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Sunday, June 21, 2026 | Muharram 6, 1448 Hijri



On behalf of King, Prince Feisal sponsors dinner marking GFP's inaugural Count Jacques Rogge Award

AMMAN (JT) — On behalf of His Majesty King Abdullah, HRH Prince Feisal, the Regent, and founder and chairman of Generations for Peace (GFP), sponsored a dinner on Thursday marking the organisation's receipt of the inaugural Count Jacques Rogge Award.

The event was attended by Their Royal Highnesses Princess Zeina Bint Feisal, Princess Ayah Bint Feisal, and Princess Sara Bint Feisal, alongside ministers and strategic partners, according to the Jordan News Agency, Petra.

Prince Feisal expressed pride in the international recognition,



On behalf of the King, HRH Prince Feisal, sponsored a dinner on Thursday celebrating the organisation winning the initial Count Jacques Rogge Award

thanking partners and supporters, and stressing that sustainable

peace is built through long-term community engagement and youth

empowerment. GFP CEO Lama Hattab said that the

award reflects the success of the Jordanian Hashemite vision in advancing youth-focused peacebuilding initiatives.

During the ceremony, GFP unveiled its 2026-2028 strategic plan, which focuses on empowering young leaders through peace education, strengthening community resilience, advancing digital empowerment and promoting environmental peacebuilding.

Prince Feisal had previously received the award at an official ceremony in Ghent, Belgium.

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King welcomes US-Iran MoU, expresses hopes for lasting agreement

AMMAN (JT) — His Majesty King Abdullah has welcomed the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the United States and Iran, expressing hope that the two sides would reach a lasting agreement that contrib-

utes to regional security and respects states' sovereignty.

In a post on X, the King wrote, "We welcome the signing of the MoU between the US and Iran, and we hope the two sides reach a lasting agreement that

ensures regional security and respects the sovereignty of states."

His Majesty also expressed appreciation for the mediation efforts by Pakistan, Qatar and other partners, which he said had helped bring "us this far".

Second batch of National Service recruits begins training at Shweier Camp

AMMAN (JT) — The second batch of conscripts under the National Service Programme reported on Saturday to the training centre at Shweier Military Camp, in line with the enrolment plan approved by the Jordan Armed Forces-Arab Army (JAF) General Command.

The enrolment process was conducted under comprehensive adminis-

trative, organisational and logistical arrangements to ensure the smooth completion of enrolment procedures, according to a JAF statement.

Director of the Mobilisation and Popular Army Directorate Brig. Gen. Shadi Abu Dalo said that the process included document verification, medical examinations, and enrolment procedures to ensure

the efficient and orderly admission of recruits.

He also said that the JAF had mobilised all necessary human and technical resources to receive the conscripts and provide a suitable training environment that enables them to benefit fully from the programme and achieve its national objectives.



The second batch of National Service Programme conscripts reports on Saturday to the training centre at Shweier Military Camp

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Competency frameworks will reshape public sector human resources management — Balbeisi

- Minister says new model links recruitment, promotion, training, performance management under unified merit-based approach
- Reform expected to improve efficiency, fairness, quality of public service delivery

By Ahmad Khatatneh

AMMAN — Minister of Public Sector Development Badriya Balbeisi said the government's adoption of competency frameworks will reshape Jordan's public sector human resources system by linking recruitment, promotion, training and performance management under a unified, merit-based model.

The frameworks are key pillars of the government's public sector modernisation programme aimed at establishing unified



Minister of Public Sector Development Badriya Balbeisi says the frameworks are central to the government's public sector modernisation programme

standards for human resources management across government institutions, according

the government. They cover a broad range of government functions, including

human resources, digital transformation, information management and data analy-

sis, cybersecurity, legal affairs, procurement, government inventory management, media and communication, and service delivery.

In remarks to The Jordan Times, Balbeisi said that the competency frameworks are not intended as isolated tools for hiring or promotion, but rather as a comprehensive reference that integrates all human resources functions under a single system grounded in efficiency, merit and equal opportunity.

Continued on page 5

Jordan condemns Israeli seizure of Greek Orthodox Patriarchate land in occupied East Jerusalem

AMMAN (JT) — The Foreign Ministry on Saturday condemned the Israeli occupation authorities' seizure of land belonging to the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate in the Silwan area of occupied East Jerusalem, as a "flagrant violation" of international law and the historical and legal status quo.

In a statement, Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Fouad Majali reiterated Jordan's absolute rejection of all unilateral and illegal measures, as well as "provocative" practices aimed at altering the status of Jerusalem and its holy sites.

He stressed that Israel has no sovereignty over occupied Jerusalem or its Islamic and Christian holy sites.

Majali called on the international community to assume its legal and



The Foreign Ministry on Saturday condemns the Israeli occupation authorities' seizure of lands belonging to the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate in the Silwan town

moral responsibilities, foremost among them the establishment of an independent and sovereign state on their national soil, as the only path towards a just and comprehensive peace that ensures security and stability in the region.

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JT file photo

JCDCF launches engineering works for Amra convention, exhibition centre

AMMAN (JT) — The Jordanian Company for the Development of Cities and Facilities (JCDCF) announced on Saturday the approval of the final designs and the launch of engineering, structural and technical blueprints for the Amra International Convention and Exhibition Centre.

The project would serve as a major venue for exhibitions and large-scale events in the Kingdom and forms part of the first phase of the Amra City development, according to a JCDCF statement.

The company said that the centre, set to be the largest of its kind in Jordan, will include 16,000 square metres of exhibition space and 12,000 square metres



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for conventions, catering to a wide range of economic and commercial sectors.

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Hormuz closure, Lebanon fighting threaten Iran-US deal

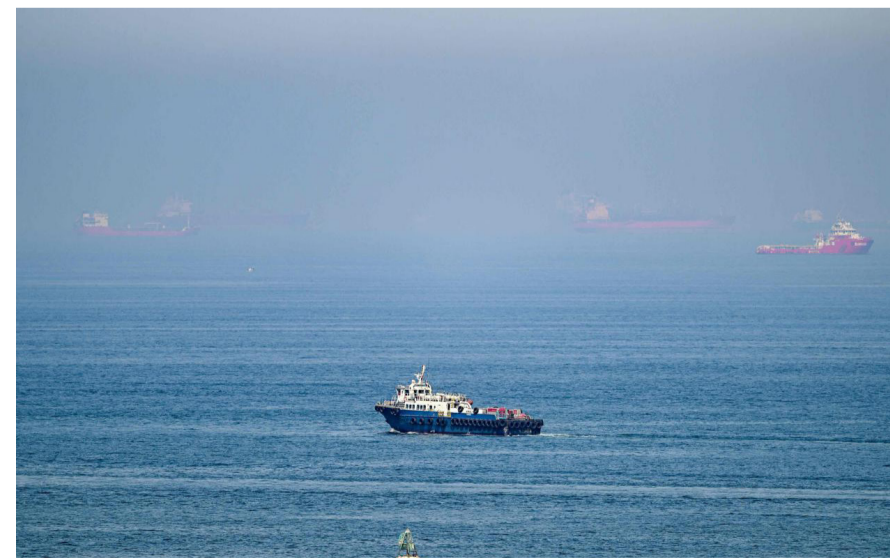
By Mai Anati

AMMAN — Iran closed the Strait of Hormuz on Saturday and warned of further measures against what it described as US and Israeli violations of a newly signed Memorandum of Understanding, as continued fighting in Lebanon threatened to derail efforts to launch negotiations between Tehran and Washington.

Iran's military leadership described the closure of the strategic waterway as a "first step" and warned of additional actions if attacks on Lebanon continue.

Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said Tehran remained committed to the Memorandum but insisted that Washington must ensure Israel halts its military operations in Lebanon.

"Failure by the other side to fulfil some of its



Cargo ships are pictured off the coast of the Khor Fakkan Container Terminal, the only natural deep-sea port in the region and one of the major container ports in Sharjah Emirate, along the Gulf of Oman on Friday

commitments will place the broader understanding at risk," Araghchi said.

The latest escalation came as Pakistan announced that technical talks involving US and

Iranian representatives, along with Pakistani and Qatari mediators, would be held in Switzerland on Sunday as a follow-up to the Islamabad Memorandum of Understanding.

US Vice President JD Vance also said he expects to travel to Switzerland in the coming days, adding that US negotiators Jared Kushner and Steve Witkoff had report-

ed that "things are going well".

The Memorandum, signed this week by US President Donald Trump and Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian, was intended to end a regional conflict that expanded across several fronts, including Lebanon.

However, renewed fighting between Israel and Hizbollah has quickly emerged as the biggest challenge facing the agreement.

US officials have reportedly pressed Israel to agree to a ceasefire with Hizbollah amid concerns that continued fighting could undermine the diplomatic track.

Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, however, has insisted that Israeli forces will remain in Lebanon "as long as necessary".

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Petra photo

Minister of Tourism and Antiquities Imad Hijazin on Friday said that Jordan will gift a mosaic football model representing the Kingdom's history to the municipality of Dallas, Texas

Jordan to gift mosaic football model to Dallas

AMMAN (JT) — Jordan will gift a mosaic football model representing the Kingdom's history to the municipality of Dallas, Texas, Minister of Tourism and Antiquities Imad Hijazin said on Friday.

Hijazin noted that several promotional events are taking place across US cities to boost Jordanian tourism, coinciding with the national football team's historic participation in the FIFA World Cup 2026, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.

He announced organising an event titled "Jordan

House" in Dallas to promote the Kingdom and enhance its tourism and cultural presence.

The minister added that the "Jordan House" activities will run from June 25 to June 27.

The event will feature performances by the Jordan Armed Forces-Arab Army Musical Band, live exhibitions of mosaic art and Arabic calligraphy, an authentic Jordanian dabke troupe and national songs.

He noted that the World Cup draw has opened up new tourism markets for Jordan in Latin America

and the Maghreb region, while also reinforcing the vital importance of the traditional European market.

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.

Jordan's national team will face Algeria at 6:00am on Tuesday, before concluding the group stage against Argentina at 5:00am on June 28, at Dallas Stadium.

