



PHOTOGRAPHS BY LEE-ANN OLWAGE FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

The Blue Train, as it traveled from Cape Town to Pretoria. A Times reporter aboard grappled with the scenes of excess and poverty.

# Perched in Luxury, as Shantytowns Roll By

## A 54-Hour Trip Through Two Worlds on a Storied South African Train

By JOHN ELIGON

Chaos surrounded us. Informal porters rolling luggage carts zigzagged between cars. Commuters spilled from the bus terminal onto the sidewalk, where they sat on suitcases. Minibus taxis zoomed through the congestion, pedestrians be damned.

Our car crawled past a barbed-wire fence and reached a sliding gate, where all that separated my wife and me from the empty lot on the other side was a security guard. “Blue Train,” I said, and the guard waved us through.

We pulled up to a blue carpet next to Cape Town’s central train station, where two butlers in blue vests and white gloves greeted us by name and unloaded our luggage before ushering us into a



Giving the train a good clean, inside and out, before its departure.

waiting room that was decidedly more upscale than the one in the adjacent building for bus travelers. We lounged on plush sofas with a few dozen other passengers, relaxing to piano music and enjoying a spread of fruit, pastries, sandwiches and sparkling wine.

I had traveled to this stunning South African metropolis, where the ocean meets the mountains, last December to indulge in a bit of Gatsby-like luxury by taking a trip on the country’s legendary Blue Train. It’s an adventure that turns a two-hour flight (plus a 45-minute drive) from Cape Town to Pretoria into a two-night, 994-mile experience, with all the pampering and beautiful vistas you could

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# Staying Sharp

## After Retiring Is Its Own Job

By MOHANA RAVINDRANATH

For the millions of Americans who retire each year, stopping work might seem like a well-deserved break. But it can also precipitate big changes in brain health, including an increased risk of cognitive decline and depression.

Before retiring, you’re getting up in the morning, socializing with co-workers and dealing with the mental challenges of your job, said Ross Andel, a professor at Arizona State University who studies cognitive aging and retirement. “All of a sudden, after 50 years, you lose that routine.”

There’s this idea that the body and brain adapt when they’re “no longer needed,” he added. “That’s when you see the deterioration and its natural response to inactivity.”

But retirement can also be an opportunity for improving cognitive and mental health, with new-found time to socialize and take on hobbies. And even if you have started to experience some decline, there’s strong evidence that your brain can bounce back from periods of inactivity, even in older age, said Giacomo Pasini, a professor of econometrics at Ca’ Foscari University of Venice, who studies the impact of economic policy on seniors’ mental health.

One analysis of more than 8,000 retirees in Europe found that people’s verbal memory (the ability to recall a set of words after a certain

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### SOLOMON ISLANDS DISPATCH

## Dolphin Hunting Is Their Tradition, and Lifeline

By PRIANKA SRINIVASAN

FANALEI ISLAND, Solomon Islands — The call of a conch shell roused the dolphin hunters from their beds. Under moonlight, the six men shuffled to the village church.

There a priest led them in a whispered prayer; his voice barely audible over the sound of crashing waves; the tide was high. Salt water pooled in parts of the village, which is on Fanalei Island, an ever-shrinking speck

## Teeth Help Buy Escape From Sinking Island

of land that is part of the Solomon Islands in the South Pacific.

They paddled out in wooden canoes before first light, cutting through the darkness until they were miles away from shore. After hours of scanning the horizon, one of the hunters, Lesley Fugui, saw a fin slice the glassy

water. He raised a 10-foot-long bamboo pole with a piece of cloth tied to the end, alerting the others of his discovery. Then he made a phone call to his wife. He had found dolphins. The hunt would begin.

These men are among the last dolphin hunters of Solomon Islands. Some conservationists say the slaughter is cruel and unnecessary. But for the 130 or so residents of Fanalei, the traditional hunt has taken on renewed urgency as climate change

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MATTHEW ABBOTT FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Rising sea levels are encroaching on the coral and sand of the habitable part of Fanalei Island.

## In Past, Leak Would Prompt A Harder Line

### Such Disclosures Were Often Prosecuted

By JOHN ISMAY and CHARLIE SAVAGE

WASHINGTON — Defense secretaries usually take a hard line when it comes to the disclosure of classified information on their watch.

During President George W. Bush’s administration, Donald H. Rumsfeld said that those who break federal law in doing so should be imprisoned. His successor, Robert M. Gates, said it should be a career-ending offense for anyone in the Defense Department.

But after a leak on a commercial messaging app, the Trump administration has played down the episode and signaled there is little chance of an investigation.

President Trump has insisted that administration officials, including Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, had committed only a minor transgression in discussing secret military plans in a group chat on Signal.

Discussing imminent combat operations on a platform not approved for classified information is, by itself, highly irregular. Even more extraordinary was the fact that a senior official had inadvertently invited a journalist to the chat.

Circling the wagons, the Trump administration has adopted the line that advance word of the timing and weapons platforms to be used in an attack were not classified, and Attorney General Pam Bondi signaled on Thursday that there was unlikely to be a criminal investigation.

