, adding that no patients were harmed but some 30 staff sustained minor injuries.

He said the hospital was still operational.

Israel's army said it had targeted "Hizbollah infrastructure sites in Tyre", adding that "prior to the strike, steps were taken to mitigate harm to civilians".

Another AFP correspondent saw heavy damage at the targeted sites in the city.

"I don't know what happened, it felt like doomsday," said Wisam Baroud, who lives near one site.

"We quickly got dressed, rushed outside, and started running," said Baroud, showing her damaged home.

Israel's army also targeted a Hizbollah compound in east Lebanon overnight.

Lebanon's Hamas-aligned Islamist group Jamaa Islamiya and its armed wing the Al Fajr Forces said one of its members was killed in a strike in the east.

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

Israeli troops who invaded Lebanon are also operating inside an Israeli-announced "yellow line" running around 10 kilometres deep along Lebanon's southern border.

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An independent Arab political daily, established in 1975

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Editorial and advertising offices
Jordan Press Foundation

The Jordan Times is published daily except Saturdays

Published by the Jordan Press Foundation
Queen Rania Al Abdullah Street
P.O. Box 6710
Amman 11118

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National Library registration number:
D/1998/2062
Telephone: **5600800 ext. 2392**
Facsimile: **5696183**
Advertising facsimile: **5696183**
Circulation Department:
5600800 ext: **2383**

Crown Prince in Berlin: The economic significance of the visit

By Raad Mahmoud Al-Tal

His Royal Higheness Crown Prince Hussein's visit to Germany carries economic implications that extend far beyond the scope of a traditional diplomatic engagement. At a time of growing regional instability and global economic uncertainty, the visit reflects Jordan's determination to move forward with its long-term economic modernisation agenda while strengthening strategic partnerships with major industrial economies such as Germany.

What makes the visit particularly significant is its strong focus on vocational and industrial training, technology, and workforce development. The decision to visit one of Germany's largest industrial and vocational training centres was not symbolic or ceremonial. Rather, it highlighted a deeper Jordanian understanding that the future of economic growth is increasingly tied to human capital, technical skills, productivity and innovation.

In recent years, Jordan has recognised that one of its central economic challenges lies not only in generating higher growth rates, but in ensuring that growth translates into sustainable job creation. This principle sits at the heart of Jordan's Economic Modernisation Vision, which aims to accelerate economic growth while creating one million jobs over the coming decade. In this context, vocational and technical education is no longer viewed as a secondary educational pathway, but as a strategic economic priority directly linked to investment, competitiveness, and labour market reform.

The German model offers an important example for Jordan. Germany's industrial strength has long been supported by its advanced vocational education system, which successfully integrates training with labour market demands and industrial production. This model has allowed Germany to maintain high productivity, strong manufacturing competitiveness, and a highly skilled workforce capable of adapting to technological transformation.

For Jordan, the relevance of this model is increasingly clear. Large-scale national projects planned under the Economic Modernisation Vision including transportation infrastructure, railways, energy, logistics, water projects, and industrial expansion will require a new generation of technically skilled workers trained according to international standards. Without investing in skills development and modern vocational education, achieving sustainable growth and reducing unemployment will remain difficult.

The visit also carries an important investment dimension. In today's global economy, investors no longer focus solely on tax incentives or low operational costs. They increasingly prioritize stable business environments supported by qualified human capital and modern technical capabilities. By strengthening vocational training and workforce readiness, Jordan improves its ability to attract high-value investments, particularly in industrial, technological and export-oriented sectors.

At the same time, the timing of the visit itself carries powerful political and economic messages. While much of the region continues to face geopolitical tensions, economic pressures, and uncertainty, Jordan is signaling that it remains committed to stability, institutional continuity and long-term economic planning. This is a critical message for international investors and strategic partners alike.

Economic confidence is deeply tied to political and institutional stability. In a turbulent region, Jordan continues to position itself as a reliable and stable economic partner capable of pursuing development projects and economic reforms despite external challenges. This stability remains one of Jordan's most important strategic assets.

The visit also reflects Jordan's broader effort to deepen cooperation with Germany not only as a political ally, but as a long-term economic and developmental partner. Germany's expertise in industry, renewable energy, advanced manufacturing, technology, and vocational education aligns closely with Jordan's modernisation priorities and future economic ambitions.

Importantly, Jordanian-German cooperation already rests on a strong foundation through initiatives in higher education, vocational training, renewable energy, and economic development. However, the current phase suggests a transition toward a more strategic partnership focused on building productive sectors, transferring expertise, and developing future-ready human capital.

Ultimately, Crown Prince Hussein's visit to Berlin should be understood within the broader framework of Jordan's economic transformation strategy. It reflects a vision centered on building a more productive, competitive, and skills-based economy capable of creating opportunities for young Jordanians while attracting investment and strengthening resilience.

