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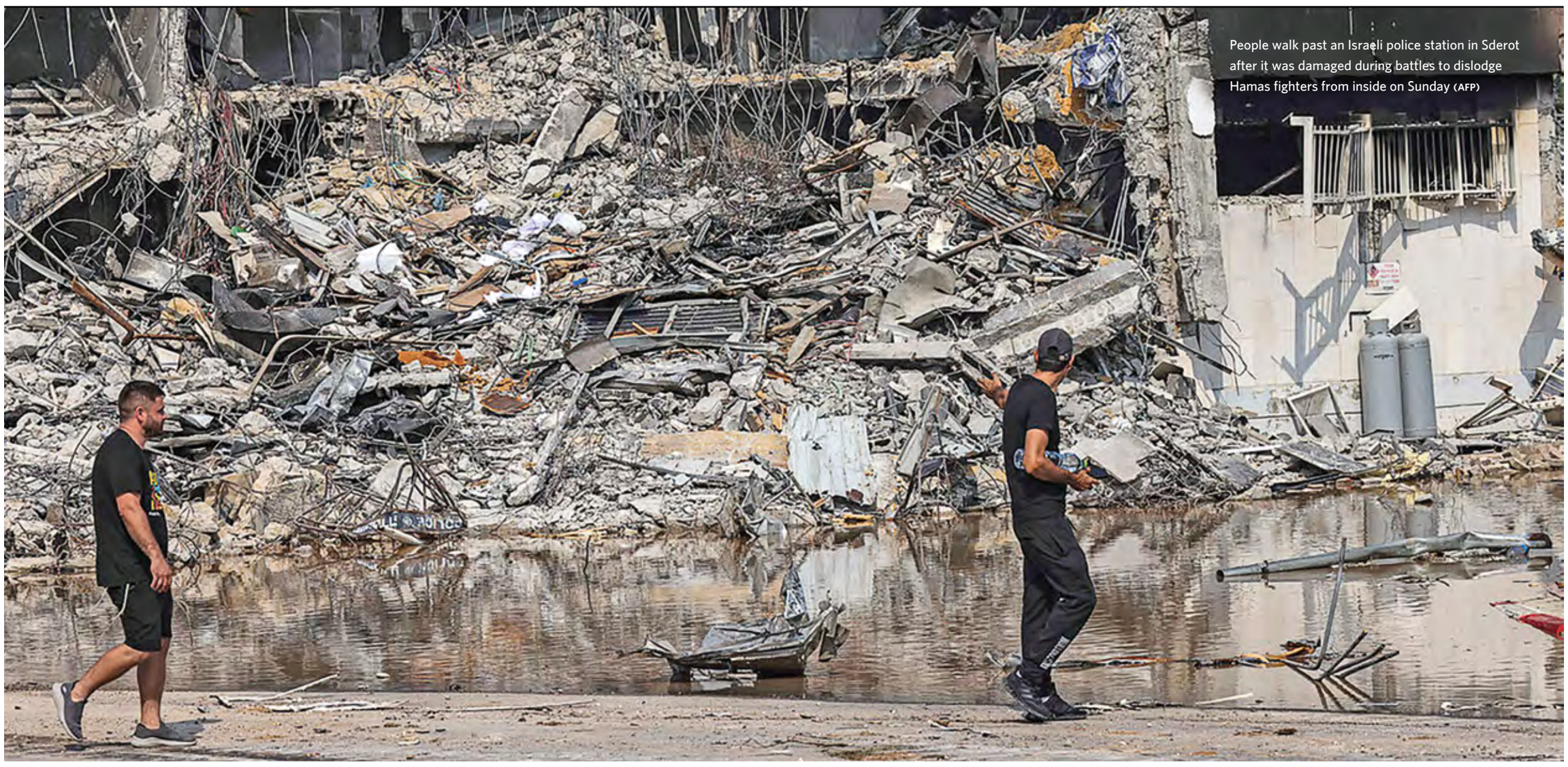


People walk past an Israeli police station in Sderot after it was damaged during battles to dislodge Hamas fighters from inside on Sunday (AFP)

# 1,000 KILLED IN WORST ESCALATION

## ISRAEL REPORTS OVER 600 DEATHS; GAZA OFFICIALS SAY AT LEAST 370 DEAD

**Jerusalem, Palestine -** The death toll surged to almost 1,000 since the Palestinian group Hamas launched its massive surprise attack on Israel with a barrage of rockets and a large-scale ground assault, officials on both sides said on Sunday.

The conflict's worst escalation in decades has claimed more than 600 lives on the Israeli side, the government press office said, while Gaza officials reported at least 370 deaths, with thousands more wounded on each side.

Thousands of Israeli forces were deployed to battle holdout Hamas fighters in the south and the airforce again pounded targets in the Gaza Strip as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu warned of a "long and difficult" war ahead.

Gun battles raged in towns and on highways as the Israeli army sought to secure desert regions near the coastal enclave, rescue Israeli hostages and evacuate all areas near Gaza within 24 hours.

"We'll reach each and every community until we kill every terrorist in Israel," vowed military spokesman Daniel Hagari, a day after hundreds of Hamas fighters launched their shock offensive and surged into Israel using vehicles, boats and even motorised paragliders.

There was widespread shock and dismay in Israel after at least 100 citizens were captured by Ha mas gunmen and abducted into Gaza, with images circulating on social media of bloodied hostages, and distraught relatives pleading for the state to rescue them.

Yifat Zailer, 37, said she was horrified to see online video footage from inside Gaza that showed her female cousin and the woman's children, aged nine months and three years.

"That's the only confirmation we have," she told AFP by phone, her voicing breaking with emotion, and adding that there was no information on her cousin's husband and her elderly parents.

"We assume they were kidnapped... We want to know what their condition is, we want them to return safe. They're innocent civilians."

### WORLD LEADERS REACT

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky expresses 'solidarity' in call with Netanyahu

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan urges Israel, Hamas 'to support peace'

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz says Israel has right to defend itself against attacks

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi warns Israel, backs Palestinians' right to self-defence

Israel also came under attack from the north when Lebanon's Hezbollah launched guided missiles and artillery shells on Sunday "in solidarity" with the unprecedented Hamas offensive, without causing any casualties.

Israel responded with artillery strikes across the UN-patrolled border. "We recommend Hezbollah not to come into this," said army spokesman Richard Hecht. "If they come, we are ready."

Israel was stunned when Hamas launched their multi-pronged offensive at dawn on Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath, raining down thousands of rockets as fighters infiltrated towns and kibbutz communities and stormed an outdoor rave party held under the desert sky.

Panicked Israeli residents phoned media outlets as they hid out in their homes from Hamas fighters.

Two Thai nationals were among those killed, and other Asian nationals, many of whom work as farm labourers in the region, were believed to be among the hostages.

"A lot of people have been killed," said Hecht, after the military released the names of 26 fallen soldiers. "We lost soldiers, lost commanders and lost a lot of civilians. "We are completing efforts to retake full control of Israeli territory from Hamas." He reported that the army had struck 426 Hamas targets including Gaza tunnels and buildings.

### No respite

Global concern has mounted, with Western capitals condemning the attack by the Islamist group Hamas, which Washington and Brussels consider a terrorist group.

Israel's foes have praised the assault, including Iran whose President Ebrahim Raisi spoke on Sunday with leaders of Hamas and Islamic Jihad and voiced his support, according to official media in the Islamic republic.

Anti-Israel protests have flared in some other Muslim majority countries, and Germany and France were among nations stepping up security around Jewish temples and schools.

In the Egyptian city of Alexandria, a police officer opened fire "at random" on Israeli tourists on Sunday, killing two of them and their Egyptian guide before he was arrested.

Netanyahu - who leads a hard-right coalition government but has received pledges of support from political opponents during Israel's national emergency - has vowed to turn Hamas hideouts "to rubble" and urged Palestinians there to flee.

"We are embarking on a long and difficult war that was forced on us by a murderous Hamas attack," Netanyahu wrote on X, formerly Twitter. "The first stage is ending at this time with the destruction of the vast majority of the enemy forces that infiltrated our territory," he added, pledging no "respite" until victory.

US President Joe Biden has voiced "rock solid and unwavering" support for its key ally Israel and warned "against any other party hostile to Israel seeking advantage in this situation".

AFP

See also Page 07

## HIS MAJESTY RECEIVES CALL FROM KING OF SPAIN

**Muscat -** His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik received a phone call from King Felipe VI of Spain on Sunday evening.

During the telephonic conversation, the two monarchs reviewed the advanced and growing bilateral relations between the two countries and ways of promoting these in various spheres.

They also exchanged points of view on a range of regional and international issues of common concern.

# Oman, Saudi to promote cultural ties

**Riyadh, Saudi Arabia -** Within the framework of the visit of H H Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, to Saudi Arabia, an official session of talks was held in Riyadh on Sunday with Prince Badr bin Abdullah al Saud, Saudi Minister of Culture.

They discussed an array of topics pertaining to culture and joint cooperation.

On the sidelines of the visit, H H Sayyid Theyazin and Prince Badr signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth and the Saudi Ministry of Culture. The MoU aims to promote cooperation and exchange between the two countries in various cultural areas.

(ONA)

The MoU covers developing Omani-Saudi cultural cooperation in areas of heritage, the fields of architecture, design, visual arts, performing arts, book publishing activities, translation, costumes, Islamic decorations, traditional cuisine and films.

The MoU includes exchange of expertise in regulations and policies governing the cultural sector, as well as implementing Unesco conventions joined by the two countries. Further, the MoU deals with participation in cultural festivals and activities organised in the two countries, facilitating communication among cultural agencies and intellectuals, enhancing joint strategic projects in diverse cultural fields and projects related to preservation of all forms of heritage.

# RO2.5bn investments in logistics sector by 2025

**Our Correspondent**
Muscat

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MTCIT) has launched an executive programme for Oman Logistics Centre for the period 2023 to 2025.

The programme's core objectives include economic diversification in transportation and logistics, targeting a robust increase in investments to RO2.5bn by 2025.

Ambitious goals include boosting government revenue growth from the sector, achieving RO18mn in returns from land transport by 2025, and increasing employment opportunities in related sectors from 19% in 2023 to 21% in 2025.

H E Said bin Hamood al Mawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, highlighted the sector's rapid growth, noting its contribution to Oman's GDP in 2022 was approximately RO2bn. He envisions the logistics sector becoming the second-largest contributor to Oman's economy by 2040.

H E Khamis al Shamakhi, Undersecretary for Transport in MTCIT, pointed to Oman's fifth position in the Arab world's Logistics Performance Index.

Continued on Page 02

YOUR SAY

# Adventure is calling

Adventure tourism in Oman has immense potential, but it comes with risks. Unregistered operators often organise such activities, putting participants in danger. To safeguard adventurers, authorities have introduced a mandatory insurance policy for adventure tourism organisers. How will this decision support adventure tourism in Oman and what else is needed to develop the sector? Here's what *Muscat Daily* readers said –

**Mohammad Salim**
**Private sector employee**

I appreciate the authorities' efforts to enhance adventure tourism safety through mandatory insurance for organisers. This decision will foster trust among thrill-seekers, consequently helping attract more adventurers. However, more developments are needed - infrastructural improvements, safety protocols and better network. Cooperation with local communities and sustainable practices are also pivotal for long-term success.

**Saleem al Hinai**
**Businessman**

This is a very good move and I, as an adventure lover myself, welcome this. Oman's tourism authorities can actively engage with insurance companies to encourage them to develop specialised adventure tourism insurance policies. Establishing partnerships and providing incentives can motivate insurers to create tailored products for this growing sector.

**Santosh Kumar**
**Salesman**

Besides insurance, there must be basic training and crash-course certification for those engaged in the sector. This will improve industry standards and encourage adventure seekers to have more trust. Insurance companies may be more inclined to offer policies to operators with certified staff. Also, the government can consider establishing clear and comprehensive regulations for adventure tourism.

**Nasser al Adawi**
**Brand manager**

The regulation comes in conjunction with a ministerial decision to add the activity of organising adventure tourism trips to the activities of travel and tourism offices in order to ensure that all companies have the advantage that qualifies them to offer adventure tourism trips in the sultanate and all companies meet the security and safety requirements when practising any adventure tourism activities. It is important to direct investments in the tourism sector to improve best practices in terms of methodology, quality and sustainability. We must ensure that adventure tourism supports the principles of the green economy, which can be done by preparing an executive programme aimed at enhancing quality projects through the optimal use of natural and cultural elements in a sustainable tourism product. Safety procedures must also be monitored by specialists of Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority to reduce risks of accidents during adventure activities.

**Sameer Khan**
**Businessman**

I welcome the move. Companies need to work closely with regulatory authorities in Oman to establish industry-wide safety standards and guidelines for adventure tourism. Insurance policies can then be aligned with these standards, ensuring that they meet legal requirement. Also, they must provide insurance policies that can be tailored to the specific needs of adventure tour operators.

**? NEXT ON YOUR SAY**

**A common tourist visa for the Gulf Cooperation Council could soon be a reality following an agreement between the GCC tourism ministers. How will this decision affect the tourism sector and the economies of the Gulf countries?**

The views stated here are those of the respondents and not endorsed by *Muscat Daily*. If you feel strongly about the issues discussed here, you can email your comments to **muscatdaily@apexmedia.co.om**

**SEND YOUR COMMENTS**

Share your comments in not more than 50 words along with your full name and profession before next Sunday, 10am, via WhatsApp, Facebook or Instagram

SEND US ON OUR NEW WHATSAPP NO 91953774

## Electricity charges further reduced by 15%

**Our Correspondent**
Muscat

In response to directives from the Council of Ministers, the Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR) has decided to reduce electricity charges for residences by 15%.

In a statement, APSR said it closely monitored social media platforms for opinions on the high electricity bills during the summer months and the concerns raised in this regard.

'Commissioned by the Council of Ministers, the authority will conduct a comprehensive review of the costs of the electricity sector. This review aims to find alternatives and sustainable solutions to address the issue without affecting quality of service during the summer months in the coming years,' it added.

It further stated that until this review is completed, a decision has been taken to further reduce electricity charges from the existing 15% to 30% of the total bill value for all subscribers with basic and national subsidy accounts for July and August 2023.

## Dutch foreign minister in Muscat for EU-GCC meeting

**Muscat** - Hanke Bruins Slot, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, will be in Oman on Monday and Tuesday to attend the 26th EU-Gulf Cooperation Council ministerial meeting, aimed at strengthening relations between the two blocs.

Her visit will focus on furthering ties between the Netherlands and Oman.

Minister Hanke will discuss ties with H E Sayyid Badr al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, and H E General Sultan bin Mohammed al Nomani, Minister of Royal Office.

The Dutch minister will also join EU High Representative Josep Borrell and other European ministers on a visit to a naval vessel sailing under the flag of the EU NAVFOR ATALANTA mission. The mission's focus is on countering piracy and other threats to maritime security in the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden and much of the Indian Ocean. These efforts help to protect Dutch economic and security interests.

On Tuesday, foreign ministers of EU member states and the GCC will meet in Muscat. They will discuss how the EU and the Gulf states can work together in areas such as energy, humanitarian aid and security.

## Oman to take part in tsunami simulation exercise on Oct 11

**Our Correspondent**
Muscat

(Supplied photo)

To test preparedness to respond to tsunamis generated by seismic and non-seismic (volcanic) events, Oman will participate in the Indian Ocean Wave 2023 (IOWave23) tsunami exercise on Wednesday.

The exercise will simulate a magnitude 9.0 earthquake in the Makran trench in the northwest Indian Ocean at 06:00 UTC on October 11.

The sultanate will be represented by Civil Aviation Authority and see participation of the National Emergency Management Committee, the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority, the Ministry of Information and Royal Oman Police.

IOWave23 will simulate Indian Ocean countries being put in a tsunami-warning situation, requiring the National Tsunami Warning Centre and national and/or local disaster management offices in each country to implement their Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs).

The exercise will test the preparedness to respond to such natural weather events, in addition to testing SOPs and communication links at all levels of the warning system.

A primary objective of IOWave23 is to enhance tsunami preparedness at the community level. To this end, IOWave23 will also provide an opportunity for member states to test the Unesco-IOC Tsunami Ready programme indicators in communities.

## Logistics sector targets RO2.5bn investments

Continued from Page 01

Breaking down the logistics sector's GDP contribution, he informed that land transport contributed 60%, water transport 6.7%, air transport 3.2% and warehousing/supporting activities 30%. Additionally, 2022 saw a 21% export growth via Omani ports, with imports increasing by 18% and re-exports by 3%.

The event also marked the inauguration of the Best Practices in the Logistics Sector Award. This accolade aims to recognise groundbreaking projects of the past year, pushing for enhanced sector efficiency and encouraging competition among businesses and SMEs. The award will have several categories, including health and safety, environment, Omani products and services.

