

TODAY

Sunday, August 31, 2008
Saban 29, 1429 Hijri

BIRTHDAY



Queen celebrates birthday today

Today marks end of a year during which Her Majesty scored several achievements on national and international arenas | 2

BLAZE

'Dibeen forest fire still raging'



Royal Jordanian Air Force sends two helicopters to fight blaze | 3

PALESTINE



Egypt opens Rafah crossing

Cairo moots Arab force for Gaza | 4

WEATHER

It will be fair in the hilly areas and hot in other parts of the country with winds northwesterly moderate to brisk at times. In Aqaba, it will be hot with winds northerly moderate and seas calm.

Min./Max. temp.		
Amman	22/33	Jordan Valley 26/40
Aqaba	28/40	Hilly Areas 19/28
Deserts	21/37	

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RELIGION

Moon sighting to determine start of fasting month

By Mohammad Ghazal

AMMAN — Chief Islamic Justice Ahmad Hilayel has called on citizens to look for the hilal (crescent), which marks the beginning of the holy month of Ramadan, at today's sunset.

Hilayel will himself head a team of scholars, including astronomers, and officials to watch for the new moon and then announce the outcome of the centuries-old ritual.

If the sighting is confirmed today, Muslims in Jordan will start fasting on Monday, otherwise, the fasting month will begin on Tuesday.

According to Islamic law, hilal sighting at dusk on the eve of 30th of Shaban (the 8th month of the lunar Islamic calendar) is the only methodology to determine the beginning of Ramadan, head of the Islamic Project for the Monitoring of Crescents, Mohammad Shawkat, said Saturday.

Shawkat told The Jordan Times from

Qatar that sighting the moon can be by the naked eye or through a telescope.

"Although Jordan is advanced in terms of using technology to monitor crescents, the country does not rely on the astronomical calculations in line with a prophet's saying that the start and the end of the month is based on the actual sighting of the moon," he said.

Shawkat said there is no problem religion-wise if Muslim nations start their fasting month at a different day.

Emad Mjahed, former vice president of the Jordanian Astronomical Society and an expert in astronomy, said the Islamic Fiqh (jurisprudence) Council has met several times over the past few years and called on the Islamic nation to use astronomical calculations to check on the validity of any witness who testifies to spotting the crescent.

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A man shops for dates in one of Amman markets on Saturday. Muslims usually break their daylong fast with dates

King concludes tour

AMMAN (Petra) — His Majesty King Abdullah on Saturday concluded a several-day tour which included Russia, Turkmenistan and France.

The King, who arrived home yesterday, held talks with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin on means to enhance bilateral ties in various fields as well as the latest regional developments and efforts to achieve peace and stability in the Middle East.

The King and Medvedev commended the high level of Jordanian-Russian relations and emphasised their willingness to activate and foster ties, especially in the economic field.

During his visit to Turkmenistan, the Monarch discussed with Turkmenistan President Qurban Gali Bardi Mohammedov issues of mutual concern and ways to boost cooperation between the two countries.

In Paris, the King met with French President Nicolas Sarkozy and discussed bilateral issues, the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and latest regional developments.

King Abdullah and Sarkozy attended the signing of a nuclear agreement with France and a memorandum of understanding with the French company, Areva, on nuclear cooperation. On the sideline of his visit, His Majesty addressed the annual conference of MEDEF, a forum on regional and international political and economic challenges.

Government mulls new oil shale proposal

By Hani Hazaimeh

AMMAN — Jordan might start producing oil from oil shale in commercial quantities within three years instead of seven years as previously estimated if a company makes good on a deal to be concluded soon, a top government official has said.

"A specialized company has contacted the government re-

cently expressing its interest to invest in the Kingdom's huge reserves of oil shale," the official, who preferred to remain unnamed, said on Thursday.

He added that the government will likely sign a memorandum of understanding with the company, which he declined to name. He said the firm would be relying on Russian techniques in ex-

tracting oil from oil shale.

The official stressed that the memo will include incentives for the company if they could produce oil in three years. However, he added that the contract would entail a penalty clause if the deadline is not met.

He noted that the company will be given a different location than the one currently allocated for an Estonian com-

pany, Eesti Energia, which has had decades of experience in Estonia.

Under separate agreements with the Natural Resources Authority (NRA), Eesti Energia, Brazilian firm Petrobras, Jordanian-British Jordan Energy and Mining Limited, Royal Dutch Shell Oil and a Saudi firm are all currently examining separate blocks in Al Atarat and Lajoun areas for oil

shale extraction.

According to NRA, some 40 billion tonnes of oil shale exist in 21 sites concentrated by the Yarmouk River, Buweida, Beit Ras, Rweished, Karak, Madaba and Maan.

While the resource can be found as shallow as 40 metres below the surface in the west and south, in the east and north of the Kingdom, it is at very deep levels.

CUISINE

Iraqi dishes to add more flavour to Ramadan meals

By Taylor Luck

AMMAN — When citizens are heading to restaurants for iftar this Ramadan, many will turn to a cuisine that is quickly taking a foothold in the Jordanian diet.

