

**WEATHER**  
Warm weather with moderate breeze forecast.

TODAY 24° 16° | WED 27° 18° | THU 30° 20°



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## Global Land Forum opens in Dead Sea Jordan launches national strategy on land governance and management

**AMMAN (JNews)** – Deputizing for His Majesty King Abdullah, Minister of Agriculture Khaled Hneifat on Monday patronized the 9th Global Land Forum (GLF) at the Dead Sea, according to the Jordan News Agency, Petra.

The four-day forum will discuss seven central themes: land decentralization, climate crisis, youth and land-based opportunities in rural areas, building partnerships, women's rights and equality, peace-building, and rangelands.

Organized by the Agriculture Ministry and the SEEDS Jordanian youth organization, in partnership with the EU, the forum brings together more than 400 specialists from 78 countries with the aim of exchanging expertise in land governance and management and discussing the most important issues and challenges facing the world, including climate change and conflicts and their impact on the environment and land.

In a keynote speech, Hneifat announced the launch of a national strategy to involve stakeholders in land governance and management to form a national land alliance that would implement the strategy in the coming years.

He lauded efforts of the International Land Coalition (ILC), a global alliance to promote secure and equitable access to and control over land, to establish wide recognition that land rights are central to development-related action, as well as to governments' commitment to setting global targets on land governance within the Sustainable Development Goals.

He also pointed to the ILC's efforts to improve the standards of best practices in land governance, shifting focus towards coming up with solutions for climate change and looking for more opportunities to empower women and youth in rural areas.

The forum, held under the theme "Pathways to Climate Solutions," is part of the ILC's 2030 Strategy to



Participants in the Global Land Forum pose for a commemorative photo at the Dead Sea on May 23. (Photo: Twitter)

come up with solutions to climate and environmental crises, overcome severe inequality, build sustainable food systems, and protect democracy and civil life, he added.

In his Speech from the Throne, His Majesty King Abdullah underlined that Jordan's priorities are achieving national food security and setting viable plans to advance the national economy in various sectors, including the agricultural sector, the minister stated.

The COVID-19 pandemic and other crises and catastrophes caused by climate change have demonstrated the dire need to prepare a comprehensive strategy for the land sector for governance, sustainability and preservation.

The national committee organizing this event prepared a strategy, adopted by the Ministry of Agricul-

ture, for the land sector in Jordan to govern land and formulate relevant policies and legal frameworks, he added. The Kingdom, he noted, looks to adapt to climate change through water harvesting programs, water treatment techniques, saving water and utilizing it in expanding green spaces.

Hneifat indicated that Jordan has partnered with other countries and international organizations to address a number of crises, and that its national plan for sustainable agriculture backs global efforts to achieve food security, an issue that His Majesty has paid attention to early on.

For her part, the Ambassador of the European Union Maria Hadji-theodosiou underscored the importance of the topics that will be discussed in the forum, saying: "these

issues concern all of us, and Jordan, a country that faces a severe shortage of natural resources, and water scarcity."

"Jordan is working hard to overcome these challenges by building partnerships to turn these challenges into investment opportunities, while involving all segments of society on an equal footing. Moreover, Jordan has hosted thousands of refugees throughout its history, which continues to put additional pressures on its already limited resources," she added.

ILC Secretariat Director Mike Taylor said: "We are in a climate state of emergency, and while the entire global focus is on the climate crisis, securing the rights of those who live on and subsist on land still does not receive the attention it deserves."

## World Bank to consider \$95.6m to support local agricultural development

**AMMAN (JNews)** – The World Bank is considering approving \$95.6 million in financing for a Jordanian project that supports agricultural development through resilience to climate change and sustainability, Al-Mamlaka TV reported Monday.

The proposed project is based on Jordan's National Sustainable Agriculture Plan (2022-2025) in terms of its objectives, priority activities, and main results.

The World Bank Board of Directors is scheduled to approve the project by the end of June. Its total value may reach about \$595 million, which will be funded by the government and trust funds.

The proposed project addresses the challenges facing the agricultural sector in Jordan through setting up partnerships between the public and private sectors. It seeks to enhance the resilience of the agricultural production system in the face of climate change and transforms the sector towards a more sustainable growth path.

It will also contribute to improving the competitiveness of the agri-food sector by strengthening the enabling environment for agribusiness and making the sector more attractive for investors.

The World Bank had indicated earlier that the agri-food sector in Jordan is an important source of income, employment and exports and has a lot of untapped potential, pointing out that a quarter of Jordan's poor depend on agriculture for their income.

"Although primary agriculture contributes only a small percentage of GDP, the broader agri-food sector contributes a much larger share when accounting in related value chain activities," according to the proposed project, which showed that increased investments in the agricultural sector would lead to rural job creation.

The World Bank had said that climate change "severely affects" agriculture in Jordan through rising temperatures and declining rainfall, warning of the recurrence of droughts and the increased need for irrigation water.

"Jordan is among the most water-scarce countries in the world, as climate change will further reduce water availability," according to the World Bank, which stressed that improving water use efficiency in irrigated agriculture could build resilience to water scarcity and mitigate the effects of climate change.

## Jordan covers part of global potash shortage

**AMMAN (JNews)** – Jordan stepped in to supply part of the global potash shortage due to the war in Ukraine, placing the Kingdom's vital fertilizer industry on the world's political map, Arab Potash Company CEO Maen Al-Nsour said Sunday.

Nsour explained to the "Economic Sunday" program on Al-Mamlaka TV that "fertilizers have a very big role in enabling countries to produce food," noting that Russia and Ukraine are among the leading countries in the field of food production."

However, he added "their capabilities in the production of fertilizers and food have been affected, therefore Jordan had to move to supply this shortage that occurred in the world."

Russia and Belarus produce about 40 percent of the potash produced globally and both countries "entered into battles, which affected their ability to extract the potash and to export it",

Nsour pointed out. He maintained: "We were able to enter markets that we did not enter during the previous stages and these markets are considered to have very high returns, such as Brazil".

Nsour said that Jordanian exports to the Brazilian market increased by up to 1,600 percent in less than 3 years, which is "evidence of the ability of Jordanian companies to manufacture fertilizers through which we can enter these markets".

Nsour said that "stability in the Kingdom and its relationship with different countries played a major role in entering these markets, and clearly moving into them."

"We have been working in this sector for a long time, and we were able to form a very positive impression about Jordanian potash and the materials that we make it depend on the raw materials," he added.



## University degree no longer sufficient to enter the labor market, say specialists

By Dana Al-Zyadat

**AMMAN** – Economic fluctuations and qualitative leaps in the world of technology have proved that a higher education degree is no longer the only criterion for assessing an individual's intelligence and ability to succeed in the labor market, specialists say.

With that being the case, universities need to seek to develop their programs to provide students with the skills they need to enter the labor market, most agree.

Ahmad Awad, founder and director of the Phenix Center for Economics and Informatics Studies, told Jordan News that a factor that could be decisive in being accepted in the labor market is skill, and therefore, equipping students with skills should be given more attention than teaching them theoretical subjects because the focus is on basic skills for filling a job and not on theoretical knowledge such as programming, management, and accounting.

He added that the private sector has the responsibility to provide training for students, and "young people should make an effort to develop and educate themselves."

According to Awad, the Jordanian "education system has many weaknesses and gaps", and the

"curricula must be consistent with the requirements of the labor market", especially since there is "failure to implement policies on the ground".

Dean of Scientific Research and Graduate Studies at Isra University Aysh Alhroob told Jordan News that the labor market today has become selective in choosing specializations, and that if "in the past, we used to think that skill came after obtaining a certificate, today, educational materials and skills on the Internet are available and free, which makes it possible to have skills without a certificate".

The German experience is a good example of this, he said, as it prepares students to engage in the labor market through training programs.

"We need a national program to train students, and there should be cooperation between universities and the labor market," he said, adding that the "Jordanian National Qualifications Framework has taken a step toward that in order to link students with the labor market and build skills".

Alhroob said that "skills come through training in a real work environment", stressing, however, that a "certificate constitutes a huge knowledge base for students".

The head of the Workers' House, Hamada Abu Nijmeh, told Jordan

News that economic changes and technological advances make it incumbent on students to make an "effort to obtain the necessary skills such as thinking, analysis, and communication".

... The "curricula must be consistent with the requirements of the labor market", especially since there is "failure to implement policies on the ground".

Abu Nijmeh said that "employers are focusing on skills such as creativity, emotional intelligence, analytical thinking, active learning, decision making, communication with others, leadership, and acceptance of change" and stressed the need for students to choose specializations wisely, to match the requirements of the labor market, and for universities to pay attention to scientific research and strive to develop the students' competencies.

## JD300,000 set by ministry to support students with disabilities

**AMMAN (JNews)** – Director of the General Education Department at the Ministry of Education Nabeel Hanaqta has said that the ministry is allocating JD300,000 annually to support students with disabilities by enrolling them in qualified private schools so that they can receive educational services at various levels of education, Al-Rai daily reported.

"The allocation of the amount was provided in order to reduce the burden on parents of students with disabilities," Hanaqta said. He added that the ministry has circulated to the principals and directorates of private schools to receive applications for supporting learning needs of students with disabilities, with the exception of those with learning difficulties, provided that the student does not receive educational support from any governmental or non-governmental entity.

He added that the ministry has launched an electronic link to receive support requests from parents and students, in addition to receiving papers manually for people who are unable to submit

them electronically. Hanaqta pointed out that funds were allocated for students with disabilities in order to integrate them into the education process, as it is an acquired right for all Jordanian students who hold a national identity number and cannot access education due to health condition.

He added that these funds were allocated earlier, but that ministry did not promote the program, especially since the number of students with disabilities who registered with the ministry does not exceed 1,000 students.

A study launched by the Higher Council for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2019, entitled "The Reality of Inclusive Education Programs in Kindergartens in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan", recommended making more efforts to institutionalize inclusive education, paying attention to types of disabilities when thinking about creating a social and physical environment, and encouraging families to volunteer for the success of inclusive education.

## BRIEFS

## Health Ministry, AstraZeneca discuss cooperation

**AMMAN (JNews)** – Jordan discussed prospects of cooperation with Oxford-AstraZeneca pharmaceuticals, one of the drug giants manufacturing the COVID-19 vaccine, said the Jordan News Agency, Petra.

Discussions between Ilham Al-Khreisat, secretary-general of the Ministry of Health for Administrative and Technical Affairs and Pelin Incesu, AstraZeneca's vice president for the Middle East and Africa took place Monday.

A ministry statement said cooperation opportunities based on the ministry's needs and priorities in fields such as medical education, training, and research were tackled during the meeting.

## Jordan's ban on monkey import continues

**AMMAN (JNews)** – A ban on monkey imports in effect in the past few years will continue, especially in light of the spread of the monkeypox virus, Ministry of Agriculture spokesperson Lawrence Al-Majali said.

Al-Mamlaka TV said Majali asserted that the suspended imports "has been going on for years".

"We stress that we will continue to follow up on the information and updates about this virus", Majali said.

On Sunday, the Jordanian National Center for Epidemiology and Communicable Diseases Control discussed the epidemiological situation related to monkeypox, which was detected in 12 European countries, Australia, Canada, and the US.

Jordan has not announced any infection with the virus so far.

## CSCC slashes prices of 150 items by up to 40%

**AMMAN (JNews)** – The Civil Service Consumer Corporation (CSCC) announced reductions on more than 150 food and other commodities sold in its markets, according to Al-Ghad News.

The five-day reductions, starting on Tuesday, will see prices knocked down by 5 to 40 percent.

Salman Al-Qudah, CSCC director-general, said in a statement that all offers and discounts are available in large quantities in all the corporation's markets across the Kingdom to meet the needs of citizens.

Qudah said the reductions were in line with his firm's policy of relieving low to middle-waged citizens of the burden of rising commodity prices.

All the reduced commodities, especially foodstuffs, passed the required laboratory testing and health checks before being placed on shelves, he said. He asserted that CSCC follows tough guidelines which set high-quality standards and lab tests in the purchase and sale of goods.

## Factory closed for using expired raw material to manufacture cosmetics

**AMMAN (JNews)** – Inspection teams from the Jordan Food and Drug Administration-Medical Devices and Supplies Directorate, and the Public Security Directorate-Royal Department for Environment and Tourism Protection, closed an Amman cosmetics factory, according to Al-Mamlaka TV.

JFDA Director-General Nizar Mheidat said that 30 tonnes of body creams, shampoos, and cosmetics manufactured using expired raw materials were confiscated, the factory was closed, and measures were taken against those responsible.

Mheidat said that specialized JFDA control and inspection teams conduct periodic inspection tours of cosmetics manufacturers to closely monitor the safety and quality of products, and to ensure their compliance with the approved health specifications and standards that ensure the health and safety of users.



Al-Aqsa Mosque complex in the Old City of Jerusalem at sundown. (Photo: Evanto Elements)

# Jordan condemns Israeli decision allowing extremists into Al-Aqsa

**AMMAN (JNews)** – The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates on Sunday condemned an Israeli court decision allowing extremists to perform their rituals in Al-Aqsa Mosque complex, Al-Mamlaka TV said.

Ministry Spokesperson Haitham Abu Al-Foul said the decision is "null and invalid" under international law, which does not recognize Israel's jurisdiction over the Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, occupied in 1967.

The Israeli court ruling is a "flagrant violation" of international legitimacy pertaining to Jerusalem, including the UN Security Council resolutions, all of which affirm the need to preserve the status of the Holy City.

Abu Al-Foul warned against continuing to allow extremists to storm Al-Aqsa. He asserted that the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, Islam's third holiest shrine, with its

entire area of 144 dunums, is a place of worship for Muslims.

He said the Jordanian-run Waqf, or endowments, and Al-Aqsa Affairs Administration in Jerusalem are the exclusive legal authority competent to administer all the affairs of the mosque and regulate access to it.

Member of the JCDC Rima Hajjo said that this virus is not new to humanity, it is present in many countries in south and West Africa, and a lot is known about the manner in which it spreads.

Hajjo said that "when a sudden increase in cases occurs, this calls us to analyze the reasons that lead to this increase and the spread of the virus in geographical areas that do not originally have it".

"We know that traveling and movement are factors that lead to the rapid spread of the virus, but there are other reasons as well, and usually we want to know if there were mutations of the virus which facilitated its spread among humans, and this is currently the main priority. What raises concerns is that symptoms are becoming less severe, which allows the virus to be less noticeable," she added.

## With rising inflation rates, questions about minimum wage need answers

**AMMAN (JNews)** – The Tripartite Committee for Labor Affairs in 2020 decided to raise the minimum wage for Jordanian workers up to JD260 for each upcoming year due to the inflation rate. But the Coronavirus pandemic delayed the government's decision, forcing it to apply it in the sectors most affected, Amman Net reported.

Earlier this year, questions were again raised about the possibility of linking the minimum wage to inflation figures, but Director of the ministry's Labor Relations Adnan Al-Dahmsheh determined that the tripartite Committee decided to postpone the decision until 2023.

Last Wednesday, the Department of Statistics announced inflation rates for the first quarter of the year. It said the overall consumer price index "inflation" in the first third of the year rose by 2.62 percent to 104.58, compared with 101.91 recorded in the corresponding period in 2021.

As a result, the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Union has requested a meeting of the tripartite committee charged with the consideration of wages, with the

intention of demanding that it be implemented soon, especially with the incoming higher prices and clear inflation costs for citizens.

Mazen Al-Mayytah, Head of Jordan Labor Watch said there were fears of lapse, non-application, and reluctance with the intention of employers under the pretext of "defense orders" and economic conditions in the Jordanian market, which reflect negatively on citizens and families.

He explained that leaving the matter to employers without a meeting or notification from the ministry will create many irregularities in its application, especially since the circumstances of the decision issued in 2020 differ from the current economic conditions, such as the coronavirus pandemic and the Russian-Ukrainian war.