More importantly, the visit sends a broader message that Jordan is not merely managing regional crises and economic pressures, but actively working to shape a long-term development model built on stability, modernisation and sustainable growth.

A technology investment opportunity inspired by the Crown Prince's Germany visit

By Mwaffaq Otoom

The recent visit of HRH Crown Prince Hussein to Germany should not only be viewed as a successful diplomatic engagement but also as a real opportunity for Jordan to fast-track its technology agenda, and turn its strategic relationship with Germany into tangible benefits in the form of investment, skills and jobs.

In that regard, HRH Crown Prince Hussein and HRH Princess Rajwa Al Hussein's visit to ABB Training Centre in Berlin was the highlight of their trip because it features the key message that technology will play an integral role in Jordan's future. The training centre is a great example of how Jordan can benefit from a direct link between educational institutions, industrial employers and the newest technologies which are shaping our future; examples of these are automation, robotics, digitalisation and smart manufacturing.

Germany does not only have strong technology but rather its underlying system is just as strong, companies, vocational training institutions, applied research institutions and governments working cooperatively to create an environment that properly prepares the youth for the workforce needed by industry. The ABB visit should teach Jordan this lesson.

This direction is completely aligned with Crown Prince Hussein's efforts through the National Council for Future Technology, which focuses on advancing the digital economy, developing future skills, promoting artificial intelligence use and providing technology-enabled public services in Jordan.

Implementation should be the focus at this stage. With the Jordan–EU Investment Conference to be held in Jordan later this yeat, there is an opportunity to convert the results of the German visit into concrete projects at this conference. Germany should not simply give its support as a token gesture, but should instead provide focused, sector-specific and investment-driven assistance.

Jordan must extend an invitation to German companies, manufactures of industrial technologies, trainers, and capital venture investors — essentially extending a well-defined package of opportunities to the aforementioned stakeholders for the purpose of supporting Jordanian manufacturing. This package can include establishment of ABB-inspired high tech training centres, establishment of labs containing automation and robotics, implementation of AI applications within an industrial environment, establishment of cyber security facilities, smart mobility solutions, establishment of renewable energy systems and water technologies and upgrade existing manufacturing to meet Industry 4.0 requirements.

Jordan provides an excellent opportunity for German investors as a safe, centrally located base with access to regional markets, a highly skilled, youthful labor pool, reasonably priced operational costs, as well as good political ties with Europe and the Arab world. Therefore, German investment in Jordan will help provide knowledge transfer and, ultimately, create new jobs for young people in Jordan, through improved industrial productivity and skills development/training.

As a result, the conference may lead to a new Jordan-Germany Technology and Skills Initiative that would connect German businesses with Jordan's universities and vocational training centers, private-sector organisations, and government agencies. The initiative would be judged on the basis of the number of trained Jordanians, improvements made to existing factories, assistance to new business ventures, and both technology and job opportunities created.

Jordan needs to include both skills development and technology transfer in all major nationwide projects. Large partnerships must respond to three questions: How many Jordanians will get trained? What technology will be transferred? Which local companies/universities will benefit from this transfer?

The visit of the Crown Prince to Germany provided a significant opening. The Jordan-EU Investment Conference serves as the means for transforming that opening into action. By applying the ABB lesson to present German investors with bankable, technology-focused opportunities, this visit can represent a pivotal moment in creating a new generation of Jordanians prepared to work in the future industries.

Mwaffaq Otoom, former vice president at Yarmouk University (Jordan)

Eighty years of independence: How Jordan is engineering its digital future

By Lubna Hanna Ammari

Over the past eight decades, Jordan has moved through a remarkable national journey shaped by resilience, institutional development, and a continuous effort to adapt to regional and global transformations. Since its independence, the country has placed strong emphasis on state-building, education, and governance stability, which collectively formed the foundation for its current transition toward a more digitally driven economy. Today, this evolution is becoming increasingly visible as Jordan invests in digital transformation as a central pillar of its future development model.

In recent years, Jordan's digital transformation agenda has gained momentum through structured national strategies aimed at strengthening the digital economy and improving public sector efficiency. The World Bank has consistently highlighted Jordan's relatively advanced ICT sector within the region, supported by a well-educated population and a growing ecosystem of technology-driven enterprises. This foundation has enabled the country to expand digital public services, modernize administrative systems, and improve access to information across key sectors. These developments reflect a broader strategic shift toward integrating technology into governance and economic planning rather than treating it as a complementary tool.

