

# WHO calls evacuation orders in north Gaza 'death sentence' for sick, injured

Cairo, Egypt - As the United Nations agency responsible for public health, the World Health Organization (WHO) strongly condemned Israel's repeated orders for the evacuation of 22 hospitals treating more than 2,000 inpatients in northern Gaza.

The forced evacuation of patients and health workers will further worsen the current humanitarian and public health catastrophe, the WHO stated.

The lives of many critically ill and fragile patients hang in the balance - those in intensive care or who rely on life support, patients undergoing hemodialysis, newborns in incubators, women with complications of pregnancy, and others 'all face imminent deterioration of their condition or death if they are forced to move and are cut off from life-saving medical attention while being evacuated'.

Health facilities in northern Gaza continue to receive an influx of injured patients and are struggling to operate beyond maximum capacity. Some patients are being treated in corridors and outdoors in surrounding streets due to a lack of hospital beds.

'Forcing more than 2,000 patients to relocate to southern Gaza, where health facilities are already running at maximum capacity and unable to absorb a dramatic rise in the number patients, could be tantamount to a death sentence,' WHO said.

Hospital directors and health workers are now facing an agonizing choice - abandon critically ill patients amid a bombing campaign, put their own lives at risk while remaining on site to treat



Ministry of Health officials in Gaza made a distress call to all countries to send medical teams to help the wounded in the ongoing Israeli aggression in Gaza (AFP)

*Forcing more than 2,000 patients to relocate to southern Gaza, where health facilities are already running at maximum capacity and unable to absorb a dramatic rise in the number patients, could be tantamount to a death sentence*

WHO

patients, or endanger their patients' lives while attempting to transport them to facilities that have no capacity to receive them.

Overwhelmingly, caregivers have chosen to stay behind, and

honour their oaths as health professionals to "do no harm", rather than risk moving their critically ill patients during evacuations. 'Health workers should never have to make such impossible

choices.'

Additionally, tens of thousands of displaced people in northern Gaza are seeking refuge in open spaces in or around hospitals, treating them as havens from violence as well as to protect the facilities from potential attacks. 'Their lives, too, are at risk when health facilities are bombed.'

There are verified reports of deaths of healthcare workers and destruction of health facilities, which denies civilians the basic human right of life-saving healthcare and is prohibited under In-

ternational Humanitarian Law.

WHO called for Israel to immediately reverse evacuation orders to hospitals in northern Gaza, and for the protection of health facilities, health workers, patients and civilians. WHO also reiterated its calls for the immediate and safe delivery of medical supplies, fuel, clean water, food and other humanitarian aid into Gaza through the Rafah crossing, where life-saving assistance - including WHO health supplies that arrived on Saturday - is currently awaiting entry.

See also [Page 07](#)

## World's conscience must awaken to crimes of Israel: Arab League

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

Ahmed About Gheit, Secretary-General of Arab League, declared that Israel is perpetrating war crimes and extensive breaches of international laws on Sunday.

"Israel's relentless acts as a killing machine are nothing short of manifesting the inherent cruelty and harshness of the occupation. Israel is accumulating a record of war crimes and sweeping infringements of international humanitarian law," Gheit posted on X.

He emphasised that the global sentiment is shifting from a long-standing bias in favour of Israel to a grim acknowledgment that civilians in the Gaza Strip are bearing the consequences.

"We will persist in diplomatic engagements and communications until there's a change in this situation. The conscience of the world must awaken to the crimes that are being committed."

Gheit informed that he conferred with Moussa Faki Mahamat, Chairperson of African Union Commission, on Sunday. "We unanimously condemned the killing of civilians and stressed the urgent need to establish humanitarian corridors for aid delivery to Gaza."

He underscored the fact that the Israeli actions constitute war crimes, and that any ground operation initiated by Israel is tan-



Ahmed About Gheit

tantamount to genocide.

Additionally, Gheit met Annelena Baerbock, German Foreign Minister, on Saturday at the Arab League to discuss the escalating crisis in the Gaza Strip.

On Friday, in a letter to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, Gheit labelled Israel's conduct as "an atrocious act of revenge, punishing helpless civilians in Gaza". He asserted the importance of Europe to align its actions with its stated principles. "We're committed to rekindling global awareness of the ongoing situation in Gaza."

On Sunday, World Food Programme stated that sufficient supplies are stationed at the Gaza border to sustain 1.3mn people and appealed for the establishment of safe passages for delivery.

The International Committee of the Red Cross has indicated that the humanitarian state of affairs in Gaza is reaching a critical point and urged the international community to facilitate the entry of relief material.

### SAYYID BADR SPEAKS TO EGYPTIAN, SYRIAN FMS

Muscat - H E Sayyid Badr al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, spoke with his Egyptian and Syrian counterparts Sameh Hassan Shoukry and Fayssal Mekdad, respectively, on Sunday.

They discussed the ongoing escalation of violence in Gaza and the rest of the occupied Palestinian territories and the efforts made to contain the situation.

The ministers stressed the need to immediately stop Israeli military operations in Gaza and open urgent humanitarian corridors to ensure the entry of relief and aid for the Palestinian population and those injured by the Israeli bombings.

## Oman investing US\$30bn in hydrogen economy

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

Oman is investing more than US\$30bn in hydrogen production, aiming to become one of the largest producers in the world by 2030. Utilising solar and wind energy for electricity generation, the sultanate is currently working on a strategy of orderly transition to zero neutrality and is committed to lowering emissions by 21% by 2030.

H E Salem bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, has detailed Oman's comprehensive plan to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050. This national initiative prioritises clean energy growth, green projects and green hydrogen. "Our energy sector plays a pivotal role in mitigating climate change and reducing emissions," he said. The minister added that increased energy efficiency in buildings and vehicles



H E Salem al Aufi

will cut down fuel consumption. Additionally, green transportation solutions like electric cars are being promoted.

Investments in green hydrogen align with Oman's ambitions. According to H E Aufi, this will not only bolster Oman's position in the hydrogen market but also support Oman Vision 2040 objectives to diversify the economy and minimise carbon footprint.

The sultanate is making sig-

nificant progress in green hydrogen development, with bidding agreements already in place. The minister also discussed the role of Oman Sustainability Centre, an entity that will monitor and ensure the progress of the national zero-neutrality plan.

Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of Environment Authority, affirmed Oman's commitment to the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. "Since adoption of the national strategy for zero neutrality in 2022 and the announcement of the year 2050 for zero neutrality, a specialised team has been working across sectors including oil, gas and transportation to identify key initiatives for reducing emissions."

Oman will submit an environmental performance report to the United Nations in November, covering areas like reducing emissions, climate adaptation and biodiversity.

### 30,000 LEMON TREES FOR NET-ZERO GOAL

H E Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, and Abdulsalam al Murshidi, President of Oman Investment Authority, planted a lemon tree marking the launch of an inaugural carbon-capture initiative in Dhofar on Sunday. To reach net-zero carbon emissions by 2050 and bolster food security, Nakheel Oman Development and Petroleum Development Oman have come together for the initiative. It involves planting 30,000 Omani lemon trees to boost lemon production by 3,000 tonnes, thereby increasing lemon production by 38%



In Pakistani biryani, subtle differences inspire devotion

## Foreign investments in Buraimi up 339%; now among rising economic hotspots

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

The Governorate of Buraimi has witnessed a remarkable uptick in foreign investments, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) has stated.

This year by October, the

governorate registered a total of 777 foreign investment companies - from 177 in 2022 - accounting for an impressive growth of 339%. This positions Buraimi firmly on the map as a rising economic hotspot.

Hamad bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Director of Department of Commerce, Industry and In-

vestment Promotion in Buraimi, attributed this boom to the governorate's forward-thinking investment strategies.

Elaborating on the importance of collaboration in achieving this milestone, Saeedi said MoCIIP's efforts aligned with those of the Governor's Office. Additionally, active participa-

tion of both government and private sectors resulted in a unified vision to spur Buraimi's growth.

"Our strategy focuses on simplifying procedures, hosting annual events and initiating activities that energise the local economy," Saeedi added.

Foreign investment in Bu-

raimi now stands at RO9mn in registered capital. "To attract foreign entrepreneurs, we've judiciously cut down investment-related charges," Saeedi informed.

The governorate now hosts 584 industrial establishments. The Department of Commerce, Industry and Investment Pro-

motion is vigilant, overseeing all business-related activities from shops and gas stations to promotions and offers, ensuring compliance with legislations.

Shedding light on other significant figures, Saeedi informed that by the end of September, commercial records in Buraimi totalled 923.



# COME ONE, COME ALL

In a historic move last week, the ministers of tourism of Gulf Cooperation Council member states came together to unanimously approve a unified GCC visa. This development is expected to enhance tourism across the GCC, making it easier and more convenient for tourists to visit and explore the diverse attractions of the region. Here's what *Muscat Daily* readers said about the unified visa -



**Salim Harthy**  
Private sector employee

The unified visa for the GCC is a significant development aimed at enhancing travel and tourism within the member states of the GCC. This visa initiative will ease travel for both GCC citizens and tourists. It eliminates the need for multiple visas when travelling within GCC countries, making it easier and more convenient to explore

neighbouring countries for leisure or business. It is also a good way for the promotion of tourism. It encourages tourists to explore a wider range of attractions and experiences in the GCC.

**Mukilvannan N**  
Mechanical quality controller

This is a well-thought solution for all GCC residents who work here, making it easy for them to access and tour

the Gulf states. Having spent 14+ years in Oman, I eagerly await implementation of this.

**Sanjay Kumar**  
Businessman

One of the main benefits of this, other than simplified travel procedures for people, is businesses will flourish. More entrepreneurs can easily attend conferences, meetings and network-

ing events. There will also be more cultural exchange with people coming back and forth thus promoting greater understanding and appreciation among the peoples of the region.

**Shakila Javed**  
Lecturer

Implementation of this decision is poised to bring about advantages for both foreigners and the GCC countries. By facilitating and enhancing the experience for international visitors, it will not only cater to the needs of foreigners but also contribute significantly to the overall promotion and growth of the tourism sector within the GCC nations.

**Maanoj Agarwala**  
General manager

A common tourist visa within the GCC, combined with efficient and rapid intra-GCC rail and road infrastructure connectivity, will significantly enhance trade and tourism. The reduction in administrative time for planning and travel can be redirected towards more productive and economy-boosting activities. This reflects a cohesive and well-planned movement in the right direction.

**Nasser al Adawi**  
Brand manager

The Gulf countries are reaping the dividends of a tourism renaissance, particularly as we approach the introduction of a tourist visa that enables visitors to explore multiple countries with a single visa. Visa-free travel among residents of the Arab Gulf countries will further catalyse growth of the tourism sector. Approximately 70% of incoming tourism originates from international markets, and by opening borders to tourists visiting the GCC countries, we stand to tap into the potential of welcoming the 100mn tourists who annually visit these nations.

**Srikanth Ayyagari**  
Deputy manager

A common tourist visa for the GCC could boost tourism by simplifying travel within the Gulf region, attracting more visitors and increasing economic activity. It can lead to improved cross-border cooperation, benefiting the economies of the Gulf countries through increased tourism revenue and job opportunities.

**? NEXT ON YOUR SAY**

**His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has ordered the establishment of an integrated sports city to host global tournaments. How will this help development of the sports sector and put the spotlight on Oman's varied offerings?**

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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

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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](mailto:muscatdaily@apexmedia.co.om)

## Two-month ban on kingfish fishing lifted

Muscat - The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR) has announced lifting a ban on kingfish fishing. The fish can be fished and traded starting Monday, October 16.

MAFWR issued a statement saying, 'The two-month ban on fishing and trading of kingfish for the year 2023 has been lifted.'

By implementing the ban, the ministry aimed to preserve stocks of kingfish and regulate fishing in order to achieve a balance between natural reserves and demand for the fish.

MAFWR also appreciated all fishermen for their cooperation throughout the prohibition period from August 15 to October 15.

The ban was vital for maintaining sustainability of kingfish stock.

## ESO, BirdLife sign MoU

**Our Correspondent**  
Muscat

Environment Society of Oman (ESO) has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with BirdLife International, represented by its Middle East Regional Office in Amman, Jordan. BirdLife International is a worldwide partnership of conservation organisations working to protect the world's birds and their habitats. The partnership network comprises 121 independent non-governmental conservation organisations covering the regions of Africa, Americas, Asia, Europe and Central Asia, Pacific and the Middle East.

BirdLife's strategy relies on the four pillars of saving species, conserving sites and habitats, encouraging ecological sustainability, and empowering people for positive change. The two organisations will set up areas of cooperation to cover these pillars, and set up research and conservation actions affecting birds, wider biodiversity and their habitats.

Dr Amor al Matany, President of ESO, said, "Our mission is to protect and conserve Oman's natural environment and influence environmentally sustainable behaviour through education, awareness and conservation. We are proud to collaborate with Birdlife International, an organisation widely recognised for its conservation efforts globally, to further implement our mission."

ESO's informal collaboration with BirdLife International started in 2012. "We worked on various initiatives together in the last ten years such as the illegal killing of birds and the global flyway programme, among others. This MoU will shape and increase our joint efforts for biodiversity conservation in Oman."

Ibrahim Khader, Regional Director of BirdLife International in the Middle East, said, "We are extremely fortunate to be working alongside such a dedicated and passionate organisation as ESO. This agreement will enable us to pool our resources and expertise to tackle some of the most pressing environmental challenges facing the region today."

Khader informed that one of the key areas of focus for this collaboration will be the conservation of migratory birds, which are not only an important part of the region's biodiversity, but also play a vital role in maintaining the health of ecosystems and supporting local communities.

**SULTANATE OF OMAN**  
**MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS and YOUTH**  
**MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS and YOUTH, Muscat, hereby give notice of tenders for the following projects**

| Tender No.        | Project Category               | Location                                                                                                   | Grade In Tender Board Registration | Last day to purchase tender documents | Last date of tender submission |
|-------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Re-tender 21/2023 | Information Technology Service | Support Libraries With The Basic Equipment Of The Operating System Rfid Technology                         | Third,Fourth Grade                 | 21/10/2023                            | 30/10/2023                     |
| 22/2023           | Consulting Offices             | Request For Proposal For The Lead Architectural Design Consultant                                          | First Grade                        | 21/10/2023                            | 30/10/2023                     |
| 23/2023           | Supply                         | Supply And Installation Of Floodlight To Main Football Pitch At Fanja Sports Club Ad-Dakhiliya Governorate | Excellent & First Grade            | 28/10/2023                            | 27/11/2023                     |
| 24/2023           | Supply                         | Supply And Installation Of Electronic Scoreboard To Football Stadium At Seeb And Saadah Sports Complex     | Excellent Grade                    | 21/10/2023                            | 30/10/2023                     |

Companies, which are registered with the Tender Board and engaged in same category with experience in and same Grade as noted above, can obtain the Tender Documents at the Tender Board E-tendering digital portal link (<http://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)

The last date of tender submission on above E-tendering site

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**Recall**

**2021-2023**  
**Jeep Grand Cherokee**  
**/Grand Cherokee L**

**Recall Date: 16 October 2023**

| Brand of Commodity | Year of Production | Number of Affected Commodities |
|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------|
| Jeep Cherokee      | 2021-2023          | 171                            |

**Recall consequence**

About 316,500 of the vehicles mentioned above may have been built with an incorrectly installed rear coil spring, which may detach from the vehicle while driving. If this were to happen while driving, it could pose a hazard to operators and occupants of other vehicles and lead to an accident. It could also result in injury to vulnerable road users.

**Recall Action**

Inspect the rear coil springs for proper orientation with the bottom isolators. Inspect the upper isolators for proper installation. If either end of the spring fails the inspection, lower the rear suspension on that side of the vehicle (one side at a time if both sides need repairs), replace the lower isolator(s), and reinstall the spring(s) and its isolators in the proper orientation.

