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King urges Nashama to fight, raise Jordan's name high

AMMAN (JT) — His Majesty King Abdullah has urged the national football team to "fight spirit of Al Nashama" and raise Jordan's name high, ahead of the squad match with Austria on Wednesday.

In a post on X platform, the King wrote,

"Our national team's heroes, all the best to you on your World Cup journey. Fight on the field with the spirit of Al Nashama that we've always known from you, and raise Jordan's name high, for our hearts are with you and our pride in you is steadfast always."

Jordan will open their World Cup campaign on Wednesday against Austria in Santa Clara, before facing Algeria on June 22 at the same venue.

The Nashama final group-stage fixture will be against Argentina on June 27 in Kansas City.

Nashama ready for Austria test, says Sellami

Austria's Rangnick cautions against Jordan at surprise-filled World Cup

AMMAN (JT) — Head coach of Jordan national football team (The Nashama) Jamal Sellami Said on Tuesday that the team's participation in the 2026 FIFA World Cup marks a historic achievement and a source of national pride.

Speaking at a press conference in San Francisco ahead of Jordan's upcoming match against Austria, Sellami acknowledged the strength of the opposition but stressed the importance of making a positive start.

"We will be facing a strong team, but the most important thing is to begin well," Sellami said.

He expressed confidence in his players' ability to cope with the intensity of the match from the opening whistle, noting that the squad possesses the quality and experience required to secure a positive result.

Sellami noted Austria as a formidable opponent but emphasised that Jordan is capable of producing a strong performance.

The coach also pointed to the performanc-



Jordan Football Association President HRH Prince Ali (centre) in group photo with the national team squad, The Nashama

es of Arab and Asian teams at the 2026 World Cup as a source of motivation for Al Nashama.

Sellami said the encouraging results achieved by those teams, along with their competitive displays against higher-ranked opponents, provide

added inspiration for Jordan's players ahead of the Austria clash.

He added that such performances reinforce the team's belief and determination to deliver a high-level display in its upcoming encounter.

Austria head coach

Ralf Rangnick has warned against underestimating World Cup debutants Jordan, citing a series of surprise results involving Asian teams at the tournament ahead of Tuesday's Group J opener.

Several European sides have already

stumbled against opponents from the Asian Football Confederation, with the Czech Republic suffering a 2-1 defeat to South Korea last week and Turkey's World Cup return ending in a 2-0 loss to Australia.

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Jordan condemns opening of Somaliland embassy in Jerusalem

AMMAN (JT) — The Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Tuesday condemned the opening of a purported embassy by Somaliland in occupied Jerusalem.

The ministry described the move as "unacceptable" and a "blatant violation" of international law and UN resolutions.

Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Fuad Majali stressed that any measures or decisions aimed at altering the status or legal standing of Jerusalem are "null and void, illegitimate and unlawful", according to a Foreign Ministry statement.

Majali reiterated that the only path to achieve



a just and comprehensive peace that ensures security and stability in the region is through the establishment of an independent, sovereign

Palestinian state on the June 4, 1967 lines, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Majali also reaffirmed Jordan's full

support for Somalia's unity and territorial integrity, as well as its legitimate institutions, stressing the Kingdom's commitment to

preserving Somalia's security and stability.

Somaliland opened its embassy in Jerusalem on Monday, Israel's foreign ministry announced, months after Israel became the first country to recognise the breakaway African state's independence.

Somaliland is the eighth country to open its embassy in Jerusalem, following the United States, Guatemala, Honduras, Kosovo, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay and Fiji.

In December, Israel became the first country to recognise the independence of Somaliland since it declared its autonomy from Somalia in 1991 following a civil war



This aerial photo taken on June 4, 2024, shows the Burgenstock resort above Lake Lucerne that will host a Ukraine peace summit on June 15-16, 2024

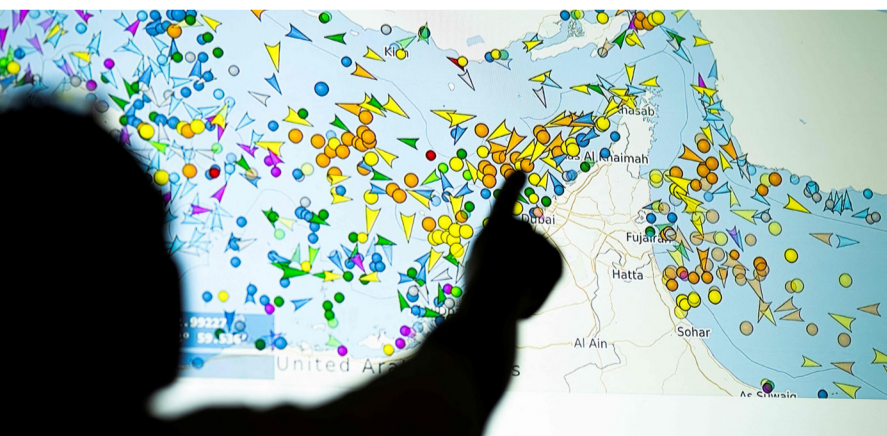
US-Iran deal to be signed in Switzerland on Friday — Bern

GENEVA (AFP) — A US-Iran deal aimed at ending the Middle East war will be signed at Switzerland's mountainside Burgenstock resort on Friday, the Swiss for-

eign ministry said. Tehran and Washington announced on Sunday they had agreed a Memorandum of Understanding aimed at ending the conflict,

which broke out on February 28 with US-Israeli strikes on Iran and engulfed the Middle East.

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A photo illustration taken in Nicosia on May 4, shows a person in front of a large screen displaying vessel movements in the Strait of Hormuz on a ship-tracking website

Hormuz shipping muted despite Iran war accord — trackers

PARIS, France (AFP) — Shipping through the Strait of Hormuz stayed at a trickle Tuesday, maritime trackers indicated, two days after the US promised to reopen it under an agreement with Iran to

end their war. As of 15:00 GMT on Tuesday, tracking platform Kpler had detected just four crossings of the strategic waterway that day by vessels carrying raw materials. Five were detected

on Monday — a similar rate to traffic during the week before the US-Iran agreement to end the Middle East war, announced late Sunday.

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As Iran links Lebanon to peace deal, questions persist over broader regional settlement

By Mai Anati

AMMAN — Iran on Tuesday said that ending the war in Lebanon is a central part of the Memorandum of Understanding reached with the United States, as both sides prepare to enter a new phase of negotiations aimed at securing a final agreement on Tehran's nuclear programme.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said that the declaration of an immediate and permanent end to the war on all fronts, including Lebanon, was "the most important issue" in the Memorandum announced a day earlier.

"Ending the war in Lebanon is an inseparable part of the complete



A vehicle carrying mattresses drives past a billboard on which hangs a portrait of Lebanese President Joseph Aoun and reads, 'Diplomacy is the way to end war in Lebanon' along the highway of the coastal city of Sidon as displaced families return to their home villages in southern Lebanon on Monday

end of the war," Araghchi said during a briefing with foreign diplomats broadcast on state television.

He added that any future Israeli military action in Lebanon, as well as the continued presence of Israeli forces in

territories occupied during the conflict, would be viewed by Tehran as a violation of the agreement.

The remarks came after Tehran and Washington announced a Memorandum of Understanding aimed at ending the war that expanded across multiple fronts following US-Israeli strikes on Iran earlier this year.

Araghchi said that a new round of negotiations between Iran and the United States on Tehran's nuclear programme would likely begin on Friday, alongside discussions on sanctions relief and the framework of a final agreement.

Swiss authorities confirmed that the memorandum is expected to be signed on Friday at the Burgenstock resort.

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The Department of Palestinian Affairs (DPA) on Tuesday organises a coordination meeting of host countries for Palestinian refugees, chaired by DPA Director General Rafiq Khirfan

Host countries for Palestinian refugees hold coordination meeting in Amman

AMMAN (JT) — The Department of Palestinian Affairs (DPA) on Tuesday organised the coordination meeting of host countries for Palestinian refugees, chaired by DPA Director General Rafiq Khirfan.

The meeting saw the participation of representatives from Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, Egypt and the Arab League, alongside the UNRWA commissioner general, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.

Khirfan noted that the meeting was held in implementation of a recommendation issued by the 69th Conference of Supervisors of Palestinian Affairs in Arab Host Countries for Palestinian Refugees, convened in Cairo in 2003, which emphasised the importance of continuing coordination meetings among Arab host countries.

He said that the meeting aimed to coordinate positions among Arab states to develop shared approaches towards the issues on the agenda of UNRWA's Advisory Commission, foremost among them the agency's financial situation and the impact of the unprecedented financial crisis it faces on the services and programmes it provides to Palestinian refugees.

Khirfan added that Jordan would not relinquish the Hashemite Custodianship over

Islamic and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem, nor its commitment to defending the rights of Palestinian refugees.

He stressed that the continuation of UNRWA's work represents an international obligation towards the Palestinian refugee issue and their right of return in accordance with international legitimacy resolutions.

They reiterated the importance of continued political and financial support for UNRWA...

Participants discussed key issues on the agenda of the Advisory Commission, particularly UNRWA's financial situation and ways to address its budget deficit.

They underscored the need to mobilise financial and political support for the agency to ensure the continuation of its vital services in education, health-care, relief and social services.

They also expressed

rejection of any reduction in services provided to Palestinian refugees due to the serious humanitarian and social consequences this would have for refugee communities in the agency's areas of operation.

The participants also stressed the need to renew UNRWA's mandate through the UN General Assembly without amendment or reduction, as a reaffirmation of the international community's commitment to the Palestinian refugee issue and their legitimate rights, foremost among them the right of return in accordance with Resolution 194.

They reiterated the importance of continued political and financial support for UNRWA, particularly in light of the unprecedented challenges it faces, both in terms of funding and attempts to undermine its role and legitimacy.

The participants stressed that the agency would remain a UN witness to the Palestinian refugee issue until a just and comprehensive solution is reached in accordance with international legitimacy resolutions.

