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Jordan, Syria pledge to deepen strategic ties, condemn Israeli incursions

AMMAN (JT) — Jordan and Syria have pledged to strengthen bilateral cooperation across key sectors, including food security, energy, water and transportation, as the two countries prepare to hold the third session of their Higher Coordination Council in Damascus next month.

The commitment came during talks Thursday in Aqaba between Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi and Syria's Foreign Minister Asaad Al Shibani, according to Foreign Ministry statement.

The ministers reaffirmed the longstanding ties between Jordan and Syria and called for their further development into a strategic partnership serving the interests of both countries and their peoples.

They also reviewed preparations for the council's third session, scheduled for November 8-9 in Damascus, and discussed implementing agreements reached during its previous session, held in Amman in April.

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Foreign Ministry photo

Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi and Syria's Foreign Minister Asaad Al Shibani hold talks in Aqaba



Photo courtesy of Royal Court

His Majesty King Abdullah on Thursday receives Syria's Foreign Minister Asaad Al Shibani

King receives Syria FM

AMMAN (JT) — His Majesty King Abdullah on Thursday received Syria's Foreign Minister Asaad Al Shibani.

During the meeting, His Majesty reiterated Jordan's support for Syria's efforts to maintain its security, stability, and sovereignty over its territory, underscoring the Kingdom's rejection of Israeli attacks on Syrian territory, according to a Royal Court statement.

The two sides underscored the strength of relations between the two countries and their peoples, and the need to build on these ties to expand cooperation in vital areas such as energy, transport, trade and investment.

The meeting also touched on the need to step up efforts to de-escalate tensions in the region and safeguard the security and sovereignty of Arab states, as well as on overall developments in the West Bank, Jerusalem, and Gaza.

Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi and Director of the Office of His Majesty Alaa Batayneh attended the meeting.

IMF maintains growth forecasts for Jordan despite regional war

AMMAN (JT) — Jordan's economy is expected to maintain steady growth despite the economic fallout from the war in the Middle East, with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) keeping its growth forecasts for the Kingdom unchanged while sharply downgrading its outlook for the wider region.

In its October 2026 Regional Economic Outlook for the Middle East and Central Asia, released on Thursday, the IMF projected Jordan's economy to grow by 2.7 per cent in 2026, accelerating to 3.1 per cent in 2027.

Both forecasts remain unchanged from the Fund's projections issued in April.

The IMF also revised its estimate of Jordan's economic growth in 2025 upward to 2.8 per cent, from its previous estimate of 2.7 per cent, according to the report.



JT file photo

The projections highlight Jordan's relative economic resilience amid regional instability, which has disrupted energy production, shipping, tourism and trade, while weighing on business confidence across the Middle East.

The global lender attributed Jordan's medium-term growth prospects to continued economic reforms, efforts to maintain macroeconomic stability and increased spending on infrastructure. It also noted that economic activity in the Kingdom had generally maintained a pace close to that recorded in the second half of 2025.

Jordan among resilient regional economies

Jordan was grouped with Egypt, Morocco, Pakistan and Tunisia as economies that have demonstrated resilience in the face of the regional conflict.

According to the IMF, oil-importing economies have generally weathered the economic shock better than oil exporters directly affected by disruptions to energy production and shipping.

Resilience among oil importers has been supported by domestic demand, workers' remittances, tourism activity and favorable financial conditions. Prompt policy responses have also helped limit the extent to which higher commodity prices have been passed on to consumers.

Jordan's unchanged growth outlook stands in contrast to the Fund's revised projections for the Middle East, North Africa, Afghanistan and Pakistan (MENAP), where economic output is now expected to contract by 1.3 per cent in 2026.

Continued on page 5



Jordan condemns Houthi attack on Saudi Arabia, reaffirms support, solidarity

AMMAN (JT) — Jordan has condemned a Houthi attack on the King Fahd International Airport in Dammam, Saudi Arabia, on Wednesday that killed two people and injured several others.

In a statement on Thursday, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs denounced the Houthi attacks on the airport, and other civilian sites in Saudi Arabia, describing them as a flagrant violation of international law and an assault on the Kingdom's sovereignty, security and stability.

The ministry reaffirmed Jordan's full solidarity with Saudi Arabia, stressing support for all measures the kingdom takes to safeguard its security, stability, national resources, and the safety of its citizens and residents.

It also extended its deepest condolences to the families of the two victims and wished those injured a speedy recovery.

A late-night attack on Saudi Arabia's Dammam airport killed two people and injured eight others, the civil aviation authority said on Thursday.

A Saudi and an Indian man were killed in the attack on Wednesday, the general authority of civil aviation said in a statement. Damage to the airport was being assessed, it added.

A total of 22 people have been killed in attacks on Saudi airports this month, according to an AFP tally of official figures.

Websites go dark as AI exposes critical security flaws

WASHINGTON, United States (AFP) — Governments and companies around the world shut down websites as they raced on Thursday to protect themselves from hacks after artificial intelligence uncovered critical flaws in a widely used programming language called PHP.

PHP helps run about 70 per cent of the world's websites — from online stores and news outlets to government services — according to Wiz Research, one of the cybersecurity firms that found the two flaws.

Created in the early 1990s, PHP originally stood for "personal home page" but now means "hypertext preprocessor" and sits underneath popular web design platforms.

"These findings rank among the most severe vulnerabilities discovered in PHP, and arguably in software history," a Wiz blog post said.

Increasingly powerful AI models can spot weak points in back-end computer code that have gone unnoticed by humans for years.

That has heightened cybersecurity fears, with the number of software vulnerabilities discovered worldwide in 2026 on track to roughly double last year's record total.

PHP programmers released a fix on Wednesday, and the US National Security Agency told organisations to patch their sites immediately or pull vulnerable systems offline — a call echoed by authorities from Japan to the European Union.

A platform affiliated with China's Ministry of Industry and Information Technology urged the same, warning of "two critical remote code execution vulnerabilities with severe impact" in PHP.

Only sites that run PHP on their own servers are exposed. Many large platforms are built on other programming languages or use operators that could install the fix quickly and were able to stay online.

Rahat Masood, senior lecturer in cybersecurity at the University of New South Wales, Sydney, described the discovery as "quite devastating".

It could allow "attackers to get into your servers without any authorisation, without any username or password", she told AFP.

"Once they are in the servers, they can do anything they want" — from stealing sensitive information to modifying website content — she added, urging institutions to "take it seriously".

'New phase'

Government agency sites in countries from Australia to Finland and The Netherlands were among those that went dark, while services from insurance firms, transport operators and media outlets were under emergency maintenance.

Popular apps, including a Pokemon sleep tracker, were also temporarily taken offline while the fix was implemented, while the foundation that runs Wikipedia warned users they could see outages while it addressed the flaws.

"If you run PHP, it is imperative that you update now," the PHP Foundation, which funds developers working on the language, said in a blog post.

Volker Dusch, a security engineer at the foundation, told The Wall Street Journal it was the most serious problem PHP had faced in more than a decade, comparing it to Heartbleed, a 2014 flaw that set off a worldwide rush to patch.

Security firm Calif found the flaws in August using OpenAI's GPT-5.6 Sol model, as part of an OpenAI-funded audit of PHP's code.

OpenAI said the discovery "marks a new phase, where AI can find security bugs with internet-scale impact".

Wiz, which is owned by Google, said it found them independently weeks later with help from AI models including Google's Gemini 4 Argon and GPT-5.6 Sol.

The flaws had been reported privately to PHP's developers and kept confidential while a fix was prepared.

AI fuels urgency

Details leaked online Tuesday, a day before the planned release of the fix — prompting the rush to take sites offline before hackers could exploit them.

Steve Kerrison, senior lecturer in cybersecurity at the Singapore campus of James Cook University, told AFP that the fear of hackers using AI to quickly and easily exploit the PHP vulnerabilities had fuelled urgency to react.

So far there has been little evidence of damaging attacks, although data breaches could lead to a wave of so-called "phishing" attacks, where hackers use personal details to steal passwords, down the line.

Larger institutions, from government agencies to news outlets, should be able to fix their websites relatively fast, Kerrison said — but others may be left vulnerable.

"There are sites, systems and people out there who will have no idea about this and still won't for days, weeks and months," Kerrison warned.

That may include user-run blogs that could be weaponised to spread computer viruses, spam people or distribute malicious content, he said.



Petra photo

Amman Design Week 2026 concludes its fourth edition, held over 16 days under the theme 'Accumulations', with the participation of more than 220 designers, makers and creative collectives

Amman Design Week attracts over 65,000 visitors in fourth edition

AMMAN (JT) — Amman Design Week (ADW) 2026 has concluded its fourth edition, held over 16 days under the theme "Accumulations", with the participation of more than 220 designers, makers and creative collectives, and attracting over 65,000 visitors to exhibitions across several locations.

Held from October 2 to 17, this year's edition featured 204 free events open to the public across Ras Al Ain, Jabal Al Luweibdeh, Jabal Amman and Iraq Al Amir, according to an ADW statement cited by the Jordan News Agency, Petra on Thursday.

For the first time, the event also extended to Aqaba as part of efforts to expand the presence of design in cultural and public spaces.

The venues welcomed the visitors in the main exhibition at the Hangar in Ras Al Ain, the student exhibition and other displays at Dar Abu Adnan in Jabal Al Luweibdeh, as well as exhibitions at Qasr Al Abd and Naqsh Collective in Iraq Al Amir.

Participating spaces in Jabal Amman also hosted exhibitions, workshops and open days for visitors.

More than 5,300 people took part in the accompanying programme, which included workshops, guided tours, salon sessions and discussions exploring design and its relationship with everyday life and the city.

The programme opened with a discussion between curators Faisal Tabara and Khaled Bashir on the theme "Accumulations", followed by further discussions on topics including city-making and the relationship between wheat and urban development.

Guided tours covered a variety of routes in and around Amman, exploring street art and architecture.

They also included a walking route organised in cooperation with the Jordan Trail and visits to Iraq Al Amir. Performances were organised in cooperation with Al Balad Theatre, beginning with the opening performance on October 3 and concluding with the final show, "Sumac".

The statement said that the event aimed to enhance Amman's position as a regional destination for design and culture. Four permanent design installations will remain in the city's public spaces after the event, extending the impact of this edition.

ADW Co-Director Sarah Hijazin said that the theme "Accumulations" went beyond serving as the title of this year's edition to reflect the lasting impact it had created.

She noted that the works produced, skills acquired through workshops, shared cultural memories, venues and four permanent installations would carry forward the legacy of what began during the week.

ADW 2026 was organised in strategic partnership with the Greater Amman Municipality, with contributions from designers, makers, partners and participants, alongside the event's sponsors.

France, Jordan mark progress towards more resilient agricultural livelihoods in northern Jordan



French embassy photo

More than 10,500 people benefit from the '20 Dunums for Change' initiative, which has strengthened rural livelihoods, promoted safer working conditions and supported child protection in northern Jordan.

AMMAN (JT) — More than 10,500 people have benefited from the "20 Dunums for Change" (20D4C) initiative, which has strengthened rural livelihoods, promoted safer working conditions and supported child protection in northern Jordan.

The project's achievements were marked on Thursday at a closing event in Amman attended by Ambassador of France to Jordan Franck Gellet and representatives of Jordanian institutions and implementing partners.

Supported by France through Agence française de développement (AFD), 20D4C was implemented in the governorates of Irbid and Mafraq by the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), in partnership with Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation, Jordan River Foundation (JRF) and Save the Children Jordan, according to a French embassy statement.

It forms part of the wider Agricultural Livelihoods Project in Northern Jordan (ALPIN), through which France supports more productive, sustainable and inclusive agricultural livelihoods.

