



BRYAN DENTON FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

The main bazaar in Bakwa, in Afghanistan’s southwest. There are few customers for piping once used to irrigate opium poppy fields.

51 MEN CONVICTED OF RAPE AT TRIAL

Ex-Husband Sentenced in France to 20 Years

By CATHERINE PORTER and SÉGOLÈNE LE STRADIC
AVIGNON, France — In a packed courtroom on Thursday in Avignon, France, the head judge asked each of the dozens of men accused of raping Gisèle Pelicot — while she was near-comatose and at the invitation of her husband of 50 years — to stand briefly. Then he pronounced their convictions swiftly, one after the other: all guilty.
When it was over, every one of the 51 accused men had been convicted, most of them for raping Ms. Pelicot in her own bedroom. Her ex-husband, Dominique Pelicot, 72, who had admitted to drugging her over nearly a decade to abuse her, was the only one to get the maximum sentence: 20 years.



MANON CRUZ/REUTERS

Gisèle Pelicot talking to the news media after the verdict.

The rest were given sentences mostly ranging from six to nine years.
And with that, the trial that had both horrified and captivated France for almost four months ended with a victory for the woman at its center, Ms. Pelicot. She became a feminist icon for her bravery in allowing the case to be tried publicly, to more fully expose the horrors of rape in a country where #MeToo hardly gained traction.
After it was over, she stepped into a swarm of French and international reporters and hundreds of supporters eagerly awaiting her, who held up signs of appreciation and cheered when she emerged. There were so many of
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Poppy Boom in Afghan Desert Has Gone Bust

By AZAM AHMED

BAKWA DISTRICT, Afghanistan — An oasis stretched far into the desert, a vast sea of emerald stalks and scarlet poppy flowers that grew to the horizon.
The Taliban operated openly, running a social experiment unlike anything in the country. Tens — then hundreds — of thousands of people flocked here to escape the war and grow poppy, fleeing the American efforts to wipe out the crop.
The Taliban opened a trauma hospital to treat their wounded and earned a fortune, not just from opium but also from methamphetamines and taxes on goods moving in and out of Afghanistan, bringing them millions upon millions of dollars every month.
During the war, the remote district of Bakwa became a laboratory for a future Taliban state, providing money for the war and a sanctuary for the men fighting it.
All that has changed. The Taliban boom is rapidly going bust.
The same insurgents who embraced opium to help finance their war have put an end to it, ordering a ban that has all but cleared Afghanistan of poppy and illicit drugs.
What the United States and its allies failed to do in two decades of war, the Taliban has managed in two years of peace. In an area where poppy once dominated the landscape, barely a stalk remains.
Hundreds of labs set up to process heroin and methamphetamines have been closed or destroyed. The drug bazaar that powered this part of southern Afghanistan has been all but emptied. And the nation, already reeling without international aid, has lost a sizable piece of its economy as a result.
On top of that, the Taliban government has stiffened its taxes, leaving residents bitter and angry. Many have moved away, except those too poor or invested to leave, like Abdul Khaliq.
“This is all coming to an end,” he said, waving his hand toward the emptying villages.
There was almost nothing in this district, Bakwa, when he arrived 25 years ago, just an empty desert plain. He built an empire out of sand, selling the pumps and solar panels that provided water for the opium boom, helping turn Bakwa into a frontier outpost for smugglers, traders and farmers.
Now his story, like Bakwa’s, has
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Taliban Funded War by Taxing Drug Trade, Then Choked It

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3 French Hens, 2 Turtle Doves and 20,000 Crows

