



King Abdullah II of Jordan at the White House in July 2007 with George W. Bush. JOSHUA ROBERTS/GETTY IMAGES

King of Jordan pessimistic about Mideast peace

By **GIDON BELMAKER**
Epoch Times Staff

The King of Jordan, Abdullah II, criticized Israel's "provocation" in an interview with the Wall Street Journal published on Monday. The king said he will bring up his concerns during his planned trip to the United States next week.

The king said that he was once

hopeful about the possibility of peace, but now he is one of the most pessimistic people regarding peace between Israel and the Palestinians.

"I was extremely optimistic by the vision he [Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu] had for peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians and the Israelis and the Arabs. However, I have to say that over the past 12

months, everything I've seen on the ground has made me extremely skeptical," he said according to the official Jordanian news agency, Petra.

King Abdullah referred especially to Israel's building in the eastern part of Jerusalem, considered by Israel as part of its capital but by most countries as occupied territory. The king warned that Jerusalem is like

a powder keg that can "ignite Muslim frustration and anger all over the world."

The king called on Israelis to embrace the peace process with the Arab world, warning of the possible alternatives to peace, among them international isolation, another round of violence, and destabilization.

"The Israelis have a major challenge on the future of their existence.

Wouldn't it be better today when you're in a stronger position to make peace not only with your neighbours but with the whole Arab-Islamic world," he said.

King Abdullah also addressed Jordanian-Israeli relations saying they are at an all-time low. "The political trust is gone, there is no real economic relationship between Jordan and Israel," he said.

Severe drought dries up Thai crops

By **ANDREY VOLKOV**
Epoch Times Staff

Thailand farmers say the second rice crop in the northern province of Chiang Rai is perishing from water shortages caused by a severe drought.

Farmers expected the dry season to come late this year, but it started earlier instead. Officials say that the drought may become the worst in decades.

According to the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization, the El Nino phenomenon is most likely responsible for this season's dryness in the Indochina region.

Local farmers usually take water from the Kam River to irrigate 40,000 acres of land, but the river has already started to shrink.

"I do not know how the government can help solve these problems, as the drought is becoming stronger. They have not yet found an alternative source of water," said local farmer Prasept Raphchak, according to an NDTV report.

To save the second rice crop, farmers are using well water, which is also not enough, he said.

Water levels in the Mekong River, Southeast Asia's largest river, have dropped to as low as 13 inches—the lowest in 50 years.

According to the Mekong River Commission (MRC), whose members include Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam, more than 60 million people rely on the river, which is the world's largest inland fishery, producing an annual estimated catch of 3.9 million tons.

Vandi Intara, deputy head of Chiang Saen District in Chiang Rai Province, says that the residents of villages located along the Mekong River are using small water pumps, which can irrigate only 80 acres of land per day.

The government has declared 36 provinces in the north, central, and east regions of the country as drought affected.

The harsh dry season is adding to the woes of the current government, which is also dealing with a major political crisis. Since March 12, intense anti-government protests by the "red shirts" have gripped the capital, making it difficult for the government to function effectively.

The drought has affected the agriculture industry in the entire country. Crop failure in Thailand, the world's largest rice exporter, could cause global rice prices to rise, international suppliers have warned.

Earlier in the week, MRC countries blamed Chinese dams higher up on the Mekong for water shortages in northern Thailand and Laos.

However, at the MRC meeting in the Thai coastal town of Hua Hin on April 5, China's observer delegation rejected the criticism, saying that it was not to blame for the regional drought affecting millions of people, reported the Bangkok Post.

China itself is suffering continued drought in the southwest that is affecting more than 50 million people in the provinces of Yunnan, Guangxi, Sichuan, Guizhou, and the city of Chongqing.

Discontent in China over the artificial causes of the drought, sky-high food prices, and unsatisfactory disaster relief is increasing. Meanwhile, the state-run media continues to praise government relief efforts.

The southwest region of China has experienced low rainfall and high temperatures since the fall of 2009, according to Chinese media reports.

According to statistics, as of March 17, about 17.6 million acres of crops in China were affected by the drought, among which some 380,566 acres yielded zero production, causing a direct economic loss of \$2.8 billion.



An anti-government protestor gestures in front of a burning car during clashes near the presidential administration in Bishkek April 7, 2010. At least 17 people were killed and 142 injured in clashes between riot police and opposition protesters in the capital of Kyrgyzstan on Wednesday, the Kyrgyz Kabar news agency said.

REUTERS/VLADIMIR PIROGOV

Uncertainty follows Kyrgyzstani revolt

By **ANDREY VOLKOV**
Epoch Times Staff

After days of violent clashes and chaos in Kyrgyzstan, anti-government protesters claimed they had toppled the government of the former Soviet Republic on Wednesday, but, at the time of this report, the true state of affairs is far from clear.

Kyrgyzstan Primer Minister Daniyar Usenov is reported to have resigned, while the president, Kurmanbek Bakiyev, has refused to capitulate. According to Kyrgyzstan news agency Kabar, the president and defense minister went to their southern residency in the city of Osh and are preparing for new plans to preserve their power.

The head of the "transitional government" was named as Social Democratic Party leader, Rosa

Otunbaeva, the BBC reported, quoting the Reuters agency.

According to Otunbaeva, people are organizing across the capital to take control of the situation, but national military forces are still facing off against protesters and do not seem ready to put down their guns.

The United Nations, the United States, and other countries have repeatedly stressed their concerns about the ongoing anti-government demonstrations and are urging all parties to show respect for rule of law and to engage in peaceful talks to resolve the dispute.

