



HRH Crown Prince Hussein on Sunday offers condolences to families of the martyrs of the terrorist attack on the Greek Orthodox Church of Saint George in Karak

Crown Prince pays condolences to families of Karak church attack martyrs

AMMAN (JT) — HRH Crown Prince Hussein on Sunday extended his deepest sympathies to the families of the martyrs of the terrorist attack on the Greek Orthodox Church of Saint George in Hmoud, Karak.

Attending the funeral at Hmoud Village, the Crown Prince denounced the attack on innocent people in a place of worship, calling it a cowardly and treacherous act, according to a Royal Court statement.

Expressing his deepest condolences to the victims' families, the Crown Prince reasserted His Majesty King Abdullah's directives to strike terrorists with an iron fist, emphasising that any attempt to under-

mine Jordanian unity will meet a decisive response. His Royal Highness underscored that the terrorist attack is an assault on Jordan and all Jordanians, adding that Karak will remain steadfast and proud

through the unyielding determination of its people. The Crown Prince emphasised that the full power of state resources is engaged to track down the terrorists and bring them to justice.

King receives call from Lebanon president

AMMAN (JT) — His Majesty King Abdullah received a phone call on Sunday from Lebanon President Gen. Joseph Aoun, during which the president expressed his condemnation of the heinous terrorist attack that targeted a church in Karak Governorate on Friday, according to a Royal Court statement.

During the call, President Aoun affirmed his country's solidarity with Jordan in the fight against terrorism, and extended his con-



dolences to His Majesty and the Jordanian people over the loss of the victims of the attack, and wished the injured a rapid recovery.

The Jordan Times marks 51st anniversary

AMMAN (JT) — The Jordan Times (JT), the Kingdom's only English-language daily newspaper, marks its 51st anniversary on Monday as Jordan mourns the victims of the terrorist attack that struck Karak.

The newspaper was first published on October 26, 1975, as a six-page, black-and-white publication targeting a limited readership, primarily foreigners residing in Jordan.



Today, alongside its print edition, the newspaper maintains an online presence and publishes content across social media platforms. Published six days a week, The Jordan Times is part of the Jordan Press Foundation, which also publishes the Arabic-language daily Al Rai. The newspaper's former editors-in-chief include Mohammad Al Amad, Rami G. Khouri, George Hawatmeh, Walid Sadi, Elia Nasrallah, Abdullah Hasanat, Rana Sabbagh, Ayman Safadi, Jennifer Hamarneh, Samir Barhoum, Mohammad Ghazal and Hana Namrouqa. Raed Omari is the newspaper's current editor-in-chief.



Mourners carry the coffins of those martyred in Friday's terrorist attack in Karak during a mass funeral held on Sunday in the village of Hmoud

Deputising for King, prime minister participates in funeral of Karak martyrs

Jordan unites in grief as Karak church attack victims laid to rest

AMMAN (JT) — Deputising for His Majesty King Abdullah, Prime Minister Jafar Hassan participated on Sunday in the funeral for the martyrs of the terrorist attack against Karak.

The prime minister, alongside several ministers and civil and military officials, attended the divine liturgy and funeral prayer held at the church.

In the courtyard of the Greek Orthodox Church, where the victims' bodies were laid, religious and social divisions gave way to a shared sense of loss. Mourners stood side by side, united in grief



Deputising for His Majesty King Abdullah, Prime Minister Jafar Hassan participates on Sunday in the funeral for the martyrs of the terrorist attack against Karak

and in their determination to reject terrorism and extremism. The funeral ceremonies drew thousands of mourners, alongside government officials, public figures and representatives of civil society.

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Pope offers prayers for victims of attack on Karak church

AMMAN (JT) — Pope Leo XIV has offered prayers for those killed and injured in a terrorist attack targeting worshippers at the Greek Orthodox Church of Saint George in Hmoud village in Karak.

In a post on X, the Pope expressed solidarity with the victims, the church community and Jordan following Friday's attack. "My prayers go out to all those who were in-



Pope Leo XIV holds the weekly General Audience on October 21

jured or lost their lives last Friday in the terrorist attack on wor-

shippers at the Orthodox Church of Saint George in Jordan," he said. "I express my closeness to the community and the entire country, which is known for its peaceful coexistence and respect between different religions," he added. Vatican News also reported the Pope's expression of solidarity with the victims and the wider Jordanian community, highlighting the country's tradition of peaceful coexistence and interfaith respect.



HRH Princess Basma, president of the National Alliance Against Hunger and Malnutrition, on Sunday attends an event to mark World Food Day and stresses the importance of innovation in enhancing food security

Princess Basma stresses innovation to boost Jordan’s food security

AMMAN (JT) — HRH Princess Basma, president of the National Alliance Against Hunger and Malnutrition (Najmah), on Sunday stressed the importance of innovation in enhancing food security and building sustainable food systems.

During an event organised by the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) to mark World Food Day 2026 under the theme “Innovate today. Nourish tomorrow”, Princess Basma said that innovation should improve access to healthy food, support stable livelihoods and ensure the sustainable use of natural resources.

She said that despite sufficient food being produced worldwide, millions of people continue to face hunger, stressing the need to ensure food reaches those most in need, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.

Princess Basma added that innovation goes beyond technology to include scientific knowledge, new ideas and traditional practices passed down through generations.

She also highlighted the impact of wars, conflicts and climate change on food supplies, particularly in the region.

Ministry of Agriculture Secretary General Mohammad Hiari, speaking on behalf of Minister of Agriculture Saeb Khreisat, said that Jordan is working to modernise

its agricultural sector and strengthen food security through innovation, technology and strategic partnerships.

He highlighted national efforts to boost food security, including the establishment of the Higher Council for Food Security, chaired by the prime minister, the adoption of a national action plan for 2025-2027, the updating of the national food security strategy in line with the Economic Modernisation Vision, and the launch of a national food security information system with 22 indicators.

The prevalence of undernourishment in Jordan declined from 17.9 per cent in 2023 to 12.2 per cent in 2025, despite the Kingdom’s water scarcity’

Hiari also said that the agricultural sector grew by 7.8 per cent in the second quarter of 2026, while agricultural exports rose by 14 per cent in the first half of the year, with Jordan’s self-sufficiency rate exceeding 61 per cent and a production surplus in 28 agricultural commodities.

“The ministry launched Jordan’s first national food waste index in December 2025, estimating food waste at around 81 kilograms per capita to establish a baseline for promoting responsible consumption and reducing waste,” he added.

FAO Representative in Jordan Thaer Yaseen said that around 645 million people worldwide faced overlapping food-related challenges in 2025, while 2.7 billion people could not afford a healthy diet.

“The prevalence of undernourishment in Jordan declined from 17.9 per cent in 2023 to 12.2 per cent in 2025, despite the Kingdom’s water scarcity,” he added.

Yaseen also stressed that innovation is essential to addressing hunger and food insecurity, noting that it extends beyond technology to include partnerships, traditional knowledge and community-based solutions to build more sustainable food systems.

The event featured an innovation showcasing solutions for sustainable agriculture, alongside the honouring of six winners of the World Food Day drawing competition, organised in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development.

Queen Rania pays condolences to families of martyrs of Al Karak attack

AMMAN (JT) — Her Majesty Queen Rania, accompanied by Their Royal Highnesses Princess Rajwa and Princess Salma, offered condolences on Sunday to the families of the victims of Friday’s attack on the St. George’s Greek Orthodox Church in Karak Governorate’s village of Hmoud.

Queen Rania paid her respects to the martyrs’ families, expressing her heartfelt prayers for the souls of the nine Jordanians who lost their lives, as well as the speedy and full recovery of the injured, according to a statement from Office of Her Majesty.



Her Majesty Queen Rania on Sunday offers condolences to the families of the victims of Friday’s attack on the St. George’s Greek Orthodox Church in Karak Governorate’s village of Hmoud

Princess Sumaya stresses women engineers’ role in sustainable urban planning

AMMAN (JT) — Deputising for HRH Princess Sumaya, Minister of Social Development Wafa Bani Mustafa on Sunday opened the sixth Arab Women Engineers Forum at Beit Al Salt Heritage House in Salt.

The forum, themed “The role of women engineers in planning resilient and sustainable cities”, highlighted the role of women in urban planning and sustainable development, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.

In a speech delivered on her behalf by Bani Mustafa, Princess Sumaya stressed the key role of women in achieving comprehensive development as partners in building society, raising generations and strengthening family cohesion, as well as contributing to various fields, including politics and the economy.

She noted that engineering goes beyond equations and designs, playing a key role in building civilisations, developing cities and infrastructure, and turning challenges into opportunities for progress.



Deputising for HRH Princess Sumaya, Minister of Social Development Wafa Bani Mustafa on Sunday opens the sixth Arab Women Engineers Forum at Beit Al Salt Heritage House in Salt

Princess Sumaya stressed the need for integrated engineering solutions to build resilient and sustainable cities, noting the role of women engineers in designing cities that meet residents’ needs, including safe pavements, adequate lighting, green spaces, accessible schools and hospitals, and energy-efficient buildings.

She said that sustainable cities require planning that puts people first and takes future needs into account, adding that women engineers, alongside their male

colleagues, play a key role in urban planning and developing cities that are more resilient to climate change and responsive to people’s needs.

Princess Sumaya highlighted Salt as an example of engineering’s role in preserving heritage, noting that a team of Jordanian women engineers contributed to documenting the city and preserving its historic character, leading to its inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2021 under the name “Al Salt: The place of tolerance and

urban hospitality”.

She said that the achievement reflects the role of engineering in preserving heritage and building for the future.