The meeting was held ahead of the UNRWA Advisory Commission meeting, scheduled to take place in Amman on Wednesday and Thursday.

Roman Theatre to bring Jordanians together behind Nashama in first World Cup appearance

AMMAN (JT) — From the heart of the capital, one of Amman's most iconic historic landmarks will turn into a national gathering space on Wednesday morning, as Jordanians come together behind Nashama in their first historic appearance at the FIFA World Cup.

The choice of the Roman Theatre carries special symbolism. As one of Amman's timeless landmarks, the nearly 2,000-year-old site has long stood as part of the city's memory, where the voices of art, culture, sport and public life once echoed through its stones, according to a Ministry of Government Communication statement.

The voices of Jordanians will rise there in support of the national team, in a moment that brings together the history of the place, the dream of Nashama and the passion of the fans.

The event, organised by the Ministry of Youth in cooperation with the Greater Amman Municipality



The Roman Theatre in downtown Amman

and the Jordan Tourism Board, will allow fans to watch Jordan's World Cup matches live on the big screen in an open public setting that brings together

families, young people and football supporters from across the Kingdom.

A range of activities will be held ahead of kick-off, with gates

opening to the public two hours before the match.

Gates will open at 5:00am for the match that will kick off at 7:00am, the statement

said, adding that admission is free and open to the public.

Jordan's upcoming World Cup matches will also be screened at the same venue.

Jordan embassy in DC issues directions to fans ahead of match against Austria



Jordanian fans celebrate historic Arab Cup Final qualification on December 15 after defeating Saudi Arabia 1-0 at Al Bayt Stadium in Doha

AMMAN (JT) — The Jordanian embassy in Washington, DC, issued a comprehensive safety advisory for Jordanian football fans attending the national team's match, during the World Cup, against Austria at Levi's Stadium in Santa Clara, California.

The match, scheduled for Wednesday, is expected to draw a massive crowd of Jordanian expatriates and travelling supporters, prompting the embassy to outline crucial logistical and emergency guidelines to ensure a smooth and safe experience.

In an official statement, the embassy urged all match-goers to arrive at the stadium

well ahead of kick-off to avoid heavy traffic and delays.

Fans were also advised to utilise public transit or ridesharing services due to the anticipated congestion around the Santa Clara venue.

The embassy highlighted several key recommendations for citizens.

Supporters should carry a copy of their passport or personal identification at all times, ensure their mobile phones are fully charged, and keep location services activated. Families and groups of friends were also advised to establish a designated meeting point in advance in case they

become separated.

The embassy strictly reminded fans that hazardous materials, sharp objects and fireworks are banned from entering the stadium.

It urged all citizens to adhere to the instructions of local authorities and stadium organisers inside and outside the venue, while also emphasising the need to closely look after children, the elderly and persons with disabilities.

Regarding emergency protocols, the embassy instructed citizens to immediately report any missing persons or critical issues to the nearest security checkpoint and to local emergency services.

Aqaba Bird Observatory designation as protected area supports biodiversity conservation

AMMAN (JT) — The designation of the Aqaba Bird Observatory (ABO) as a Special Protection Area under the Protected Areas and National Parks Regulation No. 29 of 2005 marks a "significant" milestone in Jordan's efforts to conserve biodiversity and promote sustainable environmental management.

Commissioner for Environment and Public Safety at the Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority (ASEZA) Nidal Ouran described the move as a "major" national achievement, which reflects Jordan's commitment to safeguarding its natural resources and preserving biodiversity, according to an ASEZA statement.

Ouran highlighted the role of cooperation among ASEZA, the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature (RSCN), Aqaba Development Company and Aqaba Water Company, as well as support from the Ministry of Environment and other national stakeholders, in securing the designation.

He noted that the designation establishes a legal and administrative framework aimed at safeguarding the site and preserving its ecological value over the



Aqaba Bird Observatory Director Firas Rahahleh says that the site has recorded more than 270 bird species, representing over 60 per cent of the species documented in Jordan

long term.

ABO Director Firas Rahahleh said that the observatory stands as a "leading example" of nature-based solutions, with the reuse of treated wastewater

helping to create artificial wetlands that provide a vital habitat for migratory and resident bird species.

Rahahleh said that the observatory's location along the world's

second most important migratory bird flyway makes it a key site for biodiversity conservation and environmental monitoring.

"The observatory has recorded more than 270

bird species, representing over 60 per cent of the species documented in Jordan," he added.

Rahahleh also noted that the site has emerged as one of the Kingdom's foremost lo-

cations for birdwatching and biodiversity conservation and is jointly managed by ASEZA and RSCN.

The designation is expected to bolster Jordan's network of protected sites and enhance coordination among protected areas and other conservation zones.

It also supports national efforts to preserve the Kingdom's natural heritage and ensure its sustainability for future generations through enhanced environmental protection and biodiversity conservation.

In May, ABO said that it had recorded 108 bird species at Ayla Oasis during the spring and autumn migration seasons, underscoring the area's growing environmental importance as a "key" stopover along one of the world's important migration routes between Asia and Africa.

According to the observatory's 2025 bird monitoring report, 14 of the recorded species are resident year-round, while 57 are regularly observed during migration seasons.

An additional 37 less common species can be spotted during peak migration periods, the observatory added.



Azerbaijani Agriculture Minister Majnun Mammadov

Azeri agriculture minister says preparations under way to sign MoU with Jordan

AMMAN (JT) — A strategic partnership between the agriculture ministries of Jordan and Azerbaijan is being developed through "high-level" coordination aimed at expanding trade and investment cooperation in the agricultural sector.

Azerbaijani Agriculture Minister Majnun Mammadov said that the two countries have launched joint efforts aimed at boosting bilateral relations, Al Mamlaka TV reported.

Mammadov noted that while he has met his Jordanian counterpart on several occasions at international forums, official visits between the two countries have yet to take place.

"The two sides have maintained continuous communication, paving the way for a new phase of joint initiatives," he said.

Mammadov added that the two countries are drafting a Memorandum of Understanding to enhance cooperation, while preparations are under way to establish a joint working group comprising officials and experts from both ministries.

The group will focus on identifying viable investment opportunities in the agricultural sector, facilitating the exchange of expertise and modern agricultural technologies, and enhancing food security in both countries.



Ayman Safadi



Abdullatif Bin Rashid Al Zayani

Safadi, Bahraini counterpart discuss cooperation

AMMAN (JT) — Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Ayman Safadi held a phone call on Tuesday with his Bahraini counterpart Abdullatif Bin Rashid Al Zayani.

Safadi and Al Zayani discussed the deep-rooted relations between Jordan and Bahrain and ways to enhance bilateral cooperation in a manner

that serves the interests of both countries, according to a Foreign Ministry statement.

The two ministers also reviewed regional developments and their implications for regional and international peace and security, as well as prospects for joint coordination to strengthen Arab cooperation, in addition to several issues of mutual concern.

Regent visits PSD, checks on security plans ahead of Nashama games

AMMAN (JT) — HRH Prince Feisal, the Regent, on Tuesday visited the Public Security Directorate (PSD) and met with its Director Maj. Gen. Obaidallah Maaytah,

During the visit, Prince Feisal was briefed on the PSD's key security and traffic plans, which coincide with the national football team's matches in the 2026 World Cup qualifiers, the Jordan news agency, Petra, reported.

His Royal Highness expressed his deep gratitude and appreciation to all PSD personnel for their around-the-clock security and humanitarian efforts, highlighting their vital role in maintaining security and providing top-tier services to citizens and residents.

For his part, Maaytah reviewed the director's latest statistics, operational plans and preparations. He affirmed the readiness



HRH Prince Feisal, on Tuesday visits the Public Security Directorate and meets with its Director Maj. Gen. Obaidallah Maaytah

Petra photo

of various security and traffic units to execute their duties efficiently, noting that an integrated security and traffic plan has been established to accompany the national team's World Cup qualifying matches.

Jerseys in high demand as Jordanians prepare for historic World Cup debut

By Rana Hussein

AMMAN — Dozens of fans on Tuesday queued outside one of Amman's main shops selling the national football team's jerseys ahead of Jordan's historic debut in the FIFA World Cup 2026.

Jordan will clash with Austria at 7:00am on Wednesday at Levi's Stadium in Santa Clara, California.

Farid, 18, was standing outside one of the designated sales shops in Sweifieh because the line was long.

"I wanted to buy my shirt from this shop but the line is too long," Farid told The Jordan Times.

That is why, the Computer Science major student added, he opted to order the shirt online.

"I was busy with my exams and was able to only come today to buy the national team shirt," he said.

"I will surely order my white shirt online so that I can wear it while watching the game," he added.

The Jordanian national team's official jersey colours for the World Cup are white, red and black.



Dozens of fans on Tuesday queue inside one of Amman's main shops selling the national football team's jerseys ahead of Jordan's historic debut in the FIFA World Cup 2026

Photo by Rana Hussein

Dania Jihad, 27, told The Jordan Times that she bought a white jersey that will be shipped to her sister in Texas.

"I already bought my shirt and decided today to buy one for my sister who lives in the US so that they wear it when Jordan plays Argentina," she added.

Jordan's second match will be against Algeria on June 23 in San Francisco Bay Area Stadium in Santa Clara.

Jordan will play against Argentina on June 28 in Dallas Stadium in Arlington.

Thirty-four-year-old Abdullah Bani Mustafa was standing in line waiting to buy his jersey.

"I live in another governorate and I was able to come today to Amman to buy a shirt," he told The Jordan Times.

It is going to be a tough game, Bani Mustafa pointed out, "but we are hopeful that our team will win".

On Tuesday, the head coach of Jordan's national football team (The Nashama) Jamal Sellami said during a press conference that

the team's participation in the 2026 FIFA World Cup marks a historic achievement and a source of national pride.

Sellami acknowledged the strength of the opposition but stressed the importance of making a positive start.

