



DEVELOPMENT
Agriculture water minister highlights Jordan's drive to boost drought resilience, water security



TIES
Ministerial delegation meets Iraqi PM to discuss boosting trade, energy cooperation



GROWTH
Non-Jordanian ownership of ASE-listed companies reaches 46.4%



FOOTBALL
Harry Kane: England's World Cup saviour



Friday-Saturday, July 3-4, 2026 | Muharram 18-19, 1448 Hijri

Jordan, Qatar send relief assistance to earthquake-stricken Venezuela

AMMAN (JT) — Under Royal directives, Jordan on Thursday dispatched relief, medical and food assistance to Venezuela, in cooperation with Qatar, to support those affected by the double earthquake that struck several areas of the country.

A Qatari C-17 aircraft departed from Amman for Caracas carrying 26 tonnes of specialised medical supplies for treating injuries, medical consumables, basic food items and relief parcels to meet the urgent needs of affected families, according to a statement by the Jordan Armed Forces-Arab Army.

The shipment also included equipment for the Jordanian International Search and Rescue Team, affiliated with the Public Security Directorate, which began search, rescue and relief operations in Venezuela earlier this week.

A second Qatari aircraft is scheduled to depart Amman on Friday carrying a similar shipment of medical, relief and food assistance.

The aid is intended



Under Royal directives, Jordan on Thursday dispatches relief, medical and food assistance to Venezuela, in cooperation with Qatar, to support those affected by the double earthquake that struck several areas of the country

to strengthen the capacity of the relevant authorities to respond

to the earthquake's aftermath, support the health sector and provide essential supplies to affected communities, helping ease hu-

manitarian suffering.

The assistance is part of Jordan's ongoing humanitarian efforts under the directives of His Majesty King Abdullah, reflecting the Kingdom's longstanding commitment to supporting countries and communities affected by natural disasters and humanitarian crises through the provision of relief and emergency assistance, the statement said.

Tens of thousands of people urgently need food and shelter in Venezuela due to the devastation from two huge earthquakes that killed more than 1,700 and injured 5,000, the UN said on Tuesday, as doctors warned of potential outbreaks of disease.

Last week's 7.2 and 7.5 magnitude quakes — the strongest to hit the country in more than a century — have left tens of thousands unaccounted for and prompted a frantic search and rescue operation for survivors trapped in the rubble of flattened buildings.

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This handshake photo released by the Lebanese Presidency press office shows Lebanon's President Joseph Aoun (right) meeting with Syria's Foreign Minister Asaad Al Shaibani at the presidential palace in Baabda on Thursday

Syrian top diplomat reassures Lebanese leaders on Beirut visit

BEIRUT, Lebanon (AFP) — Syrian Foreign Minister Asaad Al Shaibani told Lebanon's president on Thursday that Damascus had no intention of intervening militarily in his country, despite US pressure to do so, according to the Lebanese presidency.

Shaibani, who also in-

visited President Joseph Aoun to Syria, is visiting Beirut, where he met parliament speaker Nabih Berri, a Hezbollah ally, for the first time.

US President Donald Trump has repeatedly said that Syria could "take care of Hizbollah", criticising Israel's strategy in its war with the Iran-backed mili-

tant group. But Syrian President Ahmed Al Sharaa, who came to power in December 2024 after leading a coalition that toppled longtime ruler Bashar Assad, has stated that he has no intention of intervening or reopening old wounds.

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This photo shows a wildfire raging near houses in Pouzols-Minervois, south-western France, on Thursday

French scramble to find air conditioners before next heatwave

PARIS, France (AFP) — Hundreds of people besieged supermarkets in and around Paris on Thursday, with scuffles and shouting matches breaking out as residents scrambled to get their hands on bar-

gain air-cooling units before the next heatwave hits the French capital.

With few air conditioners on sale elsewhere for less than 1,200 euros (\$1,400), police were called to

at least two stores as huge crowds descended on Lidl supermarkets trying to get their hands on basic models on sale for as low as 179 euros.

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'Positive progress' in US-Iran indirect talks in Doha — Qatar spokesman

DOHA (AFP) — US and Iran negotiators made "positive progress" during indirect talks in Doha, with the next round expected after the late Iranian supreme leader's funeral, Qatar's foreign ministry spokesman said.

"Qatar & Pakistan mediators concluded separate meetings with the US & Iranian negotiators in Doha today, with positive progress made on issues related to the Islamabad Memorandum of Understanding, building on the outcomes of the Lake Lucerne Summit," Foreign Ministry spokesman Majed Al Ansari said Wednesday on X.

"The parties agreed to continue discussions over the coming period, with the next meeting to be scheduled at the earliest possible time following the funeral processions of the



US and Iran negotiators made 'positive progress' during indirect talks in Doha, Qatar's foreign ministry spokesman said

former Iranian Supreme Leader."

Iran and the United States concluded a round of indirect talks in Doha,

mediators said on Thursday, as efforts continued to advance negotiations and lower tensions following recent exchanges

of fire.

In June, Washington and Tehran agreed a Memorandum of Understanding, brokered

by Qatar and Pakistan, which included a 60-day ceasefire pausing the war that broke out with US-Israeli strikes in late February, as well as the reopening of the blockaded Strait of Hormuz.

US President Donald Trump hailed the progress of indirect talks between the United States and Iran in Qatar, as the sides aimed to push forward negotiations and quell tensions following exchanges of fire.

Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Kazem Gharibabadi, who led Tehran's delegation, later said the talks had concluded and that the sides had agreed to establish a communication channel by Thursday to report and record violations of their initial Memorandum of Understanding.

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Hope fades, hunger grows a week after Venezuela quakes

LA GUAIRA, Venezuela (AFP) — Hope of finding more survivors faded on Wednesday as Venezuela marked a week since twin earthquakes killed almost 2,300 people, while many who lived through the disaster were running desperately short on food.

As the death toll mounted, Venezuela's interim president Delcy Rodriguez declared seven days of mourning, saying the country's "soul is torn apart by the human losses".

Tens of thousands of people remain unaccounted for.

The majority of collapsed buildings in the hardest-hit city of



An Osprey aircraft overflies a quake-hit area in Caraballeda, La Guaira State, Venezuela on Sunday, following twin earthquakes

La Guaira, just north of Caracas, have been marked with the letter

"D" for "deceased" — a sign they had been searched with no signs

of life found. "Time isn't wasted in a place where there

is no expectation of recovering people alive," said Javier Rodes, the coordinator of a Spanish rescue team whose sniffer dog Nala searched in vain through the rubble for traces of life.

There have been miracle survivors, such as a three-year-old boy found alive Tuesday, six days after Venezuela's most powerful quake in over a century.

But experts say trapped victims are unlikely to survive more than 72 hours.

"No one is coming out of here, alive or dead," said Jose Rafael, standing among the ruins where his son is miss-

ing in the town of Caraballeda in La Guaira state.

Elsewhere a group of residents was left frustrated after an American rescuer informed them there were "no signs of life" from another heap of rubble.

Many had believed they would find their relatives alive after hearing sounds from within the debris.

Venezuela's National Assembly President Jorge Rodriguez said Wednesday that deaths had risen to 2,295, and more than 11,000 people were injured.

He said almost 13,000 people had been left homeless.

A fight for food

The United Nations estimates 50,000 people are missing.

The two powerful quakes, measuring 7.2 and 7.5, shattered entire neighbourhoods in oil-rich Venezuela, which has suffered decades of economic crisis that devastated infrastructure and health services.

The country is in a fragile transition six months after the United States ousted leader Nicolas Maduro, and lives under constant pressure from Washington for access to Venezuela's oil and oth-

er natural resources. The US has around 2,000 personnel assisting in the response, General Francis Donovan, the head of US Southern Command, told journalists on Wednesday.

International rescue teams arrived from around the globe to dig out survivors, while locals are furious at the absence of the state in the aftermath of the disaster.

With daily life in ruins, the focus is now shifting to survival. Many are homeless and food and water are becoming scarce.

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Petra photo

Jordan on Thursday launches the implementation phase of a European Union-funded project to support social and economic recovery and promote sustainable local development by improving the archaeological site of Machaerus

Jordan launches EU-funded project to develop Machaerus archaeological site

AMMAN (JT) — Jordan on Thursday launched the implementation phase of a European Union-funded project to support social and economic recovery and promote sustainable local development by improving the archaeological site of Machaerus.

The project is financed by the EU and implemented by the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS) in Amman, in partnership with the Department of Antiquities (DoA) and the University of Perugia, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.

Minister of Tourism and Antiquities Imad Hijazin, EU Ambassador to Jordan Pierre-Christophe Chatzisavvas, Italian Ambassador to Jordan Luciano Pezzotti, and Apostolic Nuncio to Jordan Archbishop Giovanni Pietro Dal Toso attended the launch ceremony.

Swedish Ambassador to Jordan Maria

Sargren, Hungarian Ambassador to Jordan Péter Jakab, UNESCO Representative to Jordan Noha Bawazir, DoA Director-General Fawzi Abudana, and representatives of partner institutions and the local community also attended the event.

Speaking at the launch ceremony, Hijazin said that the Machaerus development project marks an "important" step to enhance the site's position on the global religious tourism map.

He said that the project's success depends not only on upgrading the archaeological site but also on engaging the local community as a "key" partner in protecting and managing the site while benefiting from the development opportunities it creates.

He expressed appreciation to the EU, AICS, the Italian embassy, UNESCO and other partners for supporting a project that contributes to preserving Jor-

dan's cultural heritage and advancing sustainable local development.

Chatzisavvas said that the project has moved from the planning stage to implementation following extensive preparation and coordination among partners.

He said that work will focus on conserving the archaeological site, carrying out restoration work related to the site's caves, and involving the local community to ensure the project delivers direct development benefits to residents.

Pezzotti said that the initiative reflects the "close" partnership between Jordan, Italy and the European Union, highlighting Machaerus' exceptional historical and religious significance.

He said that the project will help boost the site's status as a "leading" religious and cultural tourism destination while preserving its heritage for future generations.

Agriculture minister highlights Jordan's drive to boost drought resilience, water security

AMMAN (JT) — Climate change, particularly drought, has escalated from an environmental challenge into a strategic national issue directly tied to Jordan's water security, food security, and socio-economic stability, Minister of Agriculture Saeb Khreisat said on Thursday.

Speaking at the opening workshop of a Japan-backed initiative titled "From Scarcity to Sustainability: Building Adaptive Interventions to Address Drought in Agriculture — Climate Adaptation and Enhancing Jordan's Drought Resilience", Khreisat noted that Jordan is actively countering these impacts by shifting from crisis management to a proactive, integrated national approach focused on long-term drought risk mitigation.

He noted that the government continues to expand its water resource infrastructure, with the Kingdom's rainwater harvesting facilities now totalling 570 structures with a capacity of 95 million cubic metres, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.

Khreisat said that the ministry has implemented 300 of these projects, securing 36 million cubic metres of storage, while additionally funding 3,683 household harvesting wells to support rural communities.

Jordan is scaling up the safe utilisation of treated wastewater, recycling some 200 million cubic metres annually in compliance with rigorous national standards to alleviate pressure on freshwater reserves.

Khreisat said that the ministry is enhancing agricultural productiv-



File photo

The King Talal Dam in Jerash Governorate in the Tal Rumman Heights area, 50 kilometres north of Amman

ity and water-use efficiency by expanding modern and smart irrigation systems, digital transformation, remote sensing technologies, artificial intelligence and geographic information systems.

