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Thursday, June 18, 2026 | Muharram 3, 1448 Hijri

Crown Prince visits Playground Global headquarters in California



Crown Prince meets with Austria vice chancellor on sidelines of Jordan-Austria football match

AMMAN (JT) — HRH Crown Prince Hussein on Wednesday met with Austria Vice Chancellor and Federal Minister for Housing, Arts, Culture, Media and Sport Andreas Babler.

During the meeting, held in California on the sidelines of the 2026 FIFA World Cup match between the Jordanian and Austrian national football teams, the Crown Prince expressed his best wishes to both

teams in the World Cup, highlighting how sporting events provide opportunities to strengthen the close ties between the two countries, according to a Royal Court statement.

His Royal Highness emphasised the importance of Austria's participation in the Jordan-EU Investment Conference, which will be held at the end of this year.

The Crown Prince

congratulated Austria on its election as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, noting its important role in supporting efforts to promote peace, security, and stability around the world.

Jordan's Ambassador to the United States Dina Kawar and Director of the Office of the Crown Prince Zaid Baqain attended the meeting.

AMMAN (JT) — HRH Crown Prince Hussein on Tuesday visited Playground Global in California, an early-stage venture capital firm that invests in technology start-ups.

The Crown Prince discussed potential cooperation and investment opportunities for the company in Jordan, highlighting the advantages of investing in the Kingdom and the role of the National Council for Future Technology in supporting the establishment of high-tech projects, according to a Royal Court statement.

His Royal Highness noted that, over recent years, Jordan has produced outstanding talent in the technology sector and is working to develop educational curricula in line with developments in this sector, which is contributing to strengthening the Kingdom's standing, broadening opportunities for young people, and leading to innovative technological



HRH Crown Prince Hussein visits Playground Global in California, which invests in technology startups

solutions.

Discussions during the visit also focused on the potential for developing advanced technical talent in Jordan in the fields of

semiconductors, quantum computing, robotics and bioengineering.

During a tour of the company's headquarters, the Crown Prince was shown examples

of the robotics technology applications developed there, as well as models created using 3D printing technology.

His Royal Highness

was accompanied by Jordan's Ambassador to the United States Dina Kawar and Director of the Office of the Crown Prince Zaid Baqain.

Cabinet approves land-use agreement with China's UEG for green hydrogen feasibility studies

AMMAN (JT) — The Cabinet, in a session chaired by Prime Minister Jafar Hassan on Wednesday, approved a land-use agreement with China's United Energy Group (UEG) to complete feasibility studies for a green hydrogen production project in Jordan.

The decision aligns with the Kingdom's efforts to advance clean energy projects, promote environmental sustainability, and attract high-quality investments in the green hydrogen and low-carbon fuels sector, supported by a developing legislative framework and suitable infrastructure for such projects, according to a Prime Ministry statement.

The project also forms



The Cabinet approves a land-use agreement with China's United Energy Group to complete feasibility studies for a green hydrogen production project in Jordan

part of government efforts to strengthen Jordan's position as a regional hub for green industries and clean fuels, while sup-

porting industries linked to ammonia and its derivatives, and opening new export markets amid rising global demand for

low-carbon products, in partnership with international investors and developers, it said.

The Ministry of Energy

and Mineral Resources signed a Memorandum of Understanding with UEG in September, 2025 to conduct a feasibility study for a \$1.155 billion green hydrogen production project in the Kingdom.

The study explored the potential for producing 200,000 tonnes of green ammonia annually for export, using desalinated seawater and renewable energy from key locations across Jordan.

It also assessed land requirements and defined the main technical stages, with a focus on keeping production costs low, according to a statement by the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources at the time.

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IMF approves fifth review of Jordan reform programme, unlocks \$188 million in financing

AMMAN (JT) — The Executive Board of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on Wednesday approved the fifth review of Jordan's Extended Fund Facility (EFF) programme and the second review of

its Resilience and Sustainability Facility (RSF), unlocking a total of \$188 million in additional financing for the Kingdom.

The approval enables Jordan to access \$134 million under the EFF

programme and \$54 million through the RSF arrangement, the Jordan news agency, Petra, said, citing a statement from IMF.

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The Jordan Armed Forces-Arab Army says the convoy is part of ongoing efforts to support the two field hospitals and maintain medical and rehabilitation services in Gaza amid difficult conditions

JAF sends 10-truck medical convoy to field hospitals in Gaza

AMMAN (JT) — The Jordan Armed Forces-Arab Army (JAF) on Wednesday dispatched a supply convoy of 10 trucks carrying specialised medicines, medical supplies and prosthetic equipment to

Jordanian field hospitals in the Gaza Strip.

The convoy is part of ongoing efforts, carried out under Royal directives, to support the two field hospitals and ensure the continued pro-

vision of medical and rehabilitation services to patients amid challenging humanitarian conditions, according to a JAF statement.

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Nashama show promise despite loss in its first World Cup game

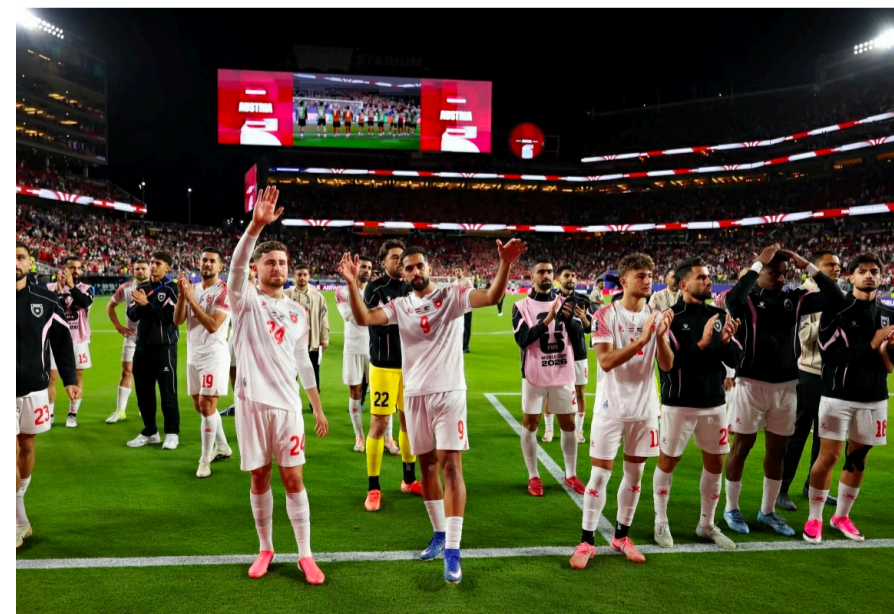
By Osama Alkafri

AMMAN — Jordan's historic FIFA World Cup debut ended in a 3-1 loss to Austria on Wednesday in Group J at the San Francisco Bay Area Stadium, despite a spirited performance and a landmark goal from Ali Olwan.

The Nashama began brightly and almost struck within two minutes when Nizar Rashdan unleashed a powerful effort that narrowly cleared the crossbar.

Five minutes later, Musa Al Taamari tested Austria goalkeeper Alexander Schlager with a long-range strike, but his effort was comfortably dealt with.

Jordan continued to press and came close again when Odeh Fakhouri's powerful shot inside the box took a



Players of Jordan applaud fans after the FIFA World Cup 2026 Group J match between Austria and Jordan at San Francisco Bay Area Stadium on Tuesday in Santa Clara, California

deflection before being pushed away for a corner by Schlager.

Austria, however, made their first clear

opportunity count in the 21st minute. Romano Schmid curled a superb effort into the top corner, leav-

ing Jordan goalkeeper Yazeed Abulaila with no chance.

Jordan responded quickly and almost lev-

elled two minutes later when Ali Olwan rose highest to meet a cross, but his header struck the crossbar.

Schlager was once again decisive shortly after, producing a fine save to deny Olwan from close range as Jordan increased their attacking pressure.

The Nashama controlled the closing stages of the first half, and in stoppage time, Taamari went on a solo run, but his shot drifted wide of the target.

Jordan carried that momentum into the second half and were rewarded in the 50th minute. Olwan made history by scoring Jordan's first-ever World Cup goal, calmly placing the ball into the right corner to level the score at 1-1.

Continued on page 5

Military training centre ready to receive second conscript batch — JAF

AMMAN (JT) — The Jordan Armed Forces-Arab Army (JAF) on Wednesday said that it had finalised preparations at the National Military Service Training Centre to receive the second batch of conscripts.

The administrative, technical and logistical arrangements have been completed as part of pre-established plans to ensure the national service programme is performed with the highest levels of efficiency and discipline, according to a JAF statement.

The preparations included upgrading training and managerial facilities, as well as securing the necessary medical and logistical provisions to create a conducive training environment that enables recruits to acquire required military and vocational skills.

HRH Crown Prince Hussein announced the reactivation of the National Military Service Programme, during a meeting with youth from Irbid Governorate in August.

During the meeting, the Crown Prince said



JAF photo

The Jordan Armed Forces-Arab Army on Wednesday says that it has finalised preparations at the National Military Service Training Centre to receive the second batch of conscripts

that young Jordanians must be prepared to serve and defend their country, adding that citizens who have participated in national military service understand the importance of this experience.

Prince Hussein noted the importance of the programme in strength-

ening national identity and young people's connection to their homeland, noting that serving with JAF builds character and instills discipline.

Director of the Mobilisation and Popular Army Directorate underscored the centre's full readiness to receive the new batch in line

with approved training curricula.

The official added that the training programmes aim to instil discipline, commitment and responsibility, while developing the physical and mental capabilities of the participants to align with the national objectives of the military service programme.

JAF continues to implement all regulatory measures for the programme, stemming from its national role in empowering youth, enhancing their capabilities, and deepening national belonging and patriotism to serve the higher national interest.

ASEZA participates in 10th World Cities Summit 2026 in Singapore

AMMAN (JT) — The Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority (ASEZA) has participated in the 10th World Cities Summit 2026 in Singapore.

The event brought together representatives from over 250 cities, including 103 city leaders, alongside decision-makers, experts, academics, CEOs of major multinational companies, and representatives from international organisations and the public and private sectors, according to an ASEZA statement.

The summit has drawn a total of 140,000 participants in its sessions.

Aqaba's participation, via an official ASEZA delegation led by Chief Commissioner Shadi Majali, underscored the city's growing prominence on the global map and aims to reinforce its presence in international forums dedicated to the future of cities and sustainable urban development.

The engagement aligns with ASEZA's efforts to bolster Aqaba's international standing, forge strategic partnerships with global cities and institutions exchange expertise, and capitalise on pioneering practices.



ASEZA photo

Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority Chief Commissioner Shadi Majali says that Aqaba's participation in the 10th World Cities Summit 2026 provides a 'significant' opportunity to review the best global practices

The 10th edition of the summit focused on several key pillars, including resilient and regenerative cities, smart cities, future cities and co-creation platforms.