Several agreements were also signed at the event. Oman National Transport Company – Mwasalat - partnered with Oman Energy Association – Opal - to enhance workforce efficiency in the energy sector. An agreement was inked between MTCIT and Khazaen City to set up the Khazaen Logistics Complex. Khazaen Dry Port Company also entered an agreement to provide comprehensive services at Khazaen Dry Port.

*The logistics sector's contribution to Oman's GDP in 2022 was approximately RO2bn*

Concluding the event, MTCIT and Civil Aviation Authority started a two-week programme to attract investments to the sector.

# Dakhiliyah lays out RO6mn worth recreational projects

**Our Correspondent**
Muscat

*The projects include Dakhiliyah Boulevard, Nizwa Park, Nizwa entrance project, and Jabal Akdar Park. Commercial areas, marketplaces, and a bus station in the Farq area are on the horizon*

**HILAL BIN SAEED AL HAJRI**

Dakhiliyah governorate is on the cusp of major developmental changes for its initiative to elevate the region's infrastructure and recreational amenities.

In continuation of its developmental efforts, the governorate has announced a number of projects worth over RO6mn to be completed by the end of 2025.

In this context, Governor Hilal bin Saeed al Hajri underscored the significance of enhancing public spaces, and the roles of parks and gardens as family retreats and hubs for cultural events.

These additions are in direct response to the needs of a burgeoning population. Among the anticipated projects are the Dakhiliyah Boulevard, the Nizwa Park, the Nizwa entrance project, and the Jabal Akdar Park.

"By 2025, we aim to pave around 600km of internal roads. Commercial areas, marketplaces, and a bus station in the Farq area are on the horizon," the governor said, elaborating on the road map.

The Dakhiliyah Boulevard project, designed as a health and recreational milestone, is scheduled to begin next year.

With 35 parks and gardens spanning its nine wilayats and covering a vast 1.35mn sqm, Dakhiliyah's recent accomplishments include the inauguration of the Manah Public Park.

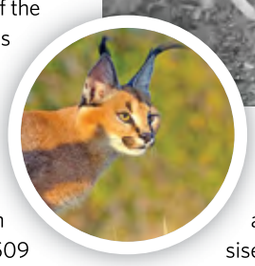
The private sector, particularly the Petroleum Development Oman, has played a pivotal role. Their backing, manifest in endeavours like the Khamila Public Park, exhibits a collaborative spirit driving the region's growth reflecting the governorate's commitment to greenery and open spaces.

Hajri spoke about the strides taken in internal road projects, focusing on residential developments. He confirmed that the groundwork for the 2024-25 phase has been laid, with execution set to roll out next year.

In sum, Dakhiliyah governorate's initiatives reflect a strategic, resident-centric vision, geared to elevate the living standards of its inhabitants.

# Arabian caracal spotted in Musandam for first time

**Our Correspondent**
Muscat



For the first time, the rare Arabian caracal - a wildcat species - has been spotted in Musandam's western mountain range, thanks to the combined efforts of the Environment Authority's National Biodiversity Survey Project team and the Environment Department in Musandam governorate.

Trap cameras at an elevation of roughly 509 metres confirmed the presence of this elusive predator, an official said.

Native to the Hajar and Dhofar mountains, North Africa and the Middle East's arid zones, the Arabian caracal feeds on small mammals, birds, and reptiles, allowing it to endure in extreme climates. Its dwindling numbers serve as a concerning barometer for the deteriorating conditions of these dry environments.

This critical monitoring effort in Musandam, a pioneering endeavour of its kind, focuses on the region's biodiversity. It also emphasises the importance of recording and understanding wildlife, paving the way for informed conservation measures, EA stated.

Predators such as the Arabian caracal play a pivotal role in maintaining the balance in the ecosystem. They maintain the prey population at sustainable levels and target the weaker members, ensuring that only the most resilient genes are passed down, fortifying the prey against adverse weather conditions and diseases.

In a dedicated effort to understand this species better, 45 trap cameras were strategically placed across Musandam in March, aligned with global biodiversity survey techniques.

The caracal is found across Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia, and India, with its dominant presence in the Arabian Peninsula's rocky terrains. Despite its diverse habitats, this wildcat faces existential threats.

Its name derives from the Turkish 'karakulak' (black ear) that suggests presence of distinctive tufted ears, often drawing comparisons to a lynx.

The caracal's agility enables it to chase down varied prey, from hares to antelopes.

# Oman, Finland sign education pact

**Muscat -** Oman's Ministry of Education on Sunday signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Finland's Ministry of Education and Culture to enhance their cooperation in the field of education.

This agreement, formalised by H E Prof Dr Abdullah bin Khamis Ambosaidi, Undersecretary of Ministry for Education, and H E Anu Erika Viljanen, non-resident Ambassador of Finland to Oman, underscores the commitment of both nations to bolster educational cooperation.

Present at this occasion were Abdul Redha bin Mustafa bin Sultan, Finland's Honorary Consul in Oman, and Maryam bint Muhammad al Riyami, the acting Director-General of Oman's Department of Educational Studies and International Cooperation.

Central to the memorandum is the aspiration to deepen ties and collaboration between the two countries in pivotal educational domains.

Both countries aim to augment professional growth opportunities for educators, work on curricula, and share advanced educational methodologies and literature. There's also a focus on equating educational qualifications, incorporating information technology into teaching, fostering strong bonds among families, schools, and communities, and devising strategies to identify and nurture gifted students.

The MoU also lays emphasis on nurturing entrepreneurial spirit among students.

# World can't 'unplug' existing energy system: COP28 head

**Riyadh, Saudi Arabia –** The president of the upcoming COP28 climate talks in Dubai called on Sunday for governments to abandon 'fantasies' such as hastily ditching existing energy infrastructure in pursuit of climate goals.

"We cannot unplug the energy system of today before we build the new system of tomorrow. It is simply not practical or possible," Sultan al Jaber said during the opening session of Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Climate Week, a UN-organised conference hosted in the Saudi capital Riyadh.

"We must separate facts from fiction, reality from fantasies, impact from ideology, and we must ensure that we avoid the traps of division and distraction."

Much of international climate diplomacy revolves around the thorny issue of how and when to quit fossil fuels.

At COP26 in Glasgow in 2021, countries agreed to phase down 'unabated coal', the first time a fossil fuel was explicitly mentioned in a final text. But efforts since then to extend such a target to all fossil fuels have foundered, most recently at last month's G20 summit in India.

Climate activists have criticised the appointment of Jaber to lead the COP28 talks which kick off in Dubai in November, given that he is also head of the Emirati state-owned oil firm ADNOC.

But Jaber has garnered the support of COP parties including US climate envoy John Kerry, partly by emphasising his belief that 'the phase-down of fossil fuels is inevitable'.

The president of the upcoming COP28 Sultan al Jaber addresses the opening session of the MENA Climate Week in Riyadh, on Sunday (AFP)

Energy officials in the United Arab Emirates and other oil-producing countries – notably Saudi Arabia, the world's biggest oil exporter – have argued for continued investments in fossil fuels to ensure energy security even as they eye an eventual transition away from them.

## Finding funds

The vast and fractured landscape of climate finance is the other major stumbling block in climate negotiations.

Developing countries least responsible for climate change are seeking money from richer polluters to adapt to its increasingly destructive and expensive consequences.

In 2009, rich countries pledged to supply $100bn of climate finance every year to developing nations but failed to meet the 2020 deadline. There are hopes the goal will be met this year.

"Old promises must be kept, including the $100bn pledge made over a decade ago," Jaber said on Sunday.

Last year's COP27 talks in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, ended with the first ever creation of a "loss and damage" fund into which countries would pay to support poorer nations suffering the most from more intense and frequent storms, floods and droughts.

The fund's operation, governance, location, contributors, beneficiaries and a timeline for payouts are all up in the air ahead of COP28.

"We must make the fund for loss and damage that was promised in Sharm el-Sheikh a reality in Dubai," Jaber said.

## Climate 'crossroads'

The talks in Riyadh are intended to 'shine a spotlight on challenges and solutions in a region that is among the most vulnerable to the effects of climate change,' organisers said in a press release on Sunday.

The region must already grapple with high temperatures and water scarcity, with more than 60% of the population having 'very little if any access to potable water', the statement said.

'Increasing temperatures are predicted to lead to more persistent and acute drought,' it added.

Jaber also highlighted challenges facing the region, referring to extreme events like hurricane-strength Storm Daniel, which last month caused two dams in eastern Libya to burst and flood the city of Derna.

"Climate change isn't a threat waiting around the corner – the MENA region knows this from first-hand experience with fierce heatwaves and water shortages," said Inger Andersen, executive director of the UN Environment Programme.

AFP

# Transactions through Oman's Invest Easy portal surge in Q2

**Our Correspondent**
Muscat

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MOCIIP) on Sunday announced that its Invest Easy portal recorded a robust growth in the number of transactions carried out during the second quarter of this year.

The number of transactions completed during the second quarter of 2023 through the Invest Easy portal, front offices of MOCIIP, the ministry's departments and directorates, free zones (Sohar, Duqm, and Al Mazyona), advocated offices, and through service provision offices (Sanad) surged by 187.6% to 187,775 transactions, compared to 159,968 transactions completed during the same period last year.

In a statement to Oman News Agency, MOCIIP clarified that the number of transactions completed through the front offices of the ministry during the second quarter reached 17,761 compared to 15,003 transactions completed during the same period in 2022.

It also showed that the number of transactions completed across departments and directorates affiliated with the ministry during the second quarter of 2023 reached 49,383 compared to 39,202 during the same period in 2022.

The number of transactions that were completed through self-service portals during the same period of 2023 reached 50,983 compared to 45,417 during the second quarter of last year. The number of transactions completed through advocated offices during the second quarter of 2023 reached 757 compared to 534 completed during the same period in 2022.

The number of transactions completed through the service provision offices (Sanad) jumped to 68,415 compared to 58,714 during the year 2022.

The number of transactions completed through the free zones in Sohar, Duqm, and Al Mazyona reached 476 in the second quarter of this year compared to 1,098 transactions in the same period in 2022.

MOCIIP seeks to convert all services it provides into electronic services to complement the efforts undertaken by the government in comprehensive digital transformation, as well as to enhance the investment environment in Oman.

# Middle East growth to slow at 1.9% in 2023: World Bank

**Washington, US –** The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is expected to see its economic growth slow to 1.9% this year, the World Bank said.

"MENA enjoyed extraordinarily rapid growth in 2022, boosted by the surge in oil prices," the World Bank said in its report titled 'Balancing Act: Jobs and Wages in the Middle East and North Africa When Crises Hit'.

The region saw an economic growth rate of 6% in 2022, which was driven by oil exporters in MENA, especially the member countries of the GCC, which grew more rapidly than and pulled ahead of oil importers, it noted.

In the GCC, economic growth is projected to average just 1% this year, much less than the 7.3% recorded in 2022. However, the deceleration in growth is expected to be less seen among developing oil exporters, which are estimated to grow 2.4% in 2023, down from 4.3% last year.

Developing oil importing countries are anticipated to have an average growth rate of 3.6% this year, also down from 4.9% in 2022.

For next year, economic growth in MENA is forecast to accelerate to 3.5%, without a large divergence between oil exporters and oil importers, according to the World Bank.

The institution noted that the macroeconomic shocks between 2020-2022 led to an additional 5.1mn people becoming unemployed in the Middle East and North Africa region.

"When economic shocks strike without triggering inflation, it is unemployment that takes centre stage as the primary margin of labour market adjustment in Middle East and North Africa," said the report.

"Following the COVID-19 shock, labour markets adjusted primarily through a reduction in employment and hours worked in MENA countries with low levels of inflation, a pattern that was common around the world," it added.

Anadolu Agency

# Oil sees biggest weekly drop in 7 months

**Muscat – Oil** prices fell around 9% during last week, recording its steepest weekly decline of the last seven months triggered by a strong dollar, rise in US gasoline stockpiles, Russia's decision to ease diesel export ban and the resumption of Iraq-Turkey crude oil pipeline.

International benchmark Brent crude traded at $84.08 per barrel on Friday, decreasing by around 8.8% relative to the closing price of $92,20 a barrel on Friday of previous week.

The US benchmark West Texas Intermediate (WTI) was trading at $82.40 a barrel at the same time on Friday, down 9.2% from previous week's Friday session, which closed at $90.79 per barrel.

Oil prices started the last week on a volatile trading session over lingering uncertainties ahead of a much-expected OPEC decision on their production policy in November and beyond.

Following the OPEC+ Joint Ministerial Monitoring Committee (JMMC) meeting on Wednesday, the group declared it would sustain output cuts, fuelling fears that supply would continue to decline despite a predicted increase in demand in the fourth quarter.

*Brent crude traded at $84.08 per barrel on Friday, decreasing by around 8.8% relative to the closing price of $92,20 a barrel on Friday of previous week*

Just hours before the meeting, Russia and Saudi Arabia said they would continue their existing supply cuts until the end of the year. They also confirmed their decision would be re-evaluated in November with the possibility of deepening output curbs or increasing production.

Russian Deputy Prime Minister Aleksander Novak said that a market analysis would be conducted next month to determine whether oil production would be reduced or increased.

In line with the confirmed output scheme, Russia will reduce its crude exports by 300,000 barrels per day (bpd) while Saudi Arabia will curb by 1mn bpd in addition to its output cut of 500,000 bpd ongoing since May.

Following the rising value of the US dollar as a result of the US government's decision to avert a shutdown over the weekend, oil prices further declined as dollar-indexed crude oil becomes more expensive for the holders of other currencies.

Easing supply concerns and supporting price downturns, Turkish Energy Minister Alparslan Bayraktar said on Monday that 500,000 barrels of oil per day would be supplied to global markets following the country's decision to restart oil flow on a pipeline that transports Iraqi crude from Kirkuk to export facilities in Ceyhan on the Turkish Mediterranean coast.

Fears of a shortage were further allayed as Russia declared on Friday that it had largely lifted the embargo on diesel shipments by pipeline via seaports, which had been in force since September 21. The restrictions for gasoline exports, meanwhile, remain in force.

Agencies

# GFH Partners acquires $150mn logistics assets in Saudi, UAE

**Dubai, UAE –** GFH Partners Ltd, a DIFC based subsidiary of GFH Financial Group, has completed the acquisition of a $150mn diversified and multi-faceted logistics and industrial portfolio in Saudi Arabia and includes assets in the United Arab Emirates as well.

The portfolio combines stabilised income-yielding assets and development opportunities that are located in strategic logistics zones and industrial areas in the key cities of Riyadh and Dubai, GFH Partners said in a press release.

The portfolio has a mix of light industrial and cold storage facilities, as well as a variety of distribution and warehousing assets that are let to a diversified mix of high calibre, blue chip, international and regional tenants.

In addition to the existing portfolio, the GFH Partners' GCC logistics platform includes development plans for logistics and light industrial facilities, in partnership with leading local developers, to enable GFH Partners and its investors to capitalise on the continued growth forecasted.

Nael Mustafa, CEO of GFH Partners, said, "Combining high-quality, income-generating facilities and development opportunities, the acquisition is well-positioned to capture opportunities arising from the current expansion of the GCC logistics sector. Particularly in Saudi Arabia, where the kingdom's Vision 2030 is driving the rapid modernisation and development of the country's transportation and logistics industry to diversify its economy and shift its dependency away from the oil industry. It also leverages GFH Partners' deep global experience in the sector that has seen us build an exceptional capability and portfolio of blue-chip assets across the GCC, US, UK and Europe."

"Further to this acquisition, GFH Partners aims to rapidly expand our GCC logistics real estate platform to SAR1bn ($250mn) over the next 12-18 months, building on growth from favourable demographics, positive momentum in capital markets, and government initiatives," he added.

Globally, GFH Partners has successfully acquired more than 50 logistics assets in six countries across three continents.

# Chances of 'soft landing' for global economy have increased, IMF chief says

**Washington, US –** The International Monetary Fund (IMF) Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said that she sees better chances of a "soft landing" for the global economy, despite high interest rates.

"The world economy has shown remarkable resilience, and the first half of 2023 has brought some good news, largely because of stronger-than-expected demand for services and tangible progress in the fight against inflation," Kristalina said in her 2023 IMF Annual Meetings curtain raiser speech in Abidjan, Ivory Coast.

"This increases the chances for a soft landing for the global economy," she added.

A soft landing is a situation where a central bank raises interest rates too much and too high, which leads to an economic slowdown but avoids a recession.

Many central banks around the world have been raising rates since last year in order to fight against high inflation levels in their respective countries.

