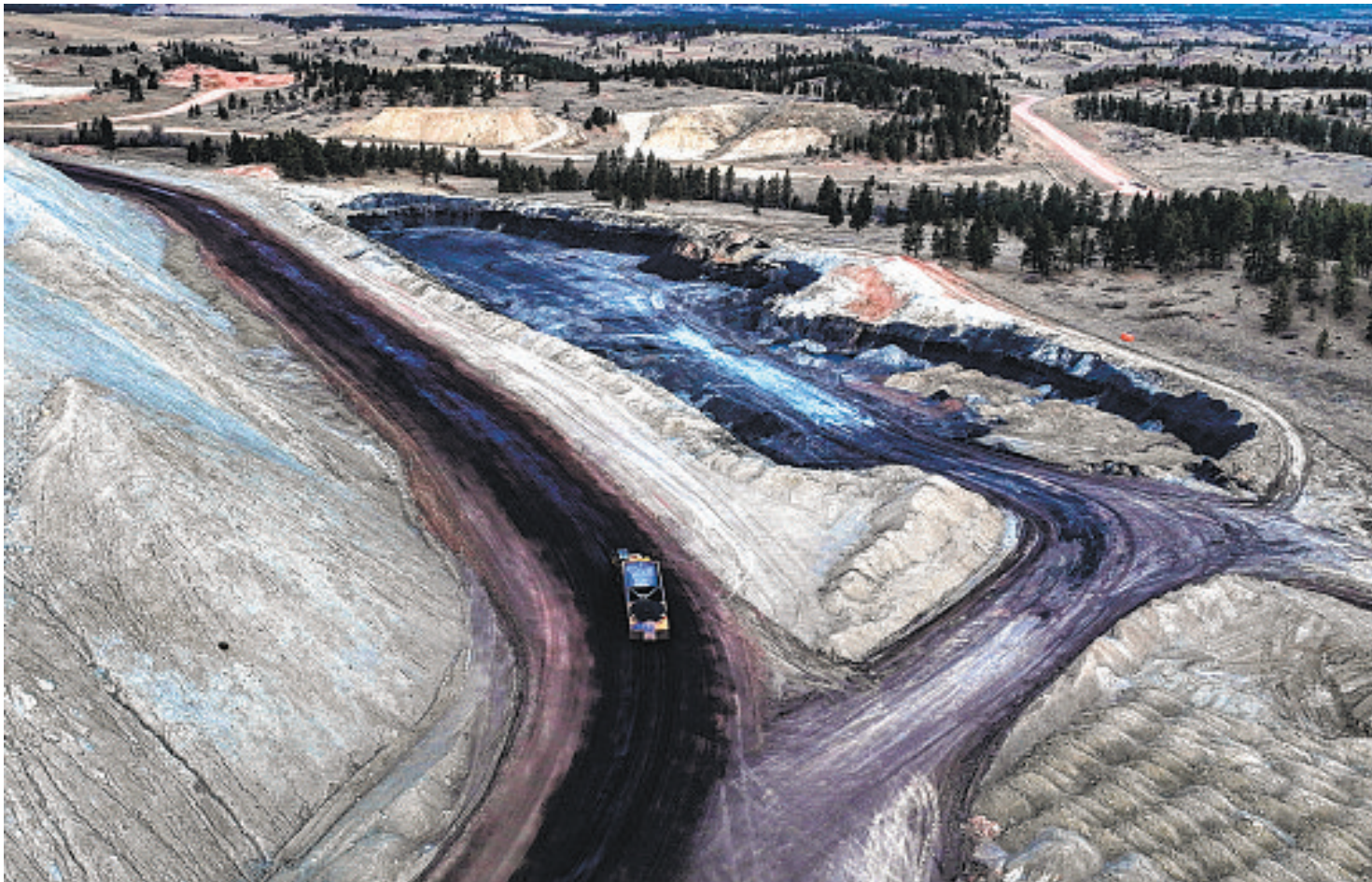


REPOWERING THE WEST



ONE OF THE strip mines that feed coal to the power plant in Colstrip, Mont., which delivers electricity to West Coast cities.

# We can't let coal towns die

COLUMN BY SAMMY ROTH | PHOTOGRAPHS BY ROBERT GAUTHIER  
REPORTING FROM COLSTRIP, MONT.

IN THE EARLY MORNING LIGHT, it's easy to mistake the towering gray mounds for an odd-looking mountain range — pale and dull and devoid of life, some pine trees and shrublands in the foreground with lazy blue skies extending up beyond the peaks.