Meanwhile, Jordanians living in the US shared dozens of video clips on social media of their preparations to support the national team during their games in the US.

In one video clip, a

Jordanian fan is reportedly seen wearing a shemagh and handing another one to a policeman in the street.

In another video clip, multiple vehicles were shot while roaming the streets in one of the US states, with occupants waving Jordanian flags from the windows.

The Jordanian embassy in Washington, DC, issued a comprehensive safety advisory for Jordanian football fans attending the national team's match against Austria.

In an official statement, the embassy urged all match-goers to arrive at the stadium well ahead of kick-off to avoid heavy traffic and delays.

Fans were also advised to utilise public transit or ridesharing services due to the anticipated congestion around the Santa Clara venue.

It urged all citizens to adhere to the instructions of local authorities and stadium organisers inside and outside the venue, while also emphasising the need to closely look after children, the elderly and persons with disabilities.



Jordan participates in IsDB annual meetings in Baku

AMMAN (JT) — Jordan on Tuesday participated in the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) Group's annual meetings, which opened in the Azerbaijani capital, Baku, by Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev under the theme "Regional Integration as a Driver of Sustainable Prosperity".

The Jordanian delegation included Minister of Planning and International Cooperation Zeina Toukan and Central Bank Governor Adel Sharkas, alongside broad participation from the private sector and academic institutions, Al Mamlaka TV reported.

The meetings bring together ministers and policymakers from 57 member states to strengthen cooperation on key development priorities, including Islamic finance, climate adaptation, artificial intelligence and digital economies, in line with the group's 10-year strategic framework (2026-2035).

Jordan participates as a founding member of the group, reflecting a strong and enduring strategic partnership with the Islamic Development Bank Group, which has long served as a key development partner to the

Kingdom. The group's cumulative financing and credit to Jordan has reached approximately \$2.73 billion. The active portfolio for development projects in the Kingdom exceeds \$1.1 billion.

In the private sector, the Islamic Corporation for the Development of the Private Sector has financed 10 ongoing projects in Jordan worth \$140.5 million, covering the education, health and food sectors, in addition to its recent financing of the strategic National Carrier Project worth \$200 million.

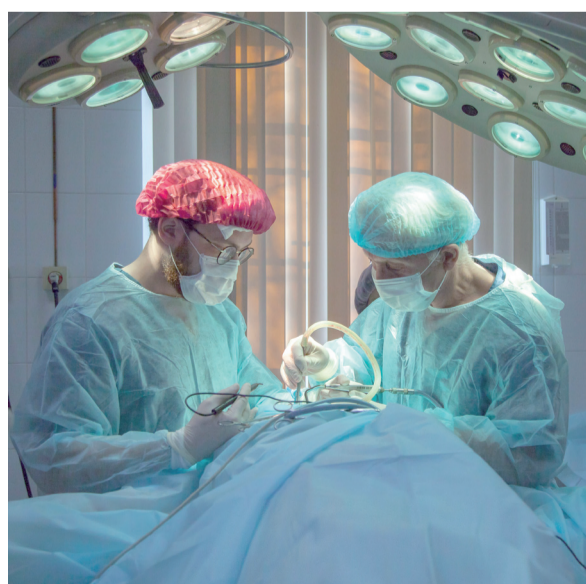
Medical tourism revenues near \$1b, attracting 230,000 patients in 2025 — PHA

By Ahmad Khatatneh

AMMAN — The Kingdom's medical tourism sector generated annual revenues of nearly \$1 billion in 2025, recording 4 per cent growth compared with the previous year and attracting around 230,000 foreign patients, according to President of the Private Hospitals Association (PHA) Fawzi Hammouri.

Hammouri told The Jordan Times that investments in Jordan's private hospital sector have reached approximately \$4 billion, underscoring the industry's importance as a key contributor to the national economy.

He added that the sector supports around 40,000 direct jobs in healthcare, in addition to 60,000 jobs in supporting industries, including hotels, airlines, transportation companies, restaurants, insurance providers and logistics services.



In this photo, surgeons are seen performing a surgical procedure under high-intensity operating lights

Photo courtesy of Unsplash

tries, including hotels, airlines, transportation companies, restaurants, insurance providers and logistics services.

Medical services and patient profile

Hammouri said that the most in-demand medical services among foreign

patients include bariatric and cosmetic surgery, orthopaedic and neurosurgical procedures, cardiology services, obstetrics and gynaecology treatments, including IVF procedures, as well as cancer and mental healthcare.

He added that around 25 per cent of patients receive treatment in hospitals, while the remainder are treated in clinics and specialised medical centres.

"Patients from Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Palestine, Syria, Yemen and Libya account for the largest share of medical tourists visiting the Kingdom, alongside visitors from other Arab and foreign countries," he said.

Jordan's competitive advantages

Hammouri noted that Jordan's position as a regional healthcare hub

is supported by highly qualified medical professionals, internationally accredited hospitals and advanced medical technologies.

"The Kingdom's competitive advantages also include a medical liability law that protects patients' rights, mandatory continuous professional development requirements for healthcare practitioners and relatively short waiting periods for treatment."

Hammouri added that Jordan received recognition from the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) in 2023 as an accredited destination for medical and wellness tourism.

He said that Jordan also benefits from political and security stability, cultural and linguistic proximity to Arab patients, a strategic geographic location and

competitive healthcare costs.

Challenges facing the sector

Despite these strengths, Hammouri identified several challenges limiting the sector's growth, including visa procedures for patients and their companions, limited international marketing campaigns compared with competing destinations, rising operational costs, taxes and fees, and high prices of medicines and medical supplies.

He also pointed to the need for additional direct air connections with target markets and the impact of regional geopolitical tensions on aviation and patient mobility.

"While Jordan continues to offer strong value for money compared with many international destinations," he noted

that some emerging competitors are attracting patients through lower treatment costs supported by cheaper medicines and medical supplies.

Government support and future outlook

Hammouri said that recent government measures to support the sector have been positive, particularly enhanced cooperation between public and private institutions, facilitation of patient entry procedures and efforts to expand direct flight routes.

He also stressed the need for further reforms to strengthen competitiveness, including visa facilitation, increased international promotion, lower taxes and energy costs, incentives for hospitals attracting foreign patients and accelerated digital transformation in

healthcare services. He also called for expanding partnerships with international insurance providers and overseas treatment agencies, alongside strengthening air connectivity with key markets.

Looking ahead, Hammouri said Jordan's long-term vision is to consolidate its position as one of the region's leading medical tourism destinations by increasing patient arrivals, diversifying source markets and enhancing specialised healthcare services.

The strategy also focuses on upgrading healthcare and digital infrastructure and developing integrated packages combining treatment, travel, accommodation and insurance services to improve the patient experience and boost the sector's contribution to economic growth.



AFP photo

Migrants attempt to cross the English Channel in a smuggler's boat off the coast of Gravelines, northern France

France to try 14 over deadliest Channel migrant disaster

PARIS, France (AFP) — Fourteen people will go on trial in France over the deaths of at least 27 migrants in November 2021 in the deadliest recorded small-boat crossing of the Channel, prosecutors said on Tuesday.

The defendants, linked to people-smuggling networks, are accused of playing a role in the sinking in which at least 27 people, mainly Iraqi Kurds, died when their inflatable dinghy sank in the early hours of November 24, 2021. Four others are still believed to remain missing.

The sinking remains the deadliest recorded small-boat crossing of the Channel, a route used by thousands of migrants each year to reach Britain from France.

The 14 individuals, most of them born in Afghanistan and Iraq, face charges including manslaughter and criminal conspiracy, the national prosecutor's office said, for roles ranging from drivers to those who organised the crossing.

Most deny any wrongdoing, with some Iraqi Kurdish defendants saying they were migrants rather than people smugglers.

It was not immediately clear when the trial would start.

In a separate probe linked to the sinking, at least seven French military personnel are under investigation for failing to help a person in danger.

A UK inquiry in February found some of the deaths would

have been "avoidable" if British and French authorities had acted sooner to rescue those onboard.

Despite several distress calls, the boat was found by a French fishing vessel nearly 12 hours after the first pleas for help were made.

By that time, most of the people on board, including seven women and two children, had drowned.

France has long been a launch pad for migrants hoping to cross the Channel and start a better life in Britain.

Efforts by Britain and France to curb the crossings have largely failed, with some 41,000 people making the journey last year, the second-highest annual total after nearly 46,000 crossings in 2022.

Israeli minister strips Palestinians of control over Hebron holy site

HEBRON, Palestinian Territories (AFP) — Israel's finance minister Bezalel Smotrich said on Tuesday he had stripped Palestinians of authority over the site of Ibrahimi Mosque in the occupied West Bank.

The move to transfer management of the site to an Israeli committee controlled by the far-right minister, drew swift condemnation from the Palestinian Authority.

In a statement posted on his Telegram channel, Smotrich said the site will no longer be administered by the municipality authority in the West Bank city of Hebron.

Smotrich posted his remarks as he attended an event marking the laying of the foundation stone of a new Israeli settlement near Hebron.

Hebron is the largest city in the West Bank, the Palestinian territory occupied by Israel since 1967.

The mosque sits inside H2, an Israeli-controlled sector of the city housing roughly 40,000 Palestinians alongside some 200 Israeli settler families.

A 1997 protocol left management of most of the complex in Palestinian hands, an arrangement Palestinian officials say Israel has steadily eroded in recent years.

"What Smotrich did is he controls the Higher Planning Council,



AFP photo

Israeli settlers, accompanied by Israel's far-right finance minister Bezalel Smotrich, gather during a cornerstone laying ceremony for a new settlement on Mount Tarousa, near the town of Dura west of Hebron in the occupied West Bank, on Tuesday

which set a meeting last Wednesday where they decided that these responsibilities in Hebron will go from the Palestinian municipality of Hebron to Israel," Yonatan Mizrahi, co-director of Peace Now, an Israeli settlement watchdog, told AFP.

