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A report issued by the Department of Statistics of Thursday shows that Jordan's food self-sufficiency ratio rose to 61.4 per cent in 2024, up from 57.3 per cent in 2020

## Jordan's food self-sufficiency rises to 61.4% in 2024 — statistics report

AMMAN (JT) — Jordan's food self-sufficiency ratio rose to 61.4 per cent in 2024, up from 57.3 per cent in 2020, reflecting improvements in local production and food security indicators, according to the annual Food Balance Sheet Report issued by the Department of Statistics.

The report, a key reference for national food security data, showed that the increase was driven by higher domestic production and surpluses in several agricultural crops, particularly

vegetables, although a number of essential commodities continue to depend heavily on imports.

According to the report, 28 agricultural products recorded production surpluses in 2024, compared with 22 products in 2020. Fresh vegetables posted some of the highest self-sufficiency rates, led by cantaloupe at 485 per cent, zucchini at 173 per cent and tomatoes at 167 per cent.

Among fruit crops, apricots achieved a self-sufficiency rate

of 271 per cent, while olives maintained full self-sufficiency at 100 per cent. Olive oil exceeded domestic demand, reaching 114 per cent.

In the livestock sector, Jordan achieved full self-sufficiency in fresh milk and recorded a surplus in table eggs, with a self-sufficiency rate of 108.1 per cent. Poultry meat reached 83.1 per cent self-sufficiency, while red meat remained significantly lower at 35.9 per cent.

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## JHCO sends 6th aid convoy to Lebanon, bringing total relief deliveries to 130 trucks

AMMAN — The Jordan Hashemite Charity Organisation (JHCO) said it dispatched a sixth humanitarian aid convoy to Lebanon on Thursday, sending 28 trucks loaded with food supplies as part of its ongoing efforts to support communities affected by the country's humanitarian challenges.

JHCO said that the convoy was organised in cooperation with the World Food Programme, the Jordan Armed Forces-Arab Army and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

With the latest shipment, the total number of aid trucks Jordan has sent to Lebanon under its continuing relief bridge has reached 130, carrying humanitarian assistance and essential supplies to vulnerable communities across the country, JHCO said.

The organisation said that the initiative reflects Jordan's long-standing commitment to supporting neighbouring countries during times of crisis and responding to growing humanitarian needs in the region.

The convoy aims to



JHCO photo

The Jordan Hashemite Charity Organisation (JHCO) says it sent 28 trucks loaded with food supplies to Lebanon on Thursday

help strengthen food security and provide direct assistance to affected families in vari-

ous Lebanese regions through the organised distribution of essential aid, it said.

The organisation also expressed its appreciation to Syrian authorities for facilitating the

transit of humanitarian convoys through Syrian territory en route to Lebanon.

## LABOUR

## Gov't suspends recruitment of non-Jordanians across most sectors

AMMAN (JT) — Minister of Labour Khaled Bakkar on Thursday issued a decision suspending the recruitment of non-Jordanian workers across all economic sectors and activities, effective June 1, as part of efforts to regulate labour market needs and prioritise employment opportunities for Jordanians.

The suspension also covers recruitment schemes linked to employment agreements for Jordanian workers, according to the Ministry of Labour.

Several sectors and activities were exempted from the decision, including domestic workers and the garment and textile industry, as well as manufacturers of complementary production inputs operating or registered in development zones, Qualifying Industrial Zones (QIZs) and free zones.



JT file

A woman work at a textile factory in Amman

High-skilled professions requiring specialised expertise were also excluded from the suspension.

The ministry said that recruitment approvals issued before the decision took effect will continue to be processed in accord-

ance with established procedures.

Ministry spokesperson Mohammad Zyoud said the measure follows an ongoing assessment of labour market requirements and employers' needs.

In remarks to the Jordan News Agency,

Petra, Zyoud explained that the ministry manages the recruitment of foreign workers based on labour market conditions, suspending recruitment when sectors achieve sufficient workforce levels and reopening it only when a clear shortage of

non-Jordanian labour emerges.

He noted that the ministry seeks to prevent oversupply in the domestic labour market while ensuring that sectors with genuine workforce needs can continue to operate effectively.

"The ministry's primary objective remains increasing the employment of Jordanians and linking job seekers with available opportunities," Zyoud said.

He added that the ministry is implementing an integrated strategy in cooperation with the Vocational Training Corporation and the Development and Employment Fund (DEF), both chaired by the labour minister, to equip young people with skills aligned with evolving labour market demands and emerging professions.

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## CBJ issues JD100m in Treasury bonds

AMMAN (JT) — The Central Bank of Jordan (CBJ), on behalf of the government, on Thursday issued the 24th issue of treasury bonds for 2026, valued at JD100 million.

According to CBJ data cited by Al Mamlaka TV, the maturity date

for this issue is June 7, 2036, while the settlement date is June 7, 2026.

Treasury bonds are long-term financing instruments with maturity periods ranging from two to 20 years, and they include both government treasury bonds

and corporate bonds.

Treasury bills are short-term government debt instruments issued for periods ranging from three to 12 months, they are low-risk financial instruments traded in financial markets through buying and selling.

## Hizbollah chief rejects truce, demands Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon



AFP photo

Smoke rises following Israeli bombardment in southern Lebanon close to the Beaufort Castle as seen from a position across the border in the Upper Galilee, in northern Israel, on Thursday

BEIRUT, Lebanon (AFP) — Hizbollah's chief on Thursday rejected a conditional truce announced by Lebanese and Israeli envoys, demanding instead a comprehensive ceasefire and full Israeli withdrawal as he threatened northern Israel with new attacks.

Naim Qassem's message came after Lebanese and Israeli representatives in the United States agreed to a conditional ceasefire that Lebanon's president called the "last chance" for a durable end to the fighting.

Lebanon was drawn into the wider Middle East war when Hizbollah attacked Israel to avenge the February 28 killing of Iran's supreme leader.

Hizbollah has rejected the Israel-Lebanon talks, and a previous ceasefire announced on April 17 has been breached daily, with Israeli troops deployed deep inside Lebanese territory and the Iran-backed militants continuing to attack Israel.

"The ceasefire must be comprehensive... without the Israeli enemy having the freedom to kill," Qassem said Thursday, urging the government to halt "the farce and humiliation called direct talks" with Israel.

He also vowed that "as long as our villages are unsafe — being bombed, destroyed and our people killed — the settlements [north Israel] are unsafe".

The speech followed new Israeli strikes on Lebanon and fresh threats against Beirut by Israeli defence minister Israel Katz, who said that the army will "at this stage, continue its fire and ground operations... without the return of the popula-

tion, while continuing to dismantle terrorist infrastructure".

### 'Freedom of action'

Israeli forces also retain the "freedom of action, with American backing, to strike in Beirut in response to fire on Israeli communities and territory", he added.

Speaking on condition of anonymity, a Hizbollah official told AFP the group had informed the Lebanese government of its rejection of the truce agreement.

In south Lebanon, a United Nations peace-

keeper was killed and two others were wounded, the UNIFIL force said, after a base was hit the previous night.

Belgrade said the slain peacekeeper was Serbian, with seven blue helmets now killed since the latest war erupted in March. Israel blamed Hizbollah for his death.

Hizbollah is Lebanon's only militant group that refused to hand over its arsenal after the 1975-1990 civil war, arguing that it was fighting Israel's occupation of south Lebanon.

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The Princess Taghrid Institute for Development and Training on Wednesday holds its annual ceremony

## Princess Taghrid attends institute annual ceremony on development, training achievements

AMMAN (JT) — In the presence of HRH Princess Taghrid Muhammad, the Princess Taghrid Institute for Development and Training on Wednesday held its annual ceremony to review its key achievements for the period from June 2025 to May 2026.

The event was attended by government officials, representatives of international organisations and strategic partners, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.

During the ceremony, Director General Aghadeer Jweihan pre-

sented an overview of the institute's key programmes and projects implemented locally and internationally, highlighting their impact on social and economic empowerment, education, health and support for vulnerable groups.

Jweihan announced the launch of the first comprehensive statistical report on children with disabilities in Jordan for the 2021-2025 period, covering children aged two and above across all governorates of the Kingdom.

She said the report provides accurate and

evidence-based data on disability rates among age groups not covered by school-based statistics, thereby supporting planning, policymaking and the development of targeted services for children with disabilities.

Jweihan added that the report aligns with the institute's commitments announced during the Global Disability Summit (Amman-Berlin), reflecting its ongoing efforts to support the rights of persons with disabilities and promote their integration into society.

# Princess Basma sponsors YWCA Jordan's 70th anniversary

AMMAN (JT) — HRH Princess Basma Bint Talal on Wednesday sponsored a ceremony marking the 70th anniversary of the National Federation of Young Women's Christian Associations (YWCA) in Jordan.

Princess Basma commended the YWCA's contributions to community service, women's empowerment, youth development and the promotion of active citizenship, noting that its seven-decade journey reflects Jordan's spirit of coexistence and social cohesion.

The ceremony was attended by Minister of Social Development Wafa Bani Mustafa, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.

YWCA President Hania Oaqish said the federation represents a humanitarian and national mission that views women as genuine partners in development.

She added that, under the leadership of His Majesty King Abdullah, Jordan continues to embody pluralism and human dignity, values that align with the fed-



HRH Princess Basma Bint Talal on Wednesday sponsors a ceremony marking the 70th anniversary of the National Federation of Young Women's Christian Associations (YWCA) in Jordan

eration's principles. Oaqish highlighted the federation's impact on hundreds of women and families through economic em-

powerment initiatives, services and training programmes.

During the ceremony, which featured folkloric and national per-

formances, Princess Basma honoured a number of pioneering YWCA members in recognition of their voluntary service.

She also honoured a supporter of the federation's scholarship programme, as well as top female student beneficiaries.

## Jordan wins presidency of Arab postal e-commerce working group

AMMAN (JT) — Jordan has won the presidency of the E-Commerce and Financial Inclusion Working Group of the Arab Permanent Postal Committee during its 49th meeting, held at the Arab League headquarters in Cairo.

According to a statement from the Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (TRC) on Thursday, the Jordanian delegation included representatives from the TRC and the Jordan Post Company, and was headed by TRC Secretary-General Nael Adwan.

The achievement reflects confidence in Jordan's expertise in regulatory and postal affairs, as well as its active role in supporting efforts to develop the Arab postal sector and enhance its integration with the requirements of the digital economy and e-commerce.



Jordan wins presidency of e-Commerce and Financial Inclusion Working Group of the Arab Permanent Postal Committee during its 49th meeting, held at the Arab League headquarters in Cairo

Adwan said the milestone underscores Jordan's "advanced" position in postal

regulation and digital transformation, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.

