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"All the News That's Fit to Print"

The New York Times

THE WEATHER
Today, sunny to partly cloudy, breezy, low humidity, high 79. **Tonight,** partly cloudy, low 65. **Tomorrow,** clouds and sun, breezy showers, high 78. Weather map, Page B12.

VOL. CLXXIII . . . . No. 60,179 SATURDAY, JUNE 8, 2024 $4.00

IVOR PRICKETT FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Amouna Elhadi at a hospital with her 14-year-old son, Hassan, who she said was shot in the stomach by an armed civilian resistance.

Civil War Pushes Ravaged Sudan Toward Abyss

Nation's Yearlong Fight Has Engulfed Capital as Famine Closes In

By DECLAN WALSH

KHARTOUM, Sudan — The gold market is a graveyard of rubble and dog-eaten corpses. The state television station became a torture chamber. The national film archive was blown open in battle, its treasures now yellowing in the sun.

Artillery shells soar over the Nile, smashing into hospitals and houses. Residents bury their dead outside their front doors. Others march in formation, joining civilian militias. In a hushed famine ward, starving babies fight for life. Every few days, one of them dies.

Once a proud city of gleaming high rises, oil wealth and five-star hotels on the Nile, Khartoum, the capital of Sudan and one of the largest cities in Africa, has been reduced to a charred battleground. A feud between two generals fighting for power has dragged the country into civil war and turned the city into ground zero for one of the world's worst humanitarian catastrophes.

As many as 150,000 people have died since the conflict erupted last year, by American estimates. Another nine million have been forced from their homes, making Sudan home to the largest displacement crisis on earth, the United Nations says. A famine looms that officials warn could kill

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Jones Seeks To Liquidate For His Lies

By ELIZABETH WILLIAMSON

WASHINGTON — The Infowars conspiracy theorist Alex Jones is seeking permission from a bankruptcy court to liquidate his personal assets and deliver the proceeds to the Sandy Hook families who are owed more than $1.4 billion in damages for his lies about the 2012 school shooting.

Mr. Jones also filed a separate bankruptcy for his company, Free Speech Systems, and in a hearing next Friday a judge is to rule whether the company will also be liquidated, an outcome favored by a majority of the families. That would shutter Infowars, effective the day of the ruling. It would also place assets from Infowars' studios and potentially Mr. Jones's popular social media accounts in control of the families.

Silencing Mr. Jones, who for years has broadcast lies ranging from denying the Sandy Hook shooting to denying the results of the 2020 election, would be a definitive win for the families.

"For too long, Alex Jones has profited from the lies and fear that he peddles every day on Infowars, his corrupt business platform," said Chris Mattei, a lawyer for the families who sued Mr. Jones in Connecticut. "The Connecticut families, driven by the principle that Jones must not be allowed to hurt or profit from the pain of others, are now on the brink of stripping him of his ability to inflict mass harm."

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VICTOR J. BLUE FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Linking History and Hope

Saratoga Race Course will host the Belmont Stakes at a key moment for horse racing. Page B8.

Biden Pressed To Shift Blame For High Prices

Attack Big Businesses, Progressives Urge

This article is by ***Nicholas Nehamas, Jim Tankersley*** *and* ***Kellen Browning.***

WASHINGTON — As high prices at grocery stores, gas pumps and pharmacies have soured many voters on his first term, President Biden has developed a populist riposte: Blame big corporations for inflation, not me.

But despite facing a tough re-election battle where economic issues will be central, Mr. Biden has not leaned into that message as frequently or naturally as some other Democrats, including senators running in competitive seats across the southwest and the industrial Midwest. The Biden campaign has not focused its television or online advertisements on messages berating companies for high prices, unlike Senators Bob Casey of Pennsylvania and Sherrod Brown of Ohio, who have made the issue a centerpiece of their campaigns — and who are outrunning Mr. Biden in polls.

Now, some progressives are urging Mr. Biden to follow those senators' lead and make "greedflation," as they call it, a driving theme of his re-election bid. They say that taking the fight to big business could bolster the broader Main Street vs. Wall Street argument he is pursuing against former President Donald J. Trump, particularly with the working-class voters of color Mr. Biden needs to motivate. And they believe polls show voters are primed to hear the president condemn big corporations in more forceful terms.

"It's a winning message for Democrats," said April Verrett, the president of the Service Employees International Union, which is knocking on doors in battleground states as part of a $200 million voter-turnout operation. "And clearly Bob Casey, who's doing better in the polls than the president, is proving that it's the winning message."

Inflation soared under Mr. Biden in 2021 and 2022, as the economy emerged from pandemic recession. Its causes were complex, including snarled global supply chains, stimulative policies by the Federal Reserve and, to a degree, federal fiscal policies including Covid relief bills signed by Mr. Trump and the $1.9 trillion emergency spending measure Mr. Biden signed soon after taking office

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U.S. STRENGTHENS RULE ON MILEAGE FOR AUTOMAKERS

CLIMATE CHANGE FIGHT

Passenger Cars Must Hit Average of 65 Miles Per Gallon by '31

By CORAL DAVENPORT

WASHINGTON — The Biden administration on Friday tightened vehicle fuel mileage standards, part of its strategy to transform the U.S. auto market into one that is dominated by electric vehicles that do not emit the pollution that is heating the planet.

The mileage standards announced by the Transportation Department are among several regulations the administration is using to prod carmakers to produce more electric vehicles. In April, the Environmental Protection Agency issued new limits on tailpipe pollution that are designed to ensure that the majority of new passenger cars and light trucks sold in the United States are all-electric or hybrids by 2032, up from 7.6 percent last year.

In addition to the regulations, the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act, championed by Mr. Biden, provides tax credits for buyers of new and used electric vehicles, along with incentives for charging stations and grants and loans for manufacturers.

The push for more E.V.s comes as the world's leading climate experts say that retiring the internal combustion engine is critical to staving off the most deadly effects of global warming.

But Mr. Biden's efforts have become a meaty target for former President Donald J. Trump and other Republicans who frame them as the federal government taking away consumer choice. The oil and gas industry is spending millions on advertising that falsely calls Mr. Biden's policies a ban on conventional cars.

Mr. Trump has made attacks on electric vehicles a mainstay of his campaign to retake the White House, falsely saying they do not work, cannot travel far and will "kill" the American automobile industry. Mr. Trump has promised that if he is elected to a second term he will undo Mr. Biden's climate policies, including federal support for electric vehicles.

But at a rally in Arizona on Thursday, Mr. Trump struck an uncharacteristically supportive

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Biden, in Normandy, Combines The Patriotic With the Political

By PETER BAKER and MICHAEL D. SHEAR

POINTE DU HOC, France — President Biden used the backdrop of the beaches at Normandy on Friday to argue that the fight for democracy in Ukraine and elsewhere remains as vital as the day that American troops helped rescue Europe from Hitler's tyranny.

On a clear and sunny afternoon overlooking Utah and Omaha beaches, the president evoked "the ghosts of Pointe du Hoc," the Army Rangers who scaled cliffs in the face of withering German fire, to link the struggle for freedom during World War II with the fight for democracy now — both in Ukraine and in the voting booths at home.

"As we gather here today," he said in a televised speech on the 80th anniversary of the D-Day invasion, "it's not just to honor those who showed such remarkable bravery that day, June 6, 1944. It's to listen to the echo of their voices. To hear them. Because they are summoning us."

"They're not asking us to scale these cliffs," Mr. Biden added, as he stood on top of a concrete German bunker overlooking the English Channel. "They're asking us to stay true to what America stands for."

But the enormity of his challenge was on display earlier on Friday. His call for American resolve in defense of democracy came just hours after he felt compelled to apologize to President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine for the political stalemate in Washington that delayed critical American military aid for months.

In a meeting in Paris before flying to Normandy, Mr. Biden blamed House Republicans for the funding delay, which frustrated Ukrainians and arguably helped

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MEMORIES Some in Ste.-Mère-Église can still recall seeing U.S. paratroopers drop. PAGE A4

In a Film Camera Renaissance, Negatives Are Left Languishing

MAANSI SRIVASTAVA/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Stacks of forgotten strips pose questions over artistic ownership.

By ALI WATKINS

Silvio Cohen has been doing this for years. Soak, rinse, soak, dry, repeat. Thirty-five millimeter, medium format, old cameras, new film. Analog work in a digital age.

"When I tell my friends that we still do developing, they laugh," Mr. Cohen said. "It's a different feel. The finish is a different finish."

Mr. Cohen works at 42nd Street Photo, one of a handful of legacy shops in New York City that still develop film. They have been at it for a century, riding the medium's ebbs and flows — from film's first plummet in the 2000s, to its resilient return in the early 2010s, to its rediscovery by yet another new generation of shooters in the 2020s.