Jordan Engineers Association (JEA) President Abdullah Ghosheh condemned the criminal incident in Karak and expressed solidarity with the families of the victims and the injured, stressing support for the Hashemite leadership, the Jordan Armed Forces-Arab Army (JAF) and security agencies in safeguarding the Kingdom’s security and

stability.

He also noted that resilient cities are those that prepare for crises, learn from them, protect their residents and recover, stressing that resilience goes beyond infrastructure to include risk assessment, advance planning, protecting people and resources, and ensuring sustainable development.

Ghosheh highlighted the need for integrated engineering planning to address water and energy scarcity, climate change and urban expansion, linking infrastructure with public policies and quality of life.

He also stressed the importance of balancing economic growth, social justice and environmental protection, calling for the forum’s outcomes to be translated into partnerships and practical projects that serve cities and their residents.

The two-day forum brought together representatives from nine Arab countries and JEA officials, opening with a minute of silence for the victims of the terrorist attack in Karak.

Embassies fly flags to half-mast as more countries condemn terrorist attack on Karak church

AMMAN (JT) — The US embassy in Amman lowered the American flag to half-staff on Saturday to mourn the victims of the terrorist attack targeting a church in Karak Governorate and to express solidarity with Jordan’s leadership and people.

The Embassy extended the American people’s heartfelt condolences to the families of the victims and expressed solidarity with the injured and survivors, reaffirming that the US stands with His Majesty King Abdullah against those who seek to sow division and target innocent people simply for practicing their faith, according to an embassy statement.

The Emirati embassy in Amman on Sunday flew its national flag to half-mast in solidarity with Jordan following the terrorist shooting attack inside the church in Hmoud in Karak Governorate, which resulted in several deaths and injuries.

The UAE previously condemned the incident, affirming its full support and solidarity with the Kingdom in the wake of the attack, according to the



Jordan News Agency, Petra.

Also on Sunday, Algeria strongly condemned the terrorist attack targeting the church, where the Algerian Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed its denunciation of this criminal act that targets the security and stability of the Kingdom, emphasising that the action contradicts human values, tolerant religious teachings, and moral principles.

Algeria expressed its full solidarity and deep sympathy with the government and people of Jordan, affirming its stand alongside the Kingdom in confronting the threat of terrorism and extremism in all its forms.

Tunisia also strongly

ly condemned the terrorist attack targeting the church.

In a statement, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Migration and Tunisians Abroad expressed Tunisia’s full solidarity and deep sympathy with the Kingdom.

The ministry offered its sincere condolences to the Jordanian people and the families of the victims, while wishing a speedy recovery to the injured.

Malaysia extended its sincere condolences to the government and people of Jordan, as well as the families of the victims of the terrorist attack.

In a statement issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Sunday, Malaysia affirmed its solidar-

ity with Jordan and strongly condemned the deliberate attack on a place of worship.

The Korean embassy in Jordan condemned on Sunday the tragic attack in Karak Governorate and all acts of violence targeting innocent civilians.

In a statement, the embassy offered its sincere condolences to the families of the victims and the Jordanian people.

The embassy reaffirmed Korea’s solidarity with the government and people of Jordan during this difficult time.

The Chinese embassy in Amman flew its national flag to half-mast on Sunday in mourning for the innocent victims of the Karak incident and in solidarity with the leadership and people of Jordan.

The embassy said in a post that it stands in solidarity with Jordan as it mourns the innocent lives lost in Karak.

The Austrian embassy in Amman on Saturday flew its flag at half-mast as a sign of mourning and solidarity with Jordan, its leadership and people, following the terrorist attack.

According to an embassy statement, Austrian Ambassador to Jordan Marieke Zimburg postponed the national day reception, which was scheduled for Monday, in light of the declared national mourning in the Kingdom, Petra reported.

The embassy also extended its sympathies to all those affected by the tragedy.

On Saturday evening, members of the Jordanian community in Washington, DC, gathered at the Jordanian embassy to express solidarity with the homeland and condemn Friday’s terrorist attack.

Jordanian Ambassador to the US Dina Kawar and members of the embassy staff received the attendees, who joined hands and lit candles to honour the memory of the martyrs, expressing deep grief and solidarity with their families.

Participants stressed that terrorism and extremism will not compromise Jordan’s unity, security, or stability, nor will they weaken the values of brotherhood and peaceful coexistence that define its society.



The martyrs’ bodies are carried on the shoulders of members of the Public Security Directorate, draped in Jordanian flags, before being laid to rest

Karak’s Muslim, Christian communities stand united after deadly church attack

By Hanan Abuzaid

AMMAN — The attack on St. George’s Greek Orthodox Church in Hmoud village, Karak Governorate, on Friday, which claimed the lives of nine and left 34 others injured, has renewed attention on the long-standing ties between Muslim and Christian communities in Karak.

Residents of the southern governorate have previously responded to violence by standing together across religious lines, proving that Jordanians stick together in times of crisis.

Eight of the martyrs were laid to rest on Sunday in Karak.

In 2016, when gunmen attacked Karak, Muslim resident Maher Habashneh rushed to protect the

home of his Christian childhood friend, Waddah Amarien. He stood guard until Amarien returned from Amman.

“The last thing I was going to do was let anyone intimidate my brother and his family,” Habashneh said in a 2017 report by the Christian Science Monitor. “We will not let them divide us.”

That same year, Muslim artist Izdehar Soub helped paint a mural of Jesus on St. George’s Church. She made this gesture to reject sectarianism as foreign to Karak’s identity.

These examples illustrate how solidarity extends beyond public statements. It involves personal acts of protection, friendship, and support between neigh-

bours of different faiths.

Following Friday’s attack, Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Mohammad Khalayleh described the incident as a national tragedy affecting all Jordanians.

He stressed that Muslims and Christians share one homeland and a common destiny.

“Extremism and terrorism have no religion,” Khalayleh added.

The challenge now is to support the victims and their families while preventing the violence from becoming a source of division.

Karak’s history offers a clear reminder. The actions of perpetrators do not define an entire religious community, and solidarity is sustained through everyday relationships.

Cabinet pays tribute to victims of Karak terrorist attack, vows to combat extremism

AMMAN (JT) — The Cabinet opened its Sunday session, chaired by Prime Minister Jafar Hassan, by reciting Surat Al Fatiha in tribute to the victims of Friday's terrorist attack in Karak.

Hassan renewed the Cabinet's condolences to the people of Karak and the families of the victims, wishing those injured a speedy recovery, according to a Prime Ministry statement.

The prime minister paid tribute to the nine victims, naming them as Maher Adel Zureiqat, Ihab Halaseh, Fadi Halaseh, Khalid Mikhail Halaseh, Asim Burqan, Alaa Masarweh, Marwan Khaitan, Mohammad Qassous and Mazen Qassous.

Hassan said that extremist and Takfiri ideology had spread over the past four decades, stressing the need to intensify efforts to eradicate it from society.

He said the fight against terrorism requires confronting



Prime Minister Jafar Hassan says on Sunday that the fight against terrorism requires confronting extremist ideology as well as taking security measures, warning that the spread of extremism and sedition threatens social cohesion

extremist ideology as well as taking security measures, warning that the spread of extremism and sedition threatens social cohesion. Hassan stressed that diversity, national cohesion and openness are fundamental pillars of the Kingdom under its Hashemite leadership. He also affirmed that state agencies were working to apprehend all those responsible for the attack and bring them to justice.

AT A GLANCE

Jordanian field hospital in Nablus receives Palestinian delegation to offer condolences

AMMAN (JT) — The Jordanian Field Hospital in Nablus on Sunday received a Palestinian official and community delegation offering condolences over the terrorist attack on St George's Greek Orthodox Church in Karak, which killed nine people. The delegation extended its condolences to Jordan's leadership and people and the victims' families, expressing solidarity with Jordan, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported. The delegation also commended the efforts of Jordanian medical teams in Nablus and other Palestinian governorates in providing medical and humanitarian services to Palestinians. The hospital administration thanked the delegation for the visit, saying it reflected the strong ties between the Jordanian and Palestinian peoples. It reaffirmed the hospital's commitment to continuing to provide medical and humanitarian assistance to Palestinians.

Army foils drug smuggling attempt using balloons

AMMAN (JT) — The Eastern Military Region thwarted at dawn on Sunday an attempt to smuggle a large quantity of narcotics using guided balloons after detecting them trying to cross the border into Jordanian territory. Border Guard units detected, targeted, and downed the balloons inside Jordanian territory within their area of responsibility, according to the Jordan Armed Forces-Arab Army (JAF). Military and security personnel, in coordination with the Anti-Narcotics Department, seized the loaded drugs and transferred the confiscated items to the competent authorities for legal processing. JAF affirmed its continued resolve to firmly confront all infiltration and smuggling attempts, monitor emerging methods, and execute all operational measures required to safeguard the Kingdom's borders.



Jordanians mourn victims of terrorist attack on church in Karak

Masri directs municipalities to name streets after Karak attack victims

AMMAN (JT) — Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Local Administration Walid Masri on Sunday directed heads of municipal committees to name a street in each municipality after one of the victims of Friday's attack in Karak, in tribute to the victims and in affirmation of national unity in the face of terrorism.

Masri commended the Greater Irbid Municipal-

ity's decision to name a street after Fadi Hlaseh, one of the victims, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.

The initiative aims to honour the victims, preserve their memory and express solidarity with their families and local communities.

The attack took place on Friday during a funeral at a Greek Orthodox church in Hamoud village in Karak Governorate, leaving several people dead and dozens injured.

The attack drew widespread condemnation across the Kingdom and renewed calls for national unity, regardless of religious background. Coexistence between Muslims and Christians remains a cornerstone of Jordan's national identity.