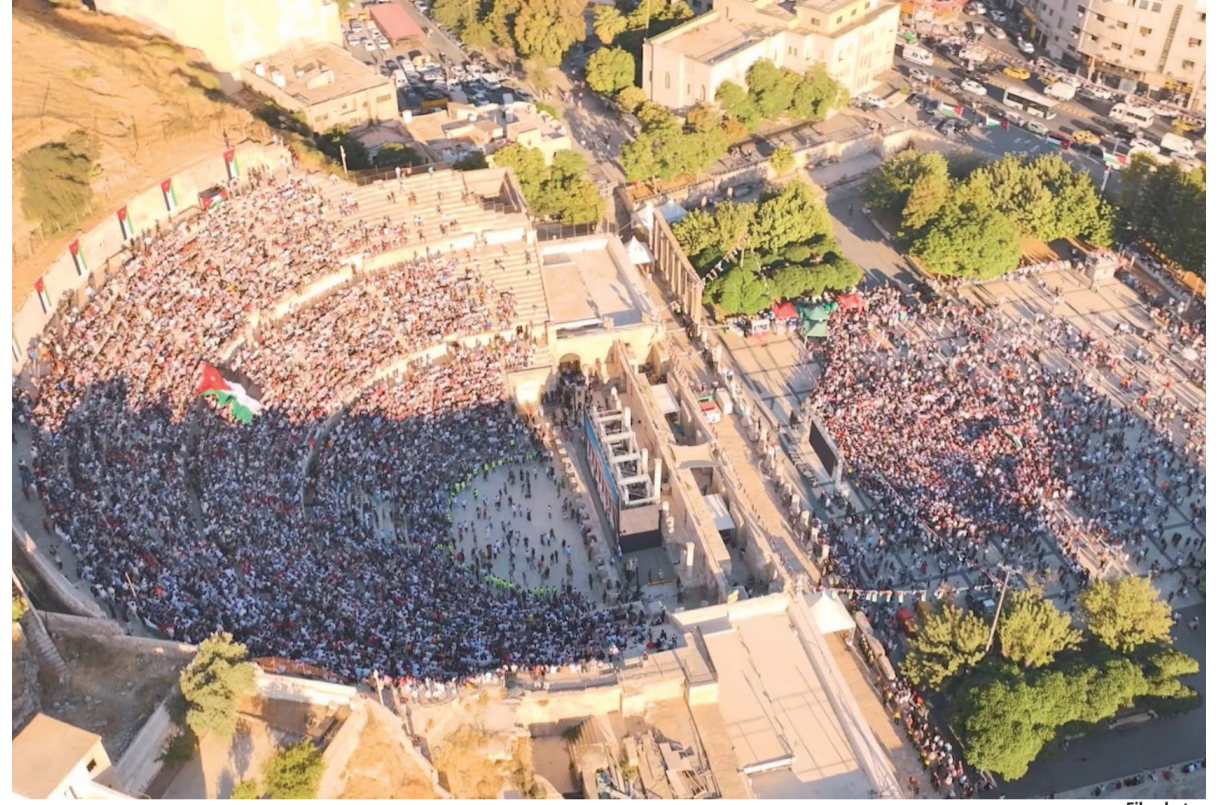
Roman Amphitheatre to welcome football fans for Jordan's World Cup match against Algeria

AMMAN (JT) — The Ministry of Youth and the Greater Amman Municipality (GAM), hold more public events for football fans at the Roman Amphitheatre, Hashemite Square, and the Odeon Theatre in downtown Amman for the national football fans at the Roman Amphitheatre, Hashemite Square, and the Odeon Theatre in downtown Amman for the national football match against Algeria on Tuesday, which will be broadcast live on big screens.

The event, held in cooperation with the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, the Ministry of Government Communications and the Jordan Tourism Board, will feature a patriotic atmosphere bringing Jordanians behind their national team, said organisers, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.

The event followed a "remarkable" turnout at the Roman Amphitheatre for the Jordanian team's (Al Nashama) first match in a show of national unity behind the Jordanian squad in its historic World Cup debut.

The match against Algeria at 6:00am on Tuesday will be broadcast live, with gates at the



File photo

Jordanian fans at the Roman Amphitheatre during Al Nashama's match against Austria on Wednesday

venues opening to the public two hours ahead of kick-off.

Organisers expected upcoming matches to attract large crowds, and have designated areas for families, youth, and people with disabilities with clear entry and exit routes, as well

as spots for the media, to ensure a safe experience for all.

Screens and additional viewing areas will also be available, while ensuring that entry will be limited to capacity and in accordance with regulations.

Football enthusiasts

are urged to show up early, heed instructions and preserve the Roman Amphitheatre, one of the capital's key historical landmarks.

They are also called on to wear red jerseys, Al Nashama's away kit, and bring with them Jordanian flags and

shemagh to cheer on their team, giving a patriotic touch to the atmosphere.

The event holds special significance at the Roman Amphitheatre, Amman's timeless landmark and a site etched in the city's memory for nearly 2,000 years.

TOURISM

'Urdunna Jannah attracts over 100,000 participants in 3 months'

AMMAN (JT) — The "Urdunna Jannah" domestic tourism programme attracted more than 100,000 participants within three months following Ramadan, exceeding initial targets, according to Minister of Tourism and Antiquities Imad Hijazin.

Hijazin announced a new option allowing participants to visit tourist sites using their private vehicles via a new digital platform, according to Al Mamlaka TV.

He noted that overnight programmes in Petra drew over 15,000 visitors during the same three-month period, benefiting tour guides, hoteliers, transport workers and restaurants.

New destinations including Rihab, Iraq Al Amir and Umm Al Jimal have joined the programme, the minister said, noting that day trips are priced at JD10 across all governorates, covering transportation, lunch and a tour guide.

The programme aims



File photo

Iraq Al Amir archaeological site in Wadi Al Seer area southwest of Amman

to revive domestic tourism and encourage citizens to explore national attractions through

funded experiences. Urdunna Jannah targets 220,000 beneficiaries during 2026, focusing

on less visited destinations and areas heavily impacted by regional events, especially Petra.

The programme plans to involve over 400 local projects and offer 60 diverse tourist trails across Jordan.

The expanded programme now includes Arab and foreign students studying in Jordan, Gazan residents, and the children and spouses of Jordanian women.

Implemented alongside local travel agencies, hotels, and transport sectors, the ministry subsidises trip costs by up to 60 per cent.

The ministry provides free bus transportation, guides and meals, while organising monthly cultural festivals and bazaars in all governorates to stimulate local economies.

In April, the Cabinet extended fee exemptions for archaeological sites under the Urdunna Jannah programme and continued subsidies for trips until December 31.

The programme aims to stimulate domestic tourism and support local communities.



Photo courtesy of the Ministry of Culture

Culture Minister Mustafa Rawashdeh and Ambassador of Spain José Luis Pardo Cuervo discuss ways to strengthen cultural cooperation

Culture minister, Spanish ambassador discuss cultural ties

AMMAN (JT) — Culture Minister Mustafa Rawashdeh has recently discussed ways to strengthen cultural cooperation with Ambassador of Spain José Luis Pardo Cuervo, as the two sides explored opportunities to expand cultural exchange and joint initiatives between the two countries.

"Culture serves as a bridge between peoples and knows no borders. It helps bring nations closer together and promotes dialogue and understanding," Rawashdeh said, according to a ministry statement.

The minister stressed the importance of activating existing agreements and Memoranda of Understanding, as

well as increasing participation in cultural festivals and events held in both countries.

"The Ministry of Culture's facilities and cultural centres remain open to the Spanish embassy to organise cultural activities and events across the Kingdom," Rawashdeh added.

The meeting also reviewed proposals to deepen cultural cooperation. These included a Memorandum of Understanding between Jordan's National Library Department and its Spanish counterpart, cultural exchange weeks, and the sharing of expertise in cultural and creative industries.

Discussions covered cooperation in intangible cultural heritage, including documentation and preservation efforts. The two sides went over collaboration in libraries, archives and documentary heritage.

The meeting also addressed the organisation of art exhibitions and film screenings as part of efforts to boost cultural engagement.

Pardo Cuervo reaffirmed Spain's commitment to expanding cultural cooperation with Jordan.

"Spain is keen to expand cultural cooperation with Jordan and broaden areas of partnership that serve the interests of both countries," the ambassador said.

Zaatari youth launch 'Amal' soundtrack for World Refugee Day

AMMAN (JT) — As the global community marks World Refugee Day on June 20, Dream Day Foundation releases a first-of-its-kind soundtrack, titled "Amal" (hope in Arabic), by Syrian children in the Zaatari refugee camp.

The soundtrack is the culmination of more than two and half years of musical programming in the Zaatari refugee camp led by Dream Day Foundation in close collaboration with Questscope and Playing for Change Foundation, according to a Dream Day Foundation statement.

Dedicated to funding and supporting music and the arts for refugees globally, Dream Day's leadership believes in the transformative and healing power of music and the arts, particularly in conflict and forced displacement settings.

This project is the first formal music programme in the Zaatari camp.

"Listening to Hope gave me goosebumps. It was a powerful reminder of how human potential can be nurtured and allowed to flourish, even in the most difficult environments, especially when the global community gives children and youth the chance to learn, create and thrive," noted Todd Krim, founder of Dream Day Foundation.

Maen Rayyan, Questscope Jordan's director said: "Through our partnership with the Dream Day Foundation and the Playing For Change Foundation, music has become much more than an educational activity, it has become a source of healing, self-expression and hope."

The Zaatari camp, located around 15 kilo-

metres from the border with Syria, is now home to 51,000 Syrian refugees, with over half of the population under the age of 18 years, according to the statement.

While the camp's population has decreased from 85,000 Syrians prior to the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024 to 51,000 today due to Syrians returning to their country, most refugees residing in the camp are still in dire need of support, from basic humanitarian services to development programming in education, sports and music, among others.

The dwindling of donor support globally, particularly for development programming, is impacting the harsh reality for Syrians in the camp everyday.

Dream Day Foundation's Music for Refugees programme kicked

off in September 2023 with British singer and artist Ellie Goulding.

The programme grew from 30 to 250 Syrian children and more than eight music teachers from the Zaatari camp.

Rayyan added that for many children and youth in the Zaatari refugee camp "music offers a powerful way to share their stories, express their identities and imagine new possibilities for the future. It reminds us that even in the face of displacement and uncertainty, creativity can inspire resilience, foster connection and open pathways to opportunity."

Khaled, a 17 year old Syrian resident of the Zaatari camp, noted how learning how to play the Oud has helped him "improve himself and participate in something new".

He added, "I learned a lot about the basics of music in a fun and



Photo courtesy of Dream Day Foundation

As the global community marks World Refugee Day on June 20, Dream Day Foundation releases a soundtrack titled 'Amal' by Syrian children in Zaatari refugee camp

clear way." Similarly, Yumna, a 14 year old learning the guitar noted that in addition to learning the

basics in music, "this experience helped me a lot psychologically, allowing me to express myself better".

Heba, another young lady enrolled in the music programme for Oud, noted that this experience has helped

her "overcome stress and shyness", describing her musical journey as "one of the most beautiful experiences she's lived".

As UNHCR highlights "Solidarity with Refugees" as a principal theme on World Refugee Day, there is no better way to act on these words than listen to this beautiful soundtrack, be inspired, and help continue and expand this programme.

"Supporting this musical programme for Syrian children in Zaatari is also an investment in Syria's future as it recovers from more than 14 years of conflict," said Krim.

"These musicians want to go back and for most of them, to meet their homeland for the first time when they are able to. We are proud to be a modest part of their journey," he added.

Safadi, US president's adviser discuss regional developments

AMMAN (JT) — Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi on Friday received Massad Boulos, senior adviser to the US president for Arab and Middle Eastern Affairs.

During the meeting, Safadi and Boulos discussed prospects for developing cooperation and strengthening the historic friendship between Jordan and the US, according to a Foreign Ministry statement.

They also reviewed regional developments and ways to support efforts aimed at resolving regional crises and restoring security and stability.



Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi on Friday receives Senior Adviser to the US president for Arab and Middle Eastern Affairs Massad Boulos

Palestinian refugees' right of return must be upheld — Khirfan

AMMAN (JT) — The Palestinian refugees' right of return remains an enduring and legitimate right, upheld despite decades of displacement, injustice and aggression, Director General of the Department of Palestinian Affairs Rafiq Khirfan said on Saturday.

Marking World Refugee Day, Khirfan said the international community should continue to recognise this right, 77 years after the displacement of more than 9 million Palestinian refugees within and outside Palestine.

He said that Jordan, under its Hashemite leadership, remains steadfast in its support for the Palestinian cause in all its dimensions, with the refugee issue remaining one of its most central and enduring pillars, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.