But the mounds aren't mountains. They're enormous piles of dirt, torn from the ground by crane-like machines called draglines to open paths to the rich coal seams beneath. And even though we're in rural southeastern Montana, more than 800 miles from the Pacific Ocean, West Coast cities are largely to blame for the destruction of this landscape.

Workers at the Rosebud mine load coal onto a conveyor belt, which carries the planet-wrecking fuel to a power plant in the small town next door.

L.A., Portland and other progressive cities are still fueled by faraway plants. We traveled to Montana to find out why.

Plant operators in Colstrip burn the coal to produce electricity, much of which is shipped by power line to homes and businesses in the Portland and Seattle areas. It's been that way for decades.

"The West Coast markets are what created this," Anne Hedges says, as we watch a dragline move dirt. She sounds frustrated, and with good reason. Hedges and her fellow Montana environmentalists were happy when Oregon and Washington passed laws requiring 100% clean energy in the next two decades. But they're furious that electric utilities in those states are planning to stick with coal for as long as the laws allow, and in some cases making deals to give away their Colstrip shares to co-owners who seem determined to keep the plant running long into the future.

"Coal is not dead yet," [See Repowering, A6]

## Heists on L.A. freeways shock jewelers

Robberies in broad daylight in recent months are linked to thieves here on tourist visas, police say.

BY DANIEL MILLER AND RICHARD WINTON

She was cruising the high, arcing ramp from the westbound 10 Freeway to the southbound 405 with a large bag of expensive jewelry in the passenger seat.

It was Oct. 18, and jeweler Stacy Nolan Soper was headed home in a rented Nissan Rogue after visiting downtown L.A.'s jewelry district, where she had picked up wares from a handful of businesses.

Traffic slowed as she came down the ramp, and the car in front of her suddenly stopped. A man hopped out. She wondered if he needed help. Then she saw two other men in ski masks jump out after him.

In a sickening flash, Soper realized: "They are coming after me."

Two of them came to her car's passenger side and began slashing its tires and smashing the windows. The other man stood at her open window waving something that she didn't recognize with certainty but may have been a knife.

"It seemed like [he] was going to attack me," Soper said.

As she looked at him in terror, the others grabbed the jewelry from the passenger seat — worth more than \$100,000 — and ran back to their vehicle. One of the criminal's faces was only [See Heists, A13]

## USC cancels appearances by commencement honorees

BY ANGIE ORELLANA HERNANDEZ AND JAWEED KALEEM

USC called off an appearance from director Jon M. Chu and other commencement honorees in the wake of controversy over its deci-

sion to cancel valedictorian Asna Tabassum's graduation speech amid security concerns, the university announced Friday.

In a letter posted on its website, the university wrote that "given the highly publicized circumstances surrounding our main-stage

commencement program," it made the decision to "release our outside speakers and honorees from attending this year's ceremony."

"We've been talking to this exceptional group and hope to confer these honorary degrees at a future [See USC, A10]



BRIAN VAN DER BRUG Los Angeles Times

STUDENTS PLAY with bubbles at Educare Los Angeles in Long Beach, a preschool serving children ages 5 and under through a public-private partnership.

## Choosing between preschool and transitional kindergarten

It's a steep learning curve for stressed-out parents

BY JENNY GOLD

Yelena Hagooli has done everything possible to give her 4-year-old son the best start in life. She took him to the library every week, fed him the healthiest foods, left her job to care for him, and

even moved to Beverly Hills because she'd heard such good things about the schools.

But the parenting decision she is grappling with now feels more momentous: Should she keep him in his beloved preschool for another year or send him to the

newly expanded transitional kindergarten, called TK for short, at her local public school?

She's looked at the question from every angle, and even paid a \$1,000 nonrefundable deposit to secure his spot at his temple-based [See Preschool, A10]



MICHAEL BLACKSHIRE Los Angeles Times

### BOOKS AND POLITICS

A panel at the Times Festival of Books, where some defended USC's valedictorian. CALIFORNIA

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### Ukraine aid wins House approval

After months of delay, aid for Ukraine, Israel and other allies was approved with bipartisan support. NATION, A5

### Clippers hoping Leonard to play

Team's star player has been out for three weeks with injury as L.A. prepares to open postseason. SPORTS, D1

Weather Sunshine. L.A. Basin: 76/57. B10



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