On the introduction of a new minimum wage figure, he said that is unlikely at the present time. He noted that he would only emphasize the inflation figure and that a meeting should be requested to review the minimum wage and demand that it be raised at the beginning of next year.

## Government removes poultry price ceilings, but continues to monitor cost

By Razan Abdelhadi

**AMMAN** – The government removed price ceilings on poultry imposed in recent weeks to prevent significant hikes, specifically during the holy fasting month of Ramadan, said Ministry of Industry, Trade and Supply spokesperson Yanal Al-Barmawi.

Poultry prices are based on supply and demand, and the ministry has previously set a price ceiling amid expectations of price increases, especially in Ramadan, Barmawi told *Jordan News*.

"The price ceilings have stopped, but the ministry monitors poultry prices daily," he said.

"If there are exaggerations or unjustified increases, the ministry will intervene directly to control the prices," he said. "We have to bear in mind that a study conducted by the competent authorities showed an increase in the inputs of poultry production, especially feed materials, in recent times."

Hassan Bu Diqer, member of the board of directors of Jordanian Poultry Producers Association, said "poultry prices rose by about 10 percent only and that the reason for the increase is due to the high prices of inputs and produc-

tion costs globally."

He said in an interview that the government should cancel or freeze the 5 percent tax imposed on fodder, noting that with an increase in feed prices, the tax constitutes an added burden on merchants.

Abdel Shakour Al-Jamjoum, owner of a poultry farm and head of the Poultry and Feed Investors Association, said setting a price ceiling for poultry "was not a good decision, especially that the government has

also imposed taxes on fodder".

He said the tax and price ceiling came with a proper review, considering a global increase on production inputs.

Jamjoum said such decisions discourage farmers, hard hit by the prevailing economic conditions.

He emphasized that the best mechanism for determining poultry prices is the supply and demand mechanism, which is currently being worked on.



Yanal Al-Barmawi, spokesperson for the Ministry of Industry, Trade, and Supply said poultry prices are based on supply and demand, and the ministry has previously set a price ceiling amid expectations of price increases, especially in Ramadan. (Photo: Pixabay)

## Dust storm disrupts life in Ruweished

**AMMAN (JNews)** – A dust storm with strong winds swept across the eastern desert region of Ruweished, disrupting traffic and forcing a suspension of classes on Monday. Local authorities advised people to remain indoors.

Ruweished Governor Mustafa Al-Abadi told the Jordan News Agency, Petra, that coordination

was underway with local police on traffic in the highway to Al-Karamah border post with Iraq. He urged motorists for caution as the region was swept by winds of up to 70km an hour.

Abadi said schools in the northeastern district shifted to remote learning "for the safety of students and teachers".



Wind sweeps across the Jordanian desert, covering a street with dust. (Photo: Ameer Khalifeh/JNews)

## Jordanian detergent industry competes internationally

**AMMAN (JNews)** – Locally-manufactured detergents are developed to high-quality, allowing them access to foreign markets, said Minister of Industry, Trade, and Supply Yousef Al-Shamali.

At the opening ceremony of DETEX 2022 on Monday, Shamali said the detergent industry undergoes fast and consistent development, keeping pace with demands for high-quality products, thanks to local manufacturers' efforts in developing and promoting their products.

Shamali said detergents are part

of the chemical and cosmetic industry, which is a key economic sector. In 2021, the sector's exports reached 16 percent of the total industrial exports, he said.

The industry has succeeded in filling the needs of local and global markets, he said, pointing out that the sector has a big opportunity to boost productivity and marketing, owing to government support.

Fathi Al-Jaghbir, president of the Jordan Chamber of Industry (JCI), said DETEX seeks to make Jordan a regional hub of the detergents

industry, noting that the sector is facing many challenges that call for cooperation between the private and public sectors.

Currently, there are 768 facilities operating in the detergents industry, with a capital of JD788 million, 15,000 employees, and exports estimated at JD1 billion in 2021. Jaghbir said.

Jordan produces 275,000 tonnes of detergents, 200,000 of which are exported at \$200 million a year. The rest is for local consumption.

## Government approves renewable energy projects exceeding 1 megawatt

**AMMAN (JNews)** – The government approved the establishment of renewable energy projects exceeding 1 megawatt to cover the needs of new investors or expand the capacity for existing consumption, Al-Ghad News said.

It said the decision was under directives by Prime Minister Bisher

Al-Khasawneh and the Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources, Saleh Kharabsheh.

The decision includes net metering, which can be calculated before a business is established, according to the expected consumption and technical determinants on the electrical network. The finding must be

presented to the Economic Development Committee for study and approval.

In 2019, the government stopped granting new approvals for renewable energy projects, whether through transit or net metering, for any project with a capacity of more than 1 megawatt.

# UN observes International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers Two peacekeepers from Jordan to be honored posthumously at UN ceremony on May 26

**AMMAN (JNews)** – UN Headquarters will observe the International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers on May 26, 2022, according to a UN press release. Secretary-General António Guterres will lay a wreath to honor the nearly 4,200 UN peacekeepers who have lost their lives since 1948 and will preside over a ceremony at which the Dag Hammarskjöld Medal will be awarded posthumously to 117 military, police, and civilian peacekeepers who lost their life serving under the UN flag last year.

Among the peacekeepers to be honored posthumously are two from Jordan: SSgt Awad Ra'ed Awad Al Shouli and Col. Tareq Sabbah Suleiman Al-Naimat; both served with the United Nations Integrated Multidimensional Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA).

Jordan is the 34th largest contributor of uniformed personnel to UN Peacekeeping. It currently deploys 639 military and police personnel to the UN peace operations in Abyei, the Central African Republic, Cyprus, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, Sudan, and South Sudan.

During a special ceremony, the secretary-general will award the "Captain Mbaye Diagne Medal for Exceptional Courage" posthumously to Captain Abdelrazakh Hamit Bahar of Chad, who served with MINUSMA. The medal is named for a Senegalese peacekeeper who was killed in Rwanda in 1994 after saving countless civilian lives. This is the second time the medal has been awarded since the inaugural medal was presented to Captain Diagne's family in 2016.

The secretary-general will also award the 2021 Military Gender Advocate of the Year Award to Major Winnet Zharare, a Zimbabwean military observer who served with the UN Mission in South Sudan. Created in 2016, the award "recognizes the dedication and effort of an individual peacekeeper in promoting the principles of UN Security Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security".

Guterres said in a message: "Today, we honor the more than 1 million women and men who have served as UN peacekeepers since 1948. We pay tribute to the nearly 4,200 heroes and heroines who sacrificed their lives in the cause of peace. And we are reminded of an age-old truth: peace can never be taken for granted. Peace is the prize. We are deeply grateful to the 87,000 civilian, police



Undated file photo of Jordanian UN peacekeepers. (Photo: Twitter)

**Jordan is the 34th largest contributor of uniformed personnel to UN Peacekeeping. It currently deploys 639 military and police personnel to the UN peace operations in Abyei, the Central African Republic, Cyprus, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, Sudan, and South Sudan.**

and military personnel now serving under the UN flag who are helping to realize the prize of peace worldwide."

The theme for this year's observance of the occasion is "People. Peace. Progress. The Power of Partnerships". According to Guterres, "around the globe, UN peacekeepers work with member states, civil society, humanitarians, the media, the communities they serve and many others to foster peace, protect civilians, promote human rights and the rule of law, and improve the lives of mil-

lions of people".

Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix said: "Every day, UN peacekeepers work to protect vulnerable people in the world's most fragile political and security situations. The dangers they face are greater than ever, with increasing global tensions, ever-more complex threats from terrorist attacks to organized crime and the use of improvised explosive devices as well as a surge in mis- and disinformation targeting our missions and the communities

we serve. Despite these challenges, peacekeepers persevere alongside our many partners in the collective pursuit of peace. Today, we thank them for their tremendous contribution and remember with great sorrow our colleagues who have made the ultimate sacrifice while serving the cause of peace."

The International Day of UN Peacekeepers was established by the UN General Assembly in 2002 to pay tribute to all men and women serving in peacekeeping, and to honor the memory of those who have lost their lives in the cause of peace. The General Assembly designated May 29 as the International Day of UN Peacekeepers in commemoration of the day in 1948 when the UN's first peacekeeping mission, the UN Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) began operations in Palestine. Since then, more than 1 million women and men have served in 72 UN peacekeeping operations.

## Round-up of ESC 2021 report's recommendations for key public sectors

**AMMAN (JNews)** – The Economic and Social Council of Jordan (ESC) 2021 state of the country report, released on Sunday, has tackled challenges facing a number of vital governmental sectors. Here is a review of some of the most important remarks and observations made in the report.

### Education

The report stated that loss of education time/resources in public schools has reached 30 percent due to the coronavirus pandemic. In addition, the report cited the fact that in 2021 Jordan saw 70,000 university students graduating in different majors. Meanwhile the national economy's competitiveness in global indicators continue to decline.

### Budget and debt

According to the report, Jordan continues to face endemic budget deficits which stands as an impediment for growth as well as increased indebtedness, which constitute the greatest challenge to fiscal policy while limiting the government's ability to cope with the issues of poverty and unemployment. These challenges stand in the way of achieving significant economic growth.

### Water

Regarding water scarcity, the report indicated that the development of Jordan's surface and underground water sources is no longer a solution, as these have been developed to a maximum extent. It added that the traditional policy of developing renewable water sources has been exhausted.

The report explained that Jordan's surface water annual capacity is estimated at 400 million cubic meters, while renewable underground water is estimated at 275 million cubic meters annually. Therefore, available water resources are insufficient, particularly with Jordan hosting millions of refugees.

The report suggested that the final solution for water scarcity in Jordan would be to desalinate the Red Sea water in Aqaba.

### Health

The report said that the health sector in Jordan has been successful in combating infectious and chronic diseases resulting in declining mortality rates. But it added that sector still suffers from many issues and challenges prior to and during the coronavirus pandemic.

The report highlighted the most prominent issues of the sector such as weak governance and management, multiple government agencies that manage and provide health services, lack of coordination or weakness between them.

The report recommended the reorganization of the sector to enhance its readiness to proactively deal with national health crisis through following the proactive model (planning and preparedness) rather than the reflexive model (real-time reaction).

### Culture

The report said that the Ministry of Culture's role is almost absent from the national agenda and does not represent an asset that enhances the moral capital of the individual and society. The report pointed to the need to support and develop productive cultural projects, establish a Supreme Council for Culture, expand and develop available cultural databases, activate the cultural support fund and come up with solutions to maximize and sustain its resources.

It also called for providing the infrastructure for small theaters, national publishing houses, cultural centers, supporting cultural products such as books, magazines, and cinematography, and facilitating public access to cultural products in marginalized and remote areas.

## Zarqa to receive major share of Jordan's desalinated water, says Miyahuna

**AMMAN (JNews)** – Zarqa Governorate will have the predominant share of the desalinated water to be carried through the National Water Carrier project, which will provide around 300 million cubic meters of desalinated water annually, a Jordan Water Company (Miyahuna) official said on Monday.

In a press interview, reported by Jordan News Agency, Petra, Head of Miyahuna's Zarqa Directorate, Youssef Al-Ai-

tan, said that the Aqaba-Amman desalination and water transport project, expected to be ready by 2027, will provide safe and reliable fresh water supplies to Amman and other governorates along the route of the carrier line.

Speaking on the governorate's current water situation, Aitan noted that pumping has now been completed from four public wells in Zarqa, with an estimated quantity of 600 cubic meters of water

per hour, while more than 10 private wells have been purchased and operated to provide about 1,200 cubic meters of water per hour, indicating that the focus was on using semi-independent water supply sources located in the Azraq water

basin. He pointed to the directorate's efforts to cut water losses and the illegal uses of water through launching security campaigns, installing accurate smart water meters, as well as replacing the old water networks and pumps.



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## Jordan attends Doha interfaith conference

**AMMAN (JNews)** – Jordan is attending an international conference on religions and hate speech which opened in Qatar's capital, according to the Jordan News Agency, Petra.

The two-day 14th Doha International Interfaith Conference, entitled "Religions and Hate Speech: Between Scripture and Practice", brings together 300 scholars, religious leaders, researchers, academics and media professionals from 70 countries.

The two-day conference focuses on three areas, such as the definition and concept of hate speech, the patterns and forms of hate speech and the role of religious figures and the media in addressing hate speech, Petra said, quoting a statement by the Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue (DICID), the meeting's organizer.

Ibrahim bin Saleh Al-Nuaimi, DICID chairman, said the conference will address hate speech and highlight the views of religions on it, in addition to calling for love, tolerance, and compassion.

## Traders urge Customs Department to extend validity of customs tariff lists

By Razan Abdelhadi

**AMMAN** – Representative of the clothing, footwear and jewelry sector at the Jordan Chamber of Commerce Asaad Al-Qawasmi said that clothing prices will continue to be stable during this summer season "if the customs tariff lists for evaluating the value of goods remain in force".

Qawasmi told *Jordan News* that merchants are preparing for the upcoming Eid Al-Adha and Hajj season, counting on the return of expatriates for the occasion.

He pointed out that the demand for clothes declined after the end of the month of Ramadan "due to the weak purchasing power and low liquidity of citizens after the Eid Al-Fitr holiday", and to a shift in priorities after this period ended.

According to Qawasmi, the volume of imported clothing, fabrics and shoes "since the beginning of this year, amounted to about JD90 million, which is about 10 per cent higher than in the same period last year".

President of the Textile and Readymade Clothes Syndicate Sultan Allan told *Jordan News* that "the customs tariff lists guarantee justice for all", stressing that the lists were created "in a practical and precise manner".

He added that "work with these lists must not be suspended, especially since there is no alternative to them", indicating that calculating tariffs based on them is

"one of the most important factors that contributes to keeping commodity prices stable".

He stressed that stopping calculating tariffs based on these lists "will create confusion in the market, especially since traders are comfortable using them".

According to Allan, the Customs Department does not regard these lists as legal, "but I do not agree with this opinion, especially since they were created based on legal methods".

Most goods, he said, are imported from the Far East, followed by Turkey, Arab countries, and Europe. He added that global freight rates fluctuate during this

period, and that reflects on the prices of goods.

Former president of the Textile and Readymade Clothes Syndicate Munir Deyye told *Jordan News* that "we started working with the tariff lists in 2009", and the agreement with the Customs Department regarding using these lists used to be renewed yearly.

"At the beginning of this year, they started being renewed on monthly basis and at the end of the current month, the lists may be suspended. If a decision is taken to extend the validity of these lists for the coming period, the prices will remain stable," he reiterated.

If the lists are no longer used as the basis for setting tariffs, "there will be speculative trading, which could bring he prices of goods up".

"Our experience with the tariff lists over the past years was successful, as it ensured the stability of the prices of imported clothes," said Deyye, urging the Customs Department to continue working with the lists "until the end of this year so that traders can prepare for the winter season smoothly".

He said that citizens are unable to bear more material burdens, and therefore, maintain the validity of the tariff lists until the end of the current year "is necessary".



(Photo: Shutterstock)

# Turkey dreams of a far-fetched gas pipeline with Israel

**ISTANBUL, Turkey (AFP)** — Turkey is ready for energy cooperation with Israel after years of enmity, reviving a project to pipe Israeli gas to Europe as Ankara seeks to reduce its dependence on Russia. But the plan faces Israeli skepticism over past diplomatic tensions and seems a pipe dream in the eyes of experts due to its logistical complexity and cost.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has voiced readiness to "cooperate (with Israel) in energy and energy security projects" with the prospect of shipping Israeli gas to Europe through Turkey as the conflict in Ukraine triggers supply fears. "Turkey has the experience and capacity to implement such projects. The recent developments in our region have shown once again the importance of energy security," he said in March.

Israeli President Isaac Herzog made a landmark visit to Ankara in March to build relations with his Turkish counterpart when both leaders proclaimed a new era following more than a decade of diplomatic rupture.