Artificial intelligence is now emerging as one of the most influential dimensions of this transformation. Globally, AI is reshaping productivity, labour markets, and service delivery systems, and Jordan is gradually positioning itself within this shift. According to international development frameworks, including analyses by UNDP and OECD, countries that successfully integrate AI into their national systems are those that combine technological investment with human capital development and adaptive governance. In Jordan's case, the presence of a strong educational base in science, engineering, and information technology provides an important advantage for engaging with AI-driven innovation.

Education remains one of Jordan's most significant national assets in this transition. Over the decades, the country has invested heavily in expanding access to higher education and producing graduates in technical and scientific fields. This has resulted in a workforce capable of engaging with emerging technologies, including data science, machine learning and digital systems design. However, international reports also emphasise the importance of continuously aligning academic programs with the fast-changing demands of the global digital economy. Ensuring this alignment is essential for maximising the country's potential in artificial intelligence and advanced technologies.

At the institutional level, Jordan has made measurable progress in advancing e-government services and digital infrastructure. Public sector modernisation initiatives have improved service delivery and increased efficiency in areas such as licensing, taxation, and citizen engagement. At the same time, the private sector has witnessed steady growth in technology startups and digital entrepreneurship, particularly in fintech and software development. These developments reflect a broader global trend toward digital economies, where innovation ecosystems play a central role in national competitiveness.

Despite these advancements, the path towards full integration of artificial intelligence into national systems remains complex. Key challenges include the need for advanced digital infrastructure, comprehensive data governance frameworks, and sustained investment in research and development. Additionally, ensuring equitable access to digital tools across different regions of the country remains a critical factor in achieving inclusive transformation. These challenges, however, also represent opportunities for Jordan to shape a distinctive model of digital development that balances innovation with ethical responsibility and social inclusion.

As Jordan marks eighty years of independence, the national narrative is increasingly expanding beyond traditional measures of development to include technological readiness and digital capability. The future will likely be defined not only by economic indicators or institutional stability, but also by the country's ability to integrate artificial intelligence and emerging technologies into its core development strategies. In this context, Jordan's digital transformation is not simply a modernisation project, but a strategic redefinition of how national progress is understood and achieved in the twenty-first century.

The author is a specialist in educational technology

What US sanctions on two officers mean for Lebanon

By Layal Abou Rahal

Agence France-Presse

BEIRUT, Lebanon — The US has announced unprecedented sanctions on two Lebanese officers, accusing them of sharing intelligence with Hizbollah, which the Lebanese government is trying to disarm.

What are the implications of the move and its repercussions, and will it contribute to isolating Hizbollah?

What is the justification?

The US sanctions also cover Iran's ambassador to Lebanon, three Hizbollah lawmakers and a former minister as well as two figures from the Hizbollah-allied Amal movement.

They also target army colonel Samir Hamadi and Khattar Nasser Eldin, an officer for General Security, marking the first time the United States has sanctioned Lebanese officers.

Washington said Hamadi, the army's intelligence head in Beirut's southern suburbs, a Hizbollah stronghold, and Nasser Eldin, the national security chief in the General Security service, "shared important intelligence" with Hizbollah "during the ongoing conflict".

In separate statements, the Lebanese army and General Security affirmed their personnel's loyalty and their commitment to following orders without political "considerations or pressures".

The military and security services prohibit their members from engaging in political or partisan activity.

> 'The sanctions are a continuation of the tightening of the noose around Hezbollah, an attempt to separate it from the state after it managed, over the past 20 years... to embed many elements'

Hamadi holds a sensitive position in Beirut's southern suburbs, in a country where appointments within institutions are based on sectarian and political quotas.

The army sent Hamadi to the United States, its key backer, for three training courses.

As for Nasser Eldin, a security source who requested anonymity told AFP that he heads the data analysis directorate of General Security, a surveillance and border control agency.

He was close to powerful former General Security chief Abbas Ibrahim, and is on good terms with senior Hizbollah security official Wafiq Safa, the source said.

How will it impact Lebanon's army?

The US sanctions against the officers, both of whom have held their current posts for less than a year, came at a sensitive time for Lebanon, as Washington is ramping up pressure on Beirut to disarm Hizbollah and Israel continues to strike the country and occupy parts of its south despite the truce.

Hizbollah drew Lebanon into the Middle East war on March 2, and a fragile truce began on April 17.

Lebanon and Israel, officially at war for decades, are preparing military delegations for security talks at the Pentagon in the US later this month, followed by a fourth round of direct negotiations in Washington in June.

Hizbollah, weakened after a 2023-2024 war with Israel, and isolated following the government's decision to disarm it, strongly opposes direct talks with Israel and refuses to surrender its weapons.

Military expert Riad Kahwaji said the US move will have "significant repercussions within Lebanon" as "the prestige that was given to the Lebanese army has been removed".

The army is widely respected domestically and has maintained its unity since the end of the 1975-1990 civil war in a country suffering from political and sectarian divisions.