Court upholds jail terms for two men over spreading terrorist propaganda

By Rana Hussein

AMMAN — The Court of Cassation has upheld a June 2022 State Security Court (SSC) ruling sentencing two men to prison terms ranging from four to seven years for spreading terrorist ideology through social media in Jordan in mid-2017.

The defendants were convicted of promoting Daesh ideology to gain more sympathisers through social media and were handed the maximum punishment.

One of the two defendants was also convicted of attempting to plot subversive acts in the Kingdom and was handed a seven-year prison term.

Court documents said the defendants adopted takfiri ideology in 2017 along with one other defendant



— who did not appeal his verdict — after monitoring the Daesh group's activities on social media.

"The defendants were convinced that Daesh applied the proper Sharia and decided to spread its ideology using Facebook and Telegram applications," court papers said.

The defendants also

"established contacts with terror group members with the aim of joining Daesh forces in Syria", court documents said.

But the defendants were unable to fulfil their plans and instead turned their attention to targets inside the Kingdom, the court papers said.

However, the defendants were arrested in late 2020 by security agencies before being able to carry out any of their plans, the court maintained.

The SSC general prosecutor asked the higher court to uphold the sentences, stating the SSC had followed the proper procedures when sentencing the defendants.

The defendants contested the SSC ruling

through their lawyers, claiming that "they were subjected to duress to confess".

The lawyers also charged that the SSC prosecutor "failed to present any other solid evidence that would implicate their clients with the charges".

The lawyer further argued that the sentence was "harsh" and that their clients "should benefit from a reduction in penalty, because they are young and deserve a second chance in life".

However, the higher court ruled that the SSC had followed the proper procedures and the defendant deserved the verdict he had received.

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

Solidarity vigils held across Kingdom to condemn terrorist attack in Karak

AMMAN (JT) — Universities, government institutions, community organisations and residents across the Kingdom held solidarity vigils on Sunday to condemn the terrorist attack on a Greek Orthodox church in the village of Hmoud in Karak Governorate, which left nine martyrs and dozens injured.

In Irbid, large crowds gathered in the northern square of the Greater Irbid Municipality for a vigil organised by the municipality to mourn the victims and reaffirm national unity.

Imad Azzam, chairman of the Greater Irbid Municipality Committee, said that Jordan had confronted such criminal acts throughout its history, stressing that those responsible did not distinguish between Muslims and Christians, and sought to undermine the Kingdom's security, stability and social cohesion.

Azzam announced that a street in Irbid would be named after Dr Fadi Halsa, one of the victims of the attack on the place of worship in Hmoud village.



In Aqaba, government institutions, universities and community groups organised



ity events outside their premises to condemn the attack and express support for the victims and their families.

The events included a minute's silence in memory of those killed,

unity, brotherhood and tolerance.

Residents of Jabal Al Taj in Amman also held a solidarity vigil at the Greek Orthodox Church of the Virgin Mary, condemning the attack and reaffirming the unity of Jordanians and their rejection of violence, extremism and attempts to undermine the country's social fabric.

The vigil was attended by representatives of the local community, the Ummah Party, the Association of Muslim Scholars, mosque imams, community leaders and local residents.

Meanwhile, the Jordanian Photography Association and the Residents of Jabal Luweibdeh Association organised a silent vigil at Paris Circle in under the slogan "No to Terrorism".

Participants carried Jordanian flags and candles in mourning for the victims of the attack on the Greek Orthodox Church of Saint George in Karak. They expressed solidarity across Jordanian society and condemned the attack as a violation of humanitarian and moral values.

The participants also arranged candles to form the word Hmoud, referring to the village where the church is located and where the attack took place.

Solidarity vigils were also held in the Palestinian governorates of Nablus and Jenin in support of Jordan and in condemnation of the attack on the Greek Orthodox Church of Saint George in Karak, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.

The gathering highlighted the historic and fraternal ties between the Jordanian and Palestinian peoples, as well as their shared rejection of terrorism, extremism and attacks on places of worship.

Participants stressed the importance of protecting religious freedom and ensuring that all people could practise their faith in safety and peace.

They also emphasised the need to strengthen unity and cooperation among different communities to confront extremist ideologies and all forms of violence and terrorism.



Voters queue at a polling station to cast their ballots for Serbia's snap parliamentary elections in Belgrade on Sunday

Serbia on track for high turnout as students challenge ruling party

BELGRADE (AFP) — Serbian voters turned out in large numbers on Sunday in what is set to be the nation's most fiercely contested parliamentary election in more than 14 years, as a student-led movement seeks to oust the party of veteran leader Aleksandar Vucic.

The snap vote is the culmination of nearly two years of student-led protests sparked by the 2024 collapse of a canopy at Novi Sad railway station that killed 16 people — a tragedy widely blamed on corruption.

The disaster triggered some of Serbia's largest protests since the fall of strongman Slobodan Milosevic in 2000.

The Students' List, a selection of candidates backed by the largely leaderless movement, now poses the biggest challenge to Vucic's right-wing populist Serbian Progressive Party (SNS), which has dominated politics throughout its tenure.

"I voted hoping to see changes... it cannot continue as it was during the past 14 years," Marija Spasenovic told AFP outside a Belgrade polling station, citing the need to tackle corruption and ensure the rule of law.

High turnout

Eighteen electoral lists are vying for seats in Serbia's 250-member parliament, but polls suggest voters will largely choose between the ruling party and the student-backed list.

Several leading opposition parties have opted not to run, instead urging their supporters to back the students.

An unusually high turnout is expected among Serbia's 6.4 million registered voters, with the central election committee recording early turnout figures that showed a significant jump since the last election.

By 11:00 GMT, just

five hours after polls opened, turnout had already reached around 35 per cent, the committee said; by the same time in 2023, it was around 21 per cent.

At many polling stations, long queues formed before doors opened, with thousands lining up in Belgrade and across the country.

Videos posted online also showed Serbs abroad turning out to vote — from singing and dancing in the streets of Los Angeles to celebrations in a Toronto bar in the early morning, where polling hours followed the Serbian time zone.

and EuroLeague Basketball president, told reporters before casting his vote in Belgrade.

Vucic, who has also campaigned nationwide, embracing citizens in villages and towns, has repeatedly accused the student movement of plotting a foreign-funded coup.

"Serbia is voting today to decide which direction it will take — towards the future or the past," he told reporters after voting at a Belgrade polling station.

Vucic early joined long queues to cast his vote.

Political novices

Most of the student list's 250 candidates are experts from fields including academia and the arts with little political experience.

The movement has a broad platform, centred on a pledge to fight corruption.

It evolved from demands for a transparent investigation into the Novi Sad tragedy into calls for an early election.

Against them is Vucic, the face of his party, who has tried to cultivate an image as an indispensable statesman, walking a diplomatic tightrope between the neighbouring European Union and his close ally Russia.

Under mounting pressure, the 56-year-old called the snap vote last month, citing "major turbulence on the domestic political scene".

The right-wing populist leader cut short his second presidential term to run for prime minister.

Days before the vote, Serbian civil society groups warned that conditions for "free and fair elections" were lacking.

Domestic and international observers will monitor the vote, with students mobilising large numbers of volunteers to oversee the process.

Polls close at 8:00pm (19:00 GMT).

Long lines of cars also formed at the Croatian, Hungarian and Kosovo borders as the diaspora returned to vote.

For nearly two years, students have staged rallies and marched across the Balkan nation to reach voters directly and counter the SNS's media machine.

Their protests have regularly drawn huge crowds, with a final pre-election rally in Belgrade on Thursday drawing around 150,000 people to the streets, according to an independent protest monitor.

'Fighting for freedom'

"Today, above all, Serbia is fighting for freedom and for the return of a country that has been hijacked," Dejan Bodiroga, a candidate on the Students' List

'Serbia is voting today to decide which direction it will take — towards the future or the past'

Debris from intercepted Houthi missiles injures 2 in Saudi Arabia's Khamis Mushayt — local media

AMMAN (JT) — Debris from two intercepted ballistic missiles launched by Yemen's Iran-backed Houthis injured two people and damaged homes and vehicles in Saudi Arabia on Sunday, authorities said.

A Saudi citizen and an Asian expatriate resident were injured when debris fell in Khamis Mushayt and Ahad Rafidah, a Saudi Civil Defence spokesperson said in a statement, cited by Arab News.

Three residential buildings and seven vehicles were damaged.

The incident followed similar interceptions Saturday, when debris from two Houthi ballistic missiles fell at several locations in western Saudi Arabia, including near the holy city of Mecca.

Some debris landed in Wadi Al Mughhammas, about 20km from Mecca's Grand Mosque, Islam's holiest site, the spokesperson said.

Debris also fell in Jeddah's Al Nuzha neighbourhood, Wadi Jalil in Taif and Masturah in Rabigh governorate.

Civil Defence did not report any casualties or provide details of damage from Saturday's interceptions.

The Coalition to Re-



Three residential buildings and seven vehicles sustained damage from the falling debris

store Legitimacy in Yemen said on Sunday it had intercepted and destroyed two drones and a ballistic missile that were launched toward Riyadh, and a cruise missile toward the southern city of Khamis Mushayt. It later said it intercepted 10 ballistic missiles fired toward southern Saudi Arabia.

The Iran-backed Houthi militia has ramped up attacks against Saudi Arabia in recent weeks, targeting airports, energy infrastructure and civilian sites, even launching attacks toward two of Islam's most important sites in Mecca and Medina, according to Arab News.

Flights resumed at Riyadh's international airport on Sunday following a series of deadly attacks on the facility that saw it

closed for two weeks, AFP reported.

King Khalid International Airport's website showed several domestic and international flights scheduled on Sunday, including arrivals to the kingdom from Dubai, Paris and Cairo.