Minutes from the planning meeting confirm this decision.

The Palestinian Authority, led by President Mahmoud Ab-

bas, rejected the move outright.

"Such unilateral measures are rejected and condemned, and constitute a violation of signed agreements with the Israeli side, as well as a breach of international law," Abbas's office said.

In a statement, Hebron's municipality condemned Smotrich's announcement, which came on the day marking the Islamic New Year.

Mayor Youssef Al Jaabari called the Israeli move "a new attempt to impose control over the historic heart of the city of Hebron", and pointed to Palestinian presence in the Ibrahimi Mosque despite movement restrictions inside the city.

Smotrich, himself a settler, has faced mounting criticism from the international community for being a vocal advocate of West Bank annexation.

Expanding settlements has been a policy under successive Israeli governments but has accelerated under prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu's coalition, which is backed by far-right allies such as Smotrich.

More than 500,000 Israelis now live in the West Bank, excluding east Jerusalem, in settlements that are illegal under international law, among some three million Palestinians.

Romanian president taps new PM in hopes of forming government

BUCHAREST (AFP) — Romanian President Nicusor Dan tapped a new designated prime minister to form a government after the previous hopeful for the post dropped out.

Romania, a member of the EU and NATO, has faced political turmoil in recent years, with the latest upheaval coming in early May when Liberal Prime Minister Ilie Bolojan saw his government brought down in a no-confidence motion.

The president tasked politician Adrian Veste, a 52-year-old fellow Liberal, with forming Romania's next government after the technocratic solution of European Parliament member Eugen Tomac failed to find the necessary support.

"Mr Eugen Tomac withdrew his candidacy this morning, and under these circumstances, I am appointing Mr Adrian Veste as prime minister," Dan said in a statement.

Tomac said that he regretted not being able to convince enough parties to support him.

Dan said that "at this



AFP photo

Photo taken on Monday shows then Minister of Development, Public Works and Administration Adrian Veste, during the swearing-in ceremony at the Cotroceni Palace in Bucharest

point, however, it is clear that a political solution is the appropriate one".

Dan has repeatedly ruled out a government that would include the far-right, which is rising in Romanian politics.

The president praised Veste's experience as a mayor and regional governmental leader, as well as his record as development minister in a previous Romanian government.

Veste said he would negotiate with "the pro-Western democratic political parties" in Ro-

mania's parliament in hopes of finding a governing majority.

"I want a political government that will undertake real reforms and keep Romania on a pro-Western course," Veste said.

A designated prime minister has to gather 233 votes across both houses of parliament to form a government.

Political turmoil

Bolojan has remained in office as the caretaker prime minister since

his administration collapsed, but lacks a majority to govern.

The no-confidence vote in May came after the centre-left Social Democrats (PSD) quit the coalition and joined with far-right parties in voting against the government.

Since then, attempts to remake the previous pro-EU coalition have failed, with the PSD — Romania's largest political party — refusing to work with Bolojan.

Bolojan, who remains the Liberal Party's leader, said on Sunday that neither he nor other Liberal leaders were consulted or informed by the president of his plans to choose a party colleague ahead of the announcement.

The move, Bolojan said, was "a hostile act and a clear attempt to split" the party.

Bolojan came to power following the controversial annulment of presidential elections in December 2024 over allegations of Russian interference. Dan was elected president in the rescheduled vote in May 2025.

Bolojan's coalition

government, which took power in June 2025, enacted unpopular austerity measures, including raising taxes, in order to tackle a large budget deficit that had become the biggest in the European Union.

His coalition partners, the Social Democrats, meanwhile saw their electoral base eroded by a rising far-right which opinion polls have shown moving ahead of them.

Social Democratic MP Mihai Fifor called Veste's designation on Sunday "a key moment in the process of forming the future government", but said that his party would need to undertake a thorough analysis.

Fifor, writing in a post on Facebook, said that his party's "top priority remains supporting a pro-Western government".

The Alliance for the Union of Romanians, the largest far-right party in the country, said in a statement that Veste's nomination "only serves to exacerbate the current crisis" and called for early elections.



AFP photo

US President Donald Trump attends a bilateral meeting with Qatar's Emir on the sidelines of the G7 summit, in Evian, eastern France, on Tuesday

Trump says Russia 'should make a deal' with Ukraine

EVIAN, France (AFP) — US President Donald Trump said on Tuesday that "Russia should make a deal" to end war with Ukraine, after meeting Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky at the G7 summit in France.

Trump said he "had a meeting" with Zelensky at the summit in the spa town of Evian-les-Bains and more

talks were planned later in the day, as the G7 group of leading world powers seeks to increase pressure on Moscow to end more than four years of fighting.

He pointed to the high casualties on both sides in the conflict, a toll he described as "ridiculous".

Trump added: "Ad-

mit the whole thing is ridiculous. So, yeah, I'm going to do whatever I can."

Zelensky said on Monday he had suggested to Trump that he could meet Putin in the United States, arguing that the Kremlin strongman could find such an offer "harder to refuse" than a previous offer for talks at the G7.

California governor probes not launched by Washington — source

WASHINGTON, United States (AFP) — Federal investigations into California's Democratic Governor Gavin Newsom stem from whistleblower complaints and were not launched by the Justice Department in Washington, a source familiar with the matter said on Tuesday.

Newsom, a likely Democratic White House contender in 2028, accused Republican President Donald Trump on Monday of

launching a criminal investigation into him and his wife, Jennifer Siebel Newsom, as a "personal vendetta".

The source familiar with the investigations told AFP that the probes were not initiated by "main Justice" but were begun about a year ago by the Sacramento-based US attorney for the Eastern District of California and were triggered by information from whistleblowers.

The source, who

requested anonymity, said the investigations were focused on "tax activity" involving Newsom's wife, a documentary film maker, and activities related to his former chief of staff and possibly current aides.

Dana Williamson, a former Newsom chief of staff, pleaded guilty in May to bank and wire fraud and other felony charges stemming from a position she held prior to working for the governor.

The source was not in a position to confirm whether Williamson's case had any links with the current investigations into the California governor.

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tweets," Newsom said. "He's coming after me because I am considering running for president."

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Donald Trump has ended up on his hit list," Newsom said.

Former FBI director James Comey, an outspoken critic of Trump, was indicted in April for allegedly threatening the Republican president in an Instagram post.

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grounds that the US attorney handpicked by Trump who brought the charges was unlawfully appointed.

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California Senator Alex Padilla condemned the investigations into his fellow Democrat.

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investigate Governor Newsom fits a pattern: Speak out against this President, hold him accountable for his own corruption and failures, and you become a target," Padilla said in a post on X.

"Every American should be alarmed when the nation's top law enforcement agency is reduced to a tool of political retribution rather than an independent institution charged with enforcing the law fairly."

UN chief on visit to gang-plagued Haiti says 'glimmers of hope'

PORT-AU-PRINCE (AFP) — UN chief Antonio Guterres apologised to Haitians on Tuesday for what he said was their abandonment by the international community but noted during a visit to the violence-plagued Caribbean nation that there were "glimmers of hope."

The secretary-general, who last traveled to Port-au-Prince in July 2023, visited a former school called Colombie that has been transformed into housing for more than 1,250 people displaced by violence.

In a stiflingly hot tin-roofed room a mother of four told Guterres about the insufferable conditions her family is living in. "Fifty people to a room, ten families, with no privacy," she said, while her neighbor complained of bedbugs and children being deprived of school.

"I ask your forgiveness for not having been able to mobilise the international community," the UN chief told them. "We know how much you have suffered and I am here to listen to you."

The United Nations' 2026 humanitarian aid plan for Haiti, earmarked at \$880 million, is less than one-quarter funded.

Haiti, the poorest country in the Americas, has for years suffered from instability as powerful gangs carry out rampant kill-



UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres meets with Chadian soldiers of the international Gang Suppression Force (GSF) in Port-au-Prince on Tuesday

ings, rapes, looting and kidnappings.

Nearly 1.5 million people are currently displaced in a country of about 11 million, and more than 5 million are facing severe food insecurity, according to UN figures.

The security crisis worsened in early 2024, when gangs launched a wave of violence that forced the country's unelected prime minister to resign.

He was replaced by an interim presidential council, but when the council's mandate expired in February, executive power passed to Prime Minister Alix Di-

dier Fils-Aime — who greeted Guterres upon arrival.

Haiti has not held elections since 2016, primarily because of poor security. Its last president, Jovenel Moïse, was assassinated in July 2021.

"The humanitarian situation here is desperate, but there are faint glimmers of hope," Guterres wrote in an X post upon arrival by helicopter from the Dominican Republic, the neighbouring — and far more stable and prosperous — country sharing the island of Hispaniola.

"We must stand with

Haiti."

The UN Security Council last year gave its approval to a new international Gang Suppression Force (GSF) tasked with neutralizing the groups, currently with fewer than 1,000 men from Chad, Mongolia, Jamaica, Guatemala and El Salvador. That number could go up to 5,500 uniformed personnel, including police officers and soldiers.

The force is to gradually replace the under-equipped and underfunded Multinational Security Support mission (MSS), which was primarily tasked with

backing up Haiti's national police.

Spokesman Farhan Haq said Guterres will "assess the support given by the United Nations to Haiti in facing its multidimensional crisis, including the logistical and operational support to the Gang Suppression Force."

Travelling the country's capital by armoured vehicle, the Secretary-General also toured the Vertieres camp, where the first contingent of GSF is staying.

UN rights chief Volker Turk on Monday said the new force is "urgently needed".

"In Haiti, gang violence has resulted in at least 2,300 deaths, 1,100 injuries and 99 kidnappings since the start of the year. I urge the authorities to move quickly on the judicial units to tackle impunity," Turk said.

A report published by his office in late March said gang-related violence claimed more than 5,500 lives between March 1, 2025 and January 15, 2026.

Most of the deaths — nearly 3,500 — occurred during anti-gang operations, including a large number of alleged gang members as well as civilians.