How will it impact Hizbollah?

The security source told AFP that the inclusion of the two officers on the sanctions list "serves as a warning to any security or military official from whom Hizbollah might request any information".

"The sanctions are a continuation of the tightening of the noose around Hizbollah, an attempt to separate it from the state after it managed, over the past 20 years... to embed many elements" in it, Kahwaji said.

"These sanctions show today that no party is immune, regardless of whether it is inside or outside state institutions."

Kahwaji said that it marks a new phase in which "everyone who facilitates Hizbollah's activities from within the Lebanese state will be held accountable".

US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said on Thursday the US "will continue to take action against officials who have infiltrated the Lebanese government".

313 investor cards issued, 92 projects launched with JD106m in investments in Q1 2026

AMMAN (JT) — Minister of Investment Tareq Abu Ghazaleh affirmed the continued positive performance of Jordan's investment sector during the first quarter of 2026, despite regional challenges, reflecting sustained confidence in the national economy and the Kingdom's investment environment.

Speaking during his appearance on the television programme "60 Minutes" on Jordan TV, Abu Ghazaleh noted that Jordan continued to achieve positive investment indicators, highlighting a 25 per cent increase in Foreign Direct Investment inflows during the previous year.

JT file

Ministry of investment states that Jordan continued to achieve positive investment indicators, highlighting a 25 per cent increase in Foreign Direct Investment, with value of JD106 million

He added that the first-quarter results of 2026 demonstrated the continuation of this positive performance, with 92 projects benefitting from exemptions and representing investments worth JD106 million, while the Ministry of Investment issued 313 new investor cards during the same period, according to a Ministry of Investment statement.

He further noted that these indicators reflect continued confidence in Jordan's investment environment and the government's efforts to enhance the business climate and strengthen the Kingdom's competitiveness as an attractive investment destination capable of driving economic growth and creating job opportunities.

The Ministry of Investment issues a dedicated identification card to investors of all nationalities registered with a company or institution engaged in economic activity within Jordan, in accordance with applicable laws and regulations.

This card is intended to streamline administrative procedures and provide incentive-based benefits that enhance the attractiveness and competitiveness of Jordan's investment environment.

It is issued based on specific criteria, including the size of the investment and the number of job opportunities created for Jordanian citizens, according to the Ministry's website.

Aqaba ports handling surges 35% in first five months of 2026 — ACPOM

AMMAN (JT) — The ports of Aqaba recorded a 35 per cent increase in maritime and commercial handling during the first five months of 2026, driven by a rise in the number of ships and inbound and outbound cargo.

This growth follows a Cabinet decision to provide an economic motivation package aimed at strengthening supply chains, boosting maritime transport and intensifying coordination among relevant authorities to ensure the continuity of supply operations across Aqaba's port system.

JT file

The ports of Aqaba records a 35 per cent increase in maritime and commercial handling during the first five months of 2026 according to Aqaba Company for Ports Operations and Management

The measures were closely monitored by the Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority (ASEZA), further solidifying Aqaba's role as a pivotal regional logistics hub.

Director General of the Aqaba Company for Ports Operations and Management (ACPOM), Mahmoud Khalifat, stated that indicators recorded until May 20, 2026, cited that total handling volume rose to around 4.85 million tonnes, compared with 3.58 million tonnes during the same period in 2025, an increase exceeding 1.26 million tonnes, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.

Khalifat added that the oil and gas port achieved a "notable" growth of 42 per cent, with handling volume increasing from 1.41 million tonnes to over 2 million tonnes. Meanwhile, handling at the main port grew by 34 per cent, reaching 2.23 million tonnes.

With regard to dry bulk handling, Khalifat indicated that it recorded a 42 per cent increase, driven by higher handling volumes of several key commodities, most notably bulk barley, which rose by 99 per cent, and bulk corn, which increased by 37 per cent, in addition to the handling of bulk sugar for the first time, totalling 234,000 tonnes.

Petroleum products also saw "significant" growth, with gasoline handling up by 59 per cent, diesel by 38 per cent and kerosene by 160 per cent.

Regarding maritime traffic, the total number of ships that completed operations rose to 683, compared with 661 during the same period in 2025, with seven additional vessels arriving in the past few hours.

The passenger terminal recorded a 21 per cent growth in handling volume, a 29 per cent increase in passenger numbers, and a 71 per cent rise in vehicles and machinery.

Khleifat emphasised that these results reflect a national success achieved through the continuous efforts of Jordanian personnel and effective institutional integration among Jordan Customs, security agencies, the Ministry of Transport, customs clearers and logistics partners.

He also noted that this cooperation has significantly boosted investor confidence and attracted increased trade, particularly from Iraqi merchants, Petra reported.