He added that the presidency provides an important opportunity to contribute to shap-

ing Arab initiatives and policies that support the growth of e-commerce and strengthen financial inclusion, in line with global trends and regional development goals.

Adwan said Jordan will continue to coordinate with Arab countries and relevant bodies to strengthen cooperation, exchange expertise, and further develop postal and logistics services to keep pace with rapid changes in the global digital economy.

He added that Jordan's participation reflects its continued commitment to enhancing its presence in Arab and international expert forums and contributing to policy development aimed at advancing the postal sector and promoting Arab integration in postal services and e-commerce.



Neolithic house with two entrances and external storage area on the slope of Mesa 4 in Wadi Qattafi

## New excavations reveal ancient mesa settlements near Azraq

By Saeb Rawashdeh

AMMAN — Archaeologists working in Jordan's eastern desert have investigated a series of mesa-based structures near Azraq, shedding new light on prehistoric settlement patterns and construction techniques in the region.

Thirty mesas are located near Wadi Qattafi, about 60 kilometres north of Azraq, while another chain of around 20 mesas lies some 5 kilometres to the south, on the eastern side of Wadi Umm Nukhayla.

The archaeological team excavated several structures to better understand their function and date.

"Our main focus was on buildings on the south-western slopes of the mesa. Many of the structures here were circular or oval, although the collapsed stonework made it difficult to determine their original shape in many cases. We had earlier suggested that they resembled nawamis, circular prehistoric megalithic tombs known from Sinai and Yemen," said Alexander Wasse of Yeditepe University in Turkey.

One structure, South Slope 11 (SS-11), proved particularly intriguing. In its collapsed state, it preserved a west-south-west-facing doorway, a feature similar to nawamis,

Wasse said, noting that the arrangement of roofing slabs indicated corbelled construction, again recalling Chalcolithic/Early Bronze Age tomb traditions in Sinai.

Because much of the fill consisted of large basalt slabs, initial clearance of SS-11 proceeded quickly.

"It soon became apparent that the structure was oval rather than circular, as is typical for nawamis. Another factor arguing against that identification was the discovery of a second doorway on the eastern side, opening onto a walled courtyard with domestic features, including a small hearth," Wasse said.

Excavation showed that the building was constructed on a consolidated bedrock surface of indurated silt and basalt gravel, sloping gently to the south and south-west.

An intentional fill layer levelled the interior, and several phases of hearths were identified above the lowest occupation surface. Radiocarbon samples were collected from these contexts.

A distinctive feature of the structure was the use of large upright slabs in the northern, eastern and south-eastern walls, which helped elevate sections of the roof.

"In many cases, these upright slabs were stabilised with small

basalt wedges at their bases, a technique previously documented in Late Neolithic structures at Burqu'. The western wall, however, differed, being built with horizontally stacked slabs rather than upright stones. This variation is difficult to explain," Wasse noted.

Researchers suggest the western wall may represent a later modification, although no clear evidence of structural alteration during the building's use was identified.

The dwelling itself was small, approximately 2 x 3 metres, and likely had a very low roof. While pillars are not structurally required in corbelled architecture, they can add stability.

A long, slender stone slab measuring 79 x 20 x 6 cm was recovered from the fill. Its deliberately shaped edges suggest it may have served as a roof support, Wasse said.

"The low roof would have required occupants to crouch when entering, which may seem impractical for a semi-permanent dwelling. However, given that it was likely used during the winter rainy season, when temperatures often hovered at or below freezing, the small interior volume would have helped retain heat and improve night-time comfort," he added.

### TALKS

## Trade Unions Federation, ILO discuss advancing decent work standards

AMMAN (JT) — Chairman of General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions (GFJTU) Khaled Fanatseh, discussed on Thursday with Director-General of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Gilbert Houngho, ways to advance decent work standards for Jordanian workers and address key labour issues at the national level.

The discussions took place on Wednesday evening on the sidelines of the 114th session of the International Labour Conference, currently underway in Geneva.

According to a Federation statement issued Thursday, the two sides reviewed developments related to Jordan's Decent Work Country Programme, launched early last month, and



Trade Unions Federation and ILO discuss advancing decent work standards on the sidelines of the 114th session of the International Labour Conference in Geneva

discussed mechanisms to strengthen the role of social partners

in implementing its objectives. The discussions fo-

cused on efforts to support labour policy development, improve

working conditions and enhance worker protection and trade union representation.

Fanatseh stressed initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality in the labour market, noting that women accounted for 25 per cent of Jordan's delegation to this year's International Labour Conference, reflecting stakeholders' commitment to advancing women's participation and empowerment.

The meeting also addressed regional developments and the impact of ongoing crises on labour markets and social stability. Participants underscored the ILO's role in protecting workers during crises and emergencies and in supporting countries and communities facing economic and social challenges.



Minister of Education Azmi Mahafzah on Thursday honours winners of the 20th edition of the King Abdullah II Fitness Award

## Education minister honours winners of King Abdullah II Fitness Award

AMMAN (JT) — Deputising for His Majesty King Abdullah, Minister of Education Azmi Mahafzah on Thursday sponsored a ceremony honouring winners of the 20th edition of the King Abdullah II Fitness Award.

The event was organised by the Ministry of Education in cooperation with the Jordan School Sports Federation, with wide participation from students, schools and education directorates across the Kingdom.

The ceremony was attended by senior education officials, representatives of the Royal Health Awareness Society, educators, parents and partners from the education sector.

A documentary was also screened, highlighting the award's development since its launch in 2005 and its role in promoting physical fitness and school health, the Jordan News Agency, Pet-

ra, reported. Officials stressed that the Royal initiative aims to embed sport as part of students' daily lives. They said it improves academic performance and social behaviour.

The event included sports and artistic performances by participating directorates from across the Kingdom...

They said that the award has evolved from a competition into a national project.

It helps build discipline, teamwork, perseverance and self-confidence. It also promotes better health and prepares students for future contributions to society.

The event included sports and artistic performances by participating directorates from across the Kingdom, showcasing physical and creative talents.

At the end of the ceremony, the minister honoured the winners, schools and directorates. He reiterated that the King Abdullah II Fitness Award and the national health championship represent a model for promoting sport, wellbeing, and excellence among Jordanian students.

Participation this year reached 985,117 students from 3,179 public, private and military culture schools, reflecting the programme's continued expansion.

# Safadi, EU human rights envoy discuss cooperation

Foreign minister, Dutch counterpart review efforts to contain regional escalation

AMMAN (JT) — Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Ayman Safadi on Thursday met with the EU Special Representative for Human Rights Kajsa Ollongren.

The meeting focused on the Jordan-EU "strategic" partnership and ways to expand cooperation across various sectors, as well as regional developments and efforts to enhance security and stability, according to a Foreign Ministry statement.

Safadi and Ollongren stressed the importance of respecting international humanitarian law and discussed avenues for cooperation in this field, including through the high-level international conference, "Preserving Humanity in War", which Jordan is scheduled to host on December 7, 2026.

Safadi also highlighted the significance of the Jordan-EU partnership and expressed appreciation for the European Union's support for Jordan's development efforts and assistance in mitigating the impact of regional crises on the Kingdom.

Also on Thursday, Safadi received a phone call from Dutch Foreign Minister Tom Berendsen, during which they discussed bilateral relations and regional developments.

The two ministers reiterated their commit-



Photo courtesy of Foreign Ministry

The meeting focused on the Jordan-EU 'strategic' partnership and ways to expand cooperation across various sectors

ment to strengthening the "strategic" partnership between Jordan and The Netherlands, which marks its 75th anniversary this year and expanding cooperation across areas of mutual interest, according to a Foreign Ministry statement.

The ministers also reviewed efforts to contain the escalating regional tensions. Safadi stressed the need for a comprehensive solution founded on principles that ensure lasting security and stability, uphold international law and promote good-neighbourly relations.

Discussions also covered developments in the occupied Palestinian territories. The ministers underscored the importance of maintaining stability in Gaza, ensuring the sustained and unhindered delivery of humanitarian aid and halting illegal Israeli settlements and imposed entry bans on Israeli officials accused of inciting violence against Palestinians.

Berendsen commended Jordan's efforts to advance regional security, stability and a just peace, stressing the importance of preserving the historical and legal status quo at Islamic and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem.

Safadi commended The Netherlands' support for the two-state solution and its opposition to policies that

undermine its viability, as well as recent Dutch measures reflecting that position.

In April, the Dutch government approved plans to proceed with a ban on trade in goods originating from illegal Israeli settlements and imposed entry bans on Israeli officials accused of inciting violence against Palestinians.

They agreed to continue coordination and consultation on regional and international issues of mutual concern while working to further deepen Jordanian-Dutch relations.

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## Tafileh Industrial Estate secures first engineering, electrical manufacturing investment — JIEC

AMMAN (JT) — Tafileh Industrial Estate has attracted its first investment in the engineering and electrical manufacturing sector, marking a significant step in efforts to diversify industrial activity beyond Jordan's traditional manufacturing industries.

Jordan Industrial Estates Company (JIEC) Director General Odai Obaidat said on Thursday that the new project, valued at approximately JD2 million, will be established by IRIS Manufacturing Technologies and is expected to create around 40 direct jobs during its operational phases.

The investment introduces a new industrial activity to Tafileh Industrial City, which has traditionally hosted industries such as plastics, food processing, textiles and sanitary paper manufacturing, according to the Jordan News Agency,



Petra photo

Tafileh Industrial City has attracted its first investment in the engineering and electrical manufacturing sector

Petra.

Obaidat also said that the project reflects growing investor confidence in the industrial environment offered by the company, citing advanced infrastructure, ready-built facilities and a range of incentives designed to support business growth and expansion.

He described the investment as a qualitative addition to Tafileh Industrial Estate, noting

that it aligns with JIEC's strategy to attract industries that generate higher value-added production and strengthen local industrial supply chains.

Obaidat added that the project is expected to contribute to economic development in Tafileh Governorate by creating employment opportunities and enhancing industrial integration within the city.

IRIS Manufacturing

Technologies said the facility will serve as an extension of its existing operations at the King Abdullah II Industrial Estate and will employ advanced production technologies that meet international standards for quality and efficiency.

The company noted that production will initially target the domestic market before gradually expanding to export destinations in neighbouring countries, the Gulf region and the United States.

The investment was supported by a package of incentives available to investors in Tafileh Industrial Estate, including free electricity for new factories for three years, reduced electricity tariffs for up to 10 years, support through employment-focused production branch programmes, and a 50 per cent reduction in container-handling fees for exports shipped

through Aqaba Port. Company officials said these incentives help lower operating costs, improve the competitiveness of locally manufactured products and enhance the governorate's attractiveness as an industrial investment destination.