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu will visit Israel on Wednesday. Energy Minister Fatih Donmez is also expected to travel but it was not immediately clear if he will accompany Cavusoglu. But according to some experts, there is little Israeli interest in energy cooperation with Turkey.

## 'Erdogan an untrustworthy party'

"Energy relations are forged by cooperative, trusting states — certainly not how one would describe the current dynamics between the two countries," Gabi Mitchell, policy fellow at the Mitvim Institute in Israel, told AFP. "There are those in Israel who argue that Erdogan is an untrustworthy party," he said.

The Turkish leader is known for his angry outbursts at Israel, especially over its policy toward Palestinians. In 2009, he stormed out of a Davos panel after a heated exchange with the then-Israeli president, Shimon Peres.

NATO member Turkey had been Israel's key ally in the Muslim world until a 2010 crisis where 10 civilians died in an

Israeli raid on a ship seeking to breach a blockade on the Gaza Strip.

In 2016, the two countries agreed to start examining the feasibility of an undersea pipeline to pump Israeli gas to Turkish consumers and on to Europe. But no progress has been made amid the tension between the two sides, with Erdogan seeing himself as a champion of the Palestinian cause and a strong backer of Hamas.

Yet Erdogan has been muted in his criticism in recent months and only voiced sadness over the Israeli violence at Al-Aqsa mosque complex, in a phone call with Herzog in April.

The pipeline project runs through controversial waters in the eastern Mediterranean, where Turkey and EU members Cyprus and Greece are often at odds. Mitchell said: "This isn't something Israel is interested in pursuing as it would damage relations" with Cyprus, Greece, and the EU.

"I've never thought the project feasible," the Foreign Policy Research Institute's Middle East Program director Aaron Stein told AFP. "The idea of the project comes back every time there is a thaw, but the logistics needed to take it from a dream to reality is complicated and expensive," he said.

The pipeline from Israeli fields to Turkey could cost \$1.5 billion, according to some media reports.

## 'Difficult but reasonable'

Ankara is hugely dependent on Russia for its energy imports, with 45 percent of its gas demand last year met by Russian sources, and is keen to diversify supplies, with a close eye on Israel's developing resources.

Turkey imports natural gas through pipelines from Russia, Azerbaijan, and Iran. It also buys liquefied natural gas (LNG) from suppliers including Qatar, Nigeria, Algeria, and the US.

"A gas pipeline crossing the south of Turkey in theory makes sense," said energy expert Necdet Pamir of Cyprus International University.

Turkey consumed 48 billion cubic me-



Turkey's President and leader of the Justice and Development (AK) Party Recep Tayyip Erdogan delivers a speech during his party's group meeting at the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TGNA) in Ankara, on May 18, 2022. (Photo: AFP)

ters of gas in 2020. This reached 60 billion in 2021 and is estimated to be 62-63 billion this year, he said. "We need alternative gas supplies and new agreements are in Turkey's interests as long as the circumstances including the financing are ripe," Pamir added.

Turkey sees the gas project with Israel

as more feasible than the EastMed pipeline despite the challenges. "It is not a project that begins today and ends tomorrow," a Turkish official told AFP. "It's difficult but it's reasonable and feasible, especially compared to the Greece-led EastMed," the official, who wished to remain anonymous, said.

# Egypt tycoon sentenced to 3 years for assault against minors

**CAIRO (AFP)** — An Egyptian court on Monday sentenced a businessman to three years in prison for trafficking and sexually assaulting seven underage girls at an orphanage he founded, judicial sources told AFP.

Media and real estate tycoon Mohamed el-Amin was arrested in January on accusations that he had sexually assaulted the young girls at an orphanage in Beni Suef, about 100 kilometers south of Cairo.

Amin, who owned the popular CBC television network before it was sold in 2018, faced up to 25 years in prison. The three-year prison sentence can be appealed, a judicial source told AFP.

The case had come to public attention after a Facebook page accused Amin of sexually assaulting young girls. In addition to witnesses who "confirmed the testimonies of the victims", images were found on the businessman's phone during the investigation and recordings were produced of the victims recounting the assault, judicial sources said.

The prosecution said the victims accused Amin of regularly assaulting them "without their consent". "He abused his power against the orphan girls, whom he sexually assaulted and threatened to expel (from the orphanage) if they reported him," it said.

Three years is the lightest penalty provided by Egyptian law, which lays out a maximum 15-year sentence for sexual assault. But the penal code sets a minimum sentence of seven years if the victim is a minor or if the perpetrator wields power over the victim, with a maximum penalty of life in prison (25 years) if both conditions are met.



Iranians gather at the site where a ten-story building collapsed in the southwestern city of Abadan on May 23, 2022. At least four people died and about 80 were trapped under rubble when an unfinished building collapsed in southwestern Iran, officials said. (Photo: AFP)

# Four dead, 80 trapped in Iran building collapse

**TEHRAN (AFP)** — At least four people died and about 80 were trapped under rubble when an unfinished building collapsed in southwestern Iran, officials said.

"Parts of the 10-story Metropal building, located in Abadan, capital of Khuzestan province, collapsed," state television said, noting that the premises was still under construction. An initial toll confirmed that at least "four people have lost their lives and 21 others have been injured," Mojtaba

Khaledi, spokesman for the national rescue service, was quoted as saying.

At least 80 people were trapped under the rubble and rescue dogs were deployed to help locate them, according to a regional branch of the Red Crescent. The building is located on Abadan's busiest street where "commercial, medical and office" buildings predominate, according to state television.

The cause of the collapse was under investigation.

# Tunisia's trade union to boycott Saied's national dialogue

**TUNIS (AFP)** — Tunisia's powerful UGTT trade union confederation said Monday it would not take part in a national dialogue proposed by President Kais Saied, arguing that it excludes key actors and civil society.

Saied sacked the government last July before dissolving parliament and seizing control of the judiciary, in moves opponents called a coup against the only democracy to emerge from the Arab Spring uprisings. The president has consistently excluded political parties from any dialogue, despite domestic and overseas calls for a more inclusive process.

On Friday, Saied appointed a loyalist law professor to head a body charged with rewriting the constitution for a "new

republic" through a "national dialogue". The UGTT was named as one of several unions and other national bodies invited to take part, while no political parties were named.

But in a statement on Monday, the union said it "will not take part in any national dialogue under the format proposed" by Saied. It said the format "was not discussed beforehand and doesn't meet national forces' demands for a patriotic process to find a way out of the crisis".

Saied had announced in early May the establishment of a long-awaited "national dialogue" — at the same time attacking the political elite, which he accuses of having plundered the country.

# Iraq sandstorms sends 1,000 to hospitals

**BAGHDAD, (AFP)** — Iraq closed public buildings and temporarily shut airports Monday as another sandstorm — the ninth since mid-April — hit the country. More than 1,000 people were hospitalized across the nation with respiratory problems, health ministry spokesman Seif Al-Badr told AFP.

Flights were also grounded in neighboring Kuwait for a second time this month, as the region grapples with the increasingly frequent weather phenomenon. The

Iraqi capital Baghdad was enveloped in a giant dust cloud that left usually traffic-choked streets largely deserted and bathed in eerie orange light, AFP correspondents said.

Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhemi ordered all work to cease in state-run institutions, except for health and security services, citing "poor climatic conditions and the arrival of violent sandstorms". Air traffic was suspended at the international airports in Baghdad, Erbil, and Najaf, before

flights resumed at Baghdad and Erbil. Iraq is ranked as one of the world's five most vulnerable nations to climate change and desertification.

The environment ministry has warned that over the next two decades Iraq could endure an average of 272 days of sandstorms per year, rising to above 300 by 2050.

Iraq's previous two sandstorms sent nearly 10,000 people to hospital with respiratory problems and killed one person.

# Oman, Iran sign trade deals during president visit

**MUSCAT, (AFP)** — Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi arrived in Oman on Monday as the two countries signed a string of trade deals and as international talks on Tehran's nuclear program hang in the balance, leaving the Islamic republic under sanctions.

Raisi, on his second Gulf visit since taking office in August, was greeted by Sultan Haitham bin Tariq at the airport and received a 21-gun salute at the royal palace, an Omani statement said.

Raisi's one-day trip comes at a time when renewed talks on restoring a 2015 nuclear deal are at a stalemate. Oman played a mediating role between Tehran and Washington in the build-up to the original agreement.

The countries signed 12 memoranda of

understanding during the visit, including in the fields of oil and gas, transport, education, trade, and investment, reported the official Omani news agency. "Trade exchanges between the two countries of Oman and Iran will improve definitely," Raisi said before departure, according to Iran's state news agency IRNA.

"Both countries are determined to upgrade the level of political and economic ties," he added.

A delegation of 50 Iranian businessmen traveled to Oman last week, IRNA said, adding that Iran's minister for roads and urban development has announced plans for a joint shipping line and tourist flights. Oman is also seeking to import gas from Iran by building an offshore pipeline be-

tween the two countries, who are discussing the development of joint gas fields offshore.

The sultanate, which faces Iran across the Gulf of Oman, endured economic pain during the pandemic, with its GDP dropping 6.4 percent in 2020 and government debt soaring. It saw rare protests over high unemployment and lay-offs last year.

Raisi visited Qatar in February, where he met with Emir Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani and took part in a conference of gas exporting countries. Stop-start talks to bring Iran back to the 2015 deal curbing its nuclear ambitions in return for a lifting of sanctions that was abandoned by former US president Donald Trump in 2018, began in April last year.



Photo caption: Sultan of Oman Haitham bin Tariq Al Said (right) welcoming Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi (center) at the airport in Omani capital Muscat on May 23, 2022. (Photo: Iranian Presidency/AFP)

# Sole survivor relives 2009 Yemenia Airways crash at French trial

**PARIS (AFP)** — A woman who aged 12 survived the 2009 Yemenia Airways crash in the Comoros islands that killed all 152 others onboard described Monday the terrifying moments leading up to her plunge into the ocean and subsequent miraculous rescue, in the French trial against the airline.

Bahia Bakari, now 25, has sat through several hearings with her father but had not testified or spoken to journalists attending the trial that opened this month. "I didn't see how I was going to get through this," Bakari told the court of her hours spent in the water holding on to a piece of debris, with "the taste of jet fuel" in her mouth.

Bakari and her mother left Paris on June 29, 2009, for a vacation in the Comoros, changing planes in the Yemeni capital of Sanaa for the final leg of the trip. "It was a smaller plane, there were flies inside and it smelled strongly like a bathroom," she said, but "the flight went normally" — until the beginning of the landing descent.

During the night-time approach of Flight Yemenia 626 to Moroni, the capital of the Comoros islands that lie between Mozambique and Madagascar, the Airbus A310 jet plunged into the Indian Ocean with its engines running at full throttle. "I started to feel the turbulence, but nobody was reacting much, so I told myself it must be normal," Bakari said as over 100 family members and friends of the victims listened in silence. Suddenly "I felt something like an electric shock go through my body."



Crash survivor Bahia Bakari leaving the courtroom for a break at the Paris courthouse, during the opening hearing in the case of the 2009 crash of Yemenia Airways flight that killed all 152 of her fellow passengers and crew. (Photo: AFP)

## 'Couldn't see anyone'

"There's a black hole between the moment when I was seated in the plane and the moment I found myself in the water." France's overseas territory of Mayotte is part of the Comoros archipelago, and 66 French citizens were among the 142 passengers and 11 crew members aboard.

Investigators and experts found there was nothing wrong with the aircraft, blaming instead "inappropriate actions by the crew during the approach to Moroni airport, leading to them losing control."

No one from Yemenia Airlines has ap-

peared at the trial, where prosecutors have accused the company of pilot training programs "riddled with gaps" and of continuing to fly to Moroni at night despite its non-functioning landing lights.

The company's lawyers have denied any

wrongdoing. Yemenia is charged with involuntary homicide and injuries.

Bakari, regaining consciousness in choppy waters, recalled waiting for hours in the water, trying to climb atop the largest piece of debris she could reach, but without the

strength to succeed.

"I realized that voices were calling for help in Comorian, and I cried out a bit but without much hope, because there was nothing but water around me and I couldn't see anyone," she said.

"I ended up falling asleep while holding onto the plane debris," and while she could see the coast when she woke up, "the water was really choppy."

## 'Hardest thing'

It was by thinking of her "incredibly protective" mother that allowed her to hold on until she was rescued by a boat after a dozen hours in the water.

Initially, she was convinced "that I was the only one who fell" and that the other passengers had arrived safely before a psychologist at the hospital told her she was the only survivor.

"The hardest thing for me has been dealing with the grief for my mother. I was very close to her," Bakari said, her voice breaking and tears flowing for the first time during her testimony.

The Yemeni national airline, whose representatives say they will not be in the dock due to the country's still-raging civil war, face a maximum fine of 225,000 euros (\$240,000) for involuntary homicide and injuries.

Although the plane's black boxes were found weeks after the crash, France accused the Comoros government of dragging its feet in the investigation, while victims' families accused Yemen of lobbying to hinder a trial.

Around 560 people have joined the suit as plaintiffs, many of them from the region around Marseille in southern France, home to many of the victims.

A video feed to the southern port city has been set up for their benefit, allowing them to follow part of the proceedings.

## Nine media workers arrested in Ethiopia raids

**NAIROBI (AFP)** — At least nine media workers in Ethiopia's northern Amhara region have been arrested by local authorities, their employers said Monday, as rights activists warned of a sweep of unlawful detentions.

Two outlets — the Nisir International Broadcasting Corporation and Ashara, both covering Ethiopian affairs on their YouTube channels — said their studios in Amhara were raided in recent days and staff taken away, some to undisclosed locations. Nisir said four of its employees, including journalists and back-office staff, were arrested and equipment seized from their workplace in Bahir Dar on Thursday and Friday by security forces and local police.

The network, which broadcasts on a YouTube channel, said two of its staff were believed to be detained in a prison at Bahir Dar, while another two were being held 185 kilometers from the regional capital. The whereabouts of two other Nisir journalists remained unknown, it added.

"We urge the government to immediately release our journalists and return our studio equipment," the broadcaster said.

The other outlet, Ashara, said five of its staff were detained in a raid on their studio in Bahir Dar on Thursday and were

being held in a detention center outside the city. Authorities in Amhara, the second-most populous region in Ethiopia, said over 4,000 people suspected of crimes had been arrested in an ongoing enforcement operation.

"The government will continue in a reinvigorated manner this peacekeeping work/activity," said Desalegn Tassew, head of Amhara's Peace and Security Bureau, in a statement published on state media.

On Sunday the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC), the state-affiliated independent rights body, expressed concern about a spate of arrests that had netted "journalists and social activists". The commission said while some detainees had been granted visitations or charged, "many other detainees have been unlawfully detained, have not been brought before court, and have not been visited by family".

"Especially in the Amhara region, many detainees have been arrested in detention centers far from their home areas and arbitrarily detained, making it difficult for family members to know their whereabouts."

TV host Solomon Shumye, who has a show on YouTube, was also detained in the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa on Friday and accused of inciting violence, his sister Tigist Shumye said.

## Former King of Spain leaves exile to make first trip back in two years

**MADRID (AFP)** — Scandal-tainted Spanish ex-king Juan Carlos I visited his son and current monarch King Felipe VI in Madrid on Monday, during a brief but controversial trip home after two years in self-imposed exile.

The meeting came at the end of the former king's first visit to Spain since he moved to the United Arab Emirates in August 2020. Juan Carlos was for decades revered for his role in steering Spain to democracy following dictator Francisco Franco's death in 1975. But damaging scandals over his finances and private life forced him to abdicate in 2014, after nearly 40 years on the throne, and then to leave Spain.

The 84-year-old flew into Spain from Abu Dhabi on May 19 for a three-day regatta featuring his yacht the "Bribon" — Spanish for "rascal". He arrived on Monday morning at the royal palace in Madrid directly from the regatta venue in Sanxenxo, in the northwestern region of Galicia. He waved from his car to several dozen sympathizers waiting for him outside the Zarzuela Palace.