Stocks gain, oil higher as investors weigh Mideast peace prospects

NEW YORK (AFP) — Stocks pushed higher Friday while oil prices also rose as traders tracked headlines on Iran war peace talks, against a backdrop of corporate earnings optimism and AI enthusiasm that have pushed indexes to record highs.

Wall Street moved broadly higher, with the Dow Jones index finishing at a second straight all-time high, despite concerns that soaring energy prices will stoke inflation and lead to tightening monetary policy.

Federal Reserve Governor Chris Waller added his voice to a growing bloc of policymakers calling for the US central bank to indicate that its next move could be an interest rate hike.

Fears about inflation sent the yield on the 30-year Treasury earlier this week to its highest level since 2007, with long-term debt yields in Britain and Japan hitting rates not seen since last century.

But stocks have been reassured as bond yields have retreated in recent days.

Equity investors are giving the benefit of the doubt to negotiators seeking to end the nearly three-month Middle East war.

Markets believe "even though things sound dicey surrounding the Iran situation, that the two sides are talking and that they'll ultimately get to a peace deal", said Briefing.com analyst Patrick O'Hare.

Mediator Pakistan's powerful army chief arrived in Tehran on Friday, as the Islamic republic examined a new US proposal to end the war.

But an Iranian spokesman cautioned that the visit did not necessarily mean "we have reached a turning point or a decisive situation".

European markets also posted gains after Asia closed out the week with a rally, with sentiment boosted by AI chip giant Nvidia's latest earnings report that blew past analyst forecasts.

Art Hogan of B. Riley Wealth Management said the negotiations on Iran appeared to be constructive.

"We need things to at least in a phase in the process that leads to progress towards an opening of the Strait of Hormuz and an off ramp to the war with Iran," Hogan said.

In Europe, German business morale unexpectedly increased in May, a survey showed on Friday, raising hopes that Europe's biggest economy is weathering the Iran war energy shock better than feared.

The Ifo institute's confidence barometer rose to 84.9 points from 84.5 in April, the first time it has gone up since the start of the Mideast conflict and confounding analyst expectations for a slight decrease.

But US consumer confidence data released by the University of Michigan pointed to historic weakness, with sentiment at its lowest level since data collection began in 1952.

"The cost of living continues to be a first-order concern, with 57 per cent of consumers spontaneously mentioning that high prices were eroding their personal finances, up from 50 per cent last month," said Joanne Hsu, director of the survey.

Financial markets will be closed on Monday in London and the United States for holidays, while continental Europe markets will be open.

US consumer confidence fell even further than estimated in May — survey

WASHINGTON, United States (AFP) — Record-low US consumer confidence in May was even worse than initially reported, according to fresh data released by the University of Michigan last week, with Americans battered by the economic fallout of the Iran war.

According to final figures, the university's consumer sentiment index came in at 44.8 points, down from 48.2 points in its preliminary estimate released on May 8.

The reading is the lowest level since data collection began in 1952, according to the survey's website.

"The cost of living continues to be a first-order concern, with 57 per cent of consumers spontaneously mentioning that high prices were eroding their personal finances, up from 50 per cent last month," said Joanne Hsu, director of the survey.

> 'Critically, consumers appear worried that inflation will increase and proliferate beyond fuel prices, even in the long run'

The US-Israel war on Iran has engulfed the Middle East in violence and sent global energy prices skyrocketing over Tehran's retaliatory actions.

Members of US President Donald Trump's Republican Party reported a decrease in sentiment, hitting their lowest level in the current administration's term.

"Critically, consumers appear worried that inflation will increase and proliferate beyond fuel prices, even in the long run," Hsu said.

Respondents to the survey expected consumer inflation to hit 4.8 per cent in the year ahead, up significantly from before the war.

Long-run inflation expectations rose to 3.9 per cent, significantly above the US Federal Reserve's target of 2 per cent.

US central bank policymakers have expressed concern about inflation expectations become "unanchored" from their target, with interest rate hikes potentially on the cards if this were to occur.

US Fed chair says will be 'reform-oriented' at glitzy White House swearing-in

WASHINGTON, United States (AFP) — New US Federal Reserve (Fed) Chair Kevin Warsh vowed to be "reform-oriented" as he was sworn in at the White House recently, with President Donald Trump insisting the central bank chief would be "totally independent".

Trump has exerted unprecedented pressure on the central bank to reduce interest rates, attempting to fire a Fed governor and pursuing a criminal probe against Warsh's predecessor Jerome Powell.

"I will lead a reform-oriented Federal Reserve, learning from past successes and mistakes both, escaping static frameworks and models, and upholding clear standards of integrity and performance," Warsh said.