The announcement comes as Tafileh Industrial City continues to expand its industrial base. The city currently hosts 27 companies with total investments exceeding JD59 million and is expected to generate more than 800 jobs across various projects once fully operational.

Developed as one of Jordan's emerging industrial hubs, the estate offers investors serviced industrial land, advanced infrastructure and ready-built facilities tailored to medium-sized and light manufacturing industries, Petra reported.

## Environment minister participates in GEF-8 assembly in Uzbekistan

AMMAN (JT) — Environment Minister Ayman Suleiman, heading the Jordanian delegation, participated on Thursday in the eighth session of the Global Environment Facility (GEF-8) Assembly.

The event, hosted by Uzbekistan from June 4 to 6, brought together environment ministers, senior officials, and representatives of international organisations and financial institutions from around the world.

Delivering Jordan's address, Suleiman said the world is facing interconnected economic, social and environmental challenges that require urgent and coordinated international action, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.

He stressed the importance of strengthening multilateral cooperation and international partnerships to address the impacts of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution.

The minister described the Global Environment Facility as a strategic partner supporting Jordan's transition towards a more resilient and inclusive green economy, in line with national priorities and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Suleiman reviewed Jordan's national efforts under the Economic Modernisation Vision and the Public Sector Modernisation Roadmap, both of which place environmental sustainability and climate-resilient growth at the core of national policy.

He noted that GEF-supported programmes and projects have contributed tangibly to improving water and food security, diversifying energy sources and advancing environmental sustainability.

He said that Jordan is actively integrating climate change, biodiversity conservation and land degradation efforts into

national planning frameworks, including the National Adaptation Plan, the National Biodiversity Strategy and the updated Nationally Determined Contributions.

In the agriculture sector, Suleiman noted ongoing efforts to develop climate-smart agriculture, improve irrigation efficiency and promote sustainable land management to strengthen food security and climate resilience.

He also outlined initiatives in the energy sector, including expanding renewable energy projects, improving energy efficiency and advancing green transition efforts to enhance energy security and reduce reliance on imported energy.

On water scarcity, Suleiman said Jordan remains among the most water-scarce countries globally, with annual per capita water availability not exceeding 60 cubic metres.

## Man detained over alleged killing of friend in Irbid

By Rana Hussein

AMMAN — The Criminal Court prosecutor on Thursday began questioning a man who allegedly murdered his friend in Irbid, official sources said.

The victim was reportedly struck with a blunt object, allegedly by his friend, following an argument on Thursday morning, a senior official source said.

"The suspect was arrested shortly after the incident," the senior source told The Jordan Times.

Meanwhile, the victim was rushed to a nearby hospital where he was declared dead on arrival, the senior source added.

The Criminal Court prosecutor summoned the victim and the suspect's family members for further questioning, according to the senior official source.

The suspect was ordered detained by the Criminal Court prosecutor at a correctional and rehabilitation centre for 15 days pending further investigations, a senior judicial source said.

## ASEZA showcases Aqaba smart tourism at WTCF event

AMMAN (JT) — Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority (ASEZA) Commissioner for Tourism and Youth Affairs Thabet Nabulsi on Thursday took part in the World Tourism Cities Federation (WTCF) event in Beijing, China.

The event brought together senior international officials and experts in tourism and technology to discuss emerging trends and opportunities in sustainable tourism development.

During the event, Nabulsi participated in the Smart Tourism Experience Salon, where he showcased Aqaba as a model for smart tourism,



Photo courtesy of ASEZA

Commissioner for Tourism and Youth Affairs Thabet Nabulsi participated in the World Tourism Cities Federation event in Beijing, China, heading a delegation from the Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority

ism, according to an ASEZA statement.

He highlighted Aqaba's experience in leveraging technology and innovation to develop

its tourism sector, noting that the city has adopted an integrated tourism model that draws on its natural, cultural and heritage

assets while advancing digital transformation and artificial intelligence applications.

Nabulsi said that Aqaba is increasingly integrating digital solutions and AI technologies into tourism management and development to improve services, enhance the visitor experience and strengthen the sector's sustainability, while boosting the city's competitiveness as a regional and international destination.

He added that ASEZA's future vision prioritises embedding technology in the design of personalised digital tourism experiences and using

artificial intelligence to promote and present cultural heritage.

The strategy also focuses on strengthening environmental sustainability in the Red Sea region and expanding opportunities for youth in the digital economy, smart tourism and innovation.

Nabulsi also highlighted the strength of Jordanian-Chinese relations, saying the partnership continues to expand in technology, development and cultural exchange, opening new avenues for cooperation in smart tourism and innovation.

The ASEZA delegation, which participat-

ed in the event hosted by Baidu Apollo — one of the leading global platforms in artificial intelligence and autonomous driving technologies — also included Wadi Rum Reserve Director Saleh Naimat.

ASEZA said the participation is part of its efforts to promote Aqaba to international tourism and technology stakeholders while showcasing investment opportunities in smart tourism and the digital economy.

It added that the move is expected to support tourism development and enhance Aqaba's regional and international competitiveness.

# Iran leader says dealt enemies 'decisive blow' in Mideast war

TEHRAN (AFP) — Iran's supreme leader said on Thursday that the United States and Israel had been dealt a "decisive blow" in the Middle East war, after the government reported "no tangible progress" in negotiations on ending the conflict.

Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei's message, read out by a prayer leader at a ceremony marking the anniversary of the death of the Islamic republic's founder, came after the US House of Representatives passed a resolution seeking to halt American military action in Iran.

Weeks of talks marked by threats and flare-ups of violence have failed to secure a deal to end the war and reopen the Strait of Hormuz, a key conduit for global energy flows.

The US and Iran have sent divergent messages, with Tehran insisting on steep conditions for progress, even as President Donald Trump again voiced optimism, telling reporters a deal "could happen... over the weekend".

In his message, Khamenei said his country's enemies, after "facing a decisive blow", were now "experiencing a deeply mean-



Iranians take part during a rally in support of the country's supreme leader Mojtaba Khamenei and commemorate Eid Al Ghadir in Tehran on Thursday

ingful and profound humiliation".

He went on to accuse them of seeking to "plant the seeds of doubt, despair, fear, mistrust and division" among the public, calling for unity to "neutralise their sinister plot".

Khamenei has not

been seen in public since being wounded in strikes that killed his father and predecessor Ali Khamenei in the opening salvo of the US-Israeli bombing campaign on February 28.

Every June 4 since 1989, the elder Khamenei had delivered a speech at the commem-

oration of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's death.

This year, however, an empty chair bearing his portrait stood at the mausoleum, according to footage broadcast from the site.

Trump is under pressure to find a way out of the war, which has

delivered a shock to markets and proven unpopular at home as midterm elections loom.

But in spite of a ceasefire that has largely held since April, progress towards a final deal has been

punctured by sporadic episodes of violence — including on Wednes-

day, when the US struck targets in Iran, which responded with an attack on Kuwait.

Four lawmakers from Trump's Republican party joined Democrats on Wednesday to vote 215-208 in favour of a resolution ordering the withdrawal of American troops from the Iran war.

"This is a loud and unambiguous message to Donald Trump on behalf of the American people: it's time to end his deeply unpopular and illegal war of choice in Iran," Democrats posted on X.

The resolution was largely symbolic, however, as the US president can veto it if it gains Senate approval.

At a congressional hearing, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said Iran's highly enriched uranium stockpiles were at the centre of discussions with Tehran.

Washington insists Tehran must turn over its near-weapons-grade enriched uranium, agree to curb its nuclear activities and reopen Hormuz.

Iran, however, has long claimed a right to enrichment, and has also preconditioned a deal on halting the parallel conflict in

Lebanon, where Israel is fighting the Tehran-backed armed group Hizbollah.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi had said Wednesday that any Israeli attack on the Lebanese capital Beirut would trigger a "full-scale resumption" of the wider war.

'This is a loud and unambiguous message to Donald Trump on behalf of the American people: it's time to end his deeply unpopular and illegal war of choice in Iran'

In Washington, Israel and Lebanon agreed on Wednesday to implement a new ceasefire after two days of direct talks.

The agreement requires a "complete cessation" of fire by Hiz-

bollah, and calls for "pilot zones" in which the Lebanese armed forces "will take exclusive control of the territory to the exclusion of all non-state actors".

Further talks were planned in the week of June 22, with a view toward reaching a "comprehensive agreement".

A previous truce was meant to have taken hold in Lebanon on April 17 but has never been observed, with the violence only escalating since.

Even after the announcement of the renewed ceasefire, Israel said there had been "a hostile aircraft infiltration" after air raid sirens sounded in the north, while Lebanese state media reported fresh Israeli drone strikes in the south.

Israel's defence minister, Israel Katz, characterised the agreement as granting his forces the "freedom of action, with American backing, to strike in Beirut in response to fire on Israeli communities".

Israel is staging its deepest ground offensive into Lebanon in two decades, and Katz said its troops would stay where they are "while continuing to dismantle terrorist infrastructure".

## UN peacekeeper from Serbia killed in south Lebanon

BEIRUT, Lebanon (AFP) — A United Nations peacekeeper died on Thursday from wounds sustained the night before when shelling hit his base in southern Lebanon, the force said.

The Israeli military accused Hizbollah of launching the mortar rounds that struck the UNIFIL position and killed the man — the seventh peacekeeper to die in Lebanon since the latest conflict erupted in March.

"A UNIFIL peacekeeper died early this morning from critical injuries sustained when mortar shells struck his position," a statement from the force said, adding that two others were wounded in the incident on Wednesday night.

It said a probe had been launched and also urged "relevant national authorities to investigate the incident".

Serbia's defence ministry said in a statement that "Senior Sergeant Milovan Jovanovic was given emergency medical care at a hospital inside the base after being wounded and then transported by helicopter to the University Medical Centre in Beirut, where he died".

According to UNIFIL, around 170 Serbian peacekeepers are among the 7,500-strong force, whose personnel



A photograph taken from the southern area of Nabatieh shows smoke rising from the site of an Israeli air strike in the village of Nabatieh Al Fawqa, with the Beaufort Castle visible in the background, on Thursday

come from nearly 50 countries.

The Israeli military said it had "identified several launches in the area of Al Qatrani carried out by the Hizbollah terrorist organisation that landed inside a UNIFIL force position in the Dibbine area" overnight.

Peacekeepers are deployed in south Lebanon near the Blue Line, the 120-kilometre (75-mile) de facto border between Lebanon and Israel, putting the force in the middle of the fighting.

