

'Vote for the most deserving'

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Over 750,000 voters are set to elect members of Majlis A'Shura for its tenth term on Sunday. Experts expect good voter turnout, considering the significance of this pivotal democratic exercise, while urging citizens to vote wisely.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, academicians and citizens expressed enthusiasm about their participation in this national duty.

Dr Ahmed al Bulushi, Dean of College of Engineering at National University of Science and Technology, emphasised the importance of the elections. "The act of voting is a significant democratic exercise that aids national development and supports government decision-making. The individuals elected to the Majlis A'Shura should be well-suited for the crucial work ahead and fulfil the nation's aspirations."

He added that the upcoming term is critical due to the legisla-



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DR AHMED AL BULUSHI

tive projects slated for debate. "It's crucial for citizens to elect members who fulfil our hopes and contribute constructively to Oman's development. The efficiency of the shura is intrinsically connected to the qualifications of its elected members. Hence, I urge the electorate to make judicious choices, devoid of regional



or tribal prejudices." Echoing Bulushi's sentiments, Dr Ahmed Said al Jahwari, a legal consultant, commended the outgoing Majlis A'Shura members for their contributions to policy-making and developmental projects across the sultanate. Elaborating on the significance of the elections for the tenth-

term, Jahwari highlighted the role of the newly elected members in implementing Oman Vision 2040 - a national blueprint for comprehensive development and improving living standards. "The government will submit various legislative proposals to the shura that span the economic, social, cultural and administra-

tive spheres which will inevitably affect citizens, either directly or indirectly," Jahwari added. Underscoring the need for informed voting, he said, "It's crucial to cast votes for candidates who possess diverse expertise - be it scientific, political or cultural - to aptly represent us and achieve our goals. The criterion

for selection should be competence." Yahya al Hassani, a government employee, urged comprehensive participation in the elections. "I've reviewed the candidates' manifestos and intend to vote for the most qualified," he said, highlighting the fact that elected members must have extensive educational qualifications and cultural awareness. However, challenges remain, particularly for female candidates. Intisar al Busaidy, a lecturer at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Muscat, expressed concern over social factors preventing women's participation. She pointed out that tribal affiliations, limited resources and traditional values can pose barriers. "Society should actively support women in achieving effective representation in governance," she said. "A diverse Majlis A'Shura makes for a more inclusive and representative decision-making body for the entire community."



Ana Escrogima

US Senate names envoy to Oman

Muscat - The US Senate on Wednesday confirmed ambassadors to Oman and Kuwait, filling two key posts in the Middle East as the region continues to be on the brink with the Israel-Hamas war raging on.

Ana Escrogima and Karen Sasahara were confirmed as ambassadors to Oman and Kuwait by voice vote.

Both ambassadors are career members of the US Foreign Service and have served previous posts in the Middle East and North Africa.

US President Joe Biden nominated Ana in January.

"Honoured to be confirmed by the Senate as the next US Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman. I'm looking forward to joining the President's team on the ground and supporting Secretary (Antony) Blinken's diplomatic efforts at such a consequential time for the region," Ana's LinkedIn profile read.

Ana was serving as consul general of the US Consulate General in Montreal, Canada.

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'Last' Beatles song set for release this week

Oman condemns Israel's war crimes; 7,703 killed in Gaza

Muscat - Oman strongly condemned the Israeli military's actions in Gaza for violating international and humanitarian law, calling these crimes of war and against humanity. The sultanate warned that Israel's planned ground operations could have significant regional

and global repercussions, jeopardising peace and stability. In a statement on Saturday, the Foreign Ministry urged immediate international intervention to halt the conflict and facilitate urgent humanitarian aid, in line with an October 27 UN General Assembly resolution.

H E Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, and Ayman al Safadi, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of Jordan, discussed the escalating situation in Gaza over phone on Saturday. Both reiterated the importance of continuing efforts at the

United Nations for a ceasefire and urged countries to convey the voice of truth and vote for the draft resolution, which Jordan presented to the UN General Assembly, on the need to protect civilians and adhere to legal and humanitarian obligations. The two ministers stressed

the significance of urgently delivering humanitarian aid, electricity and fuel to the residents of Gaza and stopping the war. The health ministry in Hamas-ruled Gaza stated on Saturday that at least 7,703 people have been killed in the war with Israel that erupted on October 7.

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'Commandos' return 62,000 turtles to sea

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Environment Authority's (EA) 'Turtle Commandos Programme' has succeeded in guiding over 62,000 turtles back into the sea until the end of the third quarter of this year.

The Turtle commandos also rescued 66 large turtles that were stuck in fishermen's nets. For the protection and safe movements of this species, they collected 3,282 bags of waste and 534 fishing nets from the sea and the beaches, and prevented 7,225 cars from entering the beaches at night where turtles come to rest and hatch.

An official at EA informed that the third phase of the 'Turtle Commandos Programme' for the



protection, control and monitoring of sea turtles, is continuing with the participation of local and international volunteers.

The EA official added that the team and volunteers succeeded in guiding 62,882 turtles back into the sea, after they had lost

their way.

The third edition of the programme commenced in June, with its ambit extending across

three sites - the Ras al Hadd Turtle Reserve, the Masirah Island and the Daymaniyat Islands Nature Reserve.

Environment Authority's 'Turtle commandos' also rescued 66 large turtles that were stuck in fishermen's nets

This initiative, focused on monitoring and safeguarding endangered sea turtles and preserving the country's biodiversity, will continue its efforts till the end of December this year, the EA informed.

The programme also achieved several set objectives, including many completed campaigns and awareness activities on the im-

portance of sea turtles among 25,635 people. These people were also made aware of the environmental laws and guidelines.

The 'Turtle Commandos Programme' aims to encourage youth to volunteer for environmental causes, rid beaches of fishing and plastic waste, implement workshops to find solutions to challenges that threaten turtles, enhancing public awareness regarding the significance of sea turtles and inspiring youth to volunteer in environmental conservation.

"The programme also focuses on finding solutions to several challenges that threaten turtles, such as environmental degradation, and contribute to their reproduction and environmental preservation," said the official.

Food security lab to kick off today

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-Up Unit and the Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR) are jointly organising a two-week long 'food security lab' from Sunday.

The lab will be held in cooperation with the National Programme for Investment and Export Development 'Nazdaher' and the National Employment Programme, the ministry informed.

The lab aims to strengthen

the food security sector in the sultanate by highlighting the available investment opportunities, addressing challenges, and proposing effective solutions.

Dr Masoud bin Suleiman al Azri, Director General of Planning, said that the laboratory aims to continue creating new investment opportunities in the sector, focusing on modern technology-based investments, creating new job opportunities, and enhancing existing professions. "Additionally, it aims to create opportunities across the entire supply chain and empower the sector by offering incentives for

economic diversification."

The objective is to attract investments to the food security sector, with a focus on innovation and modern technologies, he added.

"The goal is to promote local and foreign investments in the food security sector to achieve Oman Vision 2040, enhance the competitiveness of local products, implement a local content policy, develop a food security strategy, and localise high-tech projects in the sector."

The Food Security Laboratory operates on four pillars. The first one - Investment Pillar - focuses

on cataloging investment projects and securing the necessary approvals to address the challenges they encounter.

The Local Content and Enablers Pillar is dedicated to formulating an action framework and an executive plan for the ministry's local content.

The third pillar - the Food Security Strategy Pillar - is actively involved in preparing a detailed plan to implement the national food security strategy. The Modern Technology Pillar is dedicated to enhancing production efficiency through the implementation of adaptive technologies.

Illegal to abandon vehicles in public places: Muscat Municipality

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Muscat Municipality has reiterated that abandoning cars in public places is illegal and urged people not to cause any inconvenience by doing so.

In a statement, Muscat Municipality said that the practice 'is illegal' and called on vehicle owners to avoid leaving cars neglected. The municipality made its intent clear to combat negative impacts of abandonment of vehicles in public places owing to

health, environmental, social and economic reasons.

Listing out the health reasons, the municipality pointed out that the abandoned vehicles often become the breeding place for rodents, insects and mosquitoes, which transmit diseases.

On the environmental front, harmful oils, fuels and liquids from abandoned vehicles go into the ground and pollute the groundwater. This causes damage to plants as well as environmental pollution, it noted.

Abandoned vehicles can also

be an eyesore for they not only spoil the beauty of a place, they also distort the image of a city life and its culture. It also has its economic implications as the value of the real estate surrounding the area dips, besides creating a compelling situation for the municipality to undertake efforts to address the damage resulting from such occurrences. Leaving vehicles unattended for an extended period of time violates the administrative decision issued on the regulation of neglected vehicles in Muscat governorate.

Tender Announcement

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12/2023/PEIE/HQ-12	Madayn general insurance for 2024-2025	09-11-2023	27-11-2023	Insurance and finance services	First and above	150

Interested Companies registered with Tender Board may obtain the Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document. Tenders should be submitted on line on given website.

1. Tender Inquiry: All correspondence pertaining to the TENDER Inquiry must be online at eTendering System.

2. eTendering System Inquiry: All correspondence pertaining to the eTendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om and +968 24402200 Note: Bid Submission will be online only.

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Vintage car rally revs up tourism across Oman's scenic destinations

Our Correspondent
Muscat

For three days, from October 23 to 25, a convoy of 47 classic cars took a scenic journey across eight governorates in Oman, covering 1,400km.

This rally, initiated by the Oman Automobile Association and the Sabq Old Cars Endurance Organisation, aimed to highlight the sultanate's rich tourist and heritage sites. Government sponsorship came from the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism as well as the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth.

Kicking off in Buraimi, the rally navigated through Dhahirah, Dakhiliyah, North and South Sharqiyah, Muscat, South Batinah, before finally crossing the finish line in North Batinah. Along the way, participants visited various heritage and tourist landmarks, showcasing Oman's diverse attractions.

"This event serves multiple purposes, primarily highlighting Oman as a tourist destination while offering a unique platform to vintage car enthusiasts," said Sulaiman bin Abdullah bin Ali al Rawahi, Director General of the Oman Automobile Association. He emphasised that such events

This event primarily highlighted Oman as a tourist destination while offering a unique platform to vintage car enthusiasts

SULAIMAN AL RAWAHI

contribute significantly to the country's tourism sector and play a vital role in promoting motor sports.

Not just a leisurely drive, the rally had broader ambitions. It aimed to introduce tourists to

the cultural and historical fabric of Oman. Events like these are integral to the sultanate, offering economic, cultural, and social benefits, while also promoting a sense of shared heritage among participants and spectators alike,

added Rawahi.

Its worth noting that the rally began in Jordan and passed through Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates before making its grand entrance into the sultanate.

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Unlocking wonders of Oman in 60 sec

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A YouTube series called *One Minute in Oman* is gaining enormous popularity in the country both among citizens and residents.

Showing the unseen beauty and cultural richness of Oman, the series provides captivating visual experience of the country's enchanting landscapes, and information on camping and trekking sites and places to explore, all within the span of a minute.

The creators want to showcase caves, beaches, cliffs, wadis and oases that are still unknown to most, even in Oman. Each minute compresses all the information of the location, including tips on how to reach, what to do and safety measures to be adopted.

The series is produced under the banner of Gargarah Oman YouTube channel and is the brainchild of Murtadha al Lawati.

"Our primary goal is to provide viewers a glimpse into the essence of Oman, condensing its wonders and uniqueness into bite-sized, immersive videos,"

ONE MINUTE
IN OMAN



(Supplied photos)

said Lawati, who wears the hat of director, producer and concept maker for Gargarah Oman.

By making these short videos, Lawati aims to spark curiosity, inspire wanderlust and promote a deeper understanding and appreciation of the country. "The concept of presenting Oman in one-minute videos emerged from our desire to capture attention in today's fast-paced digital landscape."

Lawati realised the fact that concise, visually captivating content has the power to engage

viewers and leave a lasting impression. "So I carefully selected and curated videos on a wide range of stunning locations and natural wonders. These allow viewers to experience the diversity of Oman in a compact format, encapsulated within a minute."

One Minute in Oman aims to inspire both local and international viewers to explore the wonders of the sultanate and increase tourism.

Its small team of creators uses DSLRs, Insta360, drones, GoPros

and mirrorless cameras to film and edits instantly with Final Cut Pro. Lawati does the editing himself for better creative control in story telling.

"As an explorer and travel blogger myself, I am constantly amazed by the hidden gem that is Oman. With *One Minute in Oman*, my ultimate goal is to share my sense of wonder and discovery with viewers, encouraging them to embark on their own journey of exploration and appreciation."

Through the captivating visu-

Our primary goal is to provide viewers a glimpse into the essence of Oman, condensing its wonders and uniqueness into bite-sized, immersive videos

MURTADHA AL LAWATI



steep hill, trekking through a desert, or finding the perfect vantage point, getting the shots I envision requires careful planning, physical exertion and adaptability," he explained.

Another challenge he encounters is ensuring that the camera does justice to the breathtaking scenery. "Sometimes, despite my best efforts, the camera fails to fully capture the grandeur and beauty of Oman's landscapes. In such cases, I find it necessary to re-shoot certain scenes to ensure that the final footage truly reflects

the magnificence of the surroundings."

One Minute in Oman serves as a quick snapshot of the remarkable places to visit in Oman. Lawati wants to expand the series from adventure spaces to exploring different themes, such as historical sites, traditional crafts and local cuisine. "This will offer viewers a broader understanding of Oman's diverse offerings and foster a deeper appreciation for its culture," he said.

<https://youtube.com/@Gargarahoman>

Urban October conference to focus on resilient, sustainable cities

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The inaugural 'Urban October - The First Gulf Housing Week' conference will begin on Sunday at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre. Held under the patronage of H H Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, the conference has been organised by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning.

Aligned with United Nations' World Habitat Day, World Cities Day and World Architecture Day - all celebrated in October, the conference aims to advance urban sustainability. Its guiding theme, 'Building Better Cities, Enhancing Lives,' dovetails with the UN's 'Urban Economic Resilience' initiative.

The three-day conference will address four key sectors: housing, urban planning, future school buildings and city resilience.

More than 65 papers are



The three-day conference will address four key sectors: housing, urban planning, future school buildings and city resilience

scheduled for presentation, covering topics that range from sustainable cities to environmental balance and climate change mitigation. Notably, over 60 international and regional experts will contribute to the dialogue.

In a unique collaboration, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning will team up with the Ministry of Education to explore the future of educational buildings. They will present 24 papers focusing on design standards,

site selection and the educational environment's impact on students.

An event called 'Urban October Exhibition' is planned alongside the conference, featuring 35 booths highlighting innovations and services in housing and urban planning. It will also mark the debut of 'Gulf Urban Hackathon' in which Gulf youth interested in urban planning will offer innovative solutions for the Oman's urban challenges.

On the sidelines, winners of an architectural design competition will be announced. Launched in July, the competition intends to provide modern architectural maps for citizens under the housing assistance programme, thereby elevating design efficiency.

The conference and its related events are anticipated to draw more than 50,000 visitors, including a diverse array of local, Gulf and international participants.

CAA begins trial run of 500km radius weather radar in Muscat

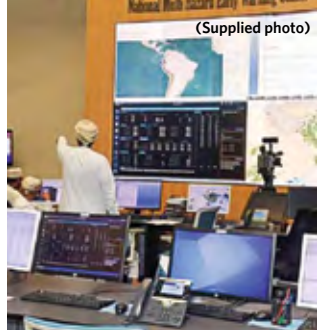
Our Correspondent
Muscat

As part of its efforts to monitor climate change and activate early warning, Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has begun trial operations of its weather radar in Muscat.