Majali emphasised that Aqaba's participation in this international forum provided a "significant" opportunity to review the best global practices and exchange knowledge with participating cities and institutions, thereby supporting Aqaba's future development plans.

He also praised the role played by the Jordanian embassy in Singapore in facilitating the delegation's mission and arranging meetings and

events, which contributed to achieving the participation goals and enhancing Aqaba's presence within this major global gathering.

On the sidelines of the summit, Majali and other delegation members held a series of meetings with city leaders, officials, and representatives of international institutions and global companies.

Discussions covered opportunities for cooperation, partnership, and knowledge sharing, while exploring future avenues of collaboration to support development projects and enhance Aqaba's regional and international status.



WORLD CUP

Prime Minister Jafar Hassan on Wednesday joined fans who gathered at the Roman Amphitheatre in downtown Amman to watch the football match between Jordan and Austria at the FIFA World Cup 2026



Petra photos



The Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Wednesday condemns the continued escalation of settler attacks against Palestinians in the occupied West Bank, including recent arson attacks targeting two mosques north of Ramallah

Jordan condemns escalating settler attacks in West Bank, mosque arsons in Ramallah

AMMAN (JT) — The Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Wednesday condemned the continued escalation of settler attacks against Palestinians in the occupied West Bank, including recent arson attacks targeting two mosques north of Ramallah.

Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Fuad Majali reiterated Jordan's absolute rejection of the attacks, as an extension of the policies of Israel's extremist government and its ongoing illegal practices in the occupied West Bank.

Majali also warned that statements by Israeli officials continue to fuel extremism and violence against Palestinians and undermine prospects for a

just and lasting peace based on the two-state solution, holding Israel as the occupying power fully responsible for the attacks.

Majali called on the international community to assume its legal and moral responsibilities and compel the occupying power to halt the escalation and settler violence, hold perpetrators accountable and ensure they are brought to justice.

He reiterated that a just and comprehensive peace can only be achieved through the realisation of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, including the establishment of an independent state on the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Cabinet approves draft law on Christian denominational councils for 2026

- Court expertise bylaw endorsed to modernise judicial system
- 25m euros EU-funded Madaba wastewater expansion project approved

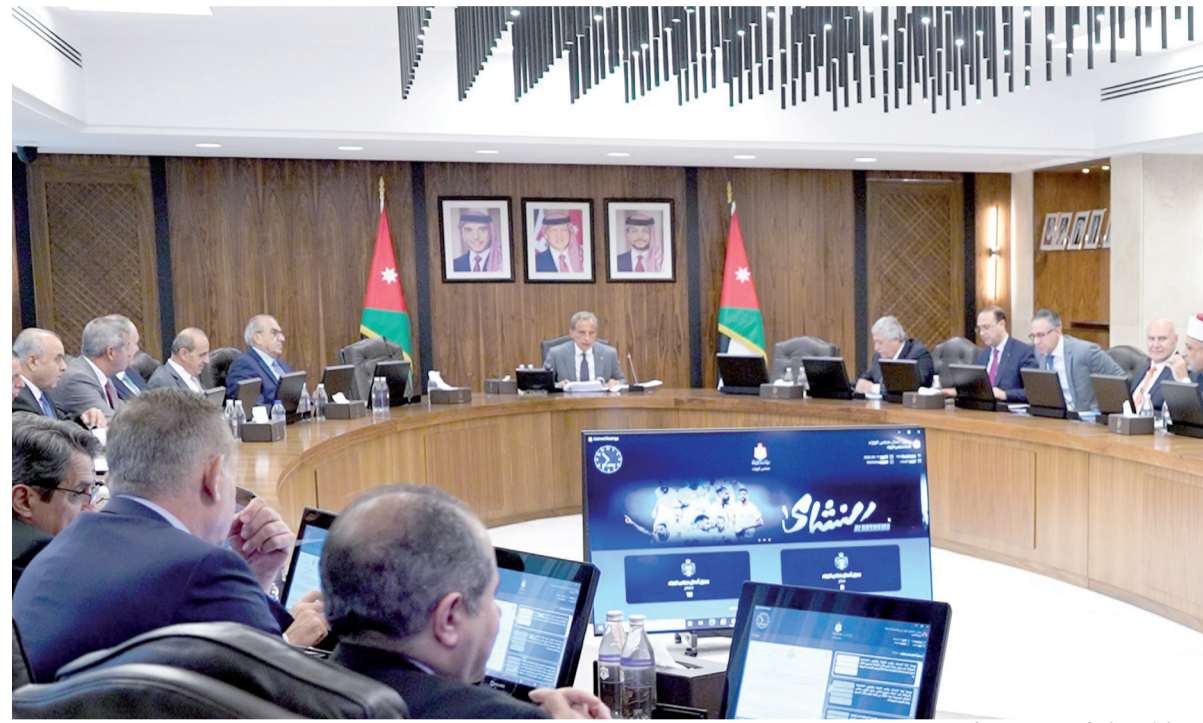
AMMAN (JT) — The Cabinet, during a session chaired by Prime Minister Jafar Hassan on Wednesday, approved the justifications for a draft amended law on Christian denominations' councils for 2026, to be referred to the Legislation and Opinion Bureau to complete the necessary approval procedures.

The draft law introduces amendments to Article 4 of the original legislation concerning the regulation of certain personal status matters before ecclesiastical courts, as outlined in their respective laws, according to a Prime Ministry statement.

The draft law also defines the jurisdiction of Christian denominational councils in line with Christian doctrine, while safeguarding the right of members of Christian communities to regulate their religious affairs and personal status matters in accordance with those rules, and in line with the Jordanian Constitution.

The amendments will not affect existing legal positions established prior to their entry into force, according to the statement.

The Cabinet also ap-



The Cabinet approves the justifications for a draft amended law on Christian denominations' councils for 2026

proved the justifications for a draft bylaw on court expertise for 2026, to be referred to the Legislation and Opinion Bureau for further procedures.

The bylaw marks a significant step in modernising the judicial system and strengthening the institutional and legislative framework governing judicial expertise, in line with the Economic Modernisation Vision and the Kingdom's digital transformation agen-

da, the statement said.

The new bylaw establishes a modern institutional framework for managing court expertise through the creation of a dedicated registry office within courts to organise administrative and technical matters related to experts, improving efficiency and expediting procedures.

It requires experts to meet defined qualification standards to ensure integrity, impartiality and professional competence,

contributing to faster case resolution and reducing disputes over technical reports.

It also mandates continuous specialised training to ensure experts remain up to date with scientific and technical developments, further strengthening the efficiency of the justice system.

The bylaw also introduces comprehensive digital transformation measures, including the creation of an electronic register of ex-

perts, legal recognition of data extracted from it, publication of expert lists on the Ministry of Justice website, and enabling electronic submission of objections, complaints and notifications, thereby enhancing accessibility, transparency and efficiency.

The bylaw also includes accountability mechanisms such as specialised committees to review complaints and appeals against evaluations, and introduces a tiered

disciplinary system including warnings, suspension and removal from the expert registry.

The Cabinet also approved a grant agreement with the French Development Agency worth 25 million euros, funded by the EU, to expand the Madaba wastewater treatment plant and rehabilitate sewerage networks.

The Madaba wastewater project is a key water sector initiative expected to serve around 200,000 people by increasing the treatment plant's capacity to 16,000 cubic metres per day. It will also enhance the reuse of treated water for restricted agricultural purposes, including fodder crops.

The project aims to expand the sewage collection system while protecting the environment and maximising water reuse opportunities, thereby reducing pressure on natural water resources.

It includes the construction of new sewage infrastructure, wastewater treatment facilities, the reconstruction and expansion of the treatment plant, and the establishment of a new network for the reuse of treated water.

AID Jordan Field Hospital in South Gaza performs 'successful complex' neck surgery

AMMAN (JT) — The medical teams at the Jordanian field hospital in South Gaza on Wednesday performed a "complex and successful" surgery (Branchial cyst excision) to clear a massive and disfiguring cyst from the neck of a 58-year-old patient.

The patient had been suffering for over a year from increasing difficulty in swallowing and breathing, alongside a deficit in cerebral blood supply caused by the severe pressure the cyst exerted on the main blood vessels supplying the head and neck.

The intricate operation was conducted under general anaesthesia by a specialised maxillofacial surgical team



The intricate operation was conducted under general anaesthesia by a specialised maxillofacial surgical team

to vital structures and sensitive blood vessels in the neck, the procedure was a complete success, with the lesion fully excised without any complications, the statement said.

The successful surgery underscores the

high competence and preparedness of the Royal Medical Services personnel at Jordanian field hospitals, and their ongoing commitment to providing top-tier therapeutic and surgical care to the fraternal Palestin-

ian people in the Gaza Strip.

The Jordanian Field Hospital South Gaza has treated 19,618 patients and performed 365 major and minor surgeries since the start of its mission in mid-February, as

part of efforts to alleviate suffering in the Gaza Strip and provide emergency and ongoing medical care.

Jordan runs two military field hospitals in Gaza, one in the Strip's north and was established in 2009 following the war in 2008, and the second is in Khan Younis in the south, which was established in November 2023 at the peak of the Israeli war of aggression on the coastal enclave that erupted on October 7, 2023.

Besides the field hospitals in Gaza, the JAF established the Jordanian field hospital in Nablus in late November 2023.

Other humanitarian programmes include the land bridge for aid delivery, the mobile bakery, the Restoring Hope Initiative, which provides prosthetics for amputees and the evacuation of critical cases to Jordanian hospitals.



President of the Jordan Esports Federation HRH Prince Omar Bin Feisal on Wednesday visits Electronic Arts (EA) company in California

Prince Omar visits EA company in California to discuss cooperation

AMMAN (JT) — President of the Jordan Esports Federation HRH Prince Omar Bin Feisal on Wednesday visited Electronic Arts (EA) company in California, one of the world's leading developers and publishers of sports video games.

During the visit, Prince Omar met with company representatives to discuss the latest developments in the esports industry and opportunities to

enhance cooperation in game development, according to the Jordan News Agency, Petra.

Prince Omar highlighted Jordan's advanced digital infrastructure and the specialised talent and young professionals the Kingdom has gained in the rapidly growing technology and gaming sectors.

The discussions focused on the future of the gaming industry, emerging technologies

and the expanding role of interactive entertainment as a driver of innovation, skills development and economic growth.

The visit forms part of Jordan's ongoing efforts to strengthen partnerships between global technology companies and the Kingdom's emerging innovation ecosystem, while supporting entrepreneurship and accelerating the adoption of advanced technologies.



Army foils infiltration attempt by 4 individuals

AMMAN (JT) — The Southern Military Region command on Tuesday thwarted an attempt by four people to illegally cross the border within its area

of responsibility.

Border guard units spotted the individuals as they were attempting to cross, according to a Jordan Armed Forces-Arab

Army statement.

The forces applied the rules of engagement, arrested them, and handed them over to the relevant authorities.