Agricultural investments, he added, are also being directed towards water basins with sustainable extraction rates to optimise water use, maximise economic returns and preserve groundwater reserves.

To bolster sector preparedness, the ministry is implementing climate-smart agriculture programmes, expanding hydroponics and protected agriculture, and introducing drought-tolerant crop varieties, he added.

These efforts are reinforced by early warning systems, agricultural research, plant genetic preservation via the Na-

tional Centre for Agricultural Research's seed bank, a comprehensive national agricultural map, and the activation of the Agricultural Risk Management Fund.

Khreisat said that the ministry is implementing sustainable rangeland management programmes covering more than 80 million dunums. He added that the initiatives include developing rangeland reserves, rehabilitating vegetation cover and establishing water sources for pastoral communities, contributing to efforts to combat desertification, enhance biodiversity and support sustainable livestock production.

Climate projections indicate that temperatures could increase by between 1.7 and 3.2 °C by 2100, accompanied

by a roughly 15 per cent decline in rainfall, more frequent droughts and increasingly severe ex-

treme weather events, including flash floods and heat waves exceeding 42-44 °C in some areas, the minister said.

He stressed that drought-related challenges extend beyond national borders, calling for stronger international cooperation, greater knowledge and technology exchange, expanded climate financing, increased investment in scientific research and innovation, and stronger partnerships among governments, international organisations, the private sector and local communities to build more resilient and sustainable agricultural and food systems.

He said that the launch of the project comes at a critical time as climate challenges intensify globally and regionally, describing the initiative as a platform for boosting international cooperation, exchanging exper-

tise and developing evidence-based policies to support a more resilient agricultural sector and enhance water and food security.

The project seeks to promote climate-smart agricultural practices in drought-affected communities in northern Jordan.

Its activities include distributing agricultural inputs, establishing demonstration sites for climate-smart practices, and enhancing institutional capacity in drought preparedness and water resource management.

Khreisat expressed gratitude to Japan for funding these climate adaptation projects, reiterating Jordan's commitment to sustainable resource management and converting environmental challenges into economic opportunities aligned with national development visions.

NCSC graduates 11th cybersecurity cohort to meet labour market needs

AMMAN (JT) — The National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) on Thursday celebrated the graduation of the 11th cohort from the Nashama Al Cyber Bootcamp.

The bootcamp is one of the "most" prominent national programmes designed to qualify cybersecurity alumni to enter the job market by providing the technical and practical skills that meet the sector's needs, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.

The camp is organised as part of NCSC's efforts to build national capabilities and enhance the readiness of young talent by providing a "comprehensive" training programme that combines tech-



Petra photo

The National Cyber Security Centre on Thursday celebrates the graduation of the 11th cohort from the Nashama Al Cyber Bootcamp

nical know-how with practice.

This effort would

contribute to developing qualified staff to keep pace with the

rapid developments in the cybersecurity field. On the course ac-

tivities, the cohort has graduated after an intensive four-month programme, which provided participants with 440 training hours, within a specific model, focusing on developing technical skills and building personal and professional capabilities, which would enhance graduates' readiness for the professional world.

On its goals, the camp provides a "unique" opportunity for beneficiaries to launch their careers and secure the necessary skills to join the labour market.

This initiative also aligns with the centre's mission to develop national talent to protect Jordan's cyberspace and support the digital transformation.



File photo

Executive Director of the Jerash Festival for Culture and Arts Yazan Khudair says that 213 Jordanian, Arab, and international events will be held in more than 15 locations within the ancient city of Jerash

Jerash festival to host 213 activities in over 15 locations

AMMAN (JT) — Executive Director of the Jerash Festival for Culture and Arts Yazan Khudair said that 213 Jordanian, Arab, and international events will be held in more than 15 locations within the ancient city of Jerash.

Khudair's announcement came during a meeting chaired by Jerash Governor Malek Khreisat on Thursday to review the key features of the festival's new edition and the final preparations for its inauguration, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.

He also said that activities will also be held at Hippodrome Theatre, which is a "significant" addition to the festival that will host diverse cultural and folkloric performances, as well as a market for local crafts

and products.

The Jerash Festival for Culture and Arts will ignite the torch of its 40th edition on July 22, under the slogan "A Legacy That Endures... Generations Unite". The festival will welcome visitors from July 23, unveiling a renewed experience that celebrates four decades of culture, creativity and artistic excellence.

The discussions also addressed the level of organisational, service and logistical readiness to ensure the event's success to benefit Jordan.

Khreisat said that the festival serves as a "cultural and national platform reflecting Jordan's identity and heritage".

He highlighted the importance of integrated efforts at the official level to com-

plete all preparations, in accordance with the "highest" organisational standards to provide a "comprehensive" environment that guarantees visitor comfort and the appropriate climate to hold events.

Talks during the meeting also addressed the progress of organisational and logistical preparations, including the readiness of event venues, the development of entrances, the completion of service facilities and the implementation of an electronic ticketing system.

These measures aim to facilitate visitor flow and enhance the quality of services, ensuring the festival's launch on schedule and reinforcing its position as one of the most prominent cultural festivals in the region.

Industry Ministry, KACE launch first excellence award for inspection units

AMMAN (JT) — The Ministry of Industry, Trade and Supply has signed an agreement with the King Abdullah II Centre for Excellence (KACE) to launch and implement the first edition of the Inspection Unit Excellence Award for 2026.

The agreement, signed by Minister of Industry, Trade and Supply Yarub Oudah and KACE Executive Director Wedad Qteishat, aims to create healthy competition among regulatory bodies, promote modern inspection practices based on the best standards,

and improve the efficiency and quality of oversight operations.

The ministry will support implementation by coordinating with participating entities

It also aims to enhance resource management and raise the performance level of

inspection teams, ultimately enhancing public confidence in regulatory systems and service delivery, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.

Under the agreement, KACE will take charge of the technical framework of the award, including developing and approving evaluation criteria, preparing participation tools, training assessors and overseeing all stages of assessment in line with principles of integrity, transparency, and neutrality.

The evaluation process will include desk reviews, field assess-

ments, arbitration stages, and final reporting.

The ministry will support implementation by coordinating with participating entities, promoting the award, organising capacity-building and training programmes, and overseeing the closing ceremony where winners will be announced.

Both sides said that the initiative is part of national efforts to advance the inspection system across economic activities, embed a culture of institutional excellence, and encourage continuous improve-

ment and adoption of international best practices in a bid to enhance government service quality and improve the overall business environment.

The award's first edition includes two main categories. The first includes ministries, institutions, and regulatory bodies covering 10 entities with 24 inspection units, while the second covers 13 municipalities, ensuring broad participation and promoting a culture of excellence across entities involved in inspection and regulatory work.

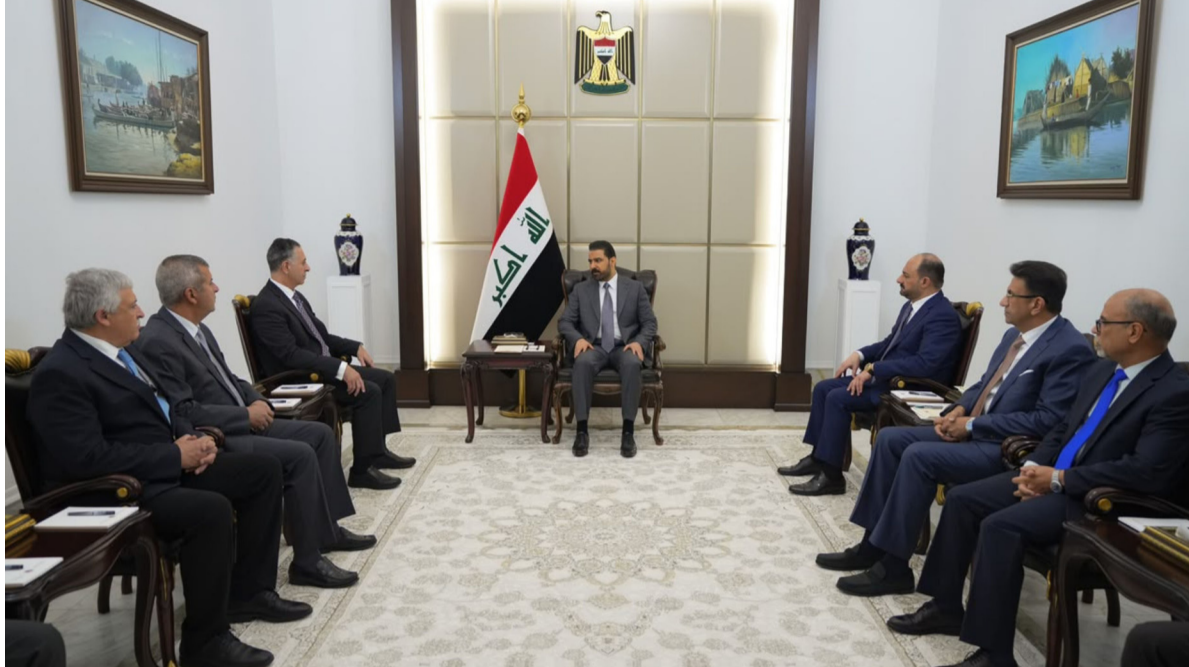
Ministerial delegation meets Iraqi PM to discuss boosting trade, energy cooperation

AMMAN (JT) — A Jordanian high ministerial delegation on Thursday held talks with Iraqi Prime Minister Ali Zaidi in Baghdad on ways to enhance bilateral relations and expand cooperation across various economic and investment sectors.

The delegation, headed by Minister of Industry, Trade and Supply Yarub Qudah, included Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources Saleh Kharabsheh, Minister of Transport Nidal Qatamin and Minister of Investment Tariq Abu Ghazaleh.

The talks focused on a range of areas of mutual interest, most notably the Basra-Aqaba oil pipeline project, cooperation in energy and electricity, facilitating trade and commercial exchange, and strengthening partnerships between the private sectors and business communities in both countries, according to Al Mamlaka TV.

Both sides stressed the depth of historical and fraternal rela-



A Jordanian high ministerial delegation on Thursday holds talks with Iraqi Prime Minister Ali Zaidi in Baghdad

tions between Jordan and Iraq, reaffirming their commitment to advancing cooperation in a way that serves shared interests.

They also underscored the importance of accelerating joint projects and deepening economic and investment ties amid regional challenges to support stability and

development.

Zaidi said that Jordan represents a key strategic depth for Iraq, expressing Baghdad's keenness to further expand bilateral relations and increase trade and investment flows across various sectors.

He added that Iraq is committed to advancing cooperation with

Jordan in line with its economic reform agenda and efforts to improve the investment climate.

Qudah reiterated Jordan's commitment to strengthening cooperation with Iraq, praising Iraq's progress in economic reform, investment environment improvements and anti-cor-

ruption efforts, which he said help reinforce bilateral partnership.

He also conveyed an official invitation from Prime Minister Jafar Hassan to his Iraqi counterpart to visit Jordan.

In a separate meeting, Minister of Transport Nidal Qatamin held talks in Baghdad with his Iraqi counter-

part Razzaq Muhaibis Al Saadawi on enhancing cooperation in the transport sector.

The two ministers stressed the importance of maintaining direct coordination between relevant authorities in both countries and working to remove obstacles hindering the transport sector, in order to facilitate trade flows and strengthen regional connectivity, particularly through the Development Road project.

They also discussed cooperation in land, maritime and rail transport, as well as exchanging expertise in maritime training and logistics.