*World economy has shown remarkable resilience and first half of 2023 has brought some good news, largely because of stronger than expected demand for services and tangible progress in fight against inflation*

**KRISTALINA GEORGIEVA**

"While the recovery from the shocks of the past few years continues, it is slow and uneven," said Georgieva.

She noted that the current pace of global economic growth remains quite weak – well below the 3.8% average in the two decades before the coronavirus pandemic.

The IMF estimates that the cumulative global output loss from shocks since 2020 amounts to $3.7tn as of this year, she said, adding "this loss is unevenly distributed across countries."

Anadolu Agency

# Debt relief for poor nations nowhere near enough: UN

**Geneva, Switzerland –** Current attempts to resolve the debt crisis swamping poor countries do not go anywhere near far enough given the scale and urgency of the situation, the United Nations warned.

UN trade and development chief Rebeca Grynspan said the issue should feature prominently at this week's meetings of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

The debt crisis "is an important issue. It has to be discussed", the head of the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) told reporters as she launched its flagship annual economic projections report.

The efforts undertaken within the G20, the World Bank and the IMF to find ways to lower the debt burden of low-income countries are insufficient, Grynspan said.

"That is very slow. There are more countries that need help. So we need to have a better mechanism for a faster resolution of the debt problem," she said.

Indebted countries need help "to negotiate better; we need to sit everybody at the table", she said.

Added to this is the urgency of preventing countries from defaulting on their debt repayments, Grynspan said, as she welcomed ongoing talks to give much more heft to the World Bank and other regional development banks.

*The efforts are very slow. There are more countries that need help. So we need to have a better mechanism for a faster resolution of the debt problem*

**REBECA GRYNSPAN**

"Part of the problem is that the system is small with respect to the scale of the challenge that we have," she said, noting that the World Bank has grown much slower than the global economy – and therefore has more difficulty meeting needs.

This year, the IMF and the World Bank will hold their traditional autumn meetings away from their US headquarters.

Financial leaders, top financiers and other development and NGO executives will meet October 9-15 in the Moroccan city of Marrakesh, which was devastated last month by a violent earthquake which left nearly 3,000 dead in the region.

AFP

# Google's new Pixel phone to run AI on-device

**New York, US –** Google has said its latest premium-priced Pixel phone would have powerful generative AI models running independently on the device, as the search engine giant seeks to lure buyers away from the latest iPhone.

The announcement by Google caps the autumn release season for big tech hardware that saw Apple unveil the iPhone 15 series and Meta officially launch its latest VR headset.

Running on a powerful chip, Google's Pixel 8 Pro would carry out certain AI functions on the device itself instead of relying on transfers from cloud data centers that require heavy bandwidth.

At a launch event in New York, Rick Osterloh, SVP of devices and services at Google, said that the company's AI teams had figured out how to "distill" AI models "into a version efficient enough to run on our flagship Pixel."

This would greatly enhance existing AI tools on Pixel phones, such as removing blemishes or unwanted intrusions in photographs.

Later this on-device ability would expand to other AI features, Osterloh said.

Rick Osterloh, Google's senior vice president, speaks during a product launch event for the Google Pixel 8, and Pixel 8 pro phones, in New York Friday (AFP)

Pixel phones would also begin testing an AI-amped assistant that would bring many of the abilities of Google's ChatGPT-style Bard onto the phone.

In time, the company said the AI assistant would provide real-time help such as choosing the best path for a hike, sifting through emails or planning a birthday party.

This would be handled through either spoken word, on-screen prompts or by using images, in a similar way that the more powerful chatbots work already. "Assistant with Bard combines personalized help with reasoning and genitive capabilities," said Monika Gupta, vice president of product management at Google.

AFP

# US logs fastest hiring pace in months

**Washington, US –** US employers stepped up their hiring pace unexpectedly in September while unemployment held steady, government data showed on Friday, adding pressure on policymakers seeking to cool the economy.

The US economy added 336,000 jobs last month in the highest surge since January, and the jobless rate was unchanged at 3.8 percent, said the Labor Department.

This adds to signals that the American job market remains robust despite efforts by the central bank to cool the world's biggest economy and lower inflation sustainably.

When the Federal Reserve lifts interest rates and borrowing costs rise, this can dampen hiring associated with business expansion and the jobless rate is generally expected to tick up.

But for now, the pace of hiring hovers above pre-pandemic levels and unemployment is still around a historically low level, meaning that Fed officials could consider further policy action.

President Joe Biden lauded Friday's hiring figures, adding that unemployment among groups like women and minority groups remained low.

"We have the highest share of working age Americans in the workforce in 20 years," Biden told reporters. He added that this was helped by his economic agenda.

Analysts, however, have warned that the job market could weaken going forward as it takes time for existing policy changes to ripple through the economy.

In September, sectors that saw job gains included leisure and hospitality, government as well as health care, said the Labor Department.

An area contributing to the increase was education with the government sector adding 73,000 jobs – mainly teachers for the new school year -- noted EY chief economist Gregory Daco.

But despite the blowout jobs report, he does not rule out the possibility that hiring will decline later this year.

Financial conditions are tighter, Daco said, adding: "The auto union workers strike will weigh on job growth in October while easing consumer spending and more cautious business activity will lead to slower labor demand."

AFP

# US offers no new cash to climate fund for developing countries

**Paris, France –** The United States offered no additional funds to the world's largest climate fund last week, overshadowing fresh support for nations most vulnerable to global warming and infuriating campaigners.

The Green Climate Fund (GCF), seen as a key element of the landmark 2015 Paris Agreement, funnels grants and loans for adaptation and mitigation projects, mostly in Africa, the Asia-Pacific region, Latin America and the Caribbean.

It plays a part in the promise by rich countries to supply $100bn of climate financing to poorer nations every year, which has already missed an initial 2020 deadline.

Financing is one of the most contentious topics in international climate diplomacy as the world scrambles to limit warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) above pre-industrial levels.

Developing countries least responsible for climate change are seeking support from richer polluting nations to adapt to the increasingly ferocious and expensive consequences of extreme weather, and for their transitions to cleaner energy sources.

The issue will play a major role in crunch UN talks, known as COP28, beginning in Dubai on November 30.

More than $9.3bn for 2024-2027 was pledged by 25 countries at Thursday's donor conference in the German city of Bonn.

The total is set to rise as five participants prepare to make announcements soon, the German government said.

But the number currently falls short of the $10bn countries pledged in the GCF's last replenishment cycle for 2020-2023.

Billions of dollars came from pledges already announced by Britain, France and Germany.

## 'Inexcusable'

The United States did not announce a new contribution, citing "uncertainty in our budget processes".

The US House of Representatives is in limbo after far-right Republicans helped to oust its speaker Kevin McCarthy on Tuesday, weeks ahead of a new funding deadline that could shut down the federal government.

Washington emphasised its "strong and steadfast confidence" in the GCF, according to a statement read out on behalf of Alexia Latortue, Assistant Secretary for International Trade and Development.

The United States pledged around $3bn for the fund's first resource mobilisation in 2014 under former president Barack Obama, but his successor Donald Trump gave nothing five years later.

Australia, one of the world's biggest polluters, announced it was rejoining the fund after withdrawing under former conservative leader Scott Morrison, while Israel said it would make its first contribution.

AFP

# MoE holds seminar on concepts of sustainability

The Ministry of Education, represented by the Directorate-General of Curriculum Development, in cooperation with the Oman Environmental Services Holding Company (be'ah), implemented last week a training seminar on 'Concepts of Sustainability and the Circular Economy'.

The seminar targeted 200 educational curriculum specialists, the senior supervisors in the ministry's General Diwan, and the educational directorates in the governorates of Muscat, South Batinah, North Batinah, Dakhiliyah and North Sharqiyah.

The seminar took place at the multi-purpose hall in the ministry's General Diwan.

The seminar was presented by Hafsa al Harrasi, Communication Specialist at the Centre for Sustainability and Circular Economy, at be'ah Company. The seminar included presentations about be'ah Company, the strategic objectives in environmental awareness and education, presenting waste as a problem, the reasons for the increase in its production rate, quality and quantity, and daily practices to get rid of it, and the broad impacts of their production, (such as wasting natural resources, increasing the rate of public expenditures,) and increasing awareness of the importance of public hygiene.

The seminar also included the theoretical foundations of environmental education that touched on environmental awareness, education as a solution to the problem of waste production, and a focus on schools as laboratories to monitor good practices in waste management, and the mechanism for reducing waste production to be implemented with students.

The seminar also included an introduction to sustainable consumption, to achieve the goal of reducing waste and purchasing practices, that contribute to changing the practical aspect, through wise shopping and purchase planning.

The seminar also included environmental academic programs, such as the programmes implemented in schools in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, their objectives, and the target group, presenting sustainable environmental projects for teachers, which were implemented in their schools, and the mechanism for implementing ideas to activate the 'My Journey towards Sustainability' page in schools, and the mechanism of evaluation is by supervisors.

The training seminar aimed to strengthen the partnership with the teaching staff and school supervisors, by including environmental concepts in the school curricula, empowering the teaching staff in the field of environmental awareness, promoting sustainable consumption to reduce waste production, improving the environment, and achieving strategic goals linked to the sustainable development goals by improving public health, preserving natural resources, raising the quality of life, motivating students to shift towards positive environmental behaviours by adopting sustainable purchasing habits, involving the local community, and providing information and statistics that illustrate the importance of reducing waste production and its positive impact on the environment and society.

The seminar came within the framework of a memorandum of cooperation between the Ministry of Education and be'ah Company to integrate the concepts of sustainability and the circular economy into school curricula, to spread the culture of resource management among emerging generations, enhance awareness of the importance of the circular economy, environmental education in schools, and encourage correct environmental behaviours.

# Bank Muscat organises leadership seminar, launches this year's Graduate Programme

In line with its key role to develop the competencies of the national cadre and enable youth to benefit from the different opportunities to sharpen their talents and abilities, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the sultanate, continues to provide comprehensive training programmes and seminars for its employees. Through these programmes, the bank implements its strategy that focuses at enabling employees to take bigger responsibilities.

Bank Muscat has organised a seminar by renowned keynote speaker John Mattone, a world's top Executive Coach.

Over 120 staff attended the seminar on Intelligent Leadership which recognises the immense need for a roadmap to developing and mastering the executive maturity necessary for emerging leadership. It also focused on how participants can connect with and cultivate their inner core through the seven dimensions of Intelligent Leadership.

Continuing the positive results achieved through the bank High Potential Graduate Development programme, the bank celebrated recently the enrolment of 57 employees from different business units in the bank in two new batches.

The programme focuses on creating a foundation in banking, self-management and building the potential leadership pipeline and nurturing talent internally to take up additional responsibilities in preparation for managerial roles. Specific modules throughout the programme emphasise on gaining critical knowledge and skills such as credit, investment banking, corporate finance, treasury and capital markets, retail banking, finance, assurance functions, Islamic banking, etc.

The two-year journey comprises a number of workshops and blended online modules with case studies, simulations and technical and leadership assessments.

Said Salim al Aufi, General Manager, Human Resources & Administration, Bank Muscat, said, "Human Resources continue to be considered as pillars of development in Bank Muscat. The bank firmly believes that its diligent and highly-competent employees are the main reason for its sustained growth and leadership position.

"The bank is keen to implement its training and development strategy and to ensure that we operate in a world-class working environment. I would like to thank Bank Muscat employees for their key role in supporting the development of this leading financial services provider in Oman."

Bank Muscat has a full-fledged Learning and Development department - Jadara Academy - which is affiliated with the Global Association of Corporate Universities and Academics. The department focuses on developing skills and capabilities through e-Learning modules, scholarships, professional certifications, Management and leadership training programmes.

The development of human resources is a priority in the bank with a substantial budget allocation for training and development in all functions. The training and development programmes are carried out through specialised educational courses.

# MHD launches Realme 11 5G smartphone in Oman

Mohsin Haider Darwish Infrastructure, Technology, Industrial and Consumer Solutions (MHD-ITICS), the official distributors of Realme in Oman, have unveiled the highly-anticipated Realme 11 5G at a special event held at the Crowne Plaza Muscat Hotel.

The launch took place on the sidelines of the Realme awards ceremony amidst a gathering of over 100 channel partners from across Oman.

The Realme 11 5G is equipped with a 6.72-inch Display, MediaTek Dimensity 6100+ Processor, 16-megapixel Front Camera, 108-megapixel + 2-megapixel Rear Camera, 8GB RAM, 256GB Storage, 5000mAh Battery Capacity, and Android 13 OS.

Commencing with a product presentation, the smartphone's launch-afternoon provided attendees with an in-depth look at the Realme 11 5G's impressive features and capabilities.

It was followed by awards distribution to deserving partners and retailers across various categories, such as Best Partner, Best Retailer, and Best Emerging Partner.

Certificates of recognition were also conferred to selected dealers for their outstanding contributions. To add excitement to the proceedings, a lucky-draw took place, where winners walked away with coveted prizes, including the Realme 11 5G, Realme C55, and Realme Buds.

MHD-ITICS is proud of its strategic partnership with Realme, as it helps the company provide customers with latest technologies and products. The Realme 11 5G is set to redefine the smartphone experience in Oman. Its affordability, remarkable features, and the brand's commitment to innovation, makes it a game-changer in the market.

Speaking on the sidelines of the event, Ray Duan - CEO MEA of Realme added, "We are pleased to bring the Realme 11 5G smartphone to Oman. The device is sure to resonate with tech-savvy consumers in this market. Realme is dedicated to delivering high-quality mobile devices and technology; and the launch of the 11 5G further reaffirms our dedication to our customers in Oman and the region."

The Realme smartphone's launch was graced by the presence of their CEO MEA and several key figures from the company.

The presence of industry experts, technology leaders, and the senior management of both MHD-ITICS and Realme demonstrated the importance of the 11 5G's launch and underscored the steadfastness of both organisations in delivering cutting-edge solutions to the Omani market.

# Liva's Hanaa al Hinai named 'Insurance CEO of the Year' for leadership

Driving the journey of excellence and setting new benchmarks in the insurance industry, Liva Insurance CEO, Hanaa al Hinai was recently honoured with the title 'Insurance CEO of the Year' at Alam al Iktisaad Awards 2023.

This prestigious accolade reflects the company's continuous efforts to redefine insurance solutions and achieve a paradigm shift in the insurance industry in the Sultanate of Oman.

Held under the auspice of H H Sayyid Malik bin Shihab al Said, in the presence of business leaders, dignitaries, and key decision-makers from a cross-section of the industry, the Alam al Iktisaad Awards felicitated the best-performing Omani companies who drive a catalyst change in the nation's economy and distinguished achievements.

On this occasion, Liva Insurance CEO Hanaa al Hinai said, "We are delighted to have been conferred with this prestigious accolade. It is a testament to the entire team's effort and dedication to successfully achieving the company's strategic goals.

"We focus on our strategic plan on developing competencies, enhancing innovation, and an insightful future outlook, which has paved the way for us to maintain an outstanding record of growth and excellence. At Liva, we strongly believe that our clients are the key growth drive for the company, and we are relentlessly working on catering to the needs and aspirations of our client base by offering innovative insurance services and products.

"With the vision of creating a fully integrated multi-line insurance powerhouse in the region, we are steadfast to spearhead the development of the insurance industry of the nation."

Hanaa's exceptional leadership and unwavering dedication inspired her team to successfully complete the integration of the two largest insurers propelling Liva to become a prominent force in the insurance sector. She played a pivotal role in leading the company's strategy with efficiency by balancing corporate objectives and cadres skills, ensuring to reach new heights in the sultanate's insurance sector. Guided by the insightful vision of its CEO, Liva experienced remarkable growth with this merger.

It is worth mentioning that Liva is a new brand created in 2023 from the synergetic union of Al Ahlia Insurance and National Life & General Insurance Company (NLGIC).

Aspiring to become the region's leading multi-line insurer, Liva is a unique combination of two dynamic and award-winning companies with a collective experience of over 80 years, a shared vision, and highly complementary capabilities.

ISRAEL-PALESTINE CONFLICT

# Hamas violently forces detour from Saudi-Israel momentum

The attack dealt a severe blow to the momentum to secure a US-brokered deal between Israel and Saudi Arabia

Residents walk along a debris-strewn street in front of a building that collapsed during an Israeli air strike in Gaza City early on Sunday (AFP)

**Washington, US -** With its surprise attack against Israel, Hamas has violently shifted the world's eyes back to the Palestinians and dealt a severe blow to momentum to secure a landmark US-brokered deal between Israel and Saudi Arabia.

The Iranian-backed Islamist fighters who run the impoverished, blockaded Gaza Strip on Saturday fired thousands of rockets and infiltrated forces into Israel, 50 years after Arab states' assault on Israel during the Jewish holy day of Yom Kippur.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Israel was at war. Just weeks earlier he had brushed aside the Palestinian issue during a speech at the United Nations and said normalisation in 2020 with three other Arab nations in the so-called Abraham Accords had 'heralded a new age of peace'.