He called for central bankers to pursue their goals "with wisdom and clarity, independence and resolve", adding that "inflation can be lower, growth stronger, real take-home pay higher, and America can be more prosperous" if they did so.

Trump, who frequently criticised and insulted Powell, praised Warsh and said he wanted him to be fully independent, before urging the Fed chair to let the economy "boom".

"Kevin understands that when the economy is booming, that's a good thing. We want to stop inflation, but we don't want to stop greatness," Trump said.

Warsh has backed rate cuts in the past, even as the world's largest economy faces inflation at a three-year high.

It is unusual for the chief of the Fed — an independent nonpartisan body that sets monetary policy according to a dual mandate on inflation and employment — to be sworn in at the White House.

The last central bank chief to do so was Alan Greenspan in 1987, under President Ronald Reagan, who Warsh referenced in his speech as a role model.

At his Senate confirmation hearing, Warsh insisted that he would "absolutely not" be a puppet for Trump.

Supreme Court Justices Clarence Thomas and Brett Kavanaugh were among those in attendance at the glitzy ceremony on Friday, with the former administering the oath of office to Warsh.

The court is due to rule on Trump's attempt to fire Fed Governor Lisa Cook.

A lengthy list of dignitaries in attendance included former vice president Dan Quayle, former secretary of state Condoleezza Rice, alongside a slew of serving officials — including the CIA director.

Trump and Warsh walked into the East Room together all smiles — a stark contrast to the Republican's only televised meeting with Powell in his second term, where he berated the then Fed chair.

Warsh will take over a divided Fed facing high inflation — fuelled by the energy price surge that resulted from Trump's war on Iran — and a labor market showing signs of weakness.

The US central bank has a dual mandate to keep inflation to its long-term target of two per cent while also maintaining maximum employment.

US consumer inflation in April came in at 3.8 per cent, a three-year high, with American households battered by years of above-expected price increases since the pandemic.

At a Fed meeting last month, a majority of policymakers indicated that rate hikes may be necessary if inflation remains above the Fed's long-term target.

Warsh has argued that productivity gains from artificial intelligence-led innovation will allow the US economy to grow rapidly without adding to inflation.

The US unemployment rate has remained relatively stable around 4.3 per cent for the last year. But job growth — often used as a proxy for economic activity — has see-sawed between expansion and contraction from month to month.

That situation — high inflation and inconsistent job growth — has left the Fed in a potentially sticky situation of having to choose between its mandates.

"Kevin Warsh will not be able to deliver the rate cuts that the president wants," said David Wessel, senior fellow at the Brookings Institution.

"At some point, the president may grow impatient and will begin attacking Mr Warsh as he did Jerome Powell."

SPORTS AT A GLANCE

FOOTBALL

Celtic win Scottish Cup to clinch double triumph

GLASGOW (AFP) — Celtic won the Scottish Cup with a 3-1 victory over Dunfermline on Saturday, sealing the double seven days after their dramatic title triumph. Martin O'Neill's side swept into a two-goal lead before half-time thanks to goals from Daizen Maeda and Arne Engels at Hampden Park. Kelechi Iheanacho struck after the interval to put the result beyond doubt, making Josh Cooper's late reply little consolation for out-classed Dunfermline. It was a ninth consecutive win in all competitions for Celtic, who have timed their best run of form perfectly after being galvanised by interim boss O'Neill. Celtic's 43rd Scottish Cup success capped an incredible end to the season for O'Neill. The 74-year-old now has nine major honours as a Celtic manager stretching over 26 years. It was Celtic's 14th top-flight and Scottish Cup double. O'Neill is in his second spell as caretaker boss of the Glasgow club this season and is yet to agree to return next term.

CRICKET

England's Bethell leaves IPL after finger injury

LONDON (AFP) — England batsman Jacob Bethell has ended his season with Indian Premier League side Royal Challengers Bengaluru after suffering a finger injury. Bethell was absent from the Bengaluru line-up for their defeat against Sunrisers Hyderabad on Friday, with captain Rajat Patidar confirming the 22-year-old had damaged his finger. Bengalaru topped IPL standings and face Gujarat Titans in the first qualifier on Tuesday. Bethell had appeared in seven matches scoring 96 runs. His injury comes less than two weeks before England's first Test against New Zealand at Lord's, starting on June 4. Bethell was expected to bat at number three for England after hitting a superb century against Australia in the Ashes in January. Now he faces an anxious wait to see if he is fit to feature against New Zealand. The England and Wales Cricket Board confirmed on Saturday that Bethell would have further checks once he had returns home. "The England and Wales Cricket Board has agreed with Royal Challengers Bangalore that top-order batter Jacob Bethell will return to the UK after sustaining a left ring finger injury while playing in the Indian Premier League," a statement said.