But usually, any government employee — whether a civilian or a uniformed member of the military — would be subject to severe consequences for failing to protect operational security.

Government employees accused of such an act could be prosecuted in court under various statutes if they knowingly transmitted national security secrets to a person who is not authorized to receive them, or if they disclosed those secrets through gross negligence.

The Espionage Act, which criminalizes the unauthorized retention or disclosure of defense information that could harm the United States or aid its enemies, has been used to prosecute spies and leakers alike.

Last November, for example, Jack Teixeira, a Massachusetts Air National Guardsman, was sentenced to 15 years in prison for posting photos of top-secret documents in online chats using the

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## U.S. HEALTH DEPT. TO LAY OFF 10,000 IN MAJOR REVAMP

### CUTS AT F.D.A. AND C.D.C.

## Restructuring Is Aimed to Put Functions Under Kennedy’s Control

By SHERYL GAY STOLBERG and CHRISTINA JEWETT

The Trump administration announced on Thursday that it was laying off 10,000 employees at the Health and Human Services Department as part of a broad reorganization that reflects the priorities of the health secretary, Robert F. Kennedy Jr., and the White House’s drive to shrink the government.

The layoffs are a drastic reduction in personnel for the health department, which had employed about 82,000 people and touches the lives of every American through its oversight of medical care, food and drugs.

The layoffs and reorganization will cut especially deep at two agencies within the department that have been in Mr. Kennedy’s



ERIC LEE/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Robert F. Kennedy Jr. leads Health and Human Services.

sights: the Food and Drug Administration and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Those agencies are expected to lose roughly 20 percent of their staff members from the latest cuts alone.

Together with previous buyouts and early retirements set off by Trump administration policies, the move will pare the health department down to about 62,000 employees, the agency said.

The restructuring is intended to bring communications and other functions directly under Mr. Kennedy. And it includes creating a new division called the Administration for a Healthy America.

“We’re going to do more with less,” Mr. Kennedy said, even as he acknowledged that it would be “a painful period for H.H.S.”

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## Trump Is Challenging California On Transgender Parental Notices

By DANA GOLDSTEIN and LAUREL ROSENHALL

The Trump administration asserted on Thursday that California’s new law protecting transgender students from unwanted disclosures to their parents was a violation of federal law.

The announcement foreshadowed a potential legal battle over one of the most contentious issues in education — and a threat to a state law that is considered a milestone in transgender rights.

The move could empower conservative school boards and parent activists in California and across the country, who have resisted efforts from liberal educators and policymakers to affirm transgender identities.

The California law, known as the Safety Act, prevents school boards from requiring staff members to tell parents when a student asks to use a different name or

pronoun. It was the first law of its kind when Gov. Gavin Newsom, a Democrat, signed it in July, and it went into effect on Jan. 1. The act came after more than a dozen conservative-led school boards tried to mandate parental notification.

Democratic leaders in the state have criticized disclosure requirements as a “forced outing” that would harm the well-being of students. “Choosing when to ‘come out’ by disclosing an L.G.B.T.Q.+ identity, and to whom, are deeply personal decisions,” the law states, “impacting health and safety as well as critical relationships, that every L.G.B.T.Q.+ person has the right to make for themselves.”

But Republicans have said that notification was a matter of parental rights. The Trump administration

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#### Babe Casts a Mighty Shadow

The Rays, Steinbrenner Field’s new tenants, had four days to remove every sign of the Yankees. PAGE B11

#### Training Through Grief

In the aftermath of an unspeakable tragedy, a Boston skating club prepares for the world championships. PAGE B8



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#### At Front, Peace Is Far Off

For those at the edge of battle in Ukraine, any talk about a lasting ceasefire still feels like a fantasy. PAGE A4

#### Fires Raze South Korea Relics

The country’s largest blaze on record has left 27 dead and destroyed two 1,000-year-old temples. PAGE A9

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#### Author of ‘Vampire Diaries’

L.J. Smith’s series went on to be a hit TV show, and after she was replaced by ghostwriters she reclaimed her characters in fan fiction. She was 66. PAGE A22

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#### Deportation Flights Blocked

An appeals court kept in place, for now, a block on the Trump administration’s use of a rarely invoked wartime statute to deport migrants. PAGE A18

#### Loophole for Online Casinos

Playing slot machines online for real money is illegal in most states, but a group of companies have found a way around the law. PAGE A13

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A county clerk blocked a legal action against a New York doctor for prescribing and sending abortion pills to a woman in Texas. PAGE A20

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The “Succession” star Sarah Snook plays all 26 roles in an Oscar Wilde tale turned into a video spectacle. PAGE C1

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Over nearly six decades, Jack Whitten experimented with paint, transforming it into a sculptural medium. PAGE C1



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President Trump’s tariffs on imported vehicles and car parts are expected to deal a blow to American allies. PAGE B1

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Soaring borrowing poses “significant risks” to the U.S. economy, the Congressional Budget Office reported. PAGE B3

### OPINION A24-25

#### Frank Bruni

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