The authority announced trial operations of Muscat Radar on its website recently.

"Muscat Radar will contribute to enhancing and developing the services of the National Early Warning Centre for multiple risks by monitoring rainfall at various levels and improving the accuracy of real-time forecasts," Abdullah bin Rashid al Khudairi, Director General of Meteorology at CAA, stated on 'X'.

The initial activation of Muscat Radar, covering a radius of 500km, includes the governorates of Muscat, North Sharqiyah, South Sharqiyah, Al Wusta, North Batinah, South Batinah and parts of Dhofar and



(Supplied photo)

Buraïmi.

"Muscat Radar is a positive addition to improving and developing the mechanisms of monitoring, alerting and forecasting at the National Early Warning Centre."

According to Khudairi, Oman has developed an integrated infrastructure for early warning systems and work is underway for the modernisation of the satellite and numerical models to achieve accurate forecasts.

Installation of the early warning system 'Muzn' helped enhance the level of accuracy of

meteorological services, which allowed government entities, communities and individuals to act and prepare better for adverse weather conditions.

The 'Muzn' programme aims to develop the quality of alerts, meteorological services, early warning and improve systems and devices at the National Multi Hazard Early Warning Centre, said a statement issued by CAA.

'It has already resulted in improving the technology solutions and digital transformation processes, and training and qualifying the national cadre, technically and practically.'

Oman launched the National Multi Hazard Early Warning System in 2015. The system, implemented with the technical support of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of Unesco, was designed to respond to natural hazards, including tsunamis, cyclones and flash floods.



(ONA)

Oman, Iran hold meeting to explore cooperation in space sciences

Muscat - The Sultanate of Oman and the Islamic Republic of Iran are exploring ways of expanding cooperation, especially in fields of space sciences, technology and joint training between higher education academic institutions.

Discussions were held when H E Dr Rahma Ibrahim al Mahrouqi, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, received Issa Zarepour, Minister of Information and Communications Technology of Iran, on Thursday.

The two sides reviewed bilateral relations and areas of cooperation in various fields related to higher education, research and innovation.

They also discussed forming

joint research teams to contribute to the economy and the process of knowledge-transfer.

Further, the two sides discussed setting up innovation startups, holding joint events in the fields of research and innovation, and the possibility of establishing branches of Iranian universities in Oman.

The meeting was attended by H E Dr Saif Abdullah al Hadabi, Undersecretary for Research and Innovation in the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, and H E Dr Ali Amer al Shidhani, Undersecretary for Information Technology in the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology.

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Sohar Port signs deal for \$300mn polymer manufacturing plant

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Sohar Port and Freezone signed a sub-usufruct agreement with Universal FINE Chemicals SPC to establish the world's second-largest polymer manufacturing plant at Sohar Port with an estimated investment of approximately \$300mn.

The agreement signing ceremony took place under the patronage of H E Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy, in the presence of H H Sayyid Faisal bin Turki al Said, chairman of Universal FINE Chemicals SPC.

The project, which will be set up on a land area of 240,000 square meters, will serve diverse applications, including energy production, agriculture, wastewater management, and the pulp and paper industry in the Middle East, North and South America, and Europe.

This major project not only demonstrates a commitment to technological advancement but also enhances the development of the industrial landscape, Sohar Port and Freezone said in a press statement. This pioneering project further underscores the commitment of both entities to



The project will serve diverse applications, including energy production, agriculture, wastewater management, and the pulp and paper industry in the Middle East, North and South America, and Europe

advancing technology and fostering sustainable growth across various sectors.

This new agreement positions Sohar Port at the forefront of global industrial chemical exporters. The significant foreign direct investment (FDI) from

Singapore and China enhances the attractiveness of Sohar Port as a premier investment destination, reinforcing its global competitiveness.

The polymer manufacturing project is expected to enhance supply chains, attract related in-

dustries, and strengthen local trade networks, making a significant contribution to economic prosperity. By integrating into Sohar Port's Petrochemical Cluster, the project not only amplifies its significance but also attracts downstream industries, stimulating regional business growth.

Commenting on the importance of the agreement, Echo Liu, CEO of Universal FINE Chemicals SPC, said, "This partnership marks a significant milestone in our pursuit of excellence. By leveraging the strategic advan-

tages provided by Sohar Port and its proximity to key markets, we aim to redefine industry standards and contribute to sustainable progress."

The polymer plant will be equipped with innovative technologies and will produce polyacrylamide and related monomers. The main plant product, polyacrylamide, is used for enhanced oil recovery, water treatment, the paper industry, agriculture, and other applications.

Emile Hoogsteden, CEO of

Sohar Port, said, "Through our signed agreement with Universal FINE Chemicals SPC, we are not only shaping trade dynamics but also driving Oman's Vision 2040 forward. This collaboration is a testament to our unwavering commitment to innovation-led growth, propelling our nation to the forefront of global progress. By revolutionising trade and fostering economic prosperity, we're turning Oman Vision 2040 aspirations into tangible reality."

Sohar Port emphasised that the scope of this major project extends beyond regional boundaries, with a strategic focus on serving markets in the GCC, North and South America, and the European Union.

By strategically targeting these diverse and expansive markets, the collaboration between Sohar Port and Universal FINE Chemicals SPC aims to establish a strong foothold in key economic zones, effectively delivering innovative solutions and contributing to economic growth on a global scale. This global outlook reflects the partnership's commitment to not only fortifying the local economy but also creating a lasting impact on a broader international stage.

FDO takes part in China Expo

Muscat - Fisheries Development Oman (FDO) and its subsidiary companies recently wrapped up a triumphant exhibition at the prestigious 26th China Fisheries & Seafood Expo, held from October 25 to 27, at the Hongdao International Convention and Exhibition Center (HICEC) in Qingdao, China.

The event garnered remarkable attention and left attendees enthralled by the extensive array of offerings and compelling investment prospects within Oman's thriving fisheries sector. Fisheries Development Oman's presentation of products adhering to international standards solidified its pivotal role in the global fisheries industry.

This event, renowned as one of the world's premier seafood exhibitions, attracted an astonishing number of attendees, marked by more than 40,000 visitors and active participation from over 1,600 companies. Beyond being a platform to showcase FDO's products and services, the expo acted as a magnet for investment opportunities.

Asyad ranks as 4th most sustainable logistics firm in region

Muscat - Asyad Group, Oman's global integrated logistics provider, was ranked as the fourth most sustainable transport and logistics company in the region, according to Forbes Middle East's Sustainability Leaders list.

The prestigious ranking reflects the group's efforts to implement cutting-edge technologies and practices across its business units, contributing to shaping Oman's sustainable future.

The Forbes Middle East's Sustainability Leaders list recognises the companies at the forefront of the Middle East's momentous sustainable transformation and economic diversification.

Categorised into 11 key sectors, the list considers a range of factors in its classification, from positive environmental impact in relation to company size, to the transparency of the companies' sustainability report, sustainability-related initiatives, cross-sector sustainability collaborations,

and a clear roadmap towards net zero.

Since its inception in 2016, Asyad has developed a state-of-the-art integrated logistics ecosystem that has become a hallmark of efficiency and sustainable growth. Driven by its unwavering commitment to Oman's net zero emissions goal by 2050, Asyad Group has prioritised sustainability in its business strategy and culture, enabling it to achieve a Gold Rating on the Oman Sustainability Index for two consecutive years.

Asyad Group has also become a leading example of sustainability-oriented organizations in Oman, developing a robust ESG framework in 2022 and placing it at the heart of its business transformation.

Through its shipping arm, Asyad Shipping, the group became the MENA's first company to secure a sustainability-linked shipping deal worth \$35mn.

ONA



Marafiq's investments in Duqm water and electricity projects reach \$600mn

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Marafiq Company, a subsidiary of OQ Group, announced that it has implemented several water and electricity projects worth more than \$600mn in the Special Economic Zone in Duqm.

The company invested in these projects as part of the agreements it signed over the past years with the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ), the Authority for Public Services Regulation, and Nama Group.

In a statement to Oman News Agency, Eng Abdullah bin Mohammed al Hashmi, the executive director of Marafiq Company, confirmed that the company has invested more than \$600mn in Duqm so far.

He noted that Marafiq has completed the integrated electricity and water station project that provides electricity supply to the Duqm Refinery and the Omani Tank Terminal Company (OTTTCO), which operates the Ras Markaz oil storage terminal.

Marafiq has also implemented an 80MW electricity generation



station serving the Duqm Special Economic Zone. Hashmi said that this station will significantly contribute to reducing carbon emissions and providing more reliable electricity services.

He added that Marafiq also manages the drinking water sector in the Duqm Special Economic Zone by operating a water desalination plant. The company has also expanded the water net-

work to serve residential, commercial, tourist neighborhoods, and other areas. The length of the pipelines that transport water in the region is about 50 km, while the length of the water distribution network pipes is more than 131 km.

According to Hashmi, Marafiq is currently constructing a line linking the main tanks to the fishing port and the fish industries

area, after recently completing several projects to expand the water network in the region. The company also recently completed a project to connect the under-construction project of Vulcan Green Steel Company to the water network.

Marafiq, as per Hashmi, contributed approximately \$56mn in local value-added through the integrated electricity and water

plant, and also contributed another \$10mn in value-added projects for the drinking water sector.

He praised the company's efforts in the field of Omanisation and training, and said that Marafiq is continuously working to implement training programmes for Omani youth to hone their capabilities and enable them to manage the company's business with efficiency and proficiency.

He explained that the company has trained 60 Omani youth in various technical and artistic fields, and a large number have been attracted to work in the integrated power and water plant. The company also developed a training programme coupled with employment for the people of Duqm.

In the field of social responsibility, Hashmi said that Marafiq, in cooperation with the German University in Oman (GUTech), implemented a training programme for school students in the Duqm Special Economic Zone, which was implemented in the UK last summer. It also provided other programmes to several schools in the region.

A year after Elon Musk's Twitter takeover, X remains mired in turmoil

San Francisco, US - A year ago Elon Musk purchased X, formerly known as Twitter, taking the platform on a journey that has resulted in lost money, advertisers and trust.

Musk closed the \$44bn deal on October 27, 2022, facing a lawsuit that held him to terms of purchase he was keen to escape.

In the days after his purchase, Musk quickly fired executives who had been running Twitter and took the publicly traded company private. He also laid off most of the San Francisco-based

company's workers, cutting ranks to fewer than 1,500 from 8,000.

Twitter employees were asked to commit unconditionally to their jobs and forego any notion of telecommuting. Former project manager Esther Crawford, who wrote online about her experience, said Musk replaced the company's family atmosphere with a climate of fear.

She described Musk as audacious but "moody," surrounding himself with "yes men" and making decisions on instinct.

In July, Musk did away with Twitter's globally recognised bird logo and changed the platform's name to X.

Misinformation

In the months following his takeover, Musk gutted content moderation restored accounts of previously banned extremists, and allowed users to purchase account verification, helping them profit from viral - but often inaccurate - posts.

Musk defended such changes in the name of free



Elon Musk

speech.

He disabled features put in place to prevent users from

being duped by false claims and put in new systems that encourage their spread, according to nonprofit fact-checking website PolitiFact.

Steps taken by Musk at X "have sparked increased sharing of misinformation and hate speech," PolitiFact said Monday in a report, echoing an array of groups tracking toxic content on social media.

The fast-evolving Israel-Hamas conflict has been seen as one of the first real tests of Musk's version of the platform

during a major crisis. For many experts, the results confirm their worst fears: that changes have made it a challenge to discern truth from fiction.

"It is sobering, though not surprising, to see Musk's reckless decisions exacerbate the information crisis on Twitter surrounding the already tragic Israel-Hamas conflict," Nora Benavidez, senior counsel at the watchdog Free Press, told AFP.

This month the European Commission announced an investigation into X for alleged dis-

semination of bogus information and terrorist content regarding the conflict between Israel and Hamas.

X chief executive Linda Yaccarino has signaled that the platform is serious about trust and safety, but researchers have voiced pessimism, saying the site has abandoned efforts to elevate top news sources.

Over the past year, the platform's advertising business partially collapsed as marketers soured on X.

AFP

US economy grows at fastest rate in 2 years

Washington, US – The US economy heated up more than expected in the third quarter, government data showed, as a resilient job market helped boost consumer spending, holding off the prospect of a recession.

Analysts have raised fears of a downturn as the US central bank started lifting interest rates rapidly last year to fight inflation, but the world's biggest economy has so far defied these predictions.

A key factor is the strong labor market, which has provided healthy wage growth, allowing consumers to keep spending even as they draw down on pandemic-era savings.

Gross domestic product growth came in at an annual rate of 4.9% for the July to September period, the quickest pace since late 2021, according to Commerce Department data.

The latest GDP figure is a significant bump from the second quarter's 2.1% expansion, and much higher than the 4.0% analysts expected.

It also comes as President Joe Biden works to bolster sentiment on his handling of the economy as he seeks reelection in 2024.



"I never believed we would need a recession to bring inflation down – and today we saw again that the American economy continues to grow even as inflation has come down," Biden

said in a statement. He called this "a testament to the resilience of American consumers and American workers," touting the effects of an economic agenda he dubs "Bidenomics."

The GDP pickup reflects "accelerations in consumer spending, private inventory investment, and federal government spending" among other factors, said

the Commerce Department.

Growth too slow?

"The US economy continued to show remarkable resilience over the summer with surprisingly robust job growth and an unexpected consumer spending spree," said EY chief economist Gregory Daco.

"While these signs of economic strength will fuel speculations that the economy is reaccelerating, we do not expect such strong momentum will be sustained," he told AFP.

A 4.0% leap in consumption propelled GDP growth – con-

this year.

"As excess savings built up during the pandemic continue to drop and wage gains decelerate, it is difficult to see how this pace of consumer spending growth can be maintained," said economist Mike Fratantoni at the Mortgage Bankers Association.

"We are now seeing some consumer stress in the rising delinquency rates for credit cards and auto loans," he added.

Apart from the drawdown in savings, employment gains are likely to cool while borrowing rates have risen further for consumers and businesses, said Na-

I never believed we would need a recession to bring inflation down – and today we saw again that the US economy continues to grow even as inflation has come down

JOE BIDEN

can lower inflation without triggering a recession.

Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen was positive on the chances of that happening.

"What we have looks like a soft landing with very good outcomes for the US economy," she told Bloomberg on Thursday.

But if trends persist, policymakers could consider further interest rate hikes to rein in price increases in a sustainable way.

"A year-end recession now appears unlikely," said Michael Pearce of Oxford Economics.

But he cautioned: "There is still a strong case to expect a sharp downturn over coming quarters."

Bostjancic expects a "mild recession" in 2024, with the largest contraction taking place in the second quarter next year.

This comes as "tighter financial and lending conditions choke off economic activity," she said.

A separate report on Thursday showed that durable goods orders rose 4.7 percent in September, on the back of a surge in volatile transportation orders for aircraft.

AFP



Q2 profits leap nearly 30% at India's Reliance

New Delhi, India – Indian oil-to-telecom conglomerate Reliance Industries saw second-quarter profits soar nearly 30%, it said Friday, driven by higher revenues across its telecommunications, retail, and oil and gas operations.

Reliance is India's most valuable company by market capitalisation, and led by Asia's richest man Mukesh Ambani.

The company would complete a pan-India rollout of 5G services by December this year, he said in a company statement, making it the "fastest roll-out of a 5G network across a large nation."

Net profit attributable to owners for the period reached 174bn rupees (\$2.1bn), the company said, up 27.3% on a year earlier, although reports said it missed estimates.