The initiative responded to challenges facing rural communities, including water scarcity, limited income opportunities and difficult working conditions.

By combining climate-smart farming practices, access to economic opportunities, labour rights and child protection, the partners sought to make agricultural livelihoods more secure and resilient.

The results reflect this integrated approach. Helvetas supported 840 smallholder farmers and women herders in adopting climate-smart practices and strengthening their access to markets.

JRF established 155 community-managed savings and loan groups, bringing together more than 2,290 members, and supported the creation of two agricultural business cooperatives.

NRC provided more than 5,340 agricultural workers with information and assistance on labour rights and decent work.

Save the Children Jordan supported 850 children through protection activities and helped more than 770 children enrol in or return to education, while engaging families and employers in efforts to prevent child labour.

Speaking at the event, representing the minister of agriculture, Assistant Secretary-General for Projects and Rural Development Khalid Haisa said this project marked the culmination of concerted and collaborative efforts to strengthen food security and enhance the resilience of rural communities in Jordan by empowering and supporting cooperatives, smallholder farmers, and agricultural workers, while improving agri-food production and value chains in the governorates of Irbid and Mafraq.

Gellet said: "Jordan is an essential partner for France, and agriculture plays a vital role in supporting communities, creating jobs, ensuring food security and managing water resources. Over the past three years, France has been proud to support the 20 Dunums for Change project, which has helped farmers and local communities in northern Jordan strengthen their skills, improve their livelihoods and promote better working conditions."

"Throughout this effort, Jordanian host communities have remained at the heart of our support. France will continue to stand alongside Jordan in developing a stronger and more resilient agricultural sector," added the ambassador.

Ghaida Qudah, NRC country director in Jordan, said: "20 Dunums for Change has demonstrated the power of partnership in delivering meaningful change."

"Together, we've shown how inclusive and sustainable agricultural development can support Jordan's priorities for rural development, with lasting benefits for both Jordanians and refugees. We look forward to seeing communities continue to build on these foundations," Qudah added.

Beyond the immediate results, the project has helped strengthen cooperation among agricultural stakeholders, local organisations and public institutions.

The partnerships and skills developed over the past three years provide a foundation for sustaining progress in rural communities, improving decent work and expanding economic opportunities in Jordan.

AFD implements France's policy on international development and solidarity. Through its financing of NGOs and the public sector, as well as its research and publications, AFD supports and accelerates transitions towards a fairer, more resilient world, according to the statement.

PSD chief reviews security plans, operational readiness in Aqaba



ASEZA photo

The Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority on Thursday signs 16 partnership agreements with private sector companies and institutions under the Creating Shared Value (CSV) project

AMMAN (JT) — Public Security Directorate (PSD) Director Maj. Gen. Obeidallah Maaytah on Thursday in Aqaba met with the southern region security commander, alongside local police, civil defence and gendarmerie chiefs, to check on field operations, security plans and measures aimed at enhancing stability and service readiness.

Conveying the greetings of His Majesty King Abdullah, the Supreme Commander of the Jordan Armed Forces-Arab Army, Maaytah highlighted the King's appreciation for the dedication of PSD personnel in safeguarding the Kingdom and protecting citizens, according to a PSD statement.

Maaytah stressed the importance of continuously upgrading institutional performance across all domains to consolidate a secure environment, which serves as a "vital" pillar for development.

He noted the pivotal economic and tourism status of the southern region, underlining commitment to delivering efficient, professional services to both citizens and visitors round the clock.

Maaytah also emphasised the need to enhance operational capabilities, update security plans and boost coordination among units to improve efficiency, ensure swift response and maintain the highest professional standards.

During the visit, Maaytah listened to a comprehensive briefing from the southern region security commander outlining key security and community initiatives, crime prevention measures, and ongoing efforts to elevate public service delivery.



ASEZA photo

The Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority on Thursday signs 16 partnership agreements with private sector companies and institutions under the Creating Shared Value (CSV) project

ASEZA signs 16 private sector partnerships to support community development in Aqaba

AMMAN (JT) — The Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority (ASEZA) on Thursday signed 16 partnership agreements with private sector companies and institutions under the Creating Shared Value (CSV) project.

The step aims to transition corporate social responsibility from isolated contributions into structured development projects aligned with local community needs, generating economic value for businesses and ensuring sustainable social impact in Aqaba, according to an ASEZA statement.

ASEZA Chief Commissioner Shadi Majali attended the signing ceremony, in the presence of board members and representatives of partner entities.

Majali stressed that the initiative establishes an institutional framework for public-private partnerships, shifting social responsibility from individual efforts to collaborative engagement in identifying needs, formulating solutions and executing community-focused projects.

He added that economic development remains incomplete unless its outcomes positively reflect on citizens' lives, highlighting the importance of leveraging corporate capabilities and expertise to support education, training, employment, entrepreneurship and public amenities.

ASEZA Commissioner for Tourism and Youth Affairs and head of the project committee Thabet Nabulsi, said that the agreements represent a "practical" step towards aligning private sector contributions with actual local needs through targeted partnerships.

Nabulsi noted that the project expands corporate participation in youth education, training, and entrepreneurship, alongside health initiatives, infrastructure, and public parks.

Murad Bawab, director of the follow-up and achievement unit and committee member, said that the project's development involved introducing the CSV concept, outreach to businesses, mapping partner interest, and formulating 16 unified framework agreements alongside a reference guide to manage the system.

Bawab pointed out that the model adopts a more comprehensive concept of community contribution that extends beyond financial support to include technical expertise, technology, human resources, and corporate networks to address local needs.

The agreements encompass companies operating across various sectors, including real estate development, logistics, food and manufacturing industries, water, tourism, telecommunications, metal and garment manufacturing, as well as healthcare and education.

Archaeologists investigate whether Qasr ed Deir was monastery, fortress or watchtower

By Saeb Rawashdeh



Photo courtesy of Eslam Dawodieh

A structure at Qasr ed Deir is associated with an ancient cemetery and a potential monastery

AMMAN — Qasr ed Deir is a site located some five kilometres southwest of Tafileh and around 1.5 kilometres north of the modern town of Al Ain Al Baida.

It sits directly across the valley from the prominent ancient Edomite stronghold of Sela.

The main monument — often referred to in archaeological registry systems as a "temple" — is a highly visible, almost square structure measuring roughly 21 by 17 metres. The temple is associated with an ancient cemetery located immediately to its east.

While the area has deeper Nabataean or Roman landscape ties, archaeological excavations led by Polish research teams (such as those from the Jagiellonian University) have focused heavily on documenting its architectural phases, which include prominent medieval and potentially monastic use.

The site was first formally recognised by a pioneering US archaeologist Nelson Glueck in 1934, following initial geographic surveys in the region by Czech explorer Alois Musil in 1900.

"The building covers an area of 396.37 square metres. It was used as a monastery during the Byzantine period, an inference drawn from a group of crosses carved inside the structure. However, this use appears to have been confined to the Byzantine period," said Jordanian archaeologist Eslam Dawodieh.

Given that the site was reoccupied and reused from the Iron Age through to the late Islamic periods, the function of the building during the periods preceding and following the Byzantine remains unknown, Dawodieh added.

"Yet, MacDonald indicated during his surveys that the site might be a watchtower, this information is unconfirmed. The foundations of the building and of the site in general, date to Iron Age I/Iron Age II [the 'Kingdom of Edom']," Dawodieh noted.

However, analysis of pottery sherds from the site suggests they may date to the Early Bronze Age, since many Early Bronze Age sherds were recovered.

"This is according to a report on an archaeological sounding by a team from Jagiellonian University," she explained.

"I can say that all our current knowledge of the site amounts to no more than a monastery dating to the Byzantine Period. We know it has been scientifically excavated only twice," Dawodieh said.

The archaeologist noted that it is therefore still too early to determine whether it functioned only as a watchtower or a monastery, since it may also have been a fortress or a storage facility.

"Furthermore, during the next phase, we will conduct limited excavations and soundings at different locations within the structure in order to clarify its function," Dawodieh stressed.



Petra photo

Minister of Tourism and Antiquities Imad Hijazeen and Director General of the Turkey Tourism Promotion and Development Agency (TGA) Sinan Seha Turkseven on Thursday discuss ways to boost tourist arrivals to Jordan

Tourism minister, Turkish tourism agency discuss cooperation

AMMAN (JT) — Minister of Tourism and Antiquities Imad Hijazeen and Director General of the Turkey Tourism Promotion and Development Agency (TGA) Sinan Seha Turkseven on Thursday discussed ways to boost tourist arrivals to Jordan through strategic partnerships, joint tourism packages and new marketing channels.

The meeting was held in Istanbul as part of a series of tourism engagements aimed at expanding Jordan's presence in international markets, according to a Jordan Tourism Board (JTB) statement.

The meeting was attended by Jordanian Ambassador to Turkey Hazem Tamimi and representatives of the Jordan Hotel Association and the Jordan Inbound Tour Operators Association.

Discussions focused on attracting more Turkish tourists, developing joint tourism packages and leveraging Istanbul's role as an international aviation hub to reach European and Asian markets.

The two sides also explored cooperation in digital marketing and the exchange of expertise in destination management.

Hijazeen said that the next phase required a shift from traditional promotional activities towards partnerships that translate into increased tourist arrivals, longer hotel stays and higher visitor spending.

He stressed the importance of coordinating government and diplomatic efforts with the private sector to strengthen Jordan's competitiveness and promote the Kingdom as a diverse and sustainable tourist destination.

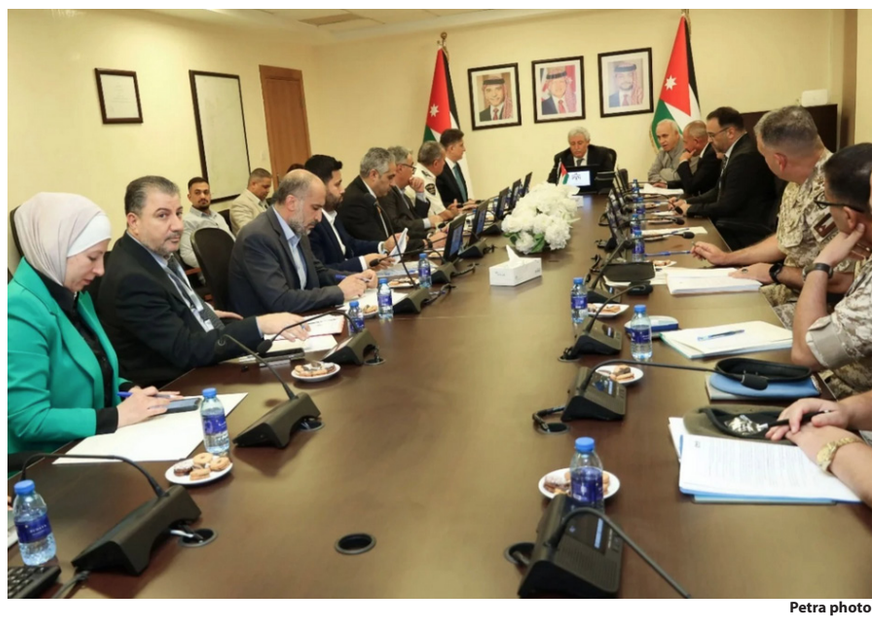
Transport minister chairs meeting on Aqaba–Maan railway project

AMMAN (JT) — Minister of Transport and Labour Nidal Qatamin on Thursday chaired a meeting of the Higher Government Committee for the Aqaba Port–Shadiya–Maan Railway Project to discuss ways to expedite implementation and address obstacles facing the project.

The meeting brought together secretaries-general and representatives of relevant ministries and government entities, as well as a representative of the Jordanian-Emirati Railway Company, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.