Embattled Albanian PM vows fines for violent protesters

TIRANA, Albania (AFP) — Albania's Prime Minister Edi Rama on Sunday vowed a tougher line against anti-government protesters calling for his resignation, saying that new fines would be introduced for violent demonstrations.

Rama said a new law would be released this week allowing for fines of more than \$550 for "anyone who chooses to remain in a crowd" that is carrying out acts of violence or looting in a public space, or "concealing their identity".

In a speech broadcast on social media, he said the clampdown would apply to any type of gathering "when it results in property damage".

Months of anti-government demonstrations have deteriorated in recent days into pitched battles between the security forces and protesters.

The new law would give police the powers to restrict "gatherings" in certain cases if there was a risk of violence, Rama said.

"Anyone demanding my resignation is mistaken if they think it can be forced or im-



Protesters clash with riot police during an anti-government demonstration — called by the student-led protest movement to denounce poor study conditions and corruption and to demand prime minister's resignation, in central Tirana on Sunday

posed in any way, but I do not believe that everything they are saying and demanding is wrong," he stated.

Rama's statement came as several hundred people in the capital staged a fresh protest outside his offices.

Opposition leader and fierce Rama rival

Sali Berisha, head of the Democratic Party, said people would not accept the new government measures, his party said in a press release.

"We will stand firmly against them" and "respond tooth for tooth" to Rama "to give him what he deserves", Berisha told an online exchange with the public.

The new law also allows for compensation for small companies affected by protests and action against those who "encourage, organise or coordinate the participation of minor school children in rallies".

Teachers have backed high school students who have taken part in the protests this year.

In recent protests, demonstrators have attacked the education ministry and other official buildings, complaining about corruption, and demanding better conditions for students and Rama's resignation.

Police said after Saturday's protests that 23 people had been formally arrested, 13 others face legal proceedings and 30 people were "wanted".

Lula supporters cross fingers in Rio, a Bolsonaro bastion

RIO DE JANEIRO (AFP) — Diehard supporters of Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva in a leftist Rio neighbourhood are pouring their faith into the Brazilian president's ability to pull off an election win despite the odds.

Rio de Janeiro is the hometown of Lula's right-wing challenger Flavio Bolsonaro, a hardliner on security who enjoys strong support in the seaside city plagued by street crime while favelas are dominated by drug-running gangs.

The senator came out on top in Rio in the first round of elections earlier this month, just like his father, jailed ex-leader Jair Bolsonaro, in



A supporter of Brazil's President and Workers' Party reelection candidate Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva walks with a campaign flag in downtown Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, on Sunday

2018 and 2022.

The middle-class Laranjeiras neighbourhood goes against the tide, however, and its residents have spent the

three weeks in between election rounds staging massive pro-Lula demonstrations.

"The great hope is to reelect President Lula,"

said NGO coordinator Michely Ribeiro, 39, accompanied by her two young daughters.

The mother told AFP she considers a Bol-

sonaro win "a threat to human rights".

People milling around Sao Salvador Square, a historical leftist gathering point during elections, were hoping against hope for a fourth Lula term.

"It's an unknown. This election may be the most closely contested in recent years," said Cristina Vermelho, a 63-year-old university professor.

"Let's go, Lula!" the oft-repeated phrase mingled in the air with a non-stop chorus of honking horns.

'It's going to work out'

Final polls showed the two candidates neck-and-neck, with Bolsonaro considered a narrow favourite.

Architect Daniel Gomes, 45, said the election came at a crucial time for Brazil.

"Democracy is at stake. Given the track record of the candidate's father, who already tried to carry out a coup, it's not crazy to think it could happen again," he told AFP.

"I'm scared, but I want to believe it's going to work out."

Jair Bolsonaro is serving a 27-year sentence under house arrest for an attempted coup following his 2022 electoral defeat to Lula.

Bolsonaro junior presents himself as a more moderate version

of his firebrand father, whom he has promised to free if elected.

Bolsonaro is the 'solution'

While the left took to the streets in large numbers to rally more votes for Lula, Flavio Bolsonaro's supporters also drew massive crowds in the deeply polarised nation.

Thousands of people crowded Rio's affluent Barra da Tijuca neighbourhood on Saturday as the presidential hopeful visited the house where his father recovered from a stabbing during his own campaign in 2018.

"I'm a Jair Bolsonaro voter and I believe in the transformation of the country," said teacher Ilma Gomes de Souza, 53.

"When it comes to education, health and security, Rio residents no longer live in peace," he added.

Bolsonaro supporter Martin Silva Peixoto says there is no reason to fear the right-wing candidate.

"Today we have a real right wing," the 43-year-old lawyer said in Belo Horizonte, another city where Bolsonaro won the first round.

"I think it's a solution and not a problem, as many people see it around here," he said.



Dogs are walked beside the swollen River Eden in Carlisle in north-west England on Sunday

Storms batter Europe hitting power supplies, flights and phones

LONDON(AFP) — Storms battered northern Europe Sunday, killing a man, cutting power to more than 150,000 homes and disrupting travel and phone networks.

A man died when a tree fell on him in southwestern Scotland, while a runner in a marathon in northern France was injured when a tree was felled by strong winds during the race.

More than 82,000 homes in Britain, nearly 60,000 in France and at least 10,000 in Germany had power cuts inflicted by the passage of storms Boelo and Austen within 24 hours of each other, authorities in the countries said.

In the Argyll and Bute region of western Scotland, winds of up to 135 kilometres an hour were recorded. Trees and power cables brought down by the storm blocked roads and rail lines across Scotland and northern England.

Britain's Energy Networks Association said more than 400,000 homes had lost power at some stage during the storms.

Part of the pier at Brighton on the southern England coast, unused since a fire in 2003, blew away in Storm Austen on Friday.

The powerful winds also battered northern France across the Channel as Europe battled its first big autumn storms of the year. Experts have warned of more ex-

treme weather events because of global warming.

Authorities warned of flood risk in regions in Scotland and England.

A runner was lightly injured in the northern French city of Lille near the start of the city's marathon, which was being staged for the first time in 31 years.

Two people were seriously hurt Saturday by scaffolding blown away by storm Austen's winds during an autumn market at the town of Nastatten

Widespread power cuts

French energy company Enedis said that at the peak of storm Austen on Saturday, some 288,000 homes had no electricity.

Some 59,000 remained without power at midday Sunday, mainly in Normandy

and Brittany. It said 2,600 Enedis technicians and contractors were working to re-establish power.

In Germany, Austen cut power to 10,000 homes in and around the southwestern town of Freiburg-Breisgau on Sunday. The town's main hospital said it had had to limit service to emergency cases because of the blackout that also cut the mobile phone network.

Two people were seriously hurt Saturday by scaffolding blown away by storm Austen's winds during an autumn market at the town of Nastatten, German police said.

Germany's DWD weather agency predicted more powerful winds of up to 100 kph on the northern coast on Sunday.

The storms also hit The Netherlands and Belgium, where falling trees injured four people in Brussels on Saturday.

Hundreds of flights were cancelled or diverted because of the storms across northern Europe.

A m s t e r d a m ' s Schiphol airport, one of Europe's busiest hubs, cancelled dozens of flights Sunday.

AFP counted some 90 flights cancelled on the airport website, mainly to European cities including Paris, Rome and Dublin. Dozens of flights due to land at the airport were also cancelled.

Flights in northern England and Scotland were also hit by the storms.

Strike on Gaza university kills three: Staff, hospital

GAZA CITY, Palestinian Territories (AFP) — An Israeli strike on a university in Gaza City killed three people on Sunday, staff and a local hospital said, while the civil defence agency reported five others killed elsewhere in the territory.

Reached for comment on the strike at the Islamic University, the Israeli army said that it was currently under review.

Al Shifa hospital reported receiving three bodies and treating eight people who were wounded in the drone strike, with two sources at the university saying the dead were employees and the injured were students.

The university said the campus and its surroundings had been targeted twice on Sunday, condemning the attacks and mourning those killed in a statement.

Gaza's education ministry likewise condemned the strike and said "the global silence regarding attacks on students and universities serves as encouragement for the continuation of these crimes".

"This strike occurs at a time when the higher education sector is facing total annihilation, with 95 percent of the buildings belonging to



Mourners carry the body of one of three Palestinians during their funeral at Al Shifa Hospital in Gaza City on Sunday

academic institutions having been damaged as a result of the war," it continued.

"This heinous assault is part of a continuous series of attacks on education; over the past six days, 10 students and educators have been killed by the occupation's fire."

In a statement, the army said it had been "targeting a terrorist from Hamas' military wing".

"Following the identification of uninvolved individuals in the area, the munition was diverted in order to mitigate harm to them. The incident is under review," it said, without specifying whether those killed at the university were hit by accident.

A truce has been in effect in Gaza for over a year, but has failed to completely halt the violence there.

Gaza civil defence spokesman Mahmoud Bassal said four other people were killed on Sunday, three in strikes around the southern city of Khan Yunis, one in central Deir al Balah and one northwest of Gaza City.

Bulgaria votes for president as concerns grow over Black Sea attacks

SOFIA (AFP) — Bulgarians will vote in a presidential election on Sunday as security concerns swirl following a series of drone attacks on ships in the Black Sea.

President Iliana Iotova, who favours dialogue with Moscow and opposes military aid to Ukraine, is the frontrunner for a new term in the largely ceremonial post, polls show.

Iotova, 62, is expected to win between 41 and 47 per cent of the vote, according to surveys.

Her main challenger Andrej Gjurkov, a banker and former caretaker prime minister backed by the pro-Western opposition, is polling at 28-31 per cent.

The leader of the pro-Russian far-right Vazrazhdane Party, Kostadin Kostadinov, is in third place on 10-13 per cent.

Iotova took over this year as president of Bulgaria, a European Union and NATO member state, when Rumen Radev stepped down to run in parliamentary elections, eventually becoming prime minister.