North Korea's push for dry-field rice reflects drought concerns — experts

SEOUL (AFP) — North Korea is stepping up cultivation of dry-field rice, which relies on irrigation or rain rather than flooded paddies, state media reported, in what experts said was a sign of worsening drought.

The nuclear-armed country is under multiple sets of sanctions over its weapons programmes and has long struggled with a moribund state-managed economy and chronic food shortages.

Elizabeth Salmon, the UN special rapporteur on human rights in North Korea, said in February that food shortages remain a key humanitarian concern in the country.

"The work for cultivating dry-field rice is being hastened in different parts of the DPRK," Pyongyang's official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said on Tuesday.

The report came after KCNA's April warning that the country was experiencing an "unusual" and "severe" drought and was taking steps to protect crops.

North Korea's state television last month reported severe drought conditions in various parts of South Hwanghae Province in western North Korea, according to South Korea's Yonhap News Agency.

Experts said the latest report suggested drought conditions remain severe in the her-

metic, impoverished country.

Kim Yong-hyun, a professor at Dongguk University, said dry-field rice is used as an alternative crop when water supplies are low.

"If North Korea is expanding the cultivation of dry-field rice, it may indicate concerns about food production later this year," he told AFP.

"The work for cultivating dry-field rice is being hastened in different parts of the DPRK"

Park Won-gon, a professor of North Korean studies at Ewha Womans University, agreed the report suggested drought conditions "have not improved" in North Korea.

"North Korea annually faces a food shortfall of roughly 500,000 to one million tonnes," he added.

Nashama ready for Austria test, says Sellami

Continued from page 1

Japan also impressed by coming from behind twice to secure a 2-2 draw against the Netherlands on Sunday, while Group B favourites Switzerland were held to a 1-1 draw by Qatar, four years after the Gulf nation exited the 2022 World Cup without a point as hosts.

Speaking to reporters on Monday at San Francisco Bay Area Stadium, where Austria will face Jordan, Rangnick stressed the importance of avoiding complacency.

"We have seen many

surprises during this World Cup," Rangnick told reporters on Monday at the San Francisco Bay Area Stadium where they face Jordan in their Group J opener.

"If you looked at the matches and the outcomes, we had 12 draws and only six victories. There was no South American team that won.

"This is not going to be a walkover. It's going to be an uncomfortable opponent. The opponent will try to lure you in, absorb the pressure, and then they will try to use the open space for their counter-attacks.

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As Iran links Lebanon to peace deal, questions persist over broader regional settlement

Continued from page 1

US President Donald Trump also voiced optimism about the process, saying relations with Iran had become "normal" and that the next phase of negotiations would move quickly.

Trump said the memorandum would be made public before being submitted to Congress for review. He also expressed confidence that the Strait of Hormuz would be fully reopened by Friday.

In remarks linking

the diplomatic track to Lebanon, Trump said he had suggested that Syrian President Ahmad Al Sharaa assume responsibility for dealing with Hizbollah.

"If Israel cannot get the job done without killing everybody, he will do it. Syria will do the job," Trump said on the sidelines of the G-7 summit.

"I suggested to Israel that Syria handle Hizbollah because, frankly, I think they would do a better job," he added.

Israeli prime minister

Benjamin Netanyahu, however, has maintained that Israeli forces will remain in Gaza, Lebanon and Syria "for as long as necessary".

Political analyst Amer Sabaleh said Tehran may seek to present the agreement as opening the door to ending the war in Lebanon, but its ability to shape outcomes beyond its own priorities remains limited.

"From Israel's perspective, any agreement between Washington and Tehran does not auto-

matically apply to Israel," he said.

"Israel may offer some concessions on the Lebanese file to President Trump as he seeks to advance direct negotiations and present a peace agreement between Lebanon and Israel."

"But from a security standpoint, no one, including Trump, can force Israel to abandon what it considers vital security positions without future guarantees."

Sabaleh said Iran's domestic priorities

would likely dominate the next phase.

"Tehran may express a desire to end the war in Lebanon, but it cannot dictate the terms. What we may instead see is a separate US-led track aimed at reaching peace between Lebanon and Israel."

The differing interpretations of the memorandum highlight the uncertainty surrounding its implementation and whether it can evolve into a broader regional settlement

US-Iran deal to be signed in Switzerland on Friday — Bern

Continued from page 1

"At this stage, the signing is scheduled for Friday, June 19, at Burgenstock," Switzerland's foreign ministry said in a statement.

The uber-plush resort, perched high above Lake Lucerne in central Switzerland, is difficult to access, with water on three sides, and therefore easily secured.

The location, the ministry said, "was proposed by the Pakistani and Qatari mediators, as well as by the US and Iran".

"Switzerland is acting as a facilitator in this process, creating the practical and diplomatic conditions necessary for this meeting to take place on Swiss territory."

The deal follows weeks of fraught negotiations and threats of renewed hostilities.

According to a senior US official, the framework agreement has already been signed electronically by US President Donald Trump, Vice President JD Vance and Iran's deputy foreign

minister, Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, the Islamic republic's top negotiator.

The text of the agreement has not been made public, leaving room for doubt over what specifically was agreed in the arduous negotiations to end the conflict.

The sides disagreed bitterly on terms around Iran's nuclear programme, sanctions and the Strait of Hormuz.

But Vance told CNN it was "about a page and a half, so it is a very general document".

Hormuz shipping muted despite Iran war accord — trackers

Continued from page 1

"The Strait of Hormuz continues to operate below normal commercial levels, despite signals of diplomatic progress," Kpler said on X.

The Iranian government said on Tuesday

that the US military's counter-blockade of Iranian ports, imposed on April 13, had been lifted ahead of the formal signing of the agreement.

US President Donald Trump said on Monday that ships were starting

to come out of the strait. He said it would "completely" reopen as soon as the accord is signed on Friday.

Shipping groups have warned however that uncertainty remains about the steps towards reopening and how long

it could for the strait to be cleared of mines.

"Key operational questions remain unresolved, including transit security, navigation fees and safe passage arrangements," Kpler said.

The vessels counted since the deal all tran-

sited with their transponders switched on but others may have passed without transmitting signals, making detection more difficult.

An Iranian tanker, the Diona, switched its transponder back on Tuesday for the first

time in nearly two months.

Tanker owners' association Intertanko said in an advisory published on June 5 that the US Navy had been liaising with ships to help them safely pass by night, with their lights

and transponders off, through the strait on its southern side near Oman's coast.

It said 15 ships a day had been using that route.

Before the conflict erupted on February 28, about 120 transits a day

were recorded, according to maritime news outlet Lloyd's List.

In peacetime the strait saw around a fifth of global oil and liquefied natural gas exports pass through, along with other key commodities.

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Fertilisers: The silent threat to the global economy

By Raad Mahmoud Al-Tal

Whenever tensions flare in the Middle East, global attention immediately shifts to oil and gas markets. Energy prices have long been viewed as the primary barometer of geopolitical instability in the region. Yet, recent conflicts and the accompanying threats to maritime traffic through the Strait of Hormuz have highlighted another strategic vulnerability that receives far less attention but may prove equally consequential: The global fertiliser market.

While oil remains the lifeblood of industrial economies, fertilisers have become indispensable to modern food production. Today, roughly 30 per cent of global fertiliser trade passes through the Strait of Hormuz, and Gulf countries account for nearly 40 per cent of global urea exports. Any disruption to production facilities, export terminals, or shipping routes therefore has implications that extend well beyond regional markets, affecting agricultural production and food security across the world.

The importance of fertilisers stems from their role as a critical input in agricultural production. Unlike many commodities, fertilisers cannot easily be substituted or deferred. Farmers must apply them at specific stages of crop development to maintain yields and productivity. Delays in supply or significant increases in prices can directly reduce agricultural output, creating ripple effects throughout the food supply chain.

This vulnerability has been demonstrated before. During the Russia-Ukraine conflict, fertiliser prices surged dramatically, with some products more than doubling in cost. Faced with soaring expenses, many farmers particularly in developing economies reduced fertiliser application rates. The consequences became evident months later through lower crop yields and tighter food supplies, contributing to rising food prices in global markets.

What makes the current situation particularly concerning is the absence of strategic fertiliser reserves comparable to those maintained for oil. Major economies have developed mechanisms to cushion short-term energy shocks, but no similar system exists for fertilisers. As a result, disruptions in fertiliser-producing regions can quickly translate into real shortages rather than merely temporary price volatility.

The economic implications extend far beyond agriculture. Fertilisers account for a substantial share of production costs for many key crops, often ranging between 30 and 50 per cent. When fertiliser prices rise, farmers face higher operating costs that ultimately feed into consumer food prices. At a time when many economies are still grappling with the inflationary legacy of the pandemic and recent geopolitical conflicts, another surge in food prices could complicate efforts to stabilise inflation and reduce interest rates.

Developing countries are likely to bear the heaviest burden. Many rely heavily on imported food and agricultural inputs, making them particularly vulnerable to disruptions in global fertiliser markets. Rising food prices can erode household purchasing power, increase poverty levels, and place additional strain on government budgets as policymakers seek to protect vulnerable populations through subsidies and social assistance programs.

Unlike energy crises, however, the effects of fertiliser disruptions emerge gradually. The consequences are often delayed by months or even entire growing seasons. Farmers may initially absorb higher costs or reduce application rates, but the true impact becomes visible later through lower harvests and reduced food availability. This delayed effect creates a dangerous illusion that risks are contained when, in reality, they may be accumulating beneath the surface.

For this reason, fertiliser markets deserve greater attention from policymakers and investors alike. Food security is no longer solely an agricultural issue; it has become a strategic concern closely linked to energy security, trade flows and geopolitical stability. Recent crises have demonstrated that vulnerabilities in one part of the global economy can quickly spread across sectors and borders.