To check the serial Numbers of the affected commodities, please visit the website for Recalls & Warnings: <http://recall.pacp.gov.om>

خط المستهلك  
Consumer line  
80079009  
80077997

هيئة حماية المستهلك  
Consumer Protection Authority  
[www.pacp.gov.om](http://www.pacp.gov.om)

For more information: 800 22 008 | [www.mhd.gov.om](http://www.mhd.gov.om)

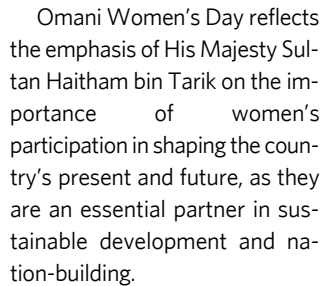
## Our Correspondent

### Muscat

Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) has suspended all celebrations related to Omani Women's Day.

In a statement, MoSD said, 'In solidarity with the Palestinian people and in light of the current events and ongoing escalation in Gaza, the ministry announces the suspension of all activities related to celebration of Omani Women's Day.'

Oman will mark Omani Women's Day on Tuesday, which recognises their contribution to the march of renaissance and comprehensive development in the sultanate, as well as their role in social, cultural, economic and sports fields.



His Majesty the Sultan has accorded attention to empowering women in various fields and assigned a number of senior government positions to distinguished women of Oman.

MoSD had drawn up a multi-day schedule of events, focusing this year's celebrations on culture and literature.

Starting on Sunday, MoSD held a seminar titled 'A Woman from the Nation's Rib' at Oman Convention and Exhibition Cen-

tre. The Governorate of North Sharqiyah, named guest of honour this year, hosted an evening programme called 'Appreciation for Omani Women' on Sunday.

An exhibition showcasing national manuscripts and historical documents was also planned for

three days. The ministry had plans to bestow honours on 30 eminent women in the field of culture and literature at a ceremony on Tuesday.

Data released by National Centre for Statistics and Information

highlight the expanding role of Omani women in multiple sectors - 95,652 women are employed in the public sector, 114,674 in the private sector and 21,419 engaged in the family sector.

In the academic year 2021-2022, 43,335 Omani women were engaged as teachers in public and private schools. The public sector had 1,605 female doctors in 2022.

According to the centre's data, Omani women made up 90% of the craft industry's workforce in 2022. Also in 2022, 26,980 women were registered in retirement funds and there were 65 women's associations. In terms of political representation, women constituted 17.6% of the State Council and 2.3% of Majlis A'Shura in the 2019-2023 term.

**Muscat** - Oman, in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR), Nama Water Services and Omani Food Bank, will observe World Food Day on Monday.

The theme for this year's World Food Day - observed every year on October 16 - is 'Water is Life, Water is Food'.

A ministry official underscored the mounting stress on global water resources due to factors such as population growth, urbanisation, economic progress and climate change. Freshwater resources worldwide have dwindled by 20% in recent decades.

"Oman requires 409mn m3 of water annually. We're boosting water availability through various measures like dam construction, cloud seeding and re-vamping traditional irrigation systems," the official said.

There are 187 dams in the sultanate with a storage capacity of about 358mn m3, including 67 groundwater recharge dam, 115 surface storage dams and five to protect against flooding.

Oman's falaj irrigation system, which is believed to be more than 2,000 years old, directs water from underground or natural runoff to communities. Located mainly in Batinah, Sharqiyah and Dakhliyah regions, there are currently 4,112 of these water channels.

## Our Correspondent

### Muscat

The Ministry of Health (MoH), in collaboration with World Health Organization, launched a Leadership Development Programme for mid-level healthcare workers on Sunday.

The programme underscores the ministry's commitment to fostering sustained leadership and aims to establish a seamless management framework for healthcare.

The event was presided over by HE Dr Hilal Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, and attended by guests such as Dr Jean Jabbour, WHO Representative in Oman.

Emphasising the role of leadership in healthcare, H E Sabti highlighted the programme's objective of building the next cadre of health leaders. "Over the next six months, we'll be selecting participants for advanced training in health systems and hospital management in collaboration with the Royal Academy of Man-



DR NASSER AL AZRI

agement."

Explaining the programme's goal to enable middle management in healthcare, Dr Nasser al Azri, Director General of Administrative Affairs at MoH, said, "We've meticulously tailored the programme's content based on an in-depth field study, identifying the skill sets required for effective hospital and health

institution management."

The programme consists of two distinct modules: one for current hospital directors and those in similar leadership roles, and another for staff chosen through a selection process.

Dr Azri added that 38 participants have been enrolled from various health institutions, including MoH, Medical City for

1920

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بؤود  
Muscat Arab Digital Capital  
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# Bank Muscat reports RO159mn net profit for first 9 months of 2023

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

Bank Muscat, the leading financial institution in the sultanate, reported a net profit of RO158.88mn for the first nine months of 2023, marking a 7.1% year-on-year growth compared to RO148.29mn net profit reported during the same period in 2022.

The bank on Sunday announced its preliminary unaudited financial results for the nine months ending on September 30, 2023.

Net interest income from conventional banking and net income from Islamic financing saw a growth of 10.2%, reaching RO280.98mn for the nine-month period ending on September 30, 2023, compared to RO254.93mn for the same period in 2022.

The bank's non-interest income for the nine-month period ending on September 30, 2023, amounted to RO100.23mn, compared to RO100.69mn in the same period in 2022. This de-



**Bank Muscat's net loans and advances (including Islamic financing receivables) grew by 6.9% to RO9.869bn as of September 30, 2023, up from RO9.229bn a year ago**

crease was primarily due to a one-off gain from the sale of investments of approximately RO8mn in the previous comparative period. Excluding this one-time gain, non-interest income saw an 8.1% increase, Bank Muscat said.

Bank Muscat's operating ex-

penses for the nine-month period ending on September 30, 2023 came at RO146.48mn compared to RO139.85mn in the same period in 2022, representing a 4.7% increase.

The net impairment for credit and other losses for the first nine months of 2023 increased by

12.8% to RO46.91mn, compared to RO41.58mn for the same period in 2022. The bank's net loans and advances (including Islamic financing receivables) grew by 6.9% to RO9.869bn as of September 30, 2023, up from RO9.229bn a year ago.

Customer deposits (including Islamic customer deposits) increased by 8.9% to RO9.485bn as of September 30, 2023, compared to RO8.709bn a year ago.

Bank Muscat's total assets increased by 6.1% to RO13.521bn at the end of September 2023, up from RO12.742bn a year ago.

## Oman economy to grow by 1.4% in 2023: WB

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

The World Bank anticipates Oman's economy to expand at a slower rate of 1.4% this year, down from the 4.3% growth recorded in 2022. This slow pace of growth is primarily attributed to a reduction in oil production under the OPEC+ agreement and subdued oil prices compared to the previous year.

The World Bank, in a recently report released, noted that oil production cuts, amidst a global economic slowdown that has been suppressing oil prices, will have adverse effects on the economic activities of oil-exporting nations in the Middle East.

Across the GCC, growth is projected to average 1% in 2023, marking a significant deceleration from the 7.3% recorded in 2022, according to the World Bank.

'In contrast to the exceptionally rapid growth seen in 2022, which was bolstered by the surge in oil prices following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, economic activity in the region is expected to decelerate in 2023,' the World Bank said in its report titled 'Balancing Act: Jobs and Wages in the Middle East and North Africa when Crises Hit.'

The report further said, 'In 2022, oil exporters in the Middle East and North Africa, especially in the GCC, experienced rapid growth, outpacing oil importers except Egypt. This divergence is projected to narrow in 2023 and 2024, bringing the tale of two MENAs to a halt.'

Due to reduced oil production levels and less favourable oil market prospects, economic activity in Saudi Arabia is projected to contract by 0.9% in 2023, a stark decrease from the 8.7% growth recorded in 2022. Growth in the remaining GCC economies is also expected to slow down significantly. In the United Arab



Emirates, growth is predicted to decrease to 3.4%, down from 6.6% in 2022.

'The headwinds in global oil markets have dampened growth among the region's oil exporters. Growth in the MENA region is expected to decelerate in 2023, reflecting both base effects and spillover effects from the global economic slowdown,' the bank said.

**Across the GCC, growth is projected to average 1% in 2023, marking a significant deceleration from the 7.3% recorded in 2022, according to the World Bank**

The World Bank's 2023 forecast has been revised downward further over the past 12 months, following the oil production cuts announced by OPEC+ in October 2022 and April 2023, along with the additional cuts announced by Saudi Arabia in June 2023.

The World Bank pointed out that despite production cuts, av-

erage oil prices for 2023 have not returned to the levels seen in 2022. As of September, the Brent crude oil spot price had risen to \$93.5 per barrel, but the estimated average oil price for the calendar year 2023 (based on spot and futures contracts) was \$83.5, significantly lower than the 2022 average of \$100.

'The increase in oil production in other countries, including the United States, may exert further downward pressure on global oil prices,' the World Bank cautioned.

### Growth to rebound in 2024

Growth is expected to rebound in 2024 for economic activity in the GCC, assuming that OPEC+ production quotas are relaxed.

'In 2024, growth is projected to accelerate to 3.6% among GCC economies, according to the World Bank's projections,' the global financial institution said.

According to the World Bank, Oman's growth is expected to rebound to 2.7% in 2024.

As per the bank's forecasts, average inflation in Oman is expected to remain at 1.3% this year and rise to 1.8% in 2024.

## CMA issues regulation for marketing insurance products

Muscat - The Capital Market Authority (CMA) issued a decision on Sunday endorsing regulation for marketing insurance products through banks.

This regulation serves as a framework for governing and regulating the relationship between insurance companies and banks. It provides adequate



protection for holders of insurance policies marketed and sold through banks.

The regulation specifies the effective channels and mechanisms for marketing these products in a manner that ensures the clarity of terms and raises awareness among policyholders.

The CMA stated that the issuance of this regulation represents a step forward in reducing unhealthy practices in marketing of these types of products.

'The regulation will also reduce disputes between policyholders and insurance companies when insurance claims arise,' the CMA added.

## OPEC oil supply rises in September

Vienna, Austria - Total crude oil production from the 13 members of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) increased by 273,000 barrels per day (bpd) month on month in September.

According to OPEC's monthly oil market report, total OPEC crude oil production averaged 27.75mn bpd in September.

Crude oil output increased mainly in Nigeria and Saudi Arabia, while production decreased the most in Venezuela.

Nigeria increased production by 141,000 bpd and Saudi Arabia by 82,000 bpd, whereas output fell by 25,000 bpd in Venezuela last month.

The share of OPEC crude oil in total global production increased by 0.3 percentage points to stand at 27.6% in September.

Global oil production was largely unchanged last month, averaging 100.6 million bpd compared with the previous month.

Non-OPEC production, including OPEC NGLs, in September declined by around 300,000 bpd to an average of 72.9mn bpd.

'Production increases were mainly driven by Other Eurasia and the UK and were more than

offset by drops in Russia and the US,' the report said.

Meanwhile, the global rig count totaled 1,830 in September, a decrease of 30 from August, with OPEC countries accounting for 428 rigs.

A total of 22 drilling rigs were closed in non-OPEC countries, while eight rigs were decommissioned in OPEC countries.

Global oil demand forecasts for 2023 remained unchanged from the previous month's estimate.

According to the latest OPEC oil market report, global oil demand is anticipated to rise by 2.4mn bpd to average 102.1mn bpd in 2023.

Demand in the OECD region is expected to rise by 89,000 bpd to average 45.8mn bpd.

'Demand in OECD Americas is expected to witness the largest regional rise, led by the US, on the back of growing jet fuel demand and expanding gasoline requirements. Light distillates are also projected to support demand growth this year,' the report said.

In the non-OECD region, total oil demand is forecast to rise by about 2.3 million bpd to an average of 56.3mn bpd in 2023.

Anadolu Agency



## Qatari banker Sheikh Jassim withdraws bid to buy Manchester United club

Manchester, UK - Qatari banker Sheikh Jassim bin Hamad al Thani has withdrawn a bid to buy Manchester United, a source close to the deal told AFP.

United announced nearly a year ago that they were exploring "strategic alternatives to enhance the club's growth", with a full sale one of the options.

Sheikh Jassim and British billionaire Jim Ratcliffe were the front-runners after several rounds of bidding earlier this year, but the process has stalled in recent months despite the anger of supporters towards current owners, the Glazer family.

The Daily Mail reported that Ratcliffe is now set to secure a 25% stake in the club for around £1.5bn (\$1.7bn).

The Glazers have owned the English giants since a leveraged takeover in 2005 for £790mn saddled the club with huge debts. Figures in March showed



United's debt has now grown to £970mn.

Sheikh Jassim's bid was for full control of United and promised to clear the club's borrowings.

Further talks this week broke down despite an improved bid believed to be around £5bn.

By contrast, Ratcliffe is reportedly willing to buy a smaller stake to break the impasse over the Glazers' £6bn asking price.

Founder of petrochemicals giant Ineos, Ratcliffe is a boyhood United fan and already has a portfolio of sports investments.

Ineos owns French club Nice and Swiss side Lausanne-Sport, as well as leading cycling team Ineos Grenadiers and is a major sponsor of the Mercedes Formula One team.

United's fortunes on the field have also faded under the Glazers' tenure.

The Red Devils have not won the Premier League since former manager Alex Ferguson retired in 2013 and last won the Champions League in 2008.

They currently sit 10th in the Premier League and have lost their first two Champions League group stage matches for the first time in the club's history.

Fans have also been left frustrated at a lack of investment in United's infrastructure over the past two decades.

Old Trafford remains the largest club football stadium in England, but is in need of significant redevelopment to keep pace

with the facilities offered by their rivals.

United's home was overlooked in favour of Manchester City's Etihad Stadium for the UK and Ireland's successful bid to host Euro 2028.

The Sheikh Jassim deal also promised \$1.7bn to finance plans for a new stadium and training centre, as well investment in the transfer market on players.

But the bid by the son of a former Qatari prime minister raised concerns over the potential growth of state influence in the Premier League.

Reigning Premier League champions City's fortunes have been transformed since a takeover from Sheikh Mansour, a member of Abu Dhabi's ruling family, in 2008.

In 2021, the Saudi sovereign wealth fund also bought a controlling stake in Newcastle.

AFP

## Pfizer cuts profit outlook on lower sales

New York, US - The US pharmaceutical giant Pfizer sharply scaled back its earnings outlook for the year, blaming lower-than-expected sales of two drugs used to treat Covid-19, the company said Friday.

It now "anticipates full-year 2023 revenues to be in the range of \$58bn to \$61bn, versus

its previous guidance range of \$67bn to \$70bn," Pfizer announced in a statement.

The cut to Pfizer's guidance was "solely due to its COVID products," the company said.

"Full-year 2023 revenues for Paxlovid and Comirnaty are expected to be approximately \$12.5bn, a decline of \$9.0bn ver-

sus original expectations," it added. The sharp revision to expected sales of Paxlovid, an oral antiviral drug, and the Covid-19 vaccine Comirnaty sent Pfizer's stock tumbling.

After a late summer surge, Covid-19 rates have since come down sharply.

AFP



# IMF agrees funding boost, extra Africa board seat

Marrakesh, Morocco – The IMF announced that member nations agreed to increase their contributions to the global lender and give sub-Saharan Africa a third seat on its executive board at its first meetings on the continent since 1973.

Boosting the International Monetary Fund's quota resources and giving Africa a bigger voice within the institution were among the priorities of the week-long talks of the IMF and World Bank in Marrakech, Morocco.

Spanish Economy Minister Nadia Calvino, who chairs the IMF Financial Committee, said at a press conference that there was "agreement on a meaningful increase of quotas by the end of the year."

The quotas, which are based on the size of a country's economy, determine how much funding a nation should provide to the IMF, its voting power and the maximum amount of loans it can obtain.

IMF chief Kristalina Georgieva and World Bank President Ajay Banga used this week's meetings to urge members to step up funding so their institutions can better support nations hit by poverty and climate change.

The conflict between Israel and Palestinian militant group Hamas has raised concerns about its impact on already weak global economic growth in the wake of the Ukraine war, elevated inflation and high interest rates.

Georgieva said the agreement on quotas was "very heart-



Kristalina Georgieva attends the annual meetings of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank Group (WBG), in Marrakesh (AFP)

*Boosting IMF's quota resources and giving Africa a bigger voice within the institution were among priorities of the week-long talks of the IMF and World Bank in Marrakech*

warming."