CRIME Cassation Court upholds 10-year sentence for drug dealer

By Rana Hussein

AMMAN — The Court of Cassation has upheld a January 2024 State Security Court (SSC) ruling sentencing a man to 10 years in prison after convicting him of possessing illegal narcotics in Aqaba in September 2023.

The court declared the defendant guilty of possessing a variety of illegal drugs at his home on September 4 with the intent to sell

the illegal narcotics in the local market.

The SSC handed the defendant a 15-year prison term for the charges and ordered him to pay JD10,000 in fines.

However, the court decided to reduce the sentence to 10 years in prison while maintaining the JD10,000 "to give the defendant a second chance in life".

Court documents said the Anti-Narcot-

ics Department (AND) learned that the defendant was possessing illegal narcotics to sell in his area.

The defendant and a second man, who did not appeal his 15-year verdict, were placed under surveillance for a while, court papers said.

The AND officers raided the defendants' home and found a variety of illegal narcotics, including Captagon pills and Hashish.

The defendant contested the SSC's ruling through his lawyer, who argued that "there were irregularities in the investigation process".

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

The higher court maintained that the SSC had followed the proper procedures in issuing the sentences

against the defendant.

"It was clear to the court that the defendant, who was convicted previously on similar charges, confessed willingly to possessing the illegal drugs to sell in the local market," the higher court said.

The Cassation Court bench comprised judges Yassin Abdullat, Nayef Samarat, Hammad Ghzawi, Qassem Dughmi and Mohammad Shreiri.

FAO-WFP report warns hunger crisis worsening in 13 global hotspots

AMMAN (JT) — Millions of people across 13 countries are expected to face worsening acute food insecurity between June and November 2026, according to a new report released on Wednesday by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the World Food Programme (WFP).

The latest edition of the Hunger Hotspots report, produced through the Global Network Against Food Crises, identifies Sudan, South Sudan, Yemen and Palestine as the world's most critical hunger hotspots due to the severity and scale of food insecurity.

Northeast Nigeria was added to the list of highest-concern areas after projections showed that populations in Borno State could face catastrophic levels of hunger in the coming months. Somalia was also classified among the most severe hotspots, with parts of Burhakaba District in the Bay region facing a risk of famine.

According to the report, a copy of which was sent to The Jordan Times, conflict and violence remain the main drivers of food insecurity, affecting 12 of the 13 hotspots. Economic shocks, severe funding shortages and the expected impacts of an El Niño weather event are further worsening conditions in vulnerable countries.

The agencies warned that humanitarian funding has fallen sharply in recent years. Funding for food assistance, emergency agricultural support and nutrition programmes declined by an estimated 59 per cent between 2022 and 2025, dropping to levels last seen nearly a decade ago. Meanwhile, the number of people facing high levels of acute food insecurity in the affected countries has risen to about 266 million.

The report also highlights additional threats, including the



Men push a stuck cart toward Sudan at the Adre border post on June 8. Rising numbers of Chadians fleeing the Sudan war are arriving at the Adre border post in Chad, but funding shortages could force UN agencies on the ground to stop operating

spillover effects of conflict in the Middle East and an Ebola outbreak in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, which could further disrupt livelihoods, markets and humanitarian access.

"We already know where the next hunger emergencies will occur," FAO Deputy Director-General Beth Bechdol said. "The challenge is whether we act early enough and at the necessary scale."

Bechdol stressed that early investment in emergency agricultural assistance and resilience-building measures is among the most cost-effective ways to protect livelihoods, maintain food production and reduce future humanitarian needs.

WFP Acting Executive Director Carl Skau urged immediate action to prevent conditions from deteriorating further.

"The warnings in this report cannot be ignored," Skau said. "Without action now, millions more are expected to face worsening levels of hunger in the months ahead, pushing some closer to famine."

In Palestine, conditions in the Gaza Strip have improved since the October 2025 ceasefire but remain fragile. The report noted that the territory faced a risk of famine through mid-April 2026, with 1.6 mil-

lion people requiring urgent food assistance. Sudan continues to face one of the world's most severe hunger crises. A risk of famine has been identified in 14 areas across North Darfur, South Darfur and South Kordofan through September 2026. About 19.5 million people, representing 41 per cent of the population, experienced high levels of acute food insecurity through May, with conditions expected to worsen.

In South Sudan, 7.8 million people — more than half the population — are projected to face crisis-level or worse food insecurity between April and July 2026. Four counties remain at risk of famine.

Yemen is also expected to remain among the countries with the highest levels of hunger, with millions projected to face crisis or emergency food insecurity during 2026.

In Northeast Nigeria, around 15,000 people in Borno State are expected to face catastrophic hunger between June and August, while Somalia is grappling with worsening food insecurity linked to prolonged drought, poor harvests, conflict and regional instability.

Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Haiti were classified as hotspots of very high concern. The report said Af-

ghanistan continues to struggle with recurring drought, high food prices and insecurity. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, conflict, displacement and the resurgence of Ebola are intensifying humanitarian challenges. Haiti moved from the highest-concern category to very high concern following limited improvements, although conditions remain fragile.

Myanmar and Mali were also identified as hotspots where food insecurity is expected to deteriorate due to conflict, economic pressures and climate-related shocks.

Lebanon and Madagascar were added to the list following an escalation in hostilities and adverse weather conditions, respectively. FAO and WFP called for urgent international action to expand humanitarian assistance, ensure safe access for aid delivery, protect livelihoods and strengthen resilience in vulnerable communities.

The agencies stressed that early intervention remains far more effective and less costly than responding after crises escalate, warning that without stronger political commitment and predictable funding, hunger emergencies are likely to deepen across some of the world's most vulnerable regions in the second half of 2026.

G7 leaders applaud Iran 'opportunity', host AI chiefs

EVIAN, France (AFP) — G7 leaders on Wednesday hailed the US-Iran deal to end the Middle East war as a "historic opportunity" and hosted AI bosses for an unusual meeting to discuss greater protection for children online.

The three-day meeting of the leaders of Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the United States has focused intensely on US President Donald Trump's deal to end the war with Iran and efforts to pressure Russia into brokering peace with Ukraine.

France, whose President Emmanuel Macron is chairing the G7, published a communique overnight that said all the leaders had agreed on key geopolitical issues.

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz said this was the first such joint statement agreed during Trump's second mandate.

"It was tough work but worth it," he said, describing the statement as a "success".

Trump's Memorandum of Understanding with Iran, to be signed in Switzerland on Friday, "provides an historic opportunity to prevent Iran from acquiring any nuclear weapon and tackling the threats related to its regional and ballistic activities", it said.

Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney, speaking before the third day got underway, said the mooted deal "could be a game-changer".

As well as increasing supplies of air defence equipment to Ukraine four years into the war launched by Russia, the leaders agreed to "increase the pressure on the Russian war economy" by strengthening sanctions, including on Moscow's



The G7 leaders have sought to bridge differences

fossil fuel revenues.

"We consider this the right moment to proceed with additional measures" now that the Strait of Hormuz, a key passage of Gulf oil and gas, is set to reopen in the wake of Trump's Iran deal, the statement said.

Carney said he had noted a US "change in tone with respect to Ukraine", with Trump taking a harder line against Moscow and showing impatience over the casualty toll on both sides.

G7 leaders also agreed to grant licences for Ukraine-based companies to produce long-range missiles and air defence systems, a diplomatic source said.

At a lunch on Wednesday the digital sphere took centre stage, with some European G7 members pushing for more security to protect minors in a fast-changing world, moves that have irked the United States.

Sam Altman, head of artificial intelligence (AI) giant OpenAI, Anthropic chief Dario Amodei, the founder of Google's AI lab DeepMind Demis Hassabis,

and Arthur Mensch of their European rival Mistral AI were all attending.

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer announced on Monday that children under 16 would be banned from using social media in the country, with France also eyeing a similar measure.

"So my message to tech bosses is clear: Work with us to keep kids safe or I'll do whatever it takes to make that happen," Starmer said.

Trump has been the centre of attention throughout his stay at the summit in the lakeside resort of Evian. French officials will be satisfied that the mercurial US president has stayed for the entire event and signed on to the G7 communique — in contrast to the previous gathering in Canada, where he left early.

In an unusual gesture, Macron has invited Trump to dinner at the Palace of Versailles outside Paris after the summit winds down on Wednesday afternoon.

Trump said on Tuesday that he had accepted Macron's offer of dinner because the

palace of King Louis XIV was "not gold leaf" but the "real deal".

Macron, under pressure to show he is not fawning over Trump, has already said the evening at Versailles will not be a "gala" dinner.

Yet it promises to be a relatively regal affair with dozens of guests set to attend the dinner inside the palace — preceded by a concert and followed by a fireworks display — before Trump flies back to the United States.

Trump emphasised that the Iran agreement was only a memorandum of understanding and said he was ready to resume military action if Tehran did not abide by its obligations.

"If they don't behave, we'll go right back to dropping bombs right smack in the middle of their head," he said.

While Macron was formally chairing the summit, the US president made clear who he believed was in charge as he arrived for the third and final day.

"I'm the boss," Trump said before taking his seat.

China tells Iran 'all parties' must adhere to deal to end war

BEIJING (AFP) — China's top diplomat told his Iranian counterpart on Wednesday it was "key" for all sides to "genuinely implement" their commitments after Tehran and Washington reached a Memorandum of Understanding to end their war, Beijing's foreign ministry said.

"The dawn of peace has already emerged, the key part of the next step is for all parties to

genuinely implement their commitments and eliminate interference from various sides," Wang Yi told Abbas Araghchi in a phone call.

"China has consistently supported Iran's reasonable and legitimate claims and Iran's efforts in safeguarding its own sovereignty and security," Wang added.

The Chinese foreign minister also called for

navigation through the Strait of Hormuz to be "properly handled, responding prudently to the widespread concerns of the international community".

China is a net importer of oil and one of several major Asian economies that depend on the key waterway for energy, with Beijing repeatedly calling for safe passage there since the war began in late February.

In a phone call on Tuesday with his counterpart from Pakistan — a key mediator between the United States and Iran — Wang warned the following stage of negotiations would be "more difficult".

Pakistani officials have previously said China, Islamabad's close ally and Iran's top trading partner, played a key role in supporting its mediation efforts.

France to compensate foster children uprooted from overseas territory

PARIS, France (AFP) — France's parliament has passed a bill aimed at compensating hundreds of adults forcibly relocated as foster children from the overseas territory of La Reunion to the mainland.

Between 1962 and 1984, French authorities uprooted 2,015 minors ranging from newborns to teenagers, often dispatching them to remote areas, officially to stem the Indian Ocean island's growing population as well as repopulate rural areas on the mainland.

A third of them were uprooted before they were five years old.

They were often separated from siblings, their names were sometimes changed, and some were exploited for free labour or suffered abuse.

Parliament recognised the state's responsibility in the case in 2014, and France has since sponsored plane tickets for former foster children to visit La Reunion.