Its telecom arm Jio Platforms saw subscriber numbers and average revenue per user both rise, it said, while turnover at its retail operations jumped 18.8 percent.

The oil-to-chemicals segment had turned in a "resilient performance", chairman Ambani said, "led by strong growth in fuel demand in a supply-constrained market".

The Mumbai-headquartered enterprise has been driven by its oil and petrochemicals businesses, before diversifying in recent years.

Shareholders had approved

the appointments of Ambani's children Isha, Akash and Anant to the board, the company said separately Friday.

Their 66-year-old father was embroiled in a bitter battle with his brother Anil over control of the company and may be looking to avoid a repetition in the next generation.

Reiance would complete a pan-India rollout of 5G services by December, making it the 'fastest roll-out' of a 5G network across a large nation

The heirs were already "leading and managing key businesses" of Reliance including in retail, digital services and energy, the company said when the move was announced in August.

A report by Bloomberg last week quoted Institutional Shareholder Service, an international proxy advisory firm, as recommending against the appointment of the youngest son, 28-year-old Anant Ambani, because of his age and limited experience.

AFP

ECB holds rates for first time in over a year

Berlin, Germany – The European Central Bank left interest rates unchanged at its meeting on Thursday, bringing an end to a series of hikes that started in July last year.

Policymakers had raised rates at each of their last 10 meetings as they sought to rein in soaring inflation driven in large part by surging energy prices in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

But ebbing price pressures and signs of weakness in the economy prompted the ECB to hold interest rates at their current levels, while the bank assesses the outlook for the eurozone.

The decision not to hike again still left the ECB's key deposit rate at four percent – its highest mark in the history of the central bank.

Eurozone inflation had "dropped markedly", the ECB said in a statement.

Having hit double-digit highs at the end of last year, the annual rate of increase in prices sat at 4.3% in September.

The figure was still more than twice the bank's two-percent target, while inflation was still expected to stay "too high for too long", the bank noted.

All the same, the eurozone economy appeared "weak", ECB President Christine Lagarde said after the meeting held exceptionally in Athens instead of Frankfurt, where policymakers usually gather.

Middle East conflict

The decision to hold interest rates was a "no brainer" for the ECB, according to ING analyst Carsten Brzeski said.

"The economic situation in the eurozone is deteriorating stronger and faster than the ECB had anticipated," he said.

Business activity in the bloc slumped in October, while eurozone banks have been tightening their lending criteria for



The decision not to hike again still left the ECB's key deposit rate at 4.0%

households and businesses in response to hikes.

The ECB's monetary policy moves were being "transmitted forcefully" into the real economy, pushing down inflation but also dampening demand, the central bank said.

There was still "more to come" when it came to the impact of higher rates on inflation, Lagarde said.

At the same time, risks to economic growth in the eurozone remained "tilted to the downside", Lagarde said, especially if the impact of interest rate hikes proved to be "stronger than expected".

A weaker world economy would also drag on the currency bloc, Lagarde said, alluding to

the war in Ukraine and the recent outbreak of the conflict between Israel and Hamas, which has caused turbulence on oil markets.

"We are very attentive to the economic consequences that that could have, whether in terms of direct or indirect impact on energy prices, or the level of confidence," Lagarde said.

The ECB's long series of hikes has seen borrowing costs rise further and faster than ever before, lifting rates out of negative territory to a record high.

The central bank's guiding principle going forward was that rates would remain "higher for longer", ING's Brzeski said.

The commitment to keep rates high was important to bring inflation back to target, Deutsche Bank economist Mark Wall said.

"The question is, how long is sufficiently long?" Wall said.

AFP

COP 'cooling pledge' vows 68% emissions cut by 2050

Bangkok, Thailand – A "cooling pledge" to be unveiled at next month's COP28 climate summit will commit countries to slash cooling-related emissions 68% by 2050, according to a draft text seen by AFP on Friday.

But it remains unclear which countries will sign up to the pledge, and whether heavyweights such as China and India, where demand for air conditioning is growing fast, will participate.

Cooling methods currently account for over seven per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions, according to the United Nations.



They contribute to emissions because of the electricity needed to power tech such as ACs and fans, and because air conditioning and refrigeration generally rely on hydrofluorocarbons.

These are short-lived but

powerful pollutants that can have exponentially greater global warming effects than carbon dioxide.

The UN has said there are already an estimated 3.6bn cooling appliances being used globally, but that figure is expected to soar, with global energy demand for cooling tripling by 2050.

"Without policy intervention, direct and indirect emissions from air conditioning and refrigeration are projected to rise 90 per cent above 2017 levels by the year 2050," a UN report warned in 2020. The Global Cooling Pledge commits signatories to work on "reducing cooling-related emissions across all sectors by at least 68% globally relative to 2022 levels by 2050".

It acknowledges the rising numbers of heat-related deaths globally, and that nearly three bil-

lion people currently have inefficient cooling options.

But it suggests access to cooling can be expanded while reducing the sector's emissions through tools including more efficient air conditioners, buildings that use passive cooling, and a reduction in the most potent hydrofluorocarbons.

"Coordinated international action on sustainable cooling" can save the emission of 78bn tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent – a measure of greenhouse house emissions – by 2050, the pledge said.

AFP

Facebook-parent Meta profit jumps but it sees volatility in ad market

San Francisco, US – Facebook-parent Meta reported that its quarterly profit more than doubled from last year's figure as it looked ahead at a volatile ad market and lawsuits accusing it of profiting from "children's pain."

"Meta earnings looked pretty good," said independent tech analyst Rob Enderle.

"They have clearly cut back on the bleeding surrounding their

metaverse efforts and the company appears to be on a more even keel right now."

The tech giant said it made a profit of \$11.6bn as ad revenue climbed 23% to \$34bn when compared to the same period a year earlier.

"We had a good quarter for our community and business," said Meta chief executive Mark Zuckerberg.



The number of people using Facebook monthly rose slightly to 3.05bn in a year-over-year comparison while monthly active users of Meta's "family" of apps was 3.96bn in a 7% increase

from the same quarter in 2022, the company reported.

Meta said it had trimmed costs, with layoffs and other belt-tightening measures started last year providing "greater efficiency."

Meta had suffered a rough 2022 amid a souring economic climate and Apple's data privacy changes, which allowed users to block ad targeting, the pillar of

Meta's business.

Meta's vow of austerity on spending brought an unprecedented round of cost-cutting that saw the company lay off tens of thousands of workers since last November.

Chief financial officer Susan Li said during an earnings call that Meta is seeing "volatility" in an ad market that started to soften when the conflict between Israel

and Hamas began.

"It's hard for us to attribute demand softness directly to any specific geopolitical event," Li said.

"We have seen broader demand softness follow other regional conflicts in the past, such as in the Ukraine war, so this is something that we're continuing to monitor."

AFP

Chery's 26,000 patents highlight its R&D capability

Recently, Chery hosted the '2023 Chery TechDay' with the theme of 'Technology Within Reach'. The event featured multiple technical zones on-site, offering a comprehensive display of the latest advancements in Chery's technological progression. Notably, the dedicated 'Chery Patent Wall' served as a focal point for showcasing Chery's concentrated technological prowess.

Chery's steadfast adherence to an independent innovation strategy has resulted in autonomous R&D capabilities in complete vehicles, engines, and critical components.

Its portfolio of invention patents covers core technologies and key domains, encompassing traditional automobiles, new energy, intelligent connectivity, and autonomous driving.

Chery has already applied for and accumulated over 26,000 patents, placing it prominently in the industry. The company has received several 'National Scientific and Technological Progress Awards', and has been honoured three times as a national-level 'Innovative Enterprise', solidifying the designation of 'Tech Chery'.

As per the information un-



veiled at the '2023 Chery Tech Day', Chery has outlined its strategic plans for the next five years. The company is set to allocate over 100bn yuan towards R&D endeavors. Simultaneously, Chery will establish 300 'Yao Guang Laboratories' globally. These will primarily focus on breakthroughs in strategic tech-

nologies related to intelligent cabins and autonomous driving.

This concerted effort aims to establish the foundational elements necessary for crafting an internationally competitive brand with a global presence.

Chery's integration of advanced technological achievements into its products has

driven rapid sales growth. From January to September this year, Chery's cumulative sales reached 1.253mn vehicles, surpassing the total sales for the entire previous year. Recently, Kantar and Google jointly released the 2023 Chinese Global Brand Builders Top 50. Chery is ranked as the best Chinese global brand builder

in cars and 14th in the overall list and its brand power has achieved strong growth.

Chery Automobile took the first spot among all Chinese automotive brands in J.D. Power 2023 China Initial Quality StudySM(IQS). In Oman, Chery will soon be launched by Saud Bahwan Group.

NEW

IELTS One Skill Retake is here!

IELTS One Skill Retake

idp IELTS

IELTS One Skill Retake now available in Oman

Test takers in Oman preparing for the world's most popular English language test, IELTS, can now access a new feature to help them attain the score they need to achieve their global learning and career goals.

Now available in all IDP IELTS test centres in Oman, IELTS One Skill Retake enables test takers to retake one of the four skills (listening, reading, writing or speaking) if they did not achieve the score they aimed for the first time around.

IELTS One Skill Retake is accepted by UK Visas and Immigration, the Australian Department of Home Affairs, Australian Health Practitioners Regulation Agency and an increasing number of universities and institutions each month. Test takers can determine whether their institution accepts One Skill Retake.

Rashi Bhattacharya, area director - the UAE, Oman, Qatar, Turkey and Kazakhstan, IDP Education, said, "The launch of

IELTS One Skill Retake gives test takers an additional opportunity to achieve their study and migration goals. We listened to our test takers who told us that instead of having to retake the whole test, they wanted the ability to retake one skill of the IELTS test if they didn't get the score they were aspiring to on test day.

"IELTS One Skill Retake, which is available for both Academic and General IELTS, gives test takers in Oman a new option and increased flexibility as they get their plans on track. It is currently available at all IDP test centres across the country and will be introduced to more centres over the coming months," she added.

Test takers who choose an IELTS One Skill Retake will receive a second Test Report Form (TRF) with their new score that can be used for migration and study purposes. Depending on their score, test takers can choose whether they would like to use their old or new TRF for the skill they retook.

'Bank Muscat managed OQ Gas Networks IPO successfully'

Bank Muscat, the leading financial service provider in the Sultanate of Oman, announced that its Investment Banking Division successfully acted as the Issue Manager and Joint Global Coordinator for the RO288mn initial public offering (IPO) of OQ Gas Networks (OQGN) on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX). OQGN is the exclusive owner and operator of the company's natural gas transportation network.

OQGN offered a total of 49% of its total issued share capital equivalent to 2,122,005,720 shares at the top end of the price range i.e. 140 Baizas per share, implying a market capitalisation of RO606mn and marking the sultanate's largest IPO ever.

The offering included a Category I offer for institutional investors representing 40% of the total offer size, a sale to anchor investors representing 30% of the total offer size, and a Category II to retail investors representing the remaining 30%.

Saudi Omani Investment Company, a wholly owned entity of the Public Investment Fund of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Falcon Investments



Khalifa bin Abdullah Al Hatmi

LLC, a subsidiary of Qatar Investment Authority, the Sovereign Wealth Fund of the State of Qatar, and Fluxys International SA/NV have each participated with a 10% share of the issue volume and are anchor investors for this offering.

Total demand for OQGN shares amounted to RO4bn from local, regional and international investors.

Overall, the book for the IPO was c.14x subscribed led by marquee international investors including many first-time investors in Oman.

Expressing the success of the

IPO, Khalifa bin Abdullah Al Hatmi, Deputy General Manager, Investment Banking and Capital Markets, Bank Muscat, said: "We are pleased to have successfully managed the largest IPO ever in Oman and continue to support the vital part of Government of Oman's announced privatisation plan. The unprecedented investor interest in this IPO further strengthens our strong track record in the investment banking business.

"OQGN is the biggest capital market event in Oman in over a decade and we look forward to further supporting the capital market activity in the Sultanate through our suite of integrated solutions."

Bank Muscat was recently crowned The Best Investment Bank in Oman by the Arab Federation of Capital Markets, where it was recognised for providing innovative financing solutions designed to meet the financial requirements of investors.

The bank has also received various awards in recognition of its outstanding performance and its tireless efforts to upgrade banking services and facilities.

Honda unveils its first-ever hybrid car in the sultanate

OMASCO, sole distributor of Honda automobiles in the sultanate has announced the start of sale of one of its most sought-after vehicles, the Accord, whilst also marking the first time a hybrid (e:HEV) vehicle is available in Honda's line-up in Oman.

The all-new 2023 Honda Accord reinvigorates the midsize sedan segment with an elegant and sophisticated design and a fuel-efficient yet sporty and exhilarating driving experience. Now available in both a hybrid (e:HEV) and 1.5 Turbo engine, the Honda Accord delivers the ultimate driving experience whether buyers are looking for thrills, serenity or both.

The Accord reinforces Honda's 'Advanced and Sporty' brand ambition, featuring a state-of-the-art technology, unmatched driving experience and spirited on-road personality.

The Accord e:HEV invites drivers to embrace the perks of electrified motoring, including instant power delivery from a standstill. This cutting-edge self-charging hybrid generates its own electricity, eliminating the need to connect to external power sources - providing maxi-



mum energy efficiency with minimum hassle. The all-new Accord is truly the ultimate driver's hybrid.

The Accord e:HEV grades also offer driver-selectable drive modes, allowing drivers to tailor the driving experience based on personal preference and road conditions. By utilising the toggle switch located in the center console, the driver can effortlessly switch between four drive modes, which are Normal, Sport, Individual, and Economy.

The 2023 Accord comes standard with new and advanced active and passive safety technology to maintain its position as a safety leader, including en-

hanced Honda Sensing Suite of Driver Assistive Technology. It comes equipped with the standard 8 airbags, and rear seats occupant reminder feature.

An updated version of Honda's Advanced Compatibility Engineering (ACE) body structure is designed to exceed current and future crash test standards, including for oblique collisions. Intuitive technology has been smartly integrated into Accord with a focus on the driver, including a standard 10.2-inch digital instrument panel with unique display functions depending on powertrain. The multi-information display features user-selectable functions such as

Honda Sensing® settings, vehicle information and more.

It also features all-new elegant and sophisticated styling that further advances the new Honda design direction, with long, clean body lines and a strong, powerful front end with an upright grille and blacked out LED headlights.

A longer hood and a flowing fastback roofline create a premium silhouette. Along the roof line, Accord uses laser brazing technology, eliminating the need for roof moulding for a smooth and clean roof line. Distinctive horizontal LED straight-line taillights accentuate Accord's wide stance.

Oman Textile presents elegant drapes for 'unique personality in you'

NaseejOman, the flagship brand of Oman Textile Mills (OTM), has been defining the fashion landscape of Oman and GCC for over three decades with its wide range of Womenswear designs, colours, and prints.

Each design is a woven tale of modernity that entwines with Oman's rich culture and heritage to offer a range of exquisite dress materials that provide comfort, versatility, and style, empowering women to embrace and express their individuality.

Emphasising on the brand's commitment to empowering

women through fashion, Huda al Falahi, of OTM, says, "Today's woman knows what she wants. She is strong and independent, who uses her style as a means of self-expression and empowerment. Our aim is to ensure we continue to inspire and do our bit to support women achieve this sense of unique style through our designs."

Faseem P P, the Chief Marketing Officer of Oman Textile Mills, adds, "Our highly experienced in-house team of experts carefully curate designs that seamlessly blend ethnic charm of the sultanate's rich culture



and tradition with evolving modern flair in the fashion landscape. Our mission is to

empower every woman to feel beautiful, confident, and comfortable as she continues to

scale new heights every day."