"UNIFIL has detected an increasingly high number of trajectories and impacts in south Lebanon," the force's statement said, adding that "the violence must end".

In late March, an Indonesian peacekeeper was

killed and another later died of his wounds after a projectile hit their base, with a preliminary UN investigation blaming an Israeli tank shell.

Shortly after, two more Indonesian peacekeepers were killed by an improvised explosive device, which the same UN investigation found was likely planted by Hizbollah.

And in April, two French peacekeepers were killed in an ambush that French authorities and the UN attributed to Hizbollah, which denied involvement.

On Monday, UN chief Antonio Guterres said peacekeepers would still be needed in Lebanon after UNIFIL's mission expires at the year's end — a suggestion likely to face opposition from the United States and Israel.

## Somalia capital rocked by gunfire and fighting overnight

MOGADISHU (AFP) — Heavy gunfire rocked Somalia's capital overnight, with smoke rising over the city and armed forces deployed on the streets on Thursday, AFP journalists reported, after clashes erupted between rival political factions ahead of planned protests.

President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud plunged Somalia into a fresh political crisis in mid-May after announcing a one-year extension of his term, which had been due to expire on May 15.

The opposition and regional leaders have rejected the move and demonstrations against it were due to take place in Mogadishu on Thursday.

But as opposition leaders came to the city ahead of the protests on Wednesday, clashes broke out and continued sporadically through the night, according to AFP journalists and witnesses in the area.

"We did not sleep throughout the night because of sporadic gunfire," said Xalimo Salad, a resident of Mogadishu's Howl Wadaag district adding that "more intense gunfight broke out" on Thursday morning.

"We have seen federal government forces



Somali government forces ride in armoured vehicles during a patrol as residents gather following reported shelling in the Howl Wadaag district of Mogadishu, on Thursday

deploying reinforcements," he said.

Police said they were conducting a "large-scale security operation" against "heavily armed militias who launched mortar attacks on some neighbourhoods of the capital".

Former prime minister Hassan Ali Khaire said he had been attacked by government forces on Wednesday after relocating from his base in the heavily fortified green zone around the airport to his city residence, in order to take part in

the protests.

In a post on social media on Thursday he said the president's forces had "directed a sustained and indiscriminate military assault with the apparent objective of killing me".

There was no immediate word on casualties as of Thursday morning, and by 9:30 am the fighting had subsided as the government and opposition entered negotiations, according to sources.

A security analyst, who asked not to be

named, confirmed to AFP the violence had spread since last night and had "escalated this morning".

"Mortars and heavy calibre weapons being used, civilian casualties in some areas," he said.

International observers have expressed concern, with the US embassy in Mogadishu calling the violence "reckless" and urging dialogue.

A joint statement from the EU and UN missions and British embassy said the clashes were "deeply

concerning".

Late Wednesday, an AFP journalist filmed panicked residents in the Howl Wadaag district near his home, with loud gunshots heard in the background.

Witnesses told AFP they saw armed opposition forces clashing with Somali police.

Gunfire was also reported near the residence of former president Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, close to the popular Lido Beach area, according to witnesses.

The president has been attempting to move Somalia towards democratic elections, replacing a system based around clan elders.

Mohamud argues he was given an extra year in the presidency when a new constitution was passed by parliament in March that set the framework for polls.

But with the country deeply divided between rival clans, and much of it under the control of Islamist insurgent group Al Shabaab, there has been little progress on organising elections beyond a few localised pockets.

Opposition and regional leaders have strongly opposed Mohamud's plan, seeing it as an attempt to centralise power.



Hungary's Prime Minister Peter Magyar (right) and Ireland's Prime Minister Micheal Martin address a press conference at the foreign ministry in Budapest, Hungary, on Thursday

## Hungary seeks Irish help to end EU censure proceedings

BUDAPEST (AFP) —

Hungarian Prime Minister Peter Magyar on Thursday asked the upcoming Irish EU presidency's assistance in closing a protracted disciplinary procedure against Budapest for allegedly undermining the bloc's legal standards and democratic values.

Since September 2018, Hungary has been targeted by "Article 7" proceedings, accused of breaching the rule of law under Magyar's

predecessor, national-ist Viktor Orban.

Such proceedings can in theory result in the suspension of a member state's voting rights in the EU Council.

Since taking office last month, Magyar has made visits to Brussels and key EU member states, including Germany and France, seeking to improve relations that were tense during Orban's 16-year tenure.

Last Friday, the EU announced it would un-

lock more than 16 billion euros (\$19 billion) for Hungary that were frozen over rule of law concerns during Orban's rule, if the central European country stays on track with a major reform push.

"We will count on the [Irish] presidency's help in concluding the ongoing Article 7 procedure against Hungary," Magyar told journalists, after talks with Irish Prime Minister Micheal Martin.

He said he plans to meet with the European

Parliament's President Roberta Metsola on the margins of a mid-June EU summit to discuss bringing an end to the proceedings "as quickly as possible".

"To achieve this, the European Parliament must first withdraw its complaint — the decision that initiated the proceedings — and then the Council must also close the proceedings," Magyar added.

The Irish prime minister promised Magyar they would work close-

ly with the EU's main executive body, the European Commission, to help Hungary unlock the frozen funds.

"You have our support in the task of implementing the domestic reforms required, which I know you and your government have already made great strides in achieving," Martin said.

Ireland will assume the EU's six-month rotating presidency from July, taking over from Cyprus.



An employee of the 'Alpes-Coccinelle' fruit and vegetable producer picks strawberries in one of the company's greenhouses in Ville-sous-Anjou, south-eastern France on May 21

## Unsafe food kills 1.5 mn people a year worldwide — WHO

GENEVA (AFP) — Food contaminated with harmful bacteria, viruses, parasites or chemicals kills 1.5 million people worldwide each year, with young children worst hit, the World Health Organisation (WHO) warned on Thursday.

After analysing 194 countries between 2000 and 2021, the United Nations health agency found that 886 million people contract an illness linked to the consumption of unsafe food a year, with under-fives nearly three times more likely to be at risk.

"Food safety is not an abstract issue — it touches every meal, every family, every day," said WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus.

Although illnesses from ingesting dangerous food have declined

overall since 2000, massive regional inequalities remain.

Africa and southeast Asia alone account for nearly three-quarters of all cases of food-related ailments and 60 per cent of deaths worldwide.

"The data show that food-borne diseases are not only persistent but are being made worse by climate change..."

At some 860 million cases in 2021, biological hazards such as bacte-

ria and viruses caused the overwhelming majority of food-borne illnesses.

But ingesting chemicals was responsible for a disproportionate share of the deaths, with arsenic and lead poisoning the prime non-biological culprits.

"The data show that food-borne diseases are not only persistent but are being made worse by climate change, which increases contamination risks and by antimicrobial resistance, which makes infections harder to treat," said Yuki Minato, WHO technical officer for food safety.

Besides the health effects, the study estimates that food-borne diseases cost the world economy \$647 billion in lost productivity in 2021.

## Iran FM says 'no tangible progress' in talks but Trump says deal close

KUWAIT CITY, Kuwait (AFP) — Iran's foreign minister said on Wednesday that "no tangible progress" has been made in negotiations to end the Middle East war as fresh US and Iranian strikes strained a fragile ceasefire.

Kuwaiti officials said the renewed hostilities included an Iranian drone strike on a passenger terminal at Kuwait international airport that killed one person and wounded 63.

In contrast with the downbeat Iranian remarks, US President Donald Trump struck an optimistic note, telling reporters at the White House that the Iran talks could yield a result "over the weekend".

"I hear the negotiation itself is going very well actually," Trump said of a potential deal. "It could happen... over the weekend."

Trump also said he wants to separate talks on the conflict in Lebanon between Israel and Iranian-backed Hizbollah and those on the war between the United States and Iran, although Tehran insists the two are linked.

"I'd like to separate it, I'd like to have a separate thing, because it is, it is separate," he said.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said Iran's highly enriched uranium stockpiles were at the centre of discussions with Tehran and voiced hope that the latest round of talks in Washington between Israel and Lebanon will produce a security roadmap.



An Iranian woman walks past a piece of street art in Tehran on Wednesday. The military adviser to Iran's supreme leader on Wednesday, warned of more missile and drone strikes should the United States renew its attacks on Iran

Washington insists Tehran must turn over its near-weapons-grade enriched uranium, agree to curb its nuclear activities and reopen the Strait of Hormuz, the key shipping channel for Gulf oil and gas, for any peace agreement to take hold.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said lines of communication with the United States were still open but warned that any Israeli attack on the Lebanese capital Beirut as part of its campaign against Hizbollah would trigger a "full-scale resumption" of the conflict.

"Communications with the Americans

have not been cut off, and messages have been exchanged regarding the need to stop aggression against Beirut, but no tangible progress has been made in the negotiation process," the Tasnim news agency quoted Araghchi as telling Lebanon's Al Mayadeen TV.

"Any attack on Beirut will have grave consequences and will lead to a full-scale resumption of the war," he said. "Our armed forces are ready to strike Israel if it attacks Beirut."

**'Playing with fire'**

Kuwait's military condemned the drone strike

on the airport as an act of "criminal Iranian aggression". India's foreign ministry said the one fatality was an Indian national.

Iran's Revolutionary Guard denied attacking the airport and said it was "an error in the American Patriot systems, which landed on the terminal after failing to intercept Iranian missiles". The Revolutionary Guard also accused US forces of provoking a response by targeting a tanker and a communications tower on the country's Qeshm Island.

The fresh attacks constitute one of the more severe tests yet of the April 8 ceasefire that

paused more than a month of war sparked by the US-Israeli bombing of Iran, and has largely held despite sporadic exchanges of fire.

Trump played down the renewed hostilities saying "in that part of the world ceasefire is when you're shooting in a more moderate manner".

Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu accused Iran meanwhile of "playing with fire".

"Iran surely knows what the [US] president has said, that if necessary, there'll be a full-scale return to military action," Netanyahu said in an interview with US channel CNBC.

## Sudan, DRC top world's most neglected crises — Norway aid group

OSLO (AFP) — Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Colombia top the list of the world's most neglected displacement crises, a prominent Norwegian aid group said on Thursday, noting that nationalism and rearmament campaigns grabbed attention in wealthy countries.

Sudan, which since 2023 has been ravaged by a bloody conflict between two rival generals competing for power, has more than nine million internally



A child returning from school stops to look at Ebola awareness illustrations displayed on the signboards of the Ebola Treatment Centre (ETC) in Munigi on Tuesday

displaced people, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) said in a

statement. A further four million Sudanese have fled

to neighbouring countries and nearly 19.5 million people there

are also suffering from hunger, the NRC said.