Lawmakers late Tuesday backed new legislation to create a remembrance committee, a national day to remember the victims and reparations through a lump sum from a state fund.

Activist Marie-Germaine Perigogne, one

of those removed from the island, said on Wednesday it had been a "historic day".

Perigogne was separated from her siblings and adopted in La Creuse, a region of central France, in 1969.

Until she was 16, she believed she was born in La Creuse and called Valerie.

"After decades of struggle, achieving such a result was extraordinary for us," Perigogne, the president of the Federation of Uprooted Children from the Overseas Departments and Regions (FEDD), told local radio broadcaster ICI Creuse.

The financial reparation would be a way "to feel more at peace, more serene", she said, especially since some former foster children still lived in poverty.

"The French state had promised them a bright future, but they never studied, and some still struggle to read and write," she added.

But she said she was still awaiting an apology from President Emmanuel Macron.

In a letter to the FEDD in 2017, Macron recognised France had made a mistake in forcibly relocating the children but he stopped short of an apology.



Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan
Ministry of Investment

Request for Qualification (RFQ) Announcement
Development of Jaber Border Crossing Project – PPP Project

Amman, 18 /06/ 2026

The Ministry of Investment (MoI) / Public-Private Partnership Unit of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan hereby invites companies or consortia to participate in the Request for Qualification (RFQ) process for the Development of Jaber Border Crossing Project through a Design Build Finance Operate and Maintain DBFOM contract, in cooperation with the Ministry of Public Works and Housing.

Project Overview
The Jaber Border Crossing Development Project aims to rehabilitate, develop, finance, operate, and maintain the Jordan-Syria land border crossing as an integrated border and logistics hub under a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model. The Project seeks to capitalize on the anticipated growth in regional trade, transport, and logistics activities by enhancing border operations, improving cargo handling and processing efficiency, and enabling the development of complementary logistics and commercial services.

Eligibility:
The Ministry of Investment seeks to select a private sector partner to implement the Project through a transparent and competitive open tender process, in accordance with the provisions of the Jordanian Public-Private Partnership Projects Law No. (19) of 2023 and Public-Private Partnership Projects Regulation No. (9) of 2024, and in line with international best practices.
The procurement process will be conducted in two stages:

- 1. First Stage – Request for Qualification (RFQ):** Interested parties are invited to submit their qualifications for shortlisting.
- 2. Second Stage – Request for Proposals (RFP):** Only shortlisted applicants will be invited to submit their technical and financial proposals

Obtaining the RFQ Documents:
Interested parties may obtain the RFQ documents by sending an email titled "Jaber Border Crossing RFQ Documents" to: [JBC.PPP@moin.gov.jo], stating the identity of the applying entity/applicant ("Applicant"). Within the body of the email, please attach the company's registration certificate alongside the bank wire transfer receipt of a non-refundable fee of JOD 1,000 (or the equivalent of USD 1,410). Fee shall be wired to:

- Account Name: MINISTRY OF INVESTMENT / TRUST
- Bank: Central Bank of Jordan
- Account No.: 01 -3100- 1208
- IBAN: JO76 CBJO 0010 0000 0000 0131 0012 08

Once the RFQ Documents are obtained, Applicants shall follow the detailed submission instructions stipulated therein in order to submit an Application for Qualification.
The deadline for submitting Applications for Qualification is Monday, 3 /8 /2026, at 3:30 PM (Jordan local time).
The public session will be held on Monday, 6 /7 /2026, at 2:00 PM (Jordan local time), subject to confirmation.

Inquiries:
For any inquiries, please contact: [JBC.PPP@moin.gov.jo]

Disclaimer:
The Ministry of Investment reserves the right to modify, suspend or cancel the RFQ process at any time and is not obligated to award any contract as a result of this process.

EU lawmakers approve 'return hubs' migration reform

BRUSSELS, Belgium (AFP) — European lawmakers gave final approval on Wednesday to tougher migration rules that will grant authorities much broader detention powers and allow for the creation of deportation centres outside the bloc.

The 418 to 218 vote in Strasbourg was one of the last hurdles for a reform that has sailed through the EU's notoriously long legislative process as Brussels and member states respond to political pressure to curb migration.

"Today Europe delivered," said Malik Azmani, a Dutch centrist lawmaker who sponsored of the bill.

"People rightly expect that those with no right to stay return to their countries of origin."

The vote was welcomed by cheers and calls of "send them back" by far-right parliamentarians. That prompted the left of the assembly to chant "shame on you" in response — underscoring deep divisions over a text severely criticised by human rights groups.

The text notably enables nations to open "return hubs" outside the EU's borders, where migrants with no right to stay could be sent — something one group of countries is raring to do.

Denmark, Austria, Greece, Germany and The Netherlands and others have already been exploring options to set hubs up.

"Our goal is to conclude the first agreements for

the creation of these structures in 2026, so that they are operational from 2027," Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said on Sunday.

Until recently a fringe idea, the plan got further endorsement on Tuesday when most EU nations agreed to seek to secure EU money to run such centres, a move opposed by France and Spain.

European governments have sought a tougher stance amid a souring of public opinion on migration that has fuelled far-right electoral gains across the continent.

With migrant arrivals down in 2025, the focus in Brussels has turned to improving the repatriation system. It currently sees less than 30 per cent of people who are ordered to leave actually returned to their country of origin.

Right-wing French EU lawmaker Francois-Xavier Bellamy called the vote a "historic step for Europe and proof that change is possible", adding "we are not condemned to powerlessness".

Besides return hubs, the new measures establish a strict obligation for migrants subject to expulsion to leave and cooperate with authorities to that end.

Those who do not, or who pose a security risk or are thought to be at risk of absconding, can be detained for up to two years.

Such provisions have sparked an outcry from human rights groups and left-wing

politicians.

Maria Nyman of Catholic humanitarian aid group Caritas said the changes risked "stigmatising and criminalising migrants, fuelling polarisation at a time when our societies urgently need greater cohesion".

Under the new rules, authorities would be allowed to search third-country nationals, their homes or other "relevant premises" and seize personal belongings, in their push to ensure the return of irregular migrants.

Alessandro Zan of the centre-left S&D group called the reform "a dark chapter for Europe".

"It paves the way for forced deportations, increasingly invasive Trump-era ICE-style checks, and the normalisation of detention even for people who committed no crime," he said, referring to the heavy-handed practices used by Immigration and Customs Enforcement in the United States under President Donald Trump.

Proponents say return hubs — which would serve either as the final destination or as transfer centres for those expelled — could facilitate repatriations and act as a deterrent for would-be irregular migrants.

But critics question their effectiveness, pointing to the hurdles faced by similar projects, and compare them to "legal black holes" that could see migrants stranded in limbo with little oversight.

Trump says Iran accord to be signed 'shortly', 'maybe' Thursday or Friday

US says Iran agrees to dilute uranium under peace deal

EVIAN, France (AFP) — US President Donald Trump on Wednesday said he expected the accord with Iran ending the Middle East war to be signed "shortly" but added uncertainty over the exact date.

"The deal we reached with Iran on Sunday will be signed shortly, tomorrow [Thursday], maybe the next day [Friday]," Trump said at the G7 summit, after previous announcements that it would be signed Friday in Switzerland.

"We are going to most likely sign a deal," he added.

Trump told reporters at the final press conference of the G7 that he was prepared to "bomb the hell" out of Iran if they violated the agreement.

"If they are not behaving they will be hit again," he said.

But he added: "They don't want to get bombed, they don't want to get hit."

In a long succession of comments on his dealings with Iran, Trump recalled at length how he had in 2020 issued the order to kill Qassem Soleimani, the head of foreign operations for the Revolutionary Guard, who he described repeatedly as a "mad genius".

Trump also recalled the February 28 air strike that killed supreme leader Ayatollah



US President Donald Trump speaks at a press conference during the G7 Leaders' Summit on Wednesday in Evian-les-Bains, France

Ali Khamenei and other senior figures, who he said were "having breakfast" at the time.

Trump was also asked about the deadly strike on an Iranian school in Minab on the first day of the war, which left 155 dead, according to the Iranian authorities.

Initially describing the question as "strange", Trump said: "Nobody did it on purpose. Mistakes are made, war is nasty."

"I know it is under investigation," he said, telling the reporter to address the question to Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth instead.

A US Tomahawk cruise

missile hit the elementary school due to a targeting mistake, according to the preliminary findings of a US military investigation reported by The New York Times.

Trump also thanked Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping for staying "neutral" in the Middle East war.

Iran has agreed to dilute its enriched uranium stocks under its interim deal with the United States, senior US administration officials said on Friday as they released what they said was the text of the agreement.

"The fact that they're conceding to that is a major, major win for the United States of America," one of the US officials said of the nuclear issue on a call with reporters.

The deal would also reopen the Strait of Hormuz and allow Iranian oil sales, while the United States and its allies would also make plans for a \$300 billion reconstruction fund for Iran.

The US officials read out the wording on a conference call after days of uncertainty about what was actually included in the deal that President Donald Trump announced on Sunday.

The outline deal will be followed by 60 days of negotiations on a final accord — after which Trump said Washington could simply go back to "bombing" if Iran doesn't agree.

Iran's nuclear programme is mentioned in the deal, according to the US officials, with extra clauses compared to drafts of the agreement that were leaked in US and foreign media.

Under the text read out by US officials, the two countries agreed to discuss a mechanism for dealing with Iran's stocks of enriched uranium, which have been at the centre of US allegations that Tehran wants to develop nuclear arms.

It says that the "minimum methodology" would be "down blending on site under the supervision of the IAEA" — the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Down blending involves mixing enriched uranium that can be refined to make atomic bombs with depleted uranium, to reduce its radioactivity.

"They're saying we will destroy the enriched stockpile, and this is how we're going to do it at a minimum," the senior US official said, in what he said was his own commentary on the deal.

Lebanon president says negotiations with Israel 'independent' of US-Iran deal

BEIRUT, Lebanon (AFP) — Lebanese President Joseph Aoun said on Wednesday that his country's negotiations with Israel in Washington were independent of the US-Iran deal to bring an end to the Middle East conflict.

Lebanon and Israel have been holding direct talks in Washington since April, seeking to end the hostilities between Israel and Hizbollah and separate their conflict from the wider regional war.

But the announcement on Monday of the US-

Iran deal, which Iran and mediator Pakistan say includes Lebanon, has reshuffled the cards.

"The assurances we have received, and what we insist on, is that Lebanon's path in the negotiations is independent, though we are certainly

for a ceasefire and for any country that helps us, including Iran," Aoun said, according to a statement from his office.

But "interference in Lebanese affairs is not permitted", he added.

The president expressed hope that next

week's fifth round of talks "will be more positive, particularly considering the US administration's great interest in Lebanon".

"The Lebanese state is sovereign in its decision-making, and for the first time, it is the one conducting the negotiations and

nobody is negotiating for us," he said.

"I reassure the Lebanese that nobody is tying us to any other country, and any settlement will be through us, not at our expense," he added.