For Jordan, the current environment presents both challenges and opportunities. The country remains exposed to fluctuations in global food prices due to its reliance on imports for a significant share of its food requirements. At the same time, Jordan's position as a major producer of phosphate and fertiliser products provides a potential competitive advantage. Increased global demand could strengthen export revenues, support industrial growth and enhance Jordan's role within international agricultural supply chains.

The lesson is clear. Geopolitical risks can no longer be measured solely through the lens of oil and gas markets. While the world watches energy prices and tanker movements through strategic waterways, a less visible but equally critical threat may be developing in fertiliser markets. If oil powers the global economy, fertilisers sustain the global food system. Prolonged disruptions in their production or trade could trigger consequences that extend far beyond agriculture, affecting inflation, economic growth and social stability worldwide.

The elephant in IMEC's room

By Mohammad Abu Rumman

Two days ago, Amman hosted an important closed-door conference titled "Beyond Hormuz: Jordan as an Anchor for Broader Integration in the Middle East". The event was organised jointly by the European Union, India, the Swedish Dialogue Institute for the Middle East and North Africa and the European Union Institute for Security Studies. Alongside foreign officials, international experts, and specialised participants, the conference brought together Jordanian ministers, policymakers and representatives of local think tanks.

On the sidelines of the conference, several important sessions were also held, including discussions involving former Prime Minister Omar Razzaz and envoys associated with the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), one of the most significant international visions currently being proposed for the future of the Middle East. The project's founding memorandum of understanding was signed in India in 2023 and brought together eight signatories: India, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, the European Union, Italy, France, Germany and the United States.

The conference operated under the Chatham House Rules, which prohibit attribution of remarks to individual participants. Accordingly, it is inappropriate to discuss specific interventions or speakers. Yet it remains important to highlight several of the critical debates and dilemmas that emerged throughout the discussions.

Although IMEC is often presented as a major economic initiative — far more than a simple trade corridor linking India, the Middle East, and Europe — it is in fact envisioned as an integrated network of maritime and land routes, logistics infrastructure, transportation systems and strate-

gic connectivity. Nevertheless, one major challenge surfaced repeatedly during the conference: Israel's role as a central transit point within the proposed corridor maps. The strategic partnership between the United States and Israel, combined with the growing strategic relationship between India and Israel, has undoubtedly reinforced this vision from the Indian perspective.

All current discussions assume the continuation of existing conditions. But what becomes of today's carefully drawn maps and connectivity plans if a major crisis erupts tomorrow in Jerusalem or the West Bank?

Yet, clear Jordanian and broader Arab reservations were equally evident. Participants repeatedly questioned whether it is possible to sidestep the Palestinian issue — politically and strategically — and move directly toward a model of regional economic integration in which Israel is treated as an ordinary partner. Such an approach, according to many of the perspectives articulated during the confer-

ence, overlooks fundamental realities on the ground. Israel today remains the proverbial "elephant in the room" that many American and European policymakers seem reluctant to acknowledge.

One of the arguments raised in support of IMEC drew on the European experience, particularly the transformation from the European Coal and Steel Community into what eventually became the European Union. The Jordanian response, however, emphasised the profound differences between the two cases. Europe's integration project emerged after reconciliation between sovereign states. The Middle East, by contrast, still faces the reality of an ongoing Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories and increasingly confrontational Israeli policies toward the wider region. These are not issues that can simply be bypassed through economic planning.

Even the logic underpinning the Abraham Accords — closely connected to the broader vision of regional integration embodied in IMEC — has appeared increasingly fragile following the events of October 7, 2023, and the subsequent American-Iranian confrontation. Developments since then have demonstrated that regional economic arrangements remain vulnerable so long as the Palestinian question remains unresolved.

Jordanian participants therefore called for consideration of alternative routes and frameworks. The original IMEC plans notably excluded Syria, which at the time remained under extensive international sanctions. Today, however, Syria is increasingly viewed as a potentially significant participant whose inclusion — alongside Jordan — could substantially enhance the project's regional viability. Questions were also raised regarding the apparent emphasis on Israeli ports while Gaza remains absent from the project's maps,

as well as the continued marginalisation of Turkey despite its obvious strategic potential as a regional connector.

In Jordan, two important studies have previously addressed the country's positioning within emerging regional connectivity projects. The first, published by the Politics and Society Institute and authored by Ali Hijazi under the title "Jordan and the Middle East: A Strategic Vision for the Future", examined Jordan's role within these evolving networks and assessed the opportunities and challenges associated with them. The second, issued by the Jordan Economic Forum under the title "Positioning Jordan as a Support Hub for Trade and Services", similarly explored Jordan's potential role as a regional logistics and services centre.

Both studies seek to identify Jordan's emerging strategic position within these initiatives, evaluate the country's available options, and maximise potential national benefits. At the same time, they grapple with the central dilemma that continues to shape all such projects: How to navigate the Israeli factor within broader regional and international planning.

The Jordanian, Saudi, and wider Arab positions expressed during the conference were largely consistent. Israel was not viewed merely as an obstacle to implementation but as a genuine iron wall standing in the way of any sustainable regional project. Yet the deeper concern lies elsewhere. All current discussions assume the continuation of existing conditions. But what becomes of today's carefully drawn maps and connectivity plans if a major crisis erupts tomorrow in Jerusalem or the West Bank?

That question remains unanswered — and it may ultimately determine the future not only of IMEC, but of every vision currently being proposed for a new Middle East.

Weakening Europe: Between geopolitical pressures and American strategic interests

By Hasan Dajah

Since the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian military operation, a fundamental question has resurfaced in global strategic debate: Who truly benefits from weakening Europe economically and depriving it of cheap Russian energy sources, which for decades constituted one of the most important elements of its industrial competitiveness? Is what has happened merely a natural consequence of the conflict with Russia, or is it part of a broader process of restructuring the balance of power within the Western camp itself?

Historically, Western Europe has relied on a simple strategic equation: American security through NATO, low-cost Russian energy, and open global markets for European exports. This equation enabled Europe for decades to achieve high growth rates, especially in Germany, which built its industrial strength on cheap Russian gas, advanced technology and open trade.

However, the military operation in Ukraine has turned this equation on its head. Europe lost a significant portion of its Russian gas and oil imports and was forced to import energy from more distant and expensive markets. This led to higher production costs, inflation and a decline in the competitiveness of European industry. Meanwhile, some major European companies began relocating their investments to the United States to take advantage of lower energy prices and generous government incentives.

From the perspective of the realist school of international relations, major powers do not act solely out of friendship or moral alliances, but rather according to calculations of power and self-interest. In this context, several analysts within the realist school of international relations believe that the United States views Europe as a key strategic ally, but at the same time, it cautiously monitors any developments that might grant

the European Union significant economic or strategic independence, which could diminish American influence within the Western system. The greater Europe's economic power and strategic independence, the less capable the United States becomes of leading the Western system unilaterally.

This explains the eagerness of successive US administrations to maintain Europe's security dependence on the American umbrella. Security is the key that grants Washington lasting influence over European strategic decisions. As the perception of a Russian threat intensified, European capitals became increasingly reliant on the United States politically, militarily and in terms of intelligence.

Regarding Ukraine and NATO, Moscow views the alliance's eastward expansion as a direct threat to its national security and an infringement upon its historical strategic depth. Russia bases its position on a series of political statements and understandings that followed the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, which it believes included Western promises not to expand the alliance toward its borders. From this perspective, Moscow considers the possibility of Ukraine joining NATO a transgression of Russia's security "red lines". Conversely, the United States and NATO members assert that the principle of state sovereignty grants Ukraine the full right to choose its alliances and security partnerships, and that no legally binding agreement prohibits NATO expansion. Caught between these two opposing viewpoints, Ukraine has become a focal point in a broader struggle over the future of European security and the balance of power in the international system.

But beyond the legal debate, the strategic outcome was clear: Europe became a protracted arena of confrontation between Russia and the West. The longer the war dragged on, the higher Europe's military spending bill became, energy costs soared

and economic growth slowed.

On the economic front, the United States benefited from several concurrent developments. Its exports of liquefied natural gas to Europe surged to unprecedented levels. The European energy crisis and the stimulus provided by the US anti-inflation law prompted a number of European companies to expand or redirect some of their industrial investments toward the United States, particularly in the electric vehicle, battery and clean technology sectors.

Perhaps the most important issue lies in the transformations underway within the international system itself

This sparked a broad debate within the European Union about the risks of declining European industrial competitiveness. Furthermore, European demand for American weapons, air defense systems, and military equipment increased.

The ongoing tension between Europe and Russia also limits the prospects of a massive Eur-

asian economic axis combining European technology, Russian resources and Asian markets — a scenario that has long worried some American strategists who believe that any significant rapprochement between Berlin and Moscow could create a geopolitical bloc capable of counterbalancing American global influence.

Perhaps the most important issue lies in the transformations underway within the international system itself. The world is witnessing a gradual shift from unipolarity to a more complex multipolarity, with the rise of China, the resurgence of Russia, and the growing influence of other regional powers. In this new environment, the United States seeks to maintain its leadership position by realigning alliances, redirecting resources and preventing the emergence of independent power centres within the Western camp.

However, talk of an "American conspiracy to weaken Europe" may be an oversimplification of reality. The transatlantic relationship remains based on a broad network of shared economic, military, and political interests. What is clear, however, is that American priorities do not always align with European interests, and that Europe has borne a greater cost than the United States in confronting Russia.

Europe finds itself facing a crucial historical question: Will it continue to rely on the American umbrella as the primary guarantor of its security, or will it move towards building genuine strategic independence that balances its economic interests with its security requirements? The answer to this question will not only determine the future of Europe, but may also shape the international order in the coming decades, in a world rapidly moving towards multipolarity and competition among major powers to reshape maps of influence, wealth, and power.

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

BUSINESS

Wednesday, June 17, 2026



SANAD

SANAD app users rising — ministry

AMMAN (JT) — The Ministry of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship announced that "Sanad" application has continued to witness accelerated growth, with the number of digital identity activations exceeding 2.7 million citizens, including nearly 400,000 daily active users.