He stressed the need to intensify efforts at the local, Arab and international levels to support Jordan's 13 Palestinian refugee camps, as part of the Kingdom's continued



A general view of Al Wihdat Camp in eastern Amman

backing of the Palestinian cause.

Khirfan said that this commitment has been reflected in numerous Royal initiatives and ongoing efforts to address the needs of camp residents and improve services across various sectors.

He noted that Jordan, under the leadership of His Majesty King Abdullah, continues to mobilise political, financial and moral

support for the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) to enable it to continue delivering services without interruption.

He said that this support is particularly important amid continued Israeli efforts to target the agency, undermine its credibility through allegations and incitement, and reduce its funding, with the aim of weakening its role as

a witness to the Palestinian refugee issue.

Khirfan added that this year's World Refugee Day comes amid continued regional instability and escalating challenges facing Palestinians, including ongoing violations, expanding settlement activity and repeated incursions into refugee camps in the occupied West Bank.

He said that the war has turned Gaza into

what resembles a vast refugee camp, forcing repeated displacement under harsh humanitarian conditions, as part of efforts aimed at pushing Palestinians off their land.

Khirfan stressed that Jordan firmly rejects displacement, resettlement and any attempts to undermine the Palestinian people's right to self-determination or the refugees' right of return, which he described as an inalienable right.

He added that continued disregard for the Palestinian refugees' right of return reflects failure to implement relevant UN resolutions, noting that the United Nations designated June 20 as World Refugee Day to raise awareness of the plight of refugees and promote international support.

According to UNHCR figures, the number of refugees worldwide stands at around 42.7 million, while nearly 6 million Palestine refugees are registered with UNRWA, 42 per cent of whom reside in Jordan.

Jordanian universities achieve 'advanced' positions in QS rankings 2027

AMMAN (JT) — Fifteen Jordanian universities have achieved advanced positions in the QS World University Rankings 2027.

The University of Jordan ranked first locally and 326th globally, marking a significant leap of 44 places compared with last year's ranking, one of the strongest performances by Jordanian universities in recent years, according to Al Mamlaka TV.

The Jordan University of Science and Technology ranked among the top 500 universities worldwide, at 449th place, followed by Amman Arab University at 643rd.

The Applied Science Private University ranked 761-770, while the German Jordanian University placed 761-790. Yarmouk University also featured among the top 1,000 universities, ranking 901-950 and seventh locally.

Middle East University, Mutah University, the Hashemite University, Al Balqa Applied University, Arab Open University-Amman, Jadara University, Petra University and Zarqa University were also listed among the top 1,500 universities globally.

The QS World University Rankings are based on several indicators, including academic reputation, research impact and citations, graduate employability, leadership outcomes, international student attraction and sustainability performance.

The rankings aim to identify universities with strong global performance across academic output and societal contribution, compare them with leading international institutions and help students choose their study destinations.

University of Jordan President Nathir Obeidat said that the QS ranking, one of the most widely recognised global university landmarks, goes beyond academic reputation to include marketing, economic impact, development and institutional performance.

He added that the ranking helps attract



The University of Jordan was ranked first locally and 326th globally

high-achieving local and international students, strengthens trust among parents, funding bodies and employers, and serves as a tool for branding, media outreach and international visibility.

Obeidat also noted that the rankings carry the economic implications, including attracting investment, expanding research partnerships with the public and private sectors, increasing access to international funding and grants, and supporting the local economy through spending by students, researchers and visitors.

He said the system also provides performance indicators that help universities identify strengths and weaknesses.

The rankings aim to identify universities with strong global performance across academic output and societal contribution...

He stressed that the University of Jordan faces a key challenge in maintaining and further improving its global position through governance reforms, administrative efficiency, and alignment with international standards in teaching, research and community service. He added that the

rankings support data-driven strategic planning, improved graduate employability and stronger academic reputation through closer alignment with labour market needs.

Amman Arab University President Sari Hamdan said that the advancement in global rankings reflects the development of Jordan's higher education system and the progress made by academic institutions in improving education quality, research output and international engagement.

He added that the progress also reflects expanded scientific research, innovation, international cooperation and increased publication in peer-reviewed journals, enhancing the competitiveness of Jordanian universities and their ability to attract students and researchers from around the world.

Hamdan said that the presence of Jordanian universities in international rankings in advanced positions is a positive indicator of the Kingdom's educational standing in the region and supports its vision of building a knowledge-based economy and investing in human capital as a key pillar of sustainable development.

He noted that Amman Arab University has worked to improve academic output, enhance programme quality, and provide a learning environment that supports student talent and innovation, which contributed to its achievement in the ranking.

Jordan condemns terrorist attack on airport in Niger

AMMAN (JT) — The Ministry of Foreign Affairs condemned the terrorist attack that targeted Niamei International Airport in Niger.

In a statement, Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Fouad Majali reiterated the Kingdom's full solidarity with the government and people of Niger.

He emphasised Jordan's rejection of all forms of violence and terrorism that aim to undermine security and stability.

Majali expressed



sincere condolences and sympathy to the government and people of Niger, as well

as to the families of the victims, wishing a speedy recovery for the injured.

DOCUMENTATION

Tourism Ministry completes survey of 34 Christian pilgrimage sites across Kingdom

AMMAN (JT) — Minister of Tourism and Antiquities Imad Hijazin said the ministry has completed a survey and documentation of 34 Christian pilgrimage sites across the Kingdom, classifying them into primary and secondary categories.

He said the classification will support the promotion of these sites through specialised tourism and religious programmes, strengthening Jordan's position on the global

religious tourism map, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.

Hijazin added that the ministry is working to launch an online platform for the Baptism Site, which will provide visitors and pilgrims with information and services related to religious tourism programmes in Jordan.

He said the platform will facilitate access to information about the site and related services, noting that

Jordan offers a diverse range of religious tourism attractions, including internationally recognised Christian pilgrimage sites and Islamic heritage landmarks, such as the shrines of the Prophet Mohammad's companions and the Cave of the Seven Sleepers.

He added that this diversity enhances Jordan's standing as a unique religious and historical destination in the region.

The minister also

noted that the ministry has launched specialised training programmes for tour guides in Christian religious tourism and Islamic heritage tourism, in cooperation with the Jordan Tour Guides Association, aimed at enhancing guides' skills and improving visitor services.

He added that a programme to license 50 tour guides as general guides across the Kingdom will be launched soon, as part of efforts

to further improve the visitor experience.

The Vatican recognises five sites in Jordan as Christian pilgrimage destinations: The Baptism Site (Bethany beyond the Jordan), Mount Nebo, Our Lady of the Mountain Church in Anjara, Tel Mar Elias and Machaerus Fortress. Leading among them is the Baptism Site, where Jesus Christ was baptised by John the Baptist, considered one of the holiest.

PHA urges enhanced cooperation between Jordanian, Syrian private healthcare sectors

AMMAN (JT) — President of the Private Hospitals Association (PHA) Fawzi Hammouri on Saturday stressed the importance of enhancing cooperation between Jordanian and Syrian private hospitals, and capitalising on Jordan's pioneering experience in the sector.

Hammouri's remarks came on the sidelines of an official visit by

a Jordanian health delegation, led by Minister of Health Ibrahim Bdour, to Syria on Thursday, aimed at bolstering bilateral health cooperation, according to a PHA statement.

Hammouri noted that the visit addressed several vital areas related to health cooperation between the two brotherly countries, including benefitting

from Jordan's experience in healthcare investment, the pharmaceutical industry, training, qualification and the exchange of expertise.

The sessions covered cooperation prospects in pharmaceutical manufacturing, quality assurance, drug registration procedures, hospital management, the development of medical services and

training programmes for healthcare personnel, aiming to enhance health integration between Jordan and Syria, he said.

Hammouri pointed out that private hospitals in Jordan account for more than 60 per cent of the total number of hospitals in the Kingdom, providing direct employment to over 40,000 Jordanians, while highlight-

ing their pivotal role in supporting the national economy and attracting Arab and foreign patients.

Syria is undergoing a critical phase of reconstruction, particularly in rehabilitating its health sector, which requires an effective public-private partnership, Hammouri said, stressing that the private sector is an essential partner

in developing health services and enhancing their efficiency and sustainability.

He added that the proposed areas of cooperation include receiving medical cases that require treatment outside Syria, collaborating on training medical and administrative cadres, exchanging knowledge and benefiting from the Jordanian experience in hos-

pital management.

"This also includes exploring opportunities to manage hospitals in Syria, and implementing health accreditation and quality standards," he said.

The Jordanian delegation's visit featured a field tour of several hospitals, healthcare facilities and state-owned pharmaceutical plants in Damascus

to review the current state of healthcare services.

Hammouri said that these meetings mark a significant step towards establishing sustainable health partnerships between the two nations, contributing to the development of the healthcare sector, the exchange of expertise and the achievement of mutual interests.



AFP photo

From left to right: US President Donald Trump, Google DeepMind CEO Demis Hassabis and South Korean President Lee Jae-myung at a working lunch meeting during the G-7 summit in Evian, France, on Wednesday

S. Korean leader says he told Trump sanctions on North are 'ineffective'

SEOUL (AFP) — Closer ties between Moscow and Pyongyang have rendered sanctions imposed on North Korea over its nuclear programme "ineffective", South Korean President Lee Jae-myung said on Friday.

Lee said he told US counterpart Donald Trump the sanctions were not working when the two leaders met at a G-7 summit in France this week and discussed the long-running standoff between South Korea and its nuclear-armed northern neighbour.

"I told him sanctions and pressure [against the North] are ineffective," Lee told reporters in Seoul.

"The effectiveness of sanctions has diminished due to military cooperation between North Korea and Rus-

sia stemming from the war in Ukraine.

"Even a small amount of assistance from Russia is of great help to North Korea," Lee said.

The two Koreas remain technically at war because their 1950-53 conflict ended in an armistice, not a peace treaty, and are separated by a demilitarised zone through which the border runs.

Trump signed a deal while he was in France aimed at ending the war in the Middle East and speculation has been rife that his administration will next shift its focus to North Korea.

On Sunday, Trump posted an uncaptioned photo of him and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un taken at a meeting in Singapore in 2018.

Lee said Trump had told him in the French town of Evian that "the time had come to pay attention to the North Korea issue".

'In love'

Kim has recently sought to enhance his standing with his allies, sending troops and munitions to aid Russia's war against Ukraine.

He also recently hosted China's President Xi Jinping in Pyongyang, soon after Xi had held back-to-back summits in Beijing with Trump and Russian leader Vladimir Putin.

Neither Pyongyang's nor Beijing's official statements mentioned the issue of North Korean denuclearisation — an outcome experts interpreted as tacit acceptance from China.

Pyongyang has repeatedly declared itself an "irreversible" nuclear state since a 2019 summit between Kim and Trump in Hanoi collapsed over the scope of denuclearisation and sanctions relief.

Trump met Kim three times during his first term — once declaring they were "in love" — as he pushed to hammer out a long-coveted deal on denuclearisation.

But no tangible progress has been made.

Trump stepped up his courtship of Kim during a tour of Asia last year, saying he was "100 per cent" open to a meeting. The offer has gone unanswered.

The US president even bucked decades of US policy by stating North Korea was "sort of a nuclear power".