Hizbollah on Monday thanked its backer Tehran

for insisting Lebanon be included in the agreement with Washington, despite Beirut's efforts through the talks to achieve a ceasefire and a full withdrawal of Israeli forces.

Hizbollah rejects the authorities' direct negotiations with Israel and a

Lebanese government decision to disarm it.

The group drew Lebanon into the Middle East war on March 2 with rocket fire at Israel to avenge the killing of Iran's supreme leader in US-Israeli strikes days earlier.

IMF approves fifth review of Jordan reform programme, unlocks \$188 million in financing

Continued from page 1

In the statement, the IMF said that Jordan has maintained macroeconomic stability despite ongoing regional security challenges, noting that the country entered the current period of heightened tensions from a position of economic strength supported by prudent fiscal, monetary and macroeconomic policies.

The fund said the government acted swiftly to mitigate the impact of regional instability by strengthening energy security, facilitating trade and supply chains, and providing targeted support to sectors most affected by the crisis, particularly tourism and industry. Assistance to vulnerable households through the National Aid Fund also continued.

According to the IMF, Jordan's reform programme remains firmly on track, with all quantitative performance criteria for end-2025 met and most indicative tar-

gets for end-March 2026 achieved. The Fund also confirmed that all structural reform benchmarks linked to the fifth review had been completed.

The successful completion of the latest reviews underscores confidence in Jordan's economic policies and reform agenda...

The IMF welcomed progress in improving the business environment, enhancing market competition, increasing labour market flexibility and reducing the costs of transitioning to the formal economy, describing the reforms as key to supporting growth and job creation.

Jordan's economy expanded by 2.8 per cent in 2025, up from 2.6 per cent in 2024, driven by strong performance across the industrial, agricultural, transport, mining and services sectors. Inflation remained subdued at 1.8 per cent.

Despite continued uncertainty stemming from regional developments, the IMF projected that the impact on Jordan's economy would remain limited. Economic growth is forecast to reach 2.7 per cent in 2026 before accelerating to 3.1 per cent in 2027.

On public finances, the global lender said that fiscal performance in 2025 exceeded programme targets, supported by stronger domestic revenues and disciplined expenditure management while preserving social spending. Jordan also met its primary budget deficit targets during the first quarter of 2026 despite economic pressures linked to regional conflicts.

The IMF attributed the

results to prudent fiscal management, sustained capital spending and efforts to maintain public debt on a sustainable trajectory.

The fund also praised the Central Bank of Jordan's (CBJ) commitment to monetary stability, highlighting foreign reserves of approximately \$27 billion at the end of the first quarter of 2026.

Improved financial inflows helped reinforce the stability of the Jordanian dinar's peg to the US dollar, while financial markets remained stable and dollarisation levels continued to decline, reflecting confidence in the country's economic policies, the IMF said.

In April 2026, CBJ introduced a JD760 million package aimed at boosting banking sector liquidity and supporting sectors affected by regional developments, Petra said.

The measures included lower reserve requirements on demand deposits and expanded concessional financing

programmes through licensed banks.

Jordan launched its National Programme for Financial and Economic Reform in early 2024.

Since then, the government has successfully completed five consecutive IMF reviews through the implementation of structural, fiscal and monetary reforms, according to Petra.

The government said that the reforms have helped preserve economic and financial stability despite challenging regional conditions without imposing additional financial burdens on citizens.

The successful completion of the latest reviews underscores confidence in Jordan's economic policies and reform agenda, the government said, reaffirming its commitment to maintaining sound economic management, strengthening resilience to external shocks and fostering private sector-led growth and employment opportunities.

Cabinet approves land-use agreement with China's UEG for green hydrogen feasibility studies

Continued from page 1

Jordan signed its first major investment agreement in the green ammonia sector in May 2026 with the Jordan Green Ammonia Company, a Polish-Emirati

consortium with Dutch technical partners

The project would produce green hydrogen using solar energy through an off-grid system fully independent of the national electricity grid.

Total capital investment was estimated at nearly \$1 billion, with financial closure targeted for September 2027 and commercial operations expected to begin in November 2030.

JAF sends 10-truck medical convoy to field hospitals in Gaza

Continued from page 1

The Commander of the Jordanian Field Hospital South Gaza said that the convoy included specialised medicines, medical consumables, and prosthetic devices to strengthen treatment and rehabilitation services and help meet patients' needs at the hospitals.

He noted that the convoy was dispatched following a field-based assessment of healthcare requirements in the Gaza Strip.

The JAF reiterated its continued commitment to supporting Palestin-

ians through sustained medical and humanitarian assistance, including the regular provision of supplies to ensure the uninterrupted delivery of healthcare services.

The Jordanian field hospitals in northern and southern Gaza continue to operate around the clock, providing medical and humanitarian services as part of Jordan's ongoing relief efforts in the enclave, JAF said.

Jordan runs two military field hospitals in Gaza, one in the Strip's north and was established in 2009 following the war in 2008, and the

second is in Khan Younis in the south, which was established in November 2023 at the peak of the Israeli war of aggression on the coastal enclave that erupted on October 7, 2023.

Besides the field hospitals in Gaza, the JAF established the Jordanian field hospital in Nablus in late November 2023.

Other humanitarian programmes include the land bridge for aid delivery, the mobile bakery, the Restoring Hope Initiative, which provides prosthetics for amputees, and the evacuation of critical cases to Jordanian hospitals.

Nashama show promise despite loss in its first World Cup game

Continued from page 1

Both sides then exchanged attacking spells in an open and competitive contest, with the game finely balanced heading into the final

stages.

Austria regained the lead in the 76th minute when Yazan Arab turned the ball into his own net under pressure.

Jordan pushed forward in search of another

equaliser but were denied, and Austria sealed the victory in stoppage time after a VAR review led to a penalty, which substitute Marko Arnautovic converted to make it 3-1.

Head coach Jamal Selami expressed his full satisfaction with the team's performance despite the result during the post-match press conference.

He said he was proud

of what the players delivered in this strong encounter, noting that they successfully executed all defensive and attacking duties throughout the match.

Selami added that the

team had already turned the page on the Austria match, with full focus now shifting to the upcoming fixtures against Algeria and Argentina.

He also highlighted the importance of the Jor-

danian supporters, who backed the team in the stadium and provided a significant moral boost that helped the players deliver the required level of performance.

Despite the loss, Ol-

wan's historic strike earned him the Man of the Match award.

Jordan now sit third in Group J and will look to bounce back when they face Algeria in their next match on June 23.

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Technology investment in banks

By Raad Mahmoud Al-Tal

A recent study published by the Association of Banks in Jordan on technology investment and digital transformation in 2025 reveals a new stage of development within the Jordanian banking sector. Technology is no longer merely a supporting tool for banking operations; rather, it has become one of the key drivers reshaping business models, services, and operational processes across banks.

The study's findings come against a global backdrop characterised by the rapid acceleration of digital transformation, the widespread adoption of artificial intelligence applications, and growing competition between traditional financial institutions and financial technology (FinTech) companies. These developments have encouraged Jordanian banks to increase their investments in digital infrastructure, modern banking systems, cybersecurity and data analytics.

According to the study, total spending by Jordanian banks on technology reached approximately JOD 221 million in 2025, representing a growth rate of 2.5 per cent compared with 2024. This figure reflects more than just an increase in expenditure; it demonstrates the sector's continued commitment to a long-term vision aimed at building a banking ecosystem that is increasingly driven by technology, data, and digital services.

Notably, technology expenditure accounted for 8.5 per cent of total bank revenues and 15.1 per cent of total operating expenses, levels that are considered relatively high by international standards. This reflects a growing recognition among bank management that technology is no longer an ordinary operational expense, but rather a strategic investment linked to competitiveness, sustainable growth, and enhanced customer experience.

The study also highlights an important shift in the governance of digital transformation within Jordanian banks. Around 70.6 per cent of participating banks reported having board-approved digital transformation strategies accompanied by clear performance indicators. This suggests that digital transformation has evolved from being a purely technical responsibility managed by information technology departments into a strategic issue subject to governance and oversight at the highest management levels. The findings further demonstrate significant progress in the adoption of digital banking services. The share of transactions conducted through digital channels increased to 64.4 per cent of total transactions in 2025, compared with 59.1 per cent in the previous year, while the proportion of digitally active customers reached 54.4 per cent. These indicators suggest that the Jordanian banking sector is gradually moving toward a "Digital-First Banking" model, where electronic channels become the primary platform for delivering banking services.

With regard to investment allocation, the study shows that banks continue to focus most of their technology spending on infrastructure, core banking systems, cybersecurity, and digital channels. Technical infrastructure accounted for 24 per cent of total technology expenditure, followed by core systems at 21.9 per cent, digital channels at 17.7 per cent, and cybersecurity at 14.8 per cent.

This distribution indicates that the Jordanian banking sector remains focused on strengthening its digital foundations and building the infrastructure necessary for comprehensive transformation before expanding further into advanced technologies. It also confirms that data protection and cyber resilience have become strategic priorities amid the growing global threat of cyberattacks.

As for artificial intelligence, the study suggests that the Jordanian banking sector is still in the gradual expansion phase of AI adoption. Although direct spending on AI applications remains relatively limited at 3.5 per cent of total technology expenditure, many banks have already begun utilising AI in fraud detection, predictive analytics, customer service, cybersecurity and intelligent automation. These indicators demonstrate that Jordanian banks view artificial intelligence as the next stage of digital transformation. At the same time, they are adopting a cautious and gradual approach that balances innovation opportunities with governance requirements and risk management considerations.

Despite this progress, the study identifies several challenges facing banks in their digital transformation journey. Among the most significant are legacy systems, data quality issues, shortages of specialised digital talent, cybersecurity concerns and the rapid pace of technological change.

The study's findings confirm that the banking sector has entered a more mature stage of digital transformation. Rising technology investments, increasing use of digital channels, and the adoption of digital transformation strategies at the board level all indicate a transition from partial digitalisation towards a comprehensive restructuring of the banking business model on digital foundations.

As global developments in artificial intelligence, financial technology, and open banking continue to accelerate, the coming years will be critical in determining the ability of Jordanian banks to translate their technology investments into sustainable productivity gains and competitive advantages, while strengthening Jordan's position as a technologically advanced banking hub in the region.

Royal Jordanian: Flying with multiple purposes

By Fares Braizat

In a region where uncertainty often shapes travel decisions, reliability becomes more than an operational value. It becomes a national asset. This is where Royal Jordanian's role is most clearly understood: not only as Jordan's flag carrier, but as a strategic bridge between the Kingdom, the Levant, the wider region and the world.

Royal Jordanian has long carried passengers, but today it is carrying a larger national purpose. It is repositioning itself as a tourism airline through the Discover Jordan Initiative: An active partner in marketing Jordan, expanding access to its destinations and converting air connectivity into economic opportunity. This matters because tourism does not grow by promotion alone. It grows when visitors, tour operators, investors, conference organisers, pilgrimage groups, wellness travellers and regional business communities have confidence that Jordan is reachable, connected and ready.