The ministry stated that these figures reflect the application's

prominent role in the daily lives of citizens and their increasing reliance on it to access digital government services quickly and easily, Al Mamlaka TV reported.

The ministry noted that Sanad application has recently undergone a series of updates and enhancements focused on simplifying procedures and accelerating access to services,

which contributed to increasing operational efficiency and improving user experience.

Among the most prominent updates is allowing users to activate their digital identity remotely through the application without the need to visit Sanad stations.

The ministry reaffirmed its commitment to continuously developing Sanad application.

JD6.51b in transactions processed via eFAWATEERcom since start of 2026 — JoPACC

AMMAN (JT) — The total value of transactions processed through Jordan's "eFAWATEERcom" system reached JD6.51 billion, with 33.93 million transactions recorded since the beginning of 2026, according to the monthly payment systems report issued by the Jordanian Company for Payment and Clearing Systems (JoPACC).

The report, cited by Al Mamlaka TV, showed that the number of users rose to 5.25 million in May 2026, up from 5.21 million in April and 5.17 million in March, marking a 0.8 per cent monthly increase.

Existing users accounted for 5.21 million, or 99.3 per cent of the total, while new us-



ers reached 40,460, representing 0.7 per cent.

The number of billers registered on the system stood at 718, while the total number of available services reached 2,513.

Transactions through the platform increased to 6.86 million in May, up 4.1 per cent from 6.6 million in April.

By sector, telecom-

munications recorded the highest number of transactions with 2.26 million, followed by water and electricity with 1.98 million, and government services with 1.31 million.

E-wallet companies and payment service providers accounted for 598,000 transactions, while the financing and financial services sec-

tor recorded 312,000, and the education sector 139,000.

Despite the rise in transaction volume, the total value of transactions fell 16.5 per cent month-on-month to JD1.19 billion in May, compared with JD1.43 billion in April.

Government services led in value terms, with JD775.7 million, fol-

lowed by e-wallet companies and payment service providers with JD159 million, water and electricity with JD76 million, financial and financing services with JD63 million, telecommunications with JD36 million and education with JD23 million.

Digital payments accounted for 5.7 million transactions in May, compared with 1.1 million cash payments. In value terms, digital payments reached JD1.06 billion, while cash payments totalled JD133.87 million.

The average transaction value through "eFAWATEERcom" declined to JD174 in May, down from JD217 in April.

IMF chief warns energy recovery to take time after US-Iran ceasefire

WASHINGTON, United States (AFP) — The International Monetary Fund chief has welcomed the ceasefire agreement between the United States and Iran, but warned it would take time for energy and other supply disruptions to dissipate.

"As we have said before, much depends on the duration and intensity of the energy supply shock," Kristalina Georgieva wrote in a post on the Fund's website.

"The sooner it is resolved, the better — especially as supply will take time to recover given the significant infrastructure damage — and Sunday's ceasefire announcement is welcome."

The United States and Iran announced a deal on Sunday to end the Middle East war on all fronts and reopen the vital Strait of Hormuz, sparking relief after months of deadly violence and global economic chaos.

Georgieva also announced that the Fund would be releasing an update to its World



International Monetary Fund Chief Kristalina Georgieva

Economic Outlook (WEO) — which includes growth and inflation projections — on July 8.

At its last WEO update in April, the Fund downgraded global growth projections due to the impact of the war.

Given uncertainty around the duration and intensity of the

conflict, the IMF issued a range of scenarios, with the "severe" case showing global growth falling to 2 per cent and inflation spiking to above six per cent.

On Monday, Georgieva reiterated that there remained "a clear risk to global growth" from the conflict, and warned that

there were "significant disparities" on its impacts.

"It is the countries that combine heavy reliance on energy imports with limited policy space that are especially hard-hit," she said, adding that the strain was visible in Africa.

She cited fuel shortages in Ethiopia, Ma-

lawi and Zambia, with high fuel prices threatening consumers in Lesotho, Rwanda and Tanzania.

Earlier this month, the Fund announced it was providing increased or faster access to funds to Ethiopia, The Gambia and Burkina Faso, and said it was in "accelerated" talks with Malawi for a new financial assistance program.

Emerging market economies in Asia have also been hard hit, with retail prices of gasoline increasing by 40 per cent since the war began, she said.

Georgieva said the Fund was prepared to offer financial support to member countries, but that most governments had so far asked for policy guidance rather than cash bailouts.

She warned that oil-exporting countries in the Gulf had been badly hit by the war, and face "steep downward revisions to growth this year, with five out of eight countries seeing outright contractions".



In an aerial view, oil storage tanks are seen at the Sunoco LP Fuel Supply Terminal on Monday in Austin, Texas

Oil drops below \$80 on US-Iran deal

LONDON (AFP) — Oil prices dropped below \$80 a barrel on Tuesday on optimism over the promised reopening of the Strait of Hormuz, easing inflation pressures on global economies even though traders are eyeing the risk of Iranian "service fees" on ships transiting the strait.

Oil hit a three-month low as Brent North Sea crude, the international benchmark, dropped 4 per cent to \$79.87 a barrel, dipping below \$80 for the first time since early March, before edging back up.

The main US oil contract, West Texas Intermediate, slid 4.7 per cent to under \$77 a barrel.

US President Donald Trump said the Strait of Hormuz would be "completely open" once Washington and Iran sign their peace agreement on Friday in Switzerland.

Iranian media reported that three oil tankers and two cargo ships had already passed through the strait.

Wall Street was cautious, with the Dow adding 0.8 per cent, but the broader S&P 500 dipped 0.2 per cent and the tech-heavy Nasdaq shed 0.4 per cent.

"It's normal for markets to want to consolidate their gains after strong up days, especially now that we're still trying to figure out exactly what's in the agreement that has been signed," said Steve Sosnick of Interactive Brokers.

Europe's main mar-

kets closed higher, while Asia ended mixed.

"Although the deal has not been formally signed, there already appears to be a peace dividend for markets," said Kathleen Brooks, research director at trading group XTB.

US Energy Department data meanwhile showed that America's strategic oil stockpiles sank last week to their lowest level since 1983 — indicating sustained demand to rebuild them even if the Mideast conflict ends.

Focus this week is also on a wave of central bank decisions. US Federal Reserve Chairman Kevin Warsh kicked off his first meeting in charge of the central bank's rate-setting committee on Tuesday, with policymakers largely expected to keep rates steady as the fallout from the Iran war ripples through the world's largest economy.

The Bank of England is also expected to stand pat.

The yen was little changed after the Bank of Japan on Tuesday raised interest rates to their highest level since 1995.

Tech stocks received a boost from another blockbuster performance by Elon Musk's SpaceX, which was up around 10 per cent — and briefly almost 20 per cent — for a second session in a row after listing at the end of last week.

INVESTMENT

Syria signs gas sector contract with US energy giant

DAMASCUS (AFP) — Syria on Tuesday signed a contract with US oil giant ConocoPhillips to develop the country's gas sector, state media reported, as Damascus seeks to attract international energy investment.

Damascus previously signed memoranda of understanding on energy with international companies including Chevron as well as HKN Energy, which has begun managing and operating oil fields recently handed over to the government by Syrian Kurdish authorities.

State news agency SANA reported that the state-owned Syrian Petroleum Company signed "a contract with US companies ConocoPhillips and Novaterra with the aim of developing several gas fields in Syria and increasing production from existing fields".

The move seeks to "contribute to strengthening the energy system and gas supplies required for the electricity sector and other



AFP photo

vital sectors", it said.

In Washington last week, Syrian Petroleum Company CEO Youssef Oablawi said it would be "the biggest contract" to be signed since the new authorities took power after the December 2024 ouster of long-time ruler Bashar Assad.

At the signing ceremony in Damascus, Oablawi said the move was "an important step

in the process of developing the gas sector in Syria".

"Through this cooperation, we look forward to increasing production, improving operational capabilities and supporting the energy system," he added.

A Syrian delegation headed by Energy Minister Mohammad Al Bashir held talks in Washington last week on investment pro-

spects in energy and infrastructure in Syria and possible partnerships with the US private sector.

After years of civil war that fractured the country and ravaged its industries and infrastructure, Syria is seeking to modernise its energy infrastructure, attract investment and boost development as it pushes along a path of economic recovery,

particularly after the lifting of Assad-era sanctions.

Syria aims to produce one million barrels of oil per day by 2030 and is seeking to broaden international cooperation on exploration and production.

Last month, Syria signed a memorandum of understanding with ConocoPhillips, France's TotalEnergies and Qatar's QatarEnergy on offshore oil and gas exploration.

In February, it also signed a preliminary deal with US energy giant Chevron and Qatari firm Power International for offshore energy exploration.

Damascus now controls all the country's oil and gas fields after taking over areas previously under Kurdish control in the north and northeast this year.

The deputy governor of the north-eastern Hasakeh province, Ahmed Al Hilali, on Monday said HKN Energy had begun managing and operating those fields.

THE JORDAN TIMES SPORTS AT A GLANCE

TENNIS

Serena Williams to play doubles with sister Venus at Wimbledon

LONDON (AFP) — Serena Williams will play at Wimbledon for the first time since 2022 after the American legend was given a wildcard to play the doubles event with her sister Venus on Tuesday. Williams made a sensational return to tennis last week when she won her first-round doubles match at Queen's Club with partner Victoria Mboko. The 44-year-old had not played professional tennis for four years after saying she was "evolving away" from the sport following the 2022 US Open. But the 23-time Grand Slam singles champion was keen to play in front of her two young daughters and made the shock announcement of her return just prior to the Wimbledon warm-up event at Queen's. Williams was unable to play more than one match at Queen's after Mboko pulled out with an injury, but she is due to continue her remarkable comeback in the Berlin Open doubles alongside Karolina Muchova this week. The Williams sisters are six-time doubles champions at Wimbledon, winning their last title on their most recent appearance together a decade ago. Following speculation that Serena would be tempted to play in the singles at Wimbledon, which starts on June 29, the American was absent from the list of wildcard entries into that part of the tournament.