Prince Ali attends national team training ahead of historic World Cup debut

AMMAN (JT) — HRH Prince Ali, President of the Jordan Football Association, on Saturday attended a training session of the national football team held at the Nashama Training Centre in Al Hussein Youth City. Prince Ali met with head coach Jamal Salami and the players, reaffirming his confidence in the team's ability to deliver strong performances in its historic participation in the FIFA World Cup, which kicks off on November 11 in the US, Mexico and Canada. The visit contributed to boosting the players' morale, with the squad expressing determination to deliver their best showing on football's biggest stage, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.The national team is currently holding a domestic training camp in Amman, which will continue until Thursday, before travelling to Switzerland to face the Swiss national team in a friendly match. The team will then head to the US to play Colombia on the 7th of June in another friendly, ahead of the World Cup finals. Jordan has been drawn in Group 10, alongside Austria, Algeria and Argentina.

Petra photo

HRH Prince Ali on Saturday attends a training session of the national football team held at the Nashama Training Centre in Al Hussein Youth City

Guardiola to step down after glittering decade at Man City

MANCHESTER, United Kingdom (AFP) — Pep Guardiola announced on Friday that he will leave Manchester City at the end of the season after a trophy-laden decade that transformed English football.

Guardiola guided City to 20 trophies, including six Premier League titles, and won the Champions League for the first time in the club's history.

Aston Villa's visit to the Etihad Stadium on Sunday will be his final match in charge, although he is set to continue working for the City Football Group as a global ambassador.

"What a time we have had together," Guardiola said in an emotional video released by City.

"Don't ask me the reasons I'm leaving. There is no reason, but deep inside, I know it's my time.

"Nothing is eternal — if it was, I would be here. Eternal will be the feeling, the people, the memories, the love I have for my Manchester City."

The Catalan's impending departure was first reported on Monday, two days after he won his third FA Cup at the club.

At that point, the former Barcelona and Bayern Munich boss was tight-lipped on his future, with City missing out on the Premier League title to Arsenal 24 hours later.

AFP photo

Manchester City's Spanish manager Pep Guardiola poses with the trophy on the pitch after the English FA Cup final football match between Chelsea and Manchester City at Wembley Stadium in London on May 16

Former Chelsea manager Enzo Maresca, who previously worked on Guardiola's staff at City, has been widely reported as the man set to take over at the Etihad.

Guardiola said the club needed "new energy" to maintain the standards they have set over his tenure and ruled out an immediate return to the game in another coaching role.

"I need to breathe a little bit, and relax," added Guardiola. "It'll be a while, that is my feeling right now."

Sheikh Mansour, vice president of the United Arab Emirates, whose takeover of City in 2008 transformed the club's fortunes, said Guardiola had "the unending gratitude of myself and the entire City family."

Guardiola arrived in England as already one of Europe's most decorated coaches.

His four-year spell at boyhood club Barcelona between 2008 and 2012, which included two Champions League triumphs and three La Liga titles, won him admirers across the globe.

He added three more league titles in three seasons at Bayern but missed out on further European success.

Guardiola was not expected to stay in the Premier League for the long term but he put down roots and his influence has transformed the English game at all levels.

Backed by the deep pockets of Abu Dhabi royalty, City have stepped out of the shadow of local rivals Manchester United to become the dominant force in the Premier League.

"The club has a decade of memories and success to be forever grateful for, and much more than that, an evolution that cannot be undone," said City chairman Khaldoon Al Mubarak.

A statue of Guardiola has been commissioned to stand outside the Etihad's newly expanded north stand, which will be named in his honour.

Guardiola's brand of passing football has been copied from grassroots through to the elite level.

"The impact he had on every league where he trained, it's just one of a kind," said England manager Thomas Tuchel. "One of the very, very, very best."

Even City's competitors have turned to Guardiola's disciples to catch up.

The movies vying for the Cannes Film Festival's top prize

PARIS, France (AFP) — Twenty-two films from some of the world's most celebrated directors are vying for the top prize at the Cannes Film Festival, which will be handed out on Saturday.

The award will be decided by a jury headed by South Korean auteur Park Chan-wook, which includes Hollywood star Demi Moore and Oscar-winning "Hamnet" and "Nomadland" director Chloe Zhao.

AFP photo

French writer Laurent Mauvignier, French screenwriter Lea Mysius, French actress Hafsia Herzi, French actor Benoit Magimel, Italian actress Monica Bellucci, French actor Bastien Bouillon and French producer Jean-Louis Livi at the 79th edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southern France, on Saturday

'Minotaur' by Andrey Zvyagintsev

The first film in nine years from the acclaimed and exiled Russian filmmaker is one of the frontrunners, with its intimate plot of an unhappy couple set against the ominous background of Russia's war against Ukraine.