Saadawi highlighted Iraq's strategic role as a regional transit hub, noting ongoing efforts to enhance infrastructure and expand international transport linkages.

The meeting also addressed ways to facilitate the movement of goods and passengers and strengthen logistical integration between Jordan and Iraq.

AT A GLANCE

Foreign Ministry coordinates return of 3 Jordanians killed in accident in Saudi Arabia



AMMAN (JT) — The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates said on Thursday that it was following up on two separate traffic accidents involving Jordanian citizens in Saudi Arabia through its Operations and Consular Affairs Directorate. Ministry spokesperson Ambassador Fouad Majali said that the two accidents claimed the lives of three Jordanian citizens, according to a ministry statement. Majali said the ministry, through the Jordanian Embassy in Riyadh, is coordinating with the Saudi authorities to provide the necessary assistance and complete procedures for repatriating the victims' bodies to the Kingdom, in accordance with their families' wishes. The spokesperson extended his deepest condolences and sympathy to the families of the victims.

Royal Decree transfers ambassador Ghassan Majali to Foreign Ministry

AMMAN (JT) — A Royal Decree issued on Thursday approved a Cabinet decision transferring Ambassador Ghassan Majali from Jordan's embassy in Israel to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates, effective July 15, 2026, according to a Royal Court statement.



Al Mamlaka TV photo

Jaber border crossing

JCD seizes nearly 6m Captagon pills, crystal meth at Jaber Border in H1 2026

AMMAN (JT) — The Jordan Customs Department (JCD) announced on Thursday that it foiled attempts to smuggle nearly 6 million Captagon pills and seized 2 kilograms of crystal meth during the first half of 2026 at the Jaber border crossing.

The JCD also said it confiscated 19,000 cartons of smuggled cigarettes, along with 11,000 bottles of vape liquid and electronic cigarettes, with legal action taken against those involved, according to the Jordan News Agency, Petra.

The department said the seizures reflect ongoing efforts to protect society, safeguard the national economy and strengthen border security.

The operations coincided with a significant increase in cross-border traffic through the Jaber crossing, one of Jordan's busiest land border points.

In June alone, customs personnel processed more than 60,000 vehicles and buses of various nationalities while maintaining smooth traffic flow and carrying out inspection procedures efficiently, the statement said.

The JCD said that the results underscore the high level of preparedness and operational efficiency of its personnel, noting that close coordination with security agencies has enabled authorities to facilitate the movement of travelers and trade while maintaining effective border protection and national security.

Zoho establishes first Jordan office to serve regional markets

Company says Amman office will support MENA operations, create local jobs, strengthen customer services

By Ahmad Kahatneh

AMMAN — Minister of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship Sami Smeirat, in the presence of Indian Ambassador to Jordan Manish Chauhan, on Thursday inaugurated Zoho Corporation's first office in Jordan.

The company said that opening the office aimed to strengthen its presence in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region and enhance local support for customers of Zoho and ManageEngine.

Smeirat said the opening of Zoho's office reflects growing confidence in Jordan's talent base and digital infrastructure, noting that it aligns with the National Digital Transformation Strategy 2026-2028 aimed at attracting high-value technology investment.

Zoho Middle East and Africa CEO Hyther Nizam said the expansion reflects the company's long-term commitment to the region, which has



Photo courtesy of Zoho

Minister of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship Sami Smeirat on Thursday inaugurates Zoho Corporation's first office in Jordan

become one of its fastest-growing markets globally, recording a 41 per cent compound annual growth rate over the past five years.

He said that the Amman office will serve as a regional base to support customers across Arabic-speaking markets, adding that Jordan was selected due to its skilled talent pool and strategic location.

Nizam said that Zoho

currently serves around 2,500 customers in Jordan and has hired 30 employees for its local operations, including 24 for Zoho and six for ManageEngine, with nearly all recruited locally.

He added that Zoho continues to expand its offerings in Jordan, including Arabic-language support and electronic invoicing integration.

Founded nearly three decades ago, Zoho pro-

vides more than 60 cloud-based business applications covering customer relationship management, finance, human resources, collaboration, analytics and software development.

The company said it also supports 55-plus applications under its Zoho One suite and serves more than 150 million users globally.

ManageEngine Vice President for Revenue

Operations Nirmal Manoharan said Jordan has become an important market for the company, which has enabled more than 500 businesses in the Kingdom to transform their IT operations in 2025, with annual growth of 30 per cent.

He said that the new office will enable faster and more direct support for enterprise customers in Jordan and the wider region, particularly in managing complex digital infrastructure.

Manoharan added that the company has partnered with Jordanian universities to support training and internship programmes aimed at building local digital skills.

Founded in 1996, Zoho Corporation is a privately-held global technology company, which has offices in more than 30 locations worldwide.

The company also owns and operates 20 data centres across the world, ensuring complete oversight of customer data, privacy and security.

Energy Ministry awards tender to evaluate Jordan's phosphate reserves

AMMAN (JT) — The Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources on Thursday announced the preliminary award of a tender for a project to evaluate Jordan's phosphate reserves, in accordance with the specifications and conditions outlined in the tender documents.

The ministry said that companies and institutions wishing to appeal the technical evaluation results have five working days from the date of the announcement to submit their objections to the ministry's specialised tenders department, in line with the approved procedures.

According to the announcement, the tender was awarded to a



JPMMC photo

joint venture comprising Rukun Al Takhteet Company and Mineral Expertise Bureau (MinXperts) for a total value of JD250,000 (around \$352,500).

The ministry last year reissued the national and international tender to review and evaluate Jordan's phosphate resources as part of government

efforts to upgrade the Kingdom's geological database and strengthen the management and investment of its natural resources.

The initiative is in-

tended to enhance the assessment of phosphate, one of Jordan's most strategic mineral resources and a key contributor to the national economy.

Under the tender, the selected consortium will carry out a comprehensive review and evaluation of all available data related to Jordan's phosphate deposits, including geological, geophysical, geochemical and previous exploration records.

The project also aims to establish an updated and integrated knowledge base to support decision-making, improve resource management, and facilitate future investment and development in Jordan's mining sector.

Cassation Court upholds 5-year sentence for drug dealer

By Rana Hussein

AMMAN — The Court of Cassation has upheld a November 2024 State Security Court (SSC) ruling, sentencing a drug dealer to five years in prison after convicting him of possessing a large quantity of illegal narcotics in February 2023.

The court declared the defendant guilty of obtaining illegal narcotics (hashish) with the intent of selling the drugs to an undercover agent on February 15.

The SSC handed the defendant five years in prison for the offence of possessing illegal narcotics and ordered him to pay JD5,000 in fines. Court documents said the Anti-Narcotics Department (AND)

learnt the defendant was in possession of illegal narcotics and sent one of its agents to pose as a buyer.

"The AND agent got in touch with the defendant and asked him for 12 Captagon pills in return for JD16," court documents said.

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

Upon searching the defendant, court papers said, AND personnel found a mobile that was "used in the drug deal between the defendant and the AND officers".

The defendant contested the SSC's ruling through his lawyer, who argued that the court had "irregularities in the investigation

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

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

"It was clear to the court that the defendant confessed willingly to possessing the illegitimate drugs with the intent of selling the illegal narcotics in the local market," the higher court said.

The Court of Cassation judges were Yassin Abdullat, Nayef Samarat, Hammad Ghazawi, Mohammad Khashshneh and Qassem Dughmi.

Russian launches 'massive' drone, missile attack on Kyiv

KYIV, Ukraine (AFP) — Russian missile and drone strikes rocked Kyiv early Thursday, after President Volodymyr Zelensky warned that Moscow was preparing a "massive attack".

Russia's defence ministry confirmed on Thursday it had launched a "massive strike" on Kyiv "in response to the Kyiv regime's terrorist attacks on civilian infrastructure".

The attack came after Ukraine's air force warned that ballistic missiles were headed towards the capital and Zelensky cut short a visit to Dublin on Wednesday, citing intelligence reports of an impending Russian strike.

AFP journalists in central and eastern Kyiv heard more than a dozen explosions and saw residents — some with children and pets — rushing to shelter in metro stations.

The strikes killed nine people and wounded 34, the State Emergency Service of Ukraine said.

Head of the city's military administration Tymur Tkachenko decried the deliberate targeting of civilians and residential areas.

Five districts of the wider Kyiv region were struck in the attack, according to regional governor Mykola Kalashnyk.

"During the night, the enemy once again launched a massive attack on the Kyiv region using strike drones, ballistic missiles and



Smoke rises over the city following a Russian air attack on Kyiv on Thursday, amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine

cruise missiles," Kalashnyk said on Telegram.

He said emergency crews were battling fires at warehouses and a house in the Bucha district.

Hours earlier, an AFP reporter witnessed an explosion in central Kyiv during an air-raid alert, followed by a cloud of smoke and flames. Firefighters and ambulances were at the scene.

A second blast erupted around 50 minutes later near the initial impact site, sending debris into the air.

Zelensky said earlier on Wednesday that he was rushing home from

a visit to Dublin due to intelligence reports that Russia was about to launch a massive attack.

"I urge our people to be especially careful, to protect themselves, their children, and, of course, their families; to use shelters and heed air raid alerts in Ukraine — this is very important," he told a news conference.

He said Russian President Vladimir Putin "has been preparing this massive strike against Ukraine for some time now".

Ukraine has also stepped up long-range drone attacks inside

Russia in recent weeks, targeting energy infrastructure and military targets.

Russian officials have reported repeated strikes in border regions, while Moscow has said its air defences had intercepted hundreds of drones from Ukraine in recent days.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has caused more than 2 million military casualties, with Moscow's forces bearing the brunt of the losses, according to a study published Wednesday by US think tank Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS).

US efforts to broker

an end to the conflict have so far failed.

"Russia's head is completely refusing to end the war," Zelensky said on Wednesday in a post on X.

"And although through all possible official and unofficial channels — including through people close to him — we have conveyed that the war can and must be ended and that we in Ukraine are ready for meetings and meaningful negotiations, he sees only further aggression against Ukraine and against other neighbours and Europe as a whole," he added.

US refuses to extend North America trade pact in current form

WASHINGTON, United States (AFP) — The United States has declined to renew a North American trade pact with Canada and Mexico in its current state, the US trade envoy said on Thursday, meaning the deal will now be reviewed annually.

The move is likely to fuel uncertainty for businesses, given the deep integration across North American supply chains in sectors like automobiles.

But the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) remains in force for another 10 years even if not extended by the deadline.

The free trade pact will instead be subject to annual reviews, unless a country decides to withdraw entirely.

"The United States did not agree to renew the USMCA in its current form. As a result, the USMCA is not renewed," US Trade Representative Jamie Greer said in a statement.

"The United States will continue to engage with Mexico and Canada to address the agreement's shortcomings and our trade deficits with these countries," he added.

A senior US official told reporters that US trade gaps were a key concern, alongside market access opportunities. The official flagged tensions in areas like dairy and corn.

Mexico's economy secretary, Marcelo Ebrard, confirmed the impasse but said there were no insurmountable differences to resolve.

He noted that Washington's pending complaints over the agreement have dropped from 54 in 2025 to 14.

On Wednesday, the USTR held a virtual meeting with Ebrard and Ottawa's minister in charge of Canada-US trade, Dominic LeBlanc.

The Trump administration's decision not to extend the pact was widely expected.

President Donald Trump said in June that he was not "looking to renew" the agreement despite signing and praising it in his first term.

Canada and Mexico had both called for a 16-year renewal of the USMCA.