The goal, she said, was "to make the fund strong financially in terms of our ability to step up should we be hit by yet another shock."

Asked when the IMF will change its voting shares, Georgieva said: the "membership has agreed that this is going to be the next step and that there will be a clear pathway and plan to go there."

Giving countries like China,

which is now the world's second biggest economy, a larger voting share has been a controversial issue.

China has a 6.08% share of votes compared to 6.14% for Japan, the third global economy.

"At some point, a revision of the IMF's quota distribution will be inevitable," French central bank governor Francois Villeroy de Galhau said in Marrakesh on Wednesday.

"But the emerging countries

that will benefit from this – including China – will have to accept common rules of the game," he said.

While voting shares were not changed, the IMF agreed to expand its executive board from 24 to 25 members to give Africa another seat.

Sub-Saharan Africa will now have three executive board members instead of two.

"I will finish with what warmed my heart the most: uniform support for a third African chair on our executive board," Georgieva said.

"That is so important for meetings that take place on African soil," she said.

"Despite all the difficulties I can only praise our members for finding this pathway to solidarity

on which hundreds of millions of people depend."

## Pledges for Africa

Pummelled by debt, poverty and natural disasters, African nations heard many pledges of support but saw little action at the first IMF-World Bank talks to be held on their soil since 1973.

The myriad troubles facing the continent were front and centre at the week-long talks in Marrakesh.

Georgieva, said from day one that holding the meetings in Africa was "symbolically and substantively very important."

"A prosperous world economy in the 21st century requires a prosperous Africa," she said.

For some African officials, a good start would be erasing the mountain of debt that is forcing many countries to spend much of their revenue on paying back interest.

The economy minister of Ivory Coast, Adama Coulibaly, who heads the G24 group of developing countries, said most of the debt is owed to multilateral development banks and the IMF.

"We are warning against a debt crisis that could stifle durable and inclusive growth," Coulibaly said.

More than 20 African countries are either already or on the edge of debt distress.

In some countries, more than 40% of the state budget goes to servicing the debt – an unsustainable level in countries that need to maintain basic public services such as water and electricity.

AFP

# Fed on track for a 'soft landing'

Washington, US – The US Federal Reserve is on track to achieve the rare feat of lowering inflation without causing a damaging recession, a senior central bank official said.

The Fed recently slowed the pace of its interest rate hikes after lifting rates to a 22-year high, citing progress made in the inflation fight.

Policymakers have voiced growing optimism in recent weeks that the Fed can pull off a so-called "soft landing" – lowering inflation without causing a recession – given the underlying strength of the US economy and the jobs market.

On Friday, another member of the Fed's rate-setting committee said the central bank is on track to do so.

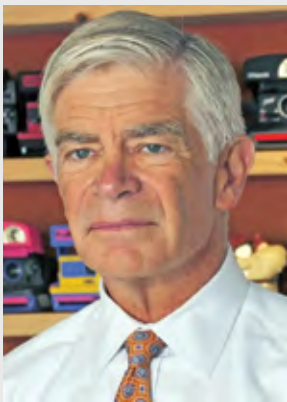
"I believe that a resolute, but patient, stance of monetary policy will allow us to achieve the soft landing that we all wish for our economy," Philadelphia Fed President Patrick Harker told a conference in Delaware.

At its most recent meeting in September, the Federal Open Market Committee indicated it expects one more hike will be needed this year.

But a number of policymakers have indicated since then that the Fed may have done enough, and should now change its focus from how high to lift rates, to how long to hold them for.

Futures traders, meanwhile, are assigning probability of close to 70% that the Fed will hold rates steady into next year, according to data from CME Group

"So far economic and finan-



Patrick Harker

cial conditions are evolving as I expected, if not perhaps even a tad better," Harker said on Friday.

He reiterated his belief that, if data trends continue, officials will have reached the point where they can hold rates steady.

"I am more and more confident that not only is monetary policy currently working, but it will continue to work," he said.

"My expectation is that rates will need to stay high for a while," he added.

Harker noted underlying strength in the economy, which is expected to continue growing robustly in the third quarter.

The jobs market may need to weaken slightly to bring inflation in line with the Fed's long-term target of two percent, he said, but added: "This does not mean that I expect mass layoffs."

Other factors could contribute to a slight increase in unemployment, such as the return to labor force of people sidelined during the pandemic.

AFP



# Microsoft fights \$29bn US back tax claim

Washington, US – The US Internal Revenue Service is asking that Microsoft pay a whopping \$29bn in unpaid taxes from 2004 to 2013, the company said in an official filing.

The case puts further focus on the international tax practices of major multinationals that have been accused in recent years of shifting revenue to lower tax jurisdictions in an effort to avoid higher taxes in their major markets.

"We disagree with the proposed adjustments and will vigorously contest the (demand) through the IRS's administrative appeals office and, if necessary, judicial proceedings," the company said in its filing to the US markets authority.

In a blog post, Microsoft said the issue with the IRS was with its transferring of revenue across international jurisdictions during the period.

The practice, called cost-sharing, is used by "many large multinationals...because it reflects the global nature of their business," the company said.

"We strongly believe we have acted in accordance with IRS rules and regulations and that our position is supported by case law," the blog post added.

Reached by AFP, the IRS said it was against US law for it to either confirm or deny an ongoing tax case.

Microsoft said that the appeal process with the IRS would take years and if it failed, the company would fight the claim in the courts.

The Windows maker said the demand emerged out of a decade-long discussion with the IRS "about how we allocated our income and expenses for tax years beginning as far back as 2004."

"We have changed our corporate structure and practices since the years covered by the audit, and as a result, the issues raised by the IRS are relevant to the past but not to our current practices," it said.

Microsoft added that "since 2004, we have paid over \$67bn in taxes to the US."

The accounting practices of US big tech companies have long posed a problem for authorities.

Governments have accused companies such as Apple, Amazon or Microsoft of shifting revenue through low or zero tax jurisdictions in order to escape taxation in their main markets and maximize profits.

AFP

# Biden unveils hydrogen hubs to boost economy

Philadelphia, US – President Joe Biden announced new "hydrogen hubs" across the United States as part of efforts to boost the economy with green energy ahead of the 2024 election.

"I'm here to announce one of the largest advanced manufacturing investments in the history of this nation – \$7bn in federal investments is going to attract \$40bn in private investment in clean hydrogen power," Biden said.

The 80-year-old Democrat traveled to Philadelphia to unveil the regions that won a bidding war for billions of dollars in funding to make the clean fuel, including a number in electoral battleground states.

The aim of the hubs is to produce around three million metric tonnes of clean hydrogen a year, amounting to one third of the US production goal for 2030, and reduce emissions.

"Taken together, the emission reductions from these hydrogen hubs will be the equivalent of taking 5.5mn gas powered vehicles off the road," Biden said.

Biden, who is neck and neck



US President Joe Biden speaks about his Bidenomics agenda at Tioga Marine Terminal in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (AFP)

with his likely rival next year, Republican Donald Trump, has made green energy a key part of his "Bidenomics" plan to revive US industry and create jobs.

Hydrogen power is a key component of his goal to combat the climate crisis and get the United States to "net zero" emissions from pollutants no later than 2050, he said.

The huge funding boost will go to large-scale hydrogen production, the pipelines to trans-

port it, and help industries and businesses adapt to using the fuel.

The hubs are to be in California; Texas; the US east coast; the Midwest; the Pacific Northwest; the Appalachian mountain region in the northeast; the northern states of Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota.

Two of the states involved – Pennsylvania in the eastern region and Michigan in the Midwest – were crucial swing states

in the 2020 election when Biden beat Trump, and are likely to be again next year.

## Fossil fuel worry

Some non-profit groups expressed concern that the latest initiative could perpetuate harms from fossil fuels.

The Union of Concerned Scientists warned in a statement that the hubs announcement "advances multiple projects premised on fossil fuel-based hy-

drogen production and risky hydrogen end uses."

US authorities must set rigorous criteria "to ensure the development of a hydrogen industry that is unequivocally aligned with our climate objectives," said Julie McNamara, deputy policy director of the group's climate and energy program.

Lauren Pagel, policy director at another nonprofit, Earthworks, charged that prioritizing hydrogen hubs "is more about extending the life of oil & gas companies than addressing the climate crisis."

Frontline communities should have a chance to "meaningfully engage and shape the selected hub proposals," Pagel added.

The hydrogen hubs are funded by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, which includes \$65bn in clean energy investments at the Department of Energy.

Biden has pledged to increase production capacity for low- and zero-carbon emission sources, which are known as "blue" and "green" hydrogen.

AFP

# US wholesale prices rise more than expected in September

Washington, US – US wholesale prices rose more than expected in September, government data showed, as energy prices continued to climb.

The producer price index (PPI) rose by 0.5% last month, building on August's 0.7% increase, according to data from the Labor Department.

This was above the median expectation of economists surveyed by MarketWatch.



US wholesale prices rose by 0.5% in September

Prices for final demand goods rose by 0.9%, while the index for services increased by 0.3%.

"Over 40% of the September increase in prices for final demand goods can be traced to a 5.4% rise in the index for gasoline," the Labor Department said in a statement.

Once food, energy and trade serves were stripped out, wholesale prices increased by a

more modest 0.2% month-on-month.

"Overall, these data likely do not change the outlook for Fed policy," High Frequency Economics' Chief US Economist Rubeeela Farooqi wrote in a note to clients.

Prices for final demand goods rose by 0.9%, while the index for services increased by 0.3%.

AFP

# GCET celebrates graduation of 350 students

Under the patronage of H E Sayyid Salim Musallam al Buisaidi, Undersecretary for Human Resources Development in the Ministry of Labour (MoL), the Global College of Engineering and Technology (GCET) celebrated the graduation of the 6th batch of its students last Wednesday, at Madinat Al Irfan Theatre, Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, Muscat.

The prestigious event was attended by Professor Sir Steve West CBE the Vice-Chancellor, President and CEO of the University of West of England (UWE), UK for awards' conferment. A total number of 350 graduated this year from 14 different academic programmes in the Engineering and Technology fields that are offered by GCET in collaboration with UWE.

In his speech, Prof Geoffrey Elliot Dean of GCET congratulated the graduates on reaching their graduation day.

"You have overcome many challenges and tests in recent years. You have been strong and committed to achieving success



for you and your family. I commend you for your commitment, passion, and drive, to achieve your rightful reward," he said, adding, "I know that learning does not end by graduation. It is a continuous life-long process. We at GCET hope you have also developed as a person."

Prof Sir Steve West Vice-Chancellor of UWE stressed on the importance of the partnership between GCET and UWE and the development both institutions have undergone over the years. He said, "At UWE we believe in the power of partnerships, that success is best

achieved together. Our partnership with the Global College of Engineering and Technology is continues to grow year-on-year with new programmes and increased student numbers. UWE is committed to GCET in developing and delivering an educational system that is

internationally recognized for high quality; GCET offers degree programmes that are unique in the Sultanate of Oman, including Computer Security, Artificial Intelligence, Robotics and Environmental Management."

Taif Nasser al Alawi one of GCET's 6th batch graduates expressed his happiness and pride

feelings to reach this glorious day, saying: "This is for sure a day to be remembered! There are no enough words to express how we feel in this day as there are mixture of feelings. We are happy and proud to become graduates, but at the same time

we feel responsible as we are now in the points where we have to contribute to the development of our beloved Oman. Over the years of our study at GCET, we have gained lots of values and attributes which make us ready to join the developmental journey in all sectors and do the role we are supposed to. I am sure that we are all ready and up for the challenge!"

It is worth mentioning that GCET had celebrated the graduation of around 1200 students over the past years since it started its journey in the higher education sector in the Sultanate in 2014. Furthermore, the college will be celebrating its 10th anniversary of prosperous and success in the sultanate, showcasing its contributions towards developing the educational system in Oman and moving it to a global level. It is expected that GCET will move to a totally new, modern and state-of-the-art campus in the year of 2029-2030 to provide an enriching environment that suits the ever-growing number of students.

## National Finance to support Dar Al Atta'a's 'Tamkeen'

Committed to enriching lives and boosting communities across Oman, National Finance recently signed an agreement with Dar Al Atta'a to support its 'Tamkeen' programme.

As part of this initiative, the organisations will extend relief to families hailing from Sanaa Bani Ghafir in Khabourah who were adversely affected by Cyclone Shaheen.

The agreement was signed by Tariq bin Sulaiman al Farsi, Chief Executive Officer of National Finance, and Maryam bint Issa al Zadjali, Chairperson of Dar Al Atta'a, in the presence of key personnel from both organisations.

This partnership marks a significant milestone in the leading financial institution's active participation in social welfare initiatives, under its 'Imtidad' corporate social responsibility wing, that contribute to the community's well-being and economic progress.

"National Finance is deeply committed to supporting the communities we serve," Tariq bin Sulaiman al Farsi commented on the occasion. "As part of 'Imtidad', we are pleased to join



*As part of this initiative, National Finance will extend relief to families hailing from Sanaa Bani Ghafir in Khabourah who were adversely affected by Cyclone Shaheen*

hands with Dar Al Atta'a to help improve the living conditions and quality of life of cyclone-affected families in Sanaa Bani Ghafir. Together, we will work tirelessly to support the community on its path to recovery. This collaboration reflects our deep understanding of our social responsibility and our aim to provide a helping hand to uplift com-

munities across the nation."

Cyclone Shaheen wreaked havoc in several regions across the country in 2021, leaving remote towns devastated in its wake. As part of the 'Tamkeen' program, supported by National Finance, Dar Al Atta'a aims to assist families of Sanaa Bani Ghafir in Al Khabourah by providing financial aid to improve

their economic standing, offering essential services and reestablishing a safe residential area for the community to thrive in.

The value of this partnership is enriched by the longstanding relationship between National Finance and Dar Al Atta'a. Having collaborated on several charitable and welfare initiatives over the years, they have been instrumental in empowering communities and providing aid for the flourishing of different segments in the society.

Their combined efforts have spanned across community welfare, education, women's empowerment campaigns and green sustainability initiatives, and have achieved exceptional results in the past.

National Finance's support for the 'Tamkeen' initiative demonstrates its unwavering commitment to social responsibility and its dedication to make a positive difference in the lives of individuals and families facing adversity. Through its participation in a diverse range of social welfare initiatives under 'Imtidad', the company strives to play an integral role in the country's progress.



## Oman Cricket, Dhofar Insurance ink three-year insurance policy

Sports injuries to international cricketers in today's highly competitive game is often considered part and parcel of their lives. Oman Cricket (OC), the national cricket governing body of the sultanate, has been mindful of the fact and faced many situations when the national team cricketers suffered injuries on international tours while performing national duties.

In an effort to mitigate the concerns of the national team cricketers and ensure their well being, OC has teamed up with Dhofar Insurance Company to offer its cricketers a first-of-its-kind sports-centric health insurance policy for a period of three years.

The sports-centric insurance policy was one of the major high-

lights of the partnership agreement inked between Oman Cricket and Dhofar Insurance Company recently at the OC headquarters in Amerat recently.

The agreement has wider benefits for the national cricket body, its staff and its assets and Duleep Mendis, chief development officer of Oman Cricket, said: "We welcome Dhofar Insurance Company into our family and we hope this agreement will help us on all fronts."

Paul Sheridan, OC vice-president, said, "This is a mutually beneficial agreement and we hope that we could continue the relationship for a long time."

Sunil Kohli, CEO of Dhofar Insurance, said, "Cricket is a very popular game and we are proud of Oman national team's suc-

cesses including winning the inaugural Gulf T20 Cup recently. We are honoured to be associated with the national team and this is our contribution to the national team. We will be there to support the team, be it in a small or big way and promise full support to them. Oman Cricket will be safe with us."

Alkesh Joshi, OC treasurer, said, "Among the major highlights of the partnership agreement is the one-of-its-kind health insurance policy for its national team players. This is a first for any national sports associations in the country and we are proud to have taken the pioneering step."

"This policy ensures that the national team players do not have to worry, God forbid, in case of any injury."