By DAVID ANDREATTA

ROCHESTER, N.Y. — In Rochester, N.Y., there are telltale signs that the holiday season is under-way.
Santa’s workshop opens at the outdoor ice rink downtown. There is the lighting of the pyramid of kegs at the local brewery. Productions of “A Christmas Carol” and “The Nutcracker” begin.
Then there are the tens of thousands of crows that descend on the city every day at dusk in early December, and the fireworks and lasers that are deployed to drive them away.
City officials and wildlife experts estimate upward of 20,000 crows roost downtown nightly.
“It’s like you’re in ‘The Birds,’” said Rachel Kudiba, referring to Alfred Hitchcock’s classic film about birds on a murderous rampage. Ms. Kudiba was one of four U.S. Department of Agriculture Wildlife Services specialists hired by the city to chase and haze the massive groups of crows.
An outbreak of West Nile virus decimated the American crow population in the early 2000s.
But no one would know it by the sight of the cawing, swirling cloud of jet-black crows over the waterfalls of the Genesee River. They come from miles around, wildlife experts say, seeking warmth in the city’s concrete grid and ambient light after foraging in fields.
The phenomenon plays out in urban centers, with reports of large roosts wintering in upstate New York cities like Albany, Auburn and Poughkeepsie; in Danville, Ill., in the Midwest; and in Portland, Ore., and Sunnyvale, Calif., in the West.
Many cities have employed scare tactics to ward them off. But few seem as consistent in their regimen as Rochester, where the annual Yuletide ritual of shooping crows began in 2012.
For two or three nights during the season, wildlife specialists comb the city. They have been conducting annual hazing raids in Rochester long enough to have an idea of where the birds gather, and they get help from residents who, in response to city media campaigns, call the city’s 311 hotline.
When they locate a cluster,
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LAUREN PETRACCA FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

A cawing cloud of jet-black birds descends on Rochester, N.Y., every year around the holidays. Getting rid of them is murder.

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Musk Wiolds Political Might At Fiscal Deal

Opposing a Bill Using Threats and Falsities

This article is by Michael D. Shear, Annie Karni, Ryan Mac and Maggie Haberman.

WASHINGTON — When President-elect Donald J. Trump picked “the Great Elon Musk,” the world’s richest man, to slash government spending and waste, he mused that the effort might be “the Manhattan Project of our time.”
By Thursday, that prediction looked spot on. Wielding the social media platform he bought for \$44 billion in 2022, Mr. Musk detonated a rhetorical nuclear bomb in the middle of government shutdown negotiations on Capitol Hill.
In more than 150 separate posts on X, starting before dawn on Wednesday, Mr. Musk demanded that Republicans back away from a bipartisan spending deal that was meant to avoid a government shutdown over Christmas. He vowed political retribution against anyone voting for the sprawling bill backed by Speaker Mike Johnson, who called Mr. Musk on Wednesday to ask that he stop posting about the bill.
Mr. Musk also shared misinformation about the bill, including false claims that it contained new aid for Ukraine or \$3 billion in funds for a new stadium in Washington. By the end of Wednesday, Mr. Trump issued a statement of his own, calling the bill “a betrayal of our country.”
It was a remarkable moment for Mr. Musk, who has never been elected to public office but now appears to be the largest megaphone for the man about to retake the Oval Office. Larger, in fact, than Mr. Trump himself, whose own vaunted social media presence is dwarfed by that of Mr. Musk. The president-elect has 96.2 million followers on X, while Mr. Musk has 207.9 million. (Mr. Musk is also far richer than Mr. Trump. According to the Bloomberg Billionaires Index, he is worth \$458 billion, while the president-elect is worth a mere \$6.61 billion.)
This week also marked the first time Mr. Musk has been able to use his website as a digital whip, driving lawmakers to support his desired outcome.
His actions had prompted a backlash from some lawmakers who recoiled at his interference in the legislative process. Some even accused him of acting more like the president or vice president than a billionaire executive.
“Democrats and Republicans spent months negotiating a bipartisan agreement to fund our government,” Senator Bernie Sanders, an independent from Vermont who has long criticized the power of wealthy business executives,
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HOUSE KILLS PLAN SOUGHT BY TRUMP ON SPENDING BILL

SHUTDOWN IS LOOMING

Speaker Back to Drawing Board, Facing Friday Night Deadline

By CATIE EDMONDSON

WASHINGTON — The government lurched toward a shutdown after the House on Thursday rejected a hastily produced plan ordered up by President-elect Donald J. Trump to keep funding flowing. Dozens of Republicans defied his demand to pair the spending with a two-year suspension of the federal debt limit.
The vote sent Speaker Mike Johnson back to the drawing board ahead of a Friday night deadline with no clear path to keeping the government open. Right-wing lawmakers balked at increasing the government’s borrowing limit, something many of them have long pledged not to do without spending cuts to keep the debt from ballooning further.
They were joined by Democrats who savaged the G.O.P. for bowing to Mr. Trump and reneging on a spending compromise Mr. Johnson had reached with them only days earlier.
The vote was 174 to 235, with one member voting “present.”