If successful in a runoff set for November 1, she would become the first woman ever elected president in the country of 6.4 million people.

A win for Iotova would be a boost for Radev, who has also called for dialogue with Moscow.

A former journalist and member of the European Parliament, Iotova was elected vice-president alongside Radev in 2016 and 2021.

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".

Without questioning Bulgaria's membership of the EU or NATO, she opposes military aid to Ukraine 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 would prolong Russia's invasion.

At another rally for Iotova in the southern town of Dimitrovgrad, retired teacher Irina Ilieva, 85, said the Ukraine war was her main concern.

"Whoever is elected... will have to do everything possible to ensure that the problems are resolved peacefully," she said.

Four vessels were struck off Bulgaria's coast this month, leaving 21 people missing, in suspected spillover from the Russia-Ukraine war.

While Radev said the attacks appeared to serve Russian interests and summoned the Russian ambassador, his government insists there is so far no evidence directly linking Moscow to them.

An American P-8 Poseidon reconnaissance plane has started to patrol the Black Sea following Sofia's call for help after the attacks.

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

Twenty-seven pairs of candidates for president and vice-president are competing in the first round, nearly half of them openly pro-Kremlin.

The election will pit two competing visions of Bulgaria against each other, said political scientist Parvan Simeonov, founder of polling institute Myra — one "conservative, popular and oriented toward the East" and the other "Western, elitist and liberal".

Deputising for King, prime minister participates in funeral of Karak martyrs

Continued from page 1

Public Security Directorate officers carried the victims' coffins, draped in Jordanian flags, before they were laid to rest.

Despite the village's small size and population, people from across the Kingdom had arrived to offer their condolences, with visitors representing different governorates and official and popular institutions.

The response extended beyond Karak. Solidarity vigils were held across Jordan and in the occupied Palestinian territories to condemn the attack, which left nine martyred and 25 wounded, according to the latest toll from the authorities.

Christian and Muslim religious leaders joined the gatherings, while church bells rang in a gesture of solidarity. Participants carried banners denouncing terrorism, extremism and violence, underscoring a common message that



religious differences must not become a source of division.

A doctor remembered for serving the poor

Among those mourned was dentist Khaled Hal-

sa, whose death left his family and the wider Karak community in deep sorrow.

Known locally as the "doctor of the poor," Halsal had earned a reputation for his charitable work and

his willingness to treat patients and help people in need without charge. His death was felt particularly deeply by those who had benefited from his generosity and dedication.

His son, Omar, spoke

to Ammon news website of a father whose commitment to his patients often came before his own comfort.

Halsal, he said, was so devoted to his profession that he would frequently cut short

his holidays to return to town and resume treating patients.

Omar, who lives in Amman, also recalled seeing his father's body after a bullet had pierced his head.

"Is this how kindness is repaid?" he said, expressing the pain of losing a father remembered for helping others.

Omar stressed that the perpetrators represented no one but

themselves. He also noted that the town had never experienced similar incidents before.

He called for the perpetrators to be arrested and given the harshest possible punishment.



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Jordanians stand stronger after terrorist attack

In the serene village of Hmoud, nestled within the southern governorate of Karak among generous and hospitable Jordanians, last Friday unfolded as an unprecedented day. News broke of an armed terrorist attack on the local Greek Orthodox Church during a funeral procession, claiming the lives of nine innocent citizens and leaving twenty-seven injured. Yet, this heinous assault was not merely directed at a church or a Christian community; it was a direct strike at the heart of Jordan itself.



Hossam Haddad

Seeking to disrupt a haven of stability in a tumultuous region, a renegade faction driven by a dark, nihilistic ideology attempted to drive a dagger into the nation's flank by opening fire on defenceless mourners during a sacred moment dedicated to quiet grief, solemn prayers and community solidarity. However, the wise and conscious people of Jordan both Muslims and Christians fully recognise that such brutal terrorism can never shake their eternal coexistence. Today's martyrs stand in the glorious tradition of the early martyr fathers who hallowed this soil with their pure blood, remembered forever as Christian martyrs for Jordan and Jordanian martyrs for Christianity. For Arabs were Arabs long before they were Christians or Muslims; their overarching identity and historic civilisation constitute the unbreakable shield under which all differences dissolve. Rather than causing fragmentation or despair, this cowardly crime triggers an immediate, resolute consolidation behind our Hashemite leadership, reinforcing a national unity that remains impervious to ideological terrorism.

From a strategic economic and security perspective, national stability constitutes the non-negotiable prerequisite upon which Jordan's sustainable growth, investment attractiveness, and socioeconomic transformation depend. Acts of violent extremism do not merely aim to cause immediate physical loss or localised panic; they are deliberately engineered to inflict structural psychological damage on the national psyche, disrupt investor confidence and de-stabilise core economic engines — most notably our world-class tourism industry, which serves as a vital pillar of national income, employment generation and foreign exchange reserves.

Security incidents, even when isolated, naturally generate temporary anxieties within global markets, foreign direct investment circles and international travel networks. However, the primary benchmark of a nation's enduring strength lies not in the complete absence of risk, but in the absolute professionalism, swift vigilance and ironclad capability of its security apparatus to neutralise threats instantly.

By apprehending the perpetrators with swift precision and ensuring they face the full, uncompromising might of an independent and just judiciary, the state asserts an unequivocal message: The rule of law is supreme, sovereign security is non-negotiable, and no entity will ever be permitted to compromise the safety or economic vitality of our homeland. Terror cannot weaken the organic unity of Jordan's identity. Rooted in The Amman Message and a shared history, Muslims and Christians form an indivisible family whose sacred brotherhood and commitment to moderation remain impervious to extremism.

This national resolve becomes even more significant as we look toward our long-term socioeconomic visions. Jordan is actively forging ahead with landmark national initiatives of global magnitude, most notably Al Maghtas (The Baptism Site) 2030. This master plan is far more than a mega-project for infrastructure and religious tourism; it is a global testament to Jordan's identity as the cradle of Christianity and a sacred sanctuary of spiritual convergence.

The synergy between robust national security and macroeconomic development is crucial here: An ironclad security environment directly bolsters investor confidence, protects capital flows and guarantees the safety of international travellers, making Al Maghtas a premier, safe global hub for pilgrimage. While a misguided faction of extremists seeks to tarnish this pristine image and cast shadows over our international standing, their malicious ambitions have failed miserably. Their actions stand completely rejected by the Jordanian people, who remain committed to moderation, receiving global visitors with the warmth, peace and open hospitality characterising our heritage.

What transpired in Karak was an isolated, transient anomaly engineered by outlaws who have rendered themselves completely alien to the national conscience and spiritual heritage of this land.

As we bow our heads in profound reverence and pray for Almighty God to bestow His infinite mercy upon the pure souls of our righteous martyrs, we find comfort in knowing that their sacrifice has further galvanised our collective resolve, fortified our internal front and sharpened our focus on a prosperous future. Standing firmly and united behind His Majesty King Abdullah and His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hussein Bin Abdullah, Jordanians remain an impenetrable shield against sectarian sedition, ideological extremism, and foreign interference.

May God bless the souls of our martyrs, grant a swift recovery to the injured and preserve Jordan as an eternal fortress of peace, security and unity proving once again that our national unity is our eternal armor, our sovereign strength and our ultimate victory.

Reengineering security and rebuilding societal culture: The challenge of stability in Jordan and the region



Amer Al Sabaileh

The region is entering a new phase of confrontation, with the renewed spread of chaos emerging as one of its defining features. Iran is seeking to use its regional instruments to threaten security and stability, and demonstrate its ability to widen the scope of confrontation. This phase is taking multiple forms, beginning with missile and drone attacks and threats to maritime navigation, extending to strikes against energy facilities and their sources and alternatives, and potentially reaching the targeting of civil aviation and airports, as well as the activation of cells operating on the ground.

These challenges are becoming more significant amid the mounting pressure on Tehran and the possibility that its confrontation with the United States could enter a more decisive phase. A growing sense of having fewer options may push Iran to make greater use of its instruments of pressure and influence, raising the cost of confrontation for regional countries and opening new fronts for escalation. Developments in the Red Sea, the threats facing Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states, and events across the wider geography surrounding Israel all point to an expanding confrontation unfolding across multiple arenas. This requires regional states to prepare for scenarios that extend beyond direct military escalation.

Jordan is not removed from this challenge. Attempts to exploit regional circumstances to activate domestic networks or undermine societal stability require the country to approach national security as an integrated system. Security cannot be confined to protecting borders and state institutions, it must also include safeguarding civil peace and preventing external pressure from being transformed into internal divisions. Protecting Jordan's stability must therefore remain a central element of strategic thinking in the period ahead, particularly in a regional environment where confrontation can increasingly shift from one arena to another.

The greater challenge, however, is not simply how to respond to the current escalation, but the need to reconsider the very concept of security. This is where the idea of reengineering security becomes essential. In an environment shaped by changing and increasingly complex threats, the state must develop its capacity to confront not only threats directed at its institutions, but also the traps,

pressures and forms of influence targeting society itself. The objective is to move beyond responding to threats after they materialise and towards building the capacity to anticipate and contain them, while strengthening societal resilience and public confidence in state institutions.

For this reason, security strategy cannot be separated from cultural strategy. Rebuilding society cannot be achieved through security measures alone, it also requires a cultural approach that restores trust within society. A state's ability to confront threats depends not only on the effectiveness of its institutions, but also on the cohesion of its society and its capacity to resist polarisation and external influence. As trust declines and divisions widen, the domestic environment becomes more vulnerable to exploitation, making challenges harder to contain even when the state possesses the necessary tools to address direct threats.