The numbers suggest that this transformation is not cosmetic. Royal Jordanian carried more than 4.4 million passengers in 2025, an 18 per cent year-on-year increase, while achieving a strong seat load factor of 81.5 per cent. It also returned to profitability, recording a net profit of JD 21.5 million after a loss the previous year, with total revenues rising to JD 829.3 million. These are not merely corporate

indicators; they are signals of a company regaining commercial discipline while serving a wider national function.

At moments when low-cost carriers treated Jordan as a seasonal calculation and quietly withdrew, Royal Jordanian continued to fly with the steadiness of a national institution, proving that reliability is not a marketing slogan but a commitment to country, traveller, and market alike.

This reliability is especially important for tourism. Every flight into Amman can become a journey onward to Petra, Wadi Rum, the Dead Sea, Jerash, Aqaba, the Baptism Site, Mount Nebo, Madaba and the wider Jordanian story of faith, heritage, wellness, adventure and hospitality. Under Royal Jordanian's growth strategy, inbound tourists carried by the airline are expected to rise from around 900,000 in 2025 to 2 million by 2028, with a further target of 2.5 million by 2030. If achieved, this would make the airline one of Jordan's most important instruments of tourism-led growth.

Royal Jordanian's role is also regional. Amman is naturally placed to become a hub for the Levant, connecting Palestine, Syria, Iraq and Lebanon with Jordan and the wider world. The airline's projected growth in connecting passengers, from around 1.5 million in 2025 to 3.5 million by 2028, reflects the strategic importance of building Amman as a practical aviation gateway for a region whose

people, markets, families and histories remain deeply intertwined.

This wider purpose is visible today as Royal Jordanian serves as the official carrier of the MENA Travel Market, held in Amman and bringing together more than 2,000 participants from across the world to market Jordan. This is more than sponsorship. It is a statement of strategic intent: Royal Jordanian is positioning itself as the airline partner of Jordan's tourism ambition and as a serious player in regional travel-market connectivity.

The airline's transformation is also taking place through fleet modernisation and network expansion. Its fleet is planned to grow from approximately 23 aircraft in 2022 to more than 40 aircraft by 2028, with new-generation Boeing 787s, Airbus A320neo family aircraft, and Embraer E2 aircraft reducing average fleet age and improving efficiency. New and planned routes across Europe, North America, the Gulf, Asia, and the Levant are not simply additions to a timetable; they are investments in market access.

This is why Jordan views Royal Jordanian not only as an airline, but as strategic economic infrastructure that should be nurtured. The company's transformation is expected to generate an annual economic contribution of approximately USD 2.1 billion, representing around 4.3 per cent of Jordan's GDP. Few national companies have such a

direct ability to influence tourism, trade, business mobility, investment confidence, diaspora connectivity and the international visibility of the Kingdom.

Of course, purpose must be matched by performance. To succeed in this new phase, Royal Jordanian must continue to modernise, improve service quality, strengthen punctuality, build smart partnerships, and expand routes that support tourism, business, pilgrimage, conferences and regional mobility. Public support and national investment should therefore be tied to clear performance goals, commercial discipline, and measurable contribution to Jordan's growth.

Royal Jordanian's future lies in combining reliability, transformation and national value. It can be a dependable airline, a tourism airline, a Levant hub carrier, and a partner in Jordan's economic growth. These are not separate missions. They are one coherent purpose: to keep Jordan connected, visible, and competitive.

Royal Jordanian is flying with multiple purposes. It carries passengers, but also confidence. It serves routes, but also markets. It connects cities, but also people, sectors and possibilities. Above all, it helps Jordan tell the world: We are here, we are ready and we are within reach.

Fares Braizat — chairman NAMA Strategic Intelligence Solutions fares@namas.com

In US, Trump's Iran deal receives mixed reception

Agence France-Presse

WASHINGTON, United States — Donald Trump can claim a diplomatic victory after reaching an agreement with Iran to end the war in the Middle East, but numerous pitfalls remain and the US president has lost political capital.

The cautious reception to the Sunday announcement of the memorandum of understanding with Iran, scheduled to be signed in Geneva on Friday, reflects prevailing scepticism at a time when the war is unpopular due to the soaring oil prices and inflation it has caused.

The deal ends nearly four months of conflict, paving the way for negotiations on Iran's nuclear programme and the lifting of sanctions.

It effectively extends the current ceasefire by 60 days and provides for the opening of the Strait of Hormuz, a strategic artery for oil and gas shipments, before the start of what promise to be extremely sensitive negotiations.

Launched on February 28 by the United States and Israel, the war has set the Middle East on fire and caused thousands

of deaths, mainly in Iran and Lebanon, and destabilised global trade.

Thirteen US troops were also killed during the conflict.

Trump, who initially said the war would last four to six weeks, has faced mounting pressure at home to extricate the United States from the conflict ahead of midterm elections in November.

While close allies immediately hailed him as the "president of peace", reactions have been mixed, even within his Republican party.

"I am somewhat concerned that Iran's view of the agreement seems different than what the American negotiating team is claiming," said Republican Senator Lindsay Graham, a staunch opponent of Tehran, adding: "Any nuclear deal with Iran will be sent to Congress for review and a vote."

Senator John Cornyn, another Republican, reposted a message on X from conservative commentator Pastor John Hagee that said: "No deal is better than a bad deal."

Senator Chris Murphy, a member of the opposition Democrats, questioned whether a final agreement will be reached.

"But if there is, two things will be true at the same time: a) It's essentially surrender to Iran. b) We should be glad about it, because every day this insane, illegal war continues, we get weaker," he said.

'Not the final word'

Senior Trump administration officials have sought to defend the deal, which Washington ostensibly launched with the aim of preventing Iran from eventually acquiring a nuclear weapon.

US Vice President JD Vance said Monday on ABC's "Good Morning America" that once the text is released, "everybody will see... that Iran doesn't get a dime of money unless they perform their obligations".

Larry Sabato, a political scientist and University of Virginia professor, said that "this is not the final word, they have loads of details to argue over, maybe even for years".

"This was a completely unnecessary war that has accomplished very little and cost a lot," Sabato told AFP.

He pointed out that Trump, whose approval ratings are at an all-time low, has lost political capital, including within

the Republican-controlled Congress and among supporters.

As for whether a new deal would effectively amount to a return to the original 2015 agreement that president Barack Obama negotiated and Trump tore up during his first term, that question remains unanswered.

Obama, a Democrat, said on ABC's "This Week" that "it is doubtful that any agreement that arises is going to be significantly different or a significant improvement from the deal that we had in the first place".

The agreement "worked for a long stretch of time before" Trump pulled out, he said.

For Wendy Sherman, one of the main negotiators of the 2015 deal, "this probably will turn out somewhat similar".

But "We're in a very different place, however, because we did not have virtually 1,000 pounds of 60-per cent highly enriched uranium, which is quite concerning, nor all of the other problems," she told ABC's Martha Raddatz.

"I can assure you, they will not get all of this done in 60 days," Sherman added.

Nigeria clamps down on misinformation after school kidnapping

Agence France-Presse

LAGOS — Nigerian authorities have arrested at least eight people in recent weeks for spreading false information on social media, as officials threaten tougher penalties following a wave of misinformation linked to a recent school kidnapping.

The abductions on May 15 rocked Nigeria's typically calm southwest, where many had thought they were safe from the mass kidnappings by jihadists and "bandit" gangs that have long rattled the conflict-hit north of the country.

Gunmen abducted at least 46 pupils and staff in a raid on three schools in Oyo state, in what the army called a terror attack.

A month later, with the pupils still in captivity, false claims about the headline-dominating incident have found foothold on social media, just as Africa's most populous country heads for what is expected to be a contentious general election in January.

One false claim said an abducted student had been killed.

"The command has responded to not less than 15 misleading publications," Oyo police spokesman Olushola Alayand

told AFP.

"A recurring pattern involves the circulation of sensational claims, recycled videos from unrelated incidents and speculative narratives presented as facts," he said.

Misinformation itself has also turned deadly.

In Lagos, the economic capital, a 24-year-old motorcyclist was killed by a mob after a false claim circulated that bandits were invading the city. Fifteen people have been arrested in connection with the incident.

Claims target politics, security

Nigerian President Bola Tinubu, who is seeking a second term in the January election, has repeatedly been the subject of fabricated content.

Earlier this month, a viral audio clip appeared to feature him threatening to allow insecurity to worsen in the southeast unless opposition figure Peter Obi, who hails from there and is a major challenger for the 2027 race, withdrew from the election.

Security agencies later dismissed the video as generated by artificial intelligence. Police said a man linked to the post was arrested on June 4.

The region is home to a simmering separatist conflict, making such claims particularly inflammatory, especially in a country where elected officials have, in other cases, historically backed political violence.

Analysts said that while Nigeria's myriad security crises are real, the approaching elections have incentivised people to amplify and distort the problem.

The military had to push back recently on an AI-generated video, posted to Facebook, purporting to show defence chief Olufemi Oluyede admitting to having run out of ideas to tackle insecurity.

The upcoming election comes as easy access to generative AI tools makes synthetic audio, deepfakes and coordinated campaigns easier to create en masse.

"The most sophisticated use of AI is likely to come from well-resourced political actors," according to Africa Practice, a consultancy with offices in Africa and Europe.

Critics warn of abuse

Many of the arrests have been made under Nigeria's Cybercrimes Act, which criminalises

sharing false information on social media and prescribes a three-year jail term or a fine of 7 million naira (about \$5,000).

But experts warn relying on arrests to combat misinformation can infringe on the right to free speech, especially in situations where there is no documented harm.

"In many cases, people share false information because they genuinely believe the information is accurate or because it reinforces their existing beliefs and biases," Olasupo Abideen of Fact Check Africa told AFP.

There are also worries the government could use the law to crack down on news it disagrees with.

In April, Amnesty International Nigeria warned of "attacks on journalists through the manipulation of the Cybercrimes Act".

Abideen said enforcement measures should be complemented with long-term investments in public awareness campaigns and robust fact-checking initiatives.

"An informed and media-literate public remains one of the strongest defences against misinformation; far more effective in the long run than the fear of arrest alone," he said.

BUSINESS

Thursday, June 18, 2026

JD103.6m worth of cheques bounced in May — JoPACC

AMMAN (JT) — The value of bounced cheques in Jordan increased to JD103.6 million in May, up from JD72.4 million in April, according to figures released by the Jordan Payments and Clearing Company (JoPACC).

The remaining 12,415 cheques, accounting for 66.7 per cent and worth JD66.9 million...

A total of 18,600 cheques were returned

during the month. Of these, 6,190 cheques, representing 33.3 per cent and valued at JD36.7 million, were bounced for financial reasons, Al Mamlaka TV reported.

The remaining 12,415 cheques, accounting for 66.7 per cent and worth JD66.9 million, were returned due to technical reasons, according to JoPACC.