## Malayalees in Sohar to organise youth festival from October 20

Sohar Malayalee Sangham (SMS) is organising 'SMS Youth-festival-2023' in collaboration with Indian Social Club Sohar, on October 20 and 21 at Women's Association Hall Sohar with various on-stage and literary competitions.

The entry is open to all Indian students studying in various schools in Oman, the sangham stated. There are competitions in the Open Category also for other Indians.

This is the 8th SMS youth festival that is scheduled to be conducted at three venues named Vallathol Nagar, Tagore Nagar and Sugathanjali.

There are four categories: Sub Junior (below 10), Junior (10-14) Seniors (15-18) and Open Category.

Altogether there are 34 competitions. Stage competitions will be held in more than 20 areas including Bharathany-



atom, Mohiniyattam, Kuchipudi, Kerala Natanam, Folk Dances, Group Dances, Opana, Thiruvathirakal, Mono Act, Fancy Dress.

Competitions in song category include Light Music, Film Songs, Classical Music and Mappilappattu. Off-stage items competitions will be held in various literary activities such as recitation, essay writing,

story writing, creative & discursive writing and in painting.

Over 400 contestants from various Indian Schools participated in the last SMS youth festival and the organising committee is expecting a much wider participation this time also as it is a great opportunity to professionally gauge the innate talents of the members of Indian community in Oman.

Judges with their proven records and competencies in their respective fields are to be exclusively brought in from India to ensure impartial and professional judgement in the competitions. Participants will get an opportunity to interact with the judges at the end of the competitions to sharpen their insight. Famous Malayalam film director Boban Samuel and cine actress Rashmi Boban will be attending the mega cultural fest.

## ROHM to mark Omani Women's Day tomorrow

The Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM) will present the annual concert - Omani Women's Day - on Tuesday.

This much anticipated annual event, presented to audiences to coincide with National Women's Day in Oman, presents an opportunity for everyone to come together in a celebration of the great women in the Sultanate of Oman and across the world.

In the spirit of solidarity and respect, the Royal Opera House Muscat invited audiences to experience this event on many levels. 'Firstly, it is a chance to extend warm congratulations to inspiring women in all areas of life, from tireless mothers and wives to women in industry, the arts, science, academia, and public service. Secondly, families and friends are invited to gather with their beloved relatives to acknowledge their love and gratitude, and finally, the concert showcases excellence in musical performance by women,' ROHM stated.

For this year's celebration of



women's day, 'we present a concert featuring honoured guests: The Al Nour Wal Amal Ladies' Orchestra has the distinction of being the only orchestra of blind musicians playing classical music, performing at international level, the orchestra is a demonstration of their phenomenal talent', it informed.

The Royal Oman Symphony Ladies' Ensemble represents Omani ladies in music of the highest standard.

Noor al Qassim is a celebrated pianist from Bahrain, she has played for orchestras throughout the world and been awarded honours at international piano competitions.

Finally, Majida el Roumi is a renowned singer superstar, it is a pleasure to present her alongside this wonderful line up of musicians, ROHM stated.

The 2023-24 season at ROHM is entitled Stars, Legends, Dreams. This special concert reflects incredible legends and legacies in music.

SIEGE OF GAZA

# Israel readies for ground attack in Gaza

Seven days of bombing have left at least 2,450 people dead in the Gaza Strip, the majority civilians

**Gaza/Jerusalem** - More than one million people have been displaced in the Gaza Strip in the last week, the UN said on Sunday, after sustained Israeli bombardment and warnings about a ground attack against Hamas commanders.

Israel declared war on the Islamist group last Sunday, a day after waves of fighters broke through the heavily fortified border. Seven days of relentless bombing have flattened neighbourhoods and left at least 2,450 people dead in the Gaza Strip, the majority ordinary Palestinians, the health ministry there said.

As Israel seeks to avenge the worst attack in its history, the Arab League and African Union warned the invasion could lead to 'genocide'.

It also faced a grave warning about the security implications of putting boots on the ground in the densely populated enclave. 'No one can guarantee the control of the situation and the non-expansion of the conflicts' if Israel sends its soldiers into Gaza, said Iran's foreign minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian.

"Those who are interested in preventing the scope of war and crisis from expanding need to prevent the current barbaric attacks... against citizens and civilians in Gaza," he added.

At least 10 people have now been killed in Lebanon and two in Israel, prompting Israel to shut the border area to civilians.

Defence Minister Yoav Gallant said Israel had 'no interest in a war in the north, we don't want to escalate the situation'.

But he added: "If Hezbollah chooses the path of war, it will



Israeli soldiers patrol a border fence gate with the Gaza Strip on Sunday (AFP)

*Those who are interested in preventing the scope of war and crisis from expanding need to prevent the current barbaric attacks... against citizens and civilians in Gaza*

HOSSEIN AMIR-ABDOLLAHIAN

pay a heavy price... but if it restrains itself, we'll respect the situation."

The United States, which has

given unequivocal backing to Israel, is concerned about violence spreading, and has sent two aircraft carriers to the eastern

Mediterranean as a deterrent. In Washington, White House National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said they feared the prospect of Iran becoming 'directly engaged', after it praised the Hamas attack but insisted it was not involved.

### Evacuations

Israel has massed thousands of troops and heavy weaponry in the desert south of the country, waiting for the green light to go

in to northern Gaza.

The army has told 1.1mn Palestinians in the north of the Gaza Strip - nearly half of its 2.4mn population - to head south to safety.

On the other side of the border, Israelis were moving to safer areas.

Military spokesmen Lieutenant Richard Hecht and Daniel Hagari said any ground offensive would be triggered by a 'political decision'.

Netanyahu visited frontline troops on Saturday, telling them 'more is coming' but without specifying when any ground operation would start.

Hecht singled out Yahya Sinwar, the chief of Hamas in Gaza blamed for the October 7 attacks, calling him 'a dead man walking'.

Aid agencies, including the UN and ICRC, as well as foreign governments have repeatedly criticised Israel's request for

Gazans to leave their homes - and accused it of inflicting collective punishment on ordinary people. The UN agency supporting Palestinian refugees said on Sunday that some one million people had already been displaced in the first week of the conflict.

"The number is likely to be higher as people continue to leave their homes," UNRWA director of communications Juliette Touma told AFP.

Palestinians carrying whatever belongings they can, in bags and suitcases, or packed onto three-wheeled motorbikes, battered cars, vans and even donkey carts have become a common sight in recent days.

But they have had to find shelter wherever they can in the increasingly crowded south of the Gaza Strip, including in the streets and UN-run schools.

Israel had cut off water, fuel and food supplies to Gaza for the duration of the conflict. Local hospitals are becoming overwhelmed with increasing numbers of dead and injured.

Israeli energy minister Israel Katz on Sunday said water supplies to southern Gaza had been switched back on. "This will push the civilian population to the southern Strip," he said.

But power outages threatens to cripple life-support systems, from sea water desalination plants to food refrigeration and hospital incubators.

In Rome, Pope Francis called for humanitarian corridors in Gaza and urged that 'children, the sick, the elderly, women and all civilians should not fall victim to the conflict'.

AFP

## DESTROYED BUT NOT DEFEATED



Palestinian boys look at the damage after an Israeli military strike on the Rafah refugee camp, in the southern of Gaza Strip on Sunday (AFP)

## Top US diplomat calls for pressure on Hamas

**Riyadh, Saudi Arabia** - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken called for pressure on Hamas during a meeting on Sunday with the de facto leader of Saudi Arabia, which has warming ties with Israel but has put normalisation on hold.

The top US diplomat met for nearly an hour in the early morning with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman at the royal's farm residence in the Riyadh area, a US official said.

"Very productive," Blinken said when asked about the meeting after returning to his hotel. Blinken 'highlighted the United States' unwavering focus on halting attacks by Hamas, securing the release of all hostages and preventing the conflict from spreading', State



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken meeting with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in the capital Riyadh on Sunday (AFP)

Department spokesman Matthew Miller said.

"The two affirmed their shared commitment to protecting civilians and to advancing stability across the Middle East and beyond," Miller said.

Prince Mohammed highlighted Riyadh's diplomatic outreach 'to calm the situation', the official Saudi Press Agency

(SPA) reported, an effort that has involved calls to regional leaders including Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi.

He also reiterated the Gulf kingdom's condemnation of attacks on civilians and 'vital interests that affect their daily lives', while stressing the need for Palestinians to 'obtain their legitimate rights and achieve just

and lasting peace', SPA said.

Blinken has been touring the region after Hamas fighters infiltrated Israel from the blockaded Gaza Strip on October 7 and killed 1,300 people, mostly civilians, and took about 150 hostages. The attack sparked a massive retaliatory campaign targeting the Islamist group in Gaza that has killed more than 2,300 people.

Before the violence, the Saudi crown prince had spoken of progress in US-led diplomacy to normalise relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel.

Saudi Arabia has put the process on hold and Blinken has said that disrupting normalisation efforts may have partly motivated the Hamas attack.

AFP

## China supports 'just cause of the Palestinian people'

**Beijing, China** - China supports the 'just cause of the Palestinian people in safeguarding their national rights', foreign minister Wang Yi told his Iranian counterpart on Sunday as Beijing takes an increasingly clear stance on the Israel-Gaza conflict.

China, which has close ties with Iran, has increasingly positioned itself as a mediator in the Middle East, but has been criticised by Western officials for not specifically naming Hamas in its condemnations of violence in the Israel-Gaza conflict.

"The root cause... of the Palestine-Israel situation is that the Palestinian people's right to statehood has been set aside for a long time," Wang said in a call with Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian on Sunday, according to an official Chinese readout.

"This historical injustice should end as soon as possible," Wang said, adding that 'China will continue to stand on the side of peace and support the just cause of the Palestinian people in safeguarding their national rights.'

Wang said in a call on Sunday with Saudi Arabia's Prince Faisal bin Farhan that Israel's actions were now 'beyond the scope of self-defence' and the Israeli government must 'cease its collective punishment of the people of Gaza'.

"(Israel) should listen earnestly to the calls of the international community and the UN secretary general, and cease its collective punishment of the



China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi attends the EU-China High-Level Strategic Dialogue in Beijing on Friday (AFP)

*China will continue to stand on the side of peace and support the just cause of the Palestinian people in safeguarding their national rights*

WANG YI

people of Gaza," Wang added in a change from Beijing's earlier ambiguous statements on the conflict.

Wang told Prince Faisal that 'all parties should not take any action to escalate the situation and should return to the negotiating table as soon as possible'.

On Saturday, Wang held a call with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who had called on China to use its influence in the Middle East to push for calm in the region.

Wang urged 'the convening of an international peace meet-

ing as soon as possible to promote the reaching of broad consensus', according to Beijing's readout of the conversation.

Jean-Pierre Cabestan, a senior research fellow at the Asia Centre in Paris, said Beijing was 'more influential (in the Middle East) than ten years or twenty years ago mainly because of its economic footprint there but also its diplomatic activism'.

But 'its good relations with Israel, especially in the technological sector, limits Beijing's room for manoeuvre', he told AFP. China's official statements on the conflict have not specifically named Hamas in their condemnations of violence, leading to criticism from some Western officials who said they were too weak.

The country's state broadcaster CCTV said on Sunday that China's special envoy Zhai Jun will visit the Middle East next week to push for a ceasefire in the Israel-Hamas conflict and promote peace talks.

AFP

# Pope Francis calls for protection of Nagorno-Karabakh monasteries

Vatican City, Holy See - Pope Francis on Sunday called for the protection of Nagorno-Karabakh's religious heritage, especially its monasteries, following the Azerbaijan offensive there in September that led to the flight of almost the entire ethnic Armenian population.

With the mass exodus of Armenians and the announced dissolution of the self-proclaimed Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh, the cultural heritage of this Caucasus territory, considered ancestral by the largely Christian Armenians, is at risk.

"Beyond the humanitarian situation of the displaced people, which is serious, I would like to appeal for the protection of the monasteries and places of worship in the region," said Francis after his traditional Angelus prayer in Saint Peter's Square in Rome.

"I express the wish that they may be respected, both by the authorities and by all its inhabitants, and protected as part of the local culture, in an expression of faith and a sign of a fraternity that allows us to live together in our differences," added the Pontiff.

Several hundred churches, monasteries and tombstones dating from the 11th to the 19th century dot Nagorno-Karabakh, a mountainous enclave which



Pope Francis waves to the crowd during the Sunday Angelus prayer in St Peter's Square at the Vatican (AFP)

has been an integral part of Muslim-majority Azerbaijan since the end of the Russian Empire but which unilaterally proclaimed its independence in 1991 after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

In September, Azerbaijan launched a lightning offensive to take control - for the first time in three decades - of the disputed enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh.

The one-day operation sparked a mass exodus of ethnic Armenians.

The vast majority of the estimated 120,000 people who had been living in the territory fled into Armenia.

The separatist Karabakh au-

thorities announced that the self-proclaimed republic will be dissolved on January 1, 2024.

Included in the recent exodus were priests and monks from the Dadivank monastery, which is said to have been founded by Saint Dadi at the birth of Christianity.

According to 'Caucasus Heritage Watch', a project that uses satellite images to document buildings of heritage, 108 medieval and modern Armenian monasteries, churches and cemeteries were completely destroyed between 1997 and 2011 in the Azeri region of Nakhichevan, near the border with Iran.

AFP

# Sorrow, anger as Indigenous Australians denied 'Voice'

Sydney, Australia - Aboriginal Australians on Sunday grieved the collapse of a landmark push for Indigenous rights and recognition that was spurned by the country's white majority in a binding constitutional referendum.

Indigenous leaders called for a 'week of silence' to mourn the 'bitter' outcome of Saturday's landslide vote, which has called into question decades-long reconciliation efforts.

With more than 70 per cent of ballots counted on Sunday, around 61 per cent of Australians said 'no' when asked if the 1901 constitution should be changed to recognise the country's first inhabitants. In doing so, Australians also voted against creating a new consultative body - a 'Voice' to Parliament - that could have a say on issues related to Indigenous communities.



Two people walk in front of a structure displaying banners at the Aboriginal Tent Embassy located outside the old Parliament House in Canberra on Sunday (AFP)

*A lot of people don't know about Aboriginal people. They don't live in our communities and they don't know what we go through... our history*

ESME BAMBLETT

"Voters voted 'no' because they fear change. Most of them wouldn't even know an Aboriginal person." Just under four per cent of Australia's 26 mn population are Indigenous.

Other Indigenous Australians expressed feeling pain and rejection, after a vote that will change the way some 'yes' voters see their neighbours and their country. At a community group in Sydney's historically Indigenous suburb of Redfern, people attended a small event for those struggling to come to terms with

the result.

They lit eucalyptus leaves in a traditional smoking ceremony designed to bring cleansing and to bring healing. Warm spring winds carried the smoke over a dozen or more attendees.

Sitting on the steps of the building, Shane Sturgiss quietly described the vote as 'disheartening', 'shattering' and 'heart-breaking'.

The community had come together and there 'was a lot of hugging, a lot of crying. I'm going to cry now', he said, his eyes

welling with tears. But he insists that 'to be angry about that would be a waste of emotion'.

"This is just another period of Australia's history where our First Nations community have to pick up our shattered, broken hearts and continue on."

**'Don't know our history'**

Political gains have not come easily for Aboriginal Australians, who have fought tooth-and-nail over the years to secure basic voting rights, own traditional lands, and win election to parliament.

Supporters saw the referendum as a way to unite the country while addressing the historical injustices inflicted upon First Nations people.

Instead, it has exposed the deep racial fault lines that still run through the country more than

two centuries since British colonisers dropped anchor in Sydney Harbour.

Indigenous leader Esme Bamblett said that white voters' unfamiliarity has created fertile ground for the misinformation that dominated the referendum campaign online and off.

Outlandish social media posts suggested the 'Voice' would lead to land seizures, create a South African-style system of apartheid, or was part of a United Nations plot.

"A lot of people don't know about Aboriginal people. They don't live in our communities, they don't work in our communities, and they don't know what we go through. They don't know the extent of dispossession and they don't know our history," Bamblett said.

AFP

# Russia's Putin claims gains on Ukraine's frontline cities

Moscow, Russia - Russian forces have made gains in their Ukraine offensive, President Vladimir Putin said on Sunday, including in Avdiivka, a symbolic industrial hub where fighting has been fierce.