Juan Carlos had not seen his estranged wife, Queen Sofia, or his son, since he fled to the UAE, dogged by corruption allegations. He was scheduled to leave Spain after Monday's private family reunion, the palace said.

## 'Wasted opportunity'

The visit followed a March decision by prosecutors to close their probes into the ex-king's financial affairs — partly because he was immune from prosecution while on the throne and because the statute of limitations had expired. Their decision triggered anger in some quarters, which was only exacerbated by his return.

Despite the end to the legal proceedings, the drip-feed of revelations about his opulent lifestyle, the murky source of his wealth, and harassment claims made by a former lover have irremediably sullied his image.

In 2012, the king was hospitalized after breaking his hip during an expensive hunting trip to Botswana, at a time when ordinary Spaniards were struggling in the throes of a recession.

Spanish media was plastered with pho-



Former king Juan Carlos I of Spain, waves from a car as he arrives at La Zarzuela palace in Madrid on May 23, 2022, to meet his son, King Felipe VI of Spain. (Photo: AFP)

tos of the rifle-toting monarch, then patron of a wildlife charity, standing in front of a dead elephant. "I think king Juan Carlos wasted the opportunity during this visit to give an explanation and apologize," Isabel Rodriguez, spokeswoman for the Socialist government, told Spanish public radio RNE on Monday.

Juan Carlos dismissed the issue during his visit to Sanxenxo. "Explanations? What about?" he snapped when asked by journalists outside the yachting club if he would try to clarify the situation when he met his son.

## Transparency

Since he ascended to the throne in 2014, King Felipe VI has distanced himself from Juan Carlos in a bid to try and restore the monarchy's image. He has not visited his father in exile and, officially, did not speak to him by phone until last week, when they arranged Monday's visit. In March 2020, Felipe cut off his father's annual palace allowance, worth a reported 200,000 euros (\$210,000), and renounced his own claim

to his inheritance from the king emeritus.

Last month, he and the government took steps to increase the monarchy's transparency via a decree requiring the palace to publish its budget and make tenders public. It also means the royal accounts will be audited, senior palace officials must declare their personal wealth on taking up and leaving a post, and gifts given to royals will be catalogued.

Spanish media said Juan Carlos' fleeting visit followed months of intense negotiations between his staff, the royal household, and the government, which was vehemently opposed to him staying at the Zarzuela Palace. When the visit was announced, Felipe's entourage stressed that while Juan Carlos now intended to visit Spain regularly, he would always stay "in private accommodation".

Juan Carlos is scheduled to return to Sanxenxo in three weeks' time for another regatta featuring the "Bribon". The ex-king and his crew sailed the six-meter racing yacht to victory in the world sailing championships in 2017 and 2019.

## Bulgarian Eastern Orthodox priests mark arrival of St. Cyril, St. Methodius relics



Bulgarian Eastern Orthodox priests carry a box containing bones, believed to be the relics of St. Cyril and St. Methodius in Sofia on May 23, 2022. (Photo: AFP)

## Ukraine jails Russian war criminal for life

**KYIV (AFP)** — A Kyiv court on Monday found a 21-year-old Russian soldier who killed a civilian guilty of war crimes and handed him a life sentence, in the first verdict against Moscow's forces since their invasion.

"The court has found that (Vadim) Shishmarin is guilty and sentences him to life imprisonment," judge Sergiy Agafonov said.

The Russian sergeant admitted in court to killing 62-year-old Oleksandr Shelipov during the first days of the Kremlin's offensive in northeast Ukraine. He was also found guilty of premeditated murder.

"The murder was committed with direct intent," judge Agafonov said. "Shishmarin violated the laws and customs of war."

The soldier told the court last week that he shot Shelipov under pres-

sure from another soldier as they tried to retreat back to Russia in a stolen car on February 28th, the fourth day of Moscow's invasion.

Shishmarin apologized and asked Shelipov's widow for forgiveness.

The landmark ruling is expected to be followed by others, with Ukraine opening thousands of war crimes cases since Russian President Vladimir Putin sent in his troops.

The youthful serviceman looked on from the glass defense box as the verdict was read out in Ukrainian. An interpreter translated for him into Russian.

Shishmarin's lawyer Viktor Ovsyannikov said he will appeal the verdict. "This is the most severe sentence, and any level-headed

person would challenge it," Ovsyannikov said, adding: "I will ask for the cancellation of the court's verdict." He said that "you can feel societal pressure" on the court's decision.

But prosecutor Andriy Syniuk said the ruling was fair. "I consider the verdict to be lawful and justified," he told reporters, saying he was "completely satisfied" with the outcome. Human Rights organizations have expressed hope that Ukraine's trials against Russian soldiers will be impartial and transparent.

The Kremlin said before the sentencing Monday that while it was "concerned" over Shishmarin's fate, it was unable to provide on-the-ground assistance because there is no Russian diplomatic presence in Ukraine.

"That doesn't mean we won't try through other channels. The fate of every Russian citizen is of paramount importance to us," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.



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# The real story in Palestine



OSAMA AL SHARIF

**T**WO WEEKS after the cold-blooded murder of veteran Palestinian journalist Shireen Abu Akleh in Jenin, in the occupied West Bank, her killers remain at large. Since her killing, which was caught on camera for the whole world to see, at least two Palestinian youths have been murdered by the Israeli occupation forces. In fact, in Jenin only, 20 Palestinians have been killed by Israel since the beginning of 2022; 42 in the last two years.

So far Israel has refused to launch an inquiry into Abu Akleh's death, which the Palestinians and many eye witnesses blame Israel for. The UN, the EU, the US and many international organizations like Human Rights Watch and Reporters without Borders have all called for transparent and thorough probe into the killing of the 51-year-old American citizen. Israel is coming under pressure to investigate the death and allow others to look into her murder. But right-wing Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett is unrelenting even as his shaky coalition is about to be voted out of power.

But despite the global unprecedented backlash triggered by the tragic death of Abu Akleh, one should still underline the fact that, once more, the West is applying double standards when dealing with anything that has to do with Israel and its decades-long brutal occupation of Palestine.

Immediately following the gunning down of Abu Akleh, many mainstream Western media outlets obfuscated the facts by choosing neutral words when reporting the crime. The New York Times shamefully wrote: Abu Akleh "dies at the age of 51", while others ignored the fact that the only armed force in the area were Israeli soldiers.

During her funeral, heavily armed Israeli police stormed the hospital from where her coffin was to be taken to the cemetery and attacked the pallbearers and mourners on live TV. The hesitant Western media talked about "violence" and "clashes" erupting at the funeral. Again, there was no pointing the finger at Israel and its brutal treatment of Palestinians under occupation.

And even then, and as politicians and international organizations condemned the killing and the attack on the mourners, few dared speak about the larger picture: that in effect it is not the killing of Abu Akleh that was the principal issue, but the unconscionable Israeli occupation.

Abu Akleh was not the first journalist to be killed by Israeli occupation forces in the last two decades. According to independent figures, more than 50 journalists, the majority Palestinians, have been gunned down by Israeli soldiers since 2000. And, like Abu Akleh's documented murder, there is plenty of evidence implicating Israel in almost all of these deliberate killings. In a handful of cases Israel promised to carry out an investigation, and in almost all of them there was no culpability.

Abu Akleh was a high-profile journalist, a household name for millions, and an American citizen. Her murder shocked the world and elicited an unexpected backlash. She had covered the occupied territories for almost 25 years and in the process reported on tens of extrajudicial killings of Palestinians, the majority unarmed civilians, by Israel. Not once had the West moved to push for independent probes or to hold Israel responsible. Never mind the fact that the occupation of the West Bank is entirely illegal under international law.

Less than two weeks after Abu Akleh was killed, Israeli forces stormed the Jenin refugee camp for the umpteenth time. On May 21, and in a morning raid, they killed 17-year-old Amajd Al-Fayyed, who was reportedly shot 12 times. No one in the West is going to condemn his murder or call for a probe. His wanton death was not going to be reported by the Western mainstream media either. He is just a number in a never ending register of Palestinian casualties who perished in "clashes".

No one in the Western media is going to write a human interest story about who Amjad was, what he dreamt of, or how his bereaved mother and siblings feel. No one is going to ask why he was killed and if his killers are ever going to face justice.

The killing of Abu Akleh has embarrassed Israel, if only for a fleeting moment. If worse comes to worst, and if the US puts pressure on Israel, an internal probe may be conducted and the final report will come up with flimsy excuses for her death. That will be that.

But the real story is not about Abu Akleh. She never thought that she would be the news. Her life was dedicated to covering the plight of her people. That remains the story — the only unfolding story.

In Israel itself, voices were heard saying that Israel lost the battle for public opinion. It was being lambasted not in the mainstream media but on social media platforms. Millions, from all over the world, told the story as it really is, about a brutal occupation that has dehumanized the Palestinians, both Muslims and Christians, in every way.

The story is about Israel that it is above the law, not held to account for its breaches of international laws and conventions, and continuing to carry out crimes with impunity.

In a few weeks' time the uproar over Abu Akleh's killing will die down. But the reality for the Palestinians will not change. Hundreds of Abu Akleh's will be killed and injured, as has been the case for decades. And again the West will look the other way. Israel knows this and, sadly, it is right to believe so.

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# About the current economic recovery



YUSUF MANSUR

**R**ECENT DATA shows that an economic recovery is under way in Jordan. The GDP is expected to grow in 2022 at 2.4 percent in real terms, which is a slight improvement over the level of growth in 2021. The recovery, albeit slow, is a recovery and not a regress or a decline in economic activity, and can be a cause of optimism, even if cautious optimism, thus replacing whatever negativity persists.

In terms of fiscal policy and public debt, tax revenues increased by JD548 million to reach JD970.2 million in the first two months of 2022, and Jordan's debt fell by JD244 million from its level in 2021. If the trend continues, the debt to GDP ratio can be expected to fall significantly this year, which would free the budget to expand the capital expenditure and increase invest-

ment in the country's infrastructure, education and health.

Remittances from Jordanians working in GCC countries have increased by 1 percent, and may be expected to increase further as the Gulf economies continue to gain due to the upsurge in oil prices. The GCC economies are forecast to grow by 6.4 percent this year. The impact will undoubtedly be felt in Jordan in the form of aid and remittances from these countries.

Inflation is expected to be around 2.8 percent this year, which is much lower than that felt worldwide. The effect of the Russian-Ukrainian war on Jordan may be diluted somewhat regarding the cost of wheat and energy. The government has already purchased the equivalent of a 13-month supply of wheat, and oil has been bought through long-term contracts which will safeguard the economy from further upward fluctuations, should they occur.

Foreign reserves are at an all-time high. The current level of reserves is around \$18 billion, which will cover 9.5 months of imports. This means that in the implausible case Jordan does not receive any foreign currency from exports, tourism, aid, and remittances, the Central Bank of Jordan has enough reserves to cover over nine months of imports. Note that the suggested level of foreign currency reserves is a two-month worth of imports.

Additionally, tourism was up 253 percent in the first four months of this year relative to the same period last year. Investment in the first quarter of 2022 rose by 107 percent relative to the same period last year, and foreign direct investment has increased over seven-fold from last year.

Overall, the numbers show an improvement at all levels of the economy, which, as stated earlier, calls for optimism. Hopefully this optimistic will translate into a bigger growth rate and further thrust of the economy toward recovery.

*The writer is CEO of the Envision Consulting Group and former minister of state for economic affairs.*

**Overall, the numbers show an improvement at all levels of the economy, which, as stated earlier, calls for optimism.**

**The story is about Israel that it is above the law, not held to account for its breaches of international laws and conventions, and continuing to carry out crimes with impunity.**

# Russia is violating the spirit of Montreux by using civilian ships for war

YÖRÜK İŞİK

**O**N FEBRUARY 28, Turkey triggered the Montreux Convention, not used since World War II, and closed the Turkish Straits to military ships. This one move interrupted Russia's maritime logistical supply line to Syria, interfered with its ability to rotate naval assets in the Mediterranean, and prevented Moscow from bringing additional warships to the Black Sea. Russia can no longer supply its Syrian operation or deliver defense exports to its customers using navy ships. However, close observation of traffic through the Turkish Straits reveals that Russia is continuing its naval operations in the Mediterranean and Black seas.

The current closure of the Turkish Straits under Montreux applies only to naval vessels. Free transit through the straits for commercial purposes continues. Russia is abusing this distinction by using civilian merchant vessels as naval auxiliaries to supply logistics to its military operations in Syria and Ukraine.

This is not the first time Moscow has done this either. At the height of its Syria campaign, the war effort required more supplies than the Russian Navy, or Voyenno-Morskoy Flot, could carry. Russia bought old civilian cargo ships from Turkey, refitted them, and began using them for its war. And now, Russia is once again using civilian ships to supply its military campaigns in Syria and Libya, and to fulfill existing contracts, such as Rosatom's nuclear power plant construction in El Dabaa, Egypt, or exporting defense products to Algeria. Russia is also plundering commodities from occupied territories in Ukraine, especially from the port of Sevastopol's Avlita grain terminal. It is absurd that Russia has been allowed to weaponize commercial trade by illegally blockading the Odessa and Chornomorsk harbors, while also profiting from the sale of stolen Ukrainian grain, exported from an occupied Ukrainian port.

**Currently, Russia is using five types of civilian merchant ships for war:**

1. Cargo vessels owned by logistics company Oboronlogistika, part of the Russian ministry of defense. These purportedly civilian ships, such as Pizhma, Sparta, Sparta II, Ursa Major (x-Sparta III), and Sparta IV, regularly carry military cargo from Novorossiysk to Syria and from Baltic ports like Ust-Luga and Kaliningrad to Novorossiysk.
2. Russian-flag roll-on/roll-off cargo ships (ro-ros) of "private" Russian companies like Moscow-based M Leasing, which are owned by or working on behalf of the Russian government, such as Adler, Angara, and Lady Maria, carry defense exports and transport weapons. For example, Russian-flag Lady Maria carried arms from Kalinin-

grad to Novorossiysk. The same ship very recently carried weapons from Novorossiysk all the way to Myanmar, another conflict zone.

3. Older, non-Russian-flag ro-ros not seen in this region before but brought back into service and flying flags of convenience. These ships, such as Kocatepe (x-Varyag), Barbaros, Hızır, and Şampiyon Trabzonspor, now frequent Novorossiysk harbor, and are likely working as contractors for the Russian government. These ships, which carried military cargo in the past, are now prolonging the war in Ukraine by providing revenue and even transporting weapons for Russia's use.

4. Russian-flag tankers regularly carry jet fuel to Khmeimim Air Base in Syria. Several smaller tankers, especially Russian-flag Sig and Yaz, have been documented transporting aviation jet fuel to Baniyas, Syria for years. They are clearly not functioning as civilian ships and should be treated as Russian Navy auxiliary vessels. Preventing them from transiting the Turkish Straits would immediately ground the Russian Air Force in the Syrian theater. As Khmeimim is also a refueling stop for flights to Russian military operations in the Central African Republic, Mali, and Venezuela, stopping these two ships would immediately disrupt Russian military operations globally.

5. Russian or Syrian-flag bulk carriers that transport commodities like wheat, barley, or corn, such as Mikhail Nenashev, Matros Poznych, Laodicea, Souria, and Finkia. Russia has found a way to work around the current closure of the Turkish Straits by supplying logistics to its military operations in Syria or Ukraine using supposedly private companies and civilian ships. The use of civilian merchant vessels for war violates the spirit of the Montreux mechanism that was used to close the Turkish Straits. Even if it is legal, it is not acceptable and should not be allowed.