Australia detects first case of contagious H5 bird flu

SYDNEY (AFP) — Scientists have detected the H5 strain of bird flu in Australia for the first time, the country's agriculture minister said on Saturday, meaning the highly contagious variant has now spread to every continent.

Julie Collins told a press conference the disease had been found in a migratory sea bird, a brown skua, in remote Western Australia and the result confirmed by the national science agency.

Samples from another sick bird, a giant petrel found in the same area, had also shown a suspected positive result, she said.

Australia was previously the only continent where the H5 strain, which can devastate poultry and wild bird populations, had not been detected.

"Whilst disappointing, this is not unexpected, given the global spread of the H5 bird flu," Collins told reporters in Canberra.

"I can confirm there is still no evidence of any mass mortalities at this time, nor is there any evidence of infection in any poultry," she said.

An emergency meeting of animal health and agriculture officials has been held to consider a national response.

"We all knew we couldn't be bird flu-free forever," Collins added.

The H5 strain has



AFP photo

This undated handout photo released by the Australian Antarctic Division on Thursday, shows a wildlife team from the Australian Antarctic Programme assessing the site of a mass mortality of southern elephant seals on Heard Island

caused severe disease and high death rates in poultry, wild birds and affected mammals across the globe.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said on Saturday the detection of the case was concerning, and that his government would take measures seeking to contain the spread of the disease.

"This is something that has happened through migratory birds, and has happened by definition around the world, and this is why we are preparing for this," he said.

The wild birds most affected by the H5 strain include waterfowl, shorebirds, seabirds and birds of prey.

Marine mammals have also been affected, with some detec-

tions in other animals like cats, goats, alpacas and pigs.

'Population-level impacts'

There has been concern that the deadly disease could add to the extinction risks faced by Australian fauna, many of which are unique to the vast continent.

Almost half of Australia's wild bird species, and 83 per cent of its mammals, are found nowhere else.

Australia's Threatened Species Commissioner Fiona Fraser said on Saturday there was a plan to protect 35 species by boosting captive breeding.

Among them, the Tasmanian devil, black swan, little penguin and Australian sea

lion are at particular risk from bird flu, she said.

"There could clearly be population-level impacts for our species," Fraser said.

The confirmed case was detected in a wilderness area 630 kilometres southeast of the city of Perth on the west coast.

Officials said they are investigating if the disease arrived in Australia via birds migrating from the sub-Antarctic.

On Thursday, Australian scientists said the H5 bird flu strain had killed more than 13,000 elephant seal pups after infecting a breeding colony on the remote Heard and McDonald Islands, one of Australia's external territories in the sub-Antarctic.

Deadly Philippines quake turns seabed into shore

GLAN, Philippines (AFP) — Arsenio Butil Jr. fell to his knees and began to pray when last week's deadly 7.8-magnitude earthquake began shaking his home on the coast of the southern Philippines.

When he opened his eyes, he saw a once-familiar shoreline changing in real time, with swathes of previously submerged coral suddenly pushing above the waterline.

The June 8 quake, driven by a shifting of the nearby Cotabato Trench, toppled buildings, triggered landslides and killed at least 76 people on the southern island of Mindanao.

The tectonic forces at work also thrust chunks of the island's coastline upward in a phenomenon known as "coastal uplift", leaving stretches of shore unrecognisable to families who have spent their whole lives there.

During a visit to the area, AFP saw fishing boats that had once been at the water's edge on the wrong side of a wall of jagged, now-dead coral stretching for kilometres in both directions.

Butil Jr, a fisherman and pastor living in Sarangani province's Glan, told AFP the June 8 quake was the largest that he had ever felt.

"The people were extremely panicked," he said.

"What I saw at the shoreline was that the water receded. After a while, I saw it... slowly returning. And then it receded again. Maybe three or four times," Butil said.



AFP photo

This photo taken on Thursday, shows an aerial photo of the coastal uplift following an earthquake along the Pangyan Marine Sanctuary in Glan, Sarangani

"The fish were dying and floating."

The Cotabato Trench, which lies as close as 50 kilometres off Mindanao, is the site of frequent seismic activity, including a "swarm" of thousands of mostly small tremors recorded in January.

A UN disaster risk reduction report released in mid-May hinted they could be a precursor to a large earthquake.

"What they see now is their new coastline," Nane Danlag of the Philippines' seismology centre told AFP from her office in General Santos City on Friday, adding the change was permanent.

"The [seabed] went up two metres," Danlag said, extending the shore by 200 metres in some areas according to initial assessments.

Pointing at a map, she said the affected area stretched between two towns nearly 100 kilometres apart.

As shocking as the changes to the coastline appeared, the shifting of the earth's crust that created it was a "natural move-

ment", she said.

"This has been going on for thousands of years."

In the hills above a neighbouring village, about 100 men, women and children who fled to higher ground when the earthquake struck were still living in an encampment visited by AFP.

Datu Atom Malimpnig, a Maguindanao chieftain, said the newly formed coastline had left the group of fishermen and their families hesitant to return to their now-destroyed homes.

Many remain convinced a tsunami could yet strike, he said, as government aid workers ladled rice porridge into bowls for the evacuees.

"[The seabed] rose... It's not the same as it was before," Malimpnig said.

"What if the sea surges forward? That is what everyone fears," he said, adding their new home atop the hill felt far safer.

Ten kilometres away, Edzel Baylon, a staffer at the Isla Jardin del Mar resort, bemoaned

a newly changed landscape that spelled trouble for a destination that touted a white sand beach holiday experience.

"It has a huge effect on the resort, because the main draw for customers is the sea," she said, pointing at an idyllic beachfront now separated from the water by exposed coral.

"Sadly, today, our sea has become shallow. It's no longer suitable for swimming."

Since the June 8 quake, more than 8,500 aftershocks have shaken the region, according to the seismology agency.

In Glan, residents were thinking about next steps, but not yet ready to attempt to rebuild their destroyed homes, said Butil Jr, the pastor.

"The ground there is cracked, and the cracks are long. That is why this area would be very dangerous if another earthquake as strong follows," he said.

Minutes later, a 5.4 tremor shook the ground underneath his feet.

Niger attack shows juntas' 'fragility' against militants

By Soulé Dia
Agence France-Presse

ABIDJAN — Militants have targeted the main airport in Niger's capital for the second time in less than six months, in a dawn attack that killed both soldiers and civilians.

After a January raid on Diori Hamani International Airport and a large, coordinated offensive in Mali in April, Thursday's assault shows the fragility of military authorities in west Africa's Sahel region against terrorists, analysts say.

What happened?

The airport in Niamey came under attack by jihadists who arrived in taxis and wore explosive belts, Nigerien officials said.

The attackers to storm the airport terminal but were repelled by the army after an hours-long gun battle.

At least 11 soldiers and two civilians were killed, officials said. They said 22 attackers were also killed.

The Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM), Al Qaeda's branch in the Sahel which carries out near-daily strikes across the region, claimed the attack late on Thursday.

Niger television broadcast footage showing the battered bodies of suspected terrorists lying on the ground, walls riddled with bullets, a sign of the intensity of the fighting, as well as a crowd of residents confronting a suspected attacker.

Following the January 29 airport attack,



AFP photo

General view of Niamey, the capital of Niger

which was claimed at the time by the Islamic State in the Sahel (EIS), the ruling junta has tightened security.

Supporters see Thursday's clashes as a successful outcome as the attackers failed to force their way into the airport, but critics point to the weaknesses of a capital hit for the second time in under six months.

Who was behind the attack?

The EIS and JNIM are rival militant groups that not only target civilians and the military, but are also struggling for dominance over the other in the Sahel, and especially in Niger.

Wassim Nasr, an expert and researcher at the Soufan Centre think tank, said the two groups were trying to stake out their "territory" in Niger, which they see as "land up for grabs".

He said the country is one of the last contested strategic areas where terrorist groups are trying to expand, control routes and link their regional strongholds.

"Their priority today is the competition between them," he added. While targeting the

Niger state, the JNIM attack on Thursday was also a "message" to its rival the EIS that it too can strike Niamey airport, the expert said.

The rivalry leads to "a proliferation of high-intensity attacks against strategic and symbolic targets", said Henri Nsaibia, leading researcher for west Africa at ACLED, an NGO which tracks victims of conflict in the world.

Worsening regional security?

The EIS and JNIM are also active in neighbouring Burkina Faso and Mali, both allies of Niger and also ruled by military juntas that seized power in coups.

The three countries quit the Economic Community of West African States bloc, turned their backs on traditional Western partners in the fight against violence, especially France, and sought closer ties with Russia — without, however, managing to restore security.

The attack this week "illustrates the growing fragility of the security environment in Niger and, more broadly, in the central

Sahel", Nsaibia said.

Violence has continued to claim thousands of lives for more than a decade in the region.

Long confined to the hinterland, attacks have in recent months spread to the capitals.

In Mali, JNIM fighters teamed up with Tuareg rebels of the Azawad Liberation Front in April to target ruling junta positions, including near Bamako, that killed Defence Minister Sadio Camara, a key figure in the country's leadership.

It highlights "the expansion of terror groups' influence towards major population centres and critical infrastructure", Nsaibia said.

What's the outlook?

The best way to curb the jihadist violence is to initiate "political dialogue with local communities and the terror groups themselves", rather than opting for an all-military approach, Franklin Nossiter, a Sahel analyst at the International Crisis Group, said.

Ivory Coast's Deputy Prime Minister Tene Birahima Ouattara, whose country borders Mali and Burkina Faso, recently said: "Terrorism, as it currently presents itself, cannot be defeated by a single state."

"There has to be collaboration, a pooling of strengths," Ouattara, who is also defence minister, said.

He added that Ivory Coast was ready to resume security cooperation with the juntas of Burkina and Mali who had turned their backs on it.

Gaza health officials say Israeli strikes kill 10

GAZA CITY, Palestinian Territories (AFP) — Gaza health officials said Israeli strikes on Saturday killed 10 people, including four members of the same family, in the latest violence to rock the Palestinian territory despite a ceasefire.

Israel and Hamas trade near-daily accusations of truce violations and the Gaza Strip remains gripped by bloodshed as progress on permanently ending the war remains stalled.

An overnight Israeli airstrike on an apartment building in the Sabra neighbourhood of Gaza City killed four members of the Al Safadi family, including the husband, wife and their two daughters, according to the civil defence agency, a rescue service that operates under Hamas authority.

It said the strike also injured 12 others.

Gaza City's Al Shifa hospital confirmed receiving the bodies of four members of the Safadi family, including two children.

"Around 2 o'clock, my cousins were asleep when a missile struck them. They have no connection to Hamas, nor are they involved in anything. They're just innocent children," said Nael Al Safadi, a relative.

AFP footage from the scene showed an exterior wall of the apartment blown off, exposing rubble, clothes, mattresses



Men ride bicycles past a heavily-damaged building at the Nuseirat camp for Palestinian refugees in the central Gaza Strip on Friday

and other household belongings strewn across the shattered interior.

"By God, I still feel as though I'm in a dream — I never expected this to happen to us," Mohammad Al Safadi, who survived the strike, told AFP.

"I'm a civilian. I swear to God I've never carried a weapon or fired one. What do you want from me? Go after whoever

you're after, what's my fault in this?"

Al Shifa hospital, meanwhile, said it had received one body following a separate Israeli drone strike near an intersection in the north of Gaza City.

Later on Saturday, five more people were killed in separate Israeli attacks, including two when an Israeli aircraft targeted a house in the

Bureij refugee camp in central Gaza, the civil defence agency reported.