Five years ago, in 2005, the same scenario occurred in Kyrgyzstan, when the current president, Kurmanbek Bakiyev, was in opposition and did not agree with the results of the election that gave Askar Akaev the presidency.

But Bakiyev's rule turned

authoritarian with people's rights, opposition parties, and media freedom being constantly suppressed.

This time around, the protests in the capital and other provinces have grown more aggressive and widespread in the impoverished mountainous country of 5 million people, particularly after 10 opposition leaders were detained. Those detained have now been released, according to media reports.

On Tuesday, several thousand opposition supporters reportedly stormed the police station and provincial government offices in the northeast city of Talal. A similar incident happened in the southern town of Naryn, where protesters are said to be holding talks with the governor regarding transferring power to the opposition.

The government has reacted severely, firing on protesters in

Bishkek. In clashes on Wednesday, riot police used guns, tear gas, and concussion grenades to crack down on rock-throwing protesters, leaving dozens killed and injured.

There has also been an information blockade inside the country, with several Internet media and TV stations blocked, although some outlets have resumed broadcasting.

An estimated 10,000 protesters were demonstrating in Bishkek in the central squares, in front of parliament and at the other state offices, leaving buildings burned and destroyed.

Opposition supporters sought the downfall of President Kurmanbek Bakiyev due to widespread anger over soaring utility costs, oppression of civil rights, and the closing of several opposition newspapers and opposition parties.

Boston man sentenced to hard labour in North Korea

By **STEPHEN JONES**
Epoch Times Staff

A Boston man has been sentenced to eight years in a North Korean gulag after illegally crossing the border into the communist country.

Aijalon Mahli Gomes, a 30-year-old English teacher who had been working in Seoul, South Korea, is the fourth U.S. citizen to have been arrested for trespassing in the past year.

He was said to have acknowledged his wrongdoing at Pyongyang's Central Court on Tuesday, reported North Korea's official news agency in a brief dispatch.

Gomes was sentenced to eight years of "hard labour" and fined \$700,000 for the illegal entry, which took place on Jan. 25.

Thaleia Schlesinger, a spokeswoman for Gomes' family, said in Boston that they were "disturbed" by the verdict.

"The family has no comment beyond that they are praying for him and hoping for his return home as soon as possible," she said.

"Needless to say, they are disturbed [by the sentence] but they are hopeful that he would be returned home to them and they are praying for that."

It is unclear what may have motivated Gomes to enter the country. Seoul-based activist Jo Sung-rae said that he may have been inspired by the actions of Robert Park, who crossed the border into the country last Christmas to highlight the lack of human rights under the communist regime. He was released after 40 days.

Analysts said that Gomes may too be released soon as Pyongyang is keen to improve relations with the United States.

"The North is not going to hold him for eight years," professor Kim Yong-Hyun of Seoul's Dongguk University told AFP news agency.

"It is likely to suspend the implementation of the sentence and expel him as a goodwill gesture toward the United States."

A spokesman for the State Department did not immediately comment on the verdict.

President Sarkozy hits back against rumours

By **AURELIEN GIRARD**
Epoch Times Staff

PARIS—Rumours about the private life of French President Nicolas Sarkozy and his wife, former top model and singer Carla Bruni, have become a state affair in France with the presidential spokesman calling them a "plot" aimed at discrediting the president.

On Tuesday, French police were asked by a Paris public prosecutor to investigate the origin of rumours that first appeared on March 10 on a blog hosted by Journal du Dimanche newspaper.

The complaint was filed by Hachette Filipacchi Associates (HFA), which owns Journal du Dimanche. The French media has speculated that Sarkozy is behind

HFA's complaint, a charge his office denies.

Two managers of the Web site have already been fired for repeating the rumors that allege infidelity on the part of both Sarkozy and Bruni. The French press as a whole did not publicize the rumours, but the international media did—and on a large scale.

President Sarkozy, who first ignored the rumours, responded curtly when he was asked about them by a journalist during a press conference in London on March 12.

"You apparently don't know that the schedule of a president is tight," answered Sarkozy.

"I don't have a second, not even half a second to lose with such flights of fancy."

On the same day, State Secretary Chantal Jouanno who was also

'I don't have a second, not even half a second to lose with such flights of fancy.'

— President Nicolas Sarkozy



French President Nicolas Sarkozy and first lady Carla Bruni-Sarkozy. OLIVIER LABAN-MATTEI/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

implicated in the affair, told Liberation newspaper that the rumor was "ignominious, because it is an abuse made against my honour and that of my family."

Sarkozy's media adviser Pierre

Charon cranked up the heat on the scandal in an April 3 interview with Rue89 Web site saying, "This ignominy is a declaration of war. We will go to the end so that this never happens again. As it

is often said, fear has to switch sides."

Charon hypothesized further that there could be "an organized plot with financial transactions backstage."

"The fact that such rumours have been spread in U.K., Germany, and Switzerland can lead us to think so, at a time when France is preparing to, in 2011, assume the G20 presidency," he said.

The suggestion is that Sarkozy could be the target of a plot because he supports regulating global capitalism.

One name that keeps surfacing in the French media is former Minister of Justice Rachida Dati, who, according to Le Journal du Dimanche, both Sarkozy and the national secret services suspect as being behind the so-called plot.

In a press release, Dati said she was "indignant against allegations by some press services that she could be involved in any way in the absurd and unacceptable rumours of the presidential couple's private life."