With the deal subject to rolling negotiations instead of a longer term extension, talks could last for months or years over everything from tariffs to trade rules governing specific sectors.

Ticking clock

Despite a 10-year countdown to the deal's expiration, the senior US official said countries need not wait a decade to conclude their agreement.

"I think we need to come to a conclusion quickly, if possible," the official added.

Analysts say the development does not change day-to-day trade between the countries for now.

But KPMG senior economist Benjamin Shoemith told AFP: "This definitely will have a large impact on investor sentiment, not

just in the US but investing into Mexico in particular."

Mexico has benefited from businesses seeking to benefit from North American supply chains.

Shoemith expects the auto sector to be top-of-mind in negotiations, alongside energy.

Still, analysts expect the USMCA to survive, with goods and services trade within North America amounting to nearly \$2 trillion in 2024.

Even as Trump unleashed tariffs on trading partners last year, he made critical exemptions for USMCA products.

American Automotive Policy Council President Matt Blunt stressed that "North American economic integration enables enormous competitive benefits for the region".

But Brian Bryant of the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers union urged for tougher labor standards, alongside "measures that discourage corporations from moving jobs out of the United States and Canada in pursuit of cheaper labour".

Underscoring other concerns, the Alliance for American Manufacturing called for "robust rules of origin" as a roadblock to Beijing's access to the US auto market.

The United States and Mexico have held two rounds of bilateral trade talks, with a third due in the week of July 20.

Almost 1.2 m apply for Spain's migrant regularisation

MADRID (AFP) — Almost 1.2 million undocumented migrants have sought legal status in Spain under a scheme that has defied a growing European crackdown on irregular immigration, according to final figures released on Thursday.

The government of Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez, a standard bearer of more open immigration policies, launched the vast plan in April while European neighbours toughen measures in response to pressure from ascendant far-right parties.

A total of 1,174,978 applications were submitted between mid-April and June 30 when the window closed, with more than 600,000 already being processed, secretary of state for migration Pilar Cancela told a press conference in Madrid.

Latin America accounted for 67 per cent of the submissions, with Colombia alone representing 25.9 per cent of the total. African nationalities followed with 22.9 per cent.

After Colombia, the most represented countries were Morocco at 13.3 percent, Venezuela with 11.8 per cent and Peru at 8.8 per cent.

An overwhelming majority of applicants were young, with eight out of 10 younger than 45 years old, while 57 per cent of the total were males against 43 percent for females.

The application total does not necessarily indicate how many

people will normalise their situation, with initial predictions forecasting the regularisation of 500,000.

Applicants must prove they have a clean criminal record and spent at least five consecutive months in Spain before January 1.

The government of Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez, a standard bearer of more open immigration policies...

The authorities have three months to process their paperwork and decide whether to issue a work and residence permit only valid in Spain.

Sanchez has touted the benefits of immigration and the vast regularisation scheme for sectors such as construction that need to boost their workforce.

Spanish business leaders have welcomed the move, but the conservative and far-right opposition are furious about a policy they say will encourage more irregular immigration.

Where do US, Iran talks stand after Doha negotiations: What we know

DOHA (AFP) — Iran and the United States concluded a round of indirect talks in Doha, mediators said on Thursday, as efforts continued to advance negotiations and lower tensions following recent exchanges of fire.

In June, Washington and Tehran agreed a memorandum of understanding, brokered by Qatar and Pakistan, which included a 60-day ceasefire pausing the war that broke out with US-Israeli strikes in late February, as well as the reopening of the blockaded Strait of Hormuz.

But the 14-point deal also set a timeline for talks to permanently end the war and settle issues like arrangements for Hormuz, reconstruction funding for Iran and the future of the Islamic republic's nuclear programme.

Here is what we know about the latest round of discussions:

What was agreed

Following the foes' indirect discussions in Doha on Wednesday, US President Donald Trump as well as mediators Qatar and Pakistan offered signs that diplomacy was holding.

"Qatari and Pakistani



Commuters drive past giant billboards bearing photo of Iran's late supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei ahead of his funeral, in Tehran on Thursday

mediators concluded separate meetings with the US and Iranian negotiators in Doha [Wednesday], with positive progress made," the two mediating nations said in a statement on Thursday.

At the talks' conclusion, Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Kazem Gharibabadi, who led Tehran's delegation, said an agreement had been reached to establish a communications channel by Thursday to report and record alleged violations of the

memorandum. Gharibabadi said discussions also covered frozen Iranian assets, whose release Tehran has demanded as part of any settlement.

He said officials reviewed the use of part of an initial \$6 billion and agreed that goods needed by Iran would be purchased and made available.

Trump told reporters Wednesday before boarding Air Force One: "As far as things are going, the

denuclearisation of Iran is moving along well."

A source familiar with the matter told AFP on condition of anonymity that indirect negotiations in Doha had focused more specifically on arrangements for the Strait of Hormuz, with the nuclear issue slated for deeper discussion in later rounds of talks.

What comes next

The next indirect US-Iran talks will come after

the late Iranian supreme leader's funeral.

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei was killed aged 86 at his compound in the centre of the Iranian capital on February 28, the first day of the war. Power was swiftly passed to his son Mojtaba.

Ali Khamenei's public funeral will begin on Saturday, with his body lying in state at the colossal complex in central Tehran that hosts major Friday prayers, official ceremonies and religious gatherings.

Qatar and Pakistan said in statements that the sides agreed to keep talking, "with the next meeting to be set at the earliest possible time following the funeral processions".

His burial will take place on July 9 at the shrine of Imam Reza in the north-eastern city of Mashhad, his birthplace.

Movements on the ground

Since the signing of the US-Iran deal in June, both sides have traded sporadic fire in the Gulf.

Tehran's enforcement of its claim to the Strait of Hormuz has sparked repeated flare-ups.

The latest came when

US Central Command said over the weekend that it had attacked 10 Iranian military targets over "continued Iranian aggression against commercial shipping".

Iran said it retaliated with strikes against US bases in Kuwait and Bahrain, which both condemned Tehran.

However, the exchanges of fire appear to have calmed in the days leading up to the talks in Qatar.

On the Lebanon front, fighting between Israel and Hizbollah has been relatively quiet, though the National News Agency reported a strike in the country's southern city of Nabatieh on Wednesday evening, without mentioning any victims.

Lebanon is still waiting for Israel to start withdrawing from "pilot zones" where the Lebanese army would deploy, as per a framework agreement between the two countries.

Tehran has insisted any deal should include an end to the parallel conflict and a withdrawal of Israeli troops from southern Lebanon, part of which they have occupied.

Panama to build a maximum-security prison for gang leaders

PANAMA CITY (AFP) — Panamanian President Jose Raul Mulino said on Wednesday he is ordering the construction of a maximum-security prison for gang leaders following a prisoner escape and a nationwide surge in violence.

Numerous Latin American countries have sought to replicate the prison-building model

of Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele, who is waging a nationwide campaign against street gangs in which some 92,000 people have been locked up since 2022.

Without mentioning Bukele's policies, Mulino said he will toughen prison rules to prevent inmates from continuing to run gangs from behind bars. He blamed such

gangs for drug trafficking and most killings in Panama.

"We are going to construct a maximum-security prison and toughen the penitentiary rules for those who commit crimes inside prison," Mulino said in a speech to Congress.

"We will implement a plan with greater effort... totally isolating the lead-

ers of [criminal] gangs," he added without giving details of the plan.

Mulino announced the measures amid outrage after a 10-year-old girl was killed when assailants attacked her father, and after almost 200 prisoners escaped from the La Joyita prison outside Panama City last month. Most were recaptured.

"I would rather they ac-

cuse me of overpopulating prisons if that means gangsters will not keep extorting, killing, robbing and pushing drugs in the streets of our country," Mulino said.

Ecuador and Costa Rica are currently building prisons in the model of the El Salvador's notorious Center for Terrorism Confinement.

There, prisoners are

subjected to strict rules and NGOs denounce widespread human rights violations, including torture and sexual violence.

Prisoners will "no longer be guests in prisons that look more like resorts", Mulino said.

"I support the policy of human rights, but always those of the victims first," he added.

Albanian clashes as protest over Trump-linked resort boils over

TIRANA, Albania (AFP) — Violent clashes erupted between police and demonstrators outside Albania's parliament on Thursday, as protests sparked by a resort development linked to US President Donald Trump's family threatened to escalate.

Protests began in late May against the planned construction of a luxury hotel linked to Trump's daughter Ivanka and her husband Jared Kushner in a nature reserve in Zvernec, on Albania's south-western coast.

For the second time this week, crowds gathered outside parliament to confront lawmakers and block entry to the building.

Lines of riot police pushed them back, leading to clashes and



Protesters try to remove a metallic barricade as violent clashes erupted between police and demonstrators on the sidelines of a demonstration against a controversial luxury resort development linked to US president near a protected natural area, outside the parliament, in Tirana, on Thursday

arrests, according to AFP journalists at the scene.

Police used tear gas, pepper spray and water cannon to break up

the crowd, and some protesters tried to push through lines of

officers. Nine officers were injured by objects thrown

by protesters, police said, but did not confirm arrest numbers.

Local media reported that as many as 20 had been detained.

People were arrested when demonstrators threw eggs at lawmakers' cars.

The violence is a marked contrast to the overwhelmingly peaceful daily gatherings that have drawn thousands to the streets since the movement began.

The planned resort was first unveiled in 2024, but the latest wave of protests began after barbed-wire fencing and bulldozers appeared on beaches in late May.

Opposition to the project has become a flashpoint for anger over perceived corruption, with protesters calling for Prime Minister Edi Rama to step down over what they describe as a lack of transparency.

Opposition to the project has become a flashpoint for anger over perceived corruption...

People were also seen smashing the windows of an empty police car in a nearby street as the crowd was pushed away from area.

On Tuesday, six peo-

Jordan, Qatar send relief assistance to earthquake-stricken Venezuela

Continued from page 1

The UN refugee agency said "food shortages are widespread, basic services have broken down, and connectivity has been largely severed" in the port city of La Guaira, north of the capital, Caracas.

"Community tensions are rising as access

to assistance remains constrained," UNHCR spokesperson Carlotta Wolf said.

The agency said it needed some \$14.85 million to scale-up protection, core relief items and temporary shelter for 30,000 earthquake-affected people over six months.

The quakes likely

damaged or destroyed 58,870 buildings, according to a preliminary assessment of satellite data published by NASA.

World Health Organisation spokesman Christian Lindmeier said health services in Venezuela were overstretched and under "extreme pressure" due to demand.

More than 400 dead in DRC's spreading Ebola outbreak

KINSHASA (AFP) — An Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has killed more than 400 people and is still spreading, with a first case reported in the major city of Kisangani nearly 600 kilometres from its epicentre.

The highly infectious disease has claimed 438 lives among the 1,406 people confirmed infected — a fatality rate of just over 31 per cent — since the outbreak was declared on May 15, the National Institute of Public Health (INSP) said in its latest report published on Thursday.

The centre of the outbreak — whose true scale remains difficult to assess — was in the north-eastern Ituri province, where more than 83 per cent of the deaths have occurred.

The province borders South Sudan and Uganda, which has reported 20 cases including two deaths.

The virus has also spread to the nearby provinces of North Kivu and South Kivu.

A case has also recently been reported in Kisangani, a north-eastern city of 1.5 million residents and the capital of Tshopo province.

A test on the body of a 24-year-old pregnant woman was positive for Ebola, the INSP said.