It said the two killed included a local Palestinian journalist working with Qatar-based Al Jazeera.

Ahmed Wishah was a cameraman for the channel, the network said, which condemned "the continuation of these crimes" against its journalists.

The military, however, said he was a "Hamas terrorist".

The Israeli military did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the other deaths.

At least 1,012 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza since the ceasefire took effect on October 10 last year, according to the territory's health ministry, which operates

under Hamas authority and whose figures are considered reliable by the United Nations.

The Israeli army has reported five deaths in its ranks during the same period.

Restrictions imposed on media outlets and limited access in Gaza prevent AFP from independently verifying tolls or freely covering the violence there.

UN Security Council warns of 'imminent risk of mass atrocities' in Sudan

UNITED NATIONS, United States (AFP) — The United Nations Security Council said Saturday it is concerned over the "imminent risk of mass atrocities" in Sudan as it called on paramilitary forces encircling El Obeid to back down.

The majority-Muslim southern city, in the Kordofan region, has been under siege for several months by the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), which has been at war with the regular army since April 2023.

"The members of the Security Council expressed concern at the imminent risk of mass atrocities and demanded the RSF immediately halt its assault on El Obeid," the Security Council said in a statement.

"Council members called on the parties to the conflict to immediately halt the fighting."

The UN has voiced fears that there could be a repeat of the atrocities committed during the October 2025 assault on the city of El Fasher, which it said bore "hallmarks of genocide".

The UN said on Friday that Pekka Haavisto, the secretary-general's special envoy for Sudan, had called

rebel paramilitary forces chief Mohamed Hamdan Daglo to urge him not to attack El Obeid.

Haavisto "underscored the need to urgently de-escalate the situation in El Obeid and avoid any actions that may further worsen the already dire humanitarian situation and put civilian lives further at risk", said Stephane Dujarric, spokesman for UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres.

The official said aid workers were "preparing for the potential movements of large numbers of people" fleeing the city, and that "our humanitarian colleagues are doing the responsible thing, which is getting ready for the worst while hoping for the best".

Dujarric said Haavisto was also talking to countries with influence over the warring parties to encourage dialogue and prevent the assault.

The conflict in Sudan has killed tens of thousands of people and forced more than 11 million from their homes, creating what the UN describes as the world's largest displacement and hunger crises.

Specter of military escalation hangs over Colombia vote

BOGOTÁ (AFP) — Colombians elect a new president on Sunday, with the frontrunner's plans for a military offensive against resurgent armed groups splitting voters, and even the military ranks.

On the eve of the vote, hard-right Abelardo de la Espriella has a slight polling edge over his leftist rival — hav-

ing promised an end to peace talks and to launch a wave of airstrikes against guerrillas and cartels.

A decade after peace accords ended a FARC leftist insurgency that killed a quarter of a million people, an alphabet soup of armed groups still control chunks of the country.

Many dissident fight-

ers have long since cast off ideology, focusing instead on illegal mining, kidnapping, extortion and above all global cocaine trafficking — their coffers filled by high prices and record production.

De la Espriella's promise to end years of sputtering peace talks with these groups, retake territory and put

"thugs" in "prison" or in "plastic bags" has won the backing of many Colombians.

In the first round, De la Espriella won 44 per cent of the vote against his nearest rival, leftist Ivan Cepeda, who tallied 41 per cent.

The military could expect to be a major winner from any De la Espriella presidency.

He has promised bumper defense budgets and wants to mend ties with Washington, which has provided the Colombian military with billions of dollars worth of aid over decades.

But sources inside the military have told AFP the armed forces were, like the population, divided on De la Espriella's plans.

One military source told AFP the younger ranks preferred to continue peace talks launched under the current leftist government and backed by Cepeda, while the older guard would support a fight to the death.

Colombia's constitution prevents the military from voting or campaigning openly.

But former officers have been willing to speak publicly.

Many said peace talks under the current government had failed, but warned zero-sum campaign promises to launch airstrikes and retake territory were going to collide with a difficult reality.

"I don't think a solution solely through

armed confrontation is viable," said former admiral Pablo Romero, echoing doubts about De la Espriella's strategy.

"Unfortunately, what we've seen is a decline in the capabilities of the public security forces, or a notable increase in the offensive capabilities of criminal organisations," he warned.

Second batch of National Service recruits begins training at Shweier Camp

Continued from page 1

The National Service Programme combines specialised military and vocational training designed to equip participants with the knowledge and skills needed to enhance their physical fitness,

operational readiness and professional capabilities.

The programme aims to prepare young Jordanians to serve their country and contribute actively to the Kingdom's development, the JAF said.

It also forms part of

broader national efforts to invest in youth, strengthen the values of belonging and loyalty, and develop qualified cadres capable of supporting Jordan's future development and meeting emerging challenges.

Each year, 6,000

young men would be selected, divided into three phases of 2,000 conscripts each, according to the Military Media Directorate.

The initiative builds on HRH Crown Prince Hussein's August announcement to reactivate the National

Service Programme, describing the effort as a national step to prepare and qualify young people through military training and a structured theoretical curriculum within the National Service and Reserve Service framework.

On behalf of King, Prince Feisal sponsors dinner marking GFP's inaugural Count Jacques Rogge Award

Continued from page 1

The honour recognises GFP's two decades

of pioneering work using sport as a tool for peacebuilding. Founded in Jordan, the

organisation is ranked 24th globally among the top 200 social good organisations.

Hormuz closure, Lebanon fighting threaten Iran-US deal

Continued from page 1

Political analyst Amer Saballeh said the memorandum should not be mistaken for a peace agreement.

"This is not a peace deal. It is a framework to launch negotiations," he said.

"During these 60 days, the parties either move forward or return to sanctions and military pressure."

Saballeh said Israel remains determined to isolate the Lebanon front from any broader understanding with Iran.

"For Israel, giving up the Lebanon front without resolving the Hizbollah issue would be a catastrophic option," he said.

He added that there is broad international consensus that the issue of Hizbollah's weapons must eventually be addressed.

Political analyst Areej Jabr said developments in Lebanon had become the biggest test facing the memorandum.

"The agreement's survival depends on Washington's ability to prevent the Lebanese front from destroying diplomacy

before negotiations even begin," she said.

Jabr added that Iran's decision to close the Strait of Hormuz again showed that Tehran still possesses significant leverage.

"The coming weeks will determine whether diplomacy regains momentum or whether developments on the ground overtake negotiations," she said.

With talks set to resume in Switzerland and tensions rising in Lebanon, diplomats fear the memorandum is facing its first and perhaps most difficult test.

JCDCF launches engineering works for Amra convention, exhibition centre

Continued from page 1

With an estimated cost of JD50 million, the facility will accommodate around 15,000 people at a time. It will feature large halls for conferences, meetings and events, in addition to supporting service facilities and extensive parking areas.

The design is based on economic and technical feasibility studies

and will be constructed in line with high sustainability standards, incorporating modern digital technologies. It will also be equipped to host multiple events simultaneously with high operational efficiency.

The centre aims to strengthen Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions (MICE) tourism, attract international events and host global summits,

supported by its strategic location along international highways, near Queen Alia International Airport, as well as the Omari and Jaber border crossings.

The construction tender is expected to be issued by the end of the third quarter of 2026, with completion scheduled for the end of 2027.

The announcement follows other developments under the first

phase of the Amra City project, including excavation and site preparation works for the King Hussein Bin Abdullah II International Stadium, as part of efforts to position the Kingdom as a regional hub for sports, tourism and investment.

JCDCF, a fully government-owned company under the Jordan Investment Fund, said it has held extensive

consultations with private sector experts and specialists to ensure the project meets both local and international standards for exhibitions and conference facilities. The company is responsible for overseeing implementation, facilitating investment opportunities and building partnerships to attract local and foreign investment to Amra City.

Competency frameworks will reshape public sector human resources management — Balbeisi

Continued from page 1

She said that at the institutional level, the frameworks will help government entities clearly define the knowledge, skills and behavioural competencies required for each job, enabling more accurate and objective HR decisions.

"When job requirements are clearly defined, institutions can select the most suitable candidates, better identify training needs,

develop employees based on actual gaps, and build more effective talent management and succession planning systems," she said.

At the employee level, Balbeisi said that the frameworks will provide greater clarity regarding career expectations and progression.

Employees, she added, will have a clearer understanding of what is required to succeed in their current roles and advance to future posi-

tions, allowing them to link training and professional development more directly to career growth.

She stressed that the ultimate impact of the reforms will be reflected in improved public service delivery.

"As selection, development and promotion become more competency-based, this will lead to faster service delivery, greater accuracy in procedures, improved interaction with citizens and stronger

institutional responsiveness," she said.

Balbeisi also stressed that implementation will be gradual and developmental rather than disruptive, particularly for existing public sector employees.

She said competency frameworks are designed as a tool for development rather than immediate evaluation, helping employees identify skill gaps and access targeted training programmes to support career

progression.

Future appointments and promotions, she added, will increasingly rely on competency-based criteria to strengthen merit and objectivity in HR decisions while ensuring alignment between job requirements and employees' actual capabilities.

Responding to questions about institutional readiness, particularly in technical fields such as digital transformation, data

management and cybersecurity, Balbeisi said that the adoption of competency frameworks is part of a broader reform process and not its final stage.

She noted that the transition requires complementary institutional tools that are being developed in parallel, including strengthening the Government Competency Centre and introducing diversified assessment methods capable of measuring

knowledge, technical skills and behavioural competencies.

"Work is also underway to develop modular training programmes directly linked to the competency frameworks, enabling continuous capacity building and helping institutions systematically close skills gaps over time," she added.

Balbeisi said that the frameworks are not merely reference documents, but the foundation for a long-

term transformation of public sector human resources, shifting the focus from inputs such as qualifications and experience to measurable performance, capability and outcomes.

She also stressed that while the frameworks establish a national reference for required competencies, full implementation depends on building institutional readiness gradually through training, assessment tools and system integration.

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Is the World approaching another economic recession?

By Raad Mahmoud Al-Tal

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has adopted a more cautious outlook than most international institutions regarding the economic consequences of the ongoing tensions in the Middle East. In its latest report, Global Economic Outlook 2026, the OECD warns that the conflict is no longer merely a regional geopolitical issue but has evolved into one of the most significant threats to the global economy since the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war.

Although the report was published prior to the recent agreement between the United States and Iran, its findings remain highly relevant. The global economy is already navigating a fragile recovery marked by persistent inflationary pressures, elevated interest rates, weak productivity growth and slowing international trade. Against this backdrop, renewed instability in the Middle East has become a major source of uncertainty, particularly given the region's central role in global energy markets. The Middle East accounts for nearly one-third of global oil production and hosts some of the world's most strategic energy transportation routes.

Under its baseline scenario, the OECD projects global economic growth of 2.8 per cent in 2026, rising modestly to 3.1 per cent in 2027. These projections, however, are based on the assumption that energy markets remain broadly stable and that no major disruptions occur in global oil and gas supplies.

The organisation also presents a less favorable scenario in which geopolitical tensions persist into next year, resulting in prolonged disruptions to energy markets. Under such conditions, global economic growth could fall to 2.1 per cent in 2026 and further decline to 1.8 per cent in 2027. Historically, global growth rates below 2 per cent have often been associated with near-recessionary conditions, particularly when accompanied by weak investment and elevated inflation.