When Ukraine wins the war, the balance of power in the Black Sea region will change fundamentally. Having exposed its own profound operational problems, Russia will no longer enjoy the perception of superiority. Expect more challenges, especially from Black Sea countries. Ukraine will emerge from the war stronger, with an experienced army and coastal defenses strengthened by new Western anti-ship weapons that will further reduce Russia's ability to patrol coastal waters. Both Romania

and Georgia are interested in a greater US and NATO presence in the Black Sea.

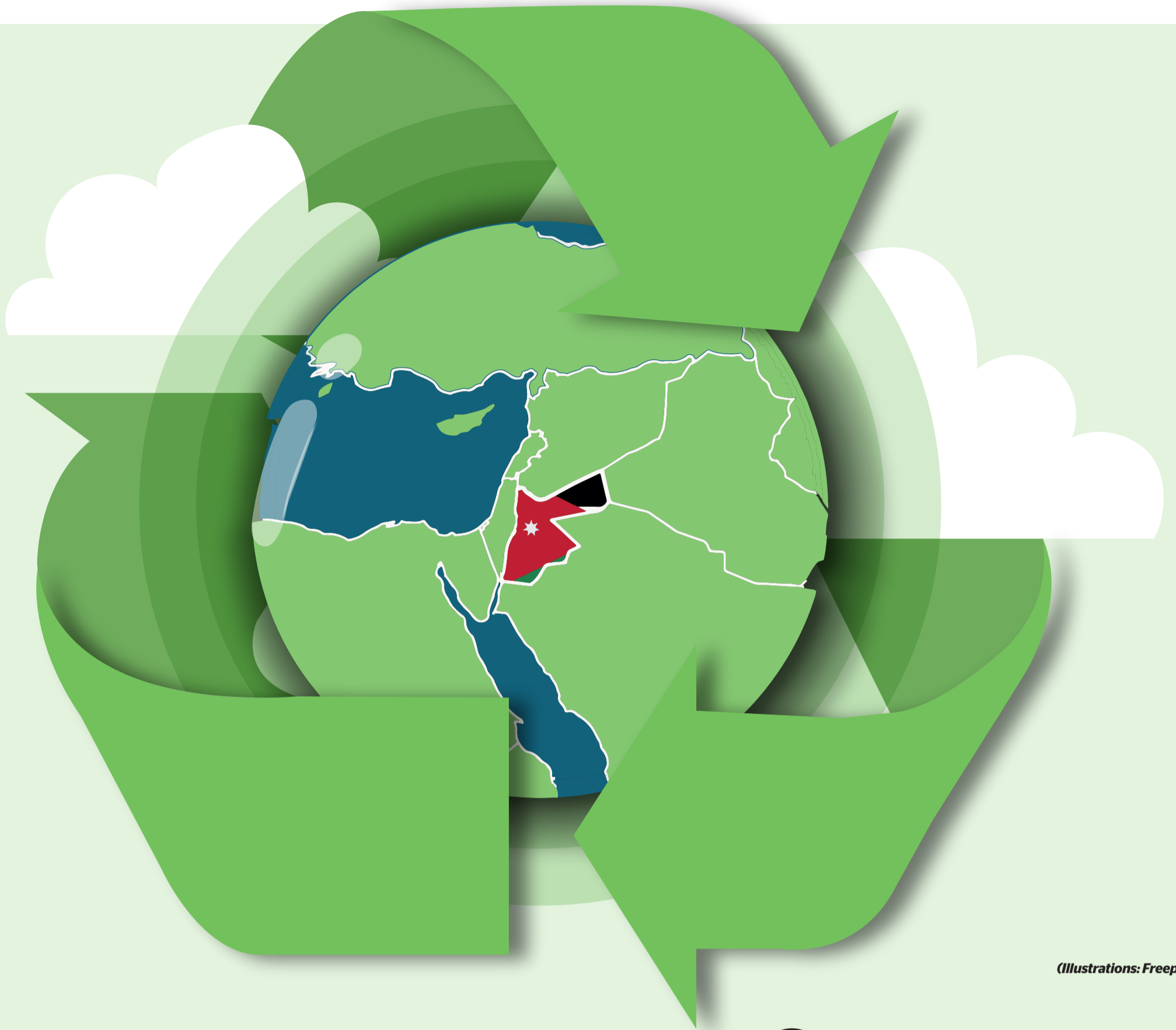
Turkey's approach to Russia will change too. Its navy is already the strongest in the Black Sea, powered by new frigates armed with new indigenous technologies, and a growing submarine fleet that already outnumbers Russia's Black Sea Fleet three to one. It also has new gas fields in the Black Sea to protect. These changes are likely to affect implementation of the Montreux Convention.

When Montreux was written, the Black Sea was understood to be under the control of the Soviet Union and Turkey, with the Soviet Union superior. Everything has changed now. Ukraine, Romania, and Georgia will want to review the limitations that Montreux currently imposes on ships from non-Black Sea countries in its waters.

For now, Turkey must use all its means to end the war sooner by choking off Russia's illegal activity and revenues. Closer inspection is required of vessels transiting the Turkish Straits. NATO should be more vigilant about inspecting ships possibly carrying arms. Ro-ros bound for the Black Sea that are likely carrying suspicious cargo should be boarded and inspected in the international waters of the Mediterranean. Closure of the Turkish Straits to merchant ships working for the Russian war effort should be considered. Turkey should prevent civilian merchant vessels from supplying Russia's wars by carrying military cargo.

Action must also be taken to re-establish global food security. Russia is stealing Ukrainian commodities on an industrial scale and selling them; profits from these illegitimate sales extend the war. Great amounts of stolen commodities end up in Turkey, some even carried inexplicably by the Syrian government shipping company SYRIAMAR. Buyers, including companies in Turkey, are wrong to get involved in this illegal trade. Turkey should instead focus on rebuilding Ukraine. While Russia continues to blockade Ukraine's most essential ports at Odessa and Chornomorsk, its ships should be denied commercial access to the Turkish Straits.

*The writer is a geopolitical analyst based in Istanbul, where he runs the Bosphorus Observer, a consultancy analyzing maritime activity on the Turkish Straits. He is also a non-resident scholar with MEI's Turkey Program.*



(Illustrations: Freepik)

# Recycling services in Jordan

By Aisha Ahmed

It is important to think of ways to leave our planet in the best way possible for our future generations. Recycling is one of the best ways to reduce the amount of waste that is harming the environment. It is beneficial for the environment as old products that are no longer useful are repurposed.

The process of recycling could start from home. For example, if you are not throwing away your old clothes and instead use them to create new pieces, you are already recycling.

People should start recycling for several reasons: reduce the amount of waste, help conserve non-renewable resources, avoid an energy crisis by saving it, prevent overburdening landfills and incinerators, generate jobs, help households' economy, and limit the search for raw resources.



In Jordan, recycling could be a challenge, as is in many other countries in the MENA region, but it is possible, and some people are recycling their old products.

**Recycling services in Jordan:**

Green spot is an environmental initiative founded in 2019 to make Jordan a greener place. Green spot offers many paper collection and recycling services from offices, shops, hotels, schools, homes, and restaurants. Paper accounts for up to 15 percent of solid waste in Amman and may be recycled into new paper, which in its turn can save local businesses money and lower the carbon footprint. Through it, people can keep their workspaces clean while helping to save trees from being cut down and turned into paper.

Green spot buys broken electrical motors and metal, including brass, lead, aluminium, copper, and steel, in Amman and in provinces. They recycle the metals and

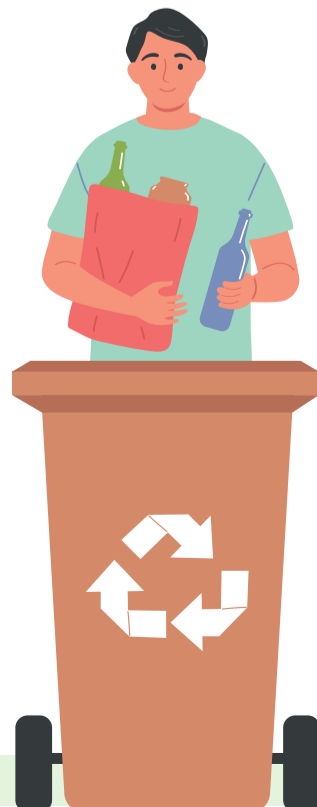


make them raw materials that will be used repeatedly to reduce pollution and the carbon footprint. By reusing the same metals over and over, they may reduce solid waste in municipal waste landfills and save Jordan use of raw materials.

Fabrica is a home-based enterprise that was launched in 2019 with the aim of reducing waste by recycling fabrics. The main focus, however, is to recycle plastic, which does not decompose.

Fabrica collects unused fabrics from several places around Jordan, such as textile shops located downtown Amman, from individuals, and from other available options; it partnered with WashyWash, an eco-friendly cleaning service app in Amman, to ensure that the recycled products are clean and hygienic.

Fabrica makes earrings, tote bags, tuts, and other products. Its goal is to raise waste management awareness, support talented tailors, encourage creativity, and reduce production costs and fabric waste. Green Wheelz is a non-profit organiza-



tion established in 2013; its aim is to protect the environment by recycling aluminium cans and plastic bottle caps. The organization also contributes to the treatment and education of disabled children and children with cerebral palsy. The most important goals of Green Wheelz are to take crucial steps to protect the environment and raise awareness about it, and nurture an environment-protection culture among local communities that will reflect on these communities and positively change them.

T Bottle is one of the few green shops in Jordan that repurposes glass. It collects empty glass from shops around Amman and tries to create artistic pieces that would add a touch to customers' offices or homes.

A great amount of glass is not being recycled and end up harming the environment. T Bottle collected around 30,000 bottles to create its products. All are handmade, and cleaned with water and heat to ensure proper hygiene.





May is ALS awareness month; it is used as an opportunity to educate the public and bring attention to the condition in hopes of helping improve the lives for those affected. (Photo: Stocksnap)

HEALTH

# ALS awareness month

By Rifaat Al-Nasser

In 1939, baseball player Lou Gehrig's career came to an end when he became afflicted with an illness now known as "Lou Gehrig's Disease". From that moment, the illness gained recognition internationally as a serious condition, but it had been identified in 1869.

The official name for this condition is amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) and was identified by French neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot. In recent years, one notable figure in the scientific community also afflicted with the condition was Stephen Hawking. Hawking lived to be 76 years old, which is astonishing considering the average survival time for ALS sufferers is two to five years. As more awareness and research has been put into the study of ALS, the chances of survival and longevity also increased.

May is ALS awareness month; it is used as an opportunity to educate the public and bring attention to the condition in hopes of helping improve the lives for those affected.

What is ALS?

ALS is a neurodegenerative disease in which the nerves in the body begin to die or atrophy. ALS affects a specific type of neuron known as motor neurons. Motor neurons relay signals from the brain, down the spinal cord, and to skeletal muscles which initiates and controls muscle movement. As the neurons begin to degrade, so too does the individual's ability to move until a voluntary movement ceases as such, in Europe the disease is referred to as motor neuron disease. Unfortunately, there is no cure for ALS, which is progressive in nature.

Based on a 2019 review, worldwide, ALS is estimated to affect 4.42 people in 1 million. Although a seemingly low prevalence rate, in the US, 5,000 people are diagnosed with ALS every year. Furthermore, a 2016 study assessed the projected increase of ALS from 2015 to 2040. The study used multiple countries around the world, two of which were Libya and Iran, which belong to the MENA region. Since Jordan has no study on the prevalence of ALS, these two countries can help reasonably estimate the potential increase in cases within the region. According to this study, the projected increase in ALS cases is estimated to more than double in Libya and Iran (117 percent and 112 percent, respectively).

Symptoms of ALS

ALS symptoms are frequently divided into two categories: limb onset and bulbar onset. They refer to where the earliest signs of ALS begin to appear and predict the progression of the disease. Limb onset is the most common form and occurs in 70 percent of those with ALS. For those with limb onset, symptoms will begin to manifest in the arms or legs. In the arms, symp-

ptoms may include weakness, stiffness, cramping, or loss of dexterity. In the legs, symptoms may include difficulty walking, tripping, and a condition known as foot drop, which occurs when the individual has difficulty lifting the front half of the foot while walking. In the early stages of limb onset, symptoms only occur in the legs or arms, but not both. Fortunately, limb onset ALS progresses more slowly than other types.

Bulbar onset ALS is less common and affects a portion of the brainstem known as the corticobulbar area, which is responsible for many movements in the face. In those with bulbar onset, common symptoms include difficulty talking, swallowing, and muscle spasms in the face or throat. There are also some rare subtypes of ALS that occur far less frequently; one is respiratory onset ALS, in which the muscles that control breathing are affected first.

As the neurons begin to degrade, so too does the individual's ability to move until a voluntary movement ceases.

How does ALS progress?

In the early stages of the disease, symptoms may be relatively mild and difficult to detect. Typically, there will be small, infrequent muscle twitches in the mouth, throat, face, and limbs. Over time, the frequency of these twitches will likely begin to increase. Additionally, it may become more difficult to perform daily tasks, and symptoms may occur more on one side than the other. As the condition progresses, symptoms typically begin to occur on both sides and muscle weakness, weight loss, and muscle atrophy becomes more common. By the late stages of ALS, total loss of voluntary movement will begin to set in (paralysis), but sensations such as touch, sight, and hearing will remain intact. It is also common to have bowel and bladder control affected in these stages. Unfortunately, the most common cause of death for those with ALS tends to be respiratory failure, as it becomes more difficult to breathe. At the time of diagnosis, the typical lifespan is two to five years. However, 20 percent of people live more than five years and 10 percent live for more than 10 years.

Causes of ALS

Although scientists and doctors have been aware of ALS for over a century, many aspects of the cause for this condition are still unknown. To date, there are two classifications of ALS that describe the origins of the condition:

sporadic and familial. Sporadic makes up the majority of cases and means that there is no known cause. Familial means that the condition was inherited from a parent and only makes up 5-10 percent of all cases. Certain environmental factors are being investigated, but there is no definitive evidence. What is known is that the risk of ALS increases with age and the typical onset of symptoms occurs between the ages of 55 and 75. Additionally, ALS is more likely to occur in males and in the white population.

Complications of ALS

Due to the progressive and debilitating nature of ALS, the condition is associated with many serious, life-threatening complications that result in the death of the individual. One of the most common complications of ALS relates to speech and eating. As the individual loses strength and mobility in the mouth, jaw, and throat, a host of problems begin to occur. Typically, it is common for those with ALS to have difficulty speaking, but in severe cases, some may lose the ability to speak entirely.

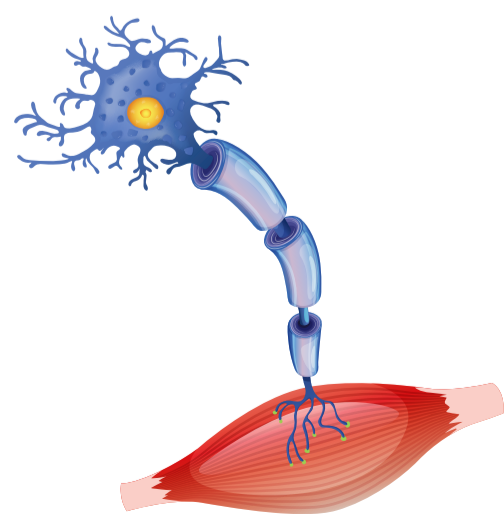
In addition to speaking, eating also becomes increasingly difficult. ALS can affect the person's ability to chew and swallow, which poses the risk of choking. Furthermore, due to the difficulty eating, those with ALS often experience rapid weight loss and malnutrition. It is also believed that ALS may cause individuals to burn more calories more quickly, which can increase weight loss.

One of the most serious complications of ALS concerns the respiratory system. As the disease progresses, breathing becomes more laborious and weakens. As a result, the risk of pneumonia and respiratory failure also increases.