Qatamin highlighted the project's importance in connecting Jordan to regional and international markets and as a strategic step towards establishing the National Railway Network.

He said that the project would strengthen the Kingdom's position in the transport and logistics sectors, facilitate freight movement and improve connectivity between ports and production and export hubs.



Petra photo

Minister of Transport Nidal Qatamin on Thursday chairs a meeting of the Higher Government Committee for the Aqaba Port–Shadiya–Maan Railway Project

The minister stressed the need for coordinated government efforts and cooperation among all stakeholders. He called for a single-window system bringing together the relevant entities to expedite approvals, streamline procedures and address obstacles ahead of the launch of field operations.

Participants stressed the importance of continued direct coordination between government entities and the executing company.

They agreed to hold regular coordination meetings to follow up on project requirements, facilitate procedures and accelerate implementation in line with approved technical and procedural standards.

The meeting was attended by secretaries-general of the ministries of transport, local administration, interior, environment, public works and housing, and water and irrigation.

Also attending were representatives of the Income and Sales Tax Department, the Jordan Customs Department, the Department of Land and Survey, the National Electric Power Company, the Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority, the Energy and Minerals Regulatory Commission and relevant security agencies.



Petra photo

The Jordan Tourism Board (JTB) launches its 2026 North American roadshow in New York City

JTB launches North American roadshow to promote Jordan

AMMAN (JT) — The Jordan Tourism Board (JTB) has launched its 2026 North American roadshow in New York City, bringing together 13 Jordanian destination management companies and 33 American tour operators and tourism partners to promote the Kingdom and attract more visitors.

Organised in cooperation with Royal Jordanian Airlines (RJ), the event featured orientation and training sessions on Jordan's tourism offerings and 429 bilateral business meetings to explore potential partnerships and develop travel itineraries covering religious, eco, luxury and adventure tourism.

The roadshow also introduced Trove Tourism Development Advisors, the JTB's newly appointed representative in North America, tasked with strengthening ties with industry partners, coordinating marketing campaigns and expanding travel programmes.

The New York event marked the first stop on a five-city tour aimed at expanding trade networks and increasing Jordan's inclusion in US travel itineraries.

The roadshow was scheduled to continue in Chicago on October 22, followed by Los Angeles on October 26. Follow-up efforts will focus on translating meeting outcomes into travel programmes.

AI monitoring systems help reduce water violations — ministry

AMMAN (JT) — The Ministry of Water and Irrigation said on Thursday that it is using artificial intelligence (AI) and modern monitoring systems to detect violations involving water networks and pipelines.

Ministry spokesperson Omar Salameh said that AI technology had delivered positive results in some areas of Amman, helping improve water supplies and reduce violations, Al Mamlaka TV reported.

He said that monitoring devices and sensors track water withdrawals and detect unusual changes in consumption or water flow, enabling technical teams to locate faults and respond more quickly.

"Tampering with or damaging the devices undermines the systems' effectiveness and requires the relevant authorities to repair, replace or upgrade the equipment, incurring additional costs," he said.



JT file

The Ministry of Water and Irrigation says on Thursday that it is using artificial intelligence (AI) and modern monitoring systems to detect violations involving water networks and pipelines

Salameh stressed that field monitoring remains essential, with mobile teams monitoring water pipelines around the clock despite the extensive networks, much of which runs underground.

Reaching a site where a violation has been detected can take one to two hours, giving those responsible time to complete their activities before technical teams arrive, particularly when several people are involved, or others are keeping watch over the site, he added.

The ministry will continue to strengthen field and technical monitoring to protect main water pipelines and sources, reduce water losses and violations and improve the efficiency of water supplies, Salameh said.

Violations involving main water pipelines pose a major challenge to Jordan's water sector, depleting resources, placing technical and financial burdens on the ministry and relevant authorities, and affecting supplies to residents amid the Kingdom's water scarcity, Salameh said.

He added that the ministry was continuing enforcement campaigns across the Kingdom to address such violations. Recent cases involving main water pipelines were detected in Sahab as part of ongoing efforts to curb the practice and protect water resources.

Epidemics centre urges insurers to cover flu vaccine

AMMAN (JT) — The National Centre for Epidemics and Communicable Diseases Control has called on insurance companies to include the influenza vaccine in their coverage to protect high-risk groups, reduce hospital admissions and lower healthcare costs.

Centre President Adel Belbeisi said on Thursday that the centre had invited insurance companies to cover the vaccine, noting that vaccination could help prevent complications among vulnerable groups and generate significant savings for the healthcare sector.

Belbeisi said that influenza cases typically rise from around epidemiological week 43 and continue until the end of April or May, with infections peaking in week 50 before declining towards the end of the year or the first or second week of the following year, Al Mamlaka TV reported.

He identified older people, pregnant women and people with chronic diseases as among the groups most vulnerable to complications, adding that vaccination could help reduce hospital admissions among them.

Regarding respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), Belbeisi said its activity typically begins towards the end of the year and continues until epidemiological week 15 or 16 of the following year.



Al Mamlaka TV photo

The National Centre for Epidemics and Communicable Diseases Control calls on insurance companies to include the influenza vaccine in their coverage to protect high-risk groups

Cassation Court upholds over 3-year sentence for drug dealer

By Rana Husseini

AMMAN — The Court of Cassation has upheld a March 2023 State Security Court (SSC) ruling, sentencing a drug dealer to over three years in prison after convicting him of possessing illegal narcotics in Amman in September 2022.

The court declared the defendant guilty of obtaining illegal narcotics with the intent of selling the drugs to an undercover agent on September 2.

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.

However, the court decided to reduce the fine to JD3,500 and the prison term to three years and four months in prison to give the defendant a second chance in life.



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 six Captagon pills in return for JD20," court documents said.

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

Upon searching the defendant, officers found Captagon pills and hashish on the defendant, the court added.

The defendant contested the SSC's ruling through his lawyer, who argued that the court "did not provide solid evidence to implicate his client for drug trafficking".

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 sentence against the defendant.

"It was clear to the court that the defendant confessed willingly to possessing the illegal drugs to sell in the local market," the higher court said.

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



AFP photo

This handout photo taken on Tuesday and provided by the South Korean defence ministry on Thursday shows South Korean Marines installing obstacles during a comprehensive island defence exercise on Yeonpyeong island near the maritime border with North Korea

Seoul sees no signs of new North Korean weapons on border

SEOUL (AFP) — South Korea's military said on Thursday it had seen no signs of newly deployed North Korean weapons on their shared border, hours after Pyongyang said new "counter means" would be put on alert along its length.

Pyongyang has rejected claims it was behind an explosion that injured three South Korean soldiers last month inside the Demilitarised Zone (DMZ), the heavily mined buffer area that has divided the two Koreas since their 1953 armistice, and mockingly dismissed calls for an apology.

The country on Monday called the situation along the border "grave", saying it was considering deploying additional "tactical strike means" to the area.

On Thursday, Kim Yo -jong, the powerful sister of leader Kim Jong -un, said the North would place loudspeakers on standby along the border "within days" and had put unspecified "new counter means" on alert.

The statement came less than 24 hours after Kim Yo -jong announced Pyongyang had moved new troop units into "firing position" after a visit to the border.

Both countries have occasionally turned to loudspeakers blaring propaganda across their shared border and other psychological warfare methods.

But Seoul's military said on Thursday that it has seen no sign of new weapons being deployed so far.

"We have not observed any signs that North Korea is deploying new types of weaponry," Jang Do-young, spokesperson for the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told reporters.

"Nevertheless, given their claims, we are keeping a close watch on the situation," he added.

Asked about the North's loudspeaker claims, Jang said "routine maintenance work" had been observed even before it had issued its latest statements.

He added that Pyongyang's recent flurry of statements only suggested that the South's ongoing efforts to clear landmines inside the DMZ were "proving effective".

South Korea's foreign ministry also said on Thursday it planned to send a letter to the president of the UN Security Council later in the day over the landmine incident.

The letter will "explain that the explosion was caused by a landmine planted by North Korean troops, constituting a clear violation of the armistice agreement", Park Doo-soon, spokesperson for Seoul's foreign ministry, said.

It will also "demand an apology and responsible measures from North Korea, while calling for dialogue to prevent further escalation of tensions and restore trust", he added.

On Tuesday, North Korea decried what it claimed were nearly 1,000 "provocative" loudspeaker broadcasts and numerous warning shots fired by South Korean forces between October 1 and 17.

Seoul's military said Pyongyang was attempting to shift the blame for escalating military tensions, while confirming the use of loudspeakers and warning shots as "legitimate defensive measures".

President Lee Jae Myung, meanwhile, has called for the North to return to dialogue, an overture Kim Yo-jong has slammed as "the climax of the farce".

North Korea has separately tested a slew of weapons recently, including a "new-type" precision-guided torpedo system and an intermediate-range hypersonic missile, both of which were said to use AI technology.

Black Sea attacks raise stakes in Bulgaria presidential vote

SOFIA (AFP) — Bulgarians head to the polls on Sunday in a presidential election overshadowed by security fears after a string of drone attacks on merchant ships in the Black Sea, seen as fallout from the war in Ukraine.

Four vessels were struck off Bulgaria's coast this month in the latest suspected spillover from Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, bringing the conflict closer to the EU and NATO member state.

While Prime Minister Rumen Radev says the attacks appear to serve Russian interests, his government insists there is so far no evidence directly linking Moscow to them.

Incumbent President Iliana Iotova, a Radev ally who favours dialogue with Moscow, is the frontrunner for the largely ceremonial post, polls show.

Her main challenger is expected to be Andrey Gyurov, a banker and former caretaker prime minister backed by the pro-Western opposition.

Historically close to Russia, Bulgaria remains deeply divided over its relationship with Moscow.

So the election will pit two competing visions of Bulgaria against each other, said political scientist Parvan Simeonov, founder of polling institute Myara.

One "conservative, popular and oriented toward the East" and the other "Western, elitist and liberal", he explained.



AFP photo

Bulgaria's former interim Prime Minister and candidate for the 2026 Presidential election Andrey Gyurov (left) and vice presidential candidate Georgi Kandev hold hands on stage during a campaign rally in Plovdiv, on Wednesday ahead of the Presidential election on Sunday

'President of peace'

Iotova, 61, took over as president earlier this year when Radev stepped down to run in parliamentary elections.

Radev's landslide victory ended years of political instability that saw a succession of pro-EU governments lead the Balkan country of 6.4 million people.

While largely ceremonial, the presidency carries veto powers, a role in appointing senior officials and command of the armed forces.

According to a Market Links poll published Wednesday, Iotova is expected to win 47.3 per cent of the vote, against 30.6 percent for Gyurov.

If successful in a runoff set for November 1, she would become the first woman ever elected president of Bulgaria.

A former journalist and member of the European Parliament, Iotova draws support from Radev as well as traditionally pro-Russian socialist circles.

Appealing to patriotic sentiment, she launched her campaign by the Golden Church in Veliki Preslav, the former capital of the First Bulgarian Empire.

Calling for national unity and action against poverty in the EU's poorest member state, she has also made peace in Ukraine a central theme of her campaign, promising to be a "president of peace".

> 'The election matters because the president symbolises the unity of the nation...'

Without questioning Bulgaria's membership of the European Union and NATO, she opposes continued military aid to Kyiv and advocates negotiations.

"We do not need a Coalition of the Willing for Ukraine, but a Coalition for Peace in Ukraine," she said at a rally in Varna, arguing that military support risks prolonging the conflict.

Facing Iotova, Gyurov, 50, has sharply criticised Radev's foreign policy.

A strong supporter of Bulgaria's Euro-Atlantic ties, he believes "diplomacy is necessary, but it does not replace either deterrence or alliances".