The implications of such a slowdown would be substantial. With global output currently estimated at approximately \$120 trillion, a reduction in growth of more than one per centage point would translate into an annual loss exceeding \$1 trillion in economic activity. This is equivalent to the combined economic output of several medium-sized economies and would represent a significant setback for global prosperity.

The risks extend well beyond higher energy prices. Oil and natural gas are fundamental inputs across modern economies, influencing transportation, manufacturing, logistics and electricity generation. Consequently, sustained increases in energy costs would quickly feed into broader inflation, raising the prices of goods and services worldwide.

According to the OECD, this scenario could increase inflation across G20 economies by an additional 1.2 per centage points over the next two years. Such an outcome would place policymakers in a difficult position, as they would be forced to confront slower economic growth alongside rising prices — a combination commonly referred to as stagflation. This is among the most challenging macroeconomic environments because conventional policy tools often become less effective when inflation and economic stagnation occur simultaneously.

Energy is not the only area of concern. The Middle East is also a key supplier of several strategic commodities and industrial inputs. The OECD notes that supply disruptions could drive up fertiliser prices through higher sulfur costs and reduce the availability of helium, a critical resource used in medical technologies, electronics, and semiconductor manufacturing. As a result, the economic consequences would likely spread across agriculture, industry and advanced technology sectors.

Emerging and developing economies are expected to be particularly vulnerable. Many of these countries depend heavily on imported energy and food while possessing limited fiscal and monetary capacity to absorb external shocks. Consequently, rising commodity prices and tighter financial conditions could place significant pressure on public finances, exchange rates, and living standards.

Europe faces a distinct challenge. Having only recently emerged from the energy crisis triggered by the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the continent could once again be exposed to higher oil and gas prices. Such a development would increase production costs, undermine industrial competitiveness and weaken both consumption and investment across the region.

Financial markets would also be affected. Heightened geopolitical uncertainty typically leads investors to postpone major investment decisions, reducing capital flows and slowing economic activity. Prolonged uncertainty can therefore become an economic shock in its own right, even in the absence of physical disruptions to trade or energy supplies.

For Jordan and other energy-importing countries in the region, the risks are particularly evident. Higher oil prices would increase energy import bills, raise transportation and production costs and contribute to inflationary pressures. At the same time, trade balances could deteriorate and fiscal pressures could intensify, placing additional strain on economic policy.

The OECD's message is clear. The world is not yet facing a global recession, but the margin for error is becoming increasingly narrow. If instability in the Middle East persists and continues to disrupt energy markets and international trade, the global economy could enter a prolonged period of weaker growth and higher inflation. For an international economy still recovering from a succession of unprecedented shocks, another major disruption could impose costs exceeding 1 trillion dollars annually and significantly delay the path towards sustainable global growth.

Sport as an industry

Whenever Jordan achieves a sporting success in taekwondo, karate, or boxing, the same question arises: Why are we able to produce world-class and Olympic champions in certain individual sports, yet fail to achieve similar success in building clubs and national teams capable of sustained international competitiveness in football, basketball and other team sports?

In advanced economies, sport is no longer merely a recreational or youth activity. It has become a fully-fledged economic sector. Sport creates jobs, attracts investment, supports tourism and stimulates the media, technology and marketing industries. In the United Kingdom, for example, sport contributes approximately 2.6 per cent of GDP and supports more than 1 million direct jobs. Across many European countries, sport has become an integral part of national economic development strategies.

Average government expenditure on sport and recreational activities across the European Union amounts to roughly 0.4 per cent of GDP. In countries such as Finland, Sweden, and Hungary, the figure approaches 0.7 per cent. By contrast, Jordan still lacks dedicated national accounts capable of accurately measuring sport's contribution to GDP. The Ministry of Youth's budget represents only around 0.07 per cent-0.08 per cent of GDP and approximately 0.25 per cent of total government expenditure, while sports funding remains dispersed among the Ministry of Youth, the Olympic Committee, sports federations, universities, municipalities and the private sector.

Yet the challenge is not simply one of spending levels. Recent European studies suggest that sporting success is not always correlated with the amount of money spent, but rather with the efficiency of spending, the quality of governance, management and organisation. Therefore, the key question is not: How much do we spend on sport? Rather, how do we transform sport into a productive economic sector?

Modern sport operates through an integrated economic ecosystem consisting of broadcasting rights, sponsorships and advertising, ticket sales, memberships, sports academies, official merchandise, digital content and sports tourism. The more sophisticated this value chain becomes, the greater the ability of clubs and federations to invest in athletes, coaches and infrastructure.

In most major global leagues, broadcasting rights constitute the largest source of revenue, followed by sponsorships and advertising, then ticket sales, official merchandise, memberships and academies. In Jordan, however, most clubs continue to rely primarily on government support, semi-government funding, or donations, while commercial revenues remain extremely limited.

This brings us to perhaps the most important issue: Sports marketing. Marketing is not merely a mechanism for increasing club revenues; it is the primary engine for de-



ECONOMIC REVIEW

Yusuf Mansur

veloping sport itself. Every additional dinar generated through sponsorships, advertising, or merchandise sales translates into better training more academies, higher-quality coaching

and greater ability to retain talent. In other words, advertising does not merely finance sport — it develops it.

The American experience offers an important lesson. Although football — or what Americans call soccer — is the world's most popular sport, it has historically failed to become the dominant sport in the United States compared with American football, baseball and basketball. One major reason is economic and media-related.

The American sports market evolved around television and advertising. Major American sports feature frequent stoppages that create numerous opportunities for commercial breaks during games. Soccer, by contrast, is characterised by continuous play and relatively few interruptions, making it traditionally less attractive to broadcasters and marketers whose business models depend heavily on in-game advertising.

The example does not mean that soccer is unprofitable. Rather, its commercial model is different. Soccer relies more heavily on shirt sponsorships, stadium advertising boards, broadcasting rights, global fan bases and official merchandise. American football, meanwhile, evolved in a way that turns every stoppage into a commercial opportunity worth tens of millions of dollars for clubs and owners. This illustrates an important reality: sporting success depends not only on the number of players or fans but also on a sport's ability to become a marketable media and commercial product.

This is particularly relevant for Jordan. If Jordanian sport wishes to attract greater advertising revenues, it cannot rely solely on match-day exposure. It must create an integrated marketing ecosystem that includes digital content, athlete storytelling, sports academies, fan engagement events, official merchandise, youth development programmes, and women's sports sponsorships.

Saudi Arabia offers another important example of sport as an economic and strategic tool. The Kingdom has invested heavily in football, boxing, golf, Formula One and major international sporting events. The objective has not been purely athletic, but also economic, tourism-related, investment-driven, and media-oriented. The investments have contributed to reshaping Saudi Arabia's global image and have made sport an integral component of the Kingdom's nation-branding strategy, helping attract tourists, investors and international attention while strengthening its soft power.

Also, Qatar has pursued a similar strategy through hosting the FIFA World Cup 2022 and using sport as a platform to enhance its international profile and strengthen its economic, tourism and diplomatic standing.

The lesson for Jordan is not about matching the scale of Gulf spending, as economic capacities differ. Rather, it is about viewing sport as an economic investment and an instrument of soft power rather than merely a recreational activity.

This leads to another issue that is often overlooked in Jordanian sports discussions: sports intellectual property. In advanced sports economies, a club logo is not merely a drawing, a jersey is not merely a piece of fabric and a club name is not merely a name. These are all valuable economic and commercial assets.

The lesson for Jordan is not about matching the scale of Gulf spending, as economic capacities differ. Rather, it is about viewing sport as an economic investment and an instrument of soft power rather than merely a recreational activity

In the modern sports economy, a club's brand may be worth more than its stadium. The brand value of some global clubs reaches billions of dollars, reflecting accumulated trust, reputation, fan loyalty and sporting success. Real Madrid's brand value is estimated at around US\$2 billion, Liverpool's at approximately US\$1.6 billion, and Bayern Munich's at roughly US\$1.5 billion. Even if all their stadiums disappeared and their players left, the value of their names alone would still be measured in billions.

As a result, logos and jerseys are no longer merely sporting symbols; they are economic assets that generate revenues through merchandise sales, sponsorships, advertising and licensing agreements. If Jordanian clubs wish to improve their financial position, they must treat their brands as investment assets that require protection, development and active marketing.

When a fan purchases an official European club jersey, part of the purchase price flows directly to the club. When a company uses a club's logo or players' images, it pays licensing fees. In Jordan, however, markets remain saturated with counterfeit products, unauthorised jerseys, and insufficient protection of club trademarks. Every counterfeit jersey sold represents lost revenue

and destroyed economic value.

Yet, even if marketing and intellectual property challenges are addressed, an important question remains: Why do individual sports perform better in Jordan than team sports? The answer is largely economic. Individual sports require far lower levels of investment. A capable coach, a suitable training facility and a limited number of athletes may be sufficient to produce a world champion in taekwondo, karate, or boxing.

Team sports, by contrast, require a complete ecosystem that includes stadiums, academies, sports medicine, performance analytics, professional management, competitive leagues, sponsors, fan bases, broadcasting arrangements, transportation, accommodation, nutrition and continuous development programs. Simply put, individual sports require talent, while team sports require an industry.

This is why Jordan's success in taekwondo is not surprising, and why its difficulties in building globally competitive team sports programmes are equally unsurprising. If Jordan seeks a transformational leap in sport, the required reforms extend far beyond increasing financial support. First, Jordan should establish a national sports satellite account to measure sport's contribution to GDP, employment and investment. Second, major clubs should be transformed into professional institutions with independent commercial and marketing management. Third, a unified system for selling broadcasting rights should be developed to increase the commercial value of domestic leagues. Fourth, sports intellectual property must be protected and counterfeit merchandise must be strictly controlled. Fifth, tax incentives should be introduced for companies investing in sports and sports academies. Sixth, school and university sports infrastructure should be strengthened and linked more closely to clubs. Seventh, sports investment funds should be established to encourage private-sector participation in developing clubs and sports facilities. Eighth, a national digital sports marketing strategy should be developed to target audiences both within Jordan and internationally. Ninth, a portion of government support should be linked to performance indicators such as youth participation, self-generated revenues, fan engagement, governance standards and transparency.

The future of Jordanian sport will not be determined solely by the number of stadiums we build or the number of tournaments we host. It will be determined by our ability to build a genuine sports economy. Modern sport does not merely produce champions; it creates jobs, attracts investment, drives economic growth, enhances national branding and strengthens soft power. The challenge of developing sport in Jordan is therefore not simply a sporting challenge — it is an economic, developmental, and investment challenge.

The writer is a former Jordanian minister of State for Economic Affairs

What comes next after the Strait of Hormuz?

It was a mix of smart and luck that helped Jordan to navigate through strong turbulences over the past few months and during unprecedented events that destabilised the region.

Smartness by leadership that joined forces of other Arab States in the Middle East to practice a successful strategy based on self-distancing themselves from any direct clash with Iran. Meanwhile, it activated its diplomatic turbines to overcome this period with minimal losses.

Luck! Yes, it was luck, as no major incident was reported throughout this period in the country due to the fight between US, Israel and Iran. We didn't receive a painful hit that put us in front of tough choices. We were lucky, thanks to strong air defence set up that prevented such incidents.

However, after the e-signing

of the deal between US and Iran, where are we now? and what we are going to do to protect our country and people from such events in the future? as I see they are certainly coming, perhaps sooner than we anticipate.