Made from the finest, luxurious High Twist Cotton and spun Polyester yarns NaseejOman's highly popular Voile creations are brought to life through Flat Bed and Digital printing machines. Be it 100% Cotton or Polyester Voile, 100% Cotton Cambric, Lawn, and Satin or 100% Silk Satin, Chiffon, and Georgette, all come in multitude of captivating hues and designs, offering the best in fashion, comfort, and versatility.

The in-house design and technical teams offer a bespoke service that can help you create

co-branded textile products that include laysoo, lihaaf, and Scarves, all tailor-made to meet every fashionista's requirement.

All materials are meticulously manufactured in the mill in Rusayl, Muscat, which houses an impressive set up of state-of-the-art European production lines, including the best Shuttleless Projectile Looms in its weaving department.

Explaining the stringent manufacturing process, Devraj Mehta, Factory Manager, Oman Textile Mills, says, "Equipped with cutting-edge dyeing and finishing machines, as well as

screen and digital printing technologies in its Process House, OTM leaves no stone unturned in its quest for excellence. With an annual processing capacity of 6mn metres, OTM possesses the remarkable ability to dye and print a wide range of fabrics comprising various fabrics such as cotton, polyester, silk, and viscose.

"In addition, the mill is outfitted with specialized machinery designed to create high-value embellishments, including computerized embroidery, crystal embossing, gold foiling, and flock printing," he added.

ISRAEL-PALESTINE CONFLICT

Israeli strikes destroy ‘hundreds’ of Gaza buildings, say rescuers

Israeli strikes have killed 7,703 people, with more than 3,500 of them children

Ashkelon, Israel - Israel's army relentlessly hammered Gaza on Saturday after fierce overnight bombardment that rescuers said destroyed hundreds of buildings three weeks into a war sparked by the deadliest attack in the country's history.

Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdogan urged Israel to halt the attacks, while the families of Israeli hostages held by Hamas said they had been snubbed by the government when asking about their fate.

Israel unleashed its bombing campaign after Hamas gunmen stormed across the Gaza border on October 7.

The health ministry in the Hamas-run Gaza said Israeli strikes had killed 7,703 people, mainly civilians, with more than 3,500 of them children.

The conflict is the fifth and deadliest in Gaza since Israel unilaterally withdrew from the Palestinian territory in 2005.

The latest Israeli strikes against Hamas, the Islamist group that has ruled Gaza since



Smoke rises during an Israeli air strike in the northern Gaza Strip on Saturday (AFP)

2007, were the most intense since the war broke out. They coincided with ground operations. With tens of thousands of troops massed along the Gaza border ahead of an expected full-blown invasion, Israeli forces had also made limited ground incursions on Wednesday and Thursday.

"Hundreds of buildings and houses were completely destroyed and thousands of other homes were damaged," said Gaza Civil Defence spokesman

Mahmud Bassal.

The intense bombardment had 'changed the landscape' of northern Gaza, he told AFP.

Witnesses said most of the bombing was concentrated in the Jabaliya district of northern Gaza.

The strikes left wide craters in the streets and flattened many buildings in the area.

'Death is everywhere'

'The army entered the Gaza Strip and extended its opera-

tions' with tanks and artillery, Israeli military spokesman Daniel Hagari said on Saturday. Israeli fighter jets hit 150 'tunnels, underground combat spaces and additional underground infrastructure' and 'several Hamas fighters were killed', the army said.

Hamas's armed wing, the Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades, said late on Friday it was 'confronting an Israeli ground incursion' in Beit Hanoun in the northern Gaza Strip and east

Bureij in the centre.

Israeli warplanes flew overhead on Saturday and successive booms could be heard coming from Gaza, where many buildings lay in ruins, AFP journalists reported.

A thick haze of smoke covered Gaza and southern Israel after the night of heavy bombardment. "There are a large number of martyrs and a large number of survivors under the rubble, and we cannot reach them," a Gaza civil defence of-

ficial said.

"The stench of death is everywhere, in every neighbourhood, every street and every house," respiratory physician Raed al-Astal told AFP from Khan Yunis in southern Gaza.

Communications blackout

Hamas said all internet connections and communications across Gaza had been cut, accusing Israel of taking the measure to carry out strikes.

AFP journalists in Gaza confirmed they were only able to communicate in limited areas where they could connect to Israeli networks across the border.

Human Rights Watch warned the near-total telecommunications blackout in Gaza risked providing cover for 'mass atrocities'.

The Palestinian Red Crescent said the outage had disrupted ambulance services.

Lynne Hastings, the UN hu-

There are a large number of martyrs and a large number of survivors under the rubble, and we cannot reach them

CIVIL DEFENCE OFFICIAL

manitarian coordinator for the Palestinian territories, also stressed on X, formerly Twitter, that 'hospitals & humanitarian operations can't continue without communications'.

Between the bombardments and the fuel shortages, 12 of Gaza's 35 hospitals have been forced to close.

The UN agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, said it has had to 'significantly reduce its operations'.

AFP

'Potential for thousands more to die'

Geneva, Switzerland - The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk warned on Saturday there was the potential for thousands more civilians to die as Israel presses a ground operation in Gaza.

"Given the manner in which military operations have been conducted until now, in the context of the 56-year-old occupation, I am raising alarm about the possibly catastrophic consequences of large-scale ground operations in Gaza and the potential for thousands more civil-



Given the manner in which military operations have been conducted until now, I am raising alarm about possibly catastrophic consequences of large-scale ground operations in Gaza

VOLKER TURK

ians to die," Turk said.

"There is no safe place in Gaza and there is no way out. I am very worried for my colleagues, as I am for all civilians in Gaza."

The UN rights chief also condemned the Internet and telecommunications blackout that has hit the Palestinian enclave since Friday.

"Compounding the misery

and suffering of civilians, Israeli strikes on telecommunications installations and subsequent Internet shutdown have effectively left Gazans with no way of knowing what is happening

across Gaza and cut them off from the outside world," he said.

"Ambulances and civil defence teams are no longer able to locate the injured, or the thousands of people estimated to be still under the rubble.

"When these hostilities end, those who have survived will face the rubble of their homes and the graves of their family members," Turk said.

He called on all parties 'to do all in their power to de-escalate the conflict'.

AFP



Protesters gather with posters calling for the release of hostages held by Palestinian Hamas, during a rally in Tel Aviv, on Saturday (AFP)

Families of hostages scramble for answers

Tel Aviv, Israel - The families of 229 hostages seized by Hamas stepped up calls on Friday for Israel's government to outline plans for their rescue as troops expanded a devastating assault on the war-torn Gaza Strip.

As Israel intensified its overnight bombardment, the Hostages and Missing Families Forum, the main group representing those abducted by Hamas, sought an immediate meeting with ministers.

With the families expressing anger over 'absolute uncertainty regarding the fate of the hostages held, who were also subject to the heavy bombings', hundreds gathered in Tel Aviv on Saturday, threatening to stage street protests if there was no response.

"The families don't sleep, they want answers, they deserve answers," said Haim Rubinstein, 35, a spokesperson at the event.

Hostage families say they have had little to no contact with officials and have been left with excruciating uncertainty over the fate of their loved ones.

"We don't know anything about what happened to them. We don't know if they were shot, if they saw a doctor, if they have food," said Inbal Zach, 38, whose cousin of Tal Shoham was kidnapped from kibbutz Be'eri with six other family members. "We are just so worried about them."

The ongoing hostage crisis continues to be a raw nerve for many, with captives ranging in age from infants to the elderly along with others who have been gravely injured based on footage of their capture.

"The families need to know what is the plan because of what happened yesterday. This is something that puts hostages at risk," Rubinstein said.

To date, just four hostages have been freed, with 85-year-old Yocheved Lifshitz telling reporters she was led through a 'spider web' of tunnels deep under Gaza. "None of the war cabinet bothered to meet with the families to explain one thing: whether the ground operation endangers the wellbeing of the 229 hostages," the group said.

AFP

Settler kills Palestinian in West Bank

Nablus, Palestinian Territories - One Palestinian was killed on Saturday by an Israeli settler near the northern city of Nablus in the occupied West Bank, the Palestinian health ministry said.

Bilal Abu Salah, 40, was 'shot in the chest by a settler' in the village of Sawiya near Nablus, a ministry statement said. Sawiya mayor Mahmud Hassan said Abu Salah was killed while he was harvesting olives with other members of his family in their fields located not far from the security fence around Rechelim settlement.

"They were attacked by four settlers, and one of them who was armed with an M16 rifle opened fire at them without warning."

AFP

Music academy rocked by conflict

Berlin, Germany - On stage, the musicians of the Barenboim-Said Akademie in Berlin still play in perfect harmony. But inside, they are reeling.

The recent escalation of fighting between Israel and Hamas poses the greatest existential challenge yet for the music academy, founded to build bridges between young Israeli and Arab musicians.

"The situation has always been complex, but this is the biggest test since the academy was created in 2016," Michael Barenboim, a violinist and dean of the school, told AFP.

The Barenboim-Said Akademie was born out of a long partnership between Barenboim's father, the Israeli-Argentine pianist and conductor Daniel Barenboim, and the Palestinian-American scholar Edward Said, who died in 2003.

Students at the school receive a broad musical education but also attend classes in philosophy, history and literature in



This file photo shows Daniel Barenboim performing on stage during a concert at Olympiapark in Berlin on August 19 (AFP)

English.

Tuition and accommodation are free for the first two years and competition is tough, with only one in three or four applicants granted a place, depending on their instrument.

The current contingent of 80 students includes 17 Israelis and six Palestinians as well as young musicians from Egypt, Lebanon, Iran, Syria and Turkey.

"Emotionally, it's extremely

complicated for them' in a context where 'everyone knows someone who knows someone' directly affected by the conflict, said Michael Barenboim, 38.

A recent concert in Berlin gave the academy's students the opportunity to express their emotions.

Before the lights went down, flyers containing a message from the students were distributed to the audience.

"Our hearts are heavy; our minds are elsewhere with every single person affected by the devastating situation in Palestine and Israel," the message read.

"It is very difficult for many of us to be playing a concert right now. But even in this darkest hour, we will still follow in the footsteps of our founders, Daniel Barenboim and Edward Said," it said.

"May our music bring us together, may it heal a little piece of our hearts. At the end of the day, all we can do is hope for peace, freedom, and the safety of everyone."

A 19-year-old Palestinian student, who did not want to give his name, spoke of a 'hard atmosphere' in the school.

"It affects all of us," he told AFP. The young musician, who has been studying at the academy for two years, is from the West Bank and has friends in Gaza.

AFP



A pedestrian walks past the state-owned telecoms provider, Telekom Srbija head office in Belgrade on Thursday (AFP)

Tighter state grip on Serbian media looms

Belgrade, Serbia - Two controversial bills backed by Serbian lawmakers this week have sparked fears of more state control over the media and another setback for press freedom in the Balkan nation.

Parliament approved a law on public information and the media as well as another on electronic media on Thursday. If President Aleksandar Vucic signs the legislation into law, it will notably enable state-owned telecoms provider Telekom Srbija to acquire media outlets - something that was prohibited up to now.

The votes raise 'fears of state influence and state pressure' on the media, the president of the European Federation of Journalists, Maja Sever, told AFP.

The intention of the authorities is to 'legalise the role of the state... in (the) media market', opposition MP Robert Kozma, of the Green-Left Front party, told AFP after the vote. "And that means only one thing - the spread of media darkness," he said.

The information and communications ministry called the adoption of the two laws an 'important step towards the further

improvement of the media scene in Serbia'. The government said earlier this month that the new laws guaranteed freedom of opinion, expression and press 'in line with the highest international standards'.

'Dominant market position'
Telekom Srbija is the largest telecommunications operator in the country with nearly 53 per cent of users, official figures show. But it does not offer the independent N1 or Nova S television channels.

The European Parliament in May voiced concern about the 'dominant market position of Telekom Srbija, where the majority stakeholder is the state'. It also noted allegations 'that the ruling party is using it to increase its influence over the media market in Serbia'.

By allowing Telekom Srbija to establish and buy media outlets, Serbia, which aspires to join the EU, has shown it still 'selectively accepts European values and principles', said the Independent Journalists' Association of Serbia. AFP

US, China agree to work towards Biden-Xi meeting in November

Washington, US - The United States and China agreed on Friday to work towards setting up a meeting between the two countries' leaders next month, after President Joe Biden met Beijing's top diplomat at the White House.

Biden has invited Xi Jinping to San Francisco in November for the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit at a time of tense relations between the two powers. Xi has not yet confirmed he will come.

After Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi held talks with Biden and other senior US officials in Washington, the White House said both countries had agreed to keep up 'high-level diplomacy' to try to smooth ties. The two sides 'reaffirmed' that they were 'working together towards a meeting between President Biden and President Xi Jinping in San Francisco in November', the White House said in a statement.

A senior administration official said the White House was leaving it to Beijing to confirm that Xi would come, but 'we are making preparations for just such a meeting.'

An official readout of talks between Wang and US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan released by Beijing confirmed 'both sides agreed to make joint efforts to realise a meeting between the two heads of state'.

In a separate readout of his meeting with Biden, Wang was quoted as saying his visit was aimed at 'working to stop the decline in China-US relations, stabilise them, and bring them back to the track of sound and steady development'.

Biden told Wang that Washington and Beijing must 'manage competition in the relationship



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Chinese FM Wang Yi look on during a meeting at the US Department of State in Washington, DC, on Friday (AFP)

The biggest threat to peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait is Taiwan independence... biggest challenge to China-US relations is also Taiwan independence

WANG YI

responsibly and maintain open lines of communication', according to the White House. With the Israel-Hamas conflict raging in the Middle East, Biden also 'underscored that the United States and China must work together to address global challenges', it added in a statement.

US officials had 'expressed our deep concern with the situation (in the Middle East) and pressed China to take a more constructive approach', including talking to its allies there, the senior administration official added.

Wang has been on a two-day visit to Washington during which he also met with Secretary of State Antony Blinken, the latest in a series of high-level contacts between the United States and China.

His meeting with Biden had been expected after Blinken met Xi in Beijing in June, but it had not previously been confirmed.

After meeting with Blinken on Thursday, Wang acknowledged that differences would still come up, but said China would respond 'calmly'. Biden and Xi have

had no contact since a meeting in Bali in November 2022.

Relations have been tense for years between the world's top two economies as they vie for influence in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond, and as Beijing boosts cooperation with Russia in a bid to reduce US dominance.

A particular point of contention has been Taiwan, the self-ruling democracy claimed by Beijing. "The biggest threat to peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait is 'Taiwan independence', and the biggest challenge to China-US relations is also 'Taiwan independence', which must be resolutely opposed," Wang said in the readout of his meeting with Sullivan.

In his meeting with Biden, he also stressed the centrality of the 'One-China principle' to US-China ties, according to the for-

eign ministry readout.

The United States and China have also traded barbs over the conflict in the Middle East, where Biden has been Israel's foremost ally.

US officials have repeatedly spoken of creating 'guardrails' with China to prevent worst-case scenarios and have sought, without success, to restore contact between the two militaries.

Biden on Wednesday warned China of US treaty obligations to the Philippines, which said that Chinese vessels deliberately hit Manila's boats in dispute-rife waters - an account contested by Beijing. Speaking alongside Australia's prime minister, Biden vowed to compete with China 'every way according to the international rules - economically, politically, in other ways'.