But in this latest renaissance — born of Covid-era lockdowns — Mr. Cohen has noticed one of the practice's most precious components has been lost.

"They don't pick up their negatives," Mr. Cohen said of his customers, guessing that maybe 10 percent of them return for the rolls. Behind him, a colleague corrects him: "Five percent." Another, laughing: "Zero percent."

Across the world, the small cadre of commercial film lab developers describe similar conundrums: stacks of forgotten envelopes, lim-

Continued on Page A18

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CHAOS The withered remains of a fighter, thought to be from the Rapid Support Forces, in Omdurman, one of the cities that make up Khartoum.

DEPRIVATION Iman and Ayman, the twin children of Amna Amin, are being treated for malnourishment. Below, a thoroughly looted Khartoum market.

DISPLACED Young girls at a shelter for women and children uprooted by Sudan's civil war. At top and left, members of the Sudanese military in Omdurman, which was recaptured from the opposition Rapid Support Forces in February.

mense damage to a capital once considered a jewel on the Nile — and how, if unchecked, it could still get much worse.

The River

Gunfire and mortars splashed into the waters around Col. Osman Taha, a badly wounded officer in the Sudanese military, as he crossed the Nile on a moonless night last November. Around him, he recalled, other wounded soldiers huddled in the boat, hoping to avoid being hit again. Several died.

Colonel Taha made it to the far bank, and five days later his right leg was amputated. Even then, there was no respite. As he recovered in a military hospital overlooking the Nile, he said, shells slammed into its walls, fired by the Rapid Support Forces across the river. Patients moved their beds to avoid being hit as artillery fell.

The Nile has long defined Khartoum. Its tributaries merge in the city center before pushing north through the desert into Egypt. Now, the great river divides Khartoum militarily as well, yet another front line in a splintered capital.

Snipers nestle in the riverbank beneath a giant bridge, blown up in fighting, that slumps into the river. Drones swoop over the water, hunting for targets. And an island in the center of the Nile, where people once picnicked and swam, has become a kind of open-air prison controlled by the R.S.F., residents say.

"Watch your step," said Dr. Manahil Mohamed as she led us up a sandbag-lined staircase to the fourth floor of the Aliaa Specialist Hospital, overlooking the Nile, where a line of blown-out windows offered a stark panorama.

On the deserted street below, burned-out vehicles clustered around the Parliament building. In the distance stood the skeletal skyline of downtown Khartoum: government ministries, luxury hotels and mirrored high-rises that poked over the city's poverty, many built during Sudan's oil boom of the 1990s, now pocked by shelling or gutted by fire. Among them stood the old Republican Palace where followers of the Mahdi, a cleric, toppled and beheaded the country's British governor-general, Charles Gordon, in 1885. It, too, has gone up in smoke.

In many ways, the destruction in Khartoum is a bitter historical reckoning. For more than half a century, Sudan's military waged ugly wars in the nation's distant peripheries, quelling rebellions by deploying ruthless militias. Khartoum was left untouched, its residents insulated from the consequences of wars fought in their name.

Now, the army's most powerful creation — the Rapid Support Forces, a successor to the infamous Janjaweed militias that terrorized Darfur in the 2000s — has turned against the military and brought its trademark havoc to the capital.

Half of Khartoum state's nine million residents have fled, the United Nations estimates. Its international airport is closed, bullet-pocked jets abandoned on the runway. Nearly all of the city's 1,060 bank branches have been robbed, officials say, and many thousands of cars stolen — some later located as far away as Niger, 1,500 miles west — in a campaign of street-by-street looting, most but not all by the Rapid Support Forces.

"A city of this size, this wealth, and nothing remains?" Mohamed Eldaw, a banker, said. "It must be the biggest episode of looting in history."

At the Aliaa hospital, a triple thud of outgoing artillery shattered the calm. Warning of snipers, Dr. Mohamed urged us back inside.

For months, shells rained on the hospital, which mostly treated soldiers, often punching through its walls, she said. With no electricity, surgeons performed operations by the light of mobile phones.

Relief came in February when the military, armed with powerful new Iranian drones, recaptured this part of the city. (By contrast, the R.S.F. uses drones supplied by the United Arab Emirates).

The military's advance allowed hundreds of wounded troops to be evacuated by air to Port Sudan, where they lie in the crowded wards of a military hospital. One man had extensive facial injuries from a drone strike. Amputations were common.

The evacuees included Colonel Taha, who sat up in his bed to show a series of videos that he took during his last battle. Jubilant soldiers can be seen whooping and hugging, thinking they have won. Bleeding R.S.F. fighters lie in the dust, and are kicked or taunted by the soldiers. The camera flips to show Colonel Taha himself, sweating heavily, his eyes glazed from battle.

But the soldiers had missed one R.S.F. fighter, a sniper hidden in a residential block, and he shot Colonel Taha in the leg. Later that night, he said, medics moved him to an ammunition factory beside the Nile, where they embarked on their perilous crossing.

He was pessimistic the war would end anytime soon.

"Guns can't solve this problem," he said. "We need to talk peace."

The Famine Ward

To Amna Amin, war means hunger.

After Rapid Support Forces fighters swept into her part of Omdurman, one of the three cities that make up greater Khartoum, Ms. Amin, 36, had no way to feed her five children.

Her husband, a gold miner in the distant north, had vanished. She lost her job as a cleaner. Neighbors shared what they could, but it was not enough. And soon she had two more mouths to feed: Iman and Ayman, twins born in September.

Within months, the twins started losing weight and suffering diarrhea, classic signs of malnutrition. Panicking, Ms. Amin bundled her children in her arms and made a desperate dash across the front line, traveling by donkey cart and minibus to reach Al Buluk children's hospital, the last place they might be saved.

The United Nations has yet to officially declare a famine in Sudan, but few experts doubt that one is already underway in parts of Darfur and, shockingly, Khartoum, one of the largest capitals in Africa.

More than 220,000 children could die in the coming months alone, the U.N. says. And both sides use hunger as a weapon of war, aid officials say. The army withholds visas, travel permits and permission to cross the front lines. Rapid Support Force fighters have looted aid trucks and warehouses and raised their own obstacles.

"One of the most horrific situations on Earth is on a trajectory to get far, far worse," said Tom Perriello, the United States envoy for Sudan.

Continued on Following Page

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WAR ON NILE PUSHES SUDAN TO THE EDGE OF THE ABYSS

From Page A1

hundreds of thousands of children in the coming months and, if unchecked, rival the great Ethiopian famine of the 1980s.

Fueling the chaos, Sudan has become a playground for foreign players like the United Arab Emirates, Iran, Russia and its Wagner mercenaries, and even a few Ukrainian special forces. They are all part of a volatile stew of outside interests pouring weapons or fighters into the conflict and hoping to grab the spoils of war — Sudan's gold, for instance, or its perch on the Red Sea.

The greatest tragedy is that none of it was necessary, said Samawal Ahmed, as he picked his way through the remnants of a famous market, past looted jewelry stores and a mangled tank. A year ago, in the first weeks of the war, a rocket smashed into his apartment, and the medical lab where he worked closed down for good. Now he was back, to salvage what he could.

"I lost everything," he said, holding a batch of documents pulled from the wreckage of his home: his children's school certificates, his professional qualifications, and a passport. Across the street, the withered remains of three fighters, reduced to bones, were splayed among the debris.

"It makes my stomach churn," Mr. Ahmed said. "All this could have been avoided."

The war erupted without warning in April 2023, when a standoff between Sudan's military and a powerful paramilitary group it helped create — the Rapid Support Forces — burst into gunfire on the streets of Khartoum.

Few Sudanese expected it would last long. Since independence in 1956, their country has experienced more coups than any other in Africa, most short-lived and bloodless. The rivals this time — the national army and the paramilitary force that once did its bidding — had seized power together in 2021, but fell out over how to merge their armies.

Almost immediately, the fighting ripped across Khartoum and far beyond, in pulsing waves that quickly consumed Africa's third-largest country. Sudanese have been stunned by the destruction, but neither side looks capable of victory, and the war is metastasizing into a devastating free-for-all.

Another genocide now threatens Darfur, the region that became synonymous with war crimes two decades ago. Fields have become battlegrounds in the country's breadbasket. The health system is crumbling. And a plethora of armed groups, including hard-line Islamists, foreign mercenaries and even former pro-democracy protesters, has piled into the fight.

With American-led peace talks stalled, the Sudanese state is collapsing and threatening to drag down a fragile region with it. Experts say it is a matter of time before one of Sudan's many neighbors, like Chad, Eritrea or South Sudan, gets sucked in.

Though often overshadowed by the wars in Gaza and Ukraine, the conflict in Sudan has global ramifications. Iran, already allied with the Houthis in Yemen, is now backing military forces on both sides of the Red Sea. Europeans fear a wave of Sudanese migrants heading for their shores. A recent U.S. intelligence assessment warned that a lawless Sudan could become a haven for "terrorist and criminal networks."