The state must recognise that delaying this process will increase the scale of the challenges and may eventually make them more difficult to manage. What is needed today is not merely a review of security policies or a change in institutional thinking and approach. It is also necessary to develop broader ways of confronting these challenges while redefining the relationship between security and society. Sustainable security cannot

rest on security measures alone. It requires a social environment capable of accommodating differences, strengthening a shared sense of belonging and maintaining trust between citizens and state institutions.

Most importantly, the reengineering of security strategies must be matched by the reconstruction of societal culture. This means moving away from a culture of suspicion, accusations of disloyalty, exclusive thinking and the treatment of difference as a threat, towards a culture that embraces diversity and accepts disagreement. Such a process cannot begin and end with individual initiatives or limited programmes. It requires a clear political decision and a long-term state vision that brings together security, cultural and social instruments within a sustained effort. One that does not respond to crises alone, but also seeks to build lasting resilience against future challenges.

Ultimately, the region faces two parallel tasks, reengineering security thinking on the one hand and reconstructing societal culture on the other. Progress in one without the other will not be sufficient to confront the challenges ahead. A state capable of protecting its security is not merely one that can thwart threats. It is also one that preserves social cohesion and prevents external pressure from turning into internal crises that threaten its stability over the long term.

Daesh is defeated, but has its ideology survived

By Mohammad Abu Rumman

The terrorist attack on Hmoud Church in Karak struck at the very heart of Jordanians' sense of security and their understanding of national solidarity. Targeting civilians attending a funeral inside a place of worship constitutes an atrocity of compounded brutality, violating the sanctity of both life and death, and transforming a space of mourning and consolation into a scene of bloodshed and fear. The King's presence in Karak, the declaration of national mourning, and the widespread expressions of popular and political solidarity therefore reflected a collective recognition that the attack was directed against Jordan as a whole, and that protecting the church and its congregation is, ultimately, an act of defending the shared national home.

The shock was also closely connected to the timing of the attack. After years in which Daesh had largely receded from public view, many had come to believe that the collapse of its territorial state in Iraq and Syria had effectively closed that chapter, reducing the organisation to remnants contained by security measures. This is precisely where a deeper examination becomes necessary, for the decline in terrorist operations does not, in itself, tell us what has become of the broader ideological movement. What appears to be a period of calm may instead reflect the success of security agencies in disrupting its operational capabilities, while its ideas and networks continue to evolve beyond public scrutiny.

The warning signs had not been entirely absent. In November 2025, a security confrontation in Ramtha ended with the deaths of two brothers whom the Public Security Directorate described as adherents of extremist takfiri ideology, while three members of the security force were injured. The incident served as a reminder that beneath the surface of apparent dormancy, certain dynamics had not disappeared, and that a decline in visible activity is insufficient to assess either the magnitude or the trajectory of the threat. At the same time, the official characterisation alone does not establish that the two brothers were organisationally affiliated with Daesh.

This distinction between the persistence of an ideological current and formal organisational affiliation is equally essential when examining the Karak attack, pending the findings of the investigation. Yet the broader question of what became of Jordanian Daesh adherents predates this crime by several years. It was the central concern of Jordanian Jihadists and the Collapse of the DAESH State, a book I co-authored with Zaid Eyadat and launched in 2022, drawing on an examination of approximately 330 cases. We sought to understand what happened to the ideas, individuals, and networks associated with Daesh after the organisation lost the territory upon which it had built its political project, and how its supporters interpreted defeat and adapted to its consequences.

One of our central findings was

that the collapse of the Daesh state did not necessarily entail the disintegration of the social environment that had produced its supporters. Extremism persisted, while significant changes emerged in the social composition of radicalised circles and patterns of recruitment. These included the increasingly visible involvement of minors in cases involving extremist cells, alongside the growing importance of family and kinship ties. Such indicators make apparent dormancy particularly deceptive when interpreted as evidence that the phenomenon has come to an end. Security operations can foil a plot and dismantle a cell, but assessing their longer-term impact on the reproduction of extremism requires understanding what takes place within its social networks, how ideas are transmitted across generations, and who introduces them to new recruits.

The issue, therefore, is not necessarily a hierarchical organisation, but rather an ideological current extending beyond any particular cell, in which circles of ideological influence intersect with networks of kinship, friendship, and personal association. Individuals or small groups may act without direct instructions from a centralised leadership. Consequently, searching exclusively for an organisation in the conventional sense is no longer sufficient. Nor should everyone influenced by extremist ideas be equated with those who engage in terrorist violence. The analytical challenge lies in understanding the distance between ideological identification and vi-

olent action and identifying the factors that lead certain individuals to cross that threshold, transforming extremist convictions into a willingness to shed innocent blood.

This approach also requires reconsidering the conventional explanations that routinely invoke poverty, unemployment and low educational attainment as the principal drivers of extremism. Our earlier study, *The Sociology of Extremism and Terrorism in Jordan*, co-authored with Musa Shteivi, revealed a considerably more complex picture, encompassing employed individuals, university students, graduates and members of diverse social backgrounds. Indeed, the quantitative findings challenged some of these conventional assumptions, showing that a substantial proportion of those involved in extremist ideological and militant activities were university students or graduates, many of whom held jobs in the public or private sectors.

Ultimately, this terrorist crime demands serious domestic reassessment, one that moves beyond the necessary emotional response and expressions of national solidarity toward the development of evidence-based policies informed by rigorous research and analytical studies. Only through a more precise understanding of the social and ideological dynamics underlying such phenomena can Jordan strengthen its capacity to confront them and reduce the risk of being caught off guard by similar acts of violence in the future.

Us vs them: A simple phrase against the architects of ignorance

By Zaid K. Maaytah

The events in Karak have left us with profound sadness and anger, sadness for the lives lost and the suffering inflicted, and anger at an act that strikes at something far greater than the people directly affected, what happened should not be viewed merely as an isolated terrorist attack, but as a confrontation between two fundamentally opposing ideologies, two understandings of what it means to belong to a country and to recognise the humanity of those who share it.

The first is an ideology rooted in the right to live, as old as the waters of this land where Christ was baptised nearly two thousand years ago, as deeply rooted as its olive trees, whose wood was fashioned into crosses by generations of believers, and as collective as the history of a land that has offered sanctuary to those born upon it and those who sought refuge within it, an ideology that accompanied the

formation of the Jordanian state more than a century ago, bringing people of different faiths and backgrounds together under one unifying identity, loyalty to the homeland.

The opposing ideology recognises neither the meaning of a homeland nor the responsibilities of citizenship, it replaces belonging with exclusion, loyalty with betrayal, and the recognition of fellow citizens with suspicion and hatred, its danger extends beyond the violence committed in its name, because it seeks to persuade people that some of their fellow citizens are somehow less entitled to the country they have collectively inherited and built, this is the idea that must be confronted, not only through security measures, but through the way we raise future generations and shape our understanding of ourselves.

That confrontation begins with education, with a fundamental overhaul of how our children learn the history of their country

and the people who built it, they should know the contributions of Jordanians from every community to the establishment of the state, its armed forces, hospitals, schools and public institutions, not as separate histories belonging to different groups, but as one national story, children should grow up seeing the full diversity of Jordan reflected in the story of their homeland, because what becomes familiar through education is less easily portrayed as foreign or threatening.

The same responsibility extends to our national media, public and private, through a comprehensive strategy that confronts hate speech, discriminatory narratives and the everyday language that normalises exclusion, perhaps it is also time to reconsider expressions such as coexistence and civil peace, coexistence implies separate groups learning to tolerate one another, while civil peace suggests that avoiding conflict is our ultimate ambition, there is

no coexistence among citizens of the same country, there is simply existence, equal citizenship is not an arrangement between communities, but a shared identity that must be reflected in how people are represented, addressed and treated.

In behavioural science, who conveys a message can be as important as the message itself, and His Majesty King Abdullah, Supreme Commander of the Jordanian Armed Forces-Arab Army, expressed the nation's resolve in simple words spoken in the Jordanian dialect, "We will show them", an expression of us versus them, between those who believe in a shared homeland and those who seek to destroy that belief, and while the immediate response must confront those who threaten our security, the greater and more enduring victory will be in preserving and nurturing the one ideology that unites us all, the homeland.

Zaid K. Maaytah is a researcher in economics and behavioural policy



The Department of Statistics says that total licensed building areas in the Kingdom rose by 5.7 per cent to 6.81 million square metres during the first eight months of 2026

Licensed building areas rise 5.7% in first eight months of 2026 — DoS

AMMAN (JT) — Total licensed building areas in the Kingdom rose by 5.7 per cent to 6.81 million square metres during the first eight months of 2026, compared with 6.44 million square metres in the same period last year, according to the Department of Statistics (DoS).

The number of building licences issued increased by 3 per cent to 16,771, up from 16,276 in the corresponding period of 2025, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.

Licensed residential areas grew by 12 per cent to nearly 5.6 million square metres, compared with 5 million square metres in the first eight months

of 2025. Non-residential licensed areas, meanwhile, fell by 14.5 per cent to 1.24 million square metres, down from 1.45 million square metres.

Residential areas accounted for 81.8 per cent of total licensed areas, while non-residential areas made up the remaining 18.2 per cent.

The Central Region accounted for 72.5 per cent of total licensed areas, an increase of 1.4 percentage points from the same period in 2025. The Northern Region's share rose by 1.2 percentage points to 21.7 per cent, while the Southern Region's share fell by 2.6 percentage points to 5.8 per cent.

Amman Governorate recorded the highest share of newly licensed residential areas relative to population, at 15 per cent, equivalent to 0.666 square metres per capita. Zarqa Governorate recorded the lowest share, at 2.4 per cent, or 0.108 square metres per capita.