"The deceased's body was secretly transported by motorcycle to Kisangani" from the health zone of Nia Nia in Ituri, the health authorities said.

The body of a deceased Ebola victim remains highly infectious and in many cases the virus has been transmitted during burial rites.



The highly infectious disease has claimed 438 lives among the 1,406 people confirmed infected since May 15, the National Institute of Public Health said

"Epidemics do not recognise borders," said the DRC President Felix Tshisekedi on Thursday at a press conference in Kinshasa following an official visit by his South African counterpart Cyril Ramaphosa.

However, Ramaphosa called on the world to "not lock out the DRC" by imposing travel bans, expressing optimism towards containing the outbreak.

'On the run'
In Haut-Uele province, which is next to Ituri, a death and a case of infection were also reported at the start of the week.

Health authorities said the infected person was "on the run" from the Nia Nia health zone.

Nevertheless, health authorities continue to say that only three provinces in total are affected by the virus, as they say that the cases in Tshopo and Haut-Uele were "imported" from Ituri.

Several contact cases have however been identified in the two provinces.

Ebola, which spreads through contact with bodily fluids, has killed more than 15,000 people in Africa over the past 50 years.

The current Ebola crisis is the 17th to hit the DRC, whose most deadly outbreak killed nearly 2,300 people between 2018 and 2020.

The Bundibugyo strain of the Ebola virus is behind the current outbreak and no vaccine or

specific treatment exists.

A trial of potential Ebola treatments — the monoclonal antibody MBP134 and the antiviral drug remdesivir — has begun, the World Health Organisation said on Thursday, but could take months to produce definitive answers.

Still, at Thursday's press conference, South Africa's Ramaphosa said he had "hope that we should be able, as we work very hard, to even have a vaccine for this variant of Ebola by the end of this year".

Health centre set on fire

Health and aid workers battling the viral haemorrhagic fever in Ituri face deep mis-

trust among the local population.

Some locals deny the existence of the disease, while others accuse international organisations of trying to make a profit.

On Wednesday, an Ebola health centre managed by local health authorities was set on fire in the health zone of Nia Nia, local sources told AFP.

Seven suspected cases, who were in isolation at the centre, fled and have not been found so far, Joseph Pemanakue, the area's chief medical officer, said.

Two bodies of people who likely died of the virus were also at the centre.

Before their sanitary burial "a group of young people opposed it and tried to retrieve the bodies, believing that these people had not died of Ebola and considering that this disease is a 'business'", Pemanakue said.

The police intervened with warning shots, but the protesters set the place on fire.

A police officer died after being attacked by the protesters and two young people were seriously injured, according to Matadi Muyapandi, police administrator for the area.

The young people managed to retrieve the two bodies. "This is a major risk of spreading," the chief medical officer said.

It adds to the challenges facing the health response.

Health facilities in Ituri still lack equipment and basic supplies such as protective kits and chlorine.

Syrian top diplomat reassures Lebanese leaders on Beirut visit

Continued from page 1

Shaibani told Aoun he wanted "to clear up the confusion sparked by reports of a potential Syrian military intervention in Lebanon", adding that "Syria had no intention of undertaking such a move", the presidency said in a statement.

Shaibani also extended to Aoun an invitation from Sharaa to visit Syria, which would be a first.

After meeting Berri, Shaibani told reporters that he did not rule out the possibility of a meeting with Hizbollah in the future.

Shaibani had previously visited Lebanon

in October — the first visit by a senior Syrian official since the Islamist coalition took power in Damascus, opening a new chapter in relations between the two countries.

Lebanese Prime Minister Nawaf Salam, for his part, travelled to Syria in May.

The new Syrian authorities are hostile to Hizbollah, which was allied with Assad, and have announced arrests of alleged cells affiliated with the group.

Hizbollah denies having any presence in Syria.

Since late 2024, Hizbollah's former Syrian supply routes have been cut and Damascus

authorities say several attempts to smuggle weapons to Lebanon have been foiled.

The Syrian army intervened in Lebanon during its civil war in 1976 and exercised tutelage over its neighbour for decades, where it was accused of numerous assassinations.

Shaibani's visit last year broke the deadlock over the issue of Syrian prisoners in Lebanon, a Damascus priority.

Around 2,000 Syrians, nearly a third of Lebanon's prison population, are held in the country's overcrowded jails.

More than 250 prisoners were transferred to Syria following Shaibani's first visit.

'Positive progress' in US-Iran indirect talks in Doha — Qatar spokesman

Continued from page 1

Iran had insisted there would be no direct negotiations in Doha on the deal, which aims to end the war that began with US-Israeli strikes

on Iran in late February.

The Qatar discussions, held at a lower level and focused on implementing the memorandum, were meant to "build on the progress made at the Lake Lucerne Summit",

a diplomat told AFP on condition of anonymity.

The discussions also covered frozen Iranian assets, whose release Tehran has demanded as part of any settlement.

French scramble to find air conditioners before next heatwave

Continued from page 1

Mousa Traore, who had been waiting for more than an hour along with some 200 other customers at a small Lidl store, said he had been told there were only two units on sale.

"But then the police came and we were told there were none. The police officers took them I think," he said laughing.

Lasana, a man who did not give his second name, told AFP he had secured one of the two air conditioners after queueing for seven hours from 04:00 in a northern Paris neighbourhood where badly insulated high-rise buildings bake in the summer heat.

Weather services are

forecasting another round of hot weather this weekend, after record high temperatures in late June that led to excess deaths, overwhelmed hospitals and closed schools.

'Misleading advertising'

Fatou, a 69-year-old grandmother, was less fortunate.

She waited six hours in line where she performed her morning prayers, before leaving with only a fan, despite being third in line.

Few homes and schools in France have air conditioning.

A recent study estimated that one in two homes is "inadequately equipped" to cope with high temperatures, turning into

a "thermal cauldron" during increasingly frequent heatwaves that scientists say are linked to human-induced climate change.

Many outside the store in the capital's 19th district were furious at the way they were treated.

Fatou and several others accused Lidl of "misleading advertising" knowing so many people desperately need the units.

The crowd at the store was mostly good-humoured, but some disputes broke out as people tried to jump the queue.

"I am not opening the store unless you leave," a manager shouted, as customers harangued her, with another member of staff telling AFP only two air condition-

ers had been delivered.

He refused to say if they had already been sold.

'It's madness'

Hundreds more descended on a supermarket in Sevran, with cars queueing for the store blocking the centre of the poor northern suburb.

It was much the same story in the nearby suburb of Livry-Gargan.

"I give up, it's madness," one local called Lolo told AFP.

"I abandoned my car several streets away to get there on foot but there is already a huge queue of people in the car park. It's impossible."

The rush for cooling units comes despite longstanding scepti-

cism towards air conditioning in France, with eight in 10 people viewing it as environmentally unfriendly, according to one survey.

But attitudes appear to be shifting as temperatures climb, with cooling units flying off shelves.

In the midst of the heatwave on June 22, hypermarket operator Carrefour had sold 30,000 units by 6:30pm — "a thousand times more than on a normal day", CEO Alexandre Bompard said.

The share of French households equipped with air conditioning rose from 18 per cent in 2023 to 24 per cent in 2025, according to the state environment agency Ademe.

Hope fades, hunger grows a week after Venezuela quakes

Continued from page 1

"They give out supplies here, but sometimes people nearly kill each other for food... It's like a cockfight," Daniela Armas, 18, a vendor in La Guaira, said after waiting to get food at an emergency shelter.

There has been widespread theft and looting and on Wednesday four police officers were arrested after being caught by residents stealing valuables from the rubble.

"The situation is quite critical," said Lia Poggio, head of mission in Venezuela for the International Organisation for Migration.

Queues for aid are growing longer by the day, with many surviving

on the goodwill of volunteers and donations from fellow citizens.

"Here, we were receiving nothing until last night when they started bringing water," said 56-year-old Fatima Berroteran, who has been sleeping with her family in a parking lot since their home in a high-rise complex in La Guaira collapsed.

"I feel guilty about eating, because every time I eat I think there's someone who has nothing to eat," said Aysmar Lopez, a young woman bringing home-cooked meals to several shelters.

The World Food Programme on Tuesday appealed for \$50 million to feed some 500,000

people for three months in Venezuela.

Risk of disease

Fears of disease outbreaks were also rising.

World Health Organisation spokesman Christian Lindmeier said health services in Venezuela were under "extreme pressure".

"There's an increased risk now of outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases" such as measles and diphtheria, due to low pre-earthquake vaccination coverage, he said.

The quakes likely damaged or destroyed 58,870 buildings, according to a preliminary assessment of satellite data published by NASA.

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The secret lives of Ukraine's deep-strike drone team

Agence France-Presse

KYIV, Ukraine — Encrypted communications, wives and children in the dark, and spending only in cash, the Ukrainian soldiers behind brazen long-range drone strikes on Russia live their lives almost completely in the shadows.

The retaliatory attacks on Russian military sites and oil refineries they carry out have embarrassed President Vladimir Putin, who four years ago thought he could capture Kyiv in a matter of days. The price they pay, though, is almost complete secrecy.

Denys, whose name has been changed, has been taking part in the strikes since 2025.

But his friends and even parents have no idea, thanks to the ultra-strict rules in his unit.

"Don't draw attention to yourself, don't brag. You'll never be able to talk about what you've done, even after the war," he told AFP in a rare interview by a member of the top-secret team.

A former marine, he serves at Centre No. 1 of Ukraine's drone forces.

His unit has carried out major attacks on Russia, including a June strike on a Moscow oil refinery that released thick black smoke over the Russian capital and on Saint Petersburg as a landmark international conference opened there.

Kyiv calls the hits fair retribution for Moscow's nightly barrages of its own cities and is targeting fuel depots and refineries on a weekly basis, trying to cut off Moscow's energy revenues.

The stakes, Denys said, mandate the secrecy.

"We are a very high-value and priority target for the enemy."

'Flight mode'

The names and ages of those in the unit are kept secret. It is impossible to photograph or film them except with their faces hidden.

AFP journalists had to follow strict security protocols to gain rare access to one of the launch sites used for the long-range attacks earlier this year.

"We ourselves understand how high the price can be for our loved ones and for us, that's why the primary, conscious decision we make is to stay as much as possible in the shadows," said a soldier at Centre No. 1 who went by Voron, the Ukrainian word for raven.

Russia will do "everything possible to hunt down at least one of these deep-strike groups", he added.

He was once part of a unit that did the same for the Ukrainians, trying to find and target Russia's long-range drone teams.

Before the invasion, he was a painter and martial arts trainer.

Married and with a child, he thinks his wife "suspects" what he does, but she "doesn't ask questions".

Even remote public association with his unit is banned.

On social media, Voron posts on the page of his former army unit and shares photos with its insignia, all to suggest he serves there.

"All my relatives and friends think I'm still in the special forces," he told AFP.

"In daily life, you wouldn't recognise us," a GUR military intelligence officer who gave the call sign Wolf told AFP.

"We maintain discretion... to pass for ordinary people," he added.

"People picture us as some kind of commando in camouflage, but in reality we go around in shirts and jeans," said Voron.

While in public, there is no talk of missions and even words like "take-off" or "wing" are banned.

Everything is bought with cash, with care taken to mix up the ATMs they use for withdrawals.

They are even prohibited from joining petrol station loyalty programmes.

Lie detectors

The Ukrainian strikes have triggered a fuel crisis across much of Russia, but its impact on Moscow's war chest is hard to assess.