AFP

Tehran metro incident: Teen dies

Tehran, Iran - An Iranian high-school student died on Saturday, nearly a month after falling into a coma in disputed circumstances on the Tehran metro, media in the Islamic republic said.

"Armita Garawand, a student in Tehran, died an hour ago after intensive medical treatment and 28 days of hospitalisation in intensive care," reported the Borna news agency affiliated with the youth ministry.

The 17-year-old ethnic Kurd, who was declared 'brain dead' a week ago, had been hospitalised at Fajr Hospital in Tehran since October 1 after she fell unconscious on the metro.

The circumstances of the incident have been disputed,

with metro surveillance footage, which had been broadcast on state television, showing the unveiled teenager being evacuated after fainting in a carriage.

It came just over a year after the death of Mahsa Amini, also a young Iranian Kurd, following her arrest by morality police for allegedly breaching Iran's strict dress code for women, in an incident that sparked mass protests across the Islamic republic. During the months-long demonstrations, several hundred people were killed, including dozens of security forces, and thousands were arrested.

Since last year's mass protests, women have been increasingly flouting the dress code, which requires head coverings and modest clothes.

But authorities have also sought to sharpen penalties on those seen to be violating the code, which has been in place since 1983, following Iran's 1979 Islamic revolution.

Garawand's case was first reported on October 3 by Kurdish-focused rights group Hengaw, which said she had been critically wounded during an incident on the underground train network.

Authorities say she suffered a sudden drop in blood pressure and denied that any 'physical or verbal altercations' had taken place between her and other passengers. But rights groups have said the teen was critically wounded during an alleged assault by female members of Iran's morality police. AFP

FIRST SNOWFALL OF THE SEASON



A couple walks through the snow-covered Zaryadye Park as snow falls for the first time of the season in downtown Moscow on Friday (AFP)

Suspect in mass shooting dead, drawing 'sigh of relief' in Maine

Lewiston, US - The suspect in a mass shooting that killed 18 people in the US state of Maine has been found dead, the state's governor said on Friday, ending a two-day manhunt that mobilised hundreds of law enforcement agents and set jittery residents of the northeastern state on edge.

Robert Card, a 40-year-old Army reservist, died of a self-inflicted gunshot wound, and his body was discovered at 7:45pm (2345 GMT), Maine public safety commissioner Mike Sauschuck said.

Card is believed to be the perpetrator of a rampage on Wednesday evening that left 18 people dead and 13 others

wounded in a bowling alley and a bar-restaurant in this hard-scrabble city.

"I'm breathing a sigh of relief tonight knowing that Robert Card is no longer a threat to anyone," governor Janet Mills told a hastily called news conference.

The sentiment was echoed by US Senator Susan Collins of Maine, who said on X, formerly Twitter, that President Joe Biden called her 'to tell me the perpetrator of the heinous attacks in Lewiston had been found.'

Biden said the mass shooting brought 'a tragic two days - not just for Lewiston, Maine, but for our entire country'.

"I will continue to do every-



Police officers block traffic after suspect Robert Card was found dead in Lisbon, Maine, on Friday (AFP)

thing in my power to end this gun violence epidemic. The Lewiston community - and all Americans

- deserve nothing less," Biden said in a statement released by the White House.

Authorities on Friday identified the victims, ranging from a husband and wife in their 70s, to a 14-year-old boy killed alongside his father. The killing spree in a bowling alley and bar-restaurant marked the deadliest mass shooting in the US this year.

Card's body was found in Lisbon Falls, southeast of Lewiston near the Androscoggin River, authorities said. US media said his body was found near a recycling centre that was Card's place of employment before he lost his job there.

Roads leading to the site were blocked by police on Friday evening, an AFP journalist saw.

Sauschuck said he could not

immediately say when Card shot himself.

The shooting - and Card's fugitive status - had brought dread to southern Maine over the past two days. Authorities had described Card as 'armed and dangerous'.

Earlier on Friday, authorities said they were chasing down more than 530 tips and leads on Card's possible whereabouts.

Card is an army reservist, but had not been deployed in any combat zone. US media reported that he had recently been sent for psychiatric treatment after he said he was hearing voices.

This latest shooting is one of the deadliest in the United States

since 2017, when a gunman opened fire on a crowded music festival in Las Vegas, killing 60 people.

Earlier on Friday, law enforcement agents deployed along the Androscoggin River - near where Card's white SUV was found - and divers using sonar entered the river to look for evidence - or a body.

Hours before the break in the case, Sauschuck announced the lifting of a lockdown in the area around Lewiston that had shuttered schools and businesses.

Lewiston residents voiced anxiety over how the search for Card would play out.

AFP

Islamic State group claims deadly blast at sports club in Kabul

Kabul, Afghanistan - The Islamic State militant group claimed on its Telegram channel on Friday that it was behind a blast at a sports club that killed four people in the Afghan capital the night before.

The Sunni Muslim extremist group said it had used a parcel bomb that 'IS fighters placed in a room where Shiites gather'.

The explosion occurred on Thursday evening at a commercial centre in the Dasht-e-Barchi neighbourhood of Kabul, an enclave of the historically oppressed Shiite Hazara community, according to police.

Police were still investigating the cause of the explosion, Kabul police spokesman Khalid Zadran said on Friday afternoon in a message to reporters.

He added that seven people were injured in the blast, revising the initial toll of two dead and nine injured. Taliban authorities did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the Islamic State (IS) claim.

The explosion ripped through a sports club several floors up in the commercial centre, blowing out all the sides of the space and shattering windows and causing damage throughout the block,



Afghan athletes and police personnel inspect the Mellat boxing club, a day after an explosion took place at the site in the Dasht-e-Barchi neighbourhood of Kabul on Friday (AFP)

AFP journalists saw on Friday.

An instructor at the club, which holds training in combat sports, told AFP the blast happened at the end of a busy boxing session that usually hosted some thirty people.

"The explosion was extraordinarily strong. The walls fell, the metal doors, glass and windows were broken," said 26-year-old Sultan Ali Amiri, who was not in the club when the blast occurred. "There has been a lot of damage, punching bags and almost everything is destroyed."

AFP journalists saw several heavy bags used for combat sport training on the floor of the club, others still hanging and pocked with fragments from the blast. Afghanistan's Hazaras have regularly faced attacks in the country.

They have been persecuted for decades, targeted by the Taliban during their insurgency against the former US-backed government as well as by IS.

The Islamic State group, which considers Shiites heretics, has carried out several deadly attacks in the same area in recent years targeting schools, mosques and gyms.

AFP

Bangladesh police break up anti-PM protest with tear gas, rubber bullets

More than 100,000 supporters of opposition parties rallied to demand resignation of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina

Dhaka, Bangladesh - Police fired tear gas and rubber bullets at huge crowds of Bangladesh opposition supporters on Saturday to break up a giant protest against the prime minister, with one officer killed and scores of people injured in several hours of violent clashes in central Dhaka.

More than 100,000 supporters of two major Bangladesh opposition parties rallied to demand Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina step down to allow a free and fair vote under a neutral government. Live footage on the verified Facebook page of the main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) showed thousands of people running for safety as sound grenades went off one after another and plumes of black smoke rose from the roads.

AFP correspondents said the violence spread in roads and alleys in the centre of the capital as



Bangladesh Nationalist party (BNP) activists light fire during a rally demanding the resignation of PM Sheikh Hasina in Dhaka on Saturday (AFP)

We demand the immediate resignation of the Hasina government, release of our leader Khaleda Zia and establishing the people's right to vote

SEKANDAR BADSHA

police fired tear gas and rubber shotgun rounds, while the protesters threw stones and bricks. One officer was killed and more than 100 injured, said Dhaka Metropolitan Police spokesman Faruk Hossain, telling AFP: "The constable was

hacked in the head by opposition activists." The protests by the BNP and the largest Islamist party, Jamaat-e-Islami, were the biggest so far this year, AFP journalists on site said, and marked a new phase in their protests with a general election due within three months.

Hasina - daughter of the country's founding leader - has been in power for 15 years and has overseen rapid economic growth with Bangladesh overtaking neighbouring India in GDP per capita, but inflation has risen and her government is accused of corruption and human rights abuses.

At least 20 people were rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital, the country's largest, with wounds from rubber bullets, police inspector Bacchu Mia told AFP.

The clashes began in front of

the city's largest Catholic church when rowdy opposition supporters fought with sticks and allegedly torched a bus and a police post.

The BNP has called a nationwide strike on Sunday to protest the violence.

"Police and armed ruling party cadres attacked our peaceful rally," party spokesman Zahir Uddin Swapan told AFP.

Months of protests

The resurgent opposition has been mounting protests to press their demands for months, despite the BNP's ailing leader Khaleda Zia, a two-time premier and old foe of Hasina's, being effectively under house arrest after a conviction on corruption charges.

Hundreds of opposition activists were detained in the days running up to the rally, officials confirmed, but her supporters poured into Dhaka on Saturday, crammed into buses despite checkpoints on roads into the capital, and even riding on top of packed trains.

"Vote thief, vote thief, Sheikh Hasina vote thief," chanted the crowd at a demonstration in front of the BNP headquarters.

Student activist Sekandar Badsha, 24, from Chittagong, said: "We demand the immediate resignation of the Hasina government, release of our leader Khaleda Zia and establishing the people's right to vote."

AFP

Ugandan soldiers among five killed in DR Congo

Beni, DR Congo - Rebels backed by the Islamic State group have killed two Ugandan soldiers in an attack that also left two civilians and a suspected assailant dead in eastern DR Congo, authorities said on Saturday.

Two truck drivers, a Kenyan and a Congolese, were shot dead on Friday night by IS-affiliated Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) at a car park in Kasindi, Beni territory, said Barthelémy Kambale, a North Kivu provincial civil servant.

A fifth dead body was assumed to be an assailant, he told AFP.

Kasindi was the scene of a Pentecostal church bombing blamed on the ADF which killed about 15 people last January, and for which IS claimed responsibility.

Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) launched a joint offensive in 2021 against the ADF to drive the militants out of their Congolese strongholds, but attacks have continued.

Originally fielding mainly Muslim Ugandan rebels, the ADF gained a foothold in the region in the 1990s and are accused of slaughtering thousands of civilians.

AFP

Panama bans new mining deals, but fails to quell demonstrations

Panama City, Panama - Panama's President Laurentino Cortizo on Friday announced a ban on new metal mining concessions, but maintained a contract with a Canadian company that has sparked massive protests in the country.

In a televised address, the president said the government had issued a decree 'declaring a ban on granting new metallic mineral concessions throughout the country'.

Cortizo made no mention of the controversial contract with First Quantum Minerals, the Vancouver-based company whose Caribbean copper mine sparked demonstrations over potential environmental impacts and in which protesters have clashed with police.

"All new metal mining applications and also those that are currently in process will be rejected outright," the president said, adding that 'this ban will be effective as of today'.

Cortizo, who signed the de-



People protest during a march against the government contract with a Canadian mining company in Panama City on Friday (AFP)

ree before television cameras, said he made this decision 'taking into account the different positions of society in relation to the issue of mining'.

But his announcement did little to quell tempers at a protest by thousands of people that was taking place in the financial center of the capital even as he spoke. Thousands of Panamanians marched again on Friday to demand that the contract with

the Canadian company, which operates the largest copper mine in Central America, be repealed.

"You who are watching, yes, they are robbing you too," protesters chanted as they banged pots and pans and waved Panamanian flags. The demonstrations began a week ago and have drawn thousands of people, an unusual occurrence in this country of 4.2mn inhabitants.

AFP

Kazakhstan: 32 killed in fire at coal mine

Karaganda, Kazakhstan - Kazakhstan said on Saturday that 32 people died in a fire in yet another deadly accident at a mine owned by ArcelorMittal, with over a dozen still missing, in the Central Asian country's worst disaster in years.

President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev called the Luxembourg-listed steel and mining giant the 'worst' company 'in our history' while the firm announced a preliminary deal on the nationalisation of its local operations.

Tokayev had earlier ordered his government to take control of the Kazakh branch of the company. "ArcelorMittal can confirm that the two parties have... recently signed a preliminary agreement for a transaction that will transfer ownership to the Republic of Kazakhstan," the global steel giant said in a statement.

At the mine, emergency workers comforted local community members, especially women, as they waited anxiously for news of those who had been working below the surface.

Dozens gathered in a waiting



A view of the Kostyenko ArcelorMittal coal mine in Karaganda, north-western Kazakhstan on Saturday (AFP)

room, some with their heads in their hands and all looking anxious. ArcelorMittal, led by Indian businessman Lakshmi Mittal, has a history of deadly disasters in Kazakhstan and is regularly accused of failing to respect safety and environmental regulations.

The fire was one of the deadliest in Kazakhstan's post-Soviet history and came just two months after five miners were killed in a blast at a site owned by the company.

"At the Kostenko mine as of 4pm (1000 GMT) the bodies of 32 people have been found," the emergency situations ministry said in a statement. "The search for 14 miners is continuing."

"This is a tragedy," Tokayev said as he met with families of the victims in the Karaganda region. He called for a day of national mourning on Sunday.

"This company has turned out

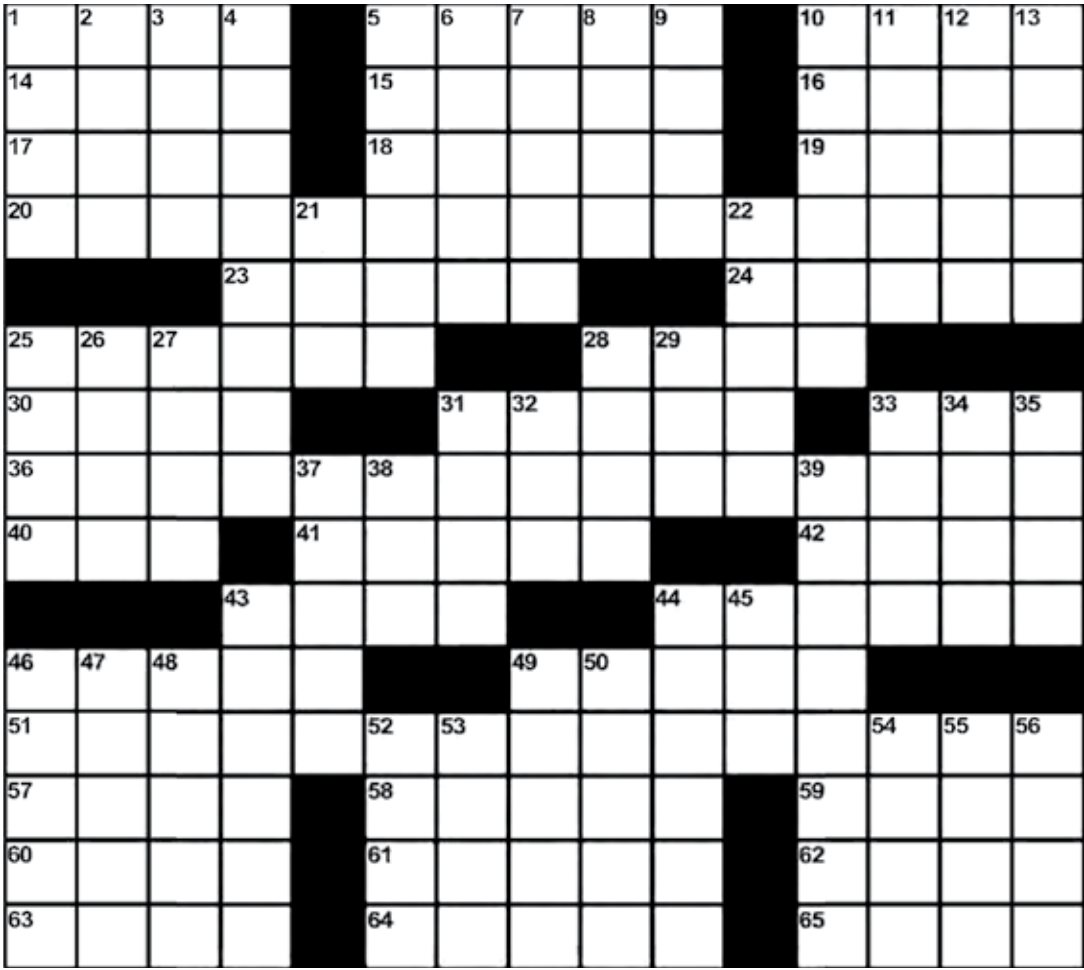
to be the worst in our history from the point of view of cooperation between a company and the government," Tokayev said.