"Our troops are improving their position in almost all of this area, which is quite vast," he said in an interview on Russian television, an extract of which was posted on social media on Sunday. "This concerns the areas of Kupiansk, Zaporizhzhia and Avdiivka," Putin said, praising the army's 'active defence strategy'.



*Our troops are improving their position in almost all of this area, which is quite vast. This concerns the areas of Kupiansk, Zaporizhzhia and Avdiivka*

VLADIMIR PUTIN

On Saturday, Kyiv reported 'very heated' fighting around Avdiivka on Saturday, saying Russian forces had 'not stopped assaulting' it for days in their attempt to surround it.

Ukraine last week said Russia had stepped up assaults on the frontline city, which lies just 15km (nine miles) from Moscow-held Donetsk.

Avdiivka has been a symbol of Ukrainian resistance since 2014, after it briefly fell to Russian-backed separatists.

It has since marked the frontline and was regularly bombed even before the offensive began in February 2022.

Russian forces now control territory to the east, north and south of Avdiivka in a bid to push Ukrainian forces further from Donetsk.

Some 1,600 civilians are believed to be in the city, which had a pre-war population of 31,000.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky had said Kyiv was holding its ground in Avdiivka, but Moscow has previously claimed its positions had improved there.

On Sunday, Kyiv's army said Russian attacks had been 're-

pelled' in the area and remained 'without success'.

Several analysts, using open source images of the assault on Avdiivka posted on social networks, have noted the Russians appear to suffering major losses of military materiel.

Russia's intensified assault on Avdiivka has come after four months of a Ukrainian counter-offensive, which has been slower than expected.

Putin on Sunday repeated that the counter-offensive had 'totally failed'.

"We know that in some combat zones, the enemy is preparing new offensive operations," he said.

"We see it, we know it. And as a consequence we are reacting."

AFP

# A course to survive: Ukrainian soldiers learn first aid near the front line

Near Kurakhove, Ukraine - For soldiers fighting on Ukraine's front lines, a split second first aid decision can be the difference between life or death.

Whether learning to apply a tourniquet, wrap a bandage or carry a wounded person, regular basic medical training is an essential part of their skill set in the field. "It's crucial training, because every soldier needs to know how to save his own life and that of others nearby," said Victor Pylypenko, a 36-year-old medic in the 72nd Ukrainian brigade.

According to analysts, at least tens of thousands of soldiers have



Ukrainian servicemen take part in a medical training near the town of Kurakhove, Donetsk region, on October 12 (AFP)

been wounded and killed on both sides since Russia's invasion on Ukraine on February 24, 2022, although neither Kyiv nor Moscow have disclosed their losses.

Near the town of Kurakhove, situated 15km (nine miles) from the eastern front, some 15 soldiers from Pylypenko's unit gathered for a course delivered by intensive care nurse Mossy, an Australian volunteer.

Starting inside, and then moving to work in the undergrowth, the soldiers practiced applying tourniquets to an arm or leg to stop massive external bleeding, which can lead to death in a matter of minutes. Every soldier is

equipped with an individual first aid kit (IFAK), which includes one or two tourniquet straps.

Measuring roughly 70cm (28 inches) and fitted with a twisting handle, the straps grip the limb above the wound and thus stop the bleeding. "The most common wounds in the field are (shrapnel) wounds in the limbs," Pylypenko said. The chest and back are also often hit, because 'the bullet-proof vest doesn't fully protect you,' he added.

**'Fake tourniquets'**

"There are frequent cases of massive haemorrhaging, and tourniquets have really saved

hundreds, if not thousands, of lives," said Pylypenko, adding that it was 'essential' that soldiers knew how to use them correctly. Both the way they are applied and the quality of the tourniquet determines their effectiveness.

"The government provides us with IFAKs, but they are not always good quality," said Pylypenko, lamenting 'fake tourniquets that are deadly on the battlefield'.

Ukrainian NGOs and combat unit nurses this summer criticised the lack of standardisation and poor quality of first aid equipment provided by the government.

Faced with backlash and after

19 months of war, Ukraine's defence ministry has only recently announced the creation of a medical department within its ranks.

"We are working with our Western partners on the possibility of a rapid decision to confirm the quality of tourniquets produced in Ukraine," deputy defence minister Natalia Kalmykova said in a TV interview.

During the training course, Mossy advised soldiers to check the origin of their equipment, noting that he had seen 'very poor quality' tourniquets coming from China.

AFP

# Poland votes in ‘most important’ election

Parliamentary elections will determine the country’s future ties with the EU and Ukraine

Warsaw, Poland - Poles voted on Sunday in parliamentary elections that will determine the country’s future ties with the European Union and neighbouring Ukraine, as the ruling populists bid for a third consecutive term in power.

Opinion polls indicate the nationalist Law and Justice (PiS) party will get the most votes but may struggle to build a governing coalition, giving a chance to the opposition led by former EU chief Donald Tusk.

Polling stations across the EU and NATO member opened at 0500 GMT and will close at 1900 GMT, with exit polls expected immediately after and final results on Monday.

Some 29mn people are eligible to vote, including half a million registered abroad in a large diaspora.

A PiS victory could exacerbate tensions with the EU and Ukraine and will dismay campaigners concerned about the future of media freedoms, women’s and migrants’ rights.



People vote at a polling station in Gdansk during the parliamentary elections on Sunday (AFP)

“It’s time for a change,” said Ewa Bankowska, a 43-year-old working in finance, told AFP as she voted in Halinow, a town just outside the capital Warsaw.

“I’m concerned about the economy. I would like us to de-

velop and for the government to stop spending money it does not have,” she said.

But Dorota Zbig, a 57-year-old nurse, said the last few years of PiS government ‘have been very good for me and my family

and I hope everyone including young people votes reasonably.”

At PiS’s last major rally on Friday, party leader Jaroslaw Kaczynski said he wanted Poland to stay in the EU but that it should be a bloc of ‘sovereign

countries’.

Tusk told supporters from his Civic Coalition party the government was ‘leading the country down the wrong path’.

“This is the most important day in the history of our democ-

racy since 1989,” Tusk said.

### Opposition hopes for upset

PiS has vowed to press ahead with controversial reforms of the judiciary which it says are aimed

at rooting out corruption but which the EU sees as undermining democracy.

The row has blocked billions of euros in EU funding.

The most likely coalition partner for PiS would be Confederation, a far-right party that has called for an end to Poland’s large-scale assistance for Ukraine and has campaigned on a strongly anti-migrant platform.

But Confederation has publicly ruled out such an alliance and some analysts say it is unlikely to happen because of simmering tensions between the two parties.

The hope among liberals is that, even if Tusk’s Civic Coalition comes second, it will have enough votes to form a government with two smaller potential allies.

The elections are for the lower and upper houses of parliament and PiS has organised a referendum on the same day with leading questions on migrants and the economy, which the opposition has called for people to boycott.

Supporters of PiS say victory on Sunday will allow the party to fulfil its vision of a strong, sovereign Poland based on traditional Catholic values.

The campaign has been characterised by personal attacks on Tusk by the ruling party, which has accused him of working in the interests of Germany, Russia and the EU.

AFP



New Zealand’s National Party leader Christopher Luxon reacts while being applauded by his supporters in Auckland on Saturday (AFP)

## Luxon prepares to form coalition govt in New Zealand

Wellington, New Zealand - Christopher Luxon said it was a ‘tremendous privilege’ to wake up on Sunday as New Zealand’s incoming prime minister as he eyed talks to form a new coalition government.

Voters ended the six-year reign of the centre-left Labour government on Saturday as Luxon’s conservative National Party won enough seats to govern in a coalition with liberal party ACT.

Labour leader Chris Hipkins, who replaced Jacinda Ardern as prime minister in January, conceded defeat after his party lost nearly half their number of seats from the previous election in 2020.

Luxon fronted the media on Sunday wearing an All Blacks jersey after watching coverage of New Zealand’s victory over Ireland at the Rugby World Cup in France, which kicked off at 8am local time (1900 GMT Saturday).

“It’s a great start to the day when you’ve got a National government and you’ve got the All Blacks winning again,” he told reporters. Luxon, who prides himself on needing only a few hours of sleep each night, said he had celebrated with family and supporters, then analysed the election results ‘until 0330’ before an

early sporting start.

The 53-year-old former airline executive, who entered politics in 2019, can only take over as prime minister after the final election results are declared on November 3. “It’s a tremendous privilege,” he replied on being the incoming premier. “I came to politics with a view of making a contribution to New Zealand,

*I came to politics with a view of making a contribution to New Zealand, unhappy that we weren’t realising our potential*

CHRISTOPHER LUXON

unhappy that we weren’t realising our potential. That’s why I feel very optimistic about our path going forward.”

Luxon said he planned a strategy meeting on Sunday ahead of coalition talks.

In their first 100 days, National has promised changes such as a ban on cellphones in schools and crackdown on crime.

AFP

## India’s EAM on 4-day visit to Vietnam

Hanoi, Vietnam - India’s External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar arrived in Vietnam on Sunday, for his four-day visit during which he will be co-chairing the 18th Joint Commission meeting.

Jaishankar received a warm personal welcome from Vietnam Minister of Foreign Affairs, Bui Thanh Son at Tran Quoc pagoda. “Arrived in Vietnam today. Thank you @FMBuiThanhSon for the warm personal welcome at the renowned Tran Quoc pagoda. Looking forward to co-chairing the 18th Joint Commission Meeting tomorrow,” Jaishankar posted on X (formerly Twitter).

He also visited the historical Tran Quoc Pagoda in Hanoi which shares age-old links between India and Vietnam.

“Visited the historical Tran Quoc Pagoda in Hanoi. The age-



External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar with Vietnam Foreign Minister Bui Thanh Son during his visit to the Tran Quoc Pagoda, in Hanoi on Sunday (ANI)

old links between India and Vietnam are symbolised by the Bodhi tree here. Was gifted by President Rajendra Prasad in 1959 to President Ho Chi Minh,” Jais-

hankar stated.

He will co-chair the 18th meeting of the India-Vietnam Joint Commission on Economic, Trade, Scientific, and Technological Co-

operation with his Vietnamese counterpart, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) stated.

The EAM will also visit Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City and is expected to hold talks with the Vietnamese leadership. He will also meet members of the Indian community and unveil Mahatma Gandhi’s bust in Ho Chi Minh City.

India and Vietnam share a robust comprehensive strategic partnership, the MEA statement said. “Vietnam is a key member of our Act East Policy. The EAM’s visit will provide an opportunity to review progress in several areas and discuss ways to further enhance bilateral cooperation,” according to MEA.

From Vietnam, Jaishankar will leave for Singapore on an official visit from October 19-20.

ANI

## Filmmaker Mehrjui, wife killed

Tehran, Iran - One of Iran’s most important filmmakers, Dariush Mehrjui, was stabbed to death on Saturday evening alongside his wife at their home near Tehran, the judiciary said on Sunday. The 83-year-old was indelibly associated with the Iranian new wave of cinema.

“Dariush Mehrjui and his wife, Vahideh Mohammadifar, were killed by multiple stab wound to the neck,” said Hossein Fazeli-Harikandi, chief justice of Alborz province, near Tehran, according to Mizan online news agency.

AFP

## Quake kills two, Afghans flee western region

Herat, Afghanistan - A magnitude 6.3 earthquake killed two people in western Afghanistan on Sunday, with damaged prisons emptied and residents fleeing a region where tremors have claimed at least 1,000 lives this past week.

Since October 7, a series of potent quakes have jolted Herat province, levelling whole villages, burying families and leaving thousands homeless as winter approaches. Residents in the provincial capital Herat city had just begun returning to their homes, after days of sleeping outside fearing aftershocks, when the latest earthquake hit around 8am on Sunday.

Doctors Without Borders (MSF) said two new fatalities and 154 injuries were registered at Herat Regional Hospital, where patients were being ferried on stretchers and treated outside under gazebos.

“The situation is very critical,” MSF’s Afghanistan Programme Head Yahya Kalilah told AFP. “In



An injured person being brought to a hospital following earthquake in Herat on Sunday (AFP)

terms of psychology, people are panicked and traumatised.”

“People are not feeling safe. I will assure you 100 per cent, no one will sleep in their house.”

The latest quake’s epicentre

was 33km (20 miles) northwest of Herat city and was followed by aftershocks of magnitudes 5.4, 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4, the US Geological Survey said.

Officials said more than 528

prisoners had been released from Herat province and neighbouring Badghis province because jails ‘were in danger of collapsing’ from quake damage.

The Prisons Administration

Authority said those freed included inmates who had served large portions of their sentences and showed signs of reform.

Herat city resident Haris Aryan said he sent his family south to Farah province to escape the trauma of the quakes.

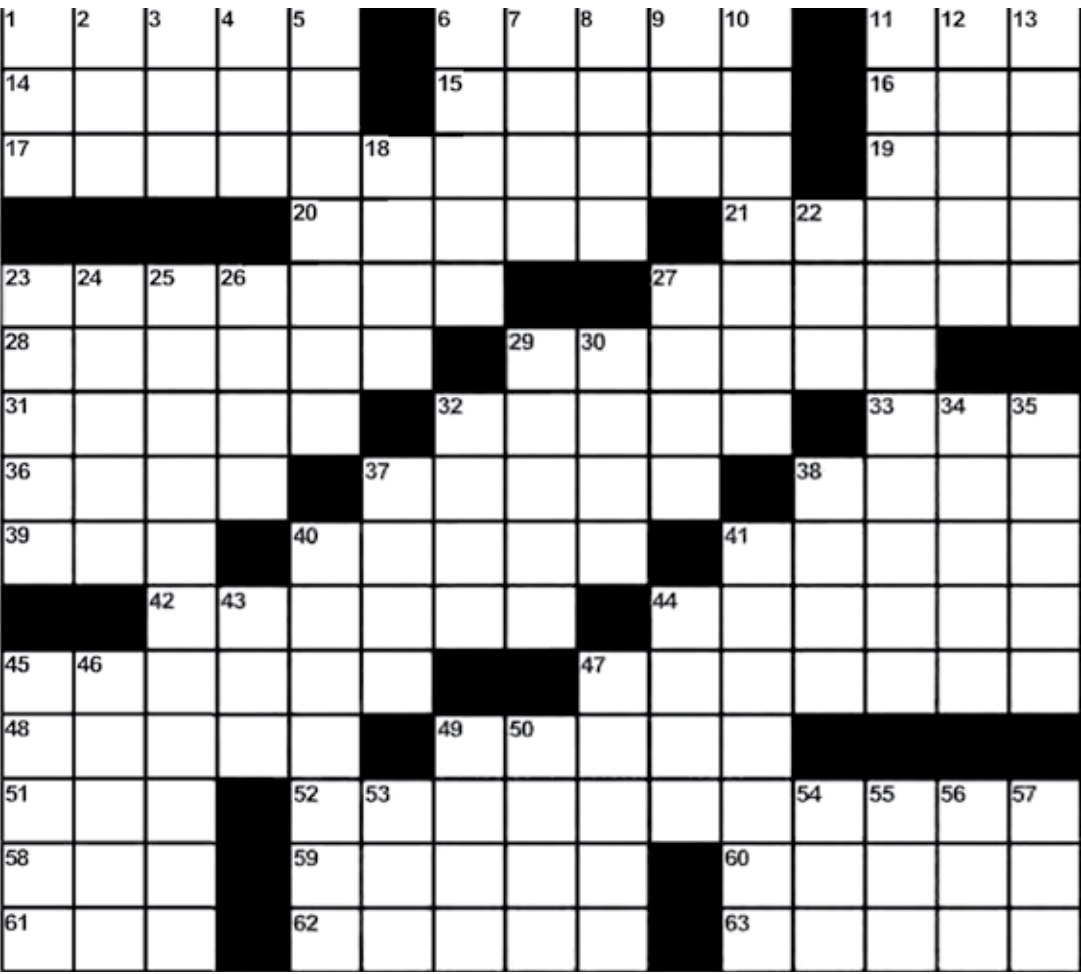
“Many people, anyone with relatives or accommodation in neighbouring provinces, all of them have fled,” he told AFP. “Those who do not have anywhere to go... they are spending nights in the roads and parks.”