Realism tells us we must look for best options to advance our defenses, through diversified strong coalitions and best of all weapons and training for our military. Also, the country must work harder to ensure a stronger solidarity among its people, this last factor needs a lot of work and efforts, giving that we in Jordan have a diversified spectrum of social differences and origins. "We are all Jordan" is the new phase for the efforts in this direction, with disregard to the divisions we might have among our societies.

After all, we had been through so many challenges and events,



Khaled Neimat

but they all finished and we remained together in this land. Economic and political modernisation programmes must succeed, and here comes the role of our executive body. The government — prime minister and his team must perform better always, with no room for failure or hesitation. In short, the government must play significant roles in the formulation of our future from political, social and economic perspectives. It must get out of its current silence and touch on the taboos.

The King should remain the guardian of all State bodies,

he is the symbol of our country's strength and power, he is the base of our people's unity and solidarity. He initiates the good, and the government must materialise it. The King is the past, the present and the future of our country and the government must act as a government, not only as a service provider.

Government must create jobs, enhance public services, pursue citizens satisfaction in all their needs. It must improve education, health, transportation ..etc. It must plan for the country to give the people hope. We do not have room for more reliance on others, we must think of getting up from our long sleep to rely on ourselves.

War in this fragile region will erupt again, as long as, we have the nasty and extremist neighbours next to us. So be ready for the coming War, this is not the end.

BUSINESS

Sunday, June 21, 2026



Photo courtesy of Amman Stock Exchange

A delegation led by head of Primary Markets for the Middle East and Africa at London Stock Exchange Group, Abi Ajayi, meet Amman Stock Exchange to discuss cooperation

London Stock Exchange delegation visits ASE to explore opportunities for promoting investment

AMMAN (JT) — A delegation led by head of Primary Markets for the Middle East and Africa at LSEG (London Stock Exchange Group), Abi Ajayi, discussed on Saturday ways to strengthen cooperation and exchange expertise between the London Stock Exchange (LSE) and the Amman Stock Exchange (ASE).

They also explored ways to promote investment opportunities at the ASE and encourage investors in the United Kingdom to take advantage of them, including necessary arrangements to hold Jordan Day in cooperation with LSE.

During the meeting, the ASE CEO Mazen Wathafi reviewed the exchange's key performance indicators. He noted that, despite the challenges, the ASE achieved outstanding results and record-breaking figures, according to an ASE statement.

These achievements were supported by growing confidence in the national economy and the attractiveness of Jordan's investment environment, as well

as positive economic indicators that reflected the national economy ability to adapt to changing conditions and its capacity to overcome challenges.

Wathafi added that the continuous improvements to the investment environment, supported by government incentives for economic sectors, the implementation of projects under the Economic Modernisation Vision and the launch of several major strategic projects, have had a direct positive impact on the performance of the ASE and its listed companies.

As a result, the ASE ranked first in the region and thirteenth globally in terms of growth in its General Index ASEGI. In addition, the companies listed on the ASE achieved the second-highest profits in their history, indicating that there are significant and important investment opportunities at the ASE.

He also highlighted the ASE's ongoing efforts to develop its regulatory framework and digital services, as well as to imple-

ment the latest standards and best practices in order to enhance its competitiveness and attractiveness to investors.

He noted that Jordan's capital market enjoys an adequate legislative and technical infrastructure that aligns with the latest international standards and best practices, particularly in the areas of trading, regulations, financial services, disclosure requirements, clearing, and settlement systems and investor protection.

Ajayi said, "Jordan's economy demonstrates strong fundamentals, anchored by a dynamic private sector, deep entrepreneurial talent and a clear commitment to reform."

He added, "At the London Stock Exchange, we see a real opportunity to partner with the Amman Stock Exchange to support Jordan in scaling its most promising companies by connecting them to deeper pools of international capital and enhancing global investor visibility," according to ASE statement.

Jordan Silos records JD20m revenue as Kingdom strengthens food security reserves

By Ilham Darwazeh

AMMAN — The Jordan Silos and Supply General Company generated around JD20 million in sales and service revenue in 2025, while transferring JD3 million to the Treasury as a financial surplus and paying nearly JD304,000 in taxes and national contributions.

The company announced the figures during its annual ordinary general assembly meeting, which Board Chairman Anwar Ajarmeh chaired in the presence of board members, General Manager Emad Tarawneh and shareholders representing 100 per cent of the company's shares.

Shareholders approved the company's 2025 annual report, financial statements and external auditor's report. The company reiterated its role in managing Jordan's strategic grain reserves and supporting the Kingdom's food security system.

Established under Cabinet Decision No. 657 in 2000, Jordan Silos serves as the storage arm for strategic reserves of grains and essential food commodities in line with the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Supply's policies, according to the Jordan News Agency, Petra.

The company's results come as Jordan continues to strengthen food security measures amid regional tensions and uncertainty surrounding global supply chains.

The Ministry of Industry, Trade and Supply told The Jordan Times, Kingdom maintains strategic reserves



JT file

The Jordan Silos and Supply General Company

of wheat and barley at safe levels under a precautionary food security policy designed to secure supplies of essential commodities.

The ministry's spokesperson said available wheat stocks can meet domestic demand for more than 10 months, while barley reserves are sufficient for more than nine months, placing Jordan among the countries with the highest reserve coverage levels globally.

The spokesperson also said developments in the Strait of Hormuz do not affect Jordan's wheat and barley imports because the Kingdom does not use the waterway to source either commodity.

Jordan's total grain storage capacity stands at around 2.25 million tonnes, one of the largest capacities in the region, enabling the Kingdom to main-

tain strategic reserves during both normal and emergency conditions, according to the ministry.

The ministry said its food security strategy focuses on diversifying import sources, increasing reserve levels, modernising and expanding storage infrastructure, supporting local wheat and barley production, and broadening shipping routes and supply channels.

Food security expert Fadel El Zubi recently told The Jordan Times that Jordan's wheat security remains strong despite the Kingdom's heavy dependence on imports.

"Jordan's wheat security is, in truth, a quiet success. The shelves are safe, the reserves are deep and the country has avoided the panic that often accompanies global food crises," El Zubi said.

He noted that Jordan imports around 97 per cent of its wheat requirements but maintains reserves that cover between five and eight months of consumption, providing flexibility during periods of global market volatility.

El Zubi argued that the main challenge lies in the financial cost of maintaining food security rather than in the availability of supplies.

"The danger is not empty shelves, but a strained Treasury and rising foreign currency costs," he said, referring to the cost of maintaining strategic reserves and bread subsidies during periods of elevated global commodity prices.

He also highlighted the economic impact of food waste, citing estimates that around 34 per cent of Jordan's wheat supply is lost or

wasted along the value chain at an annual cost of about \$105 million.

"Every percentage point of wheat waste reduced simultaneously eases the import bill, lowers subsidy expenditures and relieves foreign exchange pressures," El Zubi said.

He called for measures that would strengthen the long-term sustainability of Jordan's food security system, including reducing food waste, expanding private sector participation in grain storage, diversifying suppliers and reforming subsidy mechanisms.

As Jordan works towards expanding its strategic reserves in the coming years, policymakers face the challenge of balancing strong food security buffers with the financial cost of sustaining them.

OUTPUT

Manufacturing industries volume annually stands at \$21b — JCI

AMMAN (JT) — President of the Jordan Chamber of Industry (JCI) Fathi Jaghbir affirmed on Saturday that the manufacturing industries form the "backbone" of the Kingdom's industrial sector, with its total output reaching around \$21 billion annually, while intermediate consumption stands at some \$11.6 billion.

Jaghbir said, "This generates an added value estimated at \$9.3 billion annually, representing 45 per cent of the total gross output," the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.

He noted that this ratio reflects the significant economic impact of the manufacturing sector in generating income and wealth within the national economy.

Jaghbir added that value-added manufacturing is a key driver of sustainable economic growth, due to its role in transforming raw materials into products with higher economic value, which directly translates into increased productivity, job creation, enhanced exports and a



File photo

President of the Jordan Chamber of Industry Fathi Jaghbir says on Saturday that the total output of the Kingdom's manufacturing sector reaches around \$21 billion annually

higher contribution of the industrial sector to the gross domestic production (GDP).

Managing Director of Operations at the World Bank Anna Bjerde highlighted, during her visit to the Kingdom, the importance of value-added manufacturing as an industry that creates local jobs and supports economic growth.

Jaghbir said the manufacturing sector is characterised by its high capacity for job creation compared to

many other economic activities.

The sector employs around 254,000 workers distributed across nearly 18,000 industrial establishments in various governorates, making it one of the largest employment-generating sectors supporting social and economic stability.

President emphasised that the importance of high value-added manufacturing is particularly evident in the chemical, pharmaceutical, food, en-

gineering, leather and garment industries.

These sectors serve as key growth drivers under the Economic Modernisation Vision, given their ability to achieve high added value, boost the competitiveness of the national economy, increase exports, attract quality investments and create sustainable jobs for Jordanians.

He pointed out the importance of aligning education and technical and vocational training outcomes

with industrial needs, developing local value chains, and incentivising projects aimed at import and export promotion.

It also includes improving the business environment, lowering production, energy and financing costs, and maximising the utilisation of trade agreements enjoyed by Jordan.

The Kingdom ranked first in the Arab world and 27th globally in terms of the manufacturing sector's contribution to GDP, according to the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation.

This reflects the maturity of the national production base and the depth of industrial value chains compared to many economies that rely on low value-added primary production.

According to the JCI, the industrial sector's added value reached JD8.6 billion in 2025, compared to JD4.4 billion in 2010, marking a cumulative increase of over 94 per cent and an annual growth rate of nearly 5 per cent over the past decade, Petra reported.

SSIF, Arab Mining Company sign MoU to explore investment in phosphate fertiliser sector

AMMAN (JT) — The Social Security Investment Fund (SSIF) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Arab Mining Company (AMC) under which SSIF will explore the potential acquisition of a stake in the Arab Phosphate Mining Company, AMC's wholly owned subsidiary developing a phosphate fertiliser manufacturing project in Jordan.

The agreement was signed by SSIF Chief Executive Officer Izzeddin Kanakrieh and AMC Chairman of the Board of Directors Mohammed Shahi, in the presence of Social Security Investment Board Chairman Omar Malhas, AMC Director General Hassan Takroui, and senior officials from both organisations, according to an SSIF statement.

Speaking at the signing ceremony, Malhas described the MOU as an important step towards exploring an investment opportunity in a sector where Jordan holds genuine competitive advantages.

He emphasised SSIF's focus on projects that maximise the value added of national resources and generate sustainable economic impact, noting that the fund's existing investments in the mining sector stand at approximately JD1.8 billion.

Kanakrieh said that the



Petra photo

The Social Security Investment Fund and the Arab Mining Company sign a Memorandum of Understanding aimed at establishing a cooperation framework and exploring the fund's potential investment in the Arab Phosphate Mining Company

MoU will enable the fund to review the project's technical, economic, and environmental studies and complete the assessments required for an investment decision in line with SSIF's institutional frameworks.

"SSIF follows a rigorous methodology grounded in feasibility analysis and risk management before committing to any new investment," he said, adding that the fund remains focused on opportunities that combine viable financial returns with meaningful development impact in support of Jordan's Economic Modernisation Vision.

Shahi welcomed the agreement, describing it as a model partnership between leading investment and development institutions.