New buildings and additions to existing structures accounted for 59.5 per cent of total licensed areas during the eight-month period, while existing buildings accounted for the remaining 40.5 per cent.

Licensed areas for new buildings and additions totalled nearly 4 million square metres, unchanged from the same period last year.

National exports increase 6% to reach JD6.46b in first eight months

AMMAN (JT) — National exports rose by 6 per cent in the first eight months of 2026 to JD6.464 billion, while the trade deficit narrowed by 9.6 per cent to JD5.830 billion, according to Department of Statistics (DoS) data.

Total exports, including reexports, increased by 11.2 per cent to JD7.464 billion, with reexports surging by 63.4 per cent to JD1 billion compared with the same period last year, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.

Imports rose by 1 per cent to JD13.294 billion, while the coverage of imports by total exports increased to 56 per cent, up from 51 per cent in the first eight months of 2025.

The increase in national exports was driven by higher shipments of several key commodities, including clothing and accessories, which rose by 4.6 per cent, nitrogenous and chemical fertilisers by 16.4 per cent, pharmaceutical preparations by 1.8 per cent and crude potash by 12.3 per cent.

Exports of precious jewellery and crude phosphate, however, fell by 14.4 per cent and 13.4 per cent, respectively.

On the imports side,



The Department of Statistics says on Sunday the trade deficit was narrowed by 9.6 per cent to JD5.830 billion

purchases of crude oil and its derivatives increased by 39.1 per cent, while cereal imports rose by 13.5 per cent. Imports of precious jewellery fell by 14.4 per cent, machinery and tools by 25 per cent, vehicles and motorcycles by 33.6 per cent, and electrical machinery and equipment by 7.9 per cent.

The growth in national exports was mainly attributed to higher shipments to Syria and Iraq, non-Arab Asian countries, including China and European Union countries, including The Netherlands. Imports from Arab Free Trade Area countries, particularly Saudi Arabia, also increased.

In August, national exports rose by 17.5 per cent compared with July, reaching JD955 million, up from JD813 million. Reexports stood at JD114 million, bringing total exports to JD1.069 billion.

Imports fell by 2.2 per cent in August to JD1.708 billion, down from JD1.746 billion in July, while the trade deficit stood at JD639 million.

Jordan's ARDI programme boosts climate resilience for 111,508 farmers — World Bank

AMMAN (JT) — Jordan's Agriculture Resilience Enhancement, Value Chain Development and Innovation (ARDI) programme has strengthened the capacity of 111,508 people to cope with climate risks and provided agricultural services and assets to 63,812 farmers, while developing sustainable rainwater harvesting and storage capacity of more than 2.24 million cubic metres, according to a recent World Bank report.

According to the World Bank, the development objective ARDI (in Arabic "My Land") Programme for Jordan is to strengthen the climate resilience and enabling environment for agriculture development in selected value chains in Jordan.

The programme's implementation status report, cited by Al Mamlaka, shows that the number of people whose resilience to climate risks has improved rose from 94,101 in January to 111,508 in June. Beneficiaries included 54,412 women and 37,132 young people, against a target of 309,550 people by 2030.

The number of farmers benefitting from agricultural services and assets increased from 46,404 to 63,812 over the same period. They included 11,075 women, 25,784 young people and 739 refugees, of whom 473 were women, according to the report.

The programme aims to reach 112,303 farmers by its completion. The number of young beneficiaries has already exceeded its target of 22,460.

The programme



JT photo

has total financing of \$241 million, of which \$116.95 million or 48.53 per cent, had been disbursed, leaving \$124.05 million undisbursed, according to World Bank financial data.

The financing comprises two agreements totalling \$185.6 million, of which \$87.12 million had been disbursed and four trust fund arrangements worth a combined \$55.4 million, of which \$29.83 million had been disbursed.

Disbursements under the first financing agreement, valued at \$95.6 million, reached \$64.45 million, equivalent to 67.42 per cent. Under the second agreement, worth \$90 million, disbursements stood at \$22.67 million, or 25.19 per cent. Disbursement rates under the four trust fund arrangements ranged from 25.02 per cent to 100 per cent.

Water harvesting and farmer training expand

The programme has developed sustainable rainwater harvesting and storage capacity of 2,243,520 cubic metres, against a target of

16.17 million cubic metres by 2030.

The number of households in the Badia regions benefitting from improved water availability for livestock rose to 10,650, compared with 3,000 in the previous assessment. The programme's target is 22,950 households.

Meanwhile, 3,313 farmers completed training in climate-smart agricultural techniques, including 1,840 women and 334 refugees. This compares with 1,400 farmers in the previous assessment and a target of 8,000.

The training combined traditional methods with tools supported by virtual reality technology.

Under initiatives designed to align skills with labour market needs, 2,169 women and 804 refugees completed training, including 483 female refugees. However, the number of trainees who remained employed by their employers after completing the training was still zero, against a target of 3,878.

In agricultural production, programme-

supported nurseries distributed 852,000 drought-resistant seedlings, up from 452,136 in the previous assessment. The overall target is 1.8 million seedlings.

The programme also completed the rehabilitation of three nurseries affiliated with the Ministry of Agriculture and two regional veterinary service centres. A five-year plan to develop veterinary services through 2027 was also prepared.

The World Bank rated progress towards the programme's development objectives as "Satisfactory" and overall implementation progress as "Moderately Satisfactory", while maintaining the overall risk rating at "Substantial".

The bank approved the programme on September 29, 2022, and it became effective on November 10 that year. It is scheduled to run until September 30, 2030, with the aim of strengthening climate resilience and creating a more supportive environment for agricultural development across targeted value chains.

Iran parliament speaker calls for cutting gas consumption by 10 per cent as winter nears

TEHRAN (AFP) — Iran's Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf on Sunday called for a campaign to cut gas consumption by at least 10 per cent, with officials anticipating shortages as winter approaches.

While a major producer, Iran has long suffered shortages of natural gas, essential for powering heating systems, which have been exacerbated by war with the United States and Israel that began in February.

During the most intense phase of the fighting, which lasted nearly 40 days, the two countries struck key Iranian infrastructure including natural gas refineries, according to Tehran.

Winter in Iran often sees temperatures drop below freezing, especially in the country's north.

"To get through the



AFP photo

In this photo obtained from Iran's ISNA news agency on June 18, vessels are seen anchored in Bandar Abbas along the Strait of Hormuz

approaching winter, a nationwide effort is essential... to reduce gas consumption by at least 10 per cent," said Ghalibaf in a video carried by Iranian media.

"Anyone who saves gas, regardless of the amount, will immediately receive the corresponding proceeds in their bank account, allowing everyone to see the tangible impact of

those savings on their household budget."

Earlier in October, First Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref said the government anticipated a daily "gas shortfall of 100 million to 250 million cubic metres during the cold season because of the damage caused by the war", according to the official IRNA news agency.

He added that he hoped to restore the supply of around 100 million cubic metres by the start of winter.

An April ceasefire brought an end to the initial phase of intense bombardment but the two sides have continued to vie for control over the Strait of Hormuz, through which around a fifth of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas used to travel.

Iran has claimed control over the strait since the outbreak of the war and has regularly targeted vessels that attempt crossings without its authorisation.

In response, Washington has imposed a counterblockade on Iranian ports and in August announced what it called an "economic asphyxiation" campaign on Iran aimed at strangling its already battered economy.

AMMAN STOCK EXCHANGE

AMMAN (JT) — Amman Stock Exchange (ASE) trading value for Sunday amounted to JD15 million spread over 4.4 million shares that traded through 5,595 transactions.

The ASE share price index shed 0.52 per cent, closing at 4117.48 points.

Out of 106 companies whose shares were traded, the share price of 23 companies rose while the share price of another 55 declined.

Topping the list of the companies whose shares gained the most were National Steel Industry by 4.42 per cent, Arab International for Education and Investment by 4.26 per cent, Noor Capital Markets for Diversified Investments by 4.09 per cent, Al Manara Islamic Insurance Company by 3.13 per cent and Rumm Financial Brokerage by 3.01 per cent.

The companies whose shares dropped the most were Jordanian Management and Consulting Company by 4.52 per cent, Arab Aluminium Industry/Aral by 4.17 per cent, Al Dawliyah for Hotels and Malls by 4 per cent, Shira Real Estate Development and Investments by 4 per cent, and Jordanian Company for Developing and Financial Investment by 3.80 per cent.



FOOTBALL

Hoffenheim late show snaps Leverkusen winning streak

BERLIN (AFP) — Hoffenheim scored three goals in the final 11 minutes to beat Bayer Leverkusen 3-0 at home in the Bundesliga on Sunday, snapping the visitors' six-game winning streak. Andrej Kramaric converted a 79th-minute penalty and Alexander Prass scored 10 minutes later, but he was sent off immediately afterwards for taking off his shirt in celebration. Max Moerstedt added another deep in stoppage time. Hoffenheim, who beat Lyon by the same scoreline in the Europa League on Thursday, have now won three in a row. Leverkusen, who claimed 13 of a possible 15 points before Sunday's match, could have gone into second place with victory but instead sit fourth. The best chance of the opening half fell to former Leverkusen forward Adam Hlozek when he rattled the post with 38 minutes gone. With the match looking headed for a scoreless draw, Leverkusen captain Edmond Tapsoba swept Fislík Asllani's ankle while defending a cross, with the referee pointing to the spot after a VAR review. Hoffenheim veteran Kramaric made no mistake to put his side on track for just a second home win this season. With Leverkusen pushing for an equaliser, Hoffenheim broke on the counter and Prass scored, but he picked up a second yellow for removing his shirt, before leaving the pitch slapping himself on the forehead in dismay. Moerstedt added a third despite the one-man disadvantage in the sixth minute of stoppage time.