The number of circulated cheques rose by 26 per cent in May to 552,000, with a total value of around JD3.33 billion, compared with 438,000 cheques valued at JD3.18 billion in April.

The data also showed that bounced cheques accounted for 3.4 per cent of all circulated cheques in May, up from 2.8 per cent the previous month.

Jordan, EU to hold investment conference at Dead Sea on November 19

AMMAN (JT) — Jordan and the EU said on Wednesday that the Jordan-EU Investment Conference will be held on November 19 at the Dead Sea, under the patronage of His Majesty King Abdullah and with the participation of European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen.

In a joint statement issued by the Ministry of Investment and the European Commission, both sides reiterated their commitment to enhancing economic cooperation, supporting sustainable growth, and expanding trade and investment partnerships between Jordan and the EU.

The statement noted that the conference will serve as a platform bringing together investors, businesses, and financial institutions from Jordan and EU member states to explore promising investment opportunities in the Kingdom.

Discussions will fo-



cus on partnership prospects in several priority sectors, including renewable energy, clean technologies, the digital economy, manufacturing, logistics and

infrastructure. The conference is part of the strategic and comprehensive partnership between Jordan and the EU launched in early 2025, which is backed

by a 3 billion euros financial and investment package for the 2025-2027 period.

The event will also highlight several strategic projects that embody

the depth of the Jordan-EU partnership, the statement said.

Minister of Investment Tareq Abughazaleh said that the Economic Modernisation Vision

has provided a clear roadmap to support sustainable growth, innovation and the investment environment, enhancing Jordan's position as a reliable partner and an attractive destination for high-quality investments.

He added that the conference represents a major milestone in translating the Jordan-EU partnership into concrete investment opportunities and projects.

EU Commissioner for the Mediterranean Dubravka Šuica emphasised that Jordan is a key partner for the EU and a vital bridge connecting Europe with the Middle East.

She noted that the conference reflects a mutual desire to transform the strategic partnership into tangible opportunities for businesses, investors, and citizens alike, helping attract further investments, support innovation, and create jobs.

UAE airlines offer expanded insurance after Iran conflict

DUBAI (AFP) — The UAE's two biggest airlines have launched beefed up travel insurance packages in an effort to lure back holidaymakers scared away by the Middle East war.

The war, launched when the United States and Israel began striking Iran on February 28, severely affected air traffic in the region and the operations of the Gulf giants.

Dubai's flagship airline Emirates announced on Wednesday travel insurance that includes extended medical coverage, including in the event of conflict, as well as coverage for cancellations, delays, lost luggage and emergency



A picture taken on September 14, 2017 shows an Airbus A380 of Emirates landing at the tarmac at Dubai's International Airport

evacuations, it said in a statement.

Emirates' president

Tim Clark said in the statement that the airline wanted to of-

fer customers "added confidence in planning their journeys" to

Dubai, a major tourist hub.

"We realised that travel demand remains strong but there was a gap in the market with regards to travel insurance cover. Therefore, we acted to address our customers' needs," he said in the statement.

Abu Dhabi-based Etihad had on Friday announced it would offer free medical coverage to international visitors travelling to the Emirati capital from July to December.

Washington and Tehran are expected to sign a memorandum of understanding next Friday to end the conflict, with a final agreement between the foes still to be negotiated.

JoPACC says e-wallet transfers in Kingdom reach JD3.09b in 2026

AMMAN (JT) — The value of outgoing transfers from e-wallets in Jordan reached JD3.09 billion since the beginning of 2026, carried out through nearly 63.7 million transactions, according to Al Mamlaka TV.

Male users represented 53.7 per cent of the total, compared with 45.9 per cent for females, while the 18-30 age group remained the most active segment.

In terms of transaction type, money transfers accounted for the largest share at 83.6 per cent (12.51 million transactions), followed by purchases at 15.9 per cent (2.37 million), cash withdrawals at 0.4 per cent

(66,820) and deposits at 0.1 per cent (21,350). By value, money transfers in May amounted to JD537.12 million, purchases reached JD147.11 million, cash withdrawals totalled JD9.74 million, and deposits stood at JD3.75 million.

The average transaction value via e-wallets rose to JD47 in May, up from JD45 in April, while the average transaction value through bank accounts stood at JD98.

Total transactions across the instant payment network CliQ and JoMoPay reached 157.76 million, with a combined value of JD12.82 billion since the beginning of 2026.

OpenAI chief tells G-7 to 'not cede responsibilities' to AI giants

EVIAN, France (AFP) — OpenAI Chief Executive Sam Altman urged world leaders at the G-7 summit on Wednesday not to surrender control over artificial intelligence to the companies building it, calling on governments to set global standards for deploying the rapidly advancing technology.

"Do not cede your re-

sponsibilities to AI labs like mine," Altman told leaders and tech executives during a session of the summit in the French Alpine resort of Evian-les-Bains, according to excerpts of his remarks released by the company.

The appeal from the head of one of the world's most valuable AI firms effectively

asked democratic governments to keep the most consequential choices about the technology out of corporate hands — including his own.

"We develop the technology, and the citizens of the free world make the rules," Altman said. "Technologists have special knowledge about AI, but they don't

have any special wisdom about humanity."

Altman told leaders that the question of whether AI is useful "has been settled" and that within a year or two he expects systems of "astonishing power" capable of reshaping human life on a scale unmatched "since the harnessing of electricity".

His remarks came at a time when the United States and Europe disagree about how tightly AI should be controlled.

The European Union — including G-7 members France, Germany and Italy — has passed strict rules that sort AI systems by how risky they are and place tough requirements on ones that could cause

the most harm.

The United States, under President Donald Trump, has moved in the opposite direction, rolling back rules in hopes of speeding up new ideas and staying ahead of rivals like China.

Yet, the Trump administration has also temporarily banned foreigners from access-

ing the most powerful AI models made by US giant Anthropic, citing national security concerns and fueling fears that the United States will tightly control access to the crucial technology.

Altman stressed that OpenAI, as "an American company", would be governed by US law but said it recognised

"the sovereignty of the democratic nations in this room".

The remarks came on the final day of the three-day G7 summit hosted by France, which gathered leaders from Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Britain and the United States, along with invited guests including Brazil, India and Kenya.

US says Hormuz to be toll-free under Iran deal

WASHINGTON, United States (AFP) — The United States said on Monday that ships will move toll-free through the Strait of Hormuz under an Iran peace deal signed by President Donald Trump, and insisted Tehran would have to fulfill its commitments before getting any economic benefits.

They included a possible \$300 billion reconstruction fund for the war-battered country, but the release of funds will be "tied to performance," a senior Trump administration official said in a call with reporters.

Trump, US Vice President JD Vance and Iranian parliament speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf electronically

signed the so-called memorandum of understanding (MoU) on Sunday, the officials said.

"The president wanted to sign it personally because he wanted to show his dedication to the process," one of the US officials said on condition of anonymity.

But Vance admitted the brief outline deal kicks the thorniest issues — especially Iran's nuclear program — down the road.

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

He later said on NBC that US and international nuclear inspectors will be allowed back into Iran to help destroy its enriched uranium.

But the Strait of Hormuz bottleneck is an immediate priority due to the global economic effects from the spike in oil prices.

Vance told CNBC there was an understanding with Iran that the strait would reopen "in a toll-free way for the long term, and that's the sort of thing that we're going to figure out in these technical negotiations".

Trump himself said the critical strait would be "completely open" from Friday but added there was still "hunting" going on to ensure it was de-mined.

Shipping traffic should return to pre-war levels "over the next couple of weeks" but there had already been a "sub-

stantial increase in traffic", the first US official said.

However, Iran's foreign ministry said Monday that the deal would allow it to charge maritime service fees on ships transiting the Strait of Hormuz, rather than imposing "tolls".

Uncertainty also surrounds other key aspects of the deal, including Iran's access to its frozen funds and relief from sanctions.

Vance said no US taxpayer money — "they never get a dime" — will go to Iran under the deal and argued that Americans stand to benefit from lifting of sanctions against Iran by bringing it back into the international economy.

AMMAN STOCK EXCHANGE

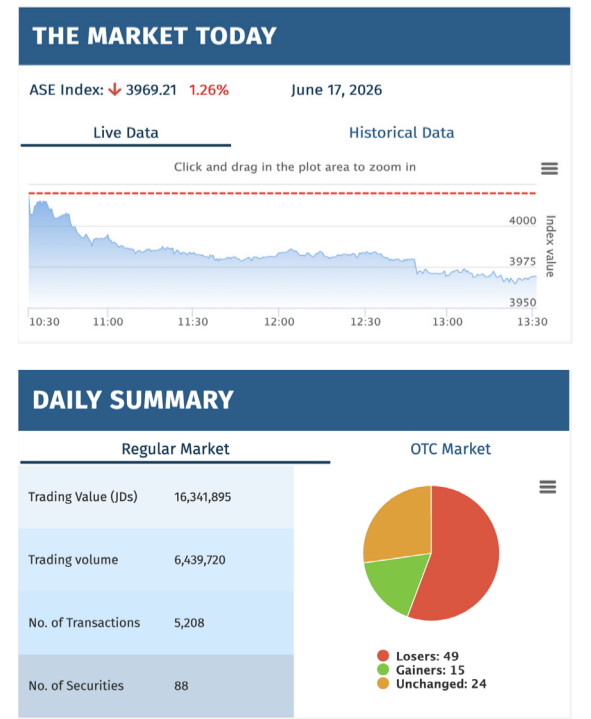
AMMAN (JT) — Amman Stock Exchange (ASE) trading value for Wednesday reached JD16.3 million with 6.4 million shares that were traded through 5,208 transactions.

The ASE shares price index closed at 3969.21 point, a decrease of 1.26 per cent.

The shares of 88 companies were traded, the shares prices of 15 companies rose, and the shares prices of 49 declined.

The top five gainers were, the Arab Investors Union Co. For Real Estates Developing by 4.44 per cent, Jordanian Co. For Developing & Financial Investment by 4.17 per cent, Jordan International Investment Co. by 3.39 per cent, Jordan Hotels & Tourism by 2.84 per cent and Injaz For Development & Projects by 2.50 per cent.

The top five losers were, Ubour Logistic Services Plc. by 5 per cent, Alshamekha For Real Estate And Financial Investments by 4.96 per cent, Ihdathiat Co-ordinates by 4.69 per cent, Rumm Financial Brokerage by 4.48 per cent and Philadelphia International Educational Investment Company by 4.41 per cent.