National disaster management officials said they were investigating the scale of Sunday’s earthquake.

MSF official Kalilah predicted ‘casualties will be low’ because residents in the worst-hit areas were already living outdoors after their homes were destroyed last week. “It’s Allah’s blessing that it happened during the day, people were awake,” said 27-year-old Herat city shopkeeper Hamid Nizami.

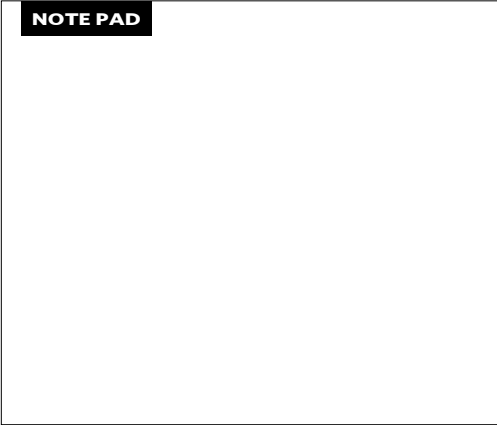
AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



- ACROSS**
- 1) Fence bridge 38) British title
  - 6) Thai monies 39) Scandinavian rug material
  - 11) "Fawltly Towers" network 40) Composer Carmichael
  - 14) Mom or pop of a mom-and- 41) Native American group
  - pop operation 42) Rustic shelter
  - 15) French farewell 44) "Groaned" partner
  - 16) The whole schmear 45) Go to, as a show
  - 17) Beatnik with a beat 47) Whopper tellers
  - 19) "The Matrix" character
  - 48) Pediatrician's patient
  - 20) 1965 Alabama march site 49) "When Harry Met..."
  - 21) Some plums ( 1989)
  - 23) Some cats 51) \_ out (dress up)
  - 27) Work out a cryptogram
  - 52) Leaps of faith?
  - 28) Unit of gene activity
  - 58) "It's no \_!"
  - 29) "Pay to..." (check words) 59) All excited
  - 31) Mortise complement
  - 60) Tsar's edict
  - 32) Fussy old hen? 61) "As to"
  - 33) It may be slung 62) Dropped hints about
  - 36) Joule fragments 63) Lamp denizen
  - 37) Certain Disney Dalmatian
- DOWN**
- 1) Open up the floodgates, so to speak
  - 2) Tango requirement
  - 3) Motel relative
  - 4) Drumstick, essentially
  - 5) Shoreline problem
  - 6) They lead to a walk
  - 7) Famous gardener
  - 8) "Howdy!"
  - 9) Golf gadget
  - 10) It's for skilled operators
  - 11) City on the Penobscot River
  - 12) Suffer a gash
  - 13) Near
  - 18) Ball-\_ hammer
  - 22) Blackjack card
  - 23) Schlepper
  - 24) Mimicry
  - 25) It might be a fat cat in India
  - 26) Ringling\_
  - 27) Carpentry groove
  - 29) Cry in a crowded hall
  - 30) Touchy or sensitive
  - 32) Gravy server
  - 34) Brown pigment
  - 35) Ownership documents
  - 37) Small waterway
  - 38) Dull as dishwater
  - 40) Lady's clutch
  - 41) Man-shaped drinking mug
  - 43) Wriggling swimmer
  - 44) Denver's height
  - 45) Become troublesome
  - 46) The items yonder
  - 47) Admiral's command
  - 49) Agitation
  - 50) Home to the Taj Mahal
  - 53) Mysterious craft
  - 54) Hawaiian instrument,

shortened  
55) One overboard?  
56) Letters of inflation  
57) Have good eyesight



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

**ARIES** MARCH 21-APRIL 19  
Trying to be perfect takes too much energy, so stop trying! Understand that just being yourself makes you much more interesting than you'd be if you were trying to be someone's idea of a perfect person. Stick to your own identity. Not only is it simpler, but it's so much more fun! You'll always be confident when you're going by what you truly believe. When you try to guess what the "right" answer is, you end up getting into trouble

**LEO** JULY 23-AUGUST 22  
You can't let yourself feel guilty if you have to put your long-term relationships on the back burner for now. After all, the people who care about you will still care about you. They understand that sometimes you have important things going on in your life that deserve your full attention. They're sensitive people, but they aren't so sensitive that they'll take it personally if you have to cancel a dinner or say no to a party invitation.

**SAGITTARIUS** NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21  
You need to make some more room in your life for just goofing off! Why not give yourself permission to follow your mood every once in a while? Daydreaming never hurt anyone, and it certainly won't slow you down long enough to hold back your progress. It isn't a waste of time to imagine what life would be like if things were different. It's a good way to stay creative! You need to make sure that you have at least a couple hours of free time today.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

**01. Which Wonder of the Ancient World begun in 356 BC at Ephesus under the direction of Dinocrates took over a century to build?**  
A. Lighthouse at Alexandria  
B. Sphinx  
C. Colossus of Rhodes  
D. Temple of Diana

**02. Which of these is a French impressionist painter?**  
A. Degas  
B. El Greco  
C. Salvador Dali  
D. Gainsborough

**03. When his Royal Highness Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, died on 9 April 2021, what happened to his title as Duke?**  
A. It merged with the Crown  
B. It was retired  
C. His oldest son, Prince Charles, inherited it  
D. It remains vacant until the Queen grants it to someone else.

Answers: 1. D 2. A 3. C

**TAURUS** APRIL 20-MAY 20  
No one can intimidate or manipulate you today. You'll be content to stay on your own path and stick to your own plan. The folks who seem to be trying so hard to get you to change your mind and do things their way don't seem to be very happy. So why do they think they know what they're talking about? You are the person who is best suited to being in charge of your life, and you should feel free to tell anyone that. It's a great way to get the naggers off your back!

**VIRGO** AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22  
Keeping in touch with your friends is important in life, but so is getting back in touch with yourself. Being aware of who you really are and what you really want out of life isn't something that comes without careful and deliberate focus. Plus, it takes time. So if you're feeling the urge to knock off the social stuff for a while and just hang by yourself, do it. Once you separate from the distractions of other people, you'll be able to come to some important conclusions.

**CAPRICORN** DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19  
A friend or loved one has been acting out of character, and today is a good day to try to get to the bottom of it. But be very careful not to push them too hard about it. Just casually ask what's new in their life. Chances are they'll open up when they understand you aren't going to judge them. But if they don't, you shouldn't take it personally. They aren't rejecting you. They just don't feel like sharing yet. Respect that and give them space.

**GEMINI** MAY 21-JUNE 21  
Your mind is much more focused on the small details of time, place, and budget today, but not everyone is as detail oriented as you are right now. They just want to have fun! They could be pushing you to cut corners, spend more, or go faster than you think is advisable. Instead of searching for a compromise, stick to your guns and push right back when they start pushing you. Their priorities aren't in the right place, but yours are.

**LIBRA** SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22  
The flexibility you're so famous for is taking a back seat today. You are all about having a plan and sticking to it, no matter what anyone else says. This will turn out to be a very good thing in terms of your progress. You won't tolerate any distractions and will rip through your to-do list like nobody's business. Your "no compromises" manner might put off a few people, but only the folks who are trying to slow you down. And there won't be many of those.

**AQUARIUS** JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18  
If you can get a little more analytical about your emotional life today, you should make great progress is solving one particular problem that's been hounding you. When you get some free time, go out for a long walk and just think. Examine the repeated patterns that have shown up in your life. Dissect where you are and where you want to go. There's probably a small change you can make to end the cycle and start down a more rewarding and exciting path

**CANCER** JUNE 22-JULY 22  
It might start to feel like there are two of you today. Your public self and your private self have been doing different jobs and it's starting to feel weird. But every once in a while you have to play a role for the public's sake, so don't worry that you're losing your true self. Be wary of the people who want you to only be one way all the time. If you think it's right to emphasize a certain part of yourself and de-emphasize another, trust that.

**SCORPIO** OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21  
There's an exciting energy and lots of possibility around you right now. Today, you can really show some influential people how you're different from everybody else. Let your freak flag fly. Be proud of your idiosyncrasies! They're what make you special, and they're what make you worth getting to know better. Step forward and let yourself go get some time in the spotlight. You'll make yourself proud and you'll make quite an impression. New things are starting for you.

**PISCES** FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20  
You're always game to meet someone new and unusual as long as they're interesting and fun. The Universe has decided to bring you all that and more right now, so prepare yourself for some wonderful diversions. Different people are due to come your way, not just today but for the next several weeks. Get plenty of rest! You'll need to keep up in any way you can. You won't want to miss anything.

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

|   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|
| I | U | T | A |
| D | R | R | O |
| I | E | G | Y |
| I | V | E | L |

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

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

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



Bangladesh captain Shakib fighting thigh injury

Dhaka, Bangladesh - Bangladesh captain Shakib Al Hasan suffered a thigh injury and is under observation ahead of their World Cup match against India next week, the country's cricket board said Saturday. Shakib injured himself during Friday's eight-wicket loss against New Zealand in when he scored 40 with the bat and completed his bowling quota of 10 overs to pick up 1-54 before hobbling off the field.

The BCB said that he had an MRI scan but did not reveal the extent of the problem. "He had an MRI scan done after the game, and we will continue to observe his fitness for the coming matches," team physio Bayjedul Islam Khan said in a BCB statement. "We will clinically assess his day-to-day progress and take measures accordingly."



'NEVER THOUGHT I'D PLAY AT WORLD CUP'

Rickshaw driver's son Siraj rose from humble beginnings to become a vital cog in Indian attack

Ahmedabad, India - Paceman Mohammed Siraj feared his humble roots as the son of an auto-rickshaw driver would shatter his dreams of playing at the World Cup.

On Saturday, however, the 29-year-old fast bowler played a crucial role in India's seven-wicket rout of arch-rivals Pakistan at Ahmedabad's 132,000-seater ground, the world's biggest cricket arena. He dismissed opener Abdullah Shafique lbw for 20 and later claimed the prize wicket of Pakistan captain Babar Azam who had made 50.

From 155-2, Pakistan collapsed to 191 all out in 42.5 overs. "To be honest I never thought that I would play a World Cup because I have come from so low (background)," Hyderabad native Siraj told reporters.

Siraj, whose rickshaw-driving father died in 2020, rose from his humble beginnings to play in the cash-soaked Indian Premier League. He made his ODI debut in 2019 and Test bow the following year.

"Now I am playing so it is a matter of achievement for me. India and Pakistan are known for their high intensity and high-pressure games and today I saw that and I felt good."

Siraj went wicketless for 76 runs in India's previous win over Afghanistan but came roaring back on Saturday.

He insisted his previous performance did not affect his mindset coming into the key clash.

"Everyone has an off day. The graph can come down sometimes and one bad day doesn't make me a bad performer," said Siraj, who singled out Shafique's wicket as being a planned strike.

"So I keep my confidence up with the fact that I am bowling well. This confidence helps me in

my bowling and I have backed myself to do that and got the result today."

Siraj was ably supported by the rest of the bowlers with Jasprit Bumrah, Kuldeep Yadav, Ravindra Jadeja and Hardik Pandya also taking two wickets

*Now I am playing so it is a matter of achievement for me. India and Pakistan are known for their high intensity and high-pressure games and today I saw that and I felt good*

MOHAMMED SIRAJ



India's Mohammed Siraj celebrates after taking the wicket of Pakistan's Abdullah Shafique (AFP)

More like an India event than World Cup: Arthur

Ahmedabad, India - Pakistan team director Mickey Arthur took a dig at cricket's governing body on Saturday, claiming the absence of support for his team in Ahmedabad's 132,000-capacity stadium made the occasion look like "a BCCI event" rather than an international marquee match-up.

Pakistan fans were effectively banned from the ground after failing to secure visas to cross the border, leaving the arena awash with the blue shirts of India supporters as the hosts coasted to a seven-wicket victory.

Arthur's team were backed only by a handful of expatriate



Micky Arthur

Pakistan fans who had made the trip from the US and the UK.

Asked how much a factor the partisan crowd was against a

ries; it seemed like a BCCI (Board of Control for Cricket in India) event."

Arthur accused the public address system organisers of favouring India by refusing to play "Dil Dil Pakistan", the nation's unofficial anthem.

"I didn't hear 'Dil Dil Pakistan' (My heart is Pakistan) coming through too often tonight.

"So yes, that does play a role, but I'm not going to use that as an excuse."

Since the 2008 attacks on Mumbai, India and Pakistan have not played a full bilateral series as New Delhi and Islamabad remain at diplomatic loggerheads.

India failed to issue visas to Pakistan fans despite them already having acquired World Cup match tickets.

On the field on Saturday India were superior.

They bowled out Pakistan for a paltry 191 and then chased down the target with 19.3 overs to spare on the back of a brilliant 86 from skipper Rohit Sharma.

Arthur admitted his team let themselves down with only captain Babar Azam (50) and Mohammad Rizwan (49) contributing major runs.

"I thought we were a little bit timid," said Arthur of the batting. AFP



India's Jasprit Bumrah (R) celebrates with teammates after taking the wicket of Pakistan's Mohammad Rizwan

'We don't want to get too excited'

Ahmedabad, India - India skipper Rohit Sharma heaped praise on his bowlers' "grit" for inspiring Saturday's seven-wicket World Cup rout of old rivals Pakistan.

Rohit smashed a 63-ball 86 with six fours and six sixes as India chased down their 192-run target with 117 balls to spare.

However, he insisted his bowlers had been key after Pakistan collapsed from 155-2 to 191 all out.

"There is no doubt about it that the bowlers set up the game for us again today. It was a great effort," said Rohit.

"I don't think it was a 190 pitch. At one stage we were looking at 270-280 but they came back and showed grit and that says a lot about the guys."

Man of the match Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Siraj, Hardik Pandya, Kuldeep Yadav and Ravindra Jadeja all took two wickets each.

India now sit on top of the 10-nation table after three wins in three games.

Pakistan are fourth with two wins and one defeat. "We pride ourselves on

whoever gets the ball doing the job for us. It can be someone's day. It can't be everybody's every day," added Rohit.

"My job as a captain is important there to read the conditions and who is the best guy to trouble the batsman."

He added: "All in all it is looking good, and I want to keep my fingers crossed. We don't want to get too excited or get too low, we want to stay balanced."

Saturday's win was an eighth for India in eight World Cup meetings with Pakistan stretching back to their first clash at the 1992 tournament.

"I've said it quite a few times now, this was an opposition we wanted to play against because we want to play quality opposition," said Rohit.

"Every opposition we come up against in this tournament is quality and can beat you on any particular day."

Babar Azam, who top scored for Pakistan with 50 before his team collapsed, admitted the middle order and opening bowlers underperformed.

Australia 'need to start winning quick'

Lucknow, India - Australia captain Pat Cummins admitted Sunday the five-time champions have "got to start winning and start winning quick" to rescue their faltering World Cup campaign.

Australia have lost both their opening matches, by six wickets to hosts India and 134 runs to South Africa, their heaviest defeat at a World Cup.

Despite boasting the batting firepower of David Warner and Steve Smith, they have yet to post a total of 200.

"We're obviously 0-2, so we've got to start winning and start winning quick," said Cummins ahead of Monday's clash against Sri Lanka in Lucknow.

"Every game now becomes almost like a final. You've got to win just about all of them."

The figures so far make for grim reading for Australia.

None of their batsmen have made a half-century with Smith top-scoring with 46 against India and Marnus Labuschagne



Pat Cummins walks back to the pavilion after his dismissal in the match against South Africa

matching that modest mark in the rout by South Africa.

They have also been hamstrung by their fielding performances.

Against India, Virat Kohli was dropped on 12 before he went on to make a match-winning 85.

Had the catch been taken, India, chasing just 200 to win, would have been teetering at 20-4. It got worse against South Africa where five chances went down.

AFP

Afghanistan beat champions England in seismic shock

New Delhi, India - Afghanistan pulled off one of the greatest World Cup shocks on Sunday when they defeated defending champions England by 69 runs in New Delhi.