Whether on mission or not, the drone team's phones must be kept permanently in flight mode and only connected to a personal portable router, the three people AFP spoke to said.

For military communications, they have special encrypted phones and any device with geolocation is strictly forbidden.

Lie detectors are used if there are suspicions information has been leaked, or to test new recruits.

As Ukraine's campaign ramps up, the team is increasingly facing one significant constraint: not a lack of drones, but "hours in a day", said Denys.

He hopes one day he can be behind a launch that hits the Kremlin, and dreams of the "total defeat of Russia".

The long-range strikes, he said, are like "ice cracking under the Russians' feet".

"We are doing everything we can so that it gives way beneath them."

When indicators begin to smile: The new momentum

By Yusuf Mansur

In economics, not all numbers carry the same weight. A modest figure can convey a powerful message, while an impressive headline number may conceal a far less encouraging reality. That is why economic growth should not be judged solely by how high it is, but by a more important question: How was it achieved, and under what circumstances?

From this perspective, Jordan's real GDP growth of 2.9 per cent during the first quarter of 2026 deserves particular attention. It was achieved under one of the most challenging regional environments in recent years.

While the region continued to grapple with the repercussions of the war in Gaza, persistent geopolitical tensions and disruptions to trade, transportation and tourism, the Jordanian economy maintained its upward trajectory and recorded one of its strongest quarterly performances in recent years.

Looking back at first-quarter growth rates since 2010 makes this achievement even more significant. Jordan has recorded a higher first-quarter growth rate only three times in 2012 (3 per cent), 2014 (3.2 per cent), and 2023 (3.2 per cent), and each of those years reflected exceptional circumstances rather than a sustained improvement in the underlying economy.

In 2012, the outbreak of the Syrian crisis triggered a massive influx of refugees into Jordan. The rapid increase in population stimulated demand for housing, consumer goods, public services and infrastructure, while international aid flows expanded significantly. Although this imposed considerable fiscal and social pressures on the Kingdom, it also generated an exceptional boost to domestic economic activity.

In 2014, economic growth was supported by an expansionary fiscal policy, accompanied by higher public expenditure and increased government borrowing to finance energy-related challenges and the costs associated with hosting refugees. While this fiscal stimulus helped sustain economic activity, it also contributed to a significant rise in public debt.

The story was different in 2023. Growth reflected the post-pandemic recovery, driven by the strong rebound in tourism, the normalisation of international travel and improving external demand for Jordanian exports. In other words, growth was largely the product of recovery from an extraordinary global shock.

The first quarter of 2026, however, tells a fundamentally different story. Growth was neither driven by an exceptional demographic shock nor by ex-



ECONOMIC REVIEW

Yusuf Mansur

exceptionally volatile regional environment.

And that is where the real story begins. The most important aspect of Jordan's recent performance lies not merely in the growth rate itself, but in what drove that growth. Agriculture expanded by 6.8 per cent, manufacturing by 5.3 per cent, and mining and quarrying by 4.7 per cent, while electricity and utilities grew by 4.3 per cent. More importantly, the industrial sector alone accounted for nearly 40 per cent of overall economic growth, underscoring a structural shift in the composition of the economy.

This development deserves particular attention. Manufacturing remains the backbone of every productive economy and achieving such a strong expansion within a relatively short period — despite a highly challenging regional environment — is no ordinary accomplishment. It reflects not only the resilience of Jordanian industry but also the effectiveness of economic policies that have strengthened the country's productive base.

In many developing economies, growth is often driven by consumption, government spending or temporary external factors. Jordan's recent experience points in a different direction. The economy is increasingly generating growth through production, exports and value creation, a transition that is essential for achieving long-term sustainable development.

The export sector provides further evidence of this transformation. Perhaps the most encouraging signal is not simply the increase in GDP, but the improvement in the quality of growth itself. During the first four months of 2026, industrial exports expanded by 9.1 per cent, while the trade deficit narrowed by 6.3 per cent. At the same time, the export-to-import coverage ratio rose to 59 per cent, the highest level recorded during the 2010-2025 period. This represents a meaningful structural improvement. Every JD100 Jordanian of imports is now matched by JD59 of exports, reflecting stronger domestic production, greater

extraordinary fiscal expansion nor by recovery from a global health crisis. Instead, it reflects a gradual strengthening of the real economy, led primarily by productive sectors despite an

export competitiveness and a reduced dependence on external financing to sustain imports. Equally significant is the diversity behind this export growth. It was not driven by a single commodity or sector, but by broad-based expansion across mining products, chemicals, fertilisers, construction materials, pharmaceuticals, garments, food processing and engineering industries.

Such diversification enhances the resilience of Jordan's export sector. Economies that rely heavily on one or two export products remain vulnerable to price shocks and fluctuations in global demand. Jordan's increasingly diversified industrial base provides a stronger foundation for sustained economic growth and greater resilience against external volatility.

Tourism presents a more nuanced picture. Tourism revenues declined by 3.8 per cent during the first quarter of 2026, reaching \$1.65 billion, compared with \$1.72 billion during the same period of the previous year. The decline primarily reflected lower spending by Jordanian expatriates, Arab visitors, and several other traditional markets. Nevertheless, tourism from European countries increased by 20.1 per cent, while arrivals from Asian and American markets also recorded positive growth.

These figures suggest that Jordan's tourism sector remains fundamentally resilient. Given that tourism is among the industries most sensitive to geopolitical developments, its performance is likely to improve significantly once regional conditions stabilise.

Another encouraging indicator is the revival of domestic investment. During the first quarter of 2026, the number of building permits issued increased by approximately 20 per cent compared with the same period a year earlier, while the total licensed construction area also expanded. In economics, building permits are widely regarded as a leading indicator of future economic activity because they reflect investment decisions made today based on expectations about tomorrow.

This suggests that confidence among investors, businesses and households has strengthened. Investment decisions are inherently forward-looking; they are made not in response to current conditions alone, but to expectations of future economic performance. The recent increase in construction activity, therefore, signals growing optimism about Jordan's economic prospects.

Beyond investment, several macroeconomic indicators continue to reinforce this positive picture. Foreign exchange re-

serves remain at comfortable levels, inflation has stayed relatively low, remittances from Jordanians working abroad continue to grow and national exports have maintained their upward momentum. Collectively, these factors have enhanced macroeconomic stability and strengthened Jordan's ability to withstand external shocks.

None of this suggests that the country's economic challenges have disappeared. Unemployment remains one of Jordan's most pressing structural issues. Raising productivity, accelerating job creation and improving household incomes continue to be essential national priorities. Yet these challenges become considerably more manageable when an economy is growing based on production, investment, exports and competitiveness, rather than relying on temporary fiscal stimulus or exceptional external circumstances.

This is precisely why the 2.9 per cent growth figure deserves attention beyond its numerical value. It reflects an economy that is becoming more diversified, more adaptable, and increasingly anchored in productive sectors. It also suggests that years of gradual economic reform are beginning to translate into tangible outcomes. Structural reforms rarely produce immediate results, but when they do, they tend to generate stronger and more sustainable foundations for long-term prosperity.

The key challenge now is to preserve this momentum. If manufacturing continues to expand, exports maintain their upward trajectory, private investment gathers further pace, and tourism recovers as regional conditions improve, Jordan will have a genuine opportunity to enter a new phase of economic development — one in which stronger growth becomes the norm rather than the exception.

At that point, economic success will no longer be measured solely by quarterly statistics or official reports. It will be reflected in better employment opportunities, higher household incomes, greater business confidence and an improved quality of life for Jordanian citizens.

Ultimately, the most important message behind Jordan's latest growth figures is not that the economy has reached its destination, but that it has demonstrated a growing capacity to move in the right direction — even amid one of the most challenging regional environments in recent history. That resilience may prove to be Jordan's greatest economic asset in the years ahead.

The writer is a former Jordanian minister of state for economic affairs.

Jerash Festival in the digital age: Reimagining Jordan's narrative

By Lubna Hanna Ammari

At a civilisational turning point where digital transformation is restructuring the ways in which cultural identity is formed, transmitted and continuously redefined, cultural festivals are no longer confined to physical stages and seasonal audiences. They are evolving into dynamic, multilayered platforms that extend far beyond geographical boundaries. The Jerash Festival of Culture and Arts in Jordan stands as one of the most prominent cultural events in the region, and its role is increasingly being reshaped by digital technologies that redefine how heritage is experienced, shared and interpreted. In this context, the festival is not merely a celebration of performance and tradition; it becomes a living narrative of Jordan's cultural identity in a globalised, interconnected world.

Since its establishment in 1981 under royal patronage, the Jerash Festival has served as a cornerstone of Jordan's cultural diplomacy, showcasing music, dance, poetry and theatrical performances in the ancient Roman city of Jerash. According to official sources from the Jordanian Ministry of Culture and the

Jerash Festival official archives, the festival was designed to bridge Jordan's rich historical heritage with contemporary artistic expression. Over the decades, it has hosted hundreds of Arab and international artists, transforming Jerash into a symbolic space where heritage and modernity converge. This duality is precisely what makes the festival particularly relevant in the digital age, where narratives are constantly being reshaped by online engagement and global media flows.

The rise of digital platforms has fundamentally altered how cultural events are consumed. Livestreaming, social media storytelling, virtual reality experiences and digital archiving have expanded the reach of festivals like Jerash beyond physical attendance. Audiences who cannot travel to northern Jordan can now engage with performances in real time or through curated digital content. This shift not only democratises access to culture but also positions Jerash within a global cultural economy where visibility is increasingly measured by digital presence. International media coverage and cultural databases such as UNESCO's cultural heritage frameworks further

emphasise the importance of digitising cultural expressions to ensure their preservation and global accessibility.

More importantly, the digital transformation of the Jerash Festival contributes to reimagining Jordan's national narrative. Rather than presenting culture as static heritage, digital storytelling allows Jordan to project a more fluid and contemporary identity one that is rooted in history but actively participating in global cultural conversations. Through curated online campaigns, interactive media and user-generated content, the festival becomes a platform where Jordanians and international audiences collectively participate in constructing meaning. This participatory dimension aligns with broader theories in digital cultural studies, which emphasise that identity in the digital age is co-created rather than simply transmitted.

At the same time, this transformation raises critical questions about authenticity and cultural preservation. While digital platforms expand reach, they also risk simplifying or commodifying cultural expressions. Scholars in cultural policy, including research published by organisa-

tions such as UNESCO and the International Federation of Arts Councils and Culture Agencies, highlight the tension between accessibility and authenticity in digitally mediated cultural heritage. For the Jerash Festival, the challenge lies in balancing technological innovation with the preservation of its artistic and historical depth. The goal is not to replace the physical experience of Jerash but to complement it with digital layers that enhance understanding and engagement.

Ultimately, the Jerash Festival in the digital age represents more than an annual cultural event; it embodies a strategic opportunity for Jordan to redefine its cultural narrative on the global stage. By embracing digital tools, the festival can transcend its traditional boundaries and become a living archive of national identity, continuously evolving with each performance, post and digital interaction. In doing so, it reinforces Jordan's position not only as a guardian of ancient heritage but also as an active participant in shaping the future of cultural expression in the digital era.

Lubna Hanna Ammari is a specialist in educational technology

BUSINESS

Friday-Saturday, July 3-4, 2026



Minister of Agriculture Saeb Khraisat says on Thursday that 19 companies have exported agricultural products under the government's agricultural export support programme

19 companies benefit from agricultural export support programme — Ministry

AMMAN (JT) — Minister of Agriculture Saeb Khraisat said on Thursday that 19 companies have exported agricultural products under the government's agricultural export support programme.