Radev ended arms deliveries from Bulgarian military stockpiles to Ukraine in June and later withdrew from the Coalition of the Willing, which provides military and diplomatic support for Kyiv.

Bulgaria's defence industry continues to supply Ukraine, however. And despite campaigning on peace, Iotova recently inaugurated a new facility at Arsenal, the country's largest weapons manufacturer.

'Don't matter'

"The election matters because the president symbolises the unity of the nation and the strategic direction it is heading towards," Vessela Tcherneva, deputy director of the European Council on Foreign Relations, told AFP.

But on Sofia's sunlit streets, just days before the vote, many Bulgarians interviewed seemed unconvinced of its significance, with turnout expected to be low.

Plamen Nikolov, a 65-year-old electrician, said he would not vote.

"These elections don't matter. The president's role is purely formal," he told AFP.

Swiss, Austrian women freed after Niger kidnap ordeal

GENEVA, Switzerland (AFP) — A Swiss and an Austrian woman kidnapped by suspected militants in Niger more than a year and a half ago have been freed, their countries announced on Thursday, after Libya's reported intervention.

Swiss national Claudia Abbt, 69, arrived in Libya's eastern city of Benghazi together with 76-year-old Eva Gretzmacher, Libyan television channel Al Masar reported earlier, before their foreign ministries said they were on their way home.

The channel said the release followed an intervention from the family of military commander Khalifa Haftar, who controls eastern Libya and parts of the south.

Gretzmacher was taken on January 11, 2025, and Abbt was captured in April last year. Several false rumours of their release had emerged previously.

"Eva is free! Today is a wonderful day — a day of relief and above all of gratitude," wrote the Austrian hostage's son Christoph Gretzmacher on Facebook.



AFP photo

Christoph Gretzmacher released a photograph of him with his mother Eva Gretzmacher on her return to Vienna after her release

"The nightmare is over."

Diplomatic efforts

Looking tired, the two women appeared in a video broadcast by the Libyan eastern-based television channel Al Masar.

Sitting beneath a portrait of military commander and Libyan National Army chief Haftar, they spoke in French to confirm their names, ages, nationalities and time in captivity.

They thanked Haftar and his son Saddam for having secured their freedom.

Several media outlets also circulated a photograph of the two women seated inside an aircraft.

The countries did not give precise details of how the release was secured.

The foreign ministry in Bern said in a statement that the Swiss citizen was met in Benghazi "by Swiss federal administration staff and received medical care. She is doing well under the circumstances and is currently on her way back to Switzerland".

Vienna confirmed that Gretzmacher had been freed and was received by an Austrian crisis response team following "intensive diplomatic efforts to secure her release".

"We are all very relieved that Eva G. is free again after more than 21 months. This period has been an unimaginable ordeal for her and her family," Foreign Minister Beate Meinl-Reisinger said in a statement.

"Today is a special day that moves us all.

"For many months, we worked closely, discreetly and in a spirit of trust with our regional, European, and international partners. These joint efforts have paid off."

Daesh role

The two women were both living in Agadez in northern Niger when they were captured.

No group has claimed the kidnappings, but a source close to the case told AFP that they were the work of the Daesh — Sahel Province, a terrorist group.

"I am relieved that the kidnapped Swiss woman is free again after more than a year and a half," Foreign Minister Ignazio Cassis said in the statement.

"I would like to thank all parties involved, both in Switzerland and abroad, that worked tirelessly to secure her release."

After the kidnapping came to light, the Swiss foreign ministry set up a task force including police and intelligence resources to try to secure her release.

The ministry "extends its gratitude to all national and international partners for their excellent cooperation in this case", it said.

The ministry said it would not be providing further details, for privacy reasons.

A Malian security source told AFP that the women were transported by plane early Wednesday from Nigerien territory to Benghazi.

"The two had been held for a time in northern Mali, but the resolution came from the Libyan side, notably involving the Haftar clan," the source said.

The source added that they had been held in the Menaka region of north-eastern Mali, an area where Daesh is highly active.

France reports first human Shamonda virus case, says no health risk

PARIS (AFP) — French health authorities said on Thursday that the Shamonda virus, which usually affects livestock, had been detected in a human for the first time, in a severely immunocompromised patient who died earlier this month.

There was "no health risk to the general public identified at this time", the health and agriculture ministries said in a joint statement.

It added that the human infection appeared to be "an exceptional case involving a severely immunocompromised patient" hospitalised for a serious medical condition.

"Despite circulating in Africa and Asia for several decades, the Shamonda virus has never previously been detected in humans," the ministries said.

The virus, which belongs to the Orthobunyavirus group and is typically transmitted to animals by small biting insects, was first detected in Europe this summer, they said.

At this stage in the investigation, the patient was believed to have contracted the virus through the bite of a midge in eastern France, where the virus was circulating in animals during the spring and summer, the ministries said.

"The neurological complications observed in the immunocompromised patient prior to his death are very likely linked to infection with the Shamonda virus," they added, citing preliminary findings.

But "clinical, biological and epidemiological investigations are still ongoing", they said.

In 14 European countries

The virus was first detected in Nigeria in the mid-1960s and has since been reported in cattle in several parts of Africa and in Japan.

The virus was detected in Europe for the first time at the end of July, including on cattle farms in France

It has now been detected in 14 western European countries, according to an epidemiological bulletin from France's national research institute monitoring animal health.

Cattle are considered its main animal hosts, although sporadic infections in smaller livestock and horses have also been identified in France this summer.

In cattle, the main symptoms are acute diarrhoea, fever, lethargy and a drop in milk production.

An investigation is ongoing, and both the World Health Organisation and the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control have been notified.

Tom Solomon, head of The Pandemic Institute in Britain and part of a health protection unit looking at zoonotic infections at the University of Liverpool, noted that "there is still a great deal we don't know" about the Shamonda virus.

"We don't know whether healthy people can become infected without developing symptoms, what symptoms the virus might normally cause, or how frequently it might cause serious disease," he said.

"The important message is that there is no reason for public alarm, but this case reinforces the importance of surveillance for emerging infections, particularly those that can affect the brain."



AFP photo

Kenya Red Cross personnel doff their Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) during a simulation of the evacuation of remains of an Ebola victim in the Kenyan capital Nairobi on Thursday

Africa faces 'complex' Ebola outbreak after spread to Nigeria — WHO

LAGOS (AFP) — The World Health Organisation (WHO) warned on Thursday that Africa faced a "complex" Ebola outbreak after the virus crossed from east Africa to Nigeria, which has reported the first case in the west of the continent.

Nigeria on Tuesday announced an imported case of the Bundibugyo strain behind a major DR Congo Ebola outbreak in a woman, a wife of a diplomat who had a history of travel to Uganda.

The continent's most populous nation is the fourth African country affected by the outbreak, which this week came to span the continent, with Kenya in the east reporting nine cases since October 6.

The outbreak began in the Democratic Republic of Congo and has become the deadliest in the country's history, killing more than 4,000 people out of more than 9,000 confirmed cases since mid-May, according to health authorities.

It is caused by the Bundibugyo strain of the virus, for which there is still neither a vaccine nor a specific treatment.

"We are facing a more complex outbreak landscape. Nigeria has confirmed an imported case of Ebola virus disease," Mohamed Janabi, regional director for WHO in Africa, told an online media briefing.

The patient in Nigeria returned to the capital Abuja on October 3 after being in Uganda since September 16, the WHO representative in Nigeria Pavel Ursu said.

She flew to Abuja on an Ethiopian Airlines flight and transited through Addis Ababa, an emergency meeting of the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (NCDC) heard on Wednesday.

The woman is originally from Uganda but based in Abuja, Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention Director General Jean Kaseya told AFP on Thursday.

He also said she did not go to the DRC, as suggested earlier by Ugandan authorities.

Officials are trying to piece together her travel history to establish where she could have been exposed.

"We're still investigating multiple scenarios of the possible source where she got the infection," Kaseya told journalists, including the possibility that there might have been contact at the airport with Kenya's first victim, who also left Uganda on October 3, the same day the woman left Uganda for Nigeria.

'Extremely serious threat'

Africa's CDC has already warned of "an extremely serious threat", with fatality rates fast edging towards 50 per cent in the DRC.

The Nigerian case has reignited memories of a widespread outbreak in 2014 that struck several countries in the region and killed more than 11,000 people across west Africa between late 2013 and 2016.

Nigeria successfully contained the Ebola outbreak in 2014, resulting in only 19 infections and seven deaths, raising confidence it can respond effectively to new public health threats.

But news of the high death rate out of the DR-Congo has some Nigerians worried in the country of 240 million people.

Airport officials at the busy international airport in Lagos were Friday screening all international inbound travellers.

"I'm scared because we have been hearing about the news the way people are dying in the Congo," Patrick Akwongu, 61, who flew in from Italy with a layover in Addis Ababa told AFP. "Because Nigeria is a crowded country, if such a thing happens here people will die like fowl," he said.

But Bezalel Mfashingabo, 44, a Kenyan flying from Nairobi through Addis Ababa, wasn't too worried because the "infected" are in quarantine in his home country and so "there is not much panic".

Ebola, which is transmitted through contact with bodily fluids and can cause severe internal and external bleeding and organ failure, has killed more than 15,000 people in Africa over the last 50 years.

French authorities seek to ban or curb fresh protests

PARIS (AFP) — French authorities on Thursday imposed bans or restrictions on fresh protests springing up in the wake of demonstrations last weekend that degenerated into the country's worst street violence in years.

President Emmanuel Macron said after chairing a meeting of key ministers and intelligence officials that curfews and other security measures would be imposed, including bans on "groups without legitimacy" holding protests.

"The priority is a return to calm," he said, adding that he would chair a defence council meeting of key ministers on Friday to decide "the next steps" for new nationwide demonstrations called for Saturday and afterwards.

The worst of the violence, Macron said, "was led by organised ultra-left groups aiming to bring down the republic", that he accused of "sedition".

Officials are still reeling from the clashes, widespread looting and vandalism of public buildings that broke out on October 17, on the margins of mass demonstrations of more than half a million people against the surging cost of living.

Macron's government has admitted police lost control, and candidates jockeying to succeed him in presidential elections in six months' time argue that authorities are incapable or unwilling to calm the situation.



AFP photo

French Republican Security Corps (CRS - Compagnies Republicaines de Securite) police officers stand next to the Bourse du Travail where high school students, National Union of Students of France (UNEF) and the New Anticapitalist Party (NPA) gather for a general assembly, in Lyon on Thursday

Protests banned

A Paris protest Thursday organised by students — who had held four weeks of protests before the October 17 rallies — went ahead with hundreds attending after a police ban was overturned by an emergency court injunction.

"The authorities are trying to make a distinction between 'good' and 'bad' protesters," a university student leader, Coppelia Moreau, said of that attempted ban and others being touted.

"What we are seeing is a government that doesn't want any demonstrations at all. That goes against the right to demonstrate," she told journalists.

Authorities on Thursday declared a ban on "all protests" in the southeastern city of Lyon on Saturday.

France's third-biggest city suffered the looting of 200 to 300 shops last weekend and the torching of a tourist office in what its mayor described as hours of "chaos".

Other cities, including Grenoble, Rouen, Le Havre and Toulon, issued bans on protests in their city centres.

In Paris, the city's police said on Thursday that the march planned for Saturday could be held in the east of the capital, starting at Bastille, but was banned from heading into the city centre, where shops and major public buildings are located.

The Yellow Vest movement organising the cost-of-living rallies along with unions said it did not agree with the order.

"We won't sign off on it," said Benjamin Ball, who runs an online map showing the planned locations of Saturday's demonstrations.

Art Basel Paris, the capital's biggest art fair, said it would shut this weekend, two days early, due to the protests.

France's interior ministry said "20 per cent more" police would be deployed this coming Saturday than for last weekend.