The New York Times spent three weeks traveling through Sudan, where few foreign reporters have gained access in the past year. Driving through sandstorms and dozens of checkpoints guarded by jumpy fighters, we traveled from Port Sudan, the new de facto capital on the Red Sea, to Khartoum, the ravaged city where the war began.

As we approached the capital, artillery boomed, a warplane swept overhead and, across the Nile, an oily plume of smoke rose from Sudan's largest refinery — the latest flashpoint in a sprawling urban battle. With the city in tumult, we slept in an abandoned house, where a neighbor told of how a bomb killed his sister in their kitchen.

It was just one corner of a country three times larger than France. Yet it was possible to see, up close, the im-

Photographs by
IVOR PRICKETT
For The New York Times

Once a Proud Capital, Now a Battle Zone

C M Y K Nxxx,2024-12-12,A,001,Bs-4C,E1

"All the News That's Fit to Print"

The New York Times

THE WEATHER
Today, windy, cold, mostly sunny, high 39. **Tonight,** mostly clear, cold, less wind, low 27. **Tomorrow,** mostly sunny, cold, not as much wind, high 37. Weather map is on Page B10.

VOL. CLXXIV . . . . No. 60,366 THURSDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2024 — Prices in Canada may be higher — $4.00

DIEGO IBARRA SANCHEZ FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

A Kiss for Luck and She's on Her Way

Since the fall of Syria's regime, many, like Hamdia Abdel Karim, left, who had fled to Lebanon, will return to uncertainty. Page A11.

A Pretty Face Overshadows A Grisly Act

VANESSA FRIEDMAN

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK

From the moment the world saw the smiling, unmasked face of the young man in the New York City hostel, memes began spreading about his looks. In the days since, after Luigi Mangione was identified and charged in the murder of the UnitedHealthcare chief executive Brian Thompson, it has been impossible to escape his photo. Or photos. They are proliferating.

They are on television, in the newspaper and all over social media. Not just pictures of Mr. Mangione from his booking at a police station in Altoona, Pa., or his mug shots in prison orange, but photos of him in earlier times, in a navy blazer, crisp white shirt and tie. Images of him hiking shirtless in the hills. In all of them, he is clean-shaven, curly-haired, often flashing a bright, white grin. Even his Tinder profile has made it into the public, with more pics featuring his six-pack. One commentator compared the stream of pictures to "an endless photo shoot."

And with them have come the comments. The swooning. The fan cams.

"If the guy is fit, you must acquit," went one post on X.

"He's even hotter with his mask and shirt off," went another.

Indeed, it didn't take long for Mr. Mangione to be popularly christened "the hot assassin."

Even before a suspect had been named, much was written about the killer's elevation to folk hero status. He was cast in the role of what the historian Eric Hobsbawm called the "social bandit" — one man seeming to take a stand against an unfair system. Then, once Mr. Mangione had been accused of shooting and killing Mr. Thompson, what forensic psychologists call the "halo effect" came into play.

The official term for the tendency of the public to associate innocence with attractiveness, the halo effect when combined with the social bandit phenomenon creates a combustible pop-

Continued on Page A18

SUSPECT'S NOTEBOOK Entries described going to a conference and killing an executive. PAGE A18

Fever for Gold Drives Both Sides in Sudan's War

Weapons and Influence Are Bought as Famine Stalks the Land

By DECLAN WALSH

JUBA, South Sudan — The luxury jet touched down in Juba, the capital of South Sudan, on a mission to collect hundreds of pounds of illicit gold.

On board was a representative of a ruthless paramilitary group accused of ethnic cleansing in Sudan's sprawling civil war, the flight manifest showed. The gold itself had been smuggled from Darfur, a region of famine and fear in Sudan that is largely under his group's brutal control.

Porters grunted as they heaved cases filled with gold, about $25 million worth, onto the plane, said three people involved with or briefed on the deal. Airport officials discreetly maintained a perimeter around the jet, which stood out at the main airport of one of the world's poorest countries.

After 90 minutes, the jet took off again, landing before dawn on March 6 at a private airport in the United Arab Emirates, flight data showed. Its gleaming cargo soon vanished into the global gold market.

As Sudan burns and its people starve, a gold rush is underway.

War has shattered Sudan's economy, collapsed its health system and turned much of the once-proud capital into piles of rubble. Fighting has also set off one of the world's worst famines in decades, with 26 million people facing acute hunger or starvation.

But the gold trade is humming. The production and trade of gold, which lies in rich deposits across the vast nation, has actually surpassed prewar levels — and that's just the official figure in a country rife with smuggling.

Indeed, billions of dollars of gold is flowing out of Sudan in virtually every direction, helping to turn the Sahel region of Africa into one of the world's largest gold producers at a time when prices are hitting record highs.

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IVOR PRICKETT FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Gold shops showed signs of looting in Omdurman, Sudan, after paramilitary forces were ousted.

An Elite School and the Criminal It Welcomed

Teacher Arrest Follows Fraud Conviction

By KATHERINE ROSMAN

Less than a month into Winston Nguyen's teaching career at Saint Ann's, an elite private school in Brooklyn, his eighth-grade students discovered that he was a felon.

While leading an algebra lesson, Mr. Nguyen had shown the class a TikTok video, which led the students, inevitably, to search for him on the internet.

What they found was a startling torrent of headlines from about four years before, when Mr. Nguyen had been charged with siphoning hundreds of thousands of dollars from an older couple he worked for in Manhattan.

That evening, in October 2021, Vincent Tompkins, the head of Saint Ann's at the time, emailed class members' parents, acknowledging the teacher's criminal conviction and saying they had nothing to worry about.

"I can assure you that as with any teacher we hire, we are confident in Winston's ability and fitness to educate and care for our students," Mr. Tompkins wrote.

His promise proved hollow. Within a year Mr. Nguyen, 38, was posing as a teenage boy on

Continued on Page A20

Recent Stream Of Immigrants Is Largest Ever

Surpassing Peak Years of Ellis Island Era

By DAVID LEONHARDT

The immigration surge of the past few years has been the largest in U.S. history, surpassing the great immigration boom of the late 1800s and early 1900s, according to a New York Times analysis of government data.

Annual net migration — the number of people coming to the country minus the number leaving — averaged 2.4 million people from 2021 to 2023, according to the Congressional Budget Office. Total net migration during the Biden administration is likely to exceed eight million people.

That's a faster pace of arrivals than during any other period on record, including the peak years of Ellis Island traffic, when millions of Europeans came to the United States. Even after taking into account today's larger U.S. population, the recent surge is the most rapid since at least 1850.

The numbers in the Times analysis include both legal and illegal immigration. About 60 percent of immigrants who have entered the country since 2021 have done so without legal authorization, according to a Goldman Sachs report based on government data.

The combined increases of legal and illegal immigration have caused the share of the U.S. population born in another country to reach a new high, 15.2 percent in 2023, up from 13.6 percent in 2020. The previous high was 14.8 percent, in 1890.

Several factors caused the surge, starting with President Biden's welcoming immigration policy during his first three years in office. Offended by Donald J. Trump's harsh policies — including the separation of families at the border — Mr. Biden and other Democrats promised a different approach. "We're a nation that says, 'If you want to flee, and you're fleeing oppression, you should come,'" Mr. Biden said during his 2020 presidential campaign.

After taking office, his administration loosened the rules on asylum and other immigration policies, making it easier for people to enter the United States. Some have received temporary legal status while their cases wend through backlogged immigration courts. Others have remained without legal permission.

Outside causes have also

Continued on Page A17

TRUMP BREATHED LIFE INTO CHOICE AT DEFENSE DEPT.

SEEN AS TEST OF POWER

Prospects of Hegseth Are Salvaged Even Amid Personal Scandals

By JONATHAN SWAN and MAGGIE HABERMAN

WASHINGTON — Just last week, Pete Hegseth was twisting in the wind.

President-elect Donald J. Trump's choice to lead the Pentagon was battered by damaging headlines: Drinking. Extramarital affairs. An allegation of sexual assault, which he denied.

Republican senators — emboldened after tanking Mr. Trump's first choice for attorney general, the scandal-ridden Matt Gaetz — were going public with their concerns. Mr. Trump was getting sick of hearing about it all, and he told confidants he was serious about picking Gov. Ron DeSantis of Florida to replace him.

But within 48 hours, Mr. Trump had changed his mind. He was going to see if Mr. Hegseth could survive.

People close to the president-elect had been telling him that this was a moment that would test his power as he prepared to return to Washington. It would be catastrophic, they argued, if he allowed Republican senators, like Joni Ernst of Iowa, to obstruct his mandate.