Carrick unsure over Man Utd future after Bournemouth loss

MANCHESTER, United Kingdom (AFP) — Michael Carrick said he will do what is best for Manchester United after a 3-0 demolition by Bournemouth plunged his future as manager into doubt on Sunday. Winless in eight games in all competitions, the 20-time English champions slipped to within one point of the relegation zone after a damaging defeat at Old Trafford. "It's a tough situation," Carrick told Sky Sports. "What is next? I don't know. I'll always do what's best for this football club. I've said it all along, I don't change that now. I love what I do. I love the responsibility, but we'll have to wait and see." Despite a dismal run of results, the United fans largely supported Carrick as he made his way off the field at full-time before they turned on the club's players. "I have mixed emotions to have that connection with the supporters in the moment we're in. I need time to digest that," added Carrick.

Inter rally late to down Fiorentina and regain Serie A lead

ROME (AFP) — Inter Milan struck twice in stoppage time to complete a remarkable 2-1 comeback win over Fiorentina at San Siro on Sunday and return to the summit of Serie A.

Alex Jimenez's rocket strike had the struggling visitors heading for a shock win, but Marcus Thuram levelled in the 91st minute before winning a penalty that Piotr Zielinski converted in the 98th minute.

The result meant the Nerazzurri returned to first place, level with surprise fellow pace-setters Lazio on 22 points, while the Florence club's winless run stretched to four games to keep them in 18th spot.

It was Inter's fifth comeback win of the season, while they conceded for the 10th time, but head coach Cristian Chivu was unconcerned by his side's defensive issues.

"That's football. Sometimes you concede," Chivu told DAZN. "The important thing is not to let your heads drop and to maintain the same mentality. Ever since I arrived here, I've always said that games last 90 minutes."

"I don't want to see people feel sorry for themselves," Chivu added. "I want to see players respond to setbacks."

Chivu's side had the



Inter Milan's French forward #09 Marcus Thuram reacts during the Italian Serie A football match between Inter Milan and Fiorentina at San Siro stadium in Milan, northern Italy, on Sunday

better of the first half but could not find a way past David de Gea, who made a fingertip stop on a Pio Esposito header before showing quick reactions to parry Thuram's angled drive.

De Gea was alert again to parry a fierce Thuram strike over the bar early in the second

half, but it was the visitors who struck first against the run of play after 65 minutes.

Former AC Milan player Jimenez took debutant Inter goalkeeper Ivan Provedel by surprise with an audacious angled strike from distance that flew into the top corner.

Inter piled forward

in search of an equaliser, with Carlos Augusto's glancing header coming off the top of the bar and De Gea denying substitute Petar Sucic, but they could not find a way through until the game was into added time.

Thuram guided a shot into the bottom corner to level the

scores before winning a penalty when he was dragged down by Victor Valdepenas in the box, which Zielinski converted to complete a pulsating victory.

There was an eight-goal thriller in Bergamo as Atalanta and Frosinone played out a 4-4 draw in which both sides came from

behind twice, extending La Dea's winless run to three games in all competitions and keeping the visitors in sixth place.

Genoa claimed a 1-0 win at home to Venezia thanks to a goal from Mikael Ellertsson to climb up to 16th place as Davide Nicola's side stayed bottom.

Sacha Baron Cohen revives the 'problematic dinosaur' Ali G in new film

LOS ANGELES, United States (AFP) — With "Ali G: Who Is It?" Sacha Baron Cohen has returned to the guerrilla-style comedy that catapulted him to global fame — but this time, the character has faced criticism.

The film, which marks the comedian's debut as a director, revives the persona that originated in a British television segment and went on to star in "Da Ali G Show".

In the series, Cohen played a white man obsessed with hip-hop and reggae who would interview public figures including Donald Trump and Buzz Aldrin — and they weren't in on the joke.

The new mockumentary follows the character known for flashy outfits and gold chains as he seeks a second chance on television, efforts driven by his need for funds after discovering his girlfriend Julie, played by Morgana Robinson, is pregnant.

In a bid to highlight society's current polarisation, Baron Cohen also plays the character's nemesis, Dr. Nira Cain-N'Degeocello — a professor so left-wing that "he makes AOC look MAGA", referring to the Democratic socialist congresswoman from New York, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

The film maker also



Sacha Baron Cohen dusted off his character Ali G for a new film attempting to use satire to shed light on society's polarisation

plays a character at the opposite end of the political spectrum, Colonel Morad.

Yet, for some, Ali G is a relic of the past whose cultural appropriation is no longer funny.

"The film has a few scattered giggles, but it's dawdling and cumbersome, and far less 'relevant' than it thinks," read a review from the Hollywood trade publication Variety.

"The joke of Ali G is that he was a maximally clueless white-bro poseur," the review continued. "He was most funny as a talk-show stooge."

Speaking with journalists, Baron Cohen acknowledged how times have changed, saying that's exactly why he wanted to dust off the

character.

"I brought back Ali G because he is a problematic dinosaur," he said. "I just love the idea of dropping him into today's world."

"It felt like this was the perfect time to bring back a character that should have been left in the 2000s."

Two decades ago, Baron Cohen used his hit film "Borat: Cultural Learnings of American for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan" as a sociological mirror to lay bare certain prejudices within US society.

His work has been compared to that of filmmaker Nathan Fielder, whose documentary "You Can See Everything" — about fallen biotech prodigy Elizabeth Holmes — de-

buted last week to both critical acclaim and box office success.

Baron Cohen praised Fielder, noting that the comedian "created something completely different".

Baron Cohen, 55, arrived at the Los Angeles premiere of his new film in character, wearing neon yellow from head to toe.

He stepped out of a convertible alongside Julie and performed "Richer than Elon" — a song that satirises the SpaceX executive, who is the wealthiest man in the world.

"The world's gone to crap. You know, there's wars, there's COVID, people are listening to Ed Sheeran more," Baron Cohen told AFP in character. "You know, Coldplay still exists. It's, like, well depressing."

At a later press conference, Baron Cohen — as himself — defended satire as the quintessential format for "shining a light on, maybe, subjects that we haven't really discussed as a society before".

"We're at this really dangerous point in society where a handful of billionaires control what information is being spread, and societies and democracies in particular rely on shared facts," Baron Cohen said.

Oscar hopeful 'La Bola Negra' offers lessons about communicating, directors say

LOS ANGELES, United States (AFP) — Festival darling "La Bola Negra" ("The Black Ball"), now leading many Oscars predictions lists, retraces the tragic past of Spain, but its subject matter is more relevant than ever, its co-directors say.

Javier Ambrossi and Javier Calvo, collectively known as "Los Javis", have wowed critics and filmgoers with their sweeping queer epic telling the interconnected stories of three gay men over multiple generations.

"It's a film about the danger of lack of communication... which really can lead us into horrible situations," Ambrossi, 42, said in an interview with AFP.

"I think we need to talk, not only in our country, but I believe it's quite a global issue. We live in an increasingly interconnected world of mobile networks, yet we make less and less effort to understand one another."

The film stars rising talents Guitarricadela Fuente, Miguel Bernardeau, Milo Quifés and Carlos Gonzalez alongside veterans Penelope Cruz and Glenn Close in featured roles.

The movie, out in se-

lect US theaters, begins in 1932 in Granada, amidst the tensions that ultimately led to the Spanish Civil War before winding through history to wrap up in 2017 in modern-day Madrid.

Early inspiration for the movie came from an unpublished play written by poet Federico Garcia Lorca, who was executed by fascist forces at the beginning of the Spanish Civil War in 1936.

"We had to dig deeply into all the material, into Federico's works, into Federico's poems," the 35-year-old Calvo said.

He explained he went so far as to memorise some of Lorca's poems and letters in order to better understand the writer, and perhaps guess how the play might have ended if he had finished it.

"Whenever I felt lost... I went back to read the books, reading them over and over," Calvo added.

Oscars buzz

The film's first thread, which comes directly from Lorca's work, follows Carlos (Quifés), who has been rejected from a social club in Granada in southern

Spain for being gay, through a voting system using black and white balls.

As conflict erupts, the action moves to a small town where young trumpeter Sebastian (Guitarricadela Fuente) finds himself co-opted by Francisco Franco's rebels.

Sebastian is ordered to watch over prisoner Rafael (Bernardeau), a Republican who is inspired by Lorca's real-life partner.

Los Javis use the stories to tell the tale of a brutal war that divided Spain and left deep scars, and the story of the joys and hardships of ordinary men turned into soldiers.

"It was a war that ultimately involved everyone, and everyone was affected," said Guitarricadela Fuente, who has generated Oscars buzz for his performance.

The war is "still a ghost that appears from time to time", added the actor and singer, who is one of the composers of "La Nieve" ("The Snow") from the film's soundtrack, which could be an Oscar contender for best original song.

For Bernardeau, who is Spanish, the film offered him a chance to study his own country's history without

the "bias" found in classrooms.

"It helped me develop a critical perspective, much as Rafael had, and to understand the significance of events at that time: The weight of the tragedy, the weight of war, the reality of the deaths — but also hope," he told AFP.

The film wraps up in 2017, when Alberto, a young historian, unearths a family secret.

Los Javis tied for best director honors in Cannes, and the Spanish-language film won the top audience prizes in San Sebastian and at the Toronto International Film Festival, a reliable bellwether for Academy Awards success.

Ambrossi said that he was thrilled about the film's success, but also surprised by it, given that it tells "a very Spanish story, really — about Spanish literature, about the history of Spain, about the Civil War, about Federico Garcia Lorca".

Calvo said the reaction to "La Bola Negra" outside Spain has taught him that "if something is important to you, if you have truly felt it, then many other people will feel it, too".

"It's a way for us to connect," he said.

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