He asked the deputy governor of the Karaganda region, Vadim Basin, who used to work for ArcelorMittal, to head the company.

"The current management of the company cannot do anything," he added.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1) Weep
5) C-shaped carpentry gadget
10)_ spumante
14) Length x width, for a rectangle
15) Bear and Berra
16) Booted up?
17) Examine hastily
18) Airborne annoyances
19) Cornbread concoction
20) What wrestlers practice?
23) Nit layer
24) Musical ensemble of eight
25) What most humans are
28) Electric power measure
30) It may include the sniffles
31) Hardly original
33) Add the audio
36) Charlemagne's domain
40) Infamous abductors
41) Violently release lava
42) Fury
43) It's for two only
44) Swiped
46) Battle reminders

49) More like a puppy dog
51) Something apartment renters can't get
57) Bone-dry
58) Up to
59) Gooley food
60) Put up, as a picture
61) "Rolling in the Deep" chanteuse
62) Humerus neighbor
63) _ gin fizz
64) Pharmacist's dispensations
65) Argus' hundred

DOWN

1) Big blowout
2) BP Amoco's acquisition
3) Raised mark on the skin
4) Mrs. Hudson, to Sherlock Holmes
5) Swan constellation
6) Lengthy suit sizes
7) Obviously surprised
8) Big name in copiers, once
9) Whispered entreaty
10) Characteristic
11) Height-challenged
12) 1,000 kilograms
13) That is, in Latin

21) Lithium-battery link
22) Pole that may have many faces
25) Advil target
26) It turns Santa's suit black
27) Misfortunes
28) Desire
29) Drink by the yard
31) Censored material
32) Barely hit
33) Television tuner of old
34) Advocate forcefully
35) "It's... real"
37) "Reduce,... recycle!"
38) It brings a smile to a miner's face
39) Postpone to a later date
43) Deepen, as a channel
44) Hair options
45) Util.
46) Former Iranian leaders
47) Great Barrier Reef makeup
48) Acid type
49) Quotes
50) Of some benefit
52) Campus meeting place
53) Reverse, as a mistake
54) A friend in war

55) "Jack of all trades, master of..."
56) Places to get muddled up

NOTE PAD

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

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

It doesn't matter if you have a drive for success if you're not moving anywhere. Today is a good day to make the most of your potential. There is too much at stake to let other people take control or tell you what to do. You have a goal and the skills you need to get there. Have confidence in your instincts and trust them to help you make the right choices. Stop looking to other people for guidance about things they don't even care about.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

You shouldn't speak or act too quickly today because you're going to be around people who are slow to listen and quick to judge. Not only could they misinterpret your words, they could talk to other people and spread news or gossip that isn't accurate. Also, while your confidence is healthy and well managed, it could come off as arrogance if you aren't careful. Know your audience and then you can avoid saying things you'll later regret.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

There's a bit of a battle brewing between your cautious and conservative side and your more outrageous and radical side. No matter which side comes out on top, you'll still be fine, so don't worry. This day can still be a win for you. You'll even start to enjoy how your mood changes between quiet and calm and boisterous and ready to party. Your unpredictability is making you very attractive to a certain someone. Pay attention!

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

It might feel like you are losing some of your idealism when a harsh truth hits you square in the face, but don't lose sight of your hopes and dreams. You can see the better side of people if you choose to, so don't give up. Sure, every once in a while someone will disappoint you with their actions, but that doesn't make them a bad person. If you care about someone, give them a second chance. You'll be very glad you did.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Today, any first impression you make will be very important, and your ambition requires you to play along with some political games. Use a combination of calm and cool to help you take advantage of a big opportunity when it appears. Don't show how enthusiastic you really are about it right away. Save that for when you're celebrating later with friends. An objective demeanor will be called for most of the day.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

If you're putting negative energy into a tricky situation at work or school, then how are you going to have a positive outcome? You have to work for the good of everyone, not just yourself right now. Acting out of spite, jealousy, or greed might get you an instant payoff, but further down the road it's going to cost you big. Be altruistic in every situation and try to consider others' feelings and needs. When you do that, they'll do the same for you.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

You should slow down right about now and don't try so hard to rush past everyone else. Why do you need to get ahead of them? You haven't stopped to realize that once you zoom right by everyone, you'll be all alone. There's much more value to being in sync with the pack now than in crossing some sort of finish line in first place. You can't think of it as slowing down for the sake of others. Think of it as keeping yourself in touch with what everyone else has going on.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

You might want to help a friend or coworker who is struggling to keep up right now, but there are limits to what you can do. Don't beat yourself up if you can't make their world as bright and cheerful as you feel it should be. Everyone goes through tough times, and this person will get through it. More than anything, they just need your support right now. You might not be able to change anything for them, but you can be their friend, and that's priceless. Just aim for that.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

You have to listen to your body today. If you're tired, get some rest. If you're antsy, get some exercise. Do whatever your body craves and it will lead you to fulfillment. It's too easy to lose sight of what's best for you when you're always so busy doing what's best for other people. Let other people cater to your needs for a change. They're happy to do it. You only have to ask once in a while.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Today is a great time to look ahead toward your future. Start putting some new goals into place, and try to be a little bit more aggressive about reaching them. It's wise to set attainable goals, but it's only the loftiest goals that will inspire you to stretch yourself in new ways. Time is going to move forward whether you're aware of it or not, so make every day count. Creating an awareness of where you are now versus where you want to be will help you do just that.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Your already healthy ambition needs to get a little more exercise to stay in top form, so put it to work in your personal life. This is a great day to start making powerful improvements in your romantic life. If you don't have a romantic life, it's a good day to start one. Whether you download a new dating app or ask a fascinating person out for coffee, make sure that your actions are bold, bright, and confident!

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Today can be a very productive day thanks in no small part to the generous friends and coworkers who offer you a helping hand. Are you going to accept their contributions? Don't let your ego get in the way of doing something that makes sense, like calling in some favors or accepting any help that's offered. These people want to help you, so why not let them? They're only doing what you would do in their shoes and offering to come to the aid of someone they like and respect.

Answers: 1.B 2.A 3.A

KIDS COLOURING

BOGGLER

G	O	N	O
R	I	I	O
M	I	D	T
A	R	S	M

Each game will present you with a matrix filled with letters. The objective is to form words by linking adjacent letters - to the left, right, on top, bottom, or diagonal to each other. The Boggles Classic game uses a 4 x 4 matrix. Words are valued at one point for each letter in excess of two letters. A three letter word is worth one point, a four letter word is worth two points, and so on. Valid words must be at least three letters long.

Solution 20-25 words: Excellent, 15-20 words: Very good, 10-15 words: Good, 5-10 words: Average

DO YOU SUDOKU?

LEVEL EASY: Fill in the grid so that every row, every column and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1 to 9 and only one instance of each number

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

WORD BUILDER

Y E
D A
T I M

You have three minutes to find all the words contained in this word.

Rules: Words should be at least four letters long, proper nouns and duplicates don't count

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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



THE HEADLINE ACT

Opener shines in World Cup debut as Australia edge New Zealand by five runs in thriller

Dharamsala, India - Five-time champions Australia edged out gallant New Zealand by just five runs in the highest-scoring World Cup game in history on Saturday.

Australia piled up 388 all out as Travis Head top scored with 109 and fellow opener David Warner made 81.

New Zealand battled hard with Rachin Ravindra making 116, Daryl Mitchell adding 54 and Jimmy Neesham supplying late fireworks with a 33-ball fifty before they finished on 383-9 in 50 overs.

With a total of 771 runs, it was the highest scoring game at a World Cup, beating the 754 scored in South Africa's win against Sri Lanka earlier in the tournament.

"That was awesome. Sometimes I have to remember I'm out in the field, not a spectator. A fantastic game, they kept coming at us," said Australia skipper Pat Cummins.

In a dramatic final over played out in the shadow of the Himalayas, New Zealand needed 19 to win.

Trent Boult scampered for a



Australia's Travis Head celebrates his century against New Zealand on Saturday (AFP)

single before Mitchell Starc donated five wides.

Neesham, one of the stars of the 2019 final which New Zealand lost to England, then took six runs off the next three balls.

However, attempting another two, he was run out from a fine throw by Marnus Labuschagne from the fence.

"To get so close hurts. It was a fantastic game."

The result left both sides with four wins and two defeats each and well-placed for the semi-finals.

Earlier, Head, playing his first match of the tournament after being sidelined with a broken hand, reached his fourth one-day international hundred off 59 balls

New Zealand battled hard with Rachin Ravindra making 116, Daryl Mitchell adding 54 and Jimmy Neesham supplying late fireworks with a 33-ball fifty before they finished on 383-9 in 50 overs

That left Lockie Ferguson, who had injured his Achilles in the field, needing to perform the heroics off the last ball.

Starc fired the ball in on a full length and Ferguson could only push it to the covers, leaving the Kiwis heartbroken.

"It was a fantastic game of cricket. There were ebbs and flows throughout the 100 overs," said New Zealand captain Tom Latham.

With 10 fours and six sixes.

The 29-year-old had brought up his 50 off 28 balls and then made the most of being dropped on 70 and 75.

He was eventually clean-bowled by off-spinner Glenn Phillips with Australia reaching 206-2 at the halfway stage.

With Warner, Head had put on 175 in the first 20 overs before his veteran partner was dismissed.

Arthur warns against Pakistan 'witch-hunt' after defeat

Chennai, India - Pakistan team director Mickey Arthur warned against a "witch-hunt" after their World Cup dream suffered a likely fatal blow on Friday.

Pakistan slipped to a one-wicket loss at the hands of South Africa, their fourth defeat in six games in India. They will have to win their remaining three matches and hope other results go their way if they are to sneak into the semi-finals.

"They're going to be blaming everybody, don't worry. It's just the way of the world," said Arthur.

"It's really unfair to start a witch-hunt, certainly on Babar Azam, on 'Inzi' (chief selector Inzamam-ul-Haq), on our coaches, on the management team. What I do know is the boys have tried and the effort of the coaching staff, the effort of the players has been first-class. If they would see the amount of effort that the players and staff put in, they would be amazed."

Edwards leads from front as Netherlands thrash Bangladesh by 87 runs

Kolkata, India - Netherlands captain Scott Edwards led from the front as his side enjoyed another World Cup success with an 87-run hammering of Bangladesh.

Saturday's victory in Kolkata followed the non-Test side's shock defeat of South Africa earlier in the tournament.

The Netherlands, as was the case against South Africa, were indebted to wicket-keeper-batsman Edwards, whose innings top-score of 68 led a recovery from 63-4 and 107-5 to 229 all out. The Tigers, chasing a seemingly modest target of 230, collapsed to 70-6 and were eventually dismissed for 142 at Eden Gardens, despite their opponents being without ill spinner Roelof van der Merwe.

This latest reverse meant Bangladesh had suffered five

defeats in six World Cup games. The Netherlands' win was all the more creditable as it followed their World Cup record 309-run defeat by Australia.

Edwards, however, was dropped twice on nought in the same Mustafizur Rahman over, Liton Das flooring him in the gully before wicketkeeper Mushfiquar Rahim grassed a tougher, diving chance.

Netherlands paceman Paul van Meekeren followed up with fine figures 4-23 as the Tigers were bowled out with more than seven overs remaining.

Bangladesh lost both their openers on 19. Edwards held a simple chance after Liton mis-cued a reverse sweep off spinner Aryan Dutt before taking another catch when Tanzid Hasan edged Logan van Beek.

AFP

England haven't 'lost faith' as India challenge looms

Lucknow, India - Defending champions England are feeling the heat of a lacklustre World Cup campaign but assistant coach Marcus Trescothick insisted Saturday that they haven't "lost faith" in the under-pressure 50-over format.

England face unbeaten hosts India in Lucknow on Sunday, coming into the contest with four defeats from five matches to languish ninth in the 10-team table and with their hopes of making the semi-finals almost over.

"We're all feeling the heat. But what can you do? We prepared the same, we've done things very similar to what you'd expect," Trescothick told reporters.

"Every practice we go through we're coming out the other side thinking we're in a good place and feeling quite right. It's just not quite worked then when we go into the games."

Critics have targeted England's approach to the 50-over format after they won the crown in 2019.

They played just 13 ODI



England's hopes of making the semi-finals took a big hit after their defeat to Sri Lanka

matches in the build-up to their title defence.

"Forgive me, I don't want to be blunt here, but we haven't lost faith in what it is," said Trescothick.

"We love playing any form of cricket, any form of the game that we play. And we were desperate to come here and try and win back-to-back 50 over competitions. So, we're still very much focused on all formats."

He added: "I think nowadays the cricket structure is so busy, right? It's really busy. You've got to plan in Test matches, T20s, 50s. And we're always trying to get the balance right - sometimes we do, sometimes we don't."

Trescothick, a former left-hand batsman who played 76 Tests and 123 ODIs for England

between 2000-2006, said the team is looking forward to playing India and make the occasion their own.

"I think playing against India in a World Cup in their own country is a special part of the game, you get these opportunities that come around - you know there'll be a big crowd, there'll be a wonderful occasion," he said.

"We're looking forward to that chance. I think there's nothing more that we can offer apart from going out and playing that performance. And then hopefully you come out on top at the end of it. So, really excited for it."

England's latest loss was to Sri Lanka by eight wickets in a match their batting folded for 156 to leave their semi-final hopes in tatters. Trescothick said for now it's about getting their act together than pursuing a place in the final-four.

"I think we're more focused on getting our performance right, getting the better levels of performance than what we've shown in the last few weeks."

We were lucky, admits Bavuma

Chennai, India - South African skipper Temba Bavuma admitted his team was lucky after pulling off a one wicket win over Pakistan in a sensational finish to their World Cup match in Chennai on Friday.

South Africa were well on course for a comfortable win at 206-4 after being set 271 to win but Aiden Markram's dismissal for a brilliant 91 gave Pakistan a sniff of victory.

It was left to the last pair of Keshav Maharaj (seven not out) and Tabraiz Shamsi (four not out) to score the last 11 runs for South Africa's fifth win in six games.

Bavuma said his side was lucky to pull off victory.

"I do think we could have shown a lot more of a clinical display in going about that run chase," said Bavuma. "I think we did have luck on our side. We did give them opportunities to get into the game."

"With the batting, there's obviously been pressure with us chasing, and we haven't done well to rectify that. We'll obviously have conversations, but it will be easier now to have those conversations with the win. But it was due to our doing that we allowed the game to get to that point."

Markram added 70 for the fifth wicket with David Miller (29) to lift his team from 136-4 before they lost the next six wickets for 54 runs.

Pakistan have lost four of six matches. To reach the semi-final, they must win their last three matches and hope other results go their way.