This was about something more than Mr. Hegseth, they said.

The sequence that followed — resuscitating Mr. Hegseth in less than a week from dead man walking to a man with a real shot of being confirmed by the Senate — was a test case of power and intimidation in the Trump era.

It was a reminder of Mr. Trump's ability to summon an online swarm, even while spending minimal personal capital of his own. It showed that he has at his disposal a powerful movement, which jumped into action once his desires became clear. And it highlighted the role of Elon Musk, who has bottomless wealth to enforce

Continued on Page A16

F.B.I. Director to Step Down

President-elect Donald J. Trump had already signaled his intention to replace Christopher A. Wray with a longtime loyalist. Page A15.

Real Estate Stars and Brothers Face Charges of Sex Trafficking

*This article is by **Benjamin Weiser**, **Patricia Mazzei** and **Debra Kamin**.*

MIAMI — Two star luxury real estate brokers and their brother are accused of using their wealth and status to lure, drug and then sexually assault and rape dozens of women, according to a federal indictment made public on Wednesday.

Oren Alexander, his older brother Tal Alexander and Alon Alexander, Oren's twin, were arrested at homes in and near Miami Beach on Wednesday. The twins also face separate state felony charges of sexual battery connected to three separate assaults, according to arrest warrants released on Wednesday by prosecutors in Miami.

Until this summer, Oren, 37, and Tal Alexander, 38, were among the biggest names in real estate in New York and Miami, and their sales and moves were chronicled in the tabloids. They reached the top ranks at Douglas Elliman, one of the largest real estate brokerages in the country, and helped broker the sale of a nearly $240 million penthouse — at the time, the most expensive residential sale in U.S. history. They then cofounded their own real estate brokerage, Official. Alon Alexander, 37, did not work in real estate, but he socialized with them.

According to the federal indictment, the three brothers had conspired in the sex trafficking scheme for at least 14 years. Co-

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NATALIE KEYSSAR FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Tal Alexander, left, and Oren, his brother, real estate agents.

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Fever for Gold Drives Both Sides in Sudan's War

Sudanese soldiers passed a demolished market in Sudan's capital, Khartoum, in April. The military captured the area after weeks of fierce fighting with the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces.

From Page A1

But instead of using the windfall to help the legions of hungry and homeless people, Sudan's warring sides are wielding the gold to bankroll their fight, deploying what U.N. experts call "starvation tactics" against tens of millions of people.

Gold helps pay for the drones, guns and missiles that have killed tens of thousands of civilians and forced 11 million from their homes. It is the prize for rampaging fighters and mercenaries who have robbed so many banks and homes that the capital now resembles a giant crime scene, with fighters gleefully vaunting piles of stolen jewelry and gold bars on social media.

The Sudanese people once hoped that gold would lift their country. Instead, it is turning out to be their downfall. It even helps explain why the war started — and why it is so hard to stop.

"Gold is destroying Sudan," said Suliman Baldo, a Sudanese expert on the nation's resources, "and it's destroying the Sudanese."

The civil war pits the nation's military and what remains of the government against their former ally, a paramilitary group known as the Rapid Support Forces.

The group's commander, Lt. Gen. Mohamed Hamdan, is a camel trader turned warlord whose forces grew especially powerful after they seized one of Sudan's most lucrative gold mines in 2017.

"It's nothing, just an area in Darfur that belongs to us," he told The New York Times in a 2019 interview, trying to play down its significance.

The mine became the cornerstone of a billion-dollar empire that transformed his armed group, the R.S.F., into a formidable force. General Hamdan later sold the mine to the government for $200 million, helping him buy even more weapons and political influence.

But that wealth and ambition led to a standoff with the Sudanese military, paving the way for the civil war that has all but destroyed the country.

The fight for gold only intensified when the war broke out in 2023. In one of his opening salvos, General Hamdan seized back the mine he had sold to the government. Weeks later, his fighters marched on the national gold refinery in the capital, making away with $150 million in gold bars, the government says.

Reporting was contributed by Anatoly Kurmanaev in Berlin; Malachy Browne in Limerick, Ireland; Abdalrahman Altayeb in Port Sudan, Sudan; Julian E. Barnes and Eric Schmitt in Washington; Jack Begg and William K. Rashbaum in New York; and Mohamed Elhadi in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

DECLAN WALSH/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Lt. Gen. Mohamed Hamdan at the headquarters of Sudan's military in June 2019. He leads the Rapid Support Forces, a paramilitary group that had been allied with the government-run military but turned against it last year, leading to a devastating war. The R.S.F. had grown powerful after seizing one of the country's most lucrative gold mines.

Gold drives the war for Sudan's military, too. It has bombed R.S.F. mines while ramping up gold production in areas still under government control, often by inviting foreign powers to do the mining. Sudanese officials have been negotiating gun and gold deals with Russia and are seeking to woo Chinese mining executives. They even share a gold mine with Gulf leaders accused of arming their enemies.

The war's foreign sponsors play both sides as well.

President Vladimir V. Putin has long heralded Russian gold mining in Sudan, and his country's Wagner Group worked with the military and its rivals even before they went to war.

Now that Wagner's boss is dead, killed in a plane crash after his brief mutiny against Russia's military leaders, the Kremlin has taken over the group's business and appears to be pursuing gold on either side of the front line, partnering with the R.S.F. in the west and the nation's army in the east.

The United Arab Emirates is also lighting both ends of the fuse. On the battlefield, it backs the R.S.F., sending it powerful drones and missiles in a covert operation under the guise of a humanitarian mission.

Yet when it comes to gold, the Emiratis are also helping to fund the opposing side. An Emirati company, linked by officials to the royal family, owns the largest industrial mine in Sudan. It sits in government-controlled territory and delivers a chunk of money to the army's cash-strapped war machine — yet another example of the dizzying array of alliances and counteralliances fueling the war.

Motorbikes, trucks and planes spirit gold out of the nation at every turn, shuttling it across the porous borders with Sudan's seven neighboring countries. Ultimately, nearly all of it ends up in the United Arab Emirates, the prime destination for smuggled gold from Sudan, the State Department says.

Along the way, a motley chain of profiteers take their cut — criminals, warlords, spymasters, generals and corrupt officials, the cogs of an expanding war economy that provides a powerful financial incentive for the conflict to grind on, experts say.

Some now liken Sudan's gold to so-called blood diamonds and other conflict minerals.

"To end the war, follow the money," said Mo Ibrahim, a Sudanese tycoon whose foundation promotes good governance. "Gold feeds the supply of weapons, and we need to pressure the individuals behind it. At the end of the day, they are merchants of death."

A Warlord's Empire

In the Spain-size region of Darfur, where a genocide caused global outrage two decades ago, the horrors have returned.

R.S.F. fighters have waged a campaign of ethnic cleansing against civilians and carried out a punishing siege on an ancient city. In the turmoil, the world's first famine in four years started in a camp of 450,000 terrified civilians.

"I shouted and screamed," said Zuhal al-Zein Hussain, a woman from Darfur who recounted being gang-raped by R.S.F. fighters last year. "But it was useless."

Yet in a corner of Darfur largely untouched by the war, the R.S.F. has also been building a vast, secretive gold mining operation.

The enterprise, worth hundreds of millions a year, expanded with the help of Russia's Wagner mercenaries and has become the financial fuel of a military campaign notorious for atrocities.

In the savanna around Songo, a mining town hacked out of a nature reserve, tens of thousands of miners labor in sandy pits in a region rich with gold, uranium and possibly diamonds. The mines provide rare, though often dangerous, jobs at a time of near total economic breakdown.

But a fortune is being made by the R.S.F., whose fighters control every aspect of the gold trade.

The mines are the latest offshoot of a vast family business that began well before the war.

When General Hamdan seized a major gold mine in Darfur in 2017 — effectively becoming Sudan's biggest gold trader overnight — he channeled the profits into a network of as many as 50 companies that paid for weapons, influence and fighters, the United Nations says.

His paramilitary force ballooned in size, and General Hamdan grew so wealthy from gold and supplying mercenaries for the war in Yemen that he publicly offered $1 billion in 2019 to stabilize Sudan's tottering economy.

One company anchors his empire of guns and gold. It's called Al Junaid, and the United States imposed sanctions on it last year, saying that gold had become "a vital source of revenue" for General Hamdan and his fighters.

As violence has engulfed Sudan, Al Junaid has focused on hundreds of square

IVOR PRICKETT FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

miles around Songo, where the R.S.F. has long worked closely with Wagner.

Production across the region has been brisk, according to witnesses, satellite images and documents obtained by The Times. A confidential report submitted to the United Nations Security Council in November found that $860 million worth of gold had been extracted from paramilitary-controlled mines in Darfur this year alone.

The fighters don't do the digging themselves. At a dozen or so sites across the region, small-scale miners work for a pittance. The R.S.F. controls everything at the barrel of a gun.