Total financial support provided to exporters has exceeded JD1.059 million, including around JD5, 200 allocated for maritime freight assistance, according to the Jordan News Agency, Petra.

Khraisat said that the specialised committee overseeing the agricultural export support programme has begun its work and meets regularly to review applications. He added that more than 500 farmers have directly benefited from the initiative.

The ministry continues to expand its agricultural

support and marketing programmes to help open new international markets for Jordanian produce. These efforts aim to boost farmers' incomes, ensure the sector's sustainability and increase agriculture's contribution to the national economy.

The support programmes also enhance the global competitiveness of Jordanian agricultural products and help exporters access new markets, driving economic growth and increasing returns across the agricultural sector.

Following a Cabinet decision, the government has extended the export support programme for fresh fruit and vegetables.

Under the programme, exporters receive a 50 per cent subsidy on air freight costs and a 25 per

cent subsidy on maritime freight costs.

The programme has helped increase the presence of Jordanian agricultural products in several European and international markets. Sweden, Germany, United Kingdom, Canada, Netherlands and Denmark are among the leading importers, reflecting growing international confidence in the quality of Jordanian produce.

Khraisat stressed that export support remains a key pillar of the ministry's development strategy. By reducing export costs and strengthening agricultural value chains, the programme improves returns for farmers and reinforces Jordan's position as a reliable supplier of high-quality agricultural products to international markets, Petra reported.

Non-Jordanian ownership of ASE-listed companies reaches 46.4%

AMMAN (JT) — Non-Jordanian investors owned 46.4 per cent of the market capitalisation of companies listed on the Amman Stock Exchange (ASE) at the end of June 2026, according to official data.

Statistics released by the ASE showed that non-Jordanian investors purchased shares worth JD42.2 million in June, accounting for 11.6 per cent of the month's total trading value, while their share sales totalled JD51.3 million.

During the first six months of 2026, non-Jordanian investors purchased shares worth around JD198.8 million, representing 11.9 per cent of the total trading value. Their share sales reached JD235.5 million over the same period, according to an ASE statement.

Arab investors accounted for the bulk of non-Jordanian trading activity in June. Their purchases totalled around JD39 million, representing 92.4 per cent of all non-Jordanian purchases, while their sales reached about JD49 million. Non-Arab investors purchased shares worth JD3.2 million



Petra photo

Non-Jordanian investors own 46.4 per cent of the market capitalisation of companies listed on the Amman Stock Exchange at the end of June 2026

and sold shares valued at JD2.3 million.

By the end of June, Arab investors held 30 per cent of the market capitalisation of ASE-listed companies, while non-Arab investors accounted for 16.4 per cent, bringing total non-Jordanian owner-

ship to 46.4 per cent.

By sector, non-Jordanian ownership stood at 48.5 per cent in the financial sector and 22.7 per cent in the services sector. The industrial sector recorded the highest level of foreign ownership, at 51 per cent.

Securities Depository Centre released figures that showed that the total number of registered securities reached nearly 7.7 billion at the end of January 2026, with a combined value of about JD29 billion.

Jordanian investors held nearly 5.4 bil-

lion registered securities, valued at around JD16.7 billion. The 10 largest non-Jordanian investor nationalities collectively owned nearly 2 billion securities, with a total value of around JD10.2 billion, according to the statement.

Dollar down, stocks shine after disappointing US jobs data

LONDON (AFP) — The dollar fell on Thursday after disappointing US jobs data dampened expectations of a quick hike in interest rates.

Stock markets got a boost however, and oil prices moved lower.

Non-farm payroll data showed that the US economy added 57,000 jobs in June, far below the approximately 110,000 jobs expected by analysts and the 172,000 jobs added in May.

"The stock market liked the data and the dollar hated it because it effectively rules out the chances of a July rate hike from the Fed — not that this was going to happen anyway with oil prices falling," said Forex.com analyst Fawad Razaqzada.

The data also showed average hourly earnings rose less than inflation.

"The key takeaway from the report for the market, which likes to see the good in the bad, is that the softer payrolls and pressure on real earnings should temper concerns about an imminent rate hike," said Briefing.com analyst Patrick O'Hare.

The dollar fell more than 1 per cent against the yen after the data.



AFP photo

The New York Stock Exchange is seen during morning trading on Wednesday in New York City

Growing expectations of an interest rate hike later this year in the United States have helped drive the yen to 40-year lows in recent days.

Investors see opportunities to borrow at low rates in yen and then invest in higher-yielding dollar assets in what is known as the carry trade.

At his first monetary policy meeting last month new Federal Reserve chief Kevin Warsh emphasised his priority was to bring down inflation, which hiked expectations in the market of an interest rate hike this year.

In comments on Wednesday, Warsh said price pressures had "come down" in recent weeks, but reiterated his commitment to return US inflation to the Fed's two per cent target.

But maximum employment is the Fed's other policy goal, and degradation in the jobs market could change the central bank's calculations.

Forex.com's Razaqzada said the June payrolls data doesn't rule out a rate hike later this year.

But eToro's US investment analyst Bret Kenwell said data may "cool the narrative a bit" on rate hikes and "nudge

the conversation back toward the Fed's dual mandate — balancing inflation with employment — rather than forcing policymakers to focus almost exclusively on price pressures".

Wall Street's main stock indices moved higher as trading got underway, having been mostly lower in pre-market trading in advance of the jobs data.

Gains in European stock markets accelerated after the US data was released, but Asian markets, which closed earlier in the day, were hammered by losses in tech shares.

US stocks gain as weak jobs data dents Fed rate hike odds

NEW YORK (AFP) — Wall Street stocks rose early Thursday following weaker than expected jobs data that markets viewed as diminishing the odds of Federal Reserve interest rate increases.

Total US nonfarm payroll employment grew by 57,000, about half the expected level in a data report that also downgraded jobs growth in the prior two

months. Markets have been girding for a potential rate hike in 2026 after new Federal Reserve Chair Kevin Warsh focused almost entirely on price stability, viewing the jobs market as strong. But Thursday's data may alter that dynamic.

About 35 minutes into trading, the Dow Jones Industrial Average was up 0.7 per cent

at 52,643.58.

The broad-based S&P 500 gained 7,532.93, while the tech-rich Nasdaq Composite Index advanced 0.7 per cent to 26,230.41.

"The jobs numbers were bad, but what that means is it reduces the likelihood of rate hikes in the short term, and the stock market is celebrating the lower likelihood of rate hikes instead of being

concerned about obvious weakness in the job market," said Steve Sosnick of Interactive Brokers.

Thursday's session is the second of the third quarter after stocks turned in a blowout performance in the second quarter fuelled by the artificial intelligence boom.

Markets will be closed on Friday for the Independence Day holiday.

Germany's Infineon opens major chip plant as EU seeks tech autonomy

DRESDEN, Germany (AFP) — German semiconductor giant Infineon opened a five-billion-euro (\$5.7 billion) microchip plant on Thursday, as Europe seeks to bolster its high-tech autonomy.

The "Smart Power Fab" in the eastern city of Dresden, completed three months ahead of schedule, has been hailed as a symbol of an EU push to reduce dependency for crucial parts on Asia and the United States.

"We all want to further strengthen Europe's position as a semiconductor hub," Infineon CEO Jochen Hanebeck said at the opening ceremony. "And technological sovereignty does not begin with words, but with factories like this one."

The plant will produce chips for intelligent power management that are used in everything from electric vehicles, wind turbines and solar plants to data centres crucial

for artificial intelligence. The plant will operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week with employees working in three shifts.

In the highly automated "clean rooms" where chips are manufactured, the air is continuously filtered to eliminate virtually all dust, and employees wear a polyester-carbon fibre blend suit, a hood, mask, latex gloves and boots to prevent any contamination.

The facility was backed by the EU's Chips Act with one billion euros in subsidies, part of a broader policy aimed at doubling the EU's share of global semiconductor production from 10 to 20 per cent by 2030.

Chancellor Friedrich Merz, who addressed the event via live video link from Berlin, said the plant opening "has direct strategic significance for our digital sovereignty, our economic resilience and our independence".

"Investment in advance

centres is breaking new records year on year," Merz said, referring to the AI-driven boom in demand. "Because the foundations for the industries of the future are being laid today."

'Silicon Saxony'

Work on the new plant began in May 2023, and represents both the largest single investment in Infineon's history and a major strategic pivot for the technology firm based outside of Munich.

The company has moved away from being primarily a supplier to the automotive industry and instead sought to capitalise on the massive AI investment boom.

However, the plant opening comes amid significant volatility affecting AI-related stocks, driven by growing concerns over the difficulty of making these massive investments profitable.

The plant is located in the heart of Germany's

"Silicon Saxony", which has boasted one of Europe's most dynamic clusters for the microchip industry with a regional specialisation in the sector that dates to investments by communist East Germany.

Dresden, home to nine universities, has a large number of trained engineers who are sought after by the roughly 2,500 companies in the sector operating in the area.

"One in three chips produced in Europe is made in Saxony," Germany's digital minister, Karsten Wildberger, noted at the event.

While constructing the "Smart Power Fab" came at a high cost, the subsequent unit production cost of the microchips will be minimal, say experts.

"The chip industry is a business driven by extreme economies of scale," Wolfgang Weber, head of the German electronics association ZVEI, told AFP.

AMMAN STOCK EXCHANGE

AMMAN (JT) — Amman Stock Exchange (ASE) trading value for Thursday amounted to JD 16 million spread over 6.3 million shares that traded through 4,557 transactions.

The ASE share price index shed 1.23 per cent, closing at 3806.89 points.

Out of 95 companies whose shares were traded, the share price of 28 companies rose while the share price of another 42 declined.

Topping the list of the companies whose shares gained the most were Specialised Jordanian Investment by 4.65 per cent, Arab Investors Union Company for Real Estates Developing by 4 per cent, Amad Investment and Real Estate Development by 3.72 per cent, Offtec Holding Group Plc. by 3.64 per cent, and Arab East Investment by 3.48 per cent.

The companies whose shares dropped the most were Jordan Vegetable Oil Industries by 4.91 per cent, Specialised Investment Compounds by 4.38 per cent, Arab Phoenix Holdings by 4.17 per cent, Arab Potash by 4.04 per cent, and Nutri Dar by 3.85 per cent.



FOOTBALL

Brazil's Paqueta ruled out of World Cup clash with Norway

MORRISTOWN, United States (AFP) — Brazil midfielder Lucas Paqueta will miss Sunday's World Cup last-16 game against Norway with a hamstring injury, a source at the Brazilian Football Confederation (CBF) told AFP on Thursday. He is not expected to play again in the tournament, unless Brazil reach the final on July 19 at MetLife Stadium in East Rutherford, the source added. Paqueta, who has started alongside Casemiro and Bruno Guimaraes in midfield, suffered the injury during Brazil's dramatic 2-1 win over Japan in Houston on Monday. He has been undergoing intensive treatment and is the only confirmed absentee for coach Carlo Ancelotti ahead of the meeting with Erling Haaland's Norway this weekend. Ancelotti could opt for a like-for-like replacement in Danilo Santos, or alter his set-up to accommodate a more attacking player, such as Endrick or Gabriel Martinelli. Barcelona forward Raphinha, sidelined since suffering a thigh injury in Brazil's second group-stage match against Haiti, has resumed individual training away from the main squad.