Detentions and dialogue

The French government has been projecting a firm response in the wake of last weekend's violence, although Macron has said he would not go as far as to call a state of emergency.

Justice Minister Gerald Darmanin said on Thursday that 217 people of 2,700 arrested during and since last weekend had been locked up, and that 1,000 more were being prosecuted.

On Thursday, a 66-year-old man was arrested over the arson last weekend of the 19th-century town hall of Limoges, prosecutors said. A man in his 30s had already been arrested Tuesday over the same crime.

Marine Le Pen, the far-right leader currently topping opinion polls for the April-May presidential elections, has accused Macron and his centrist government of being too soft and lacking authority.

Jean-Luc Melenchon, a far-left candidate criticised by the government for not strongly condemning the protest violence, blamed authorities' "non-stop brutal repression" for the unrest.

Prime Minister Sebastien Lecornu on Thursday hosted a meeting of top officials from France's main parties. While most sent their leaders, Le Pen's National Rally was represented by a lower-ranking party official.

Lecornu was to follow that with a meeting with mayors, and on Monday he will meet student groups, unions and the employer federation.

Jordan, Syria pledge to deepen strategic ties, condemn Israeli incursions

Continued from page 1

The two sides agreed to continue examining strategic projects in priority sectors, with a focus on initiatives that can be translated into practical measures during the upcoming meeting.

Safadi reiterated Jordan's support for Syria's reconstruction, stressing the importance of preserving the country's unity, sovereignty, security and territorial integrity while protecting the rights of all Syrians.

He also underscored the importance of Syria's stability to the wider region, saying its security was a cornerstone of regional security and stability.

The two top diplomats condemned repeated Israeli attacks and incursions into Syrian territory, describing such acts as violations of Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as breaches of international law, the UN Charter and Israel's obligations under the 1974 Disengagement Agreement.

They also called for an end to Israel's occupation of Syrian territory and reaffirmed the need to respect Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Jordan and Syria also expressed full solidarity with Saudi Arabia, pledging support for measures taken by the kingdom to safeguard its sovereignty, security and stability and protect its citizens and residents.

The ministers condemned attacks by Yemen's Houthi movement against Saudi Arabia as violations of international law and threats to the kingdom's security and sovereignty.

The talks also covered broader regional developments and efforts to de-escalate tensions, restore calm and strengthen regional security and stability.

Safadi and Al Shibani agreed to maintain consultations and coordination across various fields and to follow up on the implementation of bilateral agreements, the statement said.

IMF maintains growth forecasts for Jordan despite regional war

Continued from page 1

The projection represents a downward revision of 2.7 percentage points from the IMF's April outlook, which had forecast regional growth of 1.4 per cent.

The deterioration reflects the effects of the war on energy production, shipping, tourism, trade and economic confidence, with oil-exporting economies directly affected by disruptions experiencing a sharp slowdown in activity.

Despite the expected contraction this year, the IMF projects the MENAP region to rebound with growth of 6.6 per cent in 2027, assuming the conflict eases in early 2027 and trade gradually returns to normal throughout the year.

The projected recovery is expected to be driven largely by a sharp rebound in economic activity among Gulf oil exporters. However, the Fund cautioned that output in these economies would generally remain below levels anticipated before the conflict over the medium term.

For oil-importing economies, including Jordan, growth is expected to accelerate over 2026 and 2027, supported by resilient domestic demand as inflationary pressures ease following the initial shock from higher commodity prices.

The IMF also warned that further disruptions to energy production could worsen the regional outlook, underscoring the uncertainty surrounding the pace of recovery.

Risks remain despite resilience

The report pointed to diminishing economic buffers across the region, with external positions weakening in most MENAP and Caucasus and Central Asia economies.

Inflation is projected to rise across MENAP in 2026, while some governments have relied on subsidies, price controls and fixed exchange rates to limit the impact of higher prices on consumers. Such measures, however, carry fiscal costs.

For Jordan, the IMF's projections suggest that continued reforms, macroeconomic stability and infrastructure investment will remain important to sustaining growth amid regional uncertainty.

Tens of thousands rally as Serbia heads to pivotal poll

BELGRADE (AFP) — Tens of thousands of supporters of Serbia's opposition student movement rallied in central Belgrade on Thursday, seeking to oust the party of veteran leader Aleksandar Vucic in crunch parliamentary elections this weekend.

The Student List, a leaderless movement of student-backed candidates, wants to end more than 14 years of rule by Vucic's right-wing populist Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) in Sunday's vote.

It is the biggest threat Vucic has faced and civil society groups have warned the poll campaign has been marred by intimidation, arrests, attacks, misuse of public resources and a distorted media environment.

"I came to support the Student List because young people finally gave me hope that it is possible to live in a normal country," 47-year-old Marija Nedeljkovic Radic told AFP as she arrived for the students' rally.

"Really, for the first time in my life, I believe that it is possible."

The vote comes after nearly two years of student-led protests sparked by the 2024 collapse of a canopy at the newly renovated Novi Sad railway station that killed 16 people.

The tragedy, widely blamed on corruption, triggered some of Serbia's largest protests since the fall of strongman Slobodan Milosevic in 2000.

The anti-corruption movement, led by university students, snowballed from demands for a transparent investigation into the tragedy into calls for an early election.

Waving "Students are winning" flags, chanting, and blowing whistles, students and their supporters marched through Belgrade before converging on Slavija Square, the site of some of their biggest protests.

Tens of thousands of people gathered filled the square and the surrounding streets, according to AFP reporters.

"We are putting an end to 14 years of humiliation, chaos and betrayal, and to decades of putting personal and party interests above yours," university professor Jugoslav Gasic, one of 250 candidates on the Student List, told the crowd who chanted "Victory, victory!"

"You deserve better, and we know how to deliver it. Students are winning!"

The rally ended with the candidates stepping down from the stage into the crowd while holding the Serbian constitution in their hands before dancing the traditional folk dance with supporters.

Vucic defiant

Vucic has dominated Serbian politics for over a decade, serving as either prime minister or president.

Amid mounting pressure, Vucic announced the snap vote last month, setting up his biggest electoral challenge since his party took power in 2012.

Vucic, who addressed supporters at a sports hall in the capital on Thursday, has regularly accused the student movement of being a foreign-funded coup attempt.

"Let us never forget how they tried to bring down our state. Let us always protect and defend it," said the 56-year-old, who resigned to run for prime minister.

"Let us go out and defeat them! Defeat them decisively!" he said before white ticker tape and balloons showered the crowd.

Many of the 250 candidates of the Student List running for the 250-seat parliament are drawn from academia or are deliberate political outsiders.

The movement has a broad platform, but at its core is a pledge to fight corruption.

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'Media capture': Serbian journalists squeezed before vote

By Ognjen Zoric and Andrew Leeson
Agence France-Presse

BELGRADE — Weeks before Serbia's highly anticipated election, Zoran Kesic, the country's star late-night talk show host, opened his monologue with a stark warning.

"These elections determine whether our children will stay here," the seasoned journalist told his audience, staring down the lens in his usual suit and tie.

The snap poll on October 25 pits the dominant Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) against a student-led movement that has evolved from nearly two years of anti-government protests into a political force.

But ahead of the vote, Kesic lost his television platform when his channel dropped his show, citing "commercial reasons".

"It seems absurd that one of Serbia's most popular and most watched shows has no place on television," Kesic, who now delivers his acerbic political takes directly on YouTube, told AFP.

He is one of the most high-profile examples of what media watchdogs have warned about for years — independent voices being squeezed out of the mainstream as pro-government coverage proliferates.

"We know the authorities want to silence every critical voice," he said.

'Media capture'

Ardent support for former President Aleksandar Vucic — who remains the central power figure for the SNS and is its candidate for prime minister — is easy to find on television and in tabloid media.

A recent rally for his populist SNS was carried live by 46 television stations in a country of just 6.6 million people, according to election monitoring group CRTA.

In-depth coverage of student-led gatherings, among the largest since the fall of strongman Slobodan Milosevic in 2000, is largely confined to three broadcasters.

Government loyalists launch vitriolic, often expletive-laden attacks on opponents through outlets such as Informer, which publishes across print, online and broadcast television.

"I think we are entering the last phase of media capture in Serbia," said Pavol Szalai from Reporters Without Borders (RSF).

The media watchdog ranked Serbia 104 out of 180 countries in its May press freedom index — last among 40 countries in the EU-Balkans zone — citing political pressure, threats and lawsuits.

Kesic's former employer, Nova, has now come under new management — its parent, Adria News Network, which operates major independent media outlets across the region, was bought by Portuguese investment group Alpac Capital.

The buyout sparked fears in newsrooms that new management could threaten editorial independence, including at N1, one of the most watched broadcasters critical of the government.

Management says the outlets will maintain professional standards but journalists from Nova, N1 and other Adria-owned portals have protested "for the survival of the media".

"Overhauling newsroom leadership weeks before elections is not in line with European standards," Szalai said, warning that it could deprive voters of independent reporting.

Exiled

Szalai warned that Serbia is also the only country in RSF's EU-Balkans region where journalists have been forced into exile over their work.

Aleksandar Radic, a defence journalist, fled Serbia in June after reporting on the alleged use of a sonic weapon against protesters during a March 2025 rally in Belgrade.

The demonstration — one of Serbia's largest in decades — descended into panic after a mysterious noise sent crowds fleeing, fuelling claims that police had used a "sound cannon" — an allegation authorities deny.

Radic's analysis focused on a device photographed on a police vehicle at the rally, which he said resembled a US-made LRAD acoustic device.

His analysis was widely picked up across Serbia and international media.

"From that moment on, I felt growing hostility from the system," the independent reporter told AFP from an undisclosed location abroad.

Police interrogated him, raided his home and office before accusing him of plotting against the constitutional order.

Radic said he fled, fearing he would be jailed for his journalism and could return to Serbia safely only if "the government changes".

'Dictators hate humour'

After the decision not to renew Kesic's show, hundreds protested in Belgrade, in a sign of his popularity.

"I can see that from the number of views on YouTube and the public's reaction to our show," he added, pointing to the channel's more than 700,000 subscribers.

"Sometimes even government voters laughed at our observations," he said.

RSF's Szalai said it was clear why Kesic had been targeted.

"Dictators hate humour," he said.

Nova's news portal has responded to threats of journalist boycotts by offering the newsroom a choice: work under the new editors or accept a severance package.

For Kesic, switching to direct audience support was easier because of his decades-long profile but he worries about other journalists who may face pressure.

Where the Red Sea meets creative imagination

By Yazan K. Mahadin

A city's future begins with what people are willing to imagine for it. Along Jordan's Red Sea coast, Ayla offers a story of how investment, architecture and cultural ambition can shape that future together. Its evolution invites us to consider the lasting contribution of a development: the livelihoods it supports, the encounters it makes possible and the creative life it helps establish.

The recent inauguration of "Layered Becoming" by Her Majesty Queen Rania Al Abdullah has brought renewed attention to Ayla's growing cultural presence. To appreciate the significance of this moment, however, it is worth looking at the vision and commitment that preceded it.

Established in 2003, Ayla developed around an ambitious proposition for Aqaba. Across 4.3 million square meters, its residential neighborhoods, hotels, marina, beaches, commercial spaces and golf course have brought multiple dimensions of coastal life into one destination. Sabih Masri's central role in the investment vision behind the project reflects a sustained belief in Aqaba's potential and in the possibilities of investing in Jordan over the long term.

Turning such a vision into a functioning place requires years of decisions, partnerships and perseverance. Its value ultimately reaches into the lives of those who work there. In a published announcement concerning the expansion of Marina Village, Ayla reported supporting more than 1,300 jobs, with another 300 opportunities projected through the expansion. These figures describe both an existing contribution and an ambition for further employment.