Netanyahu also said Israel was on the cusp of a bigger prize - recognition by Saudi Arabia, guardian of Islam's two holiest sites. President Joe Biden, eager before next year's US election for a major diplomatic win, has pushed for a deal, and more talks were expected in coming weeks - despite skepticism from some of Biden's fellow Democrats about the proposed security guarantees to the conservative kingdom, whose rights record has long been under scrutiny.

"It was always a tough hill to climb, and that hill just got a lot steeper," said Brian Katulis, vice president of policy at the Middle East Institute in Washington.

The violence throws a spotlight on disputes between Israel and the Palestinians and 'makes it harder to sweep those complicated issues under the rug the way the 2020 Abraham Accords did', he said.

> *Netanyahu has said this is now a war. I don't anticipate normalisation is going to take place against the backdrop of war*
>
> **AZIZ ALGHASHIAN**

Saudi Arabia's de facto ruler, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, has spoken recently of progress with Israel but also insisted on movement on the Palestinian cause, seen as a priority for the aging King Salman.

Saudi Arabia's foreign ministry returned to familiar language on Saturday, saying in a statement that the kingdom had been warning of an 'explosive situation as a result of the continued occupation and deprivation of the Palestinian people's legitimate rights'.

Aziz Alghashian, a Saudi expert on Saudi-Israeli relations, said the statement was intended to dispel any notion that the kingdom would prioritise normalisation at the expense of supporting the Palestinians.

"This kind of situation has made Saudi Arabia go back to its traditional role," he said.

"Netanyahu put another obstacle to these normalisation talks because he said this is now a war. I don't anticipate normalisation is going to take place against the backdrop of war," Alghashian said. A US official said it was 'premature' to discuss the violence's effect on normalisation, as Secretary of State Antony Blinken discussed the conflict with his Saudi counterpart, Prince Faisal bin Farhan, by telephone.

A Saudi readout of the call said Prince Faisal stressed 'the kingdom's rejection of targeting civilians in any way and the need for all parties to respect international humanitarian law'.

Netanyahu has cast diplomacy with the Palestinians as antiquated and described a future of friendship with Gulf Arabs, who share Israel's hostility toward Iran's clerical rulers.

Netanyahu's government, the most right-wing in Israeli history, has continued to pursue settlements, although the prime minister backtracked in 2020 on annexation in the West Bank as he sought to woo the United Arab Emirates, the lead country in the Abraham Accords.

Joost Hiltermann, Middle East director of the International Crisis Group, which looks to resolve conflicts, said Hamas may have acted in part due to fear of a 'looming further marginalisation of the Palestinian cause in Palestinian eyes' if Saudi Arabia recognises Israel.

AFP

## Pope calls for peace

**Vatican City, Holy See -** Pope Francis on Sunday called for 'peace in Israel and in Palestine', saying 'terrorism and war do not lead to a solution'.

As war raged between Israel and Palestinian fighters, the pope called for an end to attacks in Israel.

He did not mention the Gaza Strip or the Palestinian fighter group Hamas, which launched a massive surprise attack early on Saturday.

"War is a defeat. All war is a defeat. Let us pray for peace in Israel and Palestine," he said at St. Peter's Square in the Vatican.

"I follow with apprehension and pain what is happening in Israel... I express my solidarity with the families of the victims," he told crowds after his traditional Angelus prayer.

"I pray for all those who are living through hours of terror and anguish," he said.

"May the attacks and the weapons cease, I beg you."

"Terrorism and war do not lead to a solution, but only to the death and suffering of many innocent people," the 86-year-old pontiff said.

AFP

## Lebanon's Hezbollah and Israel trade cross-border fire

**Beirut, Lebanon -** Lebanon's Hezbollah and Israel said they traded cross-border fire on Sunday, as Israel fought the Shiite movement's ally Hamas on its southern flank a day after fighters from the Palestinian group stormed its Gaza frontier.

Hezbollah and Hamas are Iran-backed Islamist groups. Both have fought multiple wars with Israel in the past few decades. Hezbollah said it carried out Sunday's assault 'in solidarity' with a large-scale air, sea and land attack Hamas launched the day before against Israel, in a dramatic escalation of the Israel-Palestinian conflict.

"The Islamic resistance... attacked three positions of the Zionist enemy (Israel) in the occupied Lebanese Shebaa farms... with large numbers of artillery shells and guided missiles," the Shiite movement said in a statement.

A column of Israeli Merkava tanks is amassed on the outskirts of the northern town of Kiryat Shmona near border with Lebanon on Sunday (AFP)

Witnesses living on the Lebanese side of the border said a dozen rockets were fired towards Israel in the morning.

Israeli drones were seen overflying the frontier region by an AFP photographer.

The Israeli army said it launched artillery into southern Lebanon on Sunday in response to fire from the area.

"Israeli artillery is in the process of striking the area of Lebanon from which a shot was fired," the army said in a statement, without giving further details. After launching its surprise assault on Israel at dawn on Saturday, the Palestinian Islamist group Hamas had called for 'Arab and Islamic nations' to join the battle.

Lebanon's National News Agency said later two more rockets were fired from the Lebanese side towards enemy positions in the Shebaa farms, prompting Israel to retaliate with fresh artillery fire.

NNA said later that a baby and another child were injured by flying shards of glass caused by the Israeli strikes on Sunday.

Israel warned Hezbollah against being involved in the fighting.

AFP

## Two Israeli tourists, one Egyptian killed in Egypt

**Cairo, Egypt -** Two Israeli tourists and one Egyptian were killed on Sunday by a policeman in Egypt, local media and Israeli authorities said, as war rages for a second day between the neighbouring country and Hamas.

The policeman fired 'at random' at an Israeli tour group visiting Alexandria using 'his personal weapon', the state-affiliated private television Extra News said quoting a security source.

A fourth person was wounded and the policeman was 'immediately arrested', it added. The Israeli foreign ministry confirmed the deaths in a statement.

"This morning during a visit of Israeli tourists in Alexandria, Egypt, a local opened fire at them, murdering two Israeli citizens and their Egyptian guide," it reads.

"In addition, there is a wounded Israeli in moderate condition."

Egypt was the first Arab country to forge a peace deal with Israel in 1979, and has long served as a key intermediary between Israel and the Palestinians. However, despite the diplomatic relations, Israel remains largely unpopular among Egyptians.

In June, three Israeli soldiers were killed in a firefight at the border with Egypt by a member of the Egyptian security forces who crossed the border 'in pursuit of drug traffickers', according to the Egyptian army.

AFP

## Germany, France step up security at Jewish temples, schools

**Berlin, Germany -** Germany and France on Saturday moved to reinforce security around Jewish temples, schools and monuments after the surprise attack by Palestinian fighter group Hamas against Israel.

Germany tightened police protection of Jewish and Israeli institutions, as some supporters of the Palestinians took to the streets of Berlin to celebrate the attack.

France focused on Jewish temples and schools in cities across the country, as one Jewish leader expressed concern at the possibility the conflict might be imported there.

"In Berlin, police protection has been immediately stepped up," Germany's Interior Minister Nancy Faeser told *Bild* newspaper. "The federal government and the regions are closely coordinating their actions."

Germany's authorities were also closely watching 'potential supporters of Hamas in the Islamist sphere', she added.

A French police officer carrying a G36 assault rifle patrols outside the Tournelles Synagogue in central Paris, on Sunday (AFP)

Berlin police posted photos on social media showing 'people celebrating the attacks on Israel by passing out pastries' on Sonnenallee, the main avenue in the city's Neukoelln district. Police had in some cases carried out identity checks and filed complaints, they added.

The German account of the Samidoun Palestinian Prisoner Solidarity Network posted photos of the distribution of pastries on the streets of Berlin and a message celebrating 'the resistance of the Palestinian people'. Martin Hikel, mayor of the Neukoelln district, denounced 'a horrible glorification of a terrible war', in comments to Welt television.

He called on the government to ban 'the disgusting terrorist propaganda of Samidoun'.

Later on Saturday, Berlin's famous Brandenburg Gate, a symbol of reunified Germany, was lit up in the colours of the Israeli flag.

AFP

# Russia to seek return to UN rights body

## The UN General Assembly on Tuesday will vote to elect 15 new members to Geneva-based UN body

**United Nations, US -** Russia, which was ousted from the UN Human Rights Council after its forces invaded Ukraine, will attempt a return to the body on Tuesday - an uncertain move that will provide a gauge of its international support.

The UN General Assembly will vote that day to elect 15 new members to the Geneva-based UN body, for terms running from 2024 to 2026.

The council's 47 members are allocated by region, and each large regional group usually preselects its own candidates, which the General Assembly then generally approves.

But this year two groups have more candidates than available seats: Latin America (candidates from Brazil, Cuba, the Dominican Republic and Peru will contest three seats), and Eastern Europe (Albania, Bulgaria and Russia will vie for two seats).

Moscow's candidacy has drawn skepticism, and the vote will come just days after a Russian missile attack on the Ukrainian village of Groza killed more than 50 people in a scene of carnage. "We hope UN members will firmly reject (Russia's) preposterous candidacy," a State Department spokesperson told AFP on condition of anonymity.

"Members of Russia's forces have committed violations of international humanitarian law, including war crimes and crimes against humanity in Ukraine," the spokesperson added.

Mariana Katzarova, a top UN expert, recently said repression inside Russia had intensified since its February 2022 invasion of Ukraine, reaching levels 'unprecedented in recent history'.

To be elected to the rights council, a country needs 97 votes of the UN's 193 member countries. In April 2022, 93 countries voted to suspend Russia from the council, while 24 opposed that move.

That majority vote against Russia was less lopsided than other resolutions defending the territorial integrity of Ukraine, with around 140 countries approving. But the situation with the rights council is more complex, as some countries also seen as rights offenders fear they may face the same fate.

A general view shows the Human Rights and Alliance of Civilizations Room, with the ceiling painted by Spanish painter Miquel Barcelo, in Geneva (AFP)

### Secret vote

The vote ON Tuesday will be by secret ballot - perhaps shining a clearer light on a fragmented world in which several developing countries have grown weary of the West's persistent focus on Ukraine. 'I think Western diplomats in New York are rather worried Russia could sneak back into the Human Rights Council' in what would be 'a public relations disaster for the UN on a massive scale', said Richard Gowan of the International Crisis Group.

"Russia has always argued that many UN members sympathise with it in private but won't support it in public for fear of antagonising Western powers," he added. "Moscow will hope that this supposed silent majority supports it in this secret vote."

Vassily Nebenzia, the Russian ambassador to the UN, pushed back, saying: "There are no beacons of democracy or rogue states, as is sometimes being portrayed. No member state can claim to be immune from human rights violations."

Louis Charbonneau of the NGO Human Rights Watch (HRW) conceded that no member of the council 'has an unblemished rights record'.

AFP

# Seventh suspect in Ecuador candidate murder dies in jail

**Guayaquil, Ecuador -** A seventh Colombian prisoner accused in the August assassination of Ecuadoran presidential candidate Fernando Villavicencio has died behind bars, authorities in Quito said on Saturday, as top security officials were sacked.

Ecuador's prison authority said in a statement that the Colombian who died in the capital's El Inca prison - like the six killed on Friday in a prison in port city Guayaquil - was 'linked' to the murder of presidential candidate and anti-corruption crusader Villavicencio.

President Guillermo Lasso on Saturday announced a 'reorganisation' of the country's police leadership, with the force's general commander, investigations chief and prisons director removed from their posts.

Lasso's office also said it will file a criminal complaint against the director of the Guayaquil prison, where the prisoners were said to have died amid 'disturbances.' "He has already been detained... to give his version before the prosecutor's office," the presidency said.

Authorities have not provided details on the inmate deaths, nor explained how the Quito prison failed to provide extra protection for the seventh suspect following Friday's killings. The assassination of Villavicencio, a centrist who had been polling in second place, rocked Ecuador days ahead of the August 20 national elections in which corruption and the country's declining security situation were major themes.

Six Colombians with long criminal records were arrested shortly after, while one was killed at the scene of the crime. Authorities arrested seven others days later. The suspects' deaths come just over a week before the election between leftist frontrunner Luisa Gonzalez and challenger Daniel Noboa.

The winner of the October 15 vote will succeed Lasso, who called snap polls to avoid possible impeachment.

AFP

Ecuadorean soldiers walk inside the premises of the Guayas 1 prison, in Guayaquil, Ecuador, on Saturday (AFP)

*The Colombian who died in El Inca prison - like the six killed on Friday in Guayaquil prison - was linked to the murder of presidential candidate Fernando Villavicencio*

# DR Congo leader files bid for 2nd term amid crowded race

**Kinshasa, DR Congo -** DR Congo's leader Felix Tshisekedi has submitted his candidacy for a second term in office, joining a crowded list of presidential hopefuls including opposition heavyweights and a Nobel Peace Prize winner.

The turbulent central African nation, a vast and impoverished country of about 100mn people, is due to hold parliamentary and presidential votes on December 20. Tshisekedi, who came to power after an election in 2018, officially submitted his candidacy for a second five-year term in office in the capital Kinshasa on Saturday.

He thereby joins over a dozen opposition candidates, including political heavyweights and senior members of the previous administration, but the opposition is far from unified.

Given the fractured opposition, the 60-year-old president is thought to stand a strong chance of winning again.

"He's in a good position," said Congolese political scientist Christian Moleka.

"He's the incumbent, he has the resources of the state, people still believe in him and he's managed to build strategic alliances," he added.

President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo Felix Tshisekedi (AFP)

The divided political opposition would need to unite around a single candidate to stand a chance of beating Tshisekedi, according to Moleka.

But that possibility appears slim. Several opposition figures who have something prove have thrown their hats in the ring.

Moise Katumbi, a business magnate and former governor of then-Katanga province is amongst those running. He had been barred from contesting the 2018 vote.

Fellow candidate Martin Fayulu says he won the popular vote in 2018 and that Tshisekedi took the presidency illegitimately. Nobel-Prize winner Denis Mukwege's entry into the race has complicated matters further.

The surgical gynaecologist and winner of the 2018 Nobel Peace Prize, for his work with sexual assault victims, announced his candidacy on October 2. He has 'moral authority,' said a diplomat in Kinshasa, who declined to be named.

Still, Mukwege is also little known outside of his native eastern DRC, and is viewed negatively in some quarters as a Western-backed candidate.

AFP

# RIP Stoneman Willie: Mummified man in US buried after 128 years

**Reading, US -** After more than a century living with a macabre mystery, the US town of Reading, Pennsylvania closed the casket on Saturday on its oddest-ever resident - a mummified man who was finally buried.

Crowds of people have lined up in recent days to pay their respects, snap photos or gaze with bewildered awe on a scene unlikely to ever be repeated in the United States.

'Stoneman Willie' was the nickname bestowed long ago on an alleged thief who died in 1895 in jail and was taken to the Theo C Auman Funeral Home when no one claimed the body, before being accidentally mummified by undertakers.

"Fast-forward 128 years and he's still here," funeral home director Kyle Blankenbiller told AFP ahead of the burial.

At his interment, a crowd gathered under overcast skies, circling around Willie's black tombstone at a local cemetery for one final farewell.

The man who became known as Willie gave a false name when he was jailed, but his true identity was tracked down and finally revealed during Saturday's ceremony, a fitting end to his life - and bizarre afterlife.

He was revealed to have been named James Murphy as his gravestone was unveiled at the climax of funeral events - which also included his remains joining a recent parade commemorating Reading's 275th anniversary.

Both names are etched on his tombstone, though his real name only in small print at the bottom.

The body of 'Stoneman Willie' lies on display at the local funeral home in Reading, Pennsylvania (AFP)

### 'Our friend'

The corpse has been in an open casket for almost his entire stay at the funeral home, until being loaded into a motorcycle-drawn hearse on Saturday.

His leathery skin and smooth sunken facial features have been the object of fascination for thousands, including countless curious locals, researchers and, in decades past, schoolchildren on class trips.

Willie had become a quirky fixture of Reading history, 'our friend' who now got a well-deserved sendoff, Blankenbiller said. According to Willie's cellmate, the man arrested for pickpocketing adopted the fictitious name James Penn because he did not want to shame his wealthy Irish father.

On his death, no next of kin were located and the body was sent to Auman's.

With embalming still an emerging science, Blankenbiller said, Auman experimented with a new formula.

'The intensity of the concoction that he used' led to Stoneman Willie's mummification, a moisture removal process that forestalls decomposition.