Although there is no cure for ALS, there are many options to help those suffering. The main goal is to help improve the quality of life, reduce symptoms, and delay the progression of the disease. Support in the form of assistive devices can help improve mobility and independence to a certain degree. Additionally, there are two current medications approved for the treatment of ALS. They can help reduce symptoms and even slow the progression of the disease, thus extending the lifespan. However, it is best that the condition be treated as soon as possible to have the best outcome. Being observant of the early signs for ALS can help ensure you or a loved one receives treatment as soon as possible.

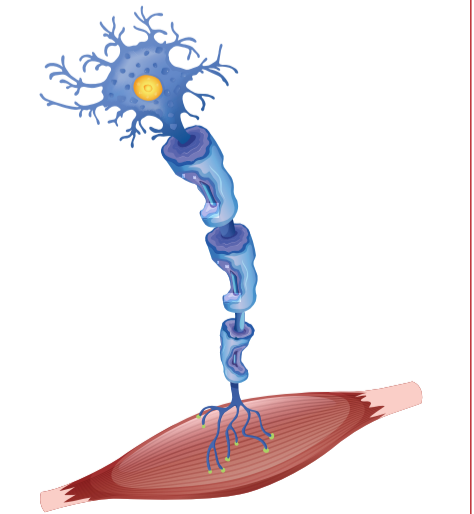
## Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS)

normal nerve cell



muscle contracts

nerve with sclerosis



muscle unable to contract

HEALTH

# Puberty starts earlier than it used to, no one knows why

**(NYT)** — Marcia Herman-Giddens first realized something was changing in young girls in the late 1980s, while she was serving as director for the child abuse team at Duke University Medical Center in Durham, North Carolina. During evaluations of girls who had been abused, Herman-Giddens noticed that many of them had started developing breasts as young as six or seven.

"That did not seem right," said Herman-Giddens, who is now an adjunct professor at the University of North Carolina Gillings School of Global Public Health. She wondered whether girls with early breast development were more likely to be sexually abused, but she could not find any data keeping track of puberty onset in girls in the US. So she decided to collect it herself.

A decade later, she published a study of more than 17,000 girls who underwent physical examinations at pediatricians' offices across the country. The numbers revealed that, on average, girls in the mid-1990s had started to develop breasts — typically the first sign of puberty — around age 10, more than a year earlier than previously recorded. The decline was even more striking in Black girls, who had begun developing breasts, on average, at age nine.

The medical community was shocked by the findings, and many were doubtful about a dramatic new trend spotted by an unknown physician assistant, Herman-Giddens recalled. "They were blindsided," she said.

But the study turned out to be a watershed in the medical understanding of puberty. Studies in the decades since have confirmed, in dozens of countries, that the age of puberty in girls has dropped by about three months per decade since the 1970s. A similar pattern, though less extreme, has been observed in boys.

Although it is difficult to tease apart cause and effect, earlier puberty may have harmful impacts, especially for girls. Girls who go through puberty early are at a higher risk of depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and other psychological problems, compared with peers who hit puberty later. Girls who get their periods earlier may also be at a higher risk of developing breast or uterine cancer in adulthood.

No one knows what risk factor — or more likely, what combination of factors — is driving the age decline or why there are stark race- and sex-based differences. Obesity seems to be playing a role, but it cannot fully explain the change. Researchers are also investigating other potential influences, including chemicals found in certain plastics



Some girls are starting to develop breasts as early as age six or seven. Researchers are studying the role of obesity, chemicals, and stress. (Photo: NYTimes)

and stress. And for unclear reasons, doctors across the world have reported a rise in early puberty cases during the pandemic.

"We are seeing these marked changes in all our children, and we don't know how to prevent it if we wanted to," said Dr. Anders Juul, a pediatric endocrinologist at the University of Copenhagen who has published two recent studies on the phenomenon. "We don't know what is the cause."

Around the time Herman-Giddens published her landmark study, Juul's research group examined breast development in a cohort of 1,100 girls in Copenhagen, Denmark. Unlike the American children, the Danish group matched the pattern long described in medical textbooks: Girls began developing breasts at an average age of 11 years old.

"I was interviewed quite a lot about the US puberty boom, as we called it," Juul said. "And I said, 'it's not happening in Denmark.'"

At the time, Juul suggested that the earlier onset of puberty in the US was probably tied to a rise in childhood obesity, which had not occurred in Denmark.

Obesity has been linked to earlier

periods in girls since the 1970s. Numerous studies since have established that girls who are overweight or obese tend to start their periods earlier than girls of average weights do.

"I don't think there's much controversy that obesity is a major contributor to early puberty these days," said Dr. Natalie Shaw, a pediatric endocrinologist at the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences who has studied the effects of obesity on puberty.

Still, she added, many girls who develop early are not overweight.

"Obesity can't explain all of this," Shaw said. "It's just happened too quickly."

Juul has become one of the most vocal proponents of an alternate theory: that chemical exposures are to blame. The girls with the earliest breast development in his 2009 study, he said, had the highest urine levels of phthalates, substances used to make plastics more durable that are found in everything from vinyl flooring to food packaging.

Phthalates belong to a broader class of chemicals called "endocrine disrupters," which can affect the behavior of hormones and have become ubiquitous in the environ-

ment over the past several decades. But the evidence that they are driving earlier puberty is murky.

In a review article published last month, Juul and a team of researchers analyzed hundreds of studies looking at endocrine disrupters and their effects on puberty. The methods of the studies varied widely; some were done in boys, others in girls, and they tested for many different chemicals at different ages of exposure. In the end, the analysis included 23 studies that were similar enough to compare, but it was unable to show a clear association between any individual chemical and the age of puberty.

"The big takeaway is that there's few publications and a paucity of data to explore this question," said Dr. Russ Hauser, an environmental epidemiologist at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health and a co-author of the analysis.

That lack of data has led many scientists to be skeptical of the theory, said Hauser, who recently reported on how endocrine disrupters affect puberty in boys. "We don't have enough data to build a strong case for a specific class of chemicals."

Other factors may also be in-

cluded in earlier puberty, at least in girls. Sexual abuse in early childhood has been linked to earlier puberty onset. Causal arrows are difficult to draw, however. Stress and trauma could prompt earlier development, or, as Herman-Giddens hypothesized decades ago, girls who physically develop earlier could be more vulnerable to abuse.

Girls whose mothers have a history of mood disorders also seem more likely to reach puberty early, as are girls who do not live with their biological fathers. Lifestyle factors like a lack of physical activity have also been linked to changes in pubertal timing.

And during the pandemic, pediatric endocrinologists from across the world noticed that referrals were increasing for earlier puberty in girls. A study published in Italy in February showed that 328 girls were referred to five clinics across the country during a seven-month period in 2020, compared with 140 during the same period in 2019. (No difference was found in boys.) Anecdotally, the same thing might be happening in India, Turkey, and the US.

"I've asked my colleagues around the country and a number of them are saying, yes, we're seeing a simi-

lar trend," said Dr. Paul Kaplowitz, a professor emeritus of pediatrics at Children's National Hospital in Washington. It is unclear whether the trend was caused by increased stress, a more sedentary lifestyle or parents being in close enough quarters with their children to notice early changes.

Several factors are most likely contributing at once. And many of these issues disproportionately impact lower-income families, which may partly explain the racial differences in puberty onset in the United States, the researchers said.

For decades, medical textbooks have defined the stages of puberty using the Tanner Scale, which was based on close observations from 1949 to 1971 of about 700 girls and boys who had lived in an orphanage in England.

The scale defines normal puberty as starting at age eight or older for girls and age nine or older for boys. If puberty begins younger than those cutoffs, doctors are supposed to screen the child for a rare hormonal disorder called central precocious puberty, which can spur puberty as early as infancy. Children with this disorder often undergo brain scans and take prescribed puberty-blocking drugs to delay sexual development until an appropriate age.

But some experts argue that the age threshold for alarm should be lowered. Otherwise, they said, healthy children could be referred to specialists and undergo unnecessary medical procedures, which can be physically taxing and expensive.

"There's plenty more data that age eight is not the optimal cutoff for separating normal from abnormal," Kaplowitz said. In 1999, he argued that the age cutoff for normal puberty should be lowered to age seven in white girls and six in Black girls. "That did not go over too well," he recalled.

That stance, though, was bolstered by a recent study from Juul's group showing that, of 205 pubertal children younger than eight who underwent brain scans, just 1.8 percent of girls and 12.5 percent of boys had brain abnormalities indicating central precocious puberty.

But lowering the age cutoff remains controversial, with many pediatricians arguing that the risk of a disorder is still large enough to justify extra precautions. Others, such as Herman-Giddens, say the changes are a sign of a legitimate public health problem and should not be accepted as normal.

"It might be normal in the sense of what the data are showing," Herman-Giddens said, "but I don't think it's normal, for lack of a better word, for what nature intended."

## A daily Aspirin regimen may hurt more than help, experts warn

**(NYT)** — Regina Griffith was 64 when she met her new primary care doctor for a routine checkup. He recommended a daily low-dose aspirin for heart health, she recalled.

It's hard to be more fit than Griffith, owner and chief instructor at a fitness studio in Montclair, New Jersey. She had a slightly elevated blood pressure at the doctor's office (but not at home, using her own cuff); other than that, she had no significant health problems.

Still, a daily aspirin did not seem like a big deal, and the doctor did not mention any downsides, so she took his advice. "I thought, 'OK, I'm at a certain age,'" Griffith said. "It didn't sound scary to take aspirin."

Millions of older Americans do likewise, and not always because of a doctor's recommendation. Alan Turner, 64, an industrial designer in New Castle, Delaware, began taking aspirin on his own about five years ago, after his mother had several strokes. "I saw what that did to her," he said. He had heard of other people his age taking prophylactic aspirin, so he "just went with it," he said. "How much damage can you do with a baby aspirin a day?"

Good question. For three decades, the US Preventive Services Task Force, an independent and influential panel of experts, has been reviewing the growing evidence of aspirin use for preventing first heart attacks and strokes.

Last month, it issued its latest recommendations on aspirin use, the first in six years. The panel warned adults older than 60 against starting an aspirin regimen for primary prevention.

"It carries possible serious harms" — notably, an increased risk of internal bleeding, said Dr. John Wong, a

task force member. "And those harms are higher than we thought in 2016." Wong is a primary care doctor and interim chief scientific officer at Tufts Medical Center in Boston.

"Primary prevention" refers to patients who have never had a heart attack or stroke and do not have heart disease. (High blood pressure, or hypertension, is not considered heart disease.) That group is the task force's focus.

People taking aspirin for secondary prevention — because they have already had a heart attack, stroke, or intervention such as stenting or bypass surgery — face higher risk of subsequent cardiovascular events, and aspirin might remain part of their treatment.

For adults ages 40-59, the net benefit of taking aspirin daily would be small, the task force concluded. They may choose to start a daily aspirin regimen if, based on widely used health calculators, they face a 10 percent or higher risk for cardiovascular disease over the next decade, but that should be an individual decision.

It will take time for these new cautions to trickle down to the public. About one-third of Americans older than 40 already take aspirin, a 2019 study found. Among those older than 70, more than 45 percent take aspirin for primary prevention, probably representing significant overuse.

"Many people don't even think of aspirin as medication, they think of it as more like a vitamin," said Dr. Amit Khera, director of preventive cardiology at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center. "But just because it's over-the-counter, doesn't mean it's not a drug with



(Photo: Pixabay)

benefits and risks."

In 2019, Khera helped develop similar guidelines for the American College of Cardiology and American Heart Association, which recommended against routine aspirin use for primary prevention in people older than 70. The American Geriatrics Society's Beers Criteria, a list of medications considered inappropriate for older patients, is also considering recommending that "most

older adults" avoid starting aspirin for primary prevention.

The US Preventive Services Task Force's position on aspirin use for prevention has seasawed over the decades, noted Dr. Allan Brett, an internist at the University of Colorado, in a JAMA editorial accompanying the new guidelines. The task force initially recommended in 1989 that patients consider aspirin, then backed off, calling the evidence insuff-

icient. It encouraged preventive aspirin for many adults in 2009 but had grown more skeptical by 2016.

What has changed this time around? Three large, rigorous clinical trials published in 2018, following more than 47,000 older patients, "really highlighted the risks," Khera said.

Wong added: "Two didn't find any significant reductions in heart attack or stroke, but there was an in-

creased risk of bleeding." The third clinical trial, which was limited to people with diabetes, a higher-risk group, found a small reduction in cardiovascular events — but with a higher bleeding risk. "The harm canceled out the benefit," Wong said.

The bleeding in question usually occurs in the gastrointestinal tract but can also include brain bleeds and hemorrhagic strokes. Although the risks are low — major bleeding occurred in 1 percent or fewer of older people taking aspirin in the 2018 studies — they increase with age. "These are serious bleeds," Brett said. "They can require transfusions. They can put people in the hospital."

With the advent of other effective advances in preventing heart attacks and strokes — better blood pressure drugs, statins for lowering cholesterol, a reduction in smoking — the role for aspirin has narrowed, experts said.

For people older than 60, per the task force guidelines, or 70, per the cardiologists' recommendations, the risks of starting aspirin now outweigh the benefits. This is particularly true for people with a history of bleeding, say from ulcers or aneurysms, or those taking medications such as blood thinners, steroids or anti-inflammatories such as ibuprofen or naproxen.

Griffith, now 65, recently saw a different doctor in her new primary care practice. The doctor looked at her chart, which showed no heart disease and more than a year of aspirin use.

"He said, 'I don't think you need to do that,'" she said. Griffith had already begun to question the practice and had cut back to an aspirin every other day. Now, she's going to stop.

GAMING

# Vampire: The Masquerade – Bloodhunt

## A refreshing take on battle royale

By Eyad Elkhatib

Released on April 27, Vampire: The Masquerade – Bloodhunt (V:TM-B) is the latest addition to the ever-growing battle royale (BR) genre.

While many might be rolling their eyes at the fact that developers seem to continuously try their luck in releasing a popular BR game, especially with games like Apex Legends, Fortnite, and COD already cementing themselves as the big three. Nevertheless, let us delve into this new title released by developers Sharkmob AB and what makes V:TM-B stand out from the rest of the BR cluster.

In V:TM-B, players join as one of many vampires who are concealing their identity from the mortal world, and while these vampires are divided into separate factions, they all follow the same rules, which are known as the “masquerade” – a sort of law that governs their so-called secrecy.

Violating the masquerade subjects the violator to a “bloodhunt”, or a green light allowing all other vampires to hunt and kill said violator without consequence.

Although not the most original of narratives, how it is incorporated into the actual gameplay adds an interesting dynamic that makes players feel like they need to follow the masquerade.

When starting V:TM-B for the



(Photo: IGDB)

first time, players will be tossed into the hub area, where they and other players can roam around the halls while waiting to find their next match.

In the hub, players can open the start menu to customize their character, check their challenges, and go through the game’s extensive library of weapons and lore. When a game is finally found (which does not take long at all), they are directed to the deployment phase of the game, where they pinpoint where they want to spawn on the map, followed by a character selection phase.

There are four classes in V:TM-B, each under a faction, three of which

also have subclasses. These subclasses are pretty much the same, with a slight difference in their passive abilities.

These classes are what I think makes V:TM-B such a fun experience, as each requires the player to adapt to a certain playstyle to shine. Whether players choose to play Brujah’s Brute, which has a very in-your-face sort of playstyle, or Nosferatu’s Saboteur, which provides players with a kit to sneak around and set up poisonous traps around the area, the game keeps players on their toes regardless of their preferred class.

The looting system in this game is great; characters pick up ammo

and heal automatically if they run over new objects. With simple and straight-to-the-point indicators of weapon rarity and power, players can make swift decisions without affecting the pace at which they’re playing.

Finally, the interesting twist this game throws at players is giving them the ability to heal off of mortals who are wandering the streets of the city, but be cautious – if a mortal sees you feeding off another, the bloodhunt is on, and your position is revealed to the other players who are out to get you.