Behind employment statistics are people developing skills, supporting households and building careers. A city's relationship with investment becomes stronger when its residents can see a place for themselves within its future. The presence of Jordanian brands, start-ups and entrepreneurs in Ayla's Marina Village adds another dimension to that relationship, connecting the destination's commercial activity with local initiative.

As an architect and landscape architect, I see an important responsibility here. We design the physical settings in which economic and social life unfold. The arrangement of buildings, the relationship with water, the continuity of walkways and the provision of places to gather all influence how a destination is experienced. Good design creates opportunities for human connection. The life that develops within those spaces gives them meaning.

> The WUJUD Culture and Art Foundation represents a further step in this development...

Culture deepens that meaning. An artwork can change how someone sees a familiar path. A performance can turn a square into a shared memory. A workshop can introduce a young person to a skill that becomes a lifelong interest. These experiences gradually create attachments between people and places.

At Ayla, this engagement with creativity has developed over several years. In 2016, the Ayla Symposium for Urban Art, organised in cooperation with the Jordan National Gallery of Fine Arts, brought together artists from different countries, with works distributed throughout the development. In 2017, the second International Art Symposium gathered twenty artists and announced a workshop through which local schoolchildren could engage with practicing professionals. Art was becoming part of both the physical setting and the opportunities for exchange within it.

Further initiatives connected creative practice with heritage and community learning. A mosaic workshop in 2022 involved seventeen participants from community associations in Aqaba. In 2023, Ayla supported and hosted the Aqaba Forum for Arabic Calligraphy and Islamic Ornamentation, bringing together forty calligraphers and decorators from fourteen countries. These activities gave space to traditions whose survival depends on practice, teaching and renewed interest across generations.

The WUJUD Culture and Art Foundation represents a further step in this development. Founded and chaired by Sirin Masri, with Iman Hindawi as its artistic and executive director, the nonprofit foundation works to connect artists and communities through contemporary art, performance and cultural exchange. Sirin Masri's contribution is particularly significant in giving this ambition an organisational foundation through which programs and relationships can grow.

Within Ayla's wider story, Sabih Masri's investment vision and Sirin Masri's cultural leadership illustrate complementary forms of commitment to place. One concerns the confidence and resources required to build a destination; the other concerns the creative encounters that help shape its identity. Their wider significance lies in demonstrating how private initiative can contribute to the cultural possibilities of a city.

On October 8, Her Majesty Queen Rania inaugurated WUJUD's "Layered Becoming", held under her patronage at Ayla. The exhibition brings together more than 140 works by ten artists from Jordan, the Arab region and beyond. Through ceramics, textiles, painting, sculpture and installations, it explores transformation and the relationships between material, memory and place. It remains open at the Moroccan Space in Marina Village until December 10, 2026.

These themes speak directly to the experience of building and inhabiting places. Materials carry traces of human effort. Landscapes hold memories. Places change as people encounter them and give them new meanings. Her Majesty's inauguration draws attention to a cultural endeavour that brings these questions into the life of Aqaba.

For Jordan, the opportunity extends beyond a single exhibition. Sustained cultural activity in Aqaba can expand the settings in which artists work and audiences engage with them. It can offer visitors a deeper connection with the country and give young people greater access to creative experiences closer to home.

The strength of this promise will depend on continuity and participation. Partnerships with schools, opportunities for emerging artists and meaningful involvement by local families and craftspeople can help these programmes become firmly rooted in the city. A cultural destination acquires lasting importance through the people who feel they have a stake in its future.

This is the horizon that makes Ayla's evolving story worth considering. Investment can create livelihoods; architecture can give shared life a setting; culture can help people discover what they wish to contribute to it.

Perhaps the most enduring measure of Ayla will emerge years from now, in a young person who remembers encountering an artwork there and discovering the courage to create something of their own. That possibility deserves to be built into every vision of development. On the shores of the Red Sea, the creative imagination can become part of Jordan's inheritance — and part of what it gives the world.

Europe must prepare for the worst

By Janis A. Emmanoulidis

BRUSSELS — What if the greatest threat to the European Union is not Russian aggression, Chinese exports, or US President Donald Trump, but actually comes from within the bloc?

Such a scenario becomes more likely by the day, as illiberal, nationalist forces grow stronger ahead of elections in Spain, France, Poland and several German states. If these parties come to power, they could hollow out the EU from within, undermining its fundamental values and obstructing collective action. Supporters of the bloc in its current liberal-democratic form must recognise the gathering storm and be prepared with new political strategies and institutional arrangements.

For decades, European integration has rested on the assumption that, despite recurring crises, member states were committed to the EU's survival and success. That assumption no longer holds. Anti-European forces now challenge not just EU policies, but the underlying logic of integration, from shared sovereignty to common rules.

But instead of seeking to dissolve or exit the bloc, Europe's far- right and populists have moved on to another approach: Neutering the EU as a political force by weakening supranational institutions, restoring the primacy of national sovereignty, and expanding veto powers. This would reduce the EU to an arena for bargaining between national governments.

Consider Germany's Alternative für Deutschland, which recently presented its "new deal for Europe" in the European Parliament. The AfD plan calls for abolishing the directly elected Parliament and replacing it with a body of delegates appointed by national parliaments.

The AfD also proposes severely curtailing the European Commission's powers, restricting the primacy of EU law, transforming the European Court of Justice into an intergovernmental arbitration panel, and allowing Germany to opt out of common EU policies. Along the same lines, Hungary's Mathias Corvinus Collegium, a think tank funded by Viktor Orbán's government before his ouster (and which has since been dismantled), last year called for the dissolution of the EU and the establishment of a new intergovernmental "European Economic Union".

If implemented, these strategies would destroy the EU as we know it. Major achievements, including the single market, a common currency, freedom of movement, independent institutions and the rules protecting citizens, businesses and fundamental rights, would be in jeopardy. The collective capacity to provide security, sustain prosperity and tackle shared challenges would be lost. In an age of "permachange", marked by geopolitical confrontation, economic insecurity, technological disruption, and democratic backsliding, a paralysed EU would leave Europeans more vulnerable and less able to shape their future.

That means we must look beyond the EU and consider the future of what I call "EUrope", a broader concept that encompasses the EU, the European continent, and potential alternative forms of cooperation. More than a geographical or institutional classification, EUrope reflects the ambition to preserve and advance what has made European integration unique: sovereign democracies sharing power, upholding common rules, and shaping their future together. It offers a positive vision of a more capable and crisis- and future-proof bloc that protects its citizens, invests in common public goods, and defends European interests and values.

The first step in realising this vision is to defend and reform the existing Union. This requires strengthening the EU's capacity to defend its fundamental values and institutions against internal threats. The EU should be equipped with more effective mechanisms, including stronger forms of financial conditionality, to respond to systematic attempts by member states to undermine its democratic and supranational foundations.

In parallel, a coalition of the willing must be prepared to deepen integration together, preferably within the EU framework and, where necessary, outside of it. In an increasingly heterogeneous EU, unity cannot mean uniformity.

> The first step in realising this vision is to defend and reform the existing Union...

The EU treaties provide for enhanced cooperation, an instrument that allows a minimum of nine member states to pursue advanced integration. Willing governments should use this instrument more ambitiously and, where legally possible, go a step further by committing themselves to majority decision-making among themselves, rather than allowing individual countries to inhibit collective action.

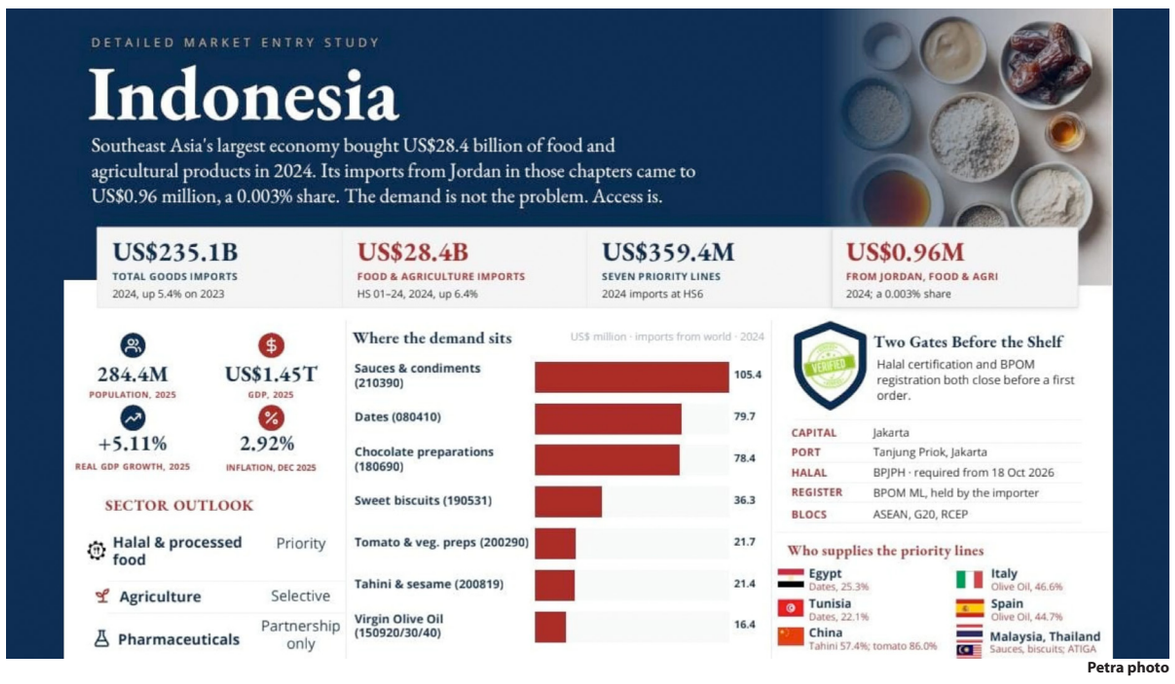
Where these instruments prove insufficient, willing countries may need to cooperate outside the EU framework. Such arrangements must remain exceptional, open to others, compatible with EU law, transparent, subject to democratic scrutiny, and aimed at eventual integration into the Union. They should strengthen supranational integration, not entrench intergovernmental bargaining, as advocated by anti-EU forces.

And in the event that illiberal, nationalist forces incapacitate the EU to such a degree that meaningful reform or deeper integration becomes impossible, the pro-European camp might need to contemplate creating a new supranational entity among willing EU and potentially also non-EU countries. Of course, such an extreme action should be a last resort, and the risks would be considerable, from deeper divisions to weaker institutions. These must be weighed, however, against the potentially greater danger of an EU that is fundamentally incapable of safeguarding and advancing European integration.

Preparing for such a future requires the political capacity to act. Think tanks, independent media, foundations, businesses and civil-society organisations should build a stronger and better-connected pro-European liberal democratic ecosystem. Learning from the long-term strategies and organisational capacities of illiberal forces, without imitating their methods or compromising democratic principles, such an ecosystem should develop compelling visions of "EUrope", foster public debate, identify opportunities for deeper integration and prepare credible alternatives in case of increasing dysfunctionality.

Those seeking to weaken the EU's supranational foundations are already preparing their radical schemes, like the AfD's "new deal". Pro-European forces cannot afford to be less imaginative, determined, or prepared. Europe's future cannot be left to those fixated on rolling back integration. It is imperative to defend what has already been achieved and to imagine how to advance it. EUrope must prepare for the worst to avoid it.

Janis A. Emmanouilidis is deputy chief executive and director of studies at the European Policy Centre



Petra photo

Indonesia's imports across seven categories reach $359.4m, offering opportunities for Jordan

AMMAN (JT) — Jordan has opportunities to expand its exports to Indonesia, particularly in dates, chocolate, biscuits, tahini and sesame products, according to a market-entry study that found Indonesian imports across seven priority export categories reached $359.4 million in 2024.