"This MOU is a first

and significant step towards a promising opportunity in Jordan's mining and phosphate industries," he said.

"Through the phosphate mining project in the Al Risha area and the development of an integrated fertiliser industry, we aim to maximise the utilisation of Jordan's natural resources in alignment with sustainable economic development goals," Shahi added.

Established under a resolution of the Arab Economic Unity Council, AMC is a pan-Arab joint company headquartered in Amman.

The company develops mining and manufacturing projects across the Arab world with the aim of advancing economic integration and sustainable development, according to the statement.

'Not ridiculous': US dreams of World Cup glory after big wins

TENNIS

Cerundolo sees off Nakashima to reach Queen's final

LONDON (AFP) — Seventh seed Francisco Cerundolo booked his place in the final at Queen's Club with a hard-fought 6-7 (5/7), 6-3, 6-4 win over the American Brandon Nakashima on Saturday. "I'm super happy because it's my first final in an ATP 500," Cerundolo said on court at the end of the match. The pair went toe to toe on the grass of the Wimbledon warm-up in the first set before the 24-year-old Nakashima got the edge in the tiebreak, taking it 7/5. The 27-year-old Argentine hit back in the second, breaking to go up 4-3 and picking up the next two games to square the match. The decider went with break until Cerundolo produced a perfect cross-court forehand that left Nakashima swishing at air. The break put him 3-2 up but he couldn't retain the advantage with the American, now coached by former world no.6 Wayne Ferreira who won at Queen's in 1992, breaking straight back. Cerundolo, who won a grass title at Eastbourne in 2023, broke again to go 5-4 up and duly served out for the match. "It was a really challenging match, really tough," said Cerundolo. "I think Brandon is playing incredible too. He was playing amazing during the whole weekend today also. I'm super happy because I just stayed there competing."

Sabalenka roars back to make Berlin WTA semis

BERLIN (AFP) — World No.1 Aryna Sabalenka stormed back from the cusp of defeat to beat Czech Nikola Pietrangola and reach the last four of the WTA event in Berlin on Friday. Sabalenka won 2-6, 7-6 (7/2), 6-4 in sweltering conditions in the German capital in the traditional Wimbledon warm-up event. Pietrangola, the World No.1 62, stormed to take the first set and led 4-0 in the second as a visibly frustrated Sabalenka struggled on serve and could not pose any kind of danger with her return. With elimination looming, the Belarusian suddenly clicked into gear, winning five straight games before taking the second set in a tiebreak. The heat began to wear on both players in the third set, with Sabalenka breaking her opponent three times but suffering two breaks herself before taking the match in two hours and 23 minutes. Sabalenka will face American World No.4 Jessica Pegula, who beat close friend and podcast co-host Madison Keys 7-6 (7/5), 7-6 (10/8) earlier on Friday.

By Andrew Marszal
Agence France-Presse

SEATTLE — Could the United States really win the World Cup?

After two opening victories, by an aggregate 6-1 scoreline, that is the wildly optimistic question being posed to many US television pundits, including Fox's Zlatan Ibrahimovic, who answered a simple "Yes."

While aware they are still vast underdogs against traditional powerhouses like Spain, France and Argentina, the US players were not exactly afraid to stoke those hugely ambitious dreams either, after beating Australia 2-0 Friday.

"I think we came here to compete, and to compete, you have to win every game," US star midfielder Malik Tillman told AFP in Seattle after the win.

"In the end, if you want to win the tournament, same again, you have to win every game. I think that's also our goal for the next one."

So far the US have only faced limited opposition in Paraguay, which it beat 4-1, and Australia. Next up is eliminated Turkey, in what will be a dead rubber for both teams.

Sterners tests surely awaits in the knockout, with Belgium and then Spain among the likeliest foes in wait if the US win its last-32 clash.

It is worth noting that the US have only won one knockout game in its entire World Cup history —



Malik Tillman was on superb form in the United States' 2-0 win over Australia in Seattle

a 2-0 win over Mexico in the round-of-16 in 2002, when they reached the quarter-finals in its best campaign of modern times.

World Cup hosts do have an impressive track record of lifting the trophy on their home turf.

Six have won in the tournament's history, most recently France in 1998, who followed up that inaugural win by building a dynasty and reaching three more finals.

But no host winners

have ever been such extreme long shots as the US, perennially seen as potential future giants of untapped promise, too distracted by home-grown sports like NFL, basketball and baseball to truly compete at the world's most popular sport.

'Why not us?'

If that has started to change, the rapid rise of the domestic Major Soccer League has played a part, providing home-

grown talent like Friday's goalscorer Alex Freeman.

So too has the emergence of a "golden generation" of stars playing for Champions League clubs, like AC Milan forward Christian Pulisic, Juventus midfielder Weston McKennie and Bayer Leverkusen's Tillman.

But perhaps no factor has been as great as the expensive hiring of elite coach Mauricio Pochettino, who deconstructed and rebuilt an underperforming, complacent squad in his own image.

US and Crystal Palace center-half Chris Richards on Friday praised the former Tottenham Hotspur, Chelsea and Paris Saint-Germain manager's track record and motivational powers for instilling belief.

"We've seen him do it with big teams, and he's very passionate in the way that he speaks," said Richards.

"It kind of reflects on us as well. So we take that passion and we try to apply it to how we go out there on the pitch."

While urging his players to remain grounded and focused, Pochettino has urged fans to dream, frequently asking "Why not us?" in public comments.

So, does Richards really believe the US could pull off what would be comfortably the greatest upset World Cup win in modern history?

"Obviously we take it one game at a time," said Richards.

"But I don't think it's ridiculous to say that we want to win it," he said.

LIFE

THE JORDAN TIMES

Plague was killing hunter-gatherers 5,500 years ago — study

PARIS, France (AFP) — The plague was causing deadly outbreaks among communities of hunter-gatherers in Siberia around 5,500 years ago, according to a study on Wednesday that sheds light on how humans could have first caught this scourge.

The plague is generally associated with rats spreading the disease through crowded mediaeval cities, sparking pandemics such as the Black Death that killed tens of millions of people across Europe from the 1300s to 1800s.

This was a long way from the rugged vistas surrounding Lake Baikal in the Russian region of Siberia, where archaeologists have spent decades studying the burial sites of pre-historic hunter-gatherers.

One of these sites has been particularly mystifying because of its "very unusual mortality profile" — many children and adolescents appear to have died over a short period, Oxford University researcher Ruairidh Macleod told journalists.

The skeletons also bore no signs of violence or trauma, meaning there was "no reasonable explanation" for this catastrophic event, said the



Ancient DNA shows plague killed Siberian hunter-gatherers 5,500 years ago, before cities and flea-borne epidemics

lead author of the new study in the journal Nature.

When the team of researchers sequenced ancient DNA from 46 people across four sites near the lake, they found *Yersinia pestis* — the bacteria responsible for the plague — in 18 of them.

This means nearly 40 per cent of these people had the plague — a higher rate than has been detected in some mediaeval mass graves. Trying to identify plague in such ancient DNA also throws up many false negatives.

The results were therefore "consistent with pretty much everybody having died of plague"

at the burial sites across two outbreaks, the earliest of which was 5,500 years ago, Macleod said.

"This was a 'complete surprise', he added.

Not a 'golden age'

Until this discovery, the oldest traces of plague had been detected among farming communities in northern Europe around 5,300 years ago.

However, exactly how deadly these ancient strains were has been "hotly debated" in the scientific community, according to the new study's senior study author Eske Willerslev.

It had been thought

that this kind of outbreak could not occur among hunter-gatherers, said the geneticist at Cambridge University and the University of Copenhagen.

Because they lived in small groups and were constantly moving around, it was believed that "infectious disease can't really take a hold and devastate entire communities", he said.

This led the authors of some best-selling pop science books such as Yuval Noah Harari of "Sapiens" and Jared Diamond to portray the time of hunter-gatherers as a "kind of golden age" without disease or ill-

ness, Willerslev said.

"Well, it wasn't that easy to be a hunter-gatherer," he said, adding that it now looks like the plague was probably "very common" for them.

It was famously rats that spread the plague in the Middle Ages, but for these prehistoric Siberian outbreaks, a different animal was likely to blame: The Tarbagan marmot.

"Marmots are thought to be the original host species that plague first evolved in," Macleod explained.

Even today, cases of plague spread by marmots are regularly recorded in Siberia and Mongolia, where the rodents are hunted for their fur and meat.

This could have also been how the hunter-gatherers originally caught the virus.

"Presumably the first infection was from an animal interaction and then spread among humans" via respiratory droplets, said study co-author Astrid Iversen, a virology professor at Oxford.

She pointed out that today, the World Health Organisation estimates three-quarters of all new infectious diseases jump over from animals into humans.

'There's no soul': Tony Leung weighs in on AI in filmmaking

By Rebecca Bailey
Agence France-Presse

SHANGHAI — One of the things Hong Kong superstar Tony Leung Chiu-wai likes about acting is the novelty — "you will never repeat the same role".

When it comes to the changes wrought on his beloved cinema by technology like AI, though, there are some things it seems he would rather keep constant.

The 63-year-old is president of the main jury at the Shanghai International Film Festival (SIFF) this year, and on Friday sat down with AFP and The Hollywood Reporter for a wide-ranging interview that took in artificial intelligence, Chinese cinema and his future projects.

Filmmaking has not been exempt from the disruption meted out onto the creative industries by AI's rapid development in recent years.

"I think AI is a double-edged sword," Leung said when asked about its impact.

"It saves a lot of time" means it saves a lot of money... But at the same time, a lot of people will lose their jobs."

The beneficiaries, he predicted, will be mainstream "popcorn movies". "You don't need to think. There's no creative. That's just calculation."

Filmmakers are experimenting more with new tech tools, with SIFF this year debuting an initiative in which selected teams were given a month to create short AI-assisted films. Asked whether he thought a movie created with AI could truly be considered art, Leung paused for several seconds.

"But there's no soul," he answered almost plaintively. He paused again.

"I don't think so. I don't think it's an art. No."

Leung is clear-eyed about the challenges facing cinema globally — especially the clamour for attention against streaming, gaming and short-form content pushed by algorithms on social media.

He said he "really hate[s]" phone viewing.

"I feel sad. When I was a kid I used to watch movies in a big cinema with a big screen and somehow it's going smaller and smaller these days," he said.

"To me movies shouldn't be watched outside the cinema."

Creativity and censorship

Leung's collaborations with fellow Hong Konger Wong Kar-wai are emblematic of the golden age of the city's film industry in the 80s and 90s.

An icon of Asian art-

house, he has also taken on Hollywood, playing a supervillain in Marvel's "Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings" in 2021. He received a Golden Lion for lifetime achievement at the Venice Film Festival in 2023.

SIFF is showing a retrospective of his works this year, but Leung will not be in the audience.

"I'm the kind of actor who doesn't like to look back to my old films," he laughed.

There was a time when the mainland Chinese industry was still in a "learning stage", including from Hong Kong, he said.

"Now they have their own thinking of making movies because they are the only ones who know the local culture, the local texture," he added.

Though he professed to not know the mainland scene "very well", he pinpointed animation and small-scale productions as bright spots.

The latter was allowing for experimentation without huge financial risk, which was good for the film industry as a whole, he said.

"At the same time, maybe they need to loosen their censorship a bit in order to have more different kinds of movie and less restriction creating-wise," he added.



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