Bavuma said players were jumping up and down in the dying moments.

"It was a little bit chaotic now with the guys jumping around. I think obviously at the end as well, we were all on the edge of our seats."

"I think you had everyone's

opinions flying around as to how we should be going about that run chase. But at the end of the day, the guys who were in there, Keshav and Shamsi, did it for us."

Bavuma said his team needed to chase wisely.

"I think the gods were with us. But like I said, it's easier for us to have those conversations regarding our blueprint and how we want to go about going about those run chases."

South Africa have won four matches while batting first and were upset by the Netherlands when they failed to chase a 246-run target.

AFP



South Africa's Tabraiz Shamsi celebrates with Temba Bavuma after taking the wicket of Pakistan's Shaheen Shah Afridi

SON FUELS SPURS

South Korean forward on target again as Tottenham beat Crystal Palace

London, United Kingdom - Ange Postecoglou told Tottenham fans to dream after his side provisionally moved five points clear at the top of the Premier League for the first time.

The Australian's 26 points from his opening 10 games in charge is the best return of any new manager in Premier League history.

After a subdued first 45 minutes, Spurs sprang into life early in the second-half as Joel Ward's own goal and Son Heung-min's strike earned victory against Crystal Palace.

Jordan Ayew pulled a goal back in stoppage time, but it was too little, too late for the Eagles.

Not since Spurs last won the league in 1960-61 have they enjoyed such an advantage at the summit of the English top flight.

A title challenge still appears a remote possibility, but with no European football to sap their energy, the sky may be the limit for Postecoglou's men.

"Let them dream, that's what being a football supporter is all about and, fair to say, this lot have suffered a bit," said Postecoglou.

After Tottenham's last game on Monday, the former Celtic boss was not fully satisfied with his side's performance, even though they beat Fulham 2-0.

It was more of a mixed bag from the visitors as they took 45 minutes to find their rhythm.

"We showed real discipline and focus. Really happy with the effort the boys put in," added Postecoglou.

"It is never gonna be an open game of football here. They're an organised team so I knew we needed to be patient. It is a different way for us to win a game."

Goalkeeper Guglielmo Vicario has been one of the unsung heroes of Spurs' form and the Italian was needed to make a smart stop low to his left to prevent Odsonne Edouard opening the

the unfortunate Ward.

Postecoglou's Midas touch was then in evidence as he introduced Brennan Johnson just after the hour mark.

The former Nottingham Forest winger was on the pitch just two minutes before he collected Maddison's pass and crossed for Son to tap home his eighth goal of the season.

A fine night for Spurs had one final highlight as midfielder Rodrigo Bentancur made his comeback from an anterior cruciate

It is never gonna be an open game of football here. They're an organised team so I knew we needed to be patient. It is a different way for us to win a game

ANGE POSTECOGLOU

scoring inside the opening 10 minutes.

The signing of James Maddison has been the catalyst to Tottenham's transformation under Postecoglou, despite the loss of the club's record goalscorer Harry Kane to Bayern Munich.

Fired up by Postecoglou's half-time team talk, Spurs emerged for the second period with greater intensity and Maddison created the opening goal as his driven low shot across goal was turned into his own net by

ligament injury suffered back in February.

Ayew's powerful strike into the top corner in the 94th minute was just Palace's second goal in their last six games.

The Ghanaian escaped a VAR check for handball to set up a grandstand finish.

Palace had one big chance with virtually the last kick of the game when Matheus Franca sliced wide, but Spurs showed their resolve to survive 12 minutes of stoppage time.



Tottenham Hotspur's Son Heung-Min (L) celebrates with Brennan Johnson after scoring against Crystal Palace on Friday (AFP)



Brentford's Ethan Pinnock (2L) scores against Chelsea on Saturday (AFP)

Chelsea slump again as Nketiah stars for Arsenal

London, United Kingdom - Chelsea slumped to another damaging home defeat against Brentford on Saturday as Eddie Nketiah hit a hat-trick in a 5-0 win for unbeaten Arsenal against bottom club Sheffield United.

Mauricio Pochettino's Chelsea appeared to have turned a corner in recent weeks, taking seven points from their three previous fixtures, but their 2-0 defeat means they have just one home win from their past 13 games in the league. Ethan Pinnock took advantage of non-existent mark-

ing to head the visitors in front shortly before the hour mark after Chelsea had failed to capitalise on their first-half dominance.

Robert Sanchez was embarrassed in added time after joining his team's attack for a corner, failing to catch Neal Maupay in a race as he broke with the ball, allowing Bryan Mbeumo to score in an empty net to compound home fans' woes.

It was a different story for Arsenal, who roared back from 2-0 down to draw against Chelsea last week to preserve their un-

beaten league record.

Arsenal broke through a resolute Blades defence as Declan Rice's pinpoint pass was collected by Nketiah, who made no mistake with a close-range finish past Wes Foderingham.

Nketiah doubled up when Foderingham failed to deal with a Bukayo Saka corner and palmed the ball into the path of the England striker, who lashed home to make it 2-0.

Nketiah's hat-trick was sealed in style as he smashed home from 20 yards.



Romelu Lukaku

Police ban Inter fans' whistle welcome for 'traitor' Lukaku

Milan, Italy - Inter Milan fans have been banned by police from distributing tens of thousands of whistles with which they were planning a noisy return for hero turned 'traitor' Romelu Lukaku this weekend.

Police have ordered that the Serie A leaders' hardcore supporters not hand out the whistles for reasons of public safety, angering fans who were ready to create a din on Sunday evening when Lukaku arrives with his new club Roma.

"The whistles have been banned, yet another violation," said Inter's ultras on their Instagram page on Friday.

Earlier this month the Curva Nord Milano group had announced that they would hand out 50,000 whistles for Sunday's match, when Lukaku plays against Inter for the first time since leaving in controversial circumstances. Lukaku was once the idol of Inter fans, winning the Serie A title in 2021 before being sold for well over 100 million euros to Chelsea that summer.

He returned to the San Siro club on loan last year but was dogged by injury. His mooted permanent move to Inter broke down this summer as the club found out he had been making noises towards fierce rivals AC Milan and Juventus.

Kane nets hat-trick in Bayern's big victory

Berlin, Germany - Hat-trick hero Harry Kane scored a goal from inside his own half as Bayern Munich thrashed promoted side Darmstadt 8-0 on Manuel Neuer's return to Bundesliga action on Saturday.

Kane lobbed goalkeeper Marcel Schuhen from the centre circle to score Bayern's fifth and his second as Bayern tore Darmstadt apart on a rollercoaster afternoon for the champions.

"I'm going home a very happy man today," said veteran keeper Neuer, who made his first appearance after almost a year out with a broken leg. Yet Neuer's return began in the worst possible way for Bayern.

In a game which saw three red cards before half-time for the first time in Bundesliga history, Joshua Kimmich was the first to go for an early bath.

The Bayern midfielder was sent off for bringing down Marvin Mehlem in front of goal after he lost the ball too easily in front of goal.



Harry Kane celebrates a goal

"It was a stupid red card and I'm very annoyed," said Kimmich, who will now miss Bayern's clash with Borussia Dortmund next weekend.

Darmstadt's hopes of a famous win were dashed just 17 minutes later, when Klaus Gjasula was given a somewhat harsh red card for tripping Bayern's Konrad Laimer on the edge of the area.

The visitors then went down to nine men just before half-time after Matej Maglica was sent off for an almost identical challenge on Kane.

Bellingham hands Real Madrid Clasico win

Barcelona, Spain - Jude Bellingham's stunning double snatched Real Madrid a 2-1 comeback victory at Barcelona in his first La Liga Clasico on Saturday.

The England international, who has started his Madrid career in remarkable goalscoring form, unleashed a rocket into the top corner from distance after Ilkay Gundogan had sent hosts Barcelona ahead at the Olympic Stadium.

Bellingham then fired home a second in stoppage time to silence Barcelona fans and reach 10 goals in the top flight this season.

Barcelona hit the woodwork twice and had the better of the game but Bellingham, La Liga's top goalscorer, is in unstoppable form and inevitably made his mark in his first Clasico.

Bellingham's brace sent Madrid to the top of La Liga, ahead of Girona on goal difference, with both teams four points ahead of Barcelona in third.

The Catalans were boosted by the returns of Robert



Real Madrid's Jude Bellingham celebrates after scoring against Barcelona

Lewandowski, Jules Kounde and Raphinha from injury, with Xavi naming them on the bench, but Frenkie de Jong and Pedri did not recover in time.

His counterpart Carlo Ancelotti selected Ferland Mendy at left back over Eduardo Camavinga and Fran Garcia, once again deploying Bellingham in the number 10 role as he got his first taste of arguably the world's

biggest club football match.

However it was another midfielder playing for the first time in the Clasico who broke the deadlock - Barcelona's summer arrival Gundogan.

The former Manchester City man was sharpest when Aurelien Tchouameni intercepted Ferran Torres' pass, diverting it back into his own area.

Centre-back David Alaba

tried to clear but was thoroughly unconvincing and Gundogan read his intentions, hopped onto the ball and swept past Kepa Arrizabalaga in the sixth minute.

Fermin Lopez, one of the emerging young Barcelona La Masia academy products who has broken into the first team, slapped a shot against the post after the intense Gavi pressed high to win the ball back.

SPRINT KING!

Martin wins Thai sprint to cut Bagnaia's MotoGP lead to 18 points

Buriram, Thailand - Spain's Jorge Martin led from pole to chequered flag to win the Thailand MotoGP sprint race on Saturday and reduce the deficit behind championship leader Francesco Bagnaia to 18 points.

Pramac-Ducati rider Martin took his fifth consecutive sprint victory, 0.933 seconds ahead of South Africa's Brad Binder in second on a KTM, with Italian Luca Marini's Ducati-VR46 third. Bagnaia was seventh.

Short-format king Martin reached the first corner in the lead and was never headed as Bagnaia suffered a poor start from the second row, dropping back to ninth by the end of the opening lap.

Bagnaia, on the factory Ducati, finally found some pace four laps into the 13-lap dash and although he clawed his way back to seventh he could not make any inroads on Marco Bezzecchi, who finished sixth on his Ducati-VR46.

Honda's Marc Marquez crossed the line fourth with Aleix Espargaro's Aprilia in fifth.

"It pretty much went to plan," said Martin, who realised he had to be wary once the flying Binder, who swept through the field from fifth on the grid, overtook Marini on the seventh lap to move up to second.

"I tried to save tyres at the beginning," said Martin. "Then I saw Brad overtook Luca so I said: 'OK, maybe now it's time to go'. I pushed the lead out to 1.9



Prima Pramac's Spanish rider Jorge Martin celebrates after winning the sprint race at the Thailand Grand Prix on Saturday (AFP)

I tried to save tyres at the beginning. Then I saw Brad overtook Luca so I said: 'OK, maybe now it's time to go' I pushed the lead out to 1.9 (seconds) then I tried to manage the tyres until the end

JORGE MARTIN

(seconds) then I tried to manage the tyres until the end."

Binder started best of all and overtook Bezzecchi and Espargaro to move up to third by the end of the second lap.

The South African thought he might have challenged for the win had he managed to get past

Marini quicker.

"The plan today was obviously not to come second but to win of course but, second place, we'll take it," said Binder.

The result leaves Bagnaia on 369 points going into Sunday's 26-lap grand prix where he will again start sixth on the grid with

pole-sitter Martin now on 351 after picking up 12 for the sprint victory.

"I missed a little bit the start," admitted Bagnaia.

"But we managed to close the gap and my feeling was so good on my bike and so finishing seventh when you are so fast and so strong is not good for us.

"So we have to consider that for tomorrow and I have to adjust to improve my pace in the first laps."

Martin began the weekend 27 points behind with four legs of the 20-race season to go, but he also started from pole a week ago in Australia before his gam-

ble on a soft rear tyre backfired as he slumped to fifth.

With 25 points available for the winners of Sunday's MotoGP main race the title battle could tighten further before the riders head to Malaysia's Sepang circuit in two weeks' time as the championship duel looks likely to go to the wire. "I think it will be a different race," said Martin of Sunday's 26-lap grand prix around the 4.554km Buriram International Circuit. "I expect Pecco (Bagnaia) to improve."

The final two race weekends of the season are in Qatar and Valencia next month.

AFP



Nairo Quintana

Quintana to return from doping ban with Movistar

Madrid, Spain - Nairo Quintana, who is currently serving a ban for doping, will return to cycling with his former team Movistar next season, the Spanish outfit announced on Saturday.

The 33-year-old Colombian, who spent three years at Team Arkea Samsic prior to his suspension, will return to the team where he shone between 2012 and 2019, winning the 2014 Giro d'Italia and the 2016 Vuelta a Espana.

"Nairo Quintana is coming home", wrote Movistar on X, describing him in a press release as "the man who changed the history of his sport in Colombia".

Quintana finished sixth in the 2022 Tour de France but was subsequently disqualified after traces of tramadol, a painkiller

banned by medical regulations, were found in his blood.

While the Colombian media had announced that he was going to retire, Quintana stated his desire in January to continue his career with a new team.

"It's super emotional for me to be back home," the 1.67 metre climber said in the team statement. "It's been such a tough year. The sleepless nights, so many days of sacrifice, going on my bike and trying to keep pushing, under the rain or the scorching sun.

"But it was all worth it. I won't waste this opportunity. I know the values of the team, the values of sport. I will give my everything to do things right, and I want to help the team achieve the best results."

Rovanpera set for world rally title after Evans crashes out

Passau, Germany - Kalle Rovanpera's quest to wrap up his second successive title received a massive boost on Saturday when his last remaining rival Elfyn Evans crashed out of the Central European Rally.

Evans, a teammate of Rovanpera's at Toyota, hit trouble in the 11th stage when placed third in the standings.

Evans went into this penultimate round of the season 31 points adrift in the world rally championship.

With a maximum 30 points on offer this weekend the Welshman's only hope of fighting

on until the final round in Japan is for him to return for Sunday's power stage, which is worth five points to the winner, and for Rovanpera to fail to finish.

Rovanpera was virtually untouchable on Friday as he build up a 36 second lead over Thierry Neuville in this new addition to the WRC calendar staged over three countries - Germany, Austria and the Czech Republic.

But the 23-year-old Finn found the going tougher on Saturday morning, spinning his Toyota on stage 10.

Any thoughts Evans enter-



Finland's Kalle Rovanpera and co-driver Jonne Halttunen compete in the WRC Central European Rally

I knew that Elfyn was off, so why would I risk anything anymore?

KALLE ROVANPERA

tained of a potential upset were dashed on the 11th stage when he misjudged a slippery right-handed bend and slid his car into a barn door.

With Evans exiting the scene Rovanpera had the luxury of taking his foot off the gas to avoid a

similar mishap, with Hyundai's Neuville, winner of stages 10 and 11, now leading by 11 seconds.

"I knew that Elfyn was off, so why would I risk anything anymore?" Rovanpera said.

"It's a real shame for Elfyn and (co-driver) Scott (Martin). They put on a good fight and it would have been really tricky for us to keep pushing.

"Being the last car on the road was really tricky, it was a big mess out there. Now the goal is a bit different and we will just try to finish with some good points," he added.

Zhang takes one-shot lead at Maybank Championship

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia - American Rose Zhang captured a one-shot lead at the Maybank Championship on Saturday after a masterful third round to pull ahead of Thai duo Atthaya Thitikul and Jasmine Suwannapura.

Zhang, 20, shot a round of 65 for an 18-under 198, while Thitikul fired home the week's lowest score of 62. Suwannapura, who led the first two rounds, finished with a 67.