The study, prepared by Export House in partnership with the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Supply, identified existing Jordanian export capabilities in several of these categories.

Jordan's exports to global markets included $71.9 million in dates, $48.2 million in chocolate and biscuits, and $36.1 million in tahini and sesame products. Exports of sauces, spices and food preparations totalled around $3 million.

Jordanian Medjool dates were highlighted as a potential opportunity in Indonesia, which imported $79.7 million worth of dates in 2024.

However, Jordan's date exports to Indonesia amounted to just $57,200 that year, compared with $206,600 in 2023.

The study recommends focusing on premium Jordanian Medjool dates, highlighting their origin and quality grades, and targeting specialised importers.

It also advises exporters to complete certification and registration requirements before shipping and arrange for products to be available in retail outlets four to five months before the Ramadan purchasing season.

Jordan's global exports of chocolate and biscuits reached $48.2 million, while Indonesia imported $114.7 million worth of these products in 2024, an increase of 8.9 per cent.

Jordan also exported $36.1 million worth of tahini and sesame products to international markets. Indonesia's imports in this category reached $21.4 million in 2024, up 15.6 per cent.

In sauces, spices and food preparations, Indonesia's imports totaled $105.4 million in 2024, representing growth of 12.8 per cent, compared with Jordanian global exports of around $3 million. The figures indicate scope for Jordan to develop its exports in these categories.

Competition is stronger in other product segments. Italy and Spain together account for around 91 per cent of Indonesia's olive oil imports, while China holds an 86 per cent share of the Indonesian market for tomato preparations.

The study found that Jordan's presence in Indonesia's food and agricultural products market remains limited.

Imports from Jordan across these categories amounted to less than $960,000 in 2024, compared with total Indonesian imports of $28.4 billion in food and agricultural products. The study reported Jordan's market share at 0.003 per cent.

Indonesia's total merchandise imports reached $235.1 billion in 2024, an increase of 5.4 per cent compared with 2023. Imports of food and agricultural products rose by 6.4 per cent.

According to the study, entering the Indonesian market requires more than identifying demand.

Exporters must also meet certification and registration requirements and remain competitive on price. The priority product categories are subject to a basic customs duty of 5 per cent.

Halal certification and registration with Indonesia's food and drug regulatory authority are key requirements before products can reach retail outlets.

At the time the study was prepared, two Jordanian halal certification bodies, HCP and the International Halal Centre T&Q, were awaiting assessment by the Indonesian authority.

The study estimated that compliance procedures before a product can be introduced to the market take around 77 working days, including halal certification and product registration. Product testing arranged by importers may take an additional week to several months.

Choosing an Indonesian importer also requires careful consideration. Product registration with the Indonesian authority is held in the importer's name, and transferring registration to another importer can take between two and four months.

The study therefore identifies the selection of a local partner as an important step in entering the market.

It recommends a phased approach, starting with the selection of three to five specialised importers, followed by completion of halal certification and technical documentation, submission of samples for testing, and product registration.

The aim is to arrange a trial shipment within the first six months before negotiating long-term supply agreements.

For pharmaceuticals, the study recommends prioritising partnerships, licensing agreements and contract manufacturing with licensed Indonesian companies rather than direct exports. Indonesia's imports of medicines under the customs classification examined in the study reached $580.7 million.

The study concludes that expanding Jordanian exports to Indonesia will depend on completing certification and registration procedures, establishing relationships with local importers.

As well as focusing on products for which Jordan has an established export base and production experience, particularly dates and specialised food products. These measures could help translate market demand into export contracts.

Earlier this month, Export House, in partnership with the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Supply, presented the findings of market-entry studies covering five potential export markets: Indonesia, Tanzania, Uzbekistan, Kenya and Malaysia.

The studies estimated the combined addressable market across the five countries at around $2.5 billion, pointing to opportunities for Jordanian exporters to expand their international presence.

Jordanian factories already export to global markets with demanding competitive requirements, providing a basis for exploring opportunities in these destinations.

Stocks retreat as tech mood sours, oil prices jump

LONDON (AFP) — Equities sank on Thursday as tech firms resumed their downward spiral following a mixed bag of earnings from Wall Street titans, while sentiment was also soured by rising oil prices.

AI-linked companies continued the rollercoaster ride they have endured since hitting record highs in June amid worries over colossal investment sums and their timeline for profitability, with growing debt-servicing costs adding to the uncertainty.

A blockbuster quarterly report from Elon Musk's SpaceX — its first since listing in June — provided what some hoped would be solid support leading into a crucial earnings season, helping push all three main Wall Street indexes higher on Wednesday.

But mixed after-hours releases from Meta and Tesla muddied the waters again for investors.

"Risk-off sentiment is returning amid high geopolitical tensions and a swirl of worries about financing the AI juggernaut," noted Susannah Streeter, chief investment strategist at Wealth Club.

Electric vehicle-maker Tesla announced lower profits in July-September and cut its capital spending forecast for this year, while Facebook-parent Meta lifted its estimates for how much it would spend on artificial intelligence.

The reports come as traders speculate about the outlook for the AI boom, with analysts pointing out that markets fret when firms ramp up spending but also grow concerned when they pull back.

"Meta's numbers reinforce the AI investment cycle, but funding is becoming an increasingly important part of the conversation," said Chris Weston, head of research at Pepperstone.

"Investors will reward growth and monetisation, yet they're also becoming more sensitive to how the next leg of investment is financed and what it means for existing shareholders," he added.

Recent disappointing results from Netflix and a weaker-than-expected earnings forecast from US semiconductor equipment manufacturer Lam Research have added to the unease among investors.

Microsoft, Amazon and Alphabet are due to report next week, with Apple and Nvidia up in November.

Asian tech firms sank on Wednesday, dragging broader markets with them, with South Korean chipmakers SK hynix and Samsung down 5.5 per cent and four per cent respectively.

Japan's Kioxia and Tokyo Electron were off as much as seven per cent.

The Kospi index in Seoul fell more than three per cent and Tokyo's Nikkei 225 was off 2.7 per cent.

Hong Kong slid more than three per cent, with NetEase and Tencent taking a battering, while Chinese e-commerce giants Alibaba and JD.com were also weighed by government calls for tighter quality standards.

European stock markets, which feature far fewer major tech firms, were lower in midday deals.

The Paris CAC 40 shed 1.4 per cent amid concerns over high government debt in France and the recent violent street protests across the country.

ACI Holds Workshop on 'Made in Jordan' Programme

AMMAN (JT) — The Amman Chamber of Industry (ACI) held a workshop to discuss the "Made in Jordan" programme and its role in promoting high-quality Jordanian products in local and international markets.

According to a statement issued by the chamber on Thursday, the workshop was attended by Chamber Director General, Nael Husami, and featured Colombian expert Leon Trujillo.

The event was supported by IPSD project, funded by the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ), and brought together representatives of industrial companies from various sectors and members of the programme's higher steering committee.

The workshop reviewed the programme, which the chamber launched in cooperation with several ministries and institutions concerned with the industrial sector, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.



Petra photo

The Amman Chamber of Industry holds a workshop to discuss the 'Made in Jordan' programme in local and international markets

It aims to establish a distinctive brand for Jordanian products, strengthen confidence in their quality in the domestic market and improve their competitiveness abroad.

Participants also discussed ways to coordinate efforts between the chamber, ministries and relevant institutions to advance the program.

Trujillo presented the programme's work plan and progress, comparing it with similar initiatives internationally.

He also outlined its strengths and weaknesses, as well as the opportunities and challenges facing the programme and Jordanian industry in local and global markets.

The programme seeks to support industrial development and the national economy, increase the industrial sector's contribution to GDP and create job opportunities for Jordanians.

Trujillo specialises in country and sector branding, industrial competitiveness, intellectual property, regional marketing and sustainable value chains.

He previously worked in Jordan on developing a branding strategy for the country's olive oil sector, Petra reported.

Why Chile's copper output is sinking despite booming demand

SANTIAGO (AFP) — The world is hungrier than ever for copper, a key ingredient in green energy and the data centres that power artificial intelligence.

But Chile, which accounts for one-quarter of the world's supply of the critical mineral, has seen its output of its biggest export fall in recent years.

In August, production fell to its lowest level in 15 years, even though strong global demand is keeping prices buoyant.

Chile's woes are largely due to the age of its mines.

After decades of extraction, the biggest deposits have been depleted, meaning companies have to process ever more ore to obtain the same quantities of the metal.

"You have to invest more money, undertake much greater maintenance efforts, and that also means more demanding technical requirements," Juan Carlos Guajardo, founder of the Chilean consultancy Plusmining, told AFP.

To offset the drop in productivity, mining companies have moved to expand and modernize their mines.

But several projects suffered delays, cost overruns or technical problems, Nicolas Munoz, an analyst at London-based consultancy CRU Group, noted.



AFP photo

A man works with copper at El Teniente mine, the world's largest underground copper mine in Machali, near Rancagua, Chile on April 2, 2025

State-owned Codelco was, for example, forced to suspend expansion of the El Teniente mine — Chile's largest — after studies flagged up seismic risks.

Meanwhile, mines in northern and central Chile were forced to reduce operations in July and August due to heavy rains linked to El Nino that knocked out power and hampered access to the sites.

These setbacks come a year after Codelco's largest mine, El Teniente, was forced to suspend part of its production for months following an accident that left six workers dead.

The drop in Chile's output has put pressure on global supplies, causing prices to hit a record $14,875 a ton in September.

A further unexpected decline in production could force importers to look for alternative suppliers, according to Munoz.

The International Energy Agency anticipates a 25-per cent copper supply deficit by 2035 if new deposits are not developed worldwide.

Copper's biggest clients are worried that Chile "does not have a significant production-increase pipeline in sight", said Guajardo.

"That means the rest of the world will have to make a greater effort (to make up the shortfall)."

Chile's market share has fallen from 34 per cent in 2010 to around 23 per cent today, according to the US Geological Survey.

The decline is hitting the economy.

Finance Minister Jorge Quiroz said this month that it had knocked "at least one percentage point" off GDP this year.

There is no quick fix, according to Guajardo and Munoz, who argue that Chile must restore production at its biggest mines and move forward with expansion and modernisation projects.

In the longer term, they say, the country needs to develop new deposits.

"It's not an issue that can be solved with a law or a regulatory change. It's a systematic effort that has to be undertaken," said Guajardo.

Munoz highlights the need to streamline mining permits, attract investment and improve infrastructure, especially in energy, logistics and water, which the industry requires.

CRU consultancy nevertheless forecasts output of around 5.5 million tonnes of copper in 2027, up from the 5.27 million tonnes projected by the Chilean Copper Commission for this year.

The medium-term outlook is more positive, with CRU forecasting up to 6 million tonnes by 2030 as new projects come online.

AMMAN STOCK EXCHANGE

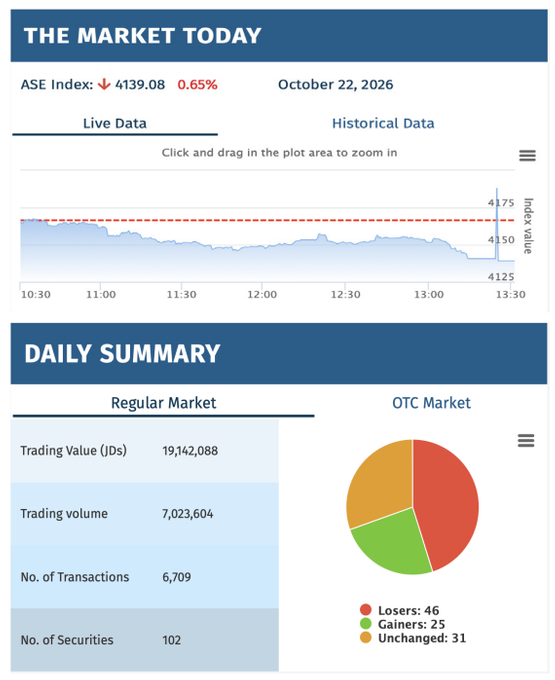
AMMAN (JT) — Amman Stock Exchange (ASE) trading value for Thursday amounted to JD19.1 million spread over 7 million shares that traded through 6,709 transactions.