Sudanese journalists with Ayin Media, an investigative website, visited the area this year and recounted R.S.F. fighters patrolling an Al Junaid gold plant, with Russian employees stationed behind high walls.

Sudan's mines have been a big lure for Wagner, as The Times reported two years ago. New documents obtained by The Times since then further detail Wagner's partnership with the R.S.F., including a plan to prospect for diamonds near Songo.

In one letter from 2021, a manager for Al Junaid invoked the name of the R.S.F. leader, General Hamdan, and extolled "the great work between us and the Russian company," common shorthand for Wagner in Sudan.

The alliance is about weapons as well as money. U.N. investigators have documented missile shipments from Wagner to the R.S.F.

Songo is now so important to General Hamdan that the mines are a military target. The Sudanese Air Force bombed the area last year and again in January, killing civilians, according to news reports. A video taken after one strike shows people scrambling for safety as a fire blazes nearby.

The R.S.F. has a ready market for its gold in the Emirates, where 2,500 tons of undeclared gold from Africa, worth a staggering $115 billion, were smuggled from 2012 to 2022, according to a recent study by Swiss Aid, a development group.

The challenge is getting it there.

Before the war, General Hamdan could fly his gold directly to the Emirates. But Sudan's main airport has been destroyed in the war, its tarmac riddled with holes, and the other way out, through Port Sudan, is in army hands.

So the R.S.F. has had to find new routes through neighboring countries — as it did with the smuggling job earlier this year, when porters heaved cases filled with illicit gold across the airport tarmac.

Loading Up a Luxury Jet

The plane that landed in South Sudan on March 5 to pick up that gold was not the usual bush hopper used by many smugglers in Africa.

It was a Bombardier Global Express, a long-range business jet of a kind favored by corporate executives, and it was registered in the United States.

Its crew had a troubled history.

Seven months earlier, the pilot in command of the plane and the flight attendant had been arrested in Zambia soon after landing in another private jet. Zambian investigators who raided that plane confiscated five guns, $5.7 million in cash and 602 bars of fake gold, indicating a likely gold scam, they said.

The flight to pick up the R.S.F.'s gold, by contrast, went off smoothly, possibly because the deal involved a web of powerful officials from multiple countries who helped ease the way, according to flight documents and three people who were involved with or briefed on the deal.

After leaving Abu Dhabi, the Bombardier jet — with the same pilot and flight attendant — stopped off briefly in Uganda before landing in South Sudan. Though the plane had room for 15 passengers, only two were listed on a manifest obtained by The Times.

One of them was a relative of General Hamdan who has acted on behalf of R.S.F. interests before, said several officials and experts familiar with the paramilitary group's business networks.

The other passenger on the manifest was a senior intelligence officer for Uganda, a country widely seen as a major hub for smuggled African gold. In 2022, the Treasury Department placed sanctions on a large gold refinery right next to Uganda's main airport that, it said, was handling hundreds of millions of dollars in conflict gold every year.

"It's the epicenter of gold laundering in Africa," J.R. Mailey, an expert on corruption at the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, said of Uganda.

Reached by phone, the senior Ugandan official confirmed that his passport details listed on the manifest were accurate, though he denied being on the plane or transporting any gold from Sudan. But the three people involved with or briefed on the deal said he was seen standing outside the Bombardier jet as porters loaded it with cases of gold weighing as much as 1,200 pounds in all.

Other regional officials appeared to take part in the deal, too. The gold had come in from Darfur through the city of Wau in South Sudan, two of the people briefed on the transfer said. From there, it was transported to Juba aboard a commercial airliner operated by South Sudanese intelligence, they said.

South Sudan is a particularly opaque corner of the international gold trade. Senior figures in the country's elite control a gold industry that produces up to 40 tons a year, diplomats say. Yet, officially, they export next to nothing.

Only a single kilo of gold left the country through official export channels this year, said James Yousif Kundu, a director general for the nation's mining ministry.

"The rest may be smuggled," he said.

On March 6, the Bombardier jet landed back in Abu Dhabi, just before 3 a.m., at the Al Bateen Executive Airport used by business and government jets, flight data shows. (Fly Alliance Aviation, the Florida-based company that operates the Bombardier jet and advertises it on its website, declined to answer questions about the flight, including who had chartered it and why.)

The Emirates is a major hub for the R.S.F., which uses front companies controlled by General Hamdan and his relatives to sell gold and buy weapons, officials say. Since the war started, the United States has imposed sanctions on 11 R.S.F. companies, mostly in the Emirates, often for their links to the gold trade.

On the sidelines of American-sponsored peace efforts in August that failed to stop the war, General Hamdan's younger brother, Algoney Hamdan, told The Times that he had lived in the Emirates for the past decade. But he insisted that the R.S.F. was no longer in the gold business.

"Since the war, there haven't been any more exports," he said.

Less than two months later, the United States imposed sanctions on him, calling him the "procurement director" for the paramilitary group, responsible for obtaining weapons "to facilitate attacks and other atrocities against their own citizens."

Mine's Shifting Ownership

Hundreds of miles from the R.S.F.'s gritty, but lucrative, gold pits in Darfur sits a modern, industrial gold mine that helps the military keep fighting as well.

It's called the Kush mine, with giant excavators and expensive machinery that churns out gold and generates precious income for Sudan's wartime government.

The trick is, Sudan's leaders haven't always known who owns it.

They thought the mine — out in the desert, 220 miles from the capital — was controlled by Boris Ivanov, a Russian mining executive with ties to the Kremlin who flourished in the upheaval of post-Soviet Russia.

But when they looked more closely in 2021, Sudanese government officials discovered that the mine had actually passed into the hands of mysterious new investors from the United Arab Emirates, the country backing their enemy today.

Officials from the Sudanese government, which had a minority stake in the mine, said that no one bothered to tell them of their surprising new partnership. So they sent a delegation, led by Sudan's finance minister, to Abu Dhabi to sort it out.

Kush was the jewel of Sudan's gold boom, the largest industrial gold mine in the country. It also had geopolitical significance as a focal point of Sudan's strengthening ties with Russia.

Mr. Putin singled out the "flagship" project at the first Russia-Africa summit in 2019, and he named the Russian company under U.S. sanctions at the center of the effort. Mr. Ivanov, the managing director of that company, also spoke at the summit, at a session titled "Using Minerals in Africa for the Benefit of Its Peoples."

Mr. Ivanov's success in mining was a classic story of post-Soviet Russia. He began his career as a diplomat — posted in the 1980s to the Soviet Embassy in Washington, where his portfolio included arms control — and ended up in the oil, gas and mining business. (Two former colleagues said he boasted that he was also working undercover for the K.G.B. during his time in Washington. A person briefed on Western intelligence confirmed that, but a spokesman for Mr. Ivanov denied the assertion, saying Mr. Ivanov never had any ties to Russian intelligence).

By 2015, when the Kush mine began producing gold, Russia and Sudan were both facing international sanctions — Russia for its intervention in Ukraine and Sudan for the genocide in Darfur — and their joint gold mining only expanded from there.

Mr. Ivanov seemed to prosper as well. Property records show that he and his wife, Natasha, bought two condominiums in Manhattan, next to St. Patrick's Cathedral on Fifth Avenue, in the early 2010s. Later, they bought a pair of adjoining beachfront homes in Juno Beach, Fla., which they are seeking to demolish to construct a single 15,000-foot mansion instead.

When the Sudanese officials traveled to Abu Dhabi in 2021, they learned that Mr. Ivanov wasn't the only one they were in business with.

The mine in Sudan now belonged to Emiral Resources, a new company founded by Mr. Ivanov. And behind that company was a much bigger player —

Continued on Following Page

THE NEW YORK TIMES

MAXAR TECHNOLOGIES

Satellite images analyzed by The New York Times show activity at a gold plant 35 miles south of Songo, Sudan. The plant belongs to Al Junaid, a company controlled by General Hamdan, the R.S.F. leader. Recently built houses beside the plant indicate a growing work force.

EMIRATES NEWS AGENCY

An official Emirati photograph shows aid arriving for Sudanese refugees last year. U.S. officials say the Emirates also supplied arms to the R.S.F.

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Zuhal al-Zein Hussain, from the Darfur region of Sudan, at a refugee camp in Chad in July. She says she was gang-raped by R.S.F. fighters last year.

DECLAN WALSH/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Human remains in April at the Al-Shaabi market in Omdurman, across the Nile from Sudan's capital, Khartoum. R.S.F. fighters had occupied the area.

ABDULMONAM EASSA FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

An ingot at a Khartoum workshop before the war broke out. Many Sudanese families built their futures around gold, keeping jewelry at home or in banks.