But the day belonged to the American rookie, who has swiftly moved up the ranks from third to first, and secured a deserved lead thanks to eight birdies she sunk at the Kuala Lumpur Golf & Country Club. Zhang's top spot was secured largely due to a strong start which saw her notch five birdies on the front nine.

A bogey on the par-4 14th



Rose Zhang

hole was a blemish on her scorecard, but did little to harm an overall solid round where she finished with a birdie on the final hole.

"I feel really great. I just feel like being able to have this opportunity to come into the final round with a little bit of a lead is really great," said Zhang.

Sabalenka tries to seal year-end No.1 spot at WTA Finals

Cancún, Mexico - Top-ranked Aryna Sabalenka will try to hold off Poland's second-placed Iga Swiatek for the year-end world number one spot when the WTA Finals begin Sunday at Cancun, Mexico.

The \$9 million season-ending outdoor hardcourt showdown of eight top players features round-robin group matches to decide semi-final pairings ahead of the November 5 championship match.

Sabalenka, the reigning Australian Open champion, was the runner-up in last month's US Open and reached the semi-finals at Wimbledon and the French Open.

The 25-year-old from Belarus also won WTA titles this year at Madrid and Adelaide and enters the WTA Finals with a 630-point lead over 22-year-old reigning



Aryna Sabalenka

French Open champion Swiatek.

Four-time Grand Slam winner Swiatek, the 2022 year-end world number one, also took 2023 titles at Stuttgart, Qatar, Poland and earlier this month at Beijing.

Sabalenka can clinch the year-end top spot by reaching the final with a 2-1 group stage record no matter what Swiatek does.

"It's not just about becoming world number one," Sabalenka said last month in China.

"I think it's about finishing the year as world number one and staying there as long as you can."

If Swiatek loses a round-robin match, Sabalenka can secure the year-end number one by going unbeaten in group play or reaching the final. Should Swiatek drop two matches in the group stage, a 2-1 round-robin record would be enough to make Sabalenka

the year-end rankings leader.

Swiatek, this year's WTA match wins leader with 63, must make the final to have a chance at the year-end number one provided Sabalenka plays all her group matches.

If Sabalenka wins even one group stage match, Swiatek would need to win the title for a chance at the throne. Others in the field include 19-year-old US Open champion Coco Gauff, fellow American Jessica Pegula, Greece's Maria Sakkari, Ons Jabeur of Tunisia, Kazakhstan's Elena Rybakina and Czech Marketa Vondrousova, the reigning Wimbledon champion.

Sabalenka became number one after her run to the US Open final in September, ending Swiatek's 75-week reign after reaching number one for the first time in April 2022.

OMAN TARGET T20 WORLD CUP SPOT

Team aims for one of the two available berths from Asia for the 2024 tournament

Muscat - Oman, radiating confidence, are setting their sights on securing a spot in the ICC T20 World Cup for the third time. They are vying for one of two coveted positions in the ICC Men's T20 World Cup Asia Qualifier Final 2023, scheduled to take place in Nepal from October 30 to November 5.

Oman enter the eight-nation tournament with high morale, having recently won a five-match T20 series 4-1 against Afghanistan A in Muscat.

Bolstered by the resounding series victory against a formidable opponent, Duleep Mendis, the national team's head coach, expresses optimism about leading the team to their third T20 World Cup appearance.

"We had a very successful series against Afghanistan A, with our players delivering strong all-around performances against a formidable adversary," said Mendis. "In Nepal, we anticipate a tough challenge and are eagerly looking forward to a strong performance, aiming to qualify for the 2024 T20 World Cup for the third time."

"Our players have prior experience playing in Nepal, and although the conditions will be cooler, we are heading to Kathmandu couple of days earlier to acclimatize. We experimented



Oman players for the ICC Men's T20 World Cup Asia Qualifier Final in Nepal

with different combinations and fine-tuned our winning formula against Afghanistan A. We are hopeful of performing well and securing a spot in the 2024 T20 World Cup."

Oman are in excellent form, having also clinched the Gulf Cricket T20I Tournament last month by defeating the UAE in the final.

For head coach Mendis, if Oman make it to the T20 World

Cup 2024, it would be the third time he has led the Men in Red to the continental showpiece, having secured qualification in 2016 and 2021.

The ICC Men's T20 World Cup Asia Qualifier Final 2023 will feature hosts Nepal, along with Bahrain, Hong Kong China, Kuwait, Malaysia, Oman, Singapore, and the UAE. The eight teams are divided into two groups of four for the Asia Quali-

fier Final. The top two teams from each group will secure a place in the high stakes semi-finals on November 3, with the winning teams earning a ticket to the USA and West Indies for the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2024.

These two qualifiers will meet in a final on November 5 for the chance to win the tournament.

Group A includes Oman, hosts Nepal, Singapore, and Malaysia, while Group B consists

of the UAE, Bahrain, Hong Kong, and Kuwait. Experienced Zee-shan Maqsood, who led Oman during their previous ICC T20 World Cup appearance in 2021, will captain the squad, with Aqib Ilyas serving as the vice-captain.

The 15-member squad comprises two new faces, Pratik Athawale and Siddharth Bukkapatnam, while notable omission is opening batter Jatinder Singh, sidelined due to a calf injury.



England's fly-half Owen Farrell (C) celebrates with teammates

England hold on to edge Argentina in World Cup third place playoff

Paris, France - Captain Owen Farrell kicked 16 points for England as they clung on to beat Argentina 26-23 on Friday to claim third place in the Rugby World Cup.

Farrell's contribution helped 2003 winners England finish third in the tournament for the first time, with champions South Africa facing New Zealand in Saturday's final, both teams eyeing a record fourth title.

With just three points between the sides, Argentina were unable to find the crucial try to match their best ever World Cup finish, back in 2007, as Nicolas Sanchez failed with a 75th minute penalty that would have drawn them level.

"I am delighted for the boys we got the result," England scrum-half Ben Youngs said after his final international.

"We are pleased to end with a win. We wanted to be here tomorrow night, but it is still a nice win tonight."

Pumas coach Michael Cheika made three changes to his starting lineup from last Friday's heavy semi-final defeat to New Zealand in a rerun of September's pool game between the sides in Marseille, won by England.

Steve Borthwick handed flanker Tom Curry his 50th Eng-

land appearance, eight years on from making his debut as a teenager against the Pumas and in a week where he alleged he was racially abused by South Africa hooker Bongi Mbonambi in the last-four loss.

Curry ran out on his own onto the pitch in front of 77,674 as the 25-year-old reached the half-century landmark before teammates Youngs, Danny Care and

We wanted to be here tomorrow night, but it is still a nice win tonight

BEN YOUNGS

Dan Cole played their final Tests.

The pre-match rainfall in northern Paris stopped and a loud chant of "Allez les Bleus" rang around the Stade de France from the majority French crowd, with Argentina wearing their alternative dark blue shirt against France's rivals from across the Channel.

Curry was involved as England opened the scoring after just three minutes with Owen Farrell slotting the penalty from the back-rower's successful pilfer at a ruck.

AFP

Indian 13-year-old makes cut at Asia-Pacific Amateur Championships

Melbourne, Australia - Thirteen-year-old Kartik Singh became the youngest player to make the cut at the Asia-Pacific Amateur Championships, but the Indian golf prodigy will not be posting an historic win after slumping to an 81 on Saturday.

Singh fired an opening-round

seven-over-par 78 and followed it up with a 72 at the Royal Melbourne Golf Club's demanding course.

At 13 years, nine months and 22 days, he was the youngest player to make the weekend since China's Guan Tianlang did the same aged 14 in 2012.

Guan went on to win, and backed up the breakthrough victory by making the cut at the 2013 Masters -- the youngest to do so in PGA Tour history.

The winner of the annual Asia-Pacific championship receives an invite to both Augusta and the Open Championship.

But Singh will not be following in Guan's footsteps after his 81 left him 21 shots behind China's Zheng Sampson-Yunhe, whose 65 on Saturday gave him a four stroke lead heading into the final day.

"I came to the tournament with no expectations," said

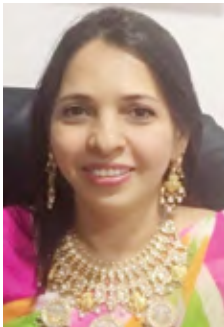
Singh, who has been playing golf since he was six.

"I had heard so much about it, I just wanted to get the experience. But if there was a goal, it was to make the cut, and I am so happy that I have managed to do that."

AFP

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QUAKE AFTERMATH

REVIVAL

of skills

NEPAL QUAKE SPARKS REVIVAL OF TRADITIONAL CRAFT SKILLS WHICH WERE ONCE PASSED ON FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION BUT LATER BECAME OBSOLETE

Nepal's deadly earthquake eight years ago reduced swathes of centuries-old monuments to rubble, but the vast task of restoration has sparked a revival of once-fading architectural craft skills.

Carpenter Dinesh Tamang is one of hundreds of craftspeople who learned a new trade in the quake's aftermath.

"I got a chance to work in reconstruction projects, to rebuild damaged temples and houses," said Tamang, who was unem-

ployed before the 7.8 magnitude earthquake that killed nearly 9,000 people.

"It is very rewarding work," he said while carefully carving an intricate pattern on a wooden panel with a chisel and mallet.

The 2015 quake also destroyed hundreds of monuments and royal palaces - including the Kathmandu Valley's UNESCO World Heritage sites - that had drawn visitors from around the world.

In deeply religious Nepal, temples and heritage sites are not just tourist attractions, but an integral part of cultural and spiritual life.

The public demand for their rebuilding fueled a need for workers adept at traditional architectural techniques including stone masonry and intricate wood and metal work.

"Nepal is rich in cultural heritage," Tamang said. "You see temples everywhere and I was always fascinated by the designs on wood."

Nepal Vocational Academy, where Tamang enrolled, said it had trained hundreds in traditional skills since the quake.

"Even though the quake was a tragic event, it has created oppor-

tunities in different sectors," said Rabin Puri, a heritage conservationist and the academy's founder. "The demand for skilled manpower drastically increased".

Puri said that the academy expanded its facility after the quake to meet the surge in demand for training. "As far as I know, none of our graduates are unemployed," he said.

Live on after us

Many initially feared Nepal lacked the skills needed for the huge task of rebuilding.

The palaces and temples dam-

aged date back to the period between the 12th and 18th centuries when the Kathmandu Valley was divided into the three kingdoms of Kathmandu, Patan and Bhaktapur.

The wood carvers, stone sculptors and metal workers who created the spectacular temples and palaces were once feted from far away and paid handsomely from the royal purse.

These crafts were historically carried out exclusively by families belonging to the Newa ethnic group and passed on through generations. But over time many opted for other professions.



The quality must match the monuments we have... These skills that have been passed on from generation to generation cannot be learnt with a few months' training

ROHIT RANJITKAR
Heritage conservationist

"The fathers didn't want to teach the sons, and sons didn't want to learn, so it was close to disappearing," Puri said. But, the funding for reconstruction has made these professions more economically sustainable.

The government has poured in over US\$45bn to restore its heritage sites, with additional projects funded from countries including neighbouring China and India, as well as Japan, Sri Lanka, Switzerland and the United States.

About 80% of the 920 heritage structures that were flattened or damaged have been reconstructed.

Heritage conservationist Rohit Ranjitkar, director of the Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust, said that while the renewed interest in learning traditional crafts is encouraging, the focus should be on quality.

"The quality must match the monuments we have... These skills that have been passed on from generation to generation cannot be learnt with a few months' training," he said.

"Practice is important... We need to see how to encourage them, so that they can carry on the skills."

Stonework expert Kancha Ranjitkar, 82, who began working with his father as a teenager, said he felt happy alongside younger craftspeople.

"Many of the skills are vanishing," he said. "But the quake gave a chance to pass on our knowledge to the next generation... for it to live on after us."

AFF



Artisans carve stone sculptures at the Nepal Vocational Academy in Bhaktapur on the outskirts of Kathmandu



Labourers work to reconstruct a temple in Bhaktapur on the outskirts of Kathmandu

THE BEATLES

A much-anticipated 'new' Beatles record, created with the help of AI (artificial intelligence), will be released on November 2, former band members Paul McCartney and Ringo Starr revealed on Thursday.

Now And Then, first written and sung by ex-Beatle John Lennon and developed by the rest of the band, has now been finally finished by McCartney and Starr - and AI - decades after its original recording.

McCartney, 81, announced its imminent release in June, in what has been dubbed in a promotional trailer 'the last Beatles song'. The track will be unveiled on November 2 by Apple Corps, Capitol and Universal Music Enterprises (UMe), with a music video debuting the following day.

A 12-minute documentary written and directed by Oliver Murray - best known for a 2022 biopic mini-series on The Rolling Stones - will premiere on YouTube the same evening, before featuring commentary from McCartney and Starr.

Now And Then was recorded by Lennon in the late 1970s at his home in New York's Dakota Building, and also features piano music.

Working with Peter Jackson - the film director behind the 2021 documentary series The Beatles: Get Back - AI was used to separate Lennon's voice from the piano chords.

Emotional

"There it was, John's voice, crystal clear," McCartney said, in comments published alongside the announcement of the release date.

"It's quite emotional and we all play on it, it's a genuine Beatles recording,"

In 2023, to still be working on Beatles music, and about to release a new song the public haven't heard, I think it's an exciting thing

PAUL MCCARTNEY



closest we'll ever come to having him (Lennon) back in the room so it was very emotional for all of us. It was like John was there, you know. It's far out."

The Beatles - Lennon, McCartney, Starr and Harrison - split in 1970, with each going on to have solo careers, but they never reunited. Lennon was shot dead in New York in 1980, aged 40, while Harrison died of lung cancer in 2001, aged 58.

Meant to be

'Now And Then was one of several tracks on a cassette that Lennon had recorded for McCartney a year before his death. It was given to him by Lennon's widow Yoko Ono in 1994.

Two other songs - Free as a Bird and Real Love, were cleaned up by the producer Jeff Lynne, and released in 1995 and 1996. An attempt was made to do the same with Now And Then but the project was abandoned because of background noise on the demo.

AI has now made that possible, though its use in music is the subject of industry-wide debate, with some denouncing copyright abuses and others praising its prowess.

McCartney said earlier this year that the technology's use was 'kind of scary but exciting because it's the future'.

Sean Ono Lennon, the son of Lennon and Ono, said it was 'incredibly touching' to hear the former Beatles working together again 'after all the years that dad had been gone'.

"It's the last song my dad, Paul, George and Ringo got to make together. It's like a time capsule and all feels very meant to be," he added.

Now And Then will be released as a double A-side, with the band's 1962 debut single Love Me Do', and cover art by US artist Ed Ruscha.

AFP

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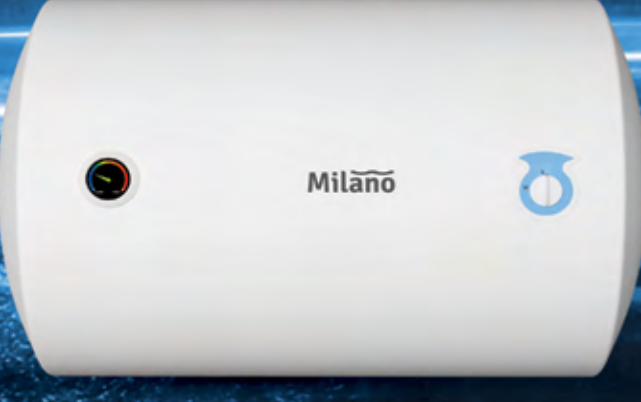
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