Unlike most BRs that are being released, V:TM-B is a third-person shooter, so for those who are avid

Fortnite players, this game should feel natural in your hands.

The game feels great to play, but movement can be clunky at times. However, with enough practice, players will be hopping between buildings and soaring through the sky before they know it.

The looting in the game is quick, which gives players the ability to focus more on the actual combat they are having. And although it can feel overwhelming at times, do not fret, as every match has players start with one extra life, with the opportunity to net another once depleted.

Everything about V:TM-B makes you want to jump right back into

the action, and after playing so many BRs myself, it has been a breath of fresh air.

It’s not often that a new BR piques my interest, especially one that happens to be a third-person shooter. But, V:TM-B has been nothing but a genuinely entertaining experience from the get-go.

There are things I wish were done just slightly better, but that is to be expected with any game that is newly released. So, if you enjoy traversing tall buildings, and strategically finding humans to feast on while having the capability of playing anyway that suits your playstyle, then V:TM-B is a definite must-try for BR lovers.

### GAMES & HOROSCOPES

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#### HOROSCOPES



**ARIES**  
Don't bluff or you may be forced to show everyone an empty hand. Forming a clear and emotional visualization of what you want to manifest isn't the same as operating on blind faith. Focus on achieving your ambitions and goals.

**CANCER**  
Someone can contribute the significant ideas and know-how while you provide the vision to use it. Kindness and empathy can be useful leadership tools as they can help people want to cooperate in helping you.

**LIBRA**  
You may want to spend the afternoon shopping or having a leisurely lunch, but a partner might hesitate. A busy person who is focused on completing a “to do” list may resist being pinned down or backed into a corner.

**CAPRICORN**  
Investigations into key subjects can be used to your advantage. Friends or family members can introduce you to beneficial ideas or could give you a helping hand so that you can profit from a financial situation.

**TAURUS**  
You may be skeptical because you are alert to every nuance and possibility. You may not be ready to accept someone's word without possessing all the facts. Overlook jealousies and hold off on making expensive purchases.

**LEO**  
Actions always speak for themselves. You may be tempted to stop and wait, but to achieve anything of value you should keep moving. Someone in close connection may offer you a sterling example of focused ambition.

**SCORPIO**  
Dreams come true when you do the work. Everyday tasks might require most of your time and energy, but you can still squeeze a few more minutes into your schedule to investigate something of interest to you.

**AQUARIUS**  
Failure can be the compost that nurtures success. You might be frustrated by a few mistakes or missteps, but they can teach valuable lessons. Pivot and use this learning to fertilize future growth.

**GEMINI**  
You may be filled with deep and profound thoughts, but no one may be interested or engaged now. Avoid holding heart-to-heart conversations because someone may think you are crashing a privacy boundary.

**VIRGO**  
You can analyze and dissect the facts better than usual, but someone else might have the vision to utilize their benefits. Don't be too proud to appeal to someone's generosity or ask for someone's sage advice.

**SAGITTARIUS**  
Be mindful even when making seemingly insignificant decisions. Today you may be passionate about making money and eager to learn more facts about methods and best practices from an expert source.

**PISCES**  
To follow the line of least resistance, you should test the air to understand which way the wind is blowing. This is a good time to discuss common goals with a loved one. Implement small economies to save up for the future.

#### GOREN BRIDGE

BY BOB JONES

##### SENSE OF SECURITY

Both vulnerable, East deals

**NORTH**  
♠ 9 7 4  
♥ A 6 2  
♦ K Q 10 4  
♣ Q 10 4

**WEST**  
♠ 10 5 3  
♥ Q 10 7 3  
♦ J 8 2  
♣ 9 7 5

**EAST**  
♠ A J  
♥ K 9 4  
♦ 9 7 5 3  
♣ A 8 6 2

**SOUTH**  
♠ K Q 8 6 2  
♥ J 8 5  
♦ A 6  
♣ K J 3

The bidding:  
**SOUTH WEST NORTH EAST**  
1♣ 1♠ Pass 2♣\*  
Pass 4♠ ALL pass  
\*Spade raise, at least invitational values

Opening lead: Seven of ♠

The late Tim Seres is widely considered the greatest Australian player in history. He was born in Hungary but relocated to Australia as a young man and made his life there. When he

was not playing in a tournament, he split his time between the thriving rubber bridge club in Sydney and various horse racing tracks in the Sydney area. He was East in today's deal. His play won the award as the Best Deal of the Year in 1975.

Seres won the opening club lead with his ace. It was obvious to shift to a heart. The likely continuation after a low-heart shift would be for declarer to win with dummy's ace and cash three high diamonds, discarding a heart loser from his hand. The fall of the jack would see declarer continue with the 10 of diamonds to discard his remaining heart. West would ruff, but the only other trick for the defense would be the ace of trumps.

Rather than shifting to a low heart, Seres led the king of hearts! From declarer's point of view, there was no need to discard a heart from his hand. The jack of hearts would surely be a winner later and playing diamonds might set up a trump problem for him. He led a spade from dummy instead. Seres hopped up with his ace and continued hearts to defeat the contract. Very nice play!

#### CROSSWORD

BY JOYCE NICHOLS LEWIS AND RICH NORRIS

- Across**
- 1 Tug
  - 5 Grinding away
  - 9 Have because of
  - 14 English horn cousin
  - 15 Hill by a loch
  - 16 Spacecraft docked at the ISS
  - 17 "Be silly
  - 19 Joints often replaced
  - 20 Mag staff
  - 21 12/31, e.g.
  - 22 Exams for aspiring judges, briefly
  - 24 "Loosen up
  - 29 Sponge (up)
  - 30 Student's hurdle
  - 31 Universal donor's type, briefly
  - 32 Recipe word
  - 35 "Like, yesterday!"
  - 37 "Hunan Report" author
  - 38 "Grand Canyon traveler
  - 42 Dallas hoopster
  - 43 Sub
  - 44 Broadcast from NBC's Studio 8H
  - 45 Score symbol
  - 47 Tuner toggle
  - 49 Previously
  - 52 "Nyctophobic
  - 57 \_\_\_ Challenge: soft drink promotion
  - 58 Hound
  - 59 Affirmative vote
  - 60 Catherine of "A Mighty Wind"
  - 62 Shortened version of a pop song ... and a hint to what's
- Down**
- 1 Rustic type
  - 2 Withstands
  - 3 Silently acknowledges
  - 4 Mauna \_\_\_
  - 5 Higher than
  - 6 Most faithful
  - 7 Novelist McEwan
  - 8 2021 Emmy winner for Outstanding Comedy Series
  - 9 Liam's "Schindler's List" role
  - 10 Is unacceptable
  - 11 "Full attention here"
  - 12 Day planner abbr.
  - 13 Birth units: Abbr.
  - 18 Driver's role in "Star Wars" sequels
  - 23 Bollywood strings
  - 25 Iridescent gem
  - 26 Block at a pass?
  - 27 Put on
  - 28 Gps. like Partners In Health
  - 33 "How silly of me!"
  - 34 Can't stand the idea of
  - 36 Safety \_\_\_
  - 38 Whale newborn
  - 39 Have trouble closing the suitcase, maybe
  - 40 Fancy dressers
  - 41 Prince who inspired Dracula

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14				15					16			
17				18					19			
20			21				22	23				
24		25				26					27	28
	29				30				31			
		32	33	34		35			36		37	
	38	39			40				41			
42				43				44				
45		46		47			48		49	50	51	
52			53				54	55				56
		57					58				59	
60	61				62	63				64		
65						66				67		
68						69						70

**Yesterday's Solution**

A	L	E	U	T	D	A	R	T	E	D	E	N				
R	U	N	N	Y	R	B	I	S	R	U	L	E				
C	R	U	D	E	O	I	L	B	A	R	R	E	L	S		
H	E	R	E	V	E	E	O	A	T	E	S					
S	E	R	V	E	S	L	E	A	N							
					D	I	R	T	Y	M	A	R	T	I	N	I
T	A	H	O	E	E	A	R	S	D	O	N					
A	G	O	G	D	A	M	O	N	F	O	O	T				
N	A	Y	K	O	B	E	S	U	L	K	S					
G	R	A	P	H	I	C	N	O	V	E	L					
H	A	T	S	R	E	A	L	T	Y							
L	A	S	I	K	S	A	T	S	H	E	S					
E	X	P	L	I	C	I	T	C	O	N	T	E	N	T		
N	O	E	L	O	P	A	L	A	O	R	T	A				
A	N	D	Y	B	A	B	E	S	P	E	A	R				

#### SUDOKU

LEVEL 1 2 3 4

Complete the grid so each row, column and 3-by-3 box (in bold borders) contains every digit, 1 to 9. For strategies on how to solve Sudoku, please visit [sudoku.org.uk](http://sudoku.org.uk)

**Yesterday's Solution**

4	6	2	8	5	7	3	1	9
1	9	3	6	2	4	8	7	5
8	7	5	3	1	9	4	2	6
3	8	7	9	6	5	1	4	2
9	4	1	7	8	2	6	5	3
2	5	6	1	4	3	9	8	7
6	2	4	5	3	8	7	9	1
7	3	8	2	9	1	5	6	4
5	1	9	4	7	6	2	3	8

7	8			5					
9		6	3	2	1				
	1						2		
	4				2	8	6		
	9	1	6					5	
	3							1	
				1	7	4	2	5	
				6				7	4

**BRIEFS** By Khaled Al-Omeri



(Photo: Saher Kadara)

**Women, girls Wrestling teams to take part in July Asian Championship**

**AMMAN** – The Wrestling Federation confirmed the participation of the girl's and women's national teams in the Asian Championship which will be held in the Bahraini capital, Manama on July 2. The national team's partici-

pation in the Asian Championship will be preceded by the holding of a training camp. This will be the women's wrestling team's first participation in a foreign championship after an absence of close to 15 years.



(Photo: Jordan Golf Federation)

**Abdallat qualifies for US Kids Golf European Championships in Scotland**

**AMMAN** – Ten-year-old national team player Salem Al-Abdallat qualified for the US Kids Golf European Championships in Scotland, which will be held from May 31 to June 2.

Abdallat qualified, after achieving second place in the previous round, the US Gold Kids World Championship in the UAE, due to losing by one point against the Japanese titleholder Shane Weider.

**FIBA announce members of new Safeguarding Council**

By Khaled Al-Omeri

**AMMAN** –The International Basketball Federation (FIBA) announced the members of the new Safeguarding Council, which seeks to advise and follow up on issues regarding the protection of vulnerable groups amongst basketball players and is headed by the council's Founding Chairman HRH Prince Feisal bin Al-Husseini.

In consultation with Prince Feisal six members were appointed to the council including Slovakia's four-time Olympian Danka Bartekova, FIBA Americas President Carol Callan, basketball star Astou Ndour-Fall, Romanian Basketball Federation President Carmen Tocala, award-winning journalist Alan Abrahamson, and FIBA Chief Operating Officer Patrick Mariller, with the majority of the council being independent members, according to the Jordan News Agency, Petra.

"In our ever-evolving world of sport and Olympism, safeguarding principles and standards have



(Photo: Jordan Olympic Committee)

become instrumental tools in ensuring that everyone practices, plays and experiences sport in a free and safe way, protected from all types of harm and abuse," Prince Feisal said.

Ensuring that sport is a respectful and equitable environment for everyone involved takes time and effort and demands decision making that answers today's challenges and clears the path for the participation of tomorrow's youth. The proactive steps that FIBA is taking to ensure the sport of basketball is accessible and safe are the right steps forward, at the right moment," he added.

The appointment of Prince Feisal came during a FIBA Board of Directors which was held at the Patrick Baumann House of Basketball in Mies, Switzerland in April.



**Qatar ruler hits back at anti-Arab attacks on World Cup**

**DAVOS, Switzerland (AFP)** – Qatar's emir on Monday hit out at what he called unprecedented attacks on Qatar becoming the first Arab country to host the World Cup.

With the Gulf state facing questions about the treatment of foreign workers and the rights of women and the LGBTQ community, Emir Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani acknowledged that Qatar was "not perfect".

But he insisted that it had carried out reforms at "lightning speed" since being awarded the World Cup in 2010.

"For decades now, the Middle East has suffered from discrimination," the ruler of the energy-rich state told the World Economic Fo-

rum in Davos, less than six months from the November 21 start of the tournament.

"And I have found, that such discrimination, is largely based on

people not knowing us, and in some cases, refusing to get to know us. Even today, there are still people who cannot accept the idea, that an Arab-Muslim country would host a tournament like the World Cup."

"These individuals, including many in positions of influence, have launched attacks, at a pace never seen before," the emir said.

Rights groups have led criticism of Qatar's record while some football stars, including England captain Harry Kane, have also raised questions.

Amnesty International last week demanded that FIFA set up a \$440 million fund for "abused" workers in Qatar.

Qatar's leader said that other

countries and regions had already staged major events, "despite the fact that each of those countries, has its own particular problems and challenges."

"Qatar is just like your own country... not perfect, constantly trying to improve, and full of hope, for a brighter future."

"We are so proud of the development, reform, and progress we have made, and we are grateful for the spotlight that the World Cup provided, which inspired us, to make these changes at lightning-speed," he said.

Qatar has spent billions of dollars on stadiums and infrastructure for the 32-nation tournament and the emir vowed that it will be a "special one".

**Nadal strolls at French Open as Osaka, Krejckikova crash out**

**PARIS (AFP)** – Rafael Nadal kicked off his quest for a 14th French Open title with a straight-sets win over Jordan Thompson, but former world number one Naomi Osaka and defending champion Barbora Krejckikova tumbled out in the first round Monday.

Nadal, on a quarter-final collision course with Novak Djokovic, brushed Australia's Thompson aside 6-2, 6-2, 6-2 to improve his Roland Garros record to 106 wins and just three losses since his 2005 title-winning debut.

"I'm very happy with the victory today. I'm happy to get through in three sets," said Nadal, seeded fifth.

"It's a first round, a positive match for me. Straight sets but with significant room for improvement."

The Spaniard, who last week downplayed concerns over the recurrence of a foot injury that plagued him in Rome, meets Corentin Moutet in round two after the French wildcard defeated 2015 champion Stan Wawrinka.

Osaka, the unseeded four-time Grand Slam winner, was knocked out earlier in the day 7-5, 6-4 by Amanda Anisimova – the same player who ended the Japanese star's title defense at the Australian Open this year.

Osaka served eight double faults and committed 29 unforced errors on her return to Roland Garros, after withdrawing in 2021 when she refused to honor mandatory media commitments before revealing she had been suffering from depression.

"I thought I tried really hard, and I just feel like it was a bit unfortunate because I wasn't able to play as many matches leading into this tournament," said Osaka.

Anisimova, the 27th seed, reached the semi-finals in Paris three years ago.

"It's tough to see Naomi Osaka in the first round so I knew it wouldn't be easy," said the American.

"I knew I had to play my best tennis and the conditions were not easy."

As the rain stopped play on the outside courts for two hours, Krejckikova followed Osaka through

the exit door, going down 1-6, 6-2, 6-3 to 19-year-old Frenchwoman Diane Parry in her first match since February following injury.

The Czech world number two had yet to play on clay this season after being sidelined by an elbow problem.

"I just think I just collapsed physically, and, I mean, it was tough because I didn't play the matches," said Krejckikova, who is set to drop out of the top 10.

Swiatek backs up favorite tag Iga Swiatek, the favorite for the women's title, stretched her winning streak to 29 matches by dispatching Ukrainian qualifier Lesia Tsurenko 6-2, 6-0 in 54 minutes.

The 20-year-old Swiatek, who

took over as world number one following Ashleigh Barty's shock retirement, has won her last five tournaments and is bidding for a second French Open in three attempts.

"Today was a pretty good match," said Swiatek.

"I love playing here even though the last couple of days it's been raining and pretty dark."

Swiatek is unbeaten since February and has the longest winning streak on the WTA tour since Serena Williams won 34 matches in a row in 2013.