AFP

# India flood toll up to 77 as waters recede; more than 100 missing

**Guwahati, India -** At least 77 people are confirmed dead in the floods that hit India's northeast, authorities said on Sunday, with destroyed roads and bridges leaving thousands more still cut off despite waters receding.

Violent torrents struck Sikkim state on Wednesday after a high-altitude glacial lake suddenly burst. Scientists warn that similar disasters will become an increasing danger across the Himalayas as global temperatures rise and ice melts, spurred by climate change.

"A total of 29 bodies have been retrieved from different parts of Sikkim," state relief commissioner Anilraj Rai told AFP by phone.

In neighbouring West Bengal state, Jalpaiguri district police told AFP that another 48 bodies had been recovered. More than 100 people are still missing, according to official figures.

Water levels along the Teesta river 'returned to normal' four days after the floods hit, an official from Sikkim's state disaster control room told AFP.

The office said more than 2,500 people stranded in the floods had been rescued.

A member of Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) conducts rescue operation at Chungthang, in Sikkim's north on Sunday (ANI)

But evacuations have been complicated by the destruction of roads, bridges and telephone lines across much of Sikkim.

Another 3,000 people were still stranded in several relief camps in the state's north with airlift rescues delayed by bad weather, the office said.

More than 1,200 houses were damaged by the floods, according to the state government.

Among the dead were eight Indian army soldiers posted to Sikkim, which sits on India's remote frontiers with Nepal and China and boasts a sizeable military presence.

India's defence ministry said in a Saturday statement that the floods had washed away 'firearms and explosives' from military camps.

Local media reports on Friday said that two people had been killed and four others injured by a mortar shell that exploded while flowing through the flood waters in West Bengal.

The water surge came after intense rainfall burst the high-altitude Lhonak Lake, which sits at the base of a glacier in peaks surrounding the world's third-highest mountain, Kangchenjunga. Water powered downstream, adding to a river already swollen by monsoon rains, damaging a dam and sweeping away houses.

Himalayan glaciers are melting faster than ever due to climate change, exposing communities to unpredictable and costly disasters, according to the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) research group.

AFP

# Death toll from 'unprecedented' Afghan quakes rises to 2,000

## Nearly 10,000 were injured, as rescue workers dug through razed villages for vanishing signs of life

Afghan residents clear debris from a damaged house after earthquake in Sarbuland village of Zendeh Jan district of Herat province on Saturday (AFP)

**Herat, Afghanistan** - The death toll from a series of earthquakes in western Afghanistan rose sharply again on Sunday to more than 2,000, with nearly 10,000 injured, as rescue workers dug through razed villages for vanishing signs of life.

More than 1,300 homes were toppled when Saturday's magnitude 6.3 quake - followed by eight strong aftershocks - jolted hard-to-reach areas 30km (19 miles) northwest of the provincial capital of Herat, according to officials.

In rural Zinda Jan district, dozens of households were reduced to jumbles of broken masonry, where makeshift rescue teams dug trenches in the hope of unearthing survivors.

"Our people witnessed an unprecedented earthquake," said disaster management ministry spokesman Mullah Janan Sayeq, putting the number of dead at 2,053 and injured at 9,240 across 13 villages. "For the treatment of the victims of the incident we are doing our best," he told reporters in Kabul.

"On-site search operations in the affected area are ongoing," he added, warning the fatality figures would likely rise higher still.

One further aftershock of magnitude 4.2 hit the same area around 7am on Sunday morning, according to the United States Geological Survey.

> *Our people witnessed an unprecedented earthquake. For the treatment of the victims of the incident we are doing our best. On-site search operations in the affected area are ongoing*
>
> **MULLAH JANAN SAYEQ**

### 'Everything turned to sand'

In Sarboland village of Zinda Jan district, an AFP reporter saw homes ruined near the epicentre of the quakes, which shook the area for more than five hours.

Gutted homes showed personal belongings flapping in the harsh wind, as women and children lingered out in the open preparing to spend the night under an open sky.

"In the very first shake all the houses collapsed," said 42-year-old Bashir Ahmad.

"Those who were inside the houses were buried," he said. "There are families we have heard no news from."

Nek Mohammad told AFP he was at work when the first quake struck at around 11am (0630 GMT). "We came home and saw that actually there was nothing left. Everything had turned to sand," said the 32-year-old, adding that around 30 bodies had been recovered.

"So far, we have nothing. No blankets or anything else. We are here left out at night with our martyrs," he said.

### Casualties set to rise

Most rural homes in Afghanistan are made of sun-fired mud bricks built around wooden support poles, with little in the way of modern steel reinforcement.

Multi-generational extended families generally live under the same roof, meaning disasters like Saturday's quake can devastate local communities.

In Herat city, residents fled their homes and schools, while hospitals and offices evacuated when the first quake was felt. There were few reports of casualties in the metropolitan area.

Afghanistan is already suffering a dire humanitarian crisis, with the widespread withdrawal of foreign aid following the Taliban's return to power in 2021.

Herat province - home to around 1.9mn people on the border with Iran - has also been hit by a years-long drought that has crippled many hardscrabble agricultural communities.

Afghanistan is frequently hit by earthquakes, especially in the Hindu Kush mountain range, which lies near the junction of the Eurasian and Indian tectonic plates. More than 1,000 people were killed and tens of thousands left homeless in June last year after a 5.9-magnitude quake struck the impoverished province of Paktika.

"The Herat earthquake is worse than the eastern earthquake that happened last year," said disaster agency spokesman Janan.

"Not only by the magnitude and depth, but also more areas are affected and destroyed."

AFP

Heavy rain clouds are seen over Central district as Hong Kong hoisted typhoon signal no 8 around noon on Sunday (AFP)

# Hong Kong raises warning for Typhoon

**Hong Kong, China -** Hong Kong issued its third-highest storm warning signal on Sunday, prompting the closure of some transport services and schools, as Typhoon Koinu skirted the financial hub, bringing rains and powerful gusts.

Koinu comes just a month after the financial hub was lashed by Typhoon Saola, which triggered Hong Kong's highest 'T10' storm alert.

A week after that, the city experienced its highest rainfall in nearly 140 years, flooding subway stations and malls, and causing landslides.

Hong Kong's weather observatory on Sunday warned of strong winds and intense rain bands as Koinu moved towards the Pearl River Estuary and was expected to skirt as close as 70km (43 miles) south of Hong Kong before midnight.

"Koinu is a mature typhoon with its eyewall edging closer to the seas south of the territory," said the Hong Kong Observatory, warning the public to avoid low-lying areas in case of a storm surge. It added that it would assess the need to issue higher storm warning signals based on wind speeds.

Typhoon Koinu's 'T8' signal - the third-highest in Hong Kong's warning system - is triggered when a storm's sustained wind speed goes up to 117km (72 miles) per hour.

The storm's maximum sustained wind speed was observed at 145km (90 miles) per hour.

Schools, daycare centres, cargo terminals, ferries and buses suspended operations for the day or for the afternoon.

Around 90 flights were cancelled and 130 others delayed throughout the day due to the storm, according to Hong Kong's Airport Authority.

Hong Kong's government received reports of four fallen trees and two people wounded during the typhoon on Sunday afternoon.

Before moving to Hong Kong, Koinu had grazed nearby Taiwan, bringing torrential rain and record-breaking winds to its outlying Orchid Island.

The storm left at least one dead, and knocked out the power to hundreds of thousands of homes.

Southern China is frequently hit during summer and autumn months by typhoons that form in the warm oceans east of the Philippines and then travel west.

AFP

# Sensing power, UK poll favourites Labour holds annual conference

**London, UK -** The leader of Britain's Labour main opposition on Sunday warned the party not to become 'giddy' as it eyes a return to power after more than a decade out of office.

Keir Starmer's words of caution came as the party gathered for its annual conference, ahead of a general election expected next year. The party, which has enjoyed double digit poll leads for months, has also been buoyed by a big local election win in Scotland on Thursday.

"It is not going to be giddy, it is not going to be 'job done'," Starmer told *The Observer* weekly.

"So you won't get razzmatazz. You won't see mistakes that have been made in the past by opposition parties," he said.

Conservative Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's government has been battling stubbornly high inflation, a cost of living crisis and strikes across the economy including the state-run National Health Service. Kicking off the four-day conference, Starmer announced a £1.5bn (US$1.8bn) plan to tackle NHS waiting lists which have ballooned due to the impact of the strikes on top of a huge pandemic backlog.

Britain's main opposition Labour Party leader Keir Starmer speaks with Labour Party deputy leader Angela Rayner on the first day of the annual Labour Party conference in Liverpool, north west England on Sunday (AFP)

> *We're the party of change in Britain. We're the party of change right across the whole country*
>
> **KEIR STARMER**

The plan, which Starmer outlined in an interview with the *Sunday Mirror*, would create an estimated 2.2mn NHS appointments a year.

Starmer, 61, will be looking to come out of the event in Liverpool with the party's poll lead intact, even strengthened, after last week's Conservative party conference was overshadowed by infighting and the downgrading of a high-speed rail project.

He described Labour's huge victory in a by-election in Scotland as a 'big step in the right direction' towards becoming the biggest party in parliament, which would see him become prime minister.

"We're the party of change in Britain. We're the party of change right across the whole country," Starmer said on Friday, a clear reference to UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's claim that only the Tories offer change - despite being in power for 13 years.

Labour last held the keys to 10 Downing Street in 2010, when Gordon Brown was prime minister, and is readying itself to govern again following a general election that must be held by January 2025 at the latest.

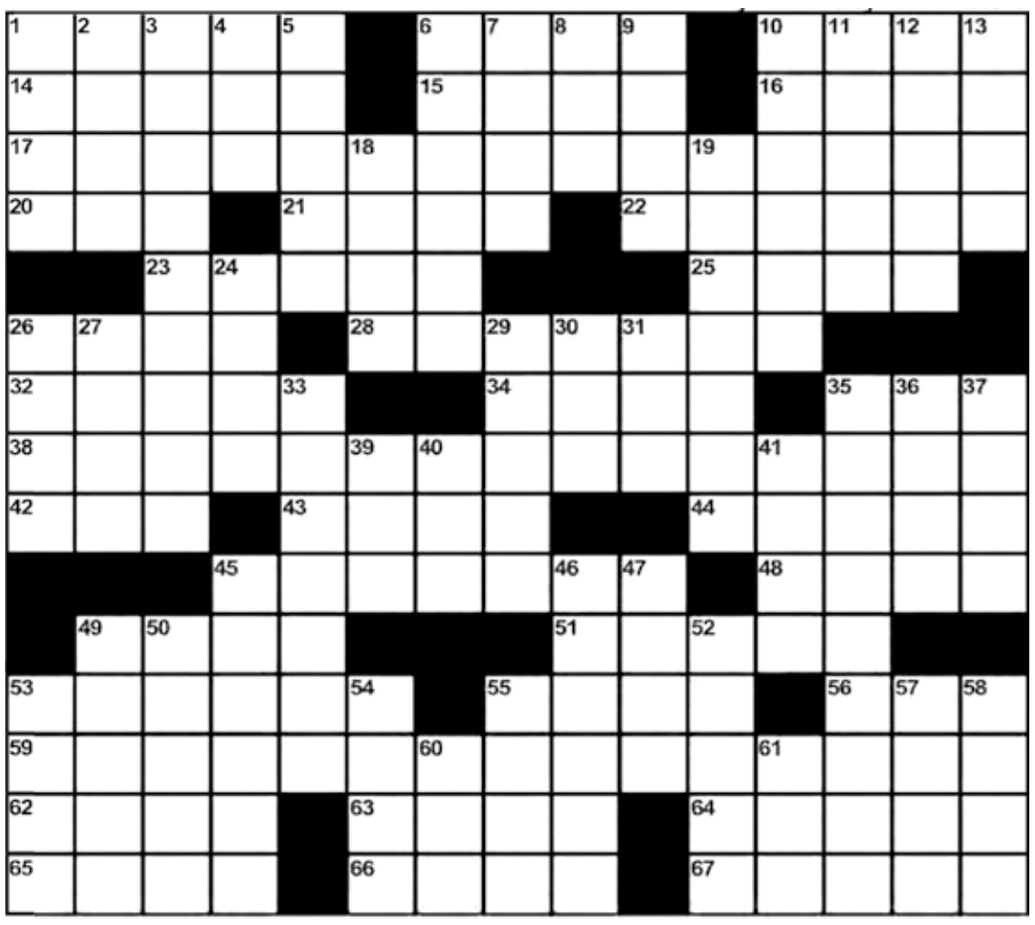
The last nationwide vote in 2019 saw Labour suffer its worst election defeat since 1935 under far-left leader Jeremy Corbyn.

But after the landslide loss to the Tories, then led by Boris Johnson, Starmer has pulled the party back to the centre ground.

He hailed as 'seismic' Thursday's win over the Scottish National Party in the Rutherglen and Hamilton West seat, southeast of Glasgow.

AFP

# DAILY CROSSWORD



**ACROSS**

1) River in Missouri
6) Overly confident
10) Crab delicacy
14) Russian prison camp
15) Lima's there
16) IRA type
17) "Waiting on ya"
20) "To_ is human ... "
21) Recital VIP
22) Crest
23) Word with "coach" or "home"
25) Recipe amt.?
26) Miner's entrance
28) Marine food fish
32) Tortellini topping
34) Stacked amount of cash
35) Mad cow disease, briefly
38) Feature of contracts
42) "Ammonia" has two
43) "The Spirit of '76" instrument
44) Feature of some purses
45) Choose not to vote
48) Uptight
49) "With this ring, I _ wed"
51) Desist's companion
53) Noah's landfall
55) Microphone word
56) Caviar, once
59) Be blatantly self-evident
62) Fire truck attachment
63) Seaside soarer
64) Slow, to a maestro
65) Orangs and such
66) Costa_, California
67) Largest city in Nigeria

**DOWN**

1) Cruel person
2) Aggressive court figure
3) Wolf criers
4) Go from pillar to post
5) Land with pyramids
6) Ball or globe
7) Track and field event
8) Cafeteria java container
9) Dates for gals
10) Trail for Hansel and Gretel
11) Rich soils
12) "Take_ down memory lane"
13) Stimulate, as an appetite
18) Seeks the affection of
19) Beginnings
24) Director Preminger
26) Church recess
27) Have an opinion
29) Sleep disturber
30) Was active at an auction
31) "Greatest" of boxing
33) Quirky
35) Along the edges of
36) Hosiery annoyance
37) Catch sight of
39) Post-USSR alliance
40) Frequent, in rhyme
41) Plural suffix with "Brooklyn"
45) Homes for hawks
46) Lipton product (var.)
47) Loch_ monster
49) Boy Scout group
50) Hole for a ship's anchor rope
52) Words before "costs"
53) Muslim honorific
54) Yonder folks
55) Large wine casks
57) Seeing through the deception of
58) They're self-inflated
60) Metal-in-the-raw
61) Yes vote

**NOTE PAD**

# YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

**ARIES** MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Today could mark the beginning of a new phase for your life. Your outlook seems much more positive. You understand that things are possible and that you're capable of doing them. Starting new adventures and tackling new challenges feels exciting rather than intimidating, and your ambition is reawakened. This is a perfect day to tackle a new goal. Pick the toughest one on your list and start moving toward it today. Success might be a long way off, but it will come.

**TAURUS** APRIL 20-MAY 20

Things between you and someone new are just getting started, but don't rush out and make any commitments regarding this relationship. Don't even make dinner reservations just yet. You need to take it slowly if you don't want to get in over your head. Leave things on a low simmer and let the boil come naturally. Before things go any deeper, you should spend more time alone. Reconnect with yourself before you give part of yourself away to another person.

**GEMINI** MAY 21-JUNE 21

Whether you're prepared for it or not, you'll finally get the challenge you've been itching for. Clear your mind and focus on staying calm under pressure. Fulfilling all your hopes and wishes is possible only if you take things slowly and deliberately. You're so close to your dream that you can just about taste it today, but you can't let your excitement make you lose your concentration. Don't dive in. Start by wading into the shallow end until you're comfortable.

**CANCER** JUNE 22-JULY 22

You can finally put an end to the friction you've been feeling with an authority figure today if you just give in and agree to let them be the boss. You might be pushing back just for the sake of pushing back, or maybe you want to show them how tough you are. Either way, this isn't the time for it. Your goals don't differ from theirs, so focus on the areas you two agree about. You could be making this harder than it needs to be. Give yourself a break.

**LEO** JULY 23-AUGUST 22

This could be one of those days in which whatever you do will be fun. You can have a good time doing anything if you stay positive! You should feel entitled to have good luck and no pressure, and that's exactly what you'll have. Put off the boring stuff and forget the errands for now. This is a time for you to clear your schedule and let the day take you wherever it takes you. There isn't a lot of pressure on you now, so make the most of it.