'A Man of His Time' by Emmanuel Marre

The clear favourite with French critics, this story of an ambitious local official during the Nazi occupation features a memorable dance scene and a virtuoso performance by lead actor Swann Arlaud.

'The Black Ball' by Javier Calvo and Javier Ambrossi

This big-budget, sprawling Spanish historical film exploring gay lives stars Penelope Cruz, and got a 20-minute standing ovation at its premiere, the longest this year.

'Paper Tiger' by James Gray

The American director of "The Yards" and "Little Odessa" returns to familiar territory, his Queens neighbourhood in New York, for this atmospheric crime drama about two brothers tangling with the Russian mafia, with Adam Driver, Scarlett Johansson and Miles Teller.

'Fatherland' by Pawel Pawlikowski

An arty critics' darling, the black-and-white movie from the Polish director features a searing performance from German actress Sandra Huller as the conflicted daughter of German writer Thomas Mann as they return to their war-shattered homeland in 1949.

'Fjord' by Cristian Mungi

The Romanian winner of the 2007 Palme d'Or has made one of the most hotly debated films of the festival, casting a critical lens on well-meaning left-wingers and their prejudices through a story about a devout Christian family in Norway.

'The Beloved' by Rodrigo Sorogoyen

Hailed by some as Javier Bardem's best-ever performance, he plays a film director who tries to rekindle his relationship with his estranged actress daughter on a troubled shoot.

'All of a Sudden' by Ryusuke Hamaguchi

After the worldwide success of "Drive My Car", the Japanese filmmaker returns with a slow but touching film about a nursing home worker, played by Virginie Efira, who befriends a dying Japanese playwright.

'Hope' by Na Hong-ji

A wild ride for audiences, this relentless blood-splattered action thriller — the most expensive movie in South Korean history — features terrifying aliens, a lot of automatic gunfire and a surprising number of jokes.

'Moulin' by Laszlo Nemes

One of several historical dramas, Hungarian Oscar winner Nemes's film focuses on the final days of French Resistance hero Jean Moulin, who was tortured to death by Nazi interrogators, its chilling story revealing "the best and worst" of humanity.

'The Man I Love' by Ira Sachs

"Bohemian Rhapsody" star Rami Malek returns as another gay musician in this melancholy story about a performer in New York in the 1980s, based on the memories of director Sachs, who lived through the AIDS pandemic in the city.

'The Unknown' by Arthur Harari

It didn't convince everyone, but this tale of a man who wakes up in the body of a woman he has had sex with — from the writer of the Oscar winner "Anatomy of a Fall" — has one of the most ambitious and quirky plotlines in Cannes.

'Sheep in the Box' by Hirokazu Kore-eda

There were high hopes for this drama about a couple in mourning who welcome an AI-powered humanoid robot into their home, but the Japanese auteur — who won the Palme d'Or in 2018 for "Shoplifters" — got mixed reviews this time.

'A Woman's Life' by Charline Bourgeois-Tacquet

Lea Drucker — one of France's most accomplished actresses — drew praise for her portrayal of a stressed-out surgeon whose life is transformed by an encounter with a novelist in this tale about female desire in middle age.

'Coward' by Lukas Dhont

Another gay romance story from the highly-rated young Belgian director of "Girl" and "Close", it tells of two soldiers in the trenches of World War I who find passion and love amid the horror.

'Bitter Christmas' by Pedro Almodovar

The veteran Spanish director looks unlikely to win the Palme d'Or at his seventh attempt with this movie about a filmmaker who is out of ideas with such strong competition this year.

'Parallel Tales' by Asghar Farhadi

Directing a French-language movie for the first time, the Oscar-winning Iranian director assembled a stellar cast of local stars but lost many viewers with a convoluted plot about voyeurism and art in Paris.

'Another Day' ('Garance') by Jeanne Herry

Cannes favourite Adele Exarchopoulos plays a gifted but hard-partying actress in this French story about alcohol addiction that loses momentum for some viewers in its second half.

'Nagi Notes' by Koji Fukada

A gentle and slow-moving story — too slow for many critics — about an architect who visits a sculptor in the Japanese countryside in rural areas.

'Gentle Monster' by Marie Kreutzer

The Austrian director brings together French actors Lea Seydoux and Catherine Deneuve — who feature in two films in competition — in a story about child abuse allegations that tear a marriage apart.

'The Birthday Party' by Lea Mysius

A well-made but conventional thriller from a rising French director, featuring Italy's Monica Bellucci alongside French stars Bastien Bouillon and Hafsia Herzi.

'The Dreamed Adventure' by Valeska Grisebach

The German director of "Western" makes her main competition debut with the story of a woman in the border region between Greece, Bulgaria and Turkey who agrees to a deal to help a friend.