"It is incomprehensible that a displacement crisis of similar proportions to the crises in Syria and Ukraine at their peak can continue to worsen almost unnoticed," NRC chief Jan Egeland said.

"Just as needs in Sudan skyrocketed last year and famine kept spreading, the funding was cut," he added.

The NGO's list is based on three criteria: Lack of humanitarian funding, lack of media coverage and lack

of political will within the international community.

The DRC, where an Ebola epidemic has added turmoil to the east of the country ravaged by decades of conflict, appears on NRC's list for the 10th year in a row.

In 2025, only 27.4 per cent of the funding needed for the DRC has been secured, leaving more than 21 million people in need, according to the NRC.

"Behind every statistic in eastern DR Congo are families who

have endured years of violence, repeated displacement, and deep uncertainty about their future," said Eric Batton, NRC's country director for the DRC.

"While attention shifts from one global emergency to another, millions of Congolese continue to live without adequate protection, assistance or hope."

Colombia for its part has been marred for over 60 years by an internal conflict involving guerrilla groups, paramilitaries, drug

traffickers and security forces and "trapped in a rollercoaster of neglect", according to the NGO.

"People affected by this conflict have found no lasting solutions. Too many are repeatedly displaced and trapped, with no end in sight," Giovanni Rizzo, NRC's country director for Colombia, commented in the report.

The list of neglected crises also includes Yemen, Afghanistan, Honduras, Ecuador, Cameroon, Nigeria and Mozambique.

## Jordan's food self-sufficiency rises to 61.4% in 2024 — statistics report

Continued from page 1

Despite the gains, several strategic commodities continue to rely almost entirely on imports. Wheat self-sufficiency stood at just 2.9 per cent, while fish and seafood reached 8.9 per cent. Production of rice, sugar and vegetable oils, excluding ol-

ive oil, remained at zero per cent.

Fresh vegetables continued to dominate food exports in 2024. Tomato exports exceeded 226,000 tonnes, while exports of zucchini, cucumber and eggplant reached 31,000 tonnes, 11,000 tonnes and 3,000 tonnes, respectively. Cantaloupe exports to-

talled 51,000 tonnes, while apricot exports reached 14,000 tonnes.

The report also highlighted growth in overall food production, which increased from 3.6 million tonnes in 2020 to approximately 4 million tonnes in 2024, representing an 11.4 per cent rise.

Food exports climbed

to nearly 900,000 tonnes during the period, while imports increased modestly from 3.3 million tonnes to 3.4 million tonnes.

A number of products, including olives, cucumbers, zucchini, eggplants and basic dairy products recorded zero imports in both years, reflecting

sufficient local production to meet domestic demand.

The report also underscored the importance of reducing food waste to strengthen food security, noting that each person in Jordan wastes an average of 81.3 kilogrammes of food annually in the household sector alone.

## Gov't suspends recruitment of non-Jordanians across most sectors

Continued from page 1

The strategy is supported by DEF financing programmes that promote entrepreneurship and help women and youth establish independent businesses.

Zyoud said the fund also offers dedicated financing programmes

for vocational training graduates, enabling them to launch small enterprises and create additional employment opportunities within their communities.

The overall unemployment rate in the Kingdom fell to 16.1 per cent in the first quarter of 2026, down 0.5

percentage points compared with the same period of 2025 and 2.3 percentage points compared with the first quarter of 2022, the Department of Statistics said on Sunday.

The report showed that unemployment among Jordanian males stood at 17.9 per cent

in the first quarter of 2026, a decrease of 0.7 percentage points year-on-year.

It added that unemployment among Jordanians overall (males and females) declined by 1.7 percentage points over the past four years compared with the first quarter of 2022, while

the rate among Jordanian males has dropped by 6.3 percentage points since 2021.

Among Jordanians aged 24 and above, the unemployment rate reached 17.7 per cent in the first quarter of 2026, including 14.4 per cent for males and 29 per cent for females.

## Hizbollah chief rejects truce, demands Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon

Continued from page 1

After Israeli troops withdrew in 2000, calls on Hizbollah to disarm multiplied, with the leadership under President Joseph Aoun taking the firmest stance yet.

The Lebanese government has declared Hizbollah's military activities illegal, and the army was working to disarm the group in areas south of the Litani River near Israel.

The war launched by the US and Israel on Iran saw Hizbollah return to the battlefield, launching attacks into Israel while fighting Israeli troops in their deepest incursion into Lebanon in two decades.

Speaking of the deal announced in Washington, Aoun said it represented "the last chance to enter into a final, comprehensive ceasefire".

Hizbollah's Qassem, however, said that Hizbollah pulling back would amount to "surrender and defeat".

Esmail Oaani, the head

of Iran's Quds Force — the foreign arm of its powerful Revolutionary Guard — insisted Israel withdraw to its pre-war positions in Lebanon as a "minimum demand", adding that "supporting the resistance in Lebanon is the duty of all of us".

Mohammad Chamseddine, 56, from Beirut's southern suburbs, told AFP that "this isn't the first time there's been a ceasefire and Israel violates it".

As an Israeli drone buzzed overhead, Chamseddine said the ceasefire for now was just "words on paper. I won't believe it until I see it on the ground. How can a ceasefire be on one side only?"

Lebanon's state-run National News Agency reported strikes in more than 20 locations in Lebanon's south and east on Thursday, some causing casualties, including a couple and their daughter who were wounded in an attack on their car.

Israel's military re-

newed a warning to Lebanese not to cross the Zaharani River, around 45 kilometres from the border, after it last week declared all areas south of the river "combat zones".

Earlier Thursday, the Israeli military said air raid sirens sounded in northern Israel, with one incident involving a "suspicious aerial target" resolved, while another incident was found to be a false alarm.

Hizbollah on Thursday claimed several attacks on Israeli troops who have invaded south Lebanon.

Israel's far-right National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir criticised the latest deal, calling it a "serious mistake".

According to a statement issued after the meeting in Washington, the two sides — which do not have diplomatic relations — had agreed to create "pilot zones" in which the Lebanese army "will take exclusive control of the territory to the exclusion of all non-state actors".

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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

E mail: [editor@jordantimes.com](mailto:editor@jordantimes.com)  
[jotimes@jordantimes.com](mailto:jotimes@jordantimes.com)  
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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**

## South Korean adoptees sue Denmark over right to know birth families

By **Camille Bas/Wohlerl**

Agence France-Presse

COPENHAGEN — Eight South Korean-born adoptees are suing Denmark for its role in their illegal adoptions decades ago, demanding the state admit responsibility for covering up their origins.

Sofie Randel was three years old when she arrived in Denmark with her younger brother in 1977, during a period of authoritarian rule in South Korea.

A lively, talkative little girl, she spoke fluent Korean at the time and her adoptive father recorded her on a cassette that then sat gathering dust for years.

In 2023, Randel gave the recording to a journalist who would follow her in her quest to discover her origins.

Little by little, through her childish chatter re-tracing her arrival in Denmark and some research done in South Korea, Randel uncovered a different story from the one in her Danish adoption papers.

Based on those, she had thought that she had been abandoned in the street, her brother swaddled on her back with their names and ages pinned to their clothes.

But instead, she learned that their mother had entrusted them to an orphanage while the family dealt with financial difficulties.

Instead of being cared for in the orphanage, the two children were adopted together in Denmark, like tens of thousands of others sent overseas in a state-sanctioned practice that lasted decades.

In South Korea, their three older brothers and sister always hoped to see them again. She and her brother finally met their siblings there in 2023.

"They were looking for us for 45 years," Randel, now 52, told AFP, wiping away tears.

She and her brother had not known anyone was looking for them.

She believes Danish authorities for their part tried "to keep the story hidden" by telling them that they had been abandoned.

### Adoption enquiry

South Korea sent more than 140,000 children overseas for adoption between 1955 and 1999, according to an official enquiry in the country.

In October 2025, Seoul apologised for the first time for state-sanctioned malpractices, saying "unjust human rights violations" were committed.

Between 1970 and 1989, 7,220 South Korean children were adopted in Denmark, almost all of whom were told they were street orphans.

Enquiries have proven otherwise, indicating that South Korean children in orphanages were given away for adoption without their families' consent.

A 2024 report by the National Social Appeals Board showed that Denmark's state-run adoption agencies knew their South Korean partners sometimes changed children's identities.

According to Danish media reports, the Danish agencies paid around \$8.4 million to facilitate the adoptions.

"As a Dane, I believed that Denmark was on the side of the good and that Korea, as a former dictatorship, was on the side of the bad guys," said Peter Moller, who heads an association defending the rights of South Korean adoptees that is not part of the lawsuit against the Danish state.

"But Korea had the courage to look what it had done straight in the eye" while "Denmark prefers to sweep everything under the rug", he said.

### Adoptee finds father

Sidse Koch Jorgensen, a 53-year-old physiotherapist and adoptee, is angry.

"It's a human right to know your identity and also to have the possibility to have contact with your biological family," she fumed.

The inaccuracies in her adoption papers prevented that for years, but she is now nearing the end of her quest, which began with a first trip to South Korea in 2013.

"One month before I was to leave, I got an email saying they found my dad," she said. "It was a shock."

She met him during her visit, and discovered that the real circumstances about her separation from her biological family were very different from what her adoption papers said.

While her father was out of the country, Jorgensen's grandmother sent her to a "camp" to be cared for without his consent. Instead of being kept there, the child was sent to Denmark for adoption.

"I want the Danish government to take responsibility for showing so much neglect," Jorgensen added.

"They were the authorities who were supposed to check everything, to get some insight if there were any concerns."

The plaintiffs have each sought \$38,800 in damages.

Contacted by AFP, the Danish social affairs ministry declined to comment.

Denmark froze international adoptions in 2024 after a number of serious problems with international adoption practices came to light.

# Israel and the erosion of international legitimacy

By **Hasan Dajah**

Over the past decades, Israel's image has undergone fundamental shifts in the international community's perception of it. However, recent years, particularly since the outbreak of the war on Gaza, have marked an unprecedented turning point in Israel's international standing and its image in the eyes of global public opinion. After successfully presenting itself for decades as a state facing security threats and striving to protect its existence, it now faces increasing accusations of practicing policies of occupation, settlement expansion and collective punishment, as well as committing grave violations of international humanitarian law and crimes against humanity. This has led to a clear decline in the popular and political support it once enjoyed in many Western countries.