HAIYUN JIANG FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

The blowup is terrible timing for Speaker Mike Johnson.

Thirty-eight Republicans joined almost every Democrat in voting “no.”
It was an epic meltdown that reflected the deep divisions among Republicans in Congress and a fraught dynamic between them and Mr. Trump that portends a difficult road ahead in January, when the G.O.P. will hold full control of Congress and he will be back in the White House. In particular, it suggested that the president-elect’s ambitious fiscal plans, including a large tax cut, could face a rocky path on Capitol Hill even with his own party in charge.
Even before the spending measure hit the House floor on
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Court Disqualifies Georgia D.A. In Election Case Against Trump

By DANNY HAKIM and RICHARD FAUSSET

Georgia’s Court of Appeals on Thursday disqualified the Atlanta prosecutor who brought an election interference case against President-elect Donald J. Trump and his allies, a surprise move that threw the entire case into disarray.
In a 2-1 decision, a three-judge panel reversed the decision of the trial judge, who in March allowed Fani T. Willis, the district attorney of Fulton County, Ga., to keep the case, despite revelations about a romantic relationship she had with the lawyer whom she hired to manage the prosecution.
All three of the appeals judges were appointed by Republicans. Ms. Willis’s office swiftly filed court papers indicating that it would appeal the decision to the Georgia Supreme Court, which is also dominated by Republican-appointed judges.
If the lower court’s decision stands, it could doom the case, which is the last active criminal prosecution involving charges against Mr. Trump. The Department of Justice recently moved to dismiss two criminal cases against the president-elect since it has a policy against prosecuting sitting presidents, and sentencing has been delayed in another.
In the Georgia case, Mr. Trump and 14 of his allies are charged with conspiring to overturn his 2020 election loss.
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INTERNATIONAL A4-13

Destruction in the Islands

After a cyclone flattened much of Mayotte, France’s poorest territory, residents point to years of neglect. PAGE A8

Signs of Joy in Syrian Rubble

Returning exiles are shocked at the damage to Homs but ecstatic that the Assad regime is gone. PAGE A6

NATIONAL A15-21

Veto Threat on Judges Bill

A proposal had bipartisan support until Donald J. Trump won the election — and the right to choose first. PAGE A17

A Jaw-Dropping Discovery

Two remarkably well-preserved mastodon teeth were discovered recently in a yard near Scotchtown, N.Y. PAGE A20

OBITUARIES B11

Trailblazing Drag Star

Long before the term “drag queen” was widely used, Sir Lady Java’s act was barred by law in Los Angeles but popular in the Black entertainment world.



BUSINESS B1-5

Amazon Drivers Strike

Some workers at seven facilities walked out, but the e-commerce giant said it expected normal operations. PAGE B1

Warning on Gas Exports

The energy secretary said the continued pace of shipments was “neither sustainable nor advisable.” PAGE B1

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Comeback of the Irish

Notre Dame’s season could have unraveled after a home defeat to lowly Northern Illinois, but its path to the College Football Playoff shows just how much its third-year coach has grown. PAGE B6

An M.L.B. Epidemic

Injury rates among pitchers have “skyrocketed” over the past several decades, Major League Baseball concluded in a report. But curbing the problem has few easy solutions. PAGE B10

OPINION A22-23

Jessica Grose

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WEEKEND ARTS C1-12

Let Her Entertain You

In the new, stripped-down Broadway revival of the musical “Gypsy,” Audra McDonald steps into the role of Rose. Jesse Green has the review. PAGE C1



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