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E-Newsletter

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Nobel laureates convene in Petra May 17

AMMAN — His Majesty King Abdullah hosted an array of Nobel laureates and key world personalities on May 17 at a meeting in Petra, “to share their views and create new insights into global concerns.”

Participants ranging from former US President Bill Clinton, the Dalai Lama and Shimon Peres to US movie star Richard Gere and prominent scientists, came with recommendations on how best to address challenges facing humanity in this age. Follow-up teams were formed to ensure the message is conveyed to decision-makers across the globe.

Officials said the timing of the conference, ahead of the May 20-22 World Economic Forum (WEF) at the Dead Sea, provided added value to the meeting of Nobel laureates.

Finance Minister Bassem Awadallah said the WEF meeting will provide the Petra conference participants with an opportunity to present their conclusions and vision to world and business leaders gathering at the Dead Sea, in addition to Arab education ministers and their counterparts from G-8 countries who are meeting on the sidelines of the forum.

The Nobel laureates' conference was co-hosted by the US-based Elie Wiesel Foundation for Humanity, founded by Elie Wiesel and his wife, Marion, soon after he was awarded the 1986 Nobel Prize for Peace. The foundation seeks to combat “indifference, intolerance and injustice through international dialogue and youth-focused programs that promote acceptance, understanding and equality,” according to the foundation's website.

More than 1,300 participants confirm attendance at WEF

AMMAN — More than 1,300 participants have confirmed their attendance at the World Economic Forum (WEF) Dead Sea 2005, which will take place this weekend.

According to Finance Minister Bassem Awadallah, who is in charge of the WEF portfolio, the list of participants includes key politicians and businessmen from the Middle East, Africa, Asia, EU and the US.

Over three days, attendees will engage in discussing a wide spectrum of topics under the theme “seizing the moment,” he said.

Topics will focus on key issues affecting the Middle East including the situations in Palestine, Iraq and

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Lebanon.

Main sessions will focus on building peace and stability in the region, reform, competitiveness, water security, education, economic growth, women, media, oil, technology, global nuclear risks, infrastructure, microfinance, small-and medium-sized businesses, and international cooperation.

Awadallah added that during the summit, several initiatives and agreements, regarding the Red-Dead canal, qualifying industrial zones, education in the Arab world, as well as the announcement of large-size investments in Jordan and a Palestinian-Israeli initiative will be put in place.

The meeting will be co-chaired by Peter Brabeck-Letmathe, chairman and chief executive officer of Nestle - Switzerland, Brian C. Bruce, group chief executive of Murray & Roberts Holdings - South Africa, Victor L. L. Chu, chairman and chief executive officer of First Eastern Investment Group- Hong Kong, Ibrahim Dabdoub, chief executive officer of National Bank of Kuwait, Maurice Levy, chairman and chief executive officer of Publicis Group - France, Marilyn C. Nelson, chair and chief executive officer of Carlson Companies - USA, and Lubna Olayan, chief executive officer of Olayan Financing Company - Saudi Arabia

The summit will be preceded by a meeting of Arab and Group of Eight education ministers who will draft a strategic plan for improving education in the Arab world and will be followed by a meeting of Nobel prize winners in Petra who will gather to discuss key issues affecting the world.

22 stone heads of ancient gods unearthed in Petra

AMMAN — Archaeologists discovered the ruins of an ancient Nabataean monument during an excavation at the Petra Archaeological Park last week.

Patricia Bikai, who headed the excavation team that made the discovery, said they initially thought the building was either a shrine or a royal residence.

However, after further examination they identified the monument as a banquet hall, which was decorated with over 22 stone heads of ancient gods.

Bikai, an archaeologist at the American Centre of Oriental Research (ACOR), added that the monument, which dates back to the first century, was only found last week after her team had been digging in the area for the past four years.

The reason the significance of the site had not been realised earlier, she explained, was because the remains of the building, which had probably collapsed after a major earthquake in 363 AD, were buried in its basement that was covered by sand.

The heads were on the capitals of the columns around the main room, said Bikai, adding that she had never seen anything like it in Petra before.

"I was not surprised to discover the building," Bikai told The Jordan Times. She was, however, amazed to find such a large collection of heads, and all in one place. She said the rich find is a treasure for Jordan.

The excavation team unearthed a total of 22 stone heads, each unique and representing a different figure, Bikai said, adding that they had so far identified around eight to 10 of them.

The Jordan News Agency, Petra, listed these as Hermes, Aphrodite, Zeus, Hercules, Apollo, Bacchus, Artemis, Demeter, and Poseidon.

In April last year, French archaeologists unearthed the head of a marble statue believed to be that of Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius, in front of Qasr Al Bint in the ancient city of Petra.

Identified stone heads

- Zeus - King of Olympus, god of the sky and storms.
 - Poseidon - God of the sea, earthquakes and horses
 - Demeter- Goddess of agriculture
 - Aphrodite - Goddess of love, beauty and fertility.
 - Apollo - God of music, prophesy and healing
 - Artemis - Goddess of the hunt and protector of women in childbirth
 - Hermes - Messenger of the gods.
 - Bacchus - God of wine, mysteries, and theatre
 - Hercules- Son of Zeus and a mortal woman called Alcmene. Hercules was the only ancient hero to eventually become a god.
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King orders immediate steps to facilitate travel, custom procedures

AMMAN (Petra) — His Majesty King Abdullah on Thursday ordered immediate measures to facilitate travel and custom procedures at airports and border crossings.

King Abdullah told top government and security officials as well as private sector representatives at a meeting that he will personally follow-up on the issue.

“I want to see tangible results on the ground soon,” the King said at the meeting.

He stressed that tourists and investors visiting the Kingdom should be treated “in a civilised manner that reflects Jordanian values and hospitality.”

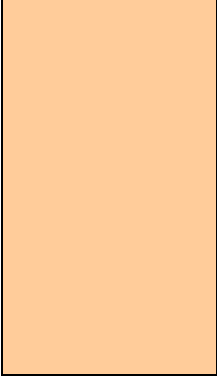
The Monarch called for upgrading border crossings and training their staff to “receive Jordan's guests with smiles and shining faces.”

Urging plans to attract more tourists, King Abdullah said border crossing employees should be picked in line with their capabilities. He added that the staff should be provided with a convenient working environment and incentives.

The King noted that such issues were highlighted by the 2004-2010 National Tourism Strategy, which, he said, requires more coordination and cooperation between the government and private sector to be implemented. The six-year plan was launched during last year's World Economic Forum at the Dead Sea and was approved by the Cabinet.

Interior Minister Awni Yarvas briefed the meeting on measures taken to facilitate the flow of passengers and goods, particularly on the border with Iraq — which needs JD600,000 to be rehabilitated until establishing a JD60 million new crossing.

For his part, Director of the Public Security Department Lieutenant General Mohammad Aitan said that the PSD increased the number of border police, who are to be trained on how to deal with passengers. He added that 1,500 university graduates were recruited to work at border crossings.



Minister of Tourism and Antiquities Alia Hattough-Bouran, meanwhile, outlined promotion campaigns conducted by the Jordan Investment Board in seven Arab Gulf states, highlighting Jordan's tourism attractions.

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