The scenes of widespread destruction and heavy human losses in the Gaza Strip have contributed to a profound shift in global public opinion. Traditional media and social media platforms have broadcast daily images of human suffering, making the Palestinian cause more prominent in the global consciousness than ever before. The Israeli narrative is no longer the sole dominant narrative in the international media landscape. Alternative narratives have emerged, based on eyewitness accounts, human rights reports and legal documents, prompting broad segments of public opinion to reconsider the nature of the conflict and its true causes.

In this context, an unprecedented wave of protests has swept through American and European universities, with dozens of campuses witnessing sit-ins and demonstrations demanding an end to the war on Gaza and a halt to military support for Israel. These protests carried significant political weight, as they originated from young people and students who represent the future

political and intellectual elites of Western societies. These movements also reflected the widening gap between the official policies of some Western governments and the positions of large segments of their populations regarding the events in the Palestinian territories.

Ultimately, Israel

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but it cannot, on its

own...

Among the factors contributing to the erosion of international support for Israel is the continued settlement expansion policy in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, Syria and Lebanon, which is considered illegal under international law. Instead of moving towards a political settlement based on a two-state solution, successive Israeli governments have continued to impose new realities on the ground, undermining the prospects for peace

and weakening international confidence in the possibility of reaching a just and lasting solution to the conflict.

The continuation of military operations on multiple regional fronts has also drawn increasing criticism of the current Israeli government's policies. Many observers have accused prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu of using the ongoing military escalation as a means to maintain the cohesion of his governing coalition and remain in power amidst successive domestic political crises and previous corruption charges. This perception has reinforced the belief in some international circles that the continuation of wars is no longer solely driven by security considerations, but also by domestic political calculations.

Conversely, Israel now faces increasing legal and diplomatic challenges on the international stage. It has become the subject of investigations and legal reviews before international institutions, and calls for accountability for those responsible for violations committed during the war have grown louder. Furthermore, some countries and human rights organisations have begun to reassess their relations and positions regarding Israeli policies, given the growing concern about the repercussions of the ongoing conflict on regional security and stability. The most serious challenge facing Israel today is not merely political criticism or diplomatic pressure, but rather the gradual and profound shift in global public opinion. History demonstrates that international legitimacy is not measured solely by military power or political alliances, but also by a state's ability to maintain its moral standing and respect international law. When populations, particularly in allied nations, begin to question a state's policies, this gradually influences the positions of political parties, legislative bodies and decision-makers.

Despite the continued official support Israel receives from some major international powers, current indicators suggest that this support no longer enjoys the popular consensus it did in previous decades. A new generation in the West views the Palestinian issue primarily through the lens of human rights and international law, rather than through the lens of traditional conflicts or geopolitical alliances. Digital media and social media platforms have played a crucial role in directly conveying images of events and human suffering to global public opinion. This has bolstered sympathy for the Palestinians and sparked broader discussions within universities, research centres, and political institutions regarding the future of the conflict, the limits of the use of force, and the necessity of finding a just and sustainable settlement based on international law and the right of peoples to self-determination.

Ultimately, Israel today faces an unprecedented strategic challenge: The decline of its moral and political standing on the international stage. Military force can achieve temporary gains on the ground, but it cannot, on its own, guarantee legitimacy or win the support of global public opinion. Therefore, the continuation of the occupation, the expansion of settlements, the escalation of regional wars, and the disregard for international demands to end the violence are all factors that contribute to accelerating Israel's loss of an increasing number of its supporters worldwide. Without addressing the root causes of the conflict and adhering to the principles of international law and justice, the crisis of legitimacy facing Israel is likely to worsen in the coming years, potentially becoming more impactful than any other military or security challenge.

Hasan Dajah is professor of strategic studies at Al-Husseini Bin Talal University

## Why public sector transformation fails without training

By **Lubna Hanna Ammari**

Artificial intelligence is rapidly reshaping how governments operate, make decisions and deliver services to citizens. Across the world, public institutions are investing heavily in digital transformation strategies, expecting artificial intelligence to increase efficiency, reduce costs and improve transparency. However, despite this accelerating adoption, a growing body of international research and policy analysis indicates that many government-led AI initiatives fail to achieve their intended impact. The reason is not the technology itself, but the human capacity required to use it effectively.

The core challenge lies in what can be described as a "human bottleneck". While artificial intelligence systems are becoming more sophisticated and accessible, the readiness of public sector employees has not evolved at the same pace. Governments often focus on procurement of advanced systems, large-scale digital infrastructure, and algorithmic tools, while underestimating the importance of preparing the workforce that must operate, interpret and govern these systems. As a result, a critical gap emerges between technological capability and institutional readiness.

International evidence increasingly supports this observation. Reports from global organisations such as the OECD and the World Bank emphasize that successful digital government transformation depends less on technology acquisition and more on sustained investment in human capital development. In many cases, public sector employees lack the structured training required to

interact with AI systems, interpret data outputs, or integrate algorithmic insights into policy decisions. This skills gap limits the effectiveness of even the most advanced technological deployments.

The consequences of insufficient training extend beyond operational inefficiency. When public servants are not adequately prepared, artificial intelligence systems risk being underutilised, misinterpreted or mistrusted. This can lead to resistance within institutions, fragmented implementation and in some cases, complete abandonment of promising digital initiatives. Moreover, without proper understanding, the ethical and governance dimensions of AI such as bias detection, transparency, and accountability become significantly harder to manage.

At the same time, governments face increasing pressure to deliver faster, more responsive, and more data-driven services. Citizens expect seamless digital experiences similar to those provided by the private sector. Yet, this expectation cannot be met solely through technological investment. It requires a fundamental rethinking of how public institutions build capacity, design training programmes, and embed continuous learning into their organisational culture.

The concept of a "trained digital workforce" is therefore becoming central to modern governance. Rather than viewing training as a supplementary activity, leading public administrations are beginning to treat it as a strategic pillar of transformation. This includes not only technical training on how to use AI tools, but also deeper capacity-building in data literacy, algorithmic

reasoning, and digital ethics. Without these competencies, the potential of artificial intelligence in the public sector remains largely theoretical.

In the case of Jordan,

this challenge is

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administration and

smart services

In this context, the future of government transformation depends on closing the human gap as much as advancing technological infrastructure. Artificial intelligence can automate processes, enhance decision-making and improve service delivery, but only when it is supported by a workforce capable of engaging with it critically and effectively. The failure to invest in training risks turning AI from a transformative opportunity into an

underperforming investment.

Ultimately, the age of artificial intelligence is not only a technological revolution but also a human one. Governments that recognise this duality will be better positioned to succeed in their digital transformation journeys. Those that focus solely on systems while neglecting people will continue to face implementation gaps and limited returns on investment. In the end, the most significant barrier to AI adoption in the public sector is not the absence of technology, but the absence of prepared minds capable of using it wisely.

In the case of Jordan, this challenge is particularly relevant as the country continues to advance its digital transformation agenda across multiple sectors, including education, public administration and smart services. While Jordan has demonstrated strong commitment to adopting emerging technologies and fostering innovation, the success of these efforts will depend largely on its ability to invest in human capital at scale. Building a digitally competent public workforce, equipped with the skills to understand, apply and critically evaluate artificial intelligence, is no longer optional but essential. Without systematic training programmes and continuous capacity-building initiatives, even the most promising national digital strategies risk underperformance. Therefore, for Jordan, closing the human gap is not just a policy priority, but a strategic necessity to ensure that artificial intelligence becomes a driver of sustainable development rather than an unrealised ambition.

The author is a specialist in educational technology

# BUSINESS

Friday-Saturday, June 5-6, 2026



## EU signs off on new 100-m-euro in support for Lebanese army

BRUSSELS, Belgium (AFP) — The European Union signed off on Thursday on a new 100-million-euro (\$116 million) support package for the Lebanese army, as it seeks to bolster the military amid a fragile ceasefire in the country.

"The latest ceasefire between Israel and Lebanon offers a chance to prevent a return to full-scale hostilities," EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas posted online.

"But the death of a UNIFIL peacekeeper

and continued skirmishes underscore the tenuous nature of what was agreed."

Kallas said "the best way to reduce the threat posed by Hizbollah is to strengthen the Lebanese state, empower its institutions, and restore its monopoly on the use of force."

The new assistance for the Lebanese armed forces is the fourth provided by the EU in recent years, taking the overall value to 182 million euros.

Israel carried out

new strikes in Lebanon on Thursday and again threatened Beirut, despite the two countries agreeing to a conditional ceasefire that Lebanon's president called the "last chance" for a durable end to the fighting.

A United Nations peacekeeper was killed and two others were wounded, the UNIFIL force said, after a base was hit on Wednesday in the south, where Israel and the Iran-backed militant group Hizbollah are fighting.

## OECD report spotlights Jordan's Audit Bureau Experience

AMMAN (JT) — The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the INTOSAI Development Initiative (IDI) have released an international report titled "Strengthening the Independence of Supreme Audit Institutions: Looking at Informal Factors Beyond Legal Safeguards".

The report, released as part of the "Forum on Restoring Public Finances" held in Paris on May 27-28, 2026, underscored the importance of the independence of supreme audit institutions as a key safeguard for public funds and a cornerstone of transparency, accountability and effective public resource management.

It noted that legal safeguards alone are not sufficient to ensure such independence, which is also influenced by factors including public trust, professional reputation, relations with executive and legislative authorities, and communication practices.

The report highlighted Jordan's experience through the



The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the INTOSAI Development Initiative have released an international report titled 'Strengthening the Independence of Supreme Audit Institutions'

Audit Bureau, noting that a supportive institutional environment, professional credibility and balanced relations with stakeholders have helped strengthen the impact of audit work and translate its findings into practical recommendations.

Audit Bureau President Radhi Hamadeen

said Jordan's inclusion in the report reflects the bureau's contribution to international discussions on strengthening oversight of public funds, according to an Audit Bureau statement.

He added that the report's recommendations are consistent with the bureau's efforts

to enhance audit practices, improve the quality of audit reports and advance digital transformation and data analytics.

The report also called for stronger compliance with international standards, further development of audit methodologies and wider use of data and

digital analytics to enhance accountability and improve government performance.

As part of the project's work, Jordan hosted a regional workshop with the participation of a number of Supreme Audit Institutions in the Arab region.

Regional hosting aimed to expand the discussion on the informal factors affecting the independence of audit bodies and to exchange experiences on the role of institutional trust, professional cooperation and balanced relations with the relevant authorities in enhancing effective independence, according to Audit Bureau statement.

The report recommended the need to adhere to international standards, develop methodologies for selecting audit subjects according to objective criteria, expand the use of data and digital analysis in risk monitoring, and employ audit results to provide proactive insights that help governments improve performance and avoid deficiencies.