CRICKET

India's Sooryavanshi, 15, loses cool in on-field spat

COLOMBO (AFP) — Fifteen-year-old cricket sensation Vaibhav Sooryavanshi blew his fuse in an India A game in Sri Lanka and pushed an opposition player after a heated on-field exchange. The spotlight has been on Sooryavanshi since his batting heroics in the recent Indian Premier League (IPL) won him a place in India's senior men's team for their T20 tour of Ireland and England. But he made headlines for all the wrong reasons after he and a Sri Lanka A player confronted each other, following India's narrow defeat in a Super Over in Dambulla on Monday. Sri Lanka's Vishen Halambage exchanged words with departing Indian batters before Sooryavanshi responded and shoved him, according to Indian media and broadcast footage. Sri Lanka A wicketkeeper Niroshan Dickwella stepped in to calm tempers and separated the two players.

Jordan opens World Cup against Austria

By Aline Bannayan

AMMAN — Jordanians are counting down to 7:00am Wednesday — a memorable day for the nation as their history making squad "Al Nashama" kick off Group J matches against World 24th ranked Austria in their first ever participation at the FIFA World Cup currently underway in the US, Canada and Mexico.

Jordanians have been given a late working day start to watch the match, which will be played Tuesday evening 9:00 pm Pacific time in San Francisco. Players have become household names, with the official T-shirt, team logo and flags adorning cars, homes, cafes and streets as the team makes its debut on the world stage.

The 26th edition of the tournament has brought an additional 16 nations including a record 8 Arab nations: 2022 semifinalists Morocco are joined by Egypt, the first Arab nation ever to qualify to a World Cup in 1934, Algeria, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Iraq, Jordan.

Fans hope "Al Nashama" will continue the positive results of most Arab and Asian teams in the first week of the event as three teams from each group will move to the next round. Results so far include Morocco vs Brazil 1-1, Egypt vs Belgium 1-1, Saudi Arabia vs Uruguay 1-1, Qatar vs Switzerland 1-1, with only the Sweden vs Tunisia 5-1 result a disappointment.

Among Asian teams, it was Japan vs Netherlands 2-2, South Korea vs Czech Republic 2-1, Aus-



Jordan's Mousa Ta'mari leads the squad at the 2026 World Cup

tralia vs Turkey 2-0, Iran vs New Zealand 2-2.

FIFA #63 ranked Jordan will play also 28th ranked Algeria on June 23, before leaving to Dallas to play World #1 ranked reigning champions Argentina on June 28 in the last Round 1 match.

Despite the challenging group, Jordan's Moroccan coach Jamal Selami, a World Cup player at France 1998, believes his side is capable of making a strong impression and has motivated players underlining the "honour and responsibility of being the first team to represent Jordan in the World Cup".

Team captain Ehsan

Haddad told a press conference it is "pride" rather than "pressure" that underscores the historic participation which has had immense support and follow by HRH Crown Prince Hussein and the team delegation headed by HRH Prince Ali, president of the Jordan Football Association.

In the leadup to the World Cup, Jordan played 7-time World Cup qualifier, 13th ranked Columbia losing 2-0 after an earlier 4-1 defeat to 12-time qualifier World 19th ranked Switzerland en route to the United States.

Mousa Ta'mari, Yazan Al Arab and Ali Alwan, lead the Jordanian

squad together with Mohammad Abul Nadi, Nizar Rashdan, Mahmoud Mardi and Mohammad Abu Zreiq "Sharara" and Ehsan Haddad back after a long injury. Jordan's young star Odeh Fakhoury, now on the linkup of Egyptian champions Pyramids, scored the sole goal against Switzerland and is one of the key stars of debutants including Ali Azaizeh, Mohammad Abu Gosh and others.

Striker Ibrahim Sabra, one of the key stars of Jordan's U-23 lineup, joined teammates sidelined with injury, adding to the challenges of the coaching staff with key players sidelined includ-

ing one of the leading strikers in Asia, Yazan Nue'imat, and Adham Qurashi. They were late joined by Isam Smeiri, who had excelled in the Arab Cup in Nue'imat's absence.

Since 1986, when Jordan first participated in World Cup qualifiers, their earlier best performance was in 2014 World Cup when they played then FIFA 6th ranked Uruguay in an intercontinental qualifying tie before exiting. Round 3 was the furthest they reached in earlier editions.

At look back at Jordan's past achievements saw their best ever FIFA ranking was 37 thin 2004

after advancing to the Asian Cup quarterfinals and losing to eventual champs Japan. Jordan's World Cup qualification seems to have started with the 2023 Asian Cup, when the team reached the final before losing to hosts Qatar. In December 2025, Jordan finished runner-up to eventual champions Morocco at the 2025 FIFA Arab Cup, despite missing many key players on the injury list or club duty. By finishing runner-up at the 2023 Asian Cup, followed by a historic first-time qualification to the World Cup, Jordan booked their spot in the next edition of the 2027 Asian Cup a well.

LIFE

THE JORDAN TIMES

UK PM announces ban on social media for under-16s

LONDON (AFP) — Children under 16 will be banned from using social media in the UK, Prime Minister Keir Starmer announced on Monday, saying such platforms were making youngsters "unhappy".

Some children's charities welcomed the sweeping change, which is likely to trigger a major fight with US tech giants, but others warned it could make teenagers less safe online. Starmer, likely to face a leadership challenge in the coming weeks, said social media sites were exposing children to content that is "dangerous" and "designed to be addictive".

The ban will "include platforms like Snapchat, TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, Facebook and X" but not messaging services such as WhatsApp, the government said.

Young people gave a mixed response.

"I think it's a good thing, to be honest, because I don't even remember what age I was when I got Instagram, but it was just way too early," student Connie Skitt, 19, told AFP in Buxton, central England.

"You're making friends with people you don't know. It's like, not that safe."

But 18-year-old tour guide Tom Warvell expressed concerns that 16 was "a little bit high", arguing younger teens were "a better age to focus on".



Swiss Federal President Guy Parmelin (left) welcomes Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer and his wife Victoria Starmer as they arrive at Geneva Airport to attend the G7 summit, in Geneva on Monday

"Times have changed so it is important for people to still be able to use it." Starmer said the upcoming ban was influenced by the experience of Australia, which in December became the first nation to ban people under 16 from social media.

The UK leader said he hoped to pass the regulation by late December and for the ban to come into force within months next year. He suggested that YouTube Kids, Lego Play and Google Classroom would not be prohibited.

Meanwhile, "harmful functions" on gaming services and live streaming platforms allowing strangers to contact children will be blocked.

The government said it would also consider overnight curfews and breaks in infinite scrolling for mi-

nors, and would announce more detail in July.

Australia's Prime Minister Anthony Albanese welcomed the move on X, saying: "Social media giants operate across borders. By standing together, we can do more to hold them accountable and keep children safe online." Canada and France are among other countries considering similar bans, while Indonesia began enforcing its ban for users under 16 in March.

Britain's ban could anger US President Donald Trump after the US embassy in London earlier this month came out against "broad social media bans".

Prince Harry and Meghan Markle, who have campaigned globally on the issue — with the duchess claiming ear-

lier this year she was "the most trolled person in the entire world" — welcomed the UK move.

But in a statement they noted: "Lasting change requires safer platforms by design, meaningful accountability, and a commitment to putting children's wellbeing ahead of engagement and profit." Starmer's announcement follows a government-led consultation where British teenagers trialed social media bans and time limits on apps.

It attracted about 116,000 contributions — the second-largest response ever received under the consultation system. More than four-fifths of responding parents said social media's risks outweighed the benefits for children, with 91 per cent backing a minimum

age of 16. But Save The Children UK voiced concerns that a ban "pushes children into less regulated spaces, where they are less likely to seek help when something goes wrong".

The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children insisted the policy must include "robust age checks on platforms" and "an effective enforcement regime".

A TikTok spokesman said the firm shares "the government's goal of safe online experiences for teens", noting its young people accounts have more than 50 preset safety and privacy settings.

"We look forward to collaborating constructively with the government on this important issue," he added.

A YouTube spokesperson warned a blanket ban would push children towards "less safe services".

It comes a week after the government said tech giants must stop children in Britain from being able to send and receive nude images on their devices.

Britain's interior ministry said it was giving companies, including Apple and Google, three months to introduce safety features to block children from taking and accessing naked photos on phones and tablets.

If they failed to do so, the government would introduce legislation forcing them to activate the technology, it warned.



This aerial view shows researchers working at the site where a large section of a Roman bathhouse has been uncovered in Nijmegen on Tuesday

Dutch uncover country's 'largest Roman bathhouse'

THE HAGUE (AFP) — Dutch authorities said on Tuesday they had excavated the biggest Roman bathhouse yet discovered in the country, complete with jewellery, hairpins, coins and a bronze bust of Bacchus, god of wine.

Archaeologists have uncovered "tens of thousands" of items, including bronze statues, signet rings and a necklace with a gold clasp, authorities in the eastern Dutch city of Nijmegen said.

The discoveries "show that the inhabitants of this part of the city lived in luxury some 1,800-1,900 years ago", said the

city authorities in a statement.

The discoveries 'show that the inhabitants of this part of the city lived in luxury some 1,800-1,900 years ago'


Of particular interest were hundreds of bone hairpins used to sculpt the "elaborate hairstyles" of wealthy

Roman women. The bathing complex appeared to have been especially luxurious, with marble-clad walls and floors paved with black and white limestone tiles.


The Roman city of Ulpia Noviomagus, now Nijmegen, was one of the biggest settlements in the present-day Netherlands.


"It is assumed that the Roman settlement... received city rights from Emperor Trajan around the year 100 AD," said the statement.

The bathhouse was erected shortly afterwards, historians believe



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