**VIRGO** AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Don't take things too seriously right now. Whatever you're mixed up in has a long way to go before it's finalized, so you can feel free to lighten up and step back a bit from work for a while. Doing so will help you stay in good spirits and smiling, which will make it a lot easier to make a flirtatious connection if you're looking to start something new. Otherwise, it will just feel nice to slow down and get reacquainted with the simple things.

**LIBRA** SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Giving someone a helping hand is something you should do because it's the right thing to do and not because you want people to see you as selfless. Find another way to promote yourself. Don't get other people involved in it. There's nothing wrong with trying to make the world see you in a certain light, but there's no need to create a big drama around it. Your best advertisement is to just be yourself. Putting on an act for other people is just exhausting.

**SCORPIO** OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Regardless of whether it's a major or minor life change that you have in mind, today is the day to start making it. The stars are favoring new beginnings. From starting a new eating regimen to starting a new job, there's so much good energy flowing right now that what you start today will surely end in success. Use your energy to the max and get things going in the right direction as quickly as you can. That way, you'll start to see the rewards of these changes more quickly too.

**SAGITTARIUS** NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER21

Unless you're crushing on a mind reader, you need to be more obvious about your feelings if you want a new romance to bloom! And if there's no current cutie to crush on, then be more romantic toward your very own self. Take yourself out, show yourself a good time, and enjoy the fact that as a solo act you can do whatever you want to do, whenever you want to do it. That freedom is priceless, and it's something you should consciously enjoy more often.

**CAPRICORN** DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

The goal you've set for yourself is very attainable if you persevere. Today, the contest is yours to lose, so there's no need to worry about ending up with the short end of the stick. If you concentrate and follow your carefully laid plans, all will be well. Avoid flighty people, and avoid making any changes in your schedule. Things are all lined up and ready to go. Don't disrupt the flow that you've established or you could set yourself back significantly.

**AQUARIUS** JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Suddenly your daily routine is going to feel comforting, not boring. This is good news, because it doesn't look like there will be much variation in the upcoming weeks. The patterns of your life are coming together to form a very interesting picture, and you'll be quite content to live through it. All your questions are going to get answered, and you're going to get a very strong confirmation that the recent tough decision you made was the right one.

**PISCES** FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

You've got a very sharp mind, and it's sharper than a razor right now. Use it to cut through all the baloney that someone is spouting today. They might be able to create an illusion that other people buy into, but you aren't as gullible as other people. Have fun with it. Play along if you like, the way a cat plays with a mouse, and let them think they've got you fooled. Or you can blast them right in front of everyone. It's up to you how you play it, but try to be compassionate.

# TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

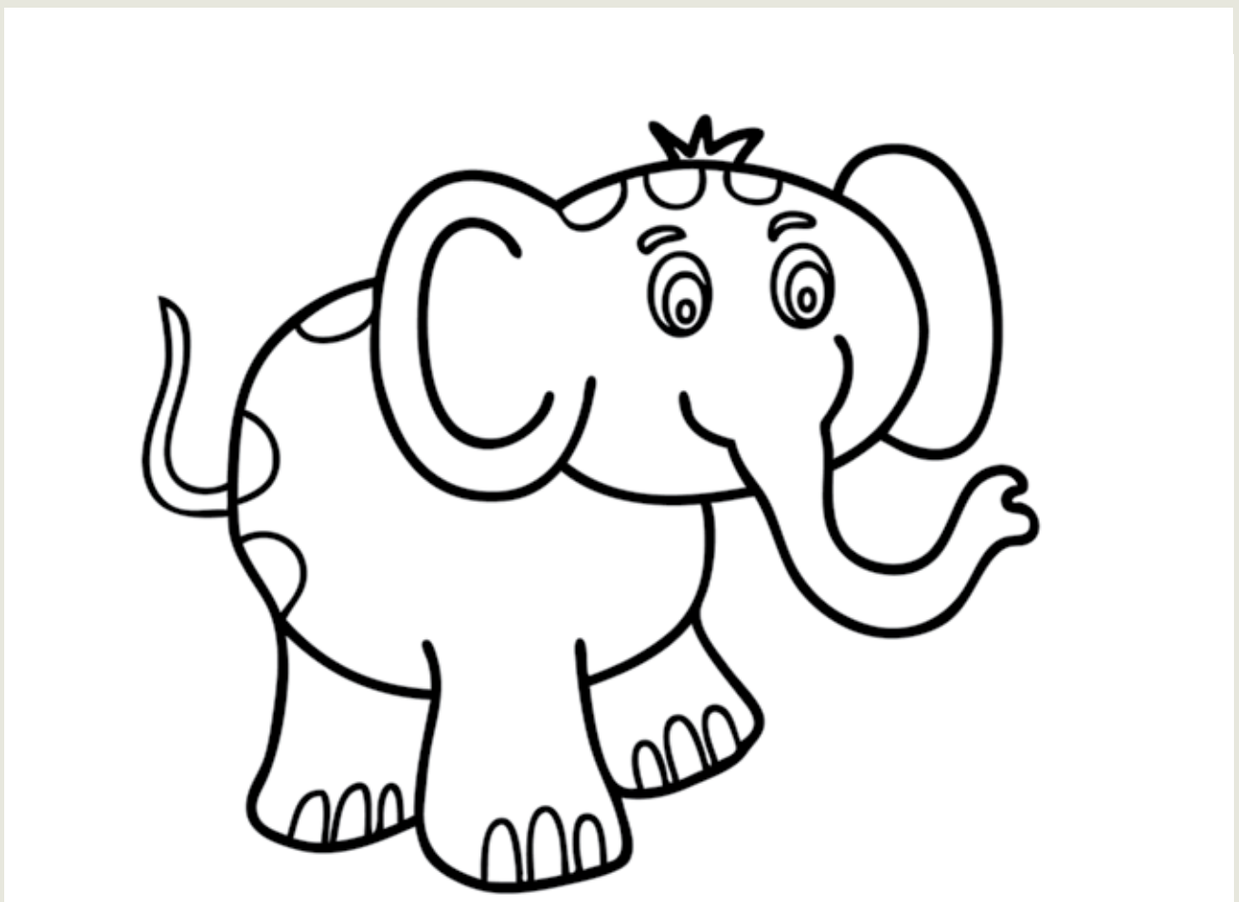
**01. Which country, after the collapse of its government-owned bank and via a referendum, decided in March 2010 not to pay Great Britain and the Netherlands the €3.9 billion that it owed them?**
A. Ireland
B. Denmark
C. Germany
D. Iceland

**02. In Victorian London, what was thick smog called?**
A. A swirler
B. A pea-souper
C. Black death
D. A ripper

**03. Buenos Aires and Montevideo are sited on opposite sides of which river?**
A. The Orinoco
B. The Amazon
C. Elqui River
D. Rio de la Plata

**Answers:** 1. D 2. B 3. D

# KIDS COLOURING



## BOGGLER

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| S | O | T | J |
| A | E | I | M |
| O | U | L | A |
| D | K | A | R |

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

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

## WORD BUILDER

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**

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

# Dynamic duo's rescue act

## Virat Kohli, KL Rahul lead India out of peril to beat Australia at World Cup

**INDIA VS AUSTRALIA**

**Chennai, India -** Virat Kohli and KL Rahul hit defiant knocks to lift India from a perilous three down for two runs to a six-wicket win over Australia in their opening Cricket World Cup match on Sunday.

Chasing a tricky target of 200, India lost three batsmen, who all failed to score, inside two overs before Kohli (85) and Rahul (97 not out) put on 165.

Victory was secured with 52 balls to spare.

Spinner Ravindra Jadeja returned figures of 3-28 to help bowl out Australia for 199 in 49.3 overs in the 150th ODI meeting between the two cricket giants.

Australia's fast bowlers then came out all guns blazing to rattle the Indian top-order after left-arm quick Mitchell Starc sent back Ishan Kishan for a duck in the first over.

Josh Hazlewood struck twice in the next to remove skipper Rohit Sharma lbw and then Shreyas Iyer caught at cover also for nought to silence the home crowd of 32,531.

Hazlewood nearly made it four down when he got Kohli to top-edge a delivery only for Mitchell Marsh to drop a skier. Kohli was on 12 at the time.

India's Virat Kohli (L) and KL Rahul run between the wickets during their 164-run partnership on Sunday

Kohli made the most of the reprieve as the star batsman reached his 67th ODI half-century and raised his bat to acknowledge the loud cheers.

Rahul soon reached his fifty in the 28th over as India went to 106-3 and in control.

Kohli finally fell to Hazlewood caught out at mid-wicket and walked off to standing ovation.

Rahul hit the winning six with Hardik Pandya at the other end.

"I had just taken a shower and was hoping to put my feet up for half an hour after the fielding innings, but I had to come in," said Rahul of his unexpectedly early arrival at the crease.

"Virat said that I should play like Test cricket for a bit."

Australia captain Pat Cummins admitted his team had been "50 runs short".

"Facing the spinners was tough and it was the kind of wicket you had to get yourself in."

Five-time champions Australia won the toss and elected to bat first but faltered.

## Prankster sparks security fear at Australia vs India match

**Chennai, India -** A pitch invader breached heavy security and fencing to break onto the field at the Cricket World Cup game between India and Australia on Sunday, getting to within touching distance of players including superstar Virat Kohli.

British YouTube prankster Daniel Jarvis stunned the crowd of around 30,000 at the M.A. Chidambaram Stadium when he appeared wearing a blue India team shirt with "Jarvo 69" written on the back.

Kohli appeared to speak with Jarvis before security escorted him away.

The International Cricket Council (ICC) said they will consider "if additional security measures are required to prevent it happening again".

"The individual concerned has been banned from attending any further games at the event and the matter is in the hand of the Indian authorities."

AFP

# Pakistan coach Arthur has inside knowledge of 'dangerous' Sri Lanka

**Hyderabad, India -** Pakistan coach Mickey Arthur admits he knows Sri Lanka's "strengths and weaknesses" inside out having spent two years at the helm of his Asian rivals.

Former champions Pakistan and Sri Lanka clash at the World Cup in Hyderabad on Tuesday, allowing Arthur the opportunity to renew his acquaintance with players he helped develop as coach between December 2019 to November 2021.

"Yeah, I know their strengths and weaknesses so we will have plans put in place for all of them," Arthur told AFP.

"They are a dangerous side so we will have to be at our best to beat them." Pakistan defeated the Netherlands in a nervy performance by 81 runs in Hyderabad on Friday to open their World Cup campaign.

They overcame a top order failure, recovering from 38-3 before posting a challenging 286 with half centuries from Saud Shakeel and Mohammad Rizwan.

They then bowled out the Netherlands for 205 in 41 overs.

Micky Arthur

> *Yeah, I know their strengths and weaknesses so we will have plans put in place for all of them. They are a dangerous side so we will have to be at our best to beat them*
>
> MICKY ARTHUR

"I enjoyed the first win even though it wasn't a great performance," admitted Arthur.

"But we did enough to win and when the game was on the line we had players standing up."

Pakistan are likely to keep the same line-up for Tuesday's match, handing a lifeline to out of form opener Fakhar Zaman who scored just 12 against the Netherlands.

"I am not worried about his form, he is a good player and is just one innings away from a big score," said Arthur of the only Pakistan batsman to have made a double century in ODI cricket.

Undone by South Africa's record-shattering 428-5 in their opening game on Saturday in New Delhi before losing by 102 runs, 1996 champions Sri Lanka will take confidence from their battling reply.

Sri Lanka will also be buoyed by their two wicket win against Pakistan last month that propelled them to the Asia Cup final in Colombo.

Skipper Dasun Shanaka admitted his side has been hampered by the loss of three frontline bowlers.

Dushmantha Chameera and Wanindu Hasaranga were ruled out of the tournament completely through injury while Maheesh Theekshana remains with the squad but sidelined with a hamstring injury.

"It was tough to manage things without three key bowlers, but that is part of the game," said Shanaka after the South Africa match.

AFP

South Africa's Aiden Markram plays a shot en route to his century against Sri Lanka on Saturday (AFP)

## South Africa record can be beaten at this World Cup, says Markram

**New Delhi, India -** South Africa's Aiden Markram confidently expects his record-breaking century, as well as his team's all-time tournament best total, to be broken before this World Cup is over.

Markram smashed a 49-ball century while the South Africans piled up 428 to defeat Sri Lanka by 102 runs in their opening fixture at the Arun Jaitley Stadium on Saturday.

The 29-year-old Markram, who went on to make 106, beat the previous record for the fastest World Cup century which was claimed by Ireland's Kevin O'Brien off 50 balls against England at Bengaluru in 2011.

South Africa surpassed the previous World Cup best total of 417 made by Australia against Afghanistan at Perth in 2015.

Their 428-5 was also the ninth highest total in all one-day internationals.

"The way batters are playing nowadays, you wouldn't be surprised if that record is broken in this comp as well," said Markram who ended his innings with 14 fours and three sixes.

"There's a sort of see-ball-hit-ball sort of mentality. We're thankful that we got a belter of a wicket there tonight."

Markram's first 50 on Saturday came from 34 balls while he needed only 15 more deliveries to add the next 50.

Rassie van der Dussen (108) and Quinton de Kock (100) also hit centuries in the first World Cup match to feature three tons in the same innings.

"It was nice for us to be able to go through the gears as a unit," added Markram after his third ODI century.

"I think a lot of credit has to go to Rassie and Quinny for setting up that platform. It's hard work always up front."

He added: "It's quite strange because you almost get this thing that just takes over your body at certain moments.

"I think there's a lot of passion in this team to give our absolute all at this World Cup and see how far it can get us. We're known to start pretty slowly."

AFP

## Williamson to miss Netherlands game

**Hyderabad, India -** New Zealand captain Kane Williamson will miss Monday's World Cup clash against the Netherlands but is expected to return to the team later in the week, said coach Gary Stead on Sunday.

Williamson is still recovering after six months out with a knee injury although he did feature in the World Cup warm-up series last week.

He sat out New Zealand's nine-wicket rout of champions England in the tournament opener on Thursday and will watch from the sidelines again in Hyderabad on Monday.

However, Stead said Williamson is expected to play in the third game of the tournament against Bangladesh in Chennai on Friday. "He is progressing really well but his fielding needs to be higher and needs trust in his body," said Stead. "We're confident he will be ready for the third game to start his tournament."

Williamson is the current squad's top scorer in ODIs with more than 6,500 runs and 13 centuries. Stead said veteran fast bowler Tim Southee, who also missed the victory over England, is available for selection after recovering from a dislocated thumb.

Kane Williamson

## Messi and Miami eliminated from MLS playoff contention

**Miami, United States -** There will be no Hollywood ending to Lionel Messi's first season in Major League Soccer after his Inter Miami team were eliminated from contention for the playoffs after a 1-0 defeat at home to FC Cincinnati on Saturday.

DC United also missed out on a spot in the post-season and immediately announced that their English manager, former Manchester United star Wayne Rooney, was leaving his post by "mutual agreement".

Messi returned from injury as a substitute in the 55th minute but Cincinnati, who have earned top seed in the playoffs, grabbed the win with a goal from Argentine Alvaro Barreal.

Messi made little impact on the field and although he had two free-kick opportunities within his shooting range, both his efforts sailed harmlessly wide.

"I could see that he was lacking football (game time)," said Miami head coach Gerardo Martino.

"The injury is fine, he doesn't have any problems, but (his performance was) logical because in recent times he has played very little and it could happen that he is lacking in rhythm."

# PULISIC, GIROUD STAR IN MILAN ACTION THRILLER

US forward's last gasp goal and Frenchman's saves help Milan move top with late drama at Genoa

AC Milan's Christian Pulisic scores against Genoa in their Serie A match on Saturday

**Milan, Italy -** Christian Pulisic fired AC Milan top of Serie A on Saturday after a 1-0 win at Genoa decided in a wild final few minutes in which Olivier Giroud slipped on his goalkeeping gloves and saved the day.

Little had happened at the Stadio Luigi Ferraris until Pulisic struck with three minutes remaining, spinning and slamming home the controversial winning goal which was only given after a long VAR check for a possible handball.

The decision to give that goal would eventually lead to a livid Genoa president Alberto Zangrillo alluding to a conspiracy in which the "usual suspects always come out on top".

Pulisic's fourth Milan goal moved his team two points ahead of Inter thanks to a fourth straight win since last month's five-goal humiliation suffered at the hands of their local rivals, who could only draw 2-2 with Bologna.

His strike also sent the match spiralling into chaos as the home side tried to scramble a point, Mike Maignan shown a straight red card in the seventh minute of stoppage time for charging out of his goal and clattering into Caleb Ekuban.