BAZ RATNER/REUTERS

The U.S. Treasury Department has placed sanctions on a refinery near the main airport in Uganda, a country seen as a major conduit for illicit gold.

More than 2,500 tons of undeclared gold from Africa, worth $115 billion, ended up in the United Arab Emirates from 2012 to 2022, a recent study by the development group Swiss Aid found.

‘Gold Is Destroying Sudan’ as War Rages

IVOR PRICKETT FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Juba International Airport in the capital of South Sudan. A U.S.-registered private jet landed there in March and picked up roughly $25 million worth of gold.

From Preceding Page

Sheikh Tahnoon bin Zayed, the Emirati national security adviser and brother to the country’s leader, Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed, according to three people familiar with the talks.

In an email, an Emiral spokesman confirmed that the company was owned by “a leading Abu Dhabi investment group,” but declined to provide names.

The takeover was a sign of the Emiratis’ billion-dollar push into African mining. Seeking to diversify the nation’s oil-dependent economy, Sheikh Tahnoon’s companies are racing to acquire mines and the raw minerals needed for electric cars and the transition to green energy.

That means the Emiratis are effectively hedging their bets in Sudan’s war. In the past 18 months, they have smuggled vast amounts of weapons to the R.S.F., often under the guise of the Red Crescent, a potential war crime.

But the Emirati-owned Kush mine, in government-controlled territory, most likely generates tens of millions of dollars for the Sudanese authorities, who, in turn, use the money to buy Iranian drones, Chinese planes and other weapons.

In other words, the Emirates is arming one side in the war while funding the other.

The Biden administration raised its concerns directly to Sheikh Mohammed and Sheikh Tahnoon when they visited the White House in September, three senior U.S. officials said. Yet President Biden has been careful not to publicly criticize a wealthy Gulf nation that is an ally on Iran and Israel — infuriating many Sudanese.

A degree of mystery still surrounds the role of Mr. Ivanov. Records at Sudan’s mining ministry list him as part owner of the Kush mine, a senior Sudanese official said. But Emiral contested that, saying that Mr. Ivanov left the business last year and that “Emiral is an Emirati company.”

Mr. Ivanov remains in the public eye.

JARED SISKIN/PATRICK McMULLAN, VIA GETTY IMAGES

Boris Ivanov, right, a Russian with ties to the Kremlin, has been associated with the Kush mine, which helps finance Sudan’s military. It is now owned by investors from the United Arab Emirates.

IVOR PRICKETT FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

With his wife and daughter, he attended a gala dinner in Manhattan in October for the Princess Grace Foundation.

Prince Albert II, the monarch of Monaco, presented an award to the actor Michael Douglas. The program said the Ivanovs, listed as a “crown sponsor,” paid $100,000 for their table.

Blood Mineral

When Sudan’s gold boom kicked off over a decade ago, many Sudanese families built their futures around it, storing jewelry at home or in banks for a rainy day.

Now, they rely on it to survive.

Ten days into the war, Al Fatih Hashim sped through the chaotic streets of the capital, Khartoum, and held his breath through checkpoints manned by plunderous fighters. The car carried his fearful parents and siblings, their hastily-packed clothes — and bags of hidden gold.

Mr. Hashim had stashed the family’s wedding jewelry in a compartment under the back seat, and even inside the fuel tank, he said, adding: “It was our insurance policy.”

The ruse worked. After weeks, the family made it to Egypt, where the gold funds their precarious new lives as refugees.

“We had to live from the gold,” he said. “So many other families have done the same.”

Even before the conflict, gold was so essential that it soared to 70 percent of the country’s exports, helping to make up for the oil revenues Sudan lost after the secession of South Sudan in 2011.

War vaporized that wealth. Gold has been looted from homes, seized at checkpoints or stolen from banks, sometimes by fighters using metal detectors to ferret it out. But the generals and their foreign allies dominate the trade.

Russian officials have streamed to Port Sudan this year, offering weapons to Sudan’s army in exchange for a naval port on the Red Sea. They also want to mine: Sudan’s minerals minister met a Russian delegation in September.

But even if the war’s foreign sponsors walked away, the gold trade is so lucrative that the belligerents could finance the conflict on their own, experts say.

In the first year of war alone, Sudanese officials say, the nation produced over 50 tons of gold — more than during the previous 12 months of peace.

One solution could be to put pressure on the buyers. Classifying Sudanese gold as a “conflict mineral” could require companies to keep Sudanese gold out of their products. Similar concerns over “blood diamonds” from West Africa led to a U.N.-backed certification system two decades ago.

But gold, which is often melted and mixed, can be hard to trace. And with gold prices recently smashing records, the incentives for war keep growing.

“Our country is cursed by gold,” Duaa Tariq, a volunteer aid worker, said from her home in war-torn Khartoum.

“Gold created armed groups and made some people rich,” continued Ms. Tariq, 32, an art curator who now serves meals in a food kitchen and helps victims of sexual assault. “But for most of us, it only brought trouble and war.”

ABDULMONAM EASSA FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Top, Sudanese troops standing guard in April in the basement of a building in Omdurman that had been used as an arms depot by the Rapid Support Forces. Above, jewelry at Khartoum’s main gold market before the war.

Feminist Film With Humor Wins Hearts Of Chinese

By VIVIAN WANG

The movie calls out stigmas against female sexuality and stereotypes about single mothers. It name-drops feminist scholars, features a woman recalling domestic violence and laments Chinese censorship.

This is not some indie film, streamed secretly by viewers circumventing China’s internet firewall. It is China’s biggest movie right now — and has even garnered praise from the ruling Communist Party’s mouthpiece.

The success of “Her Story,” a comedy that topped China’s box office for the last three weeks, is in some ways unexpected, at a time when the government has cracked down on feminist activism, encouraged women to embrace marriage and childbearing and severely limited independent speech.

The film’s reception reflects the unpredictable nature of censorship in the country, as well as the growing appetite for female-centered stories. Discussion of women’s issues is generally allowed so long as it does not morph into calls for rights. “Her Story,” which some have called China’s answer to “Barbie,” cushions many of its social critiques with jokes.

The director of “Her Story,” Shao Yihui, has emphasized at public appearances that she is not interested in provoking “gender antagonism,” an accusation that official media has sometimes lobbed against feminists.

At a time of sluggish growth and anemic ticket sales, movie producers — and perhaps government regulators — have been eager to attract female audience members, an increasingly important consumer base. Other recent hit movies have also been directed by and starred women, including the year’s top box office performer, “YOLO.”

Still, “Her Story,” the second feature from Ms. Shao, 33, was not expected to reach anywhere near this level of success. It was low-budget and at first released only in a few major cities.

It follows two women who become neighbors in Shanghai: Xiao Ye, a free-spirited but emotionally vulnerable singer, and Wang Tiemei, a no-nonsense former journalist and single mother to 9-year-old Molly. As their friendship develops, the women team up to raise Molly; encourage each other professionally; and laugh at their clueless suitors, who try to outdo each other in quoting feminist theory and declaring their “original sin” of being born male.

Ticket sales were initially slow, but the women who did watch became fervent evangelists. The film soon became ubiquitous. It now has a 9.1 rating out of 10 on the Chinese film-rating site Douban and has taken in more than $77 million, according to Maoyan, which tracks ticket sales. It is projected to be one of China’s top 15 highest-grossing films of the year.

Among young women it has spawned memes, podcast episodes and T-shirts.

Xu Tianyi, a student in the central Chinese city of Luoyang, said she had never seen a movie that directly addressed so many topics women cared about. She cited a scene in which Tiemei is shamed online for writing about her sex life, by people who suggest she’s a bad mother.

But the film’s heartwarming story made it accessible for people new to feminism too, said Ms. Xu, who counted herself among that group. “This movie is gentle, but it also has a little edge.” She and her friends had been quoting lines from the movie to each other. “It shows that feminism is spreading.”

The movie has its critics, including some who griped that the men in the movie are portrayed as inept or clownlike. On Hupu, a sports forum popular with male users, the movie has a rating of 4.9.

But generally, the response has been positive — even from somewhat unexpected quarters.

A commentary in People’s Daily, the Communist Party’s mouthpiece, praised the movie’s depiction of “humorous and absurd” aspects of daily life. It did not explicitly acknowledge specific women’s issues the movie raised, such as domestic violence, but it said that directors should, like Ms. Shao, reflect what audiences cared about.

Xiaoning Lu, a scholar of Chinese cinema at the University of London, said the authorities often left room for people to vent their frustrations, so long as they didn’t cross political lines.

Female-centered storytelling was not inherently anathema to the state, she added, noting that an actress in “Her Story” also recently starred in a television drama about a real-life female principal, a party member, who helps impoverished rural schoolgirls.

Siyi Zhao contributed research.