Chasing 285 to win, after opener Rahmanullah Gurbaz had hit a blistering 80, England were bowled out for 215 despite Harry Brook's 66 with spinners Mujeeb Ur Rahman and Rashid Khan claiming three wickets each.

The stunning upset gave Afghanistan just their second World Cup win to add to a lone victory over Scotland at the 2015 tournament.

They came into Sunday's clash having lost their opening two games in India and on a 14-match losing World Cup streak.

After Gurbaz and the recalled Ikrām Alikhil, with 58, had given them a decent target to defend, Afghanistan's bowlers went to work, striking at regular intervals.

Jonny Bairstow (two) was lbw to Fazalhaq Farooqi in the second over before Joe Root was clean



Afghanistan's Rahmanullah Gurbaz plays a shot during their World Cup match against England

bowled by 22-year-old man of the match Mujeeb for 11.

Mohammad Nabi got rid of Dawid Malan, who made 140 against Bangladesh, for 32 to precipitate a slide which saw England slump to 138-6.

Skipper Jos Buttler was clean bowled by seamer Naveen-ul-Haq for nine, Rashid Khan had Liam Livingstone lbw on 10 before Nabi also dismissed Sam

Curran (10).

England were tied down, at one stage going more than eight overs without hitting a boundary until Brook managed the team's lone six of the innings in the 31st over.

Mujeeb sent back Chris Woakes before effectively sealing the game in his next over, having Brook caught behind by Alikhil with England at 169-8.

# AZZURRI STROLL IN BARI

Scandal-hit Italy maintain Euro push with Malta thumping, Ukraine get the better of North Macedonia

Milan, Italy - Beleaguered Italy bounced back from a scandal-hit week on Saturday by cruising to a 4-0 win over Malta which maintained second place in Euro 2024 qualifying Group C.

Domenico Berardi's double, Giacomo Bonaventura's first Italy goal and a late strike from Davide Frattesi gave the European champions an expected win against rock-bottom Malta to reclaim the second automatic qualifying spot from Ukraine who beat North Macedonia 2-0 earlier in the day.

Luciano Spalletti's side are level on 10 points with Ukraine and three points behind leaders England ahead of Tuesday's key clash at Wembley where the Azzurri won the last Euro just over two years ago.

"That match is where we will really see how much potential we have," said Spalletti to broadcaster RAI.

Italy will return to the site of their greatest triumph since winning the 2006 World Cup while Ukraine face sorry Malta in Ta' Qali.

Malta are yet to register a single point after six matches in the five-team group and on the basis of Saturday's showing are unlikely to put up much resistance against Ukraine.

That means anything but another victory over England will likely leave Italy third ahead of their final two matches in November - North Macedonia in Rome and Ukraine in Leverkusen, although they have a game in hand on both.



Italy's Giacomo Bonaventura celebrates with team-mates after scoring against Malta on Saturday

"It will definitely be emotional, I have amazing memories from that stadium," said Berardi, who netted a penalty in Italy's shoot-out final win over England.

"We'll go there trying to do what we did today, play our own game and look to win."

Saturday's stroll in front of over 56,000 fans in Bari came after a difficult few days for the Italy squad, with injuries and a betting scandal hampering Spalletti's preparations for two crucial matches.

*Luciano Spalletti's side are level on 10 points with Ukraine and three points behind leaders England ahead of Tuesday's key clash at Wembley where the Azzurri won the last Euro just over two years ago*

The former Napoli coach lost striker Federico Chiesa and Mattia Zaccagni to injury over the past two days after also having to leave out strikers Ciro Immobile and Mateo Retegui from his initial squad.

Even worse, Sandro Tonali and Nicolo Zaniolo were allowed to leave the Coverciano training camp on Thursday after being questioned for two hours by criminal prosecutors over alleged gambling offences.

Ukraine are level with Italy after a 2-0 win over North Macedonia in Prague.

Georgiy Sudakov put Ukraine ahead on 30 minutes and substitute Oleksandr Karavaiev sealed victory deep into stoppage time,

ahead of their visit to Malta next week.

Denmark avenged their shock loss to Kazakhstan in March as Robert Skov netted twice in a 3-1 win in Copenhagen.

Jonas Wind set the Danes, semi-finalists at Euro 2020, on their way before Skov scored a quick-fire double either side of half-time.

Kazakhstan pulled one back via Yan Vorogovskiy but they fell four points off the pace in Group H.

## Sesko propels Slovenia

Benjamin Sesko's brace powered Slovenia to a 3-0 win over Finland in Ljubljana.

Sesko's first came from the penalty spot and the RB Leipzig forward added another with a clinical finish, taking him to eight goals in his last 11 international appearances.

Defender Erik Janza grabbed a late third for Slovenia, who lead Denmark at the top on goal difference. The two countries meet in Copenhagen on November 17.

Slovenia are away to Northern Ireland next week and Denmark will be almost certain to beat San Marino - losers in all but one of 82 previous Euro qualifiers.

## China's Zheng takes second career title at Zhengzhou Open

Shanghai, China - Zheng Qinwen swept to her second career title -- her first on home soil -- at the Zhengzhou Open on Sunday, winning a hard-fought three-set final and celebrating with an impromptu karaoke session at the trophy ceremony.

The popular 21-year-old capped an incredible week with a 2-6, 6-2, 6-4 victory over Czech seventh-seed Barbora Krejickova to become just the third Chinese woman to win a singles title at the WTA 500 level or higher, after Li Na and Zheng Saisai.

This year marked the first time in WTA Tour history that three different Chinese women have won a singles title in a season, with Zhu Lin triumphing in Hua Hin, Wang Xiyu in Guangzhou and Zheng claiming her first trophy in Palermo



Zheng Qinwen

in July.

After winning Asian Games gold on September 29, the 24th-ranked Zheng suffered a disappointing first-round loss at the China Open to Elena Rybakina, but she recovered remarkably by securing the biggest title of her young career 13 days later.

"That was such a special ex-

perience to win my first 500 in China, especially in Zhengzhou," said Zheng, who will return to the top 20 in the rankings on Monday.

Zheng was the first to break as she leapt to a 2-0 advantage but Krejickova grabbed the next five games and took a one-set lead in 39 minutes.

Zheng's first-serve percentage was a shockingly low 29 percent and the Chinese number one knew that statistic had to change for her to stand a chance against the former French Open champion.

The home favourite began the second set on the right foot, breaking from the start and carving out a 5-2 gap.

Her first-serve percentage was a healthy 68 percent in that set, and she won 92 percent of those points.

AFP

## Nagelsmann enjoys 3-1 win over USA in Germany debut

New York, United States - Julian Nagelsmann got off to a winning start as Germany's coach on Saturday with his team securing a comfortable 3-1 win over the United States in a friendly.

Germany looked much improved from the team that had suffered a 4-1 home defeat to Japan last month, a result which saw Hansi Flick fired as coach after a run of five matches without a win.

The Euro 2024 hosts could ill-afford another surprise loss but they delivered a solid, well-rounded performance after recovering from a Christian Pulisic opener for the USA in the match at East Hartford, Connecticut.

Although Pascal Gross struck the post early on for Germany, who were missing midfielder Joshua Kimmich due to illness, the home side looked threatening with Pulisic and Tim Weah



Jamal Musiala of Germany celebrates after scoring against the US in their friendly match on Saturday (AFP)

lively on the flanks.

Gio Reyna, who had gone through a bitter public row with coach Gregg Berhalter after the World Cup last year, returned to the starting lineup and provided some creative touches as the Americans started well.

Pulisic put the USA ahead in

the 27th minute with a superb solo goal, cutting in from the left flank and then unleashing a fine drive into the far corner.

But that appeared to serve merely as a wake-up call for Germany with Ilkay Gundogan leveling in the 39th minute after good work from Leroy Sane.



Zhanibek Alimkhanuly

## Alimkhanuly stops Gualtieri to unify middleweight titles of IBF and WBO

Washington, United States - Kazakh southpaw Janibek Alimkhanuly stopped Germany's Vincenzo Gualtieri in the sixth round on Saturday to unify two middleweight world boxing titles in a showdown of unbeaten champions.

Alimkhanuly kept the World Boxing Organization title and took the International Boxing Federation crown from Gualtieri when referee David Fields stopped the fight in suburban Houston after one minute and 25 seconds of the sixth round. "He was waiting because he was thinking I was going to get tired," Alimkhanuly said through a translator. "But I did not get tired."

Alimkhanuly improved to 15-0 with his 10th victory inside the distance while Gualtieri, fighting outside Germany for the first time, fell to 21-1 with one drawn.

Alimkhanuly was defending his WBO throne for the third time and took the IBF title Gualtieri was defending for the first time after winning it from Brazil's Esquivia Falcao in July.

## Tszyu sends Charlo warning with dominant WBO super welterweight title defence

Gold Coast, Australia - Undeclared Australian Tim Tszyu scored a unanimous points decision over tenacious American Brian Mendoza to defend his WBO super welterweight title on Sunday, then taunted Jermell Charlo to "come and get it"

The 28-year-old, son of renowned former world champion Kostya Tszyu, was brilliant and brutal in the 12-round battle on Australia's Gold Coast that left Mendoza bloodied but somehow still standing. All three judges scored the bout in his favour, 116-111, 116-112 and 117-111.

"He's world-class for a reason," Tszyu said of the Las Vegas-based Mendoza, who earned his right to face Tszyu



Tim Tszyu

with crushing upset knockout wins over Jeison Rosario and the highly-touted Sebastian Fundora. "But he's second best."

The victory improved the Australian to 24-0-0, with 17 knockouts, and cemented his status as the number one chal-

lenger to big-talking American Charlo, who holds the other three major sanctioning body world crowns - WBA, WBC, and

*He'll (Jermell Charlo) probably think in his delusional head that he would beat me*

TIM TSZYU

IBF - in the 154-pound division. Tszyu won the WBO interim title when he stopped American Tony Harrison in March and defended it with a spectacular first-round demolition of Mexico's Carlos Ocampo in June to position himself as the mandatory challenger to Charlo.

But, instead of facing Tszyu as he was supposed to, Charlo

opted to move up two weight classes to super middleweight and take on Canelo Alvarez in a more lucrative bout last month.

Charlo not only lost but was stripped of his WBO belt, with Tszyu elevated from interim titlist to full champion. "Charlo, where are you?," Tszyu said mockingly in the ring, tapping the belt he took from him. "He'll probably think in his delusional head that he would beat me. Come get it. Let's prove to every one who is king of this division."

Charlo, who has taunted Tszyu as a "paper champion", has indicated he plans to return to the super welterweight division, with a fight between the two in Las Vegas seen as possible.

# BACK IN FRONT

Bagnaia wins Indonesia MotoGP to reclaim title lead as Martin crashes

Lombok, Indonesia - Italy's Francesco Bagnaia won the Indonesia MotoGP on Sunday with a spectacular ride that took him back to the top of the championship standings after rival Jorge Martin crashed out.

Maverick Vinales (Aprilia) came in a close second behind the 26-year-old Ducati star, with Fabio Quartararo (Yamaha) in third at the Mandalika circuit on the Indonesian resort island of Lombok.

Bagnaia made a mesmerising surge from 13th to the top spot after rising to the podium places within the first four laps, refusing to let Pramac's Martin punish him further for a poor performance in practice and qualifying.

It was set to be another dream double weekend for Martin after winning Saturday's sprint and taking the lead from the green light, up from sixth, to dominate the early stages of the race.

But it quickly turned into a nightmare for the 25-year-old Spaniard when he crashed on lap 14 of Sunday's main event, a potentially huge moment in the title

race.

Vinales put the pressure on Bagnaia in the late stages after being overtaken, coming to within four-tenths of a second of the pack leader.

But the Italian, known for his phenomenal defence, saw out the race to turn the tables on Martin, opening up an 18-point gap with just five race weekends left and prompting wild celebrations in his garage.

"I think we were deserving a race like this," Bagnaia told reporters. "(I was) doing the maximum I could then when I saw Martin going, I said to myself 'take care of the tyres' and that was the correct thing. I am very, very happy."

He later told a news conference that he was frustrated before Sunday's race because he had been "struggling a lot" on new tyres, and worked into the night with his team.

Martin, who was several seconds clear when he crashed, said handing the title advantage to Bagnaia had not affected him.

"It happens. I was still push-



Francesco Bagnaia celebrates with the trophy after winning the Indonesian Grand Prix on Sunday (AFP)

*(I was) doing the maximum I could then when I saw Martin going, I said to myself 'take care of the tyres' and that was the correct thing. I am very, very happy*

FRANCESCO BAGNAIA



ing... and still focused on being fast," he said. "I did an amazing race until that point. I have to be calm, (there's) still 10 races to go, still a long way."

Frenchman Quartararo said

he was unhappy with his speed but content with his spot on the podium. "To be back in the podium, from Austin to India was a long time, now from India to here was shorter so really happy," he told reporters.

**Bezzecchi heroics**

It was a superlative weekend for Italian Marco Bezzecchi, the Mooney VR46 rider who surprised by riding just a week after

surgery on a broken collarbone.

Starting from ninth on the grid, he produced a heroic ride to fifth behind Fabio Di Giannantonio. That kept him 63 points behind in the title race, which he still has a slim chance of winning.

The race was marred by a series of crashes in hot and humid conditions, with only 14 riders out of 21 finishing the race.

Marc Marquez's race ended when he slid off the track in lap

eight, with the Spaniard shouting to the sky as he left his Honda bike after a dismal weekend in which he also failed to complete Saturday's sprint race.

Marquez will join Gresini Racing for the 2024 season.

Luca Marini, who immediately lost his pole position to Martin from the green light, saw his day go from bad to worse when he went down at turn 10 after being nudged by Brad Binder.



Thomas Bach

## IOC president Bach coy as members call for rule change to extend his term

Mumbai, India - International Olympic Committee president Thomas Bach refused to rule out standing for another term as several members called Sunday for a change of rules that would let him extend his time in office.

The German was elected for a first eight-year term in 2013 and re-elected for a further four-year spell in 2021.

Allowing the 69-year-old former Olympic fencing champion to remain in the post beyond 2025 would require a change to the Olympic Charter.

Nevertheless, there were several calls for Bach to continue during Sunday's opening day of the 141st IOC Session in Mumbai. Luis Mejia Oviedo, the president of the Dominican Republic Olympic Committee, hailed Bach's speech during Saturday's opening ceremony when he announced plans to look at creating an eSports Games.

Oviedo, lauding Bach's response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, said the IOC needs to "rely on the leadership which you have shown".

Paraguay's Camilo Perez Lopez Moreira urged Bach to run for a further four years.

## Hubert Hurkacz beats Rublev to win Shanghai Masters in thriller

Shanghai, China - Hubert Hurkacz saved a match point before defeating fifth seed Andrey Rublev 6-3, 3-6, 7-6 (10/8) to win a thrilling Shanghai Masters final on Sunday.

It was the big-serving Pole's second Masters triumph, to go with the one he won in Miami in 2021, and a seventh ATP title in all.

"It was such a battle, especially emotionally," the 16th seed said after surviving a nail-biting third-set tie break in front of the watching Roger Federer.

"I had a match point and Andrey hit an amazing serve and then he had a match point and then I had some match points.

"It was back and forth and such a tricky match."

Hurkacz had Rublev under pressure early and broke the Russian with a vicious whipped forehand that Rublev had no chance of returning to lead 4-2 in the first set.

The 25-year-old Rublev let out an angry roar in response and then Hurkacz easily held his own



Poland's Hubert Hurkacz hits a return to Russia's Andrey Rublev

booming serve to go up 5-2.

The Pole Hurkacz came into the final with a tournament-leading 77 aces and Rublev could not handle his blistering serve.

Hurkacz sealed the first set in 31 minutes - and it was inevitably with another ace. He sent down 21 over the course of a topsy-

turvy final.

It was the first set that Rublev had dropped in Shanghai.

But Rublev, who won the Monte Carlo Masters in April, struck back to break his opponent's torpedo of a serve for a 2-0 lead at the start of the second set.

A rejuvenated Rublev kept the 26-year-old Hurkacz at bay to send them into a deciding third set. Rublev on Saturday described his angry outbursts in his semi-final win over Grigor Dimitrov as "ugly" and he was struggling again with his emotions at times.