Coach Stefano Pioli had made his fifth substitute moments before so Giroud, who had been brought on in the 66th minute to score a winner, was then tasked with stopping Genoa and immediately watched on helpless as Albert Gudmundsson clipped a free-kick onto the crossbar.

"Pulisic wanted to go in goal but we told him he was too short, so Oli got picked to go in," said Pioli to Sky Sport.

With the home crowd baying for blood Genoa's goalkeeper Josep Martinez came up for the subsequent corner but ending up being sent off himself for a second bookable offence.

And Giroud capped an incredible evening by rushing out of his goal to twice to deny Genoa and ensure Milan took the three points back to the San Siro.

When asked what he would do with the goalkeeper's jersey, he said: "I'm going to frame it!"

"I didn't know if Cala (Hakan Calhanoglu) was going to head me the ball so I said to myself, 'go'. I don't have the natural skills of a goalkeeper and I really hurt my arm but that's OK."

Juventus are four points behind Milan in third after their 2-0 derby victory over struggling Torino.

Second-half goals from Federico Gatti and substitute Arkadiusz Milik made sure Juve stayed within sight of Milan and moved three in front of fourth-placed Napoli ahead of the champions' home clash with Fiorentina on Sunday.

> *Pulisic's fourth Milan goal moved his team two points ahead of Inter thanks to a fourth straight win since last month's five-goal humiliation suffered at the hands of their local rivals, who could only draw 2-2*

"We're not looking at what other teams are doing, we just want to win every game that we play, that's the only way to the top... there's a very long way to go," said Milik.

Juve's win came without starting centre-forwards Federico Chiesa and Dusan Vlahovic, both out injured for the match at the Allianz Stadium in Turin.

Chiesa risks missing out on Italy's two Euro 2024 qualifiers with Malta and England but was selected in the Azzurri squad by coach Luciano Spalletti on Friday.

AFP

# Liverpool held by Brighton while Newcastle drop points at West Ham

Liverpool's Mohamed Salah scores from the penalty spot

**London, United Kingdom -** Liverpool missed the chance to go second in the Premier League as the Reds were pegged back in a pulsating 2-2 draw at Brighton on Sunday, while Newcastle were also held 2-2 by West Ham.

Manchester City can go back to the top of the table later when they travel to Arsenal in a clash between last season's top two.

A point leaves Liverpool three points behind leaders Tottenham and after their justified fury in losing to Spurs last weekend when a goal was wrongly ruled out by a VAR error, Jurgen Klopp's men will feel aggrieved at another refereeing decision.

Pascal Gross somehow avoided a red card when pulling down Dominik Szoboszlai for a penalty that led to Liverpool's second goal just before half-time.

The visitors had been given the run around by Brighton in the opening half hour.

Alexis Mac Allister struggled on his return to the Amex Stadium and was one of the culprits for the opening goal.

The Argentine was caught in possession by Simon Adingra, who then caught Alisson Becker out of position by taking his shot early from outside the box.

After a bright start to the season, Brighton have now won just once in six games as the rigours of European football have told on Roberto De Zerbi's men.

The Seagulls' daring approach has won plenty of plaudits but Liverpool pounced on their weaknesses to turn the game on its head five minutes before the break.

Twice Brighton were punished for giving the ball away inside their own half as Harvey Elliot unselfishly allowed Darwin Nunez's pass to find Mohamed Salah to slot home the equaliser.

Liverpool's high press then won the penalty as Szoboszlai dispossessed Gross and was pulled down by the German midfielder.

Salah confidently dispatched the spot-kick, but Liverpool will ask questions about why they were not up against 10 men for the rest of the game.

AFP

Borussia Dortmund's Julian Ryerson (R) scores past Union Berlin's Danish goalkeeper Frederik Ronnow

# Bonucci goal not enough as Dortmund beat Union

**Berlin, Germany -** Borussia Dortmund came from behind to beat Union Berlin 4-2 and remain unbeaten in the Bundesliga on Saturday, despite Leonardo Bonucci scoring his first goal for the capital club.

Italian veteran Bonucci put Union ahead from the penalty spot in a dramatic first-half, but Dortmund battled back to claim their fifth win of the season.

"We were really good today. I usually like to be critical, but I think we can be really proud of this performance," said Dortmund defender Mats Hummels.

Last season's surprise package Union have now lost their last seven in all competitions as they also struggle with the step up to Champions League football in this campaign.

"It is really tough mentally to have to take so many hits. I think the international break will do us good," Union defender Robin Gosens told Sky.

Union started brightly, but allowed Niclas Fuellkrug to give Dortmund the lead at a corner on seven minutes.

Fuellkrug's joy was shortlived, however. Just two minutes later, he deflected a Gosens header into his own net to make it 1-1.

The drama continued with three game-changing VAR decisions in the space of 10 minutes.

> *Last season's surprise package Union have now lost their last seven in all competitions as they also struggle with the step up to Champions League football in this campaign*

Union's Alex Kral and Dortmund's Fuellkrug both had headed goals ruled out for offside, before Hummels conceded a penalty with a late challenge on Sheraldo Becker.

Bonucci converted with ease to put Union in front and net his first Bundesliga goal, but Dortmund struck back with two goals in quick succession just after half time.

First, Former Union player Nico Schlotterbeck whipped a breathtaking shot into the top corner from the edge of the area to level the scores.

Minutes later, substitute Julian Brandt put the home side back in front as Dortmund tore through Union on the counter-attack.

The hosts sealed victory through another former Union player on 72 minutes, when Julian Ryerson's long-range shot was deflected in to make it 4-2.

The win put Dortmund second overnight, while Stuttgart went top with a brilliant 3-1 win over Wolfsburg.

# Ancelotti lauds Bellingham's goal-scoring surge



Real Madrid's Jude Bellingham celebrates with teammates after scoring against Osasuna (AFP)

**Barcelona, Spain -** Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti said nobody expected Jude Bellingham to be so explosive in front of goal after the midfielder hit a brace to send Madrid back top of La Liga on Saturday with a 4-0 win over Osasuna.

Girona's 1-0 win at Cadiz temporarily gave the Catalan minnows a one-point lead but Madrid cruised to victory at the Santiago Bernabeu to reclaim first place, with Vinicius Junior and Joselu also scoring in the rout.

England international Bellingham, the division's top scorer with eight goals, was at his unstoppable best once more in the final third.

Ancelotti has shifted the former Borussia Dortmund player into a more attacking role, with freedom to move behind two more central strikers and it has paid dividends.

After scoring a brilliant solo goal against Napoli in midweek in the Champions League and adding two more against Osasuna, the midfielder now has 10 goals across both competitions in 10 appearances.

"Bellingham is finding a lot of chances in attack, he's very involved in the team's attacking play and not having a fixed position gives him an advantage," Ancelotti told reporters.

"It's been a surprising start to the season for him in all aspects. Obviously nobody expected this level, in terms of goals."

Ancelotti deployed defensive midfielder Aurelien Tchouameni alongside Antonio Rudiger at the heart of defence, with David Alaba and Eder Militao injured, and Nacho suspended after his rash tackle last weekend against Girona.

However Tchouameni enjoyed a quiet afternoon at the back as Madrid dominated to ensure they will stay top over the international break.

Luka Modric, afforded a rare start, helped create the opener by feeding Dani Carvajal who laid the ball off neatly to Bellingham.

The midfielder, who had surged into the box, slammed the ball past goalkeeper Sergio Herrera.

# TOTAL DOMINATION

## Record-breaking China bring curtain down on biggest Asian Games; Oman finish with silver and bronze

Performers take part in the closing ceremony of the 2022 Asian Games at the Hangzhou Olympic Sports Centre Stadium on Sunday (AFP)

**Hangzhou, China -** Hosts China racked up a record 201 gold medals before the curtain came down on two weeks of tears and triumphs at the Asian Games in Hangzhou on Sunday.

Japan were a distant second in the final medals table with 52 golds, down from 75 at Jakarta in 2018, and South Korea third on 42.

India's pinpoint archers and shooters helped propel the country to 107 medals, their best showing ever.

Oman also enjoyed a successful campaign, winning a silver and a bronze. Musa al Hadi and Waleed al Kindi secured silver in the men's 49er while Husain Mohsin al Farsi took bronze in the 800m.

The 19th and biggest Asiad concluded at the 80,000-capacity Olympic stadium with China handing over to Japan for 2026 at a celebratory closing ceremony.

Dancers holding lit-up props fanned out towards the audience in a performance evoking ocean waves while the words "love Asia" were projected on a big screen.

The Games are normally every four years but Nagoya-Aichi has a shorter run-up because Hangzhou was postponed by a year due to China's now-abandoned zero-Covid measures.

Speaking at the closing ceremony, a spectator surnamed Xia told AFP that the Games made her feel "very moved and proud".

"The Chinese team did great," she said.

Taiwan's Gu Shiau-shuang won the final gold earlier in the day when she successfully defended her title in women's karate.

But it was the hosts who dominated over much of the fortnight, their 201 golds beating the 199 they collected at Guangzhou 2010.

Their exploits across the 40 sports at the Games reinforced China's status as Asia's sporting superpower, topping the medals table at every Asian Games since 1982. The competition will be much stiffer in less than 10 months at the Paris Olympics.

With about 12,000 athletes, this was the biggest Asian Games in history and had more competitors than the Olympics.

The Games were China's chance to show it was business as usual following the Covid policies that largely sealed its borders.

Crowds waving mini Chinese flags regularly filled the 54 venues.

> *Oman also enjoyed a successful campaign, winning a silver and a bronze.* ***Musa al Hadi and Waleed al Kindi secured silver in the men's 49er while Husain Mohsin al Farsi took bronze in the 800m***

"Technically we have had one of the finest Asian Games ever," said Olympic Council of Asia acting director general Vinod Kumar Tiwari.

"We have had 97 Games records, 26 Asian records and 13 world records, so the standard has been very, very high and we are very happy with it."

World records tumbled in shooting and weightlifting, with North Korea celebrating their return to the global sporting arena after four years away by hoovering up six weightlifting golds.

But the hoisting of their flag - in contravention of World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) sanctions - was a running controversy in Hangzhou that was never resolved.

# Philippines basketball glory to Chopra: five Asian Games performances

**Hangzhou, China -** The Asian Games in Hangzhou witnessed some world-class performances over two weeks of action in 40 sports. AFP Sport picks out five who excelled:

### Shanti Pereira Athletics

The 27-year-old sprinter took a leap of faith earlier this year and was rewarded in Hangzhou with 200m gold.

She gave up her job as a copywriter to become a full-time runner and it paid off as she won Singapore's first athletics Asian Games gold in 49 years.

"When I had the chance I jumped right in," said Pereira, who also took home 100m silver.

### North Korea Weightlifting

North Korea's weightlifters shocked their rivals after re-emerging from four years of Covid isolation to top the competition with some record-breaking performances.

They started with a bang on the opening day of weightlifting as Ri Song Gum broke two world records in the women's 49kg.

### Zhang Yufei Swimming

Untouchable Chinese butterfly specialist Zhang Yufei reinforced her status as a major threat at the Paris Olympics with a dominant showing in the Hangzhou pool and winning the Games MVP award.

Neeraj Chopra

The Olympic and world champion won six gold medals, more than anyone else, winning the 50m, 100m and 200m fly, 50m freestyle and helping China surge to two relay titles.

### Neeraj Chopra Javelin throw

The world and Olympic champion from India conjured up a mammoth throw to win gold in style at the Hangzhou Olympic Stadium.

Under pressure after teammate Kishore Kumar Jena produced a huge personal best of 87.54m, Chopra responded with a season's best 88.88m - longer than the 88.17m that won him the world title at Budapest in August.

"It feels great when we push each other to go farther and farther," Chopra said of competing against his compatriot.

### Philippines Basketball

A first Asian Games basketball gold for 61 years sparked an outpouring of joy across the hoops-mad nation after the "Gilas" beat Jordan 70-60.

The nation of 110 million people was glued to television or phone screens to watch the Gilas - meaning panache - end more than half a century of hurt.

Russia's Daniil Medvedev looks unimpressed during his match against USA's Sebastian Korda (AFP)

## Defending champion Medvedev out of Shanghai Masters

**Shanghai, China -** Defending champion Daniil Medvedev said missing one key opportunity had cost him a spot in the Shanghai Masters' fourth round after he was knocked out in straight sets by 26th-ranked Sebastian Korda on Sunday.

The Russian fell apart in the second set after Korda won the first on a tiebreaker taken to the brink, with the match finishing 7-6 (10/8), 6-2.

"I should have won the tiebreak but didn't," said the world number three afterwards.

"I was, for sure, down mentally after such a first set... In the tiebreak, he actually didn't play that good (compared to the rest of the match). I didn't use this opportunity and I'm going home."

### Swiatek champion

Iga Swiatek hailed a "really big" victory after she delivered a dominant performance to win the China Open on Sunday, beating surprise package Liudmila Samsonova in straight sets to crown a resurgent run of form.

The world number two triumphed 6-2, 6-2 in Beijing to take the first China Open women's title since the pandemic, after Beijing lifted its isolationist zero-Covid policy.

## North Korea to let doping officials back in for testing

**Hangzhou, China -** North Korea has agreed to let drug-testing officials back into the country, the Olympic Council of Asia said Sunday, a move it hopes will temper a row over its flag being flown at the Asian Games.

North Korea has been largely closed off from the outside world since early 2020, when it shut its borders because of the Covid pandemic.

The World Anti-Doping Agency declared North Korea's national anti-doping body "non-compliant" in 2021 because it was unable to get its testers into the country and imposed sanctions.

But border restrictions appear to be easing slightly and OCA acting director general Vinod Kumar Tiwari told reporters in Hangzhou: "North Korea has written a letter to them very recently telling them that the borders have opened and they can send their doping control officers for the testing.

"WADA has agreed and they will probably be sending their people to North Korea."

The Montreal-based WADA confirmed the reopening, but told AFP that "the broader political status of the country means verification and quality control activities are not straightforward".

> *There are a range of punishments WADA could impose on the Kuwait-based Olympic Council of Asia*

One of the sanctions on North Korea is not being able to fly its flag at any regional, continental or world sports event, excluding the Olympics and Paralympics.

Despite this it has been routinely hoisted at the Games in Hangzhou, with WADA warning the OCA of "consequences" for allowing it to happen in breach of its obligations as a signatory to its anti-doping code.

"We have been in touch with WADA on a daily basis and we are trying to resolve the issue," said Tiwari.

"It's a very sensitive issue, it's not very easy to handle. Hopefully things will be resolved in a way that is mutually acceptable to both parties."

There are a range of punishments WADA could impose on the Kuwait-based OCA.

They include having International Olympic Committee (IOC) funding withdrawn, OCA events losing their status as qualifying events for the Olympic or Paralympic Games and the imposition of fines.

North Korea's participation at the Asian Games marks its return to the global sporting arena for the first time since slamming its borders shut during the pandemic.

AFP

Argentina's Mateo Carreras dives to score a try during their match against Japan (AFP)

## Argentina to play Wales in quarters after beating Japan

**Nantes, France -** Mateo Carreras scored a hat-trick of tries as Argentina beat Japan 39-27 in a thriller in Nantes on Sunday to set up a World Cup quarter-final against Wales.

Los Pumas finished as Pool D runners-up behind England and fixed a date against the Welsh in Marseille next weekend. Defeat meant Japan failed to advance to the knock-out phase.

"We like to be a fighting team and we fight for everything, but the resilience of this team is what makes the difference here. I am really proud of the team on how we fought," said Argentina captain Julian Montoya.

"We want to win every game, we started the game with England not the way we wanted to and we were upset with our performance," he added in reference to an opening pool 27-10 loss to the English followed up by victories over Samoa (19-10) and Chile (59-5). Montoya's counterpart Kazuki Himeno said he was "really disappointed" with the result.

"We talked about climbing Mount Everest, we didn't get to the summit and have the Cherry Blossoms at the top. However, our legacy and the culture of Japanese rugby will continue and believe we will improve from now on."

Simone Biles competes in the women's balance beam final on Sunday (AFP)

# Biles wins beam gold for 22nd world gymnastics title

**Antwerp, Belgium -** US superstar Simone Biles continued her winning return from a two-year break by claiming a 22nd world title with gold on the balance beam at the world gymnastics championships on Sunday.

Biles, 26, followed her gold in the team and all-around events during the week, as she sealed the beam title for a fourth time with a dazzling routine which earned her 14.800 points.

China's Zhou Yaqin, 17, scored 14.700 to take silver with Brazil's Rebeca Andrade, who beat Biles to gold in the vault on Saturday when the American fell, claiming bronze with 14.300.

In a high-level final, Biles performed her acrobatics without moving a millimetre on the apparatus.

The title was decided by a tiny margin, as teenager Zhou also impressed. Gold only escaped the Chinese gymnast because she took a step back at her exit of the beam and was penalised a tenth of a point.