"All the News That's Fit to Print"

The New York Times

THE WEATHER
Today, a mixture of clouds and sun, breezy, cooler, high 69. **Tonight,** mostly cloudy, low 50. **Tomorrow,** partly cloudy, cooler, light winds, high 58. Weather map, Page 34.

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IVOR PRICKETT FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

In the Jereif West neighborhood of Khartoum, Sudan, Khadija Mousa tried to comfort her severely malnourished daughter Fatima.

Aid Cuts Hit Hungry in a City of Shellfire and Starvation

In Sudan, the Results of U.S. Rollbacks Are Clearly Visible

By DECLAN WALSH

KHARTOUM, Sudan — The children died one after the other. Twelve acutely malnourished infants living in one corner of Sudan's war-ravaged capital, Khartoum.

Abdo, an 18-month-old boy, had been rushed to a clinic by his mother as he was dying. His ribs protruded from his withered body. The next day, a doctor laid him out on a blanket with a teddy bear motif, his eyes closed.

Like the other 11 children, Abdo starved to death in the weeks after President Trump froze all U.S. foreign assistance, said local aid workers and a doctor. American-funded soup kitchens in Sudan, including the one near Abdo's house, had been the only lifelines for tens of thousands of people besieged by fighting.

Bombs were falling. Gunfire was everywhere. Then, as the American money dried up, hundreds of soup kitchens closed in a matter of days.

"It was catastrophic," said Duaa Tariq, an aid worker.

The stark consequences of Mr. Trump's slashing of U.S. aid are evident in few places as clearly as in Sudan, where a brutal civil war has set off a staggering humanitarian catastrophe and left 25 million people — more than half of the country's population — acutely hungry.

Sudan's civil war, now in its third year, is the world's worst humanitarian crisis in decades, aid groups say. Famine is spreading rapidly, with some resorting to eating leaves and grass. About 400,000 people were scattered and hundreds killed in Darfur in the past week alone, as paramilitary fighters overran the country's largest camp for displaced people, the United Nations said.

Last year, the United States gave $830 million in emergency aid, helping 4.4 million Sudanese, the United Nations estimates. That was far more aid than any other country provided. But after Mr. Trump halted that lifeline in January by dismantling the U.S. Agency for International Development, the effect in Khartoum was devastating.

Within days, over 300 soup kitchens run by Emergency Response Rooms, a network of democracy activists turned volunteer aid workers, were forced to close. In Jereif West, the neighborhood where Ms. Tariq works, hun-

Continued on Page 16

Justices Block Deportation Of New Group of Migrants

NEWS ANALYSIS

Trump Defies Courts and Shifts Focus

By PETER BAKER

WASHINGTON — In the unlikely yet profound showdown between the president and the migrant that has captured international attention, the courts have uniformly determined that one of them recently violated the law. And it wasn't the migrant.

According to liberal and conservative judges up to the Supreme Court, President Trump's administration broke the rules by deporting Kilmar Armando Abrego Garcia and must try to fix the mistake. But Mr. Trump and his team are trying to rewrite the narrative so that it is a dispute about illegal immigration rather than the rule of law.

It is a fight that Mr. Trump seems to welcome. His administration could have avoided it by simply bringing Mr. Abrego Garcia back from El Salvador and following a process that might have resulted in him being deported anyway. Instead, Mr. Trump doubled down, defying the courts and reverse-engineering a justification for a deportation that his administration initially acknowledged was wrong.

This in the view of the president's team is a political winner with the vast majority of voters, an "80-20 issue," as his adviser Stephen Miller puts it, referring to theoretical percentages. Mr. Trump bolsters his credentials as a scourge of evil immigrants while asserting that his critics care more about foreign-born murderers and thugs than they do about law-abiding Americans. Yet at a time when Mr. Trump is claiming unprecedented power in so many arenas, the case of one imprisoned migrant has come to crystallize the debate about whether Mr. Trump himself is a law-abiding American.

Continued on Page 26

Ouster of 50 Under Wartime Statute Is Banned, for Now

This article is by ***Alan Feuer, Hamed Aleaziz*** *and* ***Abbie VanSickle.***

The Supreme Court temporarily blocked the Trump administration early Saturday from deporting another group of Venezuelan migrants accused of being gang members under the expansive powers of a rarely invoked wartime law.

"The government is directed not to remove any member of the putative class of detainees from the United States until further order of this court," the court said in a brief, unsigned order that gave no reasoning, as is typical in emergency cases.

Justices Clarence Thomas and Samuel A. Alito Jr. dissented, with Justice Alito saying he would issue a statement later.

Later on Saturday, the Trump administration asked the Supreme Court to "dissolve" the temporary block and allow lower courts to weigh in on the matter before intervening further in the case.

More than 50 Venezuelans were scheduled to be flown out of the country — presumably to El Salvador — from an immigration detention center in Anson, Texas, according to two people with knowledge of the situation. The American Civil Liberties Union in recent days had already secured court orders barring similar deportations under the law, the Alien Enemies Act, in other places including New York, Denver and Brownsville, Texas.

The situation in Anson was urgent enough that A.C.L.U. lawyers

Continued on Page 26

IN THE STREETS Protesters nationwide disputed the president's handling of many issues. PAGE 28

The Firefighter With O.C.D. And the Vaccine He Dreaded

By JOSEPH GOLDSTEIN

There was always an awkward moment for Timmy Reen after the fire was out. Standing amid the smoke and steam and wet debris, the other firefighters would shut off their oxygen tanks and pull off their face masks. But not Firefighter Reen.

The other guys ribbed him as they poked at ash and drywall, searching for embers. "Shut your bottle, Reen," they'd say, nodding to his tank.

In the macho culture of the Fire Department of New York, showing too much concern over lingering smoke was a sure way to stand out. There's a reason firefighters call themselves smoke eaters.

"Mind your own business," he'd say. But sometimes the teasing would get to him and he'd pull his mask off. Even then, he'd hold his breath for 20 or 30 seconds before sneaking a sip of air from the mask dangling at his waist.

The funny thing was that *this* is what he got grief for — trying to avoid wafting carcinogens. Of all his idiosyncrasies, and there were lots, this was among the most rational.

A small sampling of the others: He brought his own sheets and pillowcase for overnights at the firehouse. He wiped down everything with his own stash of bleach wipes — including the inside of the fire engine. In his back pocket, he had a second remote control for the fire station's TV, so he wouldn't need to touch the shared one.

Unlike the other men in the company, he walked to work from his tidy little house on the Rockaway Peninsula in Queens: a lone figure in a dark blue F.D.N.Y. uniform on a two-mile trek, along the empty beach and through vast parking lots. Firefighters waiting for the shift change would watch from the kitchen window and take turns announcing his approach: *Here comes Reen, he's trudging along, getting closer now.*

What Engine Company 329 never saw was the ritual that Firefighter Reen performed after his shift. On the walk home, he would stop in a secluded part of the beach parking lot and undress, whatever the weather — shaking

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JEENAH MOON FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Timmy Reen at Jacob Riis Park in Queens, near his home.

TONY CENICOLA/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Obsolete, but Still Moving Millions

Analog signaling still rules New York's subway, and system managers fear losing money for modernization. Metropolitan. Page 1.

Trump Tears At U.S. Bonds With Colleges

By JEREMY W. PETERS and ANDREA FULLER

For over eight decades, American universities and the federal government wound themselves into an ever tighter embrace.

The United States wanted to build the most powerful bombs and cure the worst diseases. It wanted to be first to explore the outer edges of the solar system. It wanted to grow more efficient crops. And so, it offered millions, and then billions, to researchers at universities across the country — in Cambridge, Mass., and Berkeley, Calif., but also in Minnesota, Indiana and Mississippi.

The schools took the money. They built the best labs and attracted top-notch professors and students from around the world. They also became increasingly and, at first, somewhat warily beholden to the whims of politicians in Washington.

Now, this mutually beneficial bargain has started to unravel.

President Trump and many Republicans say they will use the

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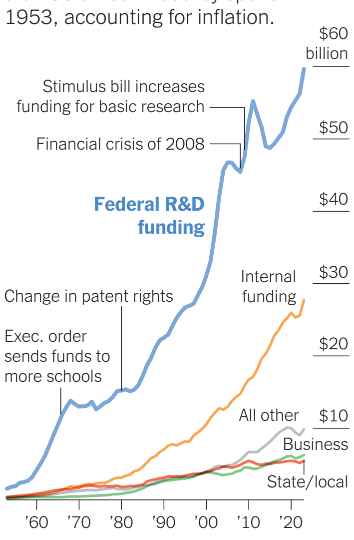
70 Years of Research Funding

American universities spent $60 billion in federal money in 2023, more than 30 times what they spent in 1953, accounting for inflation.