## Overtaken by Hong Kong in global wealth management, Swiss keep cool

By Nathalie Olof/ORS with Tommy Wang in Hong Kong  
Agency France-Presse

ZURICH — Though Hong Kong has overtaken Switzerland as the number one in cross-border wealth management, rather than entrepeneur mode, Swiss banks seem unruffled — feeling it bolsters the case against looming tighter banking regulations.



Hong Kong has bypassed Switzerland as number one in global wealth management

Hong Kong is now the world's largest cross-border booking centre thanks to inflows from mainland China, strong initial public offering activity, and equity market gains, said a study published last week by the Boston Consulting Group (BCG).

Hong Kong had \$2.95 trillion of cross-border assets under management in 2025, while Switzerland had \$2.946 trillion.

Rapid advances in technology innovation and artificial intelligence sectors are "expected to open up greater scope for development within Hong Kong's asset and wealth management industry", said the semi-autonomous Chinese city's Financial Secretary Paul Chan.

More than 60 per cent of the external capital comes from mainland China, the BCG 2026 Global Wealth Report said, adding that Hong Kong was "cementing its role as China's gateway to global markets".

"Uncertainties around US-China tensions are the main reason they are moving capital and managing wealth in Hong Kong," Gary Ng, senior economist at Natixis Corporate and Investment Banking, told AFP.

However, China's market regulator announced a sweeping investigation in May against some brokers

running cross-border trading, as it launched a two-year crackdown on investment leaving the mainland.

On Monday, China's cabinet unveiled new rules due to enter force in July, aimed at curbing outbound investment and deals with foreign entities which might transfer restricted technology, services and data overseas without authorisation.

"Investors engaging in foreign investment and related activities... shall not endanger China's national security or harm national interests," authorities said.

Ng noted that if Beijing "truly wants to accelerate" the internationalisation of China's yuan currency, "it will need to accept freer cross-border capital movement".

**Tougher Swiss regulations planned**

The Swiss Bankers Association told AFP that Hong Kong had been directly benefiting from exceptionally strong asset growth in China.

But it said Swiss banks too had a successful presence in key Asian growth markets.

"For Switzerland, competitive framework conditions are particu-

larly crucial for the future. It is essential that regulation remains targeted and internationally coordinated so that both stability and competitiveness are strengthened," it said.

Switzerland's biggest bank UBS is currently at loggerheads with the government, which wants to tighten banking regulations following the implosion of Credit Suisse in 2023.

UBS was strong-armed into a quickfire takeover of its closest domestic rival to prevent a major blow to Switzerland's financial stability.

Bern now wants stronger safeguards, given the merged megabank's size relative to the Swiss economy.

Hong Kong overtaking Switzerland "shows that international competitiveness must remain at the heart of the discussions", the Association of Swiss Private Banks, which represents wealth management firms, told AFP.

During debates on the government's proposals, "parliament will have to keep this in mind", it added.

**'Playing half the game'**

Andreas Venditti, an an-

alyst with Swiss investment managers Vontobel, said Hong Kong's rise to the top had been coming because growth rates were stronger in Asia.

"As Swiss banks are among the largest wealth managers in Asia — with UBS the largest in the region by very far — they clearly benefit from the higher growth rates," he told AFP.

UBS's assets under management in the Asia-Pacific region amounted to \$781 billion at the end of March, he noted.

Cross-border wealth grew by 10.7 per cent in Hong Kong in 2025, compared to 7.6 per cent in Switzerland, said BCG.

Dean Frankle, a managing director and financial institutions specialist at BCG, said Hong Kong overtaking Switzerland is primarily down to "the rise of Asia".

For wealthy Asian clients, "why would you go to Europe" when Hong Kong is "at your doorstep", he said, hence the importance for Swiss banks to be competitive in the Asian market.

"If you're not serving both markets, you're only playing half the game," he told AFP.

## Oil drops, stocks mixed on Mideast war, AI uncertainty

LONDON (AFP) — Oil prices and the dollar retreated on Thursday while stock markets were mixed as traders tracked conflicting events in the Middle East war, while a disappointing outlook from US chipmaker Broadcom weighed on AI stocks.

Iran reported "no tangible progress" in negotiations on ending the war, even as the US House of Representatives passed a resolution seeking to halt American military action in Iran.

Israel, meanwhile, struck south Lebanon and threatened new attacks on Beirut despite an announcement hours earlier that the opposing sides had agreed to implement a conditional ceasefire.

Elsewhere, a disappointing forecast by chip giant Broadcom stoked concerns about AI stock valuations, which have soared in recent months and helped push equity indexes to record highs.

Broadcom's stock



Fuel prices are displayed at a gas station in Brooklyn on Monday, in New York City

plunged around 15 percent, "reviving doubts the actual growth rates for artificial intelligence", said John Plassard at Cite Gestion.

Investors also braced for a coming IPO by Elon Musk's SpaceX, the rockets-to-AI behemoth that is aiming to raise \$75 billion in the biggest initial share sale ever.

SpaceX said in a regulatory filing that it would offer over 550 million shares at \$135 each next week, which could value the com-

pany at a whopping \$1.8 trillion.

"Investors will be mindful of the extraordinary gains made in semiconductors over the past two months, and the upcoming SpaceX IPO which is sure to suck some money out of outperforming stocks," said David Morrison, senior market analyst at Trade Nation.

Investors are also waiting for a US jobs report due on Friday to get a reading of the performance of the economy. A sepa-

rate report this week showed that despite rising energy prices, companies in the world's biggest economy added in May the most jobs since the start of 2025.

The dollar fell against main rivals after recent gains thanks to its safe-haven status and expectations that the Fed could raise US interest rates to combat higher inflation.

"Market sentiment is coming under pressure following yesterday's pullback in US equities and the precarious nature of negotiations between the US and Iran to reopen the Strait of Hormuz," said Neil Wilson, investor strategist at Saxo UK.

However, the greenback still managed to push Indonesia's rupiah to a record low against the currency, with the Asian country stung by surging energy costs and as its lawmakers passed a bill expanding oversight of the central bank that raised concerns over its independence.

## AMMAN STOCK EXCHANGE

AMMAN (JT) — Amman Stock Exchange (ASE) trading value for Thursday amounted to JD18.8 million spread over 5.7 million shares that traded through 5,423 transactions.

The ASE share price index shed 0.64 per cent, closing at 4030.24 points.

Out of 101 companies whose shares were traded, the share price of 31 companies rose while the share price of another 35 declined.

Topping the list of the companies whose shares gained the most were Sura Development and Investment Plc. by 5 per cent, Al Tajamout for Catering and Housing Company Plc. by 4.76 per cent, Dar Al Aman for Investment by 4.65 per cent, Rumm Financial Brokerage by 4.59 per cent, and Al Entkaeya for Investment and Real Estate Development Company Plc. by 2.94 per cent.

The companies whose shares dropped the most were Int'l Arabian Development and Investment Trading Company by 5 per cent, Jordan Poultry Processing and Marketing by 4.55 per cent, Al Shamekha for Real Estate and Financial Investments by 4.51 per cent, Al Rakaez Investment Company by 4.17 per cent, and National Aluminum Industrial by 4.11 per cent.

### THE MARKET TODAY

ASE Index: ↓ 4030.24 0.64% June 04, 2026

**Live Data**

Click and drag in the plot area to zoom in

**Historical Data**

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### DAILY SUMMARY

	Regular Market	OTC Market	Bonds
Trading Value (JDs)	18,794,697		
Trading volume	5,681,396		
No. of Transactions	5,423		
No. of Securities	101		

# THE JORDAN TIMES SPORTS AT A GLANCE

## CRICKET

### England collapses against New Zealand in first Test

LONDON (AFP) — England suffered a dramatic top-order collapse on the opening day of the first Test against New Zealand on Thursday, slumping to 55-5 in bowler-friendly conditions. New Zealand captain Tom Latham decided to field first after winning the toss and pacemen Kyle Jamieson and Will O'Rourke vindicated his decision, taking two wickets apiece. Several England batsmen fell for single-figure scores, with debutant Emilio Gay out for eight, while Joe Root and wicketkeeper Jamie Smith both scored just one run. Gay, playing in place of dropped opener Zak Crawley, hit his first ball in Test cricket for four but was first to go with the score on 16 when he edged Jamieson to Daryl Mitchell in the slips. Rain forced an early lunch, with England 24-1 off 10 overs. Nathan Smith trapped opening batsman Ben Duckett lbw for 19 before Jacob Bethell was dismissed in similar fashion by O'Rourke to leave England 33-3. Rourke next captured the prized wicket of Root, caught behind as he opened the face a touch, before Smith was clean bowled playing no shot to a Jamieson ball that cut back and knocked out his off stump. Harry Brook gave England fans something to cheer with a couple of resounding pulls for four before he was joined in the middle by captain Ben Stokes. England, in the opening Test of a three-match series, had moved on to 83-5 by the end of the 26th over.

## RUGBY

### Ireland Slattery dead at 77

LONDON (AFP) — Ireland rugby great Fergus Slattery has died aged 77, the Irish Rugby Football Union announced on Thursday. An outstanding back-row forward, Slattery had been suffering from dementia for several years. His case was one of a number involving former rugby players stricken with neurodegenerative disease. Slattery won 61 caps for Ireland and was a key member of the victorious 1971 and 1974 British and Irish Lions teams that won Test series in New Zealand and South Africa respectively. He also played for the Barbarians in their celebrated 1973 win over New Zealand in Cardiff. Slattery captained Ireland and featured in the 1982 and 1985 teams that won Triple Crowns in the old Five Nations. Fergus Slattery was a giant of Irish rugby and a player who defined excellence in his era," said IRFU president John O'Driscoll. "His leadership, skill and unwavering commitment to the jersey set standards that continue to inspire generations of players. "Off the field, he carried himself with humility and integrity, embodying the very best values of our game."