The ASE share price index shed 0.65 per cent, closing at 4139.08 points.

Out of 102 companies whose shares were traded, the share price of 25 companies rose while the share price of another 46 declined.

Topping the list of the companies whose shares gained the most were Jordanian Company for Developing and Financial Investment by 4.64 per cent, Amwaj Properties by 4.35 per cent, Al Entkaeya for Investment and Real Estate Development Company Plc. by 3.03 per cent, Jordan Dairy by 2.43 per cent, and Ad Dulayl Industrial Park and Real Estate Company Plc. by 2.40 per cent.

The companies whose shares dropped the most were Masafat for Specialised Transport by 7.02 per cent, Ready Mix Concrete and Construction Supplies by 5.24 per cent, Noor Capital Markets for Diversified Investments by 5 per cent, Afaq Holding for Investment and Real Estate Development Company Plc. by 4.88 per cent, and Euro Arab Insurance Group by 4.83 per cent.



SPORTS AT A GLANCE

TENNIS

Top-ranked Rybakina into Ningbo quarter-finals on return from injury

SHANGHAI (AFP) — World No.1 Elena Rybakina reached the quarter-finals of the Ningbo Open on Thursday on her return from injury when opponent Polina Kudermetova retired. The top seed and defending champion was cruising 5-0 in eastern China when the world number 105 from Uzbekistan called it quits because of injury. Moscow-born Kazakh Rybakina will face Poland's unseeded Katarzyna Kawa in the last eight. Rybakina, 27, won the US Open for her third Grand Slam crown in September and usurped Aryna Sabalenka as World No.1 in New York. She was then stunned in the second round in Beijing at the start of this month, and pulled out of the Wuhan Open citing a foot injury. Alexandra Eala crashed out in the Ningbo last 16 as the Philippine history-maker suffered a battling straight-sets defeat to Diana Shnaider.The Russian world number 13 won 7-5, 6-4 and will face the talented American teenager Iva Jovic in the quarter-finals.

Philippines trailblazer Eala ousted in Ningbo last 16

SHANGHAI (AFP) — Alexandra Eala crashed out in the Ningbo Open last 16 on Thursday as the Philippine history-maker suffered a battling straight-sets defeat to Diana Shnaider. The Russian world number 13 won 7-5, 6-4 and will face the talented American teenager Iva Jovic in the quarter-finals in eastern China. The 21-year-old Eala in August became the first player from the Philippines to win a WTA title and is typically followed by a throng of fans from her country. But after beating France's Diane Parry in straight sets in the previous round in Ningbo, the world number 20 came up against a far sterner test in Shnaider. The 22-year-old Russian, who is seeking to win a sixth WTA singles title, used her superior power to take the first set in just over 50 minutes. The second set was closer as Eala fought for survival. Shnaider put the Eala serve under severe pressure in the ninth game before breaking for 5-4, then doggedly held to seal victory in one hour and 55 minutes. The 18-year-old Jovic defeated two-time Grand Slam finalist Jasmine Paolini of Italy 6-4, 6-3 But after beating France's Diane Parry in straight sets in the previous round in Ningbo, the world number 20 came up against a far sterner test in Shnaider.

Pitiful Man Utd display heaps pressure on Carrick



AFP photo

Como's Greek forward #09 Tasos Douvikas (left) falls as Manchester United's Belgian goalkeeper #01 Senne Lammens eyes the ball during the UEFA Champions League at the Stadio Giuseppe Sinigaglia in Como, northen Italy on Wednesday

LONDON (AFP) — Short of confidence and bereft of ideas — have proud European giants Manchester United sunk to a new low after a 4-1 Champions League humbling on the shores of Lake Como?

The three-time European champions left northern Italy with their tails between their legs and serious questions over Michael Carrick's future just two months into the season.

United avoided equalling their worst-ever defeat in Europe's top competition by the skin of their teeth, thanks to a late goal from substitute Joshua Zirkzee.

But that did not mask an embarrassing defeat against a team playing in Italy's fourth tier as recently as 2019.

Carrick said Sunday's point at Premier League rivals Leeds marked a "fresh start", days after defender Lisandro Martinez ripped into the club's hierarchy in a blockbuster interview following a 2-0 defeat at Atletico Madrid.

The United boss said in the run-up to the Como game that he did not need reassurances from club bosses over his future.

But the Red Devils are now winless in seven games in all competitions and it is difficult to see where their next victory will come from.

It is an unwelcome case of rinse and repeat for long-suffering United fans, who have been on a rollercoaster ride since the retirement of Alex Ferguson in 2013.

Carrick's struggles bear an uncanny resemblance to those of Ole Gunnar Solskjaer, a cherished club legend who took up the managerial reins and started well before a rapid decline in results.

'Unacceptable'

Carrick took full responsibility for the defeat against Como, apologising to travelling fans for the lacklustre showing.

"As a supporter of this football club for so long, to see a performance like that is unacceptable, I have to say," he told TNT Sports.

The former midfielder, who won multiple trophies under Ferguson at Old Trafford, deflected a question about whether he had the backing of the United board.

"It's not about me," he said. "It's about digesting the game and how it went. That is the most important thing right now."

United's problems are abundantly clear — no cohesion, a lack of cutting edge and a frustrating defensive frailty.

Most damning of all, they look short of fight.

United's hierarchy chose to focus almost exclusively on strengthening the midfield in the summer transfer window, bringing in Andrey Santos, Youri Tielemans and Carlos Baleba.

That left glaring gaps elsewhere in the squad, particularly at left-back and in attack, exacerbated when the sole senior forward, Benjamin Sesko, was injured.

Even their talismanic captain Bruno Fernandes has struggled this season and was hauled off in the second half in Italy after an ineffective display.

The Portugal international did not hide his frustration after the drubbing, questioning the tactics of his manager.

"It's a decision from the staff to not press man to man and sometimes leave space behind and try to get the ball, wait for them, but sometimes when you give space to these teams they get confidence," he said.

Former Chelsea and England midfielder Joe Cole said the spotlight would be on the United boss but he believes many of the players at the club are not good enough.

"The rot at this club has been there for many, many years. Michael Carrick is the man who is at the wheel at the moment," he said.

"Let's not forget he dragged the club into the Champions League. And they are where they are now. It's a difficult period."

"It was a terrible, terrible night," said former United forward Dimitar Berbatov. "A terrible game for United.

Dozens of orangutans saved from Indonesia blazes as region grapples with haze

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AFP) — Dozens of critically endangered orangutans have been rescued in recent weeks from rampant wildfires burning across Indonesia that have cloaked the region in toxic haze, conservation groups said.

Singapore experienced the longest duration of unhealthy air levels since Southeast Asia's most severe haze crisis hit in 2015, officials told AFP.

The fires have triggered a months-long pollution spell that has closed schools, fuelled a surge in respiratory conditions both among humans and animals and restricted outdoor activities in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and East Timor.

Pollution levels ranged from unhealthy to very unhealthy across the region on Sunday, as fires continued to burn and emit smoke on Borneo and Sumatra islands, intensified by a turbo-charged El Nino weather phenomenon.

Swiss-based air quality monitor IQAir again ranked Singapore and Kuala Lumpur among the world's top five most polluted major cities on Sunday afternoon. Singapore has now seen "the longest duration of air quality being in the unhealthy range since 2015", said Jason Evans Tan, a deputy director at Singapore's National Environment Agency, noting the current spell began on October 5.



AFP photo

Members of the BKSDA (Natural Resources Conservation Agency), the Borneo Orangutan Survival Foundation (BOSF) and the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) Indonesia evacuate a 20-year-old orangutan due to forest and land fire, in Hampangen Village, Katingan Regency, Central Kalimantan, on Saturday

In Indonesia, groups are working to save wildlife including orangutans from the fires.

On Saturday, the West Kalimantan conservation agency and Indonesian non-profit YIARI said a team evacuated 51 orangutans from locations in the province from August 6 to October 19.

And figures from Indonesia's forestry ministry suggested this week that the number rescued over recent months in Kalimantan could be as high as 96.

Officials could not be immediately reached to clarify the number.

'Shared responsibility'

Three conservation agencies saved a 20-year-old male orangutan in Hampangen village in Central Kalimantan on Borneo island on Saturday.

"The evacuation process was carried out with great caution," the agencies said.

"After the orangutan was sedated, the medical team immediately conducted a health examination before taking the animal to the... rehabilitation center," it said.

"We tried to check and found that there are a few orangutans left in these small forest patches," WWF Indonesia conservation coordinator Fenky Wirada said.

Indonesia's transport ministry said around 2,400 flights across the country have been affected by the haze since mid-August.

"Haze reduces visibility around airports, which can lead to delays, disruptions, and even flight cancellations," the ministry said.

Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim late on Sunday said his country has proposed setting up a regional cooperation mechanism within the 11-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations to coordinate a response to border-crossing fires.

"In the spirit of unity and close relations among neighboring countries, Malaysia believes that border-crossing challenges must be addressed with determination and shared responsibility," Anwar said on his Facebook page.

'Absorbed moisture'

In Singapore, concentrations of PM2.5, a fine particulate pollutant, remained elevated in western parts on Sunday, with the 24-hour Pollutant Standards Index straying in the "very unhealthy" range at times.

Although PM2.5 is the dominant pollutant during haze episodes and one of six indicators used to calculate Singapore's overall PSI, it is not the same as the PSI itself.



AFP photo

Underwater hockey players take part in the 2026 HKUWHA Under Water Hockey tournament in Hong Kong on October 17

'Physical hell': Hong Kong hosts gruelling underwater hockey tournament

HONG KONG (AFP) — Swimmers brandishing short, curved sticks held their breath as they somersaulted and dove towards a weighted puck at the bottom of a Hong Kong swimming pool, vying for first place in a sport likened to voluntary drowning.

The annual underwater hockey tournament, ominously advertised as "physical hell", nevertheless drew a roster of hardcore enthusiasts from countries across Asia to the Chinese city over the weekend.

"You have to choose when to use your breath and when not to... Anyone that's got the puck, you know that they've got some level of suffering," Leo Lines, a Japanese-New Zealander competitor from Hokkaido, told AFP.

"I love that."

Suited up in snorkel masks and fins, players only resurface for air when they absolutely have to, and their heads remain constantly underwater so they can monitor the game.

There are six players on each team and no goalkeepers, while referees watch for fouls and send players to a penalty box for serious rule-breaching.

"You're so into trying to succeed, trying to score the goal, that you forget about breath hold and how tough it is," competitor Rita Frieske, a Hong Kong-based Polish academic, told AFP.

Games last 30 minutes and are split into two halves with a three-minute break in between.

The gruelling sport has created a tight-knit community.

"It's like that sadistic study that forces everybody to survive together and then you stick together for a long time," Malaysian player Hui Chin Teoh said.

Underwater hockey, previously known as "octopush", was invented in England in 1954 as a way to keep divers fit during the off-season winter months.

While not yet an Olympic sport, it is recognised by the International Olympic Committee, and made its debut at the Southeast Asian Games in 2019.

Competition organisers hope that as underwater camera technology improves, the spectator experience will too.