RUGBY

Borthwick plans to rest Itoje for England tour

LONDON (AFP) — England boss Steve Borthwick said on Wednesday that he will rest captain Maro Itoje for their forthcoming Nations Championship matches — unless injuries in the second row derail his plan. Itoje is set to miss the Tests against South Africa, Fiji and Argentina in July after a draining year. The 31-year-old led the British and Irish Lions to a series victory against Australia in 2025, then played in the November internationals and the 2026 Six Nations campaign. Itoje, who also had to deal with the death of his mother, has completed more Test minutes than any other player over the last decade. Borthwick is ready to let Itoje put his feet up, but he will wait to see if George Martin and Alex Coles emerge unscathed from their matches on Friday and Saturday. Martin will start for England in their non-cap international against a France XV in Vannes on Friday before Coles plays for Northampton in the English Prem final against Exeter. An injury to either would leave Borthwick with Itoje and Ollie Chessum as his only front line locks for their Nations Championship opener against South Africa on July 4.

CRICKET

Gill, Kishan star as India thrash Afghanistan to clinch ODI series

LUCKNOW, India (AFP) — Skipper Shubman Gill and Ishan Kishan hit brisk centuries to set up India's 170-run thrashing of Afghanistan in the second One-Day-International (ODI) and clinch the series in sweltering Lucknow on Wednesday. India posted 402 after Gill top-scored with 154 and the left-handed Kishan struck 125 as the pair put up a commanding 224 runs for the third wicket. Indian quicks Arshdeep Singh and Gurnoor Brar took three wickets each to help bowl out Afghanistan for 232 in 44.3 overs for an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three-match series. The extreme heat forced organisers to schedule three drinks breaks per innings, with several players from both sides requiring on-field treatment for cramps. Invited to bat first as temperatures soared above 40 degrees Celsius, India lost an early wicket before Rohit Sharma (48) and Gill steadied the innings with an 87-run second-wicket partnership to set the tone. Rashid Khan broke the stand with a quick googly to bowl Rohit just short of a half-century, but the breakthrough did little to stem India's momentum.

Messi equals World Cup goalscoring record in Argentina romp

KANSAS CITY (AFP) — Lionel Messi scored a dazzling hat-trick for Argentina on Wednesday to equal Miroslav Klose's all-time record of 16 goals at World Cups as the defending champions swept Algeria aside 3-0.

On a night for the ages in Kansas City, the records kept tumbling for Argentina's miracle man, considered by many to be the greatest footballer of all time.

When the match kicked off at the home of the NFL's Kansas City Chiefs, Messi became the first player to feature in six World Cup tournaments, in his 200th international match.

And the 38-year-old, who made his first appearance at a World Cup as a teenager in 2006, lit up the occasion with three goals in a clinical display by the reigning champions.

"To enjoy this with my family, with my teammates, the ones who are always there, is a really beautiful moment," said the Inter Miami star. "I'm happy."

He added: "I'm grateful to the fans, because once again they've shown that Argentina is crazy about this. We packed the stadium again."

Messi produced a majestic finish from distance in the 17th minute, sparking a frenzy among his adoring fans, who had turned the match into a virtual home game.

He netted again in the second half from close range, gobbling up a re-



Argentina's forward #10 Lionel Messi shoots and scores his team's second goal during the 2026 World Cup Group J football match between Argentina and Algeria at the Kansas City Stadium in Kansas City on Wednesday

bound to take him just one goal behind the all-time record held by Germany's Klose.

And Messi completed his first hat-trick at a World Cup with an unstoppable finish in the 76th minute.

The diminutive genius was substituted shortly afterwards, forcing Argentine fans to wait to see their hero have a shot at the outright record.

Messi magic

The Group J match in the open-air stadium started at a frantic pace and both

sides had early goals ruled out for offside, including one from Messi.

But Argentina took the lead when Rodrigo De Paul played a beautifully measured through ball, which Messi picked up before driving at goal and unleashing a fierce drive from outside the penalty area that curled away from goalkeeper Luca Zidane.

The South American team was largely in control, fluid in attack with its revered number 10 pulling the strings.

But as the clock ticked towards half-time Alge-

ria enjoyed a better spell, with Argentina goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez forced to parry a shot from Fares Chaibi.

Messi curled another effort over the bar in the early minutes of the second half and Zidane kept out a shot from Lautaro Martinez.

But the crowd did not have to wait long to celebrate another goal from the veteran Inter Miami forward.

Zidane failed to deal with a sizzling Alexis Mac Allister strike and Messi was there to sweep home in the 60th minute.

Time stood still six minutes later as Messi was through again but this time Zidane pushed the ball over the bar.

But he was not to be denied, completing his hat-trick after being set up by substitute Nico Gonzalez.

"I don't have the words to describe Messi," said Argentina boss Lionel Scaloni. "For 20 years, he's had us used to seeing things like this, and he inspires everyone who watches him play."

Argentina are seeking to become the first back-to-back winners of the World Cup since Brazil

managed the feat in 1962.

Earlier, the roads around the stadium were clogged as tens of thousands of Argentine fans streamed towards ground dressed in blue and white, many with Messi's name on the back of their shirts.

Argentina's all-time top-scorer is just the third man to reach 200 caps after Cristiano Ronaldo and Kuwait's Bader Al Mutawa.

Ronaldo will equal Messi's record of six World Cup appearances if he plays for Portugal against DR Congo on Wednesday.

LIFE

Prayer, psalms — and rap: Kinshasa priest engages youth

KINSHASA (AFP) — Clad in his black cassock and energised by the frenetic beat, Jean-Pierre Mongambi, Kinshasa's "rapping priest", roamed underprivileged districts using rap to bring the gospel to the city's youth.

"Nayambi, nayambi" — "I believe" in the local language — he rapped, as clusters of young people jumped in time with the beat, clutching their smartphones.

"Rap is not a sin," he proclaimed, winning immediate applause from his audience in the poor neighbourhood of Ngalieima in the capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

With a black cap on, the 47-year-old rapping priest performed as three bodyguards kept watch over the stage.

Mongambi has become something of a celebrity in the DRC, and beyond, thanks to his rap tracks based on psalms and prayers and concerts that are widely shared on social media.

In 2023, he even rapped for Pope Francis, who was visiting the DRC at the time, in front of a cheering crowd.

In Africa's most populous Roman Catholic nation, religion is deeply embedded in everyday life in many communities and conservative views such as on same-sex relations are widely held.



Father Jean-Pierre Mongambi performs alongside children and dancers during a religious music event at Bienheureuse Anuarite parish in Kinshasa on May 17

"Rap is a way for me to spread the word of God," Mongambi said, sat on a bench during a break in the Bienheureuse Anuarite parish of Ngalieima.

Young people, he lamented, are increasingly giving up on Sunday Mass, or turning towards the evangelical Revival Church, which is flourishing in Kinshasa, a mega-city of nearly 17 million inhabitants.

His goal is "to bring young people back to the Church", he said. Parish priest Augustin Mfwankama said many youngsters "no longer find any interest in the Church; they prefer to play football, go to bars or bet online".

And in recent years, "more and more kulus" — the name for gangs of armed youths who terrorise Kinsha-

sa residents with violent robberies — have plagued his district, he said.

To "bring these lost sheep back", Mfwankama pinned his hopes on "the rapping priest" after coming across him on social media.

He invited Mongambi to give a first concert in his parish three years ago.

"It's a good method to use rap, rather than a Bible in hand, to draw them in," he said.

'Find my way back'

"He gave me hope to live on this earth again," said 20-year-old Chadrack Mayambi, who is getting over the death of his mother four months ago following an illness.

"I was wondering what would become of me, but when I listened

to his rap, it made me want to find my way back to the Church," he said.

"If not in God, who else can one believe in?" said Mayambi, who has been picking up odd jobs on building sites since finishing his studies in electrical engineering a few months ago.

Being unemployed is common in the vast central African country, where nearly 70 per cent of the population lives below the poverty line.

With online prayers, religious music and discussions about spirituality, church leaders have tapped into the digital world to try to reach young people.

"On social media, messages can go out directly and reach everywhere," Mongambi said. "Today's priests are capable of engaging

with modernity in order to truly attract young people," the former choirboy said.

Inspired

Mongambi comes from the bustling Matonge neighbourhood, Kinshasa's renowned round-the-clock music hub.

He wrote his first songs as a teenager, inspired by his "idols" the American hip hop duo Kris Kross and rapper Dr. Dre.

After trying to form a music group, he said he was drawn to the Church by the actions of a parish priest who had managed to reconcile his parents and stop them from splitting up.

"I thought, I'd like to be like that man — someone who brings families together and helps people do good," he said.

After his ordination in 2011, Mongambi wrote his first hit.

The song marked the birthday of Cardinal Laurent Monsengwo, the former archbishop of Kinshasa and a leading figure in the Church, who died in 2021.

"He's the one who supported me, he pushed me to record in the studio and he financed the production of my music videos," Mongambi said.

As one of his best-known songs tells future generations: "Ingratitude doesn't pay."

Enjoy unbeatable value and family fun in 2026

Inspired

DUBAI — The countdown to Dubai Summer Surprises (DSS) 2026 has officially begun, with Dubai Festivals and Retail Establishment (DFRE) encouraging residents and visitors across the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to "Make it a Dubai Summer" as the city's favourite summer festival returns from July 2 to August 30 2026. Across 60 days, the city will come alive with a packed calendar of shopping, entertainment, dining and family-friendly experiences, and exceptional offers across hotels, restaurants, attractions and retail destinations, bringing something new to discover throughout the summer.

DSS 2026 is designed to keep excitement building all season long, featuring major sale moments, limited-time deals and new experiences across the city. The momentum will keep going all summer, with two major retail moments curated to bring shoppers limited-time experiences to discover across Dubai.

Residents and visitors across the GCC will also have the

chance to take part in Win Your Home in Dubai, a first-of-its-kind flagship citywide initiative. By spending AED 500 or more at participating outlets, shoppers will take a step closer to owning one of 12 residential units from Bingham Developers including 11 new studio apartments and one grand prize of a two-bedroom apartment.

Entertainment will also play a key role in DSS 2026, with a summer line-up that includes the return of the biggest ever edition of Beat the Heat DXB concert series, alongside live entertainment experiences such as the Miami Musical Show at Coca-Cola Arena on 28 August, appearing outside Kular wait for the first time, with tickets now available on Platinumlist. More performances and events will be announced as part of the full DSS calendar. Across the city, selected malls will also host the new DSS Performing Arts Fest concept over three weeks, bringing DSS-themed performances, roaming entertainment and community activations to participating malls

Dubai's malls, hotels and entertainment venues will further add to the summer atmosphere with citywide themed experiences and activations, creating even more ways to enjoy the season.

Families can once again look forward to Modesh World at Dubai World Trade Centre, while DSS 2026 will kick off with opening weekend celebrations across multiple malls, transforming retail destinations into immersive entertainment hubs featuring summertime performances. Dubai's dining scene will also buzz with excitement as Summer Restaurant Week returns from July 13 to August 2, followed by the popular 10 Dirham Dish from August 3 to August 30. Fitness enthusiasts will also be able to take part in Summer Mallathons, offering an active indoor experience during the summer months. As the season moves into August, Back to School celebrations will bring family entertainment, themed installations and live stage performances to malls across the city.

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