For Biles it was a 29th world medal. The Texan could add another later on Sunday when she competes in the floor routine on the final day of competition in Antwerp. Biles has made an impressive return to competition two years after her "twisties", a temporary mental block whereby gymnasts lose their sense of where they are in the air, ended her Tokyo Olympics.

She then stopped training completely and only returned to competition last August in the United States.

## Red Bull boss hails Verstappen as 'most competitive ever'

**Doha, Qatar -** Red Bull team boss Christian Horner hailed newly-crowned three-time world champion Max Verstappen as "the most competitive driver I've ever seen" on Saturday after he clinched his third title at the Qatar Grand Prix.

As tributes flowed and the Red Bull team celebrated in their black "champion" t-shirts, Horner described the 26-year-old Dutchman as "phenomenal" and "out of this world".

His father Jos Verstappen, a former team-mate of seven-time champion Michael Schumacher at Benetton, expressed his pride in not only his son's achievement but the manner of them.

"Of course, we appreciate it (the championship triumph), but it's also the way he did it," said Verstappen senior.

His calm, consistency and work ethic were most frequently praised by those close to him and the Red Bull team with Horner adding that his innate self-confidence was his most telling characteristic.

AFP

Max Verstappen (C) celebrates his third world championship with his team after the sprint race at the Lusail International Circuit on Saturday (AFP)

# THREE IN A ROW FOR MAX

## Verstappen wins third straight Formula One title

**Doha, Qatar -** Max Verstappen clinched his third consecutive world title on Saturday when he finished second behind rookie Oscar Piastri in an incident-filled sprint race at the Qatar Grand Prix, describing his success as "fantastic".

It was a fine maiden Formula One victory for Australian 22-year-old Piastri, but his feat was overshadowed by Verstappen's achievement, the Dutchman having required only three points to take the title. His only rival and Red Bull team-mate Sergio Perez was involved in a collision and retired, making him the first "Saturday champion" since Nelson Piquet, father of his girlfriend Kelly, in South Africa in 1983.

"I don't know what to say. Incredible year. Thank you for providing me with such a car. It has been a pleasure so far this year," 26-year-old Verstappen told his team over the car radio.

Piastri's win was McLaren's first since Daniel Ricciardo triumphed for them at the 2021 Italian Grand Prix and it was only the second time this season that Red Bull had been defeated.

Verstappen won the title with six races remaining in the season, the greatest margin since 2002 when Michael Schumacher was champion for Ferrari.

His title win enabled him to join a rare club for three-time champions alongside Jack Brabham, Niki Lauda, Nelson Piquet, Ayrton Senna and Jackie Stewart – and an even more elite group of those to have won three in a row, Juan Manuel Fangio, Schumacher, Sebastian Vettel and Lewis Hamilton.

"This has been a fantastic feeling and it has been a fantastic year. We have had some great races and I am super proud of the team job and it is so enjoyable to be a part of this group of people. To win three times is incredible," added Verstappen.

He said that he had no records in sight as targets, but wanted to continue racing and winning.

> *This has been a fantastic feeling and it has been a fantastic year. We have had some great races and I am super proud of the team job and it is so enjoyable to be a part of this group*
>
> MAX VERSTAPPEN

"We'll keep on pushing and doing the best we can."

Verstappen, who will start Sunday's Qatar Grand Prix from pole position, has an unassailable 184-point lead with six races left in the season.

Piastri said: "I am very happy but that was a stressful race. We did a great job."

His McLaren team-mate Lando Norris came home third ahead of Mercedes' George Russell and Hamilton with the Ferraris of Carlos Sainz and Charles Leclerc sixth and seventh.

Alex Albon of Williams was eighth, two-time champion Fernando Alonso of Aston Martin ninth and Pierre Gasly of Alpine 10th. After a sweltering day, the sprint race started in warm conditions under floodlights at the Lusail International Circuit, Piastri making an excellent start to pull clear as team-mate Norris was engaged by a cluster of skirmishes behind him.

Norris dropped from second to sixth while Russell went through to second ahead of the two Ferraris with Verstappen fifth before Liam Lawson ran off-track in a cloud of dust, prompting a safety car intervention.

On re-start, a fiery Alonso pressurised Norris in a wheel-to-wheel battle while Piastri ran wide and allowed Russell through to lead. Logan Sargeant then spun off in his Williams to bring another safety car interval.

Piastri had chosen medium compound tyres while Russell, Sainz and Leclerc were all on softs, giving them an early advantage in grip.

Verstappen, in fifth as the safety car led into lap six of the 19-lap race, was comfortable in the knowledge that he was on course to clinch his third title by finishing in the top six.

As lap seven began and the safety car went in, Russell stormed into a 1.4 seconds lead ahead of Piastri, who was fending off attacks from Sainz, hoping that his medium tyres would prove more durable in the closing stages.


# CLASSIFIEDS

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**An Indian-British** national, U.K. citizen, a published writer on defence policy and strategy, available for advice/consultancy work on geopolitical and international security issues or assignments. Please reply in the first instance to pj11.online@gmail.com

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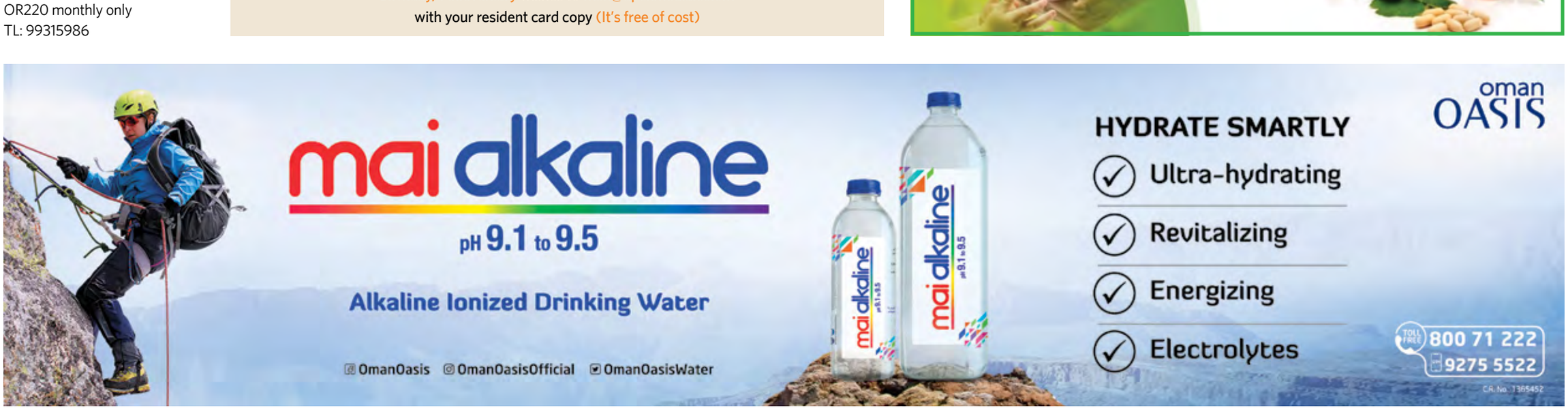


INDIGENOUS TROOPS

Major Rob Watchorn (R) teaching soldiers from the North-West Mobile Force (Norforce) and the 51st Far North Queensland Regiment during a training exercise at a military barracks located on the outskirts of the Northern Territory capital city of Darwin

# BUSH FORCE

## INDIGENOUS TROOPS GUARD AUSTRALIA'S VAST NORTH

In the scorching heat of Australia's far north, the next generation of Indigenous army leaders crawl almost unseen through red dust, past towering termite mounds and eucalyptus trees.

Just over a century ago, their ancestors were banned from fighting for their country but these men and women are now training in Darwin to become patrol commanders.

The soldier at the rear uses the leaves of a small tree branch to brush the group's bootprints from the soil, erasing all traces of their presence.

The Indigenous soldiers are among 1,300 troops responsible for guarding just over half of Australia's landmass, an area larger than India. They are from the North-West Mobile Force (Norforce) and 51st Far North Queensland Regiment.

Along with Western Australia's Pilbara Regiment, they make up the Regional Force Surveillance Group.

In the unlikely event that the north of Australia is invaded, they would conduct covert surveillance, feeding information to those coordinating a response. But much of the group's peacetime work is border protection, looking for signs of smuggling, poaching, drug running and illegal fishing.

### DEADLY WILDLIFE

Indigenous people have lived in Australia for at least 60,000 years.

Their knowledge of the land and local contacts mean they quickly notice anything amiss - a discarded fishing net, animal remains, even money coming in.

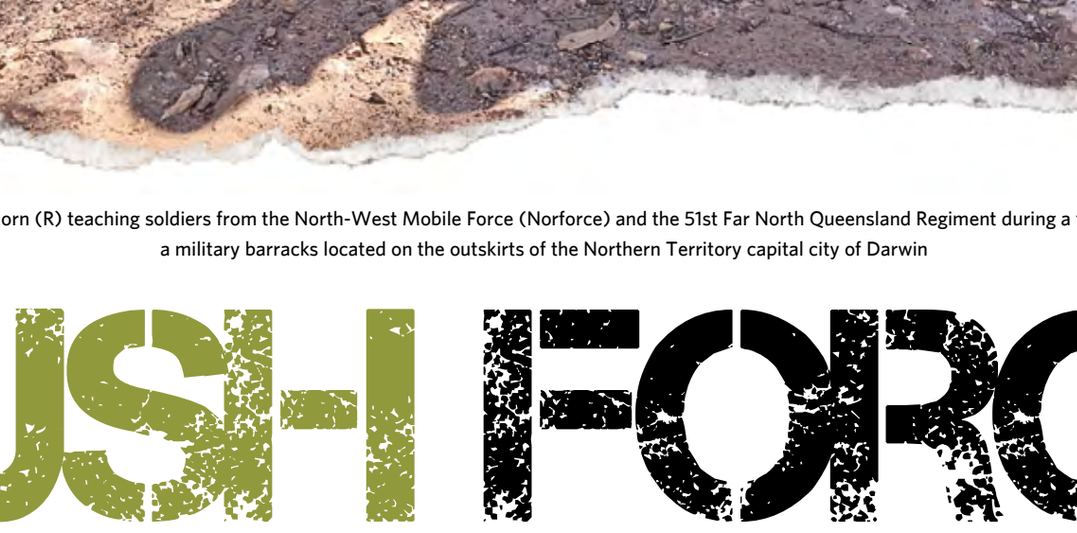
"I know how to take care of myself when I'm in the bush," said Norforce Lance Corporal Carl Murkun, 34, from Gapuwiyak in north-east Arnhem Land. "It's really natural to me." The surveillance group can never hope to cover such a massive area alone, so they rely on contacts within remote communities who trust them with information.

A small group of soldiers can be sent to these communities to build networks or to check on assets such as fuel supplies, rural roads or landing strips.

Soldiers must be able to cope with extreme weather and deadly wildlife for up to three weeks. They rely on skills passed down from ancestors - hunting, tracking and the ability to read the environment and work with it.

Major Rob Watchorn, who commands the Indigenous Development Wing, said the First Nations soldiers' knowledge of the environment is valuable.

"What I depend on is the people with the intimate knowledge to be able to answer my questions and influence how I plan activities," Watchorn said.



An armed soldier from the North-West Mobile Force (Norforce) on his watch

> When the army recruits an Indigenous soldier, it also negotiates with their family and wider community, We take the community on that journey".
>
> LIEUTENANT COLONEL EILEEN HALL

### BAD TRACK

Lance Corporal Murkun spent much of his childhood sleeping in the wilderness with his parents, dealing with snakes and crocodiles. He decided to join the army after realising he was on a 'bad track', struggling with alcohol and violence.

"Now I'm a clean man, a clean person and I don't like violence any more."

First Nations soldiers make up just over three per cent of the Australian Defence Force - about the same proportion as in the wider population -- but in these units, they represent up to 40%.

Cultural adviser Lieutenant Colonel Eileen Hall's job is to bridge the gap between military command and Indigenous communities. With a First Nations mother and an Irish father, Hall describes herself as "blessed to walk within two worlds".

"When the army recruits an Indigenous soldier, it also negotiates with their family and wider community," she said. "We take the community on that journey."

First Nations Australians often have poorer education records and, if they live in an isolated community, the nearest high school may be too far away for them to attend. They are statistically far more likely to end up in jail than other Australians.

Ordinary details like date of birth can also be hard to confirm, notably due to a government policy that forcibly removed Indigenous children from their families during much of the 20th century.

### LOOK AFTER COUNTRY

Commanding officers can often help overcome such hurdles, but there is no guarantee. Many remote First Nations communities share mobile phones, and the nearest reception could be many miles away.

Since British colonisation more than 200 years ago, Indigenous Australians have struggled against discrimination, even when it comes to military service.

When Australia entered the First World War in 1914, it banned "Aborigines, half-castes and all coloured men" from service. The rules were relaxed in 1917 as the need for reinforcements became desperate.

Despite not being allowed to vote or receive veterans' benefits, around 6,000 First Nations Australians served in World War II.

Murkun is like many other First Nations soldiers - he follows his grandfather, who fought the Japanese in the Pacific.

Hall said First Nations people are also drawn to the military out of a sense of duty to the land.

"Part of that obligation is looking after and protecting because if I don't look after country, country won't look after me. And it doesn't just affect me, it affects my whole bloodline."

AFP

# QUAKE REBUILD

## *Traditional methods urged for Morocco quake rebuild*

A man rides his donkey next to the rubble in the earthquake-hit village of Imi N'Tala, in central Morocco



**DOUARS**

How do you rebuild and earthquake-proof a centuries-old Moroccan mountain village, at speed, without sacrificing its traditional architecture? That's a key challenge facing the reconstruction of the country's isolated 'douars', which were devastated by a strong 6.8-magnitude earthquake last month.

The September 8 quake, which killed around 3,000 people and injured 5,600, according to the latest official figures, damaged about 60,000 homes across 3,000 villages in the High Atlas mountains and their surroundings.

One month on, the survivors are still living in tents and relying on a field hospital and temporary schools set up by the authorities.

In the meantime, a small army of architects has mobilised and is sketching out ideas on how to reconstruct the douars in a way that respects the traditional architecture of these isolated and largely deprived communities.

Karim Rouissi, a Moroccan architect, has been on investigative trips to around 30 of the villages, in particular those in Al-Haouz - the province most affected by the earthquake.

"Supervised self-build should be encouraged, using local materials," he told AFP. "It's important that the response in the douars and rural centres be different to that for urban areas," said Rouissi, who was joined on his visits by fellow volunteer architects, engineers and officials from the housing ministry.

### OVERCONFIDENCE IN CONCRETE

Returning to traditional architecture may, in fact, be part of the answer to the need for greater resilience.

In recent years, 'often poorly built' concrete construction has displaced traditional earthen and stone buildings in the High Atlas, said Elie Mouyal, another Moroccan architect.

"Overconfidence in concrete has been a trap," the specialist in traditional housebuilding told AFP. "I saw many more collapsed concrete houses," he said. While some earthen buildings had also fallen down, he added, they were mostly already in poor condition before the earthquake.

"Morocco must avoid copying external experiences or opting for standardised housing," said Philippe Garnier, a French architect who studied Iran's 2003 Bam earthquake and the devastating 2010 tremor in Haiti.

"The idea is to build on local expertise in traditional construction, making some improvements, and therefore enhancing their know-how," he said.

Rabat has announced a budget of 120bn (US$11.6bn) over five years to support 4.2mn people affected by the quake.

And King Mohammed VI has stressed the importance of listening to the local population and respecting the unique heritage and traditions in the region during the reconstruction.

### WINTER WORRIES ME

Such is the scale of the task that it may well last several years, said Garnier. Avoiding a rushed reconstruction will be essential to ensuring solid and lasting foundations, the architects said.

Proper positioning of rebuilds to take seismic activity into account and avoiding open-plan ground floors is essential, Garnier said.

Given how long this could take, Mouyal has designed a prototype 'nouala', a type of traditional cabin, as a potential temporary housing solution.

The 15sqm cabins are built using reed canes wrapped in earth and straw. For insulation, the architect at first opted for foam but eventually settled on hemp and PVC tarpaulins.

The temporary housing can be built in as little as a week for just 6,000 dirhams (US$582) without insulation, said Mouyal, who has already begun training others in how to build the prototypes.

Nevertheless, Abderrahim Akbour, who has been homeless for a month, remained worried. He lived in Imi N'Tala, a mountain village 75km south of Marrakesh. It was completely flattened by the earthquake, and residents were relocated to a neighbouring village.

"Living in a tent with winter coming quickly worries me a lot," he said. "It could be much worse than the earthquake itself."

AFP

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