## Authorities warn of World Cup ticket, merchandise scams

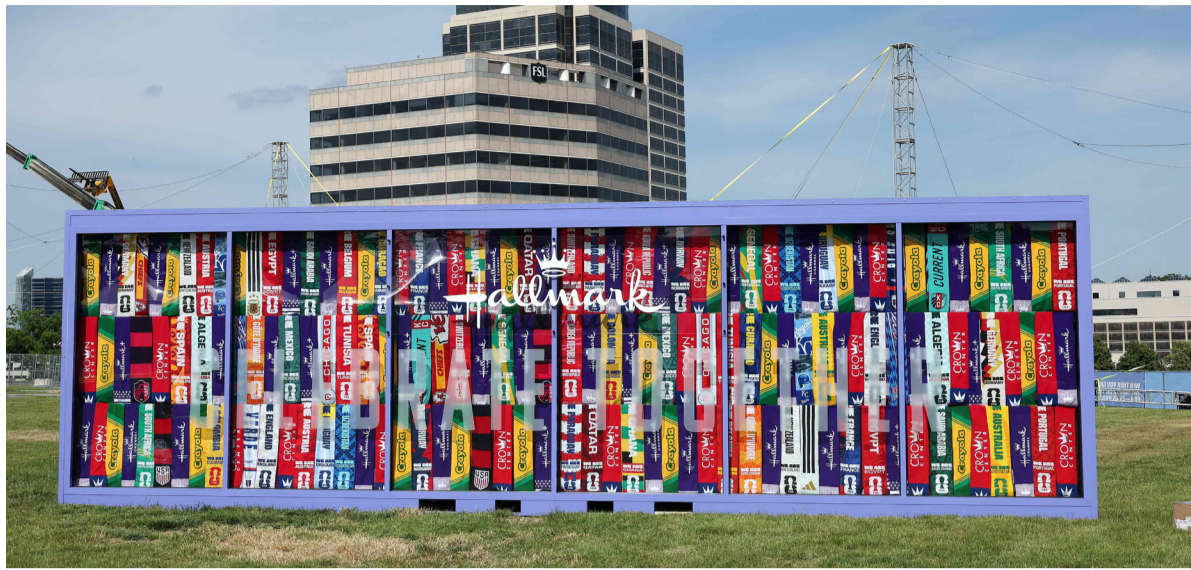
By Gwen Roley and Bill McCarthy  
Agence France-Presse

WASHINGTON, United States — Fraudsters are exploiting interest in the 2026 World Cup with a barrage of scams, as authorities and researchers caution against fake websites impersonating FIFA's official online presence to sell phantom tickets.

Controversy has already swirled around the football governing body's official ticketing for the largest-ever World Cup, which begins June 11 with an expanded 48-team format and 104 matches across the United States, Mexico and Canada.

As sky-high entry costs price many people out, malicious actors are capitalizing on desperate fans seeking bargains outside accredited channels, using techniques experts say represent a "new normal" for major events.

The FBI warned last week of three dozen websites — with domains such as "fifa-ticket.live" and "fifaworldcup26.sale" — posing as the authentic



A general view of construction of the Fanfest as Kansas City prepares to host the FIFA World Cup 2026 on Wednesday in Kansas City, Missouri

fifa.com to steal personal information or sell fake tickets and products.

Singapore-based cybersecurity firm Group-IB reported an even larger scale of deception, identifying more than 4,300 fraudulent domains posing as FIFA-affiliated that have registered since August, including over 300 operated by a single Chinese-speaking actor.

Many of the sites are dormant, researchers said, primed to activate as the competition nears.

"Scammers exploit fan excitement, limited ticket availability and the fear of missing out, knowing people may lower their guard when an opportunity feels exclusive or time-sensitive," Justin Miller, associate professor of practice of cyber studies at the Uni-

versity of Tulsa, told AFP.

"Cybercriminals follow attention, urgency and money, and the World Cup sits at the intersection of all three," Miller added, saying the lookalike sites show increasingly sophisticated cybercriminals consider it "easier to imitate trust than to break through security".

The sites closely resemble fifa.com, stamped

with official branding of the World Cup and payment partner Visa. Complex interfaces let users browse match offerings, make selections and proceed through checkout.

AFP reviewed dozens of now-inactive Facebook ads, in multiple languages, directing users to scam ticket pages such as "fifa house".

Romania-based cyber-

security company Bitdefender also said it found 55 football-related scam ad campaigns on Meta platforms, including promotions for phony collectibles and merchandise.

Meta has started deploying pop-up warnings when Facebook users search for tickets and said it dismantled a network linking to spoofed FIFA sites promoting "fake gambling content".

Some scam sites target job hunters, promising meetings with World Cup employees whose names and photos were lifted from LinkedIn.

"Someone is fraudulently using my name and photo," one staffer wrote on LinkedIn in April.

Offline fraud also appears to be rising, Toronto police said on Monday they seized more than 16,000 fake football jerseys and flags, along with two counterfeit trophies.

Authorities in all three host countries have encouraged fans to purchase from verified sources, check web addresses and beware of splashy social media offers.

## World Cup fans barred from bringing water bottles into stadia — report

NEW YORK (AFP) — FIFA has banned fans from bringing refillable water bottles into World Cup venues in a last-minute policy change that will force thirsty supporters to pay for bottled water, The Athletic reported on Wednesday.

As recently as last month, FIFA's official stadium code of conduct included a clause which read: "For the avoidance of doubt, empty, transparent, reusable plastic bottles, up to [1 litre in] capacity, may be brought

into the Stadium."

However The Athletic reported on Wednesday that those guidelines had now been tweaked to explicitly ban refillable bottles.

"For the avoidance of doubt, reusable water bottles may not be brought into the stadium," an updated stadium code of conduct read.

It was not clear why football's global governing body FIFA had changed the guidelines, which come with the World Cup due to kick off

in Mexico City on June 11.

FIFA did not immediately respond to a request for comment from AFP.

The move comes despite experts warning fans could face health risks from extreme heat at open-air venues during the World Cup, which is being co-hosted by the United States, Canada and Mexico.

A report published by the World Weather Attribution research group last month estimated

that 26 of 104 games at the World Cup are likely to be played in conditions where the Wet Bulb Global Temperature (WBGT) exceeds 26 degrees.

WBGT is a measure of heat stress on the human body which combines temperature, humidity, wind and sunlight.

At last year's FIFA Club World Cup in the United States, where fans complained of searing temperatures, supporters were also barred from bringing water bottles into venues.



This aerial view shows progress on the Estadio Guadalajara and the upcoming FIFA facilities, which will host four matches of the 2026 FIFA World Cup, in Zapopan, Jalisco, Mexico, on Wednesday

## South Africa's closed white enclave attracting Afrikaner youth

By Clément Varanges  
Agence France-Presse

ORANIA, South Africa — A generation has grown up in the closed world of Orania, South Africa's whites-only Afrikaner enclave on the margins of the rainbow nation that this year celebrates its 35th anniversary.

And more young people from the white minority are moving to the small town, drawn by a new college and a sense of home carved out of the country's melting pot of cultures.

The Friday night crowd at Stokkies bar appeared mostly aged under 30, all Afrikaans-speaking descendants of the early European colonisers.

Bathed in blue light and lulled by country music, sons and daughters of Orania mingled in the tobacco smoke with students in engineering or plumbing. The owner of Stokkies, where a table is set aside for arm-wrestling bouts to "settle disputes", has the profile of many of Orania's young people: someone who left only to return.

After moving to the town with his parents at the age of eight, Thomas de Villiers left as an adult for the cosmopolitan metropolis of Cape Town.

But the high cost of liv-



A bronze statue of the Kleinreus (centre), also known as 'Little Giant', the symbol of Orania, is seen with several bronze busts of past Afrikaner leaders including Apartheid leaders in Orania, on January 28

ing drove him back, the 31-year-old told AFP.

Charlotte van Niekerk, 22, also chose to return to the arid town, which was founded in the Northern Cape province in 1991 and now counts just over 3,000 residents.

She lived here with her parents between the ages of four and 14 before they moved to outlying farms.

"Lot of kids that grew up with me can't wait to be 18 so they can just leave this place," said the Taylor Swift lookalike

who works in marketing. "But it's funny because they go away and then a lot of the time they just come back after a couple of years when they've seen it's not so wonderful out there," she added. She misses the cinema most of all but says the launch of a training college in 2019 has brought new energy to the town.

Nearly all its 250 students come from elsewhere, selected — as are all residents — on the basis of ethnicity, religion, a

strong work ethic and a clean criminal record.

The college is planning for an intake of 800 students within four years, town spokesman Joost Strydom told AFP, pointing to dormitories under construction. Few are likely to stay after graduation: Jobs are scarce and the biggest nearby town, Hopetown, with 10,000 inhabitants, is 40 kilometres away.

But at least while they are here, the students are spending money at the

petrol pump, the mini-market and at Stokkies.

"The social life is quite different from Pretoria or Joburg," said David Loock, 21. "We go fishing in our free time," he said, as a friend took out a photograph of a huge catfish pulled from the adjoining Orange River. Motocross is another favourite pastime. Orania's small-town feel has won over 19-year-old Di van van der Westhuizen, originally from sprawling Johannesburg about

600 km to the northeast.

"It's been a big change coming from where you mingle with a lot of people," he said. "It did me good to be back with my own people, the Afrikaners," said van der Westhuizen, wearing a moustache and "Boere-style" shorts.

Orania's inhabitants make up only a fraction of South Africa's Afrikaner population, estimated at around 2.6 million of 62 million people in 2022.

But its reinforcement of identity appeals to young Afrikaners in much the same way as MAGA conservatives in the United States and European far-right parties, both attracting a younger demographic.

The Afrikaner minority led South Africa through much of the stark apartheid-era oppression of the black majority, who were only given the vote in 1994.

The establishment of the new "rainbow nation" led some Afrikaners to fear for the future of their culture and language.

While thousands of Afrikaners are seduced by US President Donald Trump's offer of refuge, 23-year-old Doret Le Cornu found a harbour in Orania when she moved in three years ago.

## 'Dictatorship of monsters': Richard Gere slams 'maniac' Trump

OSLO (AFP) — Hollywood legend Richard Gere criticised Donald Trump on Tuesday, calling the US president a "maniac" who has "dismantled almost everything that was good" about the United States.

"We're living in the darkest moment that I've experienced on this planet," the 76-year-old "Pretty Woman" star told an awards ceremony in Oslo for the Vaclav Havel International Prize for Creative Dissent.

"Who ever thought America could turn like this? Who ever thought that a maniac like this would be president of the United States?" Gere told the audience of hundreds.

"First day, this guy dismantled almost everything that was good about the US government and the US people."

The "American Gigolo" heartthrob has previous form with Trump, having already branded the Republican a "bully" in February 2025.

As he announced prizes on Tuesday at the Oslo Freedom Forum for imprisoned Chinese artist Gao Zhen and Myanmar anti-junta dissi-

dent Sai, Gere admitted that he had done too little to campaign against Trump's return to the White House.


"How is this even possible? Because we went to sleep. We didn't care. We didn't vote. We didn't really listen," the veteran actor said.

'Who ever thought America could turn like this?..'


Gere told the audience that he had recently visited the Nazi concentration camp in Dachau.


"We have to see the cues, this dictatorship of the monsters, how quickly it happens. We have to be vigilant.

Since 2024, he has lived in Spain with his Spanish third wife, Alejandra Silva.



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