"I'm pretty sure that it can end, but I just want to keep going. I'm sure someday my streak will stop."

Djokovic launches his title de-

fence against Yoshihito Nishioka of Japan in the first of 10 night sessions – introduced at Roland Garros last year when a pandemic curfew saw most late matches played in front of empty stands.

It is the world number one's first Grand Slam match since his high-profile deportation from Australia. He won his first title of the year at the Italian Open earlier this month.

"I feel I am always in that contention to fight for any Grand Slam trophy," said Djokovic.

The Serb's last match at a major was his loss to Daniil Medvedev in last year's US Open final, a defeat which denied Djokovic a calendar Grand Slam.



**Manchester City and France international footballer Benjamin Mendy (center) arrives to Chester Crown Court for a pre-trial hearing in Chester, northwest England, on May 23, 2022. (Photo: AFP)**

**Man City's Mendy pleads not guilty to nine sex offenses**

**CHESTER, United Kingdom (AFP)** – Manchester City and France footballer Benjamin Mendy denied nine sexual offenses against six young women as he appeared in court on Monday.

The 27-year-old player stood in the dock at Chester Crown Court and repeated: "Not guilty" as the charges were put to him and he entered pleas for the first time.

The defender denies seven counts of rape, one count of sexual assault, and one count of attempted rape, relating to six complainants.

All the alleged offenses are said to have taken place at his home address near Macclesfield, northwest England, between October 2018 and August last year.

Mendy entered his pleas during a hearing on Monday ahead of his trial, scheduled to begin later this year.

He will go before a jury on July

25 along with his co-defendant Louis Saha Matturie, 40, who also entered not guilty pleas to all charges.

Matturie denies eight counts of rape and four counts of sexual assault, relating to eight young women. His alleged offenses span from July 2012 to August last year.

After both defendants entered their pleas, the hearing went into private session with press excluded from the courtroom.

Mendy joined Premier League champions City from French club Monaco in 2017. He has played 75 times for the club but his playing time has been limited by injuries and a loss of form.

The last of his 10 caps for France came in November 2019, after the defender won the World Cup in 2018.

Mendy was suspended by City after being charged by police.

Both defendants are on bail.



**Spain's Rafael Nadal serves to Australia's Jordan Thompson during their men's singles match at the Court Philippe-Chatrier on day two of the Roland-Garros Open tennis tournament in Paris on May 23, 2022. (Photo: AFP)**

# The mundane thrill of 'romanticizing your life'

(NYT) — On YouTube, a filmmaker from Utah soaks in the morning sun, savors a fresh croissant, and spritzes lemon-scented perfume on a duvet decorated with pink roses. Her videos, a cozy escape into cottagecore, are inspired by "Anne of Green Gables," Jane Austen novels, and the period drama "Bridgerton," offering tips on "how to be happier and appreciate the little things."

Elsewhere, on TikTok, people spice up their breakfast routines, buy bouquets of flowers, and practice gratitude. One content creator, Rachel Hess, 21, uses a rolling pin to press eucalyptus leaves before hanging them in her shower, in a video that has been viewed more than 6.8 million times. "Romanticize yourrrr lifeeeeeeee," the caption reads.

"I want to make even the most mundane of days feel unique because they are what make up the majority of our lives — not the vacations, or special events that happen once in a while," said Hess, a student in Pennsylvania.

For the past two years, the phrase "romanticize your life" has emerged on social media as a call to action, rising in popularity during some of the grimmest months of the pandemic. It asks us to appreciate what we have right in front of us and to live with intention, no matter how mundane our daily rituals might be — a reminder to look for moments of beauty and embrace minimalism.

Videos with the hashtag, posted overwhelmingly by young women, have been viewed more than 525 million times on TikTok. There are also more than 28,000 posts referring to it on Instagram, where images include sunsets by the water, elegantly plated dinners, and dainty cups of tea.

Although some of the content appears aspirational — not all of us can afford a quick trip to Italy or run off to a field full of flowers, dressed in flouncy spring fashion — most of it rejects the type of messaging that pushes people to acquire material things. And it likewise renounces the "that girl" aesthetic that promotes a one-size-fits-all path to well-being, replete with green juices, journaling, and working out.

One Reddit commenter found joy even while washing coffee pots at work. "After putting a little soap in the pot, I gently squeeze the bottle to blow bubbles out," the user wrote in a thread about romanticizing



The phrase "romanticize your life," which emerged during the pandemic as a call to action to appreciate life's simple pleasures, resonates just as strongly two years later. (Photo: NYTimes)

ing. "I love bubbles."

Experts say the romanticizing trend may have endured in part because it is a new way of exploring mindfulness — the practice of paying attention to the present moment and becoming aware of your physical sensations, thoughts, and emotions in a nonjudgmental way. It also offers a sense of agency, a feeling of control that has been sorely lacking as the pandemic grinds on.

"It's being positive about the things that life has to offer, regardless of whether the circumstance is what you imagined or wanted," said Ashley Ward, 26, whose 2020 TikTok video about romanticizing has been viewed more than 3 million times. "You can't control everything in your life, but you do have control of how you view your situation."

The trend draws wisdom from different domains, like mindfulness, positive psychology, and the Danish custom of hygge, but "it's being presented in a way that's engaging and keeps it fresh," said Eric Loucks, an associate professor of epidemi-

ology, behavioral and social sciences, and medicine at Brown University and the director of the school's Mindfulness Center.

Loucks' research and his new book, "The Mindful College Student," illustrate how mindfulness can decrease stress and symptoms of depression and improve sleep quality and physical activity levels. "Romanticizing your life" intersects with mindfulness, he added, in part by helping us become more in tune with ourselves.

"If we're trying to build a life that makes us happy, and put ourselves in the center of it in a kind way, well, each of us are different," he said. "Which methods resonate most? That's self-awareness."

Intertwined in the online conversation about "romanticizing your life" is the "main character" trend — videos with the hashtag have generated 6.9 billion views on TikTok, followed by its sibling, "main character energy."

The main character meme spawned numerous parodies poking fun at movie clichés and narciss-

ism. It's "a fun way to bring to light some of the cringey things people romanticize," Ward said. But "being the main character" has also become a sincere reminder to let your actions drive the narrative, much like a film's protagonist would.

In Ward's TikTok video, the camera is positioned high above, peering down at the beach where she reclines on a towel. The overhead shot conveys that she is the main character, and the simplicity of the imagery allows her earnest voice-over to take center stage.

"A main character has a full sense of agency, and what the pandemic took away from us was that sense of agency," said Sherry Turkle, a psychologist and professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology who researches people's relationships with technology.

Becoming the main character is also a way of creating a more authentic self, and making space for who you are, she added.

"I think there's been a convergence of wanting to — in our isolation — find our identities in a kind of

heightened way, and one in which we assert our individuality," she said.

Livia Boerger, a mental well-being coach in London, has written about the various ways people can begin to romanticize their lives and has a 28-day challenge on her website, to "help you celebrate living for the smaller reasons and fall in love with life again."

During the pandemic, she said, a lot of people have been "looking for ways to create joy and find that happiness internally, and make the most of what they had."

It may also lead to a larger question: What truly brings us happiness? Is it that expensive vacation or that new piece of clothing? Or should we stop waiting for that picture-perfect moment and start enjoying the present?

"You can find so much joy in free things," Boerger said. Taking the time to jump in rain puddles with your child, for example. Or stopping to enjoy a cup of tea rather than multitasking while you drink it. "It tastes so much better when I put my focus on it," she said.

## Libyan, 31, wins top Arabic fiction prize with debut novel

ABU DHABI (AFP) — Libyan author Mohamed Alnaas became the youngest winner of the prestigious International Prize for Arabic Fiction with his debut novel "Bread on Uncle Milad's Table" on Sunday.

Alnaas, 31, will receive \$50,000 and funds will also be provided to translate his book into English, organizers said on their website.

The prize, along with a further \$50,000 divided between five other shortlisted novelists, is publicly funded by Abu Dhabi, one of seven emirates that make up the UAE.

Published by Rashm, with support from the Libyan Arete Foundation, the winning novel explores gender roles in the male-dominated closed society of a Libyan village.

It recounts the story of Milad, who strives to live up to the definition of ideal masculinity but is deemed to have failed as "a man" after taking on a home role typically reserved for women while his partner, Zeinab, works and supports the family.

Born in 1991, Alnaas published a short story collection, "Blue Blood," in 2020, but "Bread on Uncle Milad's Table" is his first novel.

He is the first Libyan author and youngest writer to win the prize, which was launched in 2007.

The novel "offers a deep and meticulous critique of prevailing concepts of masculinity and femininity and the division of work between men and women, and the effect of these on both a psychological and social level," said Shukri Mabkhout, chair of the prize's panel of judges.

"It falls into the category of novels which question cultural norms about gender."

Alnaas' novel was chosen from a shortlist of six.

The five other shortlisted authors, from Egypt, Kuwait, Morocco, Oman, and the UAE, will each receive \$10,000, the organizers said.

Oil-rich Abu Dhabi, the richest of the UAE's seven emirates, has taken steps to become a cultural hub including hosting the Louvre Abu Dhabi museum.



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## 'Men' brings blood-soaked toxic masculinity to Cannes

CANNES, France (AFP) — Rising star Jessie Buckley admits she is no horror film junkie, but was happy to take on the wild, gore-splattered "Men" thanks to its provocative look at issues around toxic masculinity.

"Men", which follows Buckley's Oscar-nominated turn in Netflix hit "The Lost Daughter", is the latest from British director Alex Garland.

His back catalogue includes inventive sci-fi dramas such as "Ex Machina", "Annihilation" and "Devs", as well as writing credits on "The Beach" and "28 Days Later".

But his new film, which premiered at the Cannes Film Festival on Sunday, may be his strangest concoction yet.

It sees Buckley trapped in a remote English village, trying to recover from a traumatic relationship only to find herself under siege from several extremely creepy guys — all played by British actor Rory Kinnear.

This was not Buckley's comfort zone.

"I'm very squeamish. The last horror film I saw was 'The Texas Chainsaw Massacre' when I was about 10 and that was it for me," the 32-year-old told AFP in Cannes.

"It wasn't so much the film, it was the fact that it was a Halloween party and my dad stopped the film midway and drove us all out to the woods. We were terrified!" she said, laughing.

Garland's film, however, uses horror film tropes in an innovative way to talk about emotional manipulation, male violence and challenges to the patriarchy.

"Alex provoked some very blunt, honest questions that we could investigate together," Buckley said.

"He's an intelligent and provocative film-maker and I felt safe exploring this with him."

Kinnear faced a special acting challenge, having to play a wide

variety of strange characters.

But nothing could prepare him for the final sequence which — without giving away any spoilers — is one of the strangest and goriest conclusions ever put on screen.

"The last week of filming was very messy," Kinnear told AFP.

"There was lots of squashed banana and fake blood," added a delighted Buckley.

Garland tried to keep the actor sweet as the demands of the scene became increasingly disgusting with goodies, Kinnear said.

"I tried to hide my discomfort — I didn't want to be a moaner."

Filming sounds almost as memorable as the insane imagery that was produced.

"There was a lot of being outdoors and baying at the moon. I woke up the local livestock," Kinnear said.

"It's true," said Buckley, jumping in. "At one point the sheep started responding. You can hear them in the film if you listen carefully."

Kinnear is a celebrated theatre actor, also known for supporting roles in recent James Bond films and shows like "Penny Dreadful".

Buckley is considered one of the most exciting new talents in cinema.

Her breakout role as a fiery, working-class single mother in 2018's "Wild Rose" earned her a BAFTA nomination and her Oscar-nominated role in "The Lost Daughter" means she is now highly in demand.

She also won an Olivier Award last month after starring in a West End revival of "Cabaret" in London in 2021.

Her character in "Men", Harper, "is someone who was always going to choose life," she said.

"Even if that meant facing the most fearful things," she added.

## Rising star of African art hits on colonialism, tyranny, and beauty of black

BAMBILOR, Senegal (AFP) — In a serene studio filled with birdsong, Omar Ba takes off his shoes and gets down on his hands and knees. Then the renowned Senegalese artist begins to paint a five-meter-long canvas a deep, dark shade of black.

This is how Ba, a rising star in the world of contemporary African art, starts most of his works, which question the state of the world and Africa's place in it.

"On black backgrounds, I feel that the drawing will be much more readable and clear for me," he said from his airy workspace at the end of a pathway strewn with shells from the nearby Lac Rose.

"I feel in perfect union with what I am doing because I find myself in front of this color, which I find noble and magnificent."

Ba, 45, is a top sensation at the 14th Dakar Biennale, which opened Thursday. His work touches on colonialism, violence, but also hope.

"We see the color white as the neutral color, the pure color, the innocent color," he said. "Black is always associated with what is dirty, what is dark ... and that can affect the person who lives these clichés."

**Enigmatic, hallucinatory, poetic**  
Ba has 20 pieces currently on display at the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, and an exhibition opening in New York in September. In November, the Baltimore Museum of Art will host a retrospective of his work.

Enigmatic, even hallucinatory, and intensely poetic, his work is inhabited by dream-like visions with shimmering colors and hybrid creatures with the head of a goat, a ram, or Horus, the falcon-headed Egyptian deity.

His creatures embody the traumas inherited from colonialism, tyranny, violence, and North-South inequalities.

"These characters are half-man, half-animal," he said. "It is a nod to the natural within the human being, who I think behaves like an animal



Contemporary Senegalese artist, Omar Ba, paints onto a black canvas at his workshop in Sangalkam on May 9, 2022. (Photos: AFP)

in the jungle — we try to dominate others to be able to exist."

In his 2021 "Anomalies" exhibition in Brussels, Ba painted imaginary heads of state with their hands resting on a book symbolizing a constitution, a way to castigate the slew of African leaders who have recently modified constitutions in order to stay in power.

"We see that Africa wants to go elsewhere, wants to move," he said. "There are wars, overthrown heads of state, dictatorships ... the African artist should not remain indifferent to what happens in this continent — we must try to see what we can do to build, pacify and give hope."

Currently, Ba says he is focused on solutions, a theme apparent in his biennale exhibit.

One of his festival pieces features two figures with trophies for necks standing on an enormous globe and shaking hands. They are surrounded by laurel branches, symbolizing peace.

"It speaks of reconciliation, unity and an Africa that wins — not an Af-

rica that always asks or begs, but an Africa that participates in the concert of nations," he said.

The biennale, hosted in his home country for more than three decades, holds special significance for Ba. It was in Dakar where, after abandoning training to be a mechanic, he switched to art studies.

**Painting 'reinvented'**

Since his first exhibition in Switzerland in 2010, Ba, who now lives between Senegal, Brussels, and Geneva, has also exhibited at the Centre Pompidou in Paris.

For the past few years, he has worked from the peace and quiet of his Bambilor studio, in the middle of a mango plantation, an hour's drive from Dakar, sharing the land with cows, ducks and exotic flowers.

"Omar Ba has reinvented painting," said Malick Ndiaye, the biennale's artistic director.

"It is an innovative and powerful work that we are not used to seeing in terms of the technique he uses, the materials he uses and the com-

position and arrangement."

Highly sought-after by collectors, Ba is represented by the Templon Gallery, which has previously exhibited Jean-Michel Basquiat, Cesar and Andy Warhol.

"His work is much more complex than most things you see — his treatment of subject matter, his use of bestiary and color are strikingly strong and beautiful," said gallerist Mathieu Templon.

"He is one of the African artists with the most aesthetic and political work."

Ba's work has featured in the Louvre Abu Dhabi's permanent collection and the Louis Vuitton Foundation for the Contemporary Art's collection.

Speaking ahead of the biennale, the continent's largest contemporary art event, Ba said he was pleased to see young African artists "beginning to enter very large galleries and exhibit in museums that are recognized internationally."

"We must try to make Africa an essential place for art," he said.