Source: National Science Foundation
THE NEW YORK TIMES

Italians Fear American Palates Will Settle for 'Italian Sounding'

By EMMA BUBOLA

ROME — Italian food producers have long fretted over competition from American brands that are made to look, and sound, as if they are from Italy. Some carry Italian flags and Tuscan landscapes on their labels; others have (sometimes made-up) names that sound Italian.

But since President Trump began his tariff war with Europe, those concerns have become outright alarm. American competitors could gain an unfair advantage in U.S. supermarkets, the Italians say, turning crumbled Gorgonzola cheese made in the Midwest into a new threat.

"They could take over," said Fabio Leonardi, the chief executive of Igor, an Italian Gorgonzola producer in Novara, west of Milan. "Authentic Italian products could be replaced with Italian-sounding products from Wisconsin."

That, according to one American, would be a culinary travesty.

"I will not go back to the green shaker of unrefrigerated dust that America calls Parm, has the balls to call Parm," Stephen Colbert said on "The Late Show" this month. "I am not interested in eating eggplant à la dandruff."

Italy exports nearly $9 billion worth of foodstuffs to the United States, with Parmigiano-Reggiano, Gorgonzola, Prosecco and olive oil filling American kitchen cabinets and restaurant menus.

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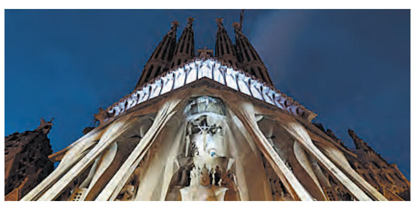

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‘It was catastrophic,’ an aid worker said after hundreds of soup kitchens were closed as American money dried up.

A War-Ravaged Sudan, With Millions Starving, Is Hit by Trump Aid Cuts

From Page 1

gry residents roved the streets in search of food amid shelling and drone strikes.

“People shared what they could,” she said. “But many went home empty-handed.”

Any cut in aid can be deadly: More than 600,000 Sudanese people are already living in famine, and another eight million are “on the cliff edge,” according to a consortium of major aid groups.

The Trump administration has said that lifesaving aid is exempt from the cuts. In an email, a State Department spokesman said that the United States was still helping four million people inside Sudan, as well as 3.8 million refugees in neighboring countries.

Photographs by IVOR PRICKETT

But on the ground, aid groups say the flow of American money stopped for almost two months and has resumed only in fits and starts, if at all.

The U.S.A.I.D. officials who once helped make the payments have been fired. A work force of about 10,000 is being reduced to about 15 positions, leaving the American chain of assistance mired in chaos, delays and uncertainty.

So while the Trump administration says the tap for Sudan is still on, aid groups trying to stave off starvation say the total amount has been reduced and the entire system has been paralyzed, cutting off food for weeks at a time in a place where few can afford to miss a single meal.

Other rich countries have not filled the gap. Despite new pledges from Britain and the European Union at a conference on Tuesday in London, the U.N. is still billions of dollars short of what it says it needs to save lives in Sudan this year.

“This is the darkest hour for Sudan,” said Jan Egeland, head of the aid agency Norwegian Refugee Council, who described the cuts as a “moral failure.”

In recent weeks, the United States has resumed payments to several large aid organizations that work in Sudan, several aid officials confirmed. But little of that money appears to have yet reached Emergency Response Rooms, and nearly half of the 746 kitchens in Khartoum remain closed, said Gihad Salahaldeen, the network’s financial coordinator for the capital.

Nor is American aid guaranteed to continue, the State Department said in its email. The United States continues to review its aid to Sudan “with the goal of restructuring assistance to be more effective, efficient and aligned with U.S. interests,” it added.

This month, the United Nations World Food Program announced that the Trump administration was terminating emergency food assistance for 14 fragile countries around the world.

“This could amount to a death sentence for millions of people,” the agency warned.

In Sudan, rates of acute child malnutrition in parts of the once-proud capital are 10 times above the emergency threshold, aid workers estimate.

Sudan’s military swept across the city in recent weeks, pushing out its paramilitary rivals, the Rapid Support Forces, in the civil war tearing the country apart. Neighborhoods that had been cut off for two years suddenly opened up, revealing a picture of hunger and suffering on a shocking scale.

Down a dusty street in Jereif West, Fatima Bahlawi, 20 months old, lay wailing in her mother’s arms, waving limbs that were thin as sticks. The U.S.A.I.D. suspension in late January had come at the worst possible time, said Fatima’s mother, Khadija Musa.

The army was advancing on Jereif West. Fighters with the Rapid Support Forces lashed out as they retreated, looting and killing civilians. Bombs fell steps away from Ms. Musa’s tin-roof home. A nearby bridge on the Nile was shut, choking the area’s food supply.

When the American money stopped flowing, the local soup kitchen closed and Ms. Musa went out searching for food. “It was a terrible time,” she said.

When I reached her neighborhood with my colleague Ivor Prickett in late March, visibly malnourished residents poured onto the streets. For many, the soup kitchens had been their only sources of food for months.

On the other side of the Nile, which runs through the capital, Babakir Khalid, 2 months old, gasped for breath. A tube protruded from his nose. Almost apologetically, his mother, herself malnourished, said she could not produce enough milk to feed him.

The U.N. has accused both warring sides of using starvation as a weapon of war. Sudan’s government even denies that a famine is underway. In many parts of the country, security threats and deliberate obstructions mean that the United Nations and many international aid groups have no presence.

That has left volunteer groups like Emergency Response Rooms to fill the void. Its work is so essential that it was widely considered one of the favorites for last year’s Nobel Peace Prize.

Until January, the group received U.S.A.I.D. money through international aid organizations that managed the onerous paperwork. Its volunteers had little time for spreadsheets — they were just trying to stay alive and feed as many people as they could.

Dozens of them have died in the war, at least 45 in Khartoum alone, the group says. Some were hit by bombs; others were detained by fighters who looted food, demanded money or attacked them. Both sides in the war have accused volunteers of spying.

Mr. Salahaldeen, his arm in a sling after months in R.S.F. detention, wept as he recounted how a fellow volunteer was beaten to death while they were being held. “They accused him of working for military intelligence,” he said.

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Many volunteers made enormous personal sacrifices to respond to the crisis.

When the war broke out, Ms. Tariq, the aid worker in Jereif West, was four months pregnant and waiting for her husband to arrive at Khartoum Airport from Istanbul. His flight never came, and the airport was bombed. Instead of fleeing the city, like most residents, Ms. Tariq stayed on to set up soup kitchens.

It was dangerous work. Fighters looted her family home weeks after she gave birth, she said. She watched as fighters shot a fellow volunteer in the stomach “right in front of me,” she said while nursing her infant son.

After securing new donations from Europe and Sudanese people abroad, her eight soup kitchens have reopened, albeit at a reduced capacity, she said. Volunteers stirred giant pots of steaming lentils one recent afternoon as people formed a line to receive their portions.

“This is their only meal in the day,” Ms. Tariq said. “It’s not enough.”

As we drove out of Khartoum, dozens of passenger buses streamed into the city, part of an influx of returning residents that is expected to grow now that the R.S.F. has left.

Local volunteer groups across Sudan, like Emergency Response Rooms, need $12 million a month to feed starving people, but are receiving just over $500,000, said two senior aid officials.

In Bahri, in northern Khartoum, Wasfi Nizameldin said that four of the nine kitchens he operated have remained closed since the U.S. funding cuts. In an interview, he both railed against Mr. Trump’s aid pullback and pleaded for him to change course.

“People are dying from it,” Mr. Nizameldin said.

Out in the yard, Musa Salim, a street vendor turned volunteer, prepared food for needy residents. Lifting his shirt, he showed where he had been wounded in a drone strike, then told of how R.S.F. fighters had barged into his daughter’s home and tried to rape her.

It has been an unimaginable few years, he said. By some estimates, three-quarters of Khartoum’s prewar population of eight million has fled. He would have fled, too. “But to leave, you need money,” he said. “Where would I get that?”

Above, Sitalbanat Mohammed with her malnourished 20-month-old grandson as she waited to receive food at one of the soup kitchens Ms. Tariq helps run in the Jereif West district. Right, the decaying remains of Rapid Support Forces fighters in a recently recaptured area of central Khartoum last month.

A severely malnourished 2-month-old, Babakir Khalid, at a hospital in Khartoum. He was treated and survived.

Musa Salim, 70, cooking beans at a soup kitchen run by the aid group Emergency Response Rooms in the Bahri district of northern Khartoum.

Duaa Tariq, an Emergency Response Rooms volunteer, greeted another aid worker as they met for the first time after paramilitary fighters left.

Crossing from an area controlled by the Rapid Support Forces paramilitary in Omdurman, in the capital's west, to buy food in a government-held area.

The day after Khartoum was declared recaptured by the Sudanese military in late March, residents of the city's Jereif West neighborhood came out of their homes to welcome soldiers.