USA's Jessica Pegula celebrates her triumph

## Pegula wins in Seoul for second title of season

Seoul, South Korea - US top seed Jessica Pegula won the WTA Korean Open in Seoul on Sunday with a straight-sets win over China's Yuan Yue.

The 29-year-old, whose mother was born in Seoul, eased through 6-2, 6-3 for the fourth title of her career and second this season after Montreal in August.

World number four Pegula also reached the finals in Doha and Tokyo this year.

"My mom is Korean and she was adopted from here so it's really special to be able to win here," Pegula said. "In the last few years, as my ranking has

gone up, I've definitely felt so much more support from the fans, a lot more than I expected coming back here from five years ago. So it's really special."

Pegula, who reached a career-high world number three last year, has never managed to get past the quarter-finals in the four Grand Slams.

It was the first WTA final for 128th-ranked Yuan, 25, who has never reached a quarter-final before this week.

"Last time we played was a battle and this one was as well," Pegula said of their second meeting.

## Angel Yin wins in Shanghai for maiden LPGA title

Shanghai, China - Angel Yin won on the LPGA Tour for the first time as she held her nerve on the first playoff hole to beat world number one Lilia Vu in Shanghai on Sunday.

On a dramatic final day that saw the lead change hands repeatedly at Qizhong Garden Golf Club, the Americans both finished 14-under after four rounds, to ensure they went to a playoff.

In hazy conditions at the \$2.1 million event, overnight co-leader Yin birdied the par-four

18th in the sudden-death playoff.

It was Yin's first victory on the LPGA Tour in her 159th start.

"Feels amazing. I got to say," said the 25-year-old, who is ranked 35 in the world.

"I was playing today and I was like, wow, winning is tough. It's not easy. So hats off to Lilia for playing so well last day again, and obviously she's been playing really well."

Vu had shot a final-round four-under-par 68 and Yin, who shared the overnight lead with Sweden's Maja Stark, carded a

70 to take them into the playoff.

Vu said she was happy with her performance during the week but felt she was not at her best in the final round.

"I made a lot of mistakes today, to be honest, and I felt like this was definitely not my A-game," she said.

"Today was just Angel's day, I'm happy for her," she added.

South Korea's Choi Hye-jin, who started the day in 24th position, rocketed up the leaderboard with an eight-under 64 for third place on 13-under for the

tournament.

Choi at one point held the clubhouse lead.

In the end, she finished alongside Germany's Esther Henseleit, Liu Yu of China and the Thai duo of Ariya Jutanugarn and Pavarisa Yoktuan.

Sweden's Stark had led after three rounds but lost her nerve with a 72 to finish tied eighth.

Danielle Kang of the United States, who won the tournament the last time it was played, in 2019, carded a final-round 71 for a share of 17th.



USA's Angel Yin celebrates with her trophy

# 'GUTTING' DEFEAT ENDS SEXTON'S STORIED CAREER

Paris, France -Johnny Sexton's son Luca accompanied his father round a rugby pitch for the final time after his stellar career ended in bitter disappointment with a 28-24 defeat to New Zealand in the Rugby World Cup quarter-final, and told him "you're still the best dad."

It was a tearful but dignified Sexton who appeared at the post-match press conference after his dreams of a fairytale ending were dashed by the All Blacks in an absorbing contest on Saturday.

After leading them to 17 successive Test wins, including a historic series win in New Zealand, many had thought this Irish side would finally break the World Cup glass ceiling and reach the semi-finals.

However, like so many great Irish players before him, Sexton fell short.

The 38-year-old described the defeat as "gutting" because of the small margins involved - including when Ronan Kelleher was held up over the line with minutes remaining.

The fly-half said the end result may not have been what he wanted but overall this final campaign had left him with happy memories.

"How can you be prouder to be Irish when you see what's happened over the last six weeks really?" said Sexton, of the tens of thousands of Irish fans who had turned the Stade de France into a sea of green for two consecutive weekends.

"We get behind the team like no other. It's incredible and it's not wasted on us, and that's why it's so hard to take really, that we didn't give them another couple of weekends.



Johnny Sexton

*The last couple of years have definitely been, in a green jersey anyway, the most enjoyable of my career, definitely. It's an incredible place to be and that's what I'll miss the most*

JOHNNY SEXTON

"They (the squad) are an incredible bunch led by the man beside me," he said, gesturing to head coach Andy Farrell.

"It's the best group I have ever been apart of. Bar none.

"The last couple of years have definitely been, in a green jersey anyway, the most enjoyable of my career," said Sexton. "Defi-

nitely. "The group, the way 'Faz' leads us with the other coaches, everyone runs into camp and never wants to leave.

"It's an incredible place to be and that's what I'll miss the most."

Sexton retires with a record that many players would die for. He hangs up his boots as Ire-

land's record points scorer, the Six Nations overall points record holder, a pivotal figure in two Six Nations Grand Slams and the 2018 World Player of the Year.

"I'm just grateful as well," he said.

"You can't be 38 and sit here giving out too much.

"I've had lots of ups and downs in my career, lots of injuries and I will reflect more in the coming weeks on my career."

For Farrell, Sexton is simply the best player to have donned the green jersey.

"I just said to the group in the changing room the reason they're going to keep on learning is because of this guy sat beside me

here," said Farrell.

"The impact that he's had on the rest of the team over the last four years has been amazing, and the way that he's conducted himself as a leader and as a player and the way that he's shown the love playing for Ireland will be remembered and connected to this group for many years to come."

Sexton too received a glowing tribute from All Blacks captain Sam Cane.

"He's been outstanding for Ireland for a very long time, as long as I've been playing against Ireland," said Cane.

"The fact he has been able to play at the top for so long is an absolute testament to that."



Dan Biggar

## Biggar bows out, but insists Wales' future is bright

Marseille, France - Dan Biggar ended his stellar career with Wales in a disappointing defeat by Argentina in the World Cup quarter-final, but the Toulon fly-half believes the future is bright for Welsh rugby.

Biggar's 112th Test appearance in the red jersey saw Wales go down 27-19 to Argentina on Saturday, leaving the playmaker described by Wales coach Warren Gatland as a "great servant" feeling a mix of "frustration and disappointment".

"You know sometimes when you're absolutely hands-down beaten, you can hold your hands up and let it slide a little bit but we felt like we had control of that game, certainly for large periods of that first half," Biggar said.

"But fair play to Argentina, they hung on in there and turned the game into a bit of a brawl really, which probably

suited them a bit more than it did us."

While Biggar steps away from the international stage, he will continue at club level in the Top 14 with Toulon, but admitted he would miss the passion of being involved in the Wales set-up.

"Yeah, that's been my character from day one really. Hopefully people will remember me for being passionate and caring about every moment. I am going to miss it," said the 33-year-old, who leaves as Wales' fourth-highest Test points scorer with 633 points and also fourth on the list of their most-capped players.

"I didn't think I would be particularly emotional, I almost thought I would be relieved, but there's definitely a bit of sadness. I'm definitely going to miss it in the months and years to come."

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**BIRTHDAY WISHES**

**SHAIK DILSHAD**

Wish you many more returns of Happy Birthday my dear wife. May Allah grant peace, health & success forever.  
From  
Mohammed Zulfikar Ali & Daughter Ikhlas al Samaa

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DELECTABLE DEBATE



When you visit Pakistan, you couldn't possibly avoid gorging on biryani (a spicy rice and meat dish) that is served out everywhere - from elite restaurants to roadside eateries and foodcarts in every marketplace. Eying each other across a stream of traffic, rival Pakistani biryani joints vie for customers, serving a fiery medley of meat, rice and spice that unites and divides South Asian appetites. Both sell a niche version of the dish, steeped in the same vats, with matching prices and trophies commending their quality. But in Karachi, where a biryani craze boomed after the creation of Pakistan, it is the subtle differences that inspire devotion.

world's largest cities today with a population of 20mn. For Indian food historian Pushpesh Pant, biryani served in South Asia's melting-pot cities, such as Karachi, is a reminder of shared heritage. "Hindus ate differently, Nanakpanthis (Sikhs) ate differently, and Muslims ate differently, but it was not as if their food did not influence each other," he told AFP from the city of Gurugram outside Delhi. "In certain parts of Pakistan and certain parts of India, the differences in flavours and foods are not as great as man-made borders would make us think." Every Karachi neighbourhood has its own canteens fronted by vendors clanking a spatula against the inside of biryani pots. The recipe has endless variations. The one with beef is a favourite in Islamic Pakistan, while vegetarian variants are more popular in largely Hindu India. Chicken is universal. Along coastlines, seafood is also in the mix. And purists debate if adding potatoes is heresy. "Other than that, there is 'Pulao Biryani' which is purely from Delhi," says 27-year-old pharmacist Muhammad al Aaqib, describing a broth-stewed variation. "My roots lead back to Delhi, too, so it's like the mother of biryanis for us. Perhaps every person has a different way of cooking it, and their way is better," says 36-year-old landlord Mehran Khoso.



# BONE OF contention

PAKISTANI BIRYANI HAS BEEN THE FOCUS OF A DEBATE FOR YEARS — THE ORIGINS AND RECIPES HAVE MANY CLAIMANTS BUT 'THE PROOF OF THE PUDDING IS IN THE EATING', SAY LOCAL CHEFS



A staff serves biryani at a restaurant in Karachi

"Our biryani is not only different from theirs but unique in the world," says restaurateur Muhammad Saqib, who layers his 'bone marrow biryani' with herbs. "When a person bites into it he drowns in a world of flavours," the 36-year-old says. Across the road, Muhammad Zain sees it differently. "We were the ones who started the biryani business here first," the 27-year-old claims, as staff scoop out sharing platters with a gut-punch of masala. "It's our own personal and secret recipe." Both, however, agree on one thing. "You can't find biryani like Pakistan's anywhere in the world," says Saqib. "Whether it's a celebration or any other occasion, biryani always comes first," according to Zain.

**INTERNATIONAL CUISINE** British colonial rule in South Asia ended in 1947 with a violent rupture of the region along religious lines. Hindus and Sikhs in newly created Pakistan fled to India while Muslim 'Mohajirs' - refugees - went the other way. India and Pakistan have been arch-rivals since, fighting wars and locked in endless diplomatic strife. Trade and travel have been largely choked off. Many Mohajirs settled in Karachi, home to just 400,000 people in 1947 but one of the

**NO SECRET INGREDIENT** The origins of biryani are hotly contested. However, it is generally accepted the word has Persian roots and it is argued the dish was popularised in the elite kitchens of the Mughal Empire, which spanned South Asia between the 16th and 19th centuries. In spite of that pedigree, its defining quality is permutation. Quratul Ain Asad (40) spends Sunday morning cooking for her husband and son, Mohajir descendants of a family that arrived in Karachi from the Indian town of Tonk in 1948. But at the dinner table, they feast not on an heirloom recipe but a TV chef's version with a cooling yoghurt sauce and a simple shredded salad. Asad insists on Karachi's biryani supremacy. "You will not like biryani from anywhere else once you've tasted Karachi's biryani," she says. "There is no secret ingredient. I just cook with a lot of passion and joy. Perhaps that's why the taste comes out good," she adds. Cooked in bulk, biryani is also a staple of charity donations. At Ghazi Foods, 28-year-old Ali Nawaz paddles out dozens of portions of biryani into plastic pouches, which are delivered to poor neighbourhoods on motorbikes. AFP



You can't find biryani like Pakistan's anywhere in the world

MUHAMMAD SAQIB



عالي البروتين  
و قليل السكر

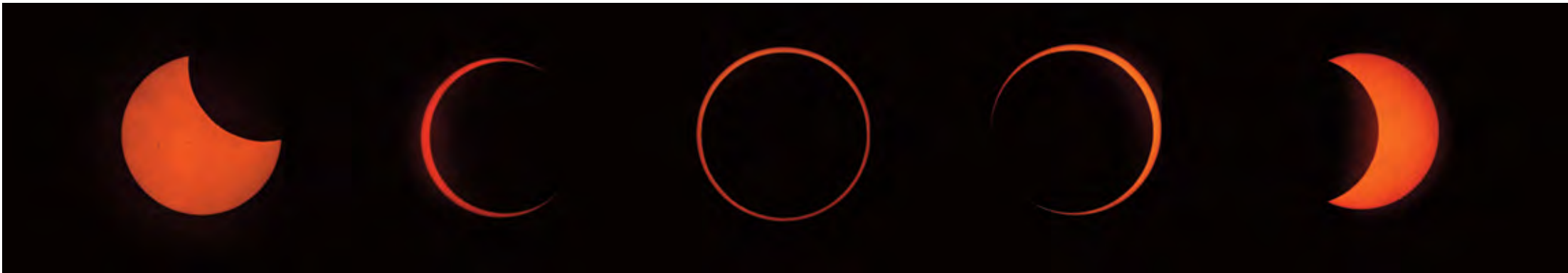
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The moon crosses in front of the sun during the annular solar eclipse in Bogota on Saturday



# RING OF FIRE

SKYGAZERS  
WATCH 'RING OF  
FIRE' ECLIPSE  
OVER WESTERN  
HEMISPHERE



People watch the annular solar eclipse at the planetarium of the University of Costa Rica (UCR) in San Jose

Hot air balloon operators create a 'ring of fire' with their gondola burners during the solar eclipse at the 51st Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta in Albuquerque, New Mexico

Skygazers across the Americas turned their faces upwards on Saturday for a rare celestial event - an annular solar eclipse.

A crowd of people wearing protective eyewear gathered in Albuquerque, New Mexico, one of many across the western United States watching as the Moon passed between the Sun and Earth at its furthest point from our planet.

Since it is so distant, it did not cover the Sun completely, creating a 'ring of fire' effect that brought cheers from the crowd in Albuquerque. "It's majestic. We're in awe," said one viewer, Shannon Cozad.

In the course of just a few hours the most striking 'path of the annularity' was crossing a handful of major cities, including Eugene, Oregon and San Antonio, Texas, with partial eclipse phases lasting an hour or two before and after.

"It's kind of like a black hole," said Mubaraq Sokunbi, an excited eight-year-old who was at a hot air balloon festival in Albuquerque with his family. "The Moon covers

the Sun and then there's a ring around it."

At any given location, the eclipse was visible from between 30 seconds and five minutes - but people were urged to take safety precautions and use solar viewing glasses, and never regular sunglasses, to preserve their vision.

The eclipse crossed into Mexico and Central America, then into South America through Colombia and northern Brazil before ending at sunset in the Atlantic Ocean.

**A beautiful memory**

At the Bogota Planetarium, a crowd gathered around noon, holding their breath for the clouds to clear. When they did - and in time to see the eclipse - some observers shed tears, overwhelmed by emotion.

"It was at first distressing not to be able to see it, then very moving" when it appeared, Xiomara Cifuentes, a 41-year-old civil servant who came with her husband and their three children, told AFP.

"It will be a beautiful memory," she added.

"It was a pretty beautiful moment...an indescribable thing, with-

out words," said Jhoan Vinazco, a 25-year-old university student who had never seen an eclipse before.

In the town of Penonome, Panama, about 160km from Panama City, Carlos Ramirez watched the eclipse dressed as an astronaut - something he dreamed of becoming as a child. "I found the event here in Panama spectacular," the 55-year-old tour guide said.

**Sounding rockets**

The event also served as a dress rehearsal ahead of a total eclipse set for April 2024. Both eclipses are going to be 'absolutely breathtaking for science', said Madhulika Guhathakurta, a heliophysics program scientist at NASA.

Solar eclipses have a noticeable effect on the upper atmosphere, such as the ionosphere, which is full of charged particles and responsible for reflecting and refracting radio waves.

"Although the atmospheric effects of solar eclipses have been studied for over 50 years, many unanswered questions remain," said Guhathakurta.

To study these effects, NASA



planned three rocket launches on Saturday from the White Sands Missile Range in New Mexico to gather data on the electric and

magnetic fields, electron density and temperature.

A total eclipse took place in 2017 in the United States. After next

April's total eclipse, there will not be another until 2044, while the next annular eclipse will be in 2046.

AFP

# NEW *arrivals*

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