TENNIS

Superb Swiatek storms into Wimbledon last 32, Zverev waits

LONDON (AFP) — Iga Swiatek put a stuttering start to her Wimbledon title defence firmly behind her by powering to a statement second-round victory over Karolina Pliskova. Reigning champion Swiatek, who struggled to hold back tears after battling past Taylor Townsend in the first round, was back to her ruthless best in a 6-1, 6-3 dismantling of former World No.1 Pliskova in 70 minutes. "For sure the first round was really emotional but today I felt like it's another day at the office, I need to be ready, be sharp," said Swiatek. The Pole, who has been inconsistent since winning her sixth Grand Slam title at the All England Club 12 months ago, will face the Philippines' Alexandra Eala, who beat Serena Williams' first-round conqueror Maya Joint. Pliskova, who returned to the tour this year after a long-term injury absence, was no match for the third seed in a contest reminiscent of their 2021 Italian Open final meeting which Swiatek won 6-0, 6-0. The 25-year-old Swiatek has reached at least the third round on each of her past 26 Grand Slam appearances since losing in round two at the 2019 US Open.

By John Weaver
Agence France-Presse

KANSAS CITY — Harry Kane is England's talisman, record goalscorer and often their saviour. Is he also their only hope at the World Cup?

The captain came up with the goods yet again against the Democratic Republic of Congo in Atlanta on Wednesday, scoring twice in 11 minutes as Thomas Tuchel's men recovered from a shocking start to win 2-1.

The Bayern Munich star headed a superb equaliser from Anthony Gordon's cross in the 75th minute and thumped home the winner with four minutes remaining.

Kane now has five goals at the 2026 World Cup, one behind Lionel Messi and Kylian Mbappe and level with Erling Haaland in a captivating race for the Golden Boot.

His 12th and 13th World Cup goals in the round of 32 moved him ahead of Pele's dozen, up to sixth on the all-time list, level with France forward Just Fontaine and six behind Messi.

A relieved Tuchel described Kane as being one of the "sharks" at the World Cup, alongside the other A-list forwards.

"They are all sharks," he said. "If they smell blood, they come and score."

"It's crazy," the German added. "So, so good. He's our captain, he's our leader, and decides football matches with unbelievable finishes."

Kane, who has few equals as a finisher, has a remarkable 72 goals



AFP photo

England's forward #09 Harry Kane celebrates after winning the 2026 World Cup round of 32 match football between England and the Democratic Republic of Congo at the Atlanta Stadium in Atlanta on Wednesday

for club and country this season in just 62 appearances.

Midfielder Declan Rice told the BBC that his skipper was posting "ridiculous numbers".

"He is a proper leader, a captain, trains every day and gets on with everyone in the group," he said.

"When you have someone who can win a game for you like that... That second goal, he just reverse whips it into the top corner and it was ridiculous to see. What a player. We're very lucky to have him."

'Hero moment'

Kane himself said it

was his day for "hero moments" as England now looks forward to a last-16 match against Mexico at the Azteca Stadium.

But the question for Tuchel is: Who else can don a cape and come to England's rescue when they need it?

Kane and Real Madrid midfielder Jude Bellingham are undoubtedly the team's "go-to" men for a crisis, scoring seven out of England's eight goals so far at the World Cup.

England is not the only team to rely on special players to provide moments of inspiration — Messi scored six of Argentina's eight goals

in the group phase.

But Tuchel must have sleepless nights over the fitness of his 32-year-old captain, with no natural replacement at centre-forward.

Despite Kane's goals, England has struggled to live up to their billing as one of the favourites to win their first World Cup since 1966 since an encouraging 4-2 win against Croatia in their opener.

The Three Lions looked shaky in defence against DR Congo — ranked dozens of places below them — and pedestrian in attack, with Marcus Rashford and Noni Madueke unable to make much impact on

the wings.

Substitute Gordon set up both of Kane's goals but England look short of the "wow" factor off the bench.

World Cup favourites France, by contrast, have an embarrassment of riches in attack, with Michael Olise and Ballon d'Or winner Ousmane Dembele alongside Mbappe, and a clutch of stars in reserve.

England will return to its base camp in Kansas City to prepare for a daunting clash with co-hosts Mexico on Sunday.

Tuchel said he wanted to focus on the win against DR Congo before turning his atten-

tion to Mexico, with the added challenge of playing at high altitude.

"I'm just coming from this match and trying to enjoy it, but it is maybe one of the most beautiful fixtures, the most exciting fixtures that you can have," he said.

And former England forward Chris Sutton warned against taking the DR Congo result for granted.

"For England to win was a big deal," he told the BBC. "It's knock-out football. It's about getting over the line."

"The question you want to put out there tonight — where would England be without Harry Kane?"

LIFE

THE JORDAN TIMES

New York prepares for Taylor Swift-Travis Kelce wedding

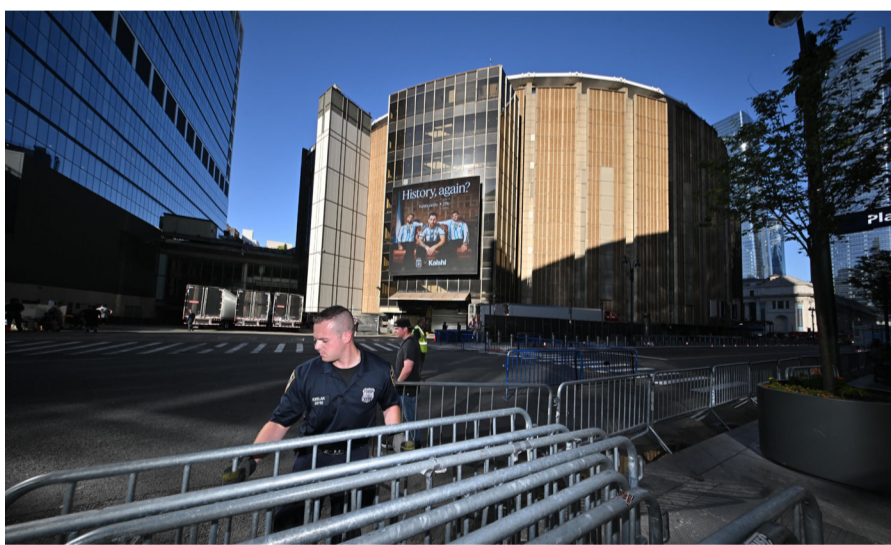
NEW YORK (AFP) — Pop singer Taylor Swift and pro-athlete Travis Kelce's official wedding plans are tightly under wraps, but New York is bracing to host the celebrity marriage of the year this week at Madison Square Garden.

The billionaire superstar and three-time NFL Super Bowl champion, both 36, have kept fans guessing, but details are beginning to emerge as the clock counts down to their big day.

US media report that the A-list festivities will kick off Thursday evening with an exclusive dinner — only around 100 people are invited — at the storied sports arena.

The wedding itself will reportedly take place on Friday with a star-studded guest list of around 1,000, including models Gigi Hadid and Cara Delevingne, singer Selena Gomez and actress Zoe Kravitz — all known to be close Swift pals — and Kelce's Kansas City Chiefs teammates.

Rumour has it that Stevie Nicks and Tim McGraw, both close to Swift, will perform. British artists Ed Sheeran — another Swift pal — and Paul McCartney may also go



AFP photo

Police set up barricades around Madison Square Garden on Thursday in New York City

around stage.

Guests are said to have signed confidentiality agreements and will be without their phones for the ceremony, expected to begin in the mid-afternoon with cocktails before a reception going into the night.

Celebrity outlet TMZ said that the lavish decor will include a replica castle built inside Madison Square Garden.

Outside the arena Wednesday afternoon a clutch of reporters and onlookers watched as trucks and crews unloaded stuff for the big

alleged wedding.

"This is fascinating!" said Alicia Griffith, 51, who was visiting from South Carolina with her two daughters, aged 10 and 12, both of them Swift fans.

Griffith said she told one of them to snap pictures. "She's like, 'But it may not be her wedding.' I'm like, but it may be. I think it is," she added.

Head of the Metropolitan Transport Authority Janno Lieber said he had no inside information about nuptials but recommended public transport as the best way to

get to Madison Square Garden, no matter who you are.

"I hope and expect that some of the celebrities, if there are celebrities coming to this alleged event, will take full advantage of our service, rather than spending a lot of time stuck in traffic somewhere in Midtown," said Lieber.

Rumour mill

Rumours have run rampant for weeks over the couple's wedding, with no official confirmation, but clues have multiplied

around Madison Square Garden.

A procession of trucks and forklifts has been outside the arena for several days, while The New York Times has reported an increased police presence and street closures in the area from Thursday.

The couple, who announced their engagement last August, appear to already be in New York.

Swift's private jet landed nearby on Tuesday and her car was seen in the city. Meanwhile, Kelce was photographed joggling in Manhattan.

Even Mayor Zohran Mamdani has added to the speculation with a video on social media warning New Yorkers — and celebrity couples — of a heat wave hitting the eastern United States this week.

"We're ready but we want to make sure that you are, too. Especially if you're celebrating the World Cup, or the 4th of July, or renting out MSG to get married. Hypothetically," he says with a smirk.

Unconventional venue

Madison Square Gar-

den boasts both an arena space and a smaller theatre traditionally used for concerts and meetings.

It is perhaps not a traditional wedding venue, but Swift would not be the first musician to marry there.

Sly Stone, who died last year, was married there in June 1974 to actress Kathy Silva during a concert by his band, Sly and the Family Stone.

It is shaping up to be a huge weekend in New York, with July Fourth celebrations culminating in a massive fireworks show, and World Cup action scheduled for July 5.

Swift, a 14-time Grammy winner, is coming off a banner year with the success of her album "The Life of a Showgirl," induction into the Songwriters Hall of Fame and a new song on the "Toy Story 5" soundtrack.

Kelce, a star tight end for the Kansas City Chiefs, has signed to play for a 14th season in the National Football League. He was on three Super Bowl winning teams with the Chiefs.

Chanel eyes menswear with Charvet shirtmaker takeover

PARIS, France (AFP) — French luxury giant Chanel announced on Thursday that it had acquired historic Parisian shirtmaker Charvet, having previously collaborated with the brand which caters mostly to men.

Charvet has been making bespoke shirts and suits from its home on Place Vendome in Paris since 1838, with past clients including Winston Churchill, John F. Kennedy and Chanel founder Gabrielle "Coco" Chanel.

New Chanel creative director Matthieu Blazy worked with the family-owned manufacturer for his debut collection in October last year, creating a long-sleeved white shirt for women that sells for more than 4,000 dollars.

The acquisition is "to support, over the long term, the passing down of unique savoir-faire and the continued existence of an iconic French heritage house, while fully respecting its creative independence," the firm said in a statement.

No price was given for the takeover.

Blazy is only the fourth creative director in Chanel's history and

has made a promising start to his task of moving the brand on from the 40-year period defined by its legendary designer Karl Lagerfeld.

His first collections have been snapped up by buyers worldwide, helping the group report a slight rise in sales last year when many of its peers are struggling with lower demand.

The group, owned by Alain and Gerard Wertheimer, turns over around 20 billion euros a year despite resisting the commercial temptation of launching a dedicated menswear fashion line.

"Now we have a name, Chanel, for women, and a name for men, Charvet," Chanel head of fashion, Bruno Pavlovsky, told The New York Times in an interview published on Thursday.

"Even if Chanel is about women, we see more men coming in," he continued.

In a separate interview with fashion website WWD, Pavlovsky denied any plans to expand Charvet beyond its single Paris store, where customers can pick from around 6,000 fabrics.

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