With the influx of Iraqis residing in the Kingdom, dozens of distinctive Iraqi restaurants have sprouted up in Amman and elsewhere, serving up dishes such as maskouf, the traditional Mesopotamian dish of grilled freshwater fish.

According to the Jordan Restaurants Association (JRA), there are 14 rated Iraqi restaurants in Amman alone, ranging from 1-4 stars, all registered within the last few years.

This number, however, does not include the scores

of late-night takeaway stands that have spread in various neighbourhoods in the capital and other towns.

Some of the medium-sized establishments have grown rapidly, such as Qasim Abu Kas, whose shawarma and kebabs have become the cornerstone of the night scene in Rabia, serving hundreds of customers a day, according to restaurant staff.

Hussein, a 40-year-old owner of a butchery and an adjacent fast-food restaurant also in Rabia, has spent the last two years serving up kebab wrapped in traditional Iraqi flat bread, thicker than the standard pita, and qoozi, a stuffed lamb dish popular in the Gulf.

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Customers walk into an Iraqi restaurant in the west Amman district of Rabia this weekend



Members of the US-based Free Gaza Movement who arrived in Gaza in two boats on Saturday, and two Palestinian women, one in a wheelchair, raise their hands waiting to be permitted by Israeli soldiers to approach the Erez Crossing between the northern Gaza Strip and Israel, Friday

Peace pirates declare Gaza mission 'huge success'

By Michael Jansen

LARNACA — The Free Gaza and the Liberty sailed into Larnaca port late Friday after twice breaking the Israeli siege and blockade of the strip.

On board were seven Gazans who had been trapped there and 31 human rights workers from a dozen countries.

The return trip was a second challenge to Israel because the Palestinians left without Israeli exit visas. Since occupying Gaza in 1967, Israel has directly or indirectly exercised full control over everyone and everything entering and exiting the enclave.

Musheir Farra, who was born and raised in the central Gaza town of Khan Younis and now resides in Sheffield in the UK, said: "For the first time in my life, I went to Gaza without being humiliated, without having

to ask Israel for permission. We did it. We finally did it. And now others must join us and do it as well."

While in Gaza, he visited his father and siblings and the grave of his mother, who died five years ago.

The boat people and passengers were handed long stemmed roses and bouquets when they alighted from the two Greek flagged vessels.

The activists brandished red Palestinian diplomatic passports issued by the Hamas government in Gaza. At the back were the first ever exit stamps from Gaza port fixed by a Palestinian administration as the boat people were the first travellers to depart directly from Gaza.

Saed Mosleh, a teenager who lost a leg to an Israeli tank shell in 2006, and his wheelchair were lifted gently off the Liberty onto the dock. His father, Khaled, a farmer from Beit Hannoun, stood by proudly as the boy respond-

ed to journalists' questions. "I am happy and overwhelmed to be in Cyprus. There are many wounded people like me in Gaza. I hope the international community will take a stand so they can leave for treatment. I want to get an artificial leg so I can have a chance of walking again." Although it is possible to secure simple artificial limbs in Gaza, his case requires special handling because his leg was severed at the hip.

He failed in an attempt to sue the Israeli government for compensation because his family could not pay 25,000 euros in cost.

Maha Darwish and her four children were met at the quay by her brother, Ayman Soboh, a businessman who resides in the Cypriot port city of Limassol. "I have not seen my sister in 10 years," he said.

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A masked Iraqi soldier listens during a briefing of the security preparations for the hand over of the Anbar province in Ramadi, 100km west of Baghdad, Saturday

Diyala Kurds, Baghdad in dispute over government buildings

Gov't to clear out squatters to encourage people who are legal owners of their homes to return

ERBIL (AFP) — Tension flared Saturday between Baghdad and Iraq's northern Kurdish administration

after Iraqi forces ordered Kurdish political parties to vacate their offices in Diyala province, an official said.

"The crisis erupted after the Iraqi army entered without coordinating with Kurdish leaders and ordered the Kurdish parties to vacate the public buildings in Khanaqin," said Fuad Hussein, a senior Kurdish official.

Khanaqin, northeast of Baqouba in the central province of Diyala, is a flashpoint district subject

to frequent attacks by insurgents.

The district, which includes a string of villages and some of Iraq's oil reserves, is home to about 175,000 people, most of them Kurdish Shiites.

During the Arabisation policy of Saddam Hussein in the 1980s, a large number of Kurdish Shiites were displaced by force from Khanaqin. They started returning after the fall of Saddam in 2003.

In June 2006, the local council of Khanaqin proposed that the district be integrated into the autonomous Kurdish adminis-

tration in northern Iraq. Tension which had been simmering since the local council issued its demand was given fresh impetus mid-August when the defence ministry ordered Kurdish peshmerga forces who had been providing security in Khanaqin to be replaced by Iraqi troops.

Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri Maliki then issued an order that all public buildings occupied "illegally" across Iraq must be vacated — prompting the latest demand that officials from the Kurdish parties leave their offices.

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