breezy, high 39. **Tonight,** partly cloudy, low 30. **Tomorrow,** mostly

cloudy, snow and rain at night, high 40. Weather map is on Page A20.

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Prices in Canada may be higher

# Fears of Wider War Grow

# Attacks in Lebanon and Iran Raise Tensions — White House Warns the Houthis

In Middle East, and U.S.

This article is by Eric Schmitt, Julian E. Barnes, Helene Cooper and David E. Sanger.

WASHINGTON — American, Israeli and Lebanese officials insist that few parties want Israel's war in Gaza to become a wider conflict that engulfs the Middle

But the assassination of a top leader of Hamas in Lebanon on Tuesday, and the deaths of scores of people in explosions in Iran on Wednesday, threatened to bring the Middle East — and the United States - closer to the brink of a regional war, which the Biden administration has tried to stave off since Hamas's deadly attacks against Israel on Oct. 7.

Just hours after the bombs went off in Iran, the United States and 12 of its allies issued a written warning to another militia group in the region, the Houthis of Yemen, who have been mounting neardaily missile, drone and seaborne attacks on commercial vessels.

So far the United States has held back from retaliating against Houthi bases in Yemen, in large part because it does not want to undermine a fragile truce in Yemen's civil war

But now Biden officials are signaling that their patience is running out.

"Let our message now be clear: We call for the immediate end of these illegal attacks and release of unlawfully detained vessels and crews," White House officials said in a statement issued on Wednesday, a day after the shipping giant Maersk announced it would pause operations in the Red Sea.

"The Houthis," the statement continued, "will bear the responsibility of the consequences should they continue to threaten lives, the global economy, and free flow of commerce in the region's critical waterways."

The warning — also signed by Britain, Australia, New Zealand, Bahrain, Belgium, Canada, Germany, Denmark, Italy, Japan, Singapore and the Netherlands stopped short of threatening military strikes. Over the weekend, the U.S. Navy sank three Houthi boats, killing all the crew members, when they fired on American helicopters coming to aid a Maersk cargo ship.

On Monday, Iran's navy announced the deployment of a flotilla of warships to the waterway. On the same day, Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian of Iran expressed "gratitude and appreciation" to a Houthi official visiting Tehran for the group's support for Hamas, the government-run IRNA news agency reported.

A senior Iranian official said dispatching the warships, which join an Iranian spy ship already in the region, was meant to signal that Iran is supporting the

Continued on Page A8







People gathered on Thursday to mourn, clockwise from top left, victims of bombings for which the Islamic State took responsibility; militants killed in a U.S. drone attack in Baghdad; Saleh al-Arouri, a Hamas leader killed in Beirut; and relatives hit by Israeli strikes.

# Few Take Paxlovid, Even as Covid Surges Again | Eyes on 1991,

### By CHRISTINA JEWETT

As Covid rises again, killing about 1,500 Americans each week, medical researchers are trying to understand why so few people are taking Paxlovid, a medicine that is stunningly effective in preventing severe illness and death from the disease

A study of a million high-risk people with Covid found that only about 15 percent who were eligible for the drug took it. If half of the eligible patients in the United

# Researchers Struggle to Explain Unease Over Lifesaving Drug

States had gotten Paxlovid during the time period of the study, 48,000 deaths could have been prevented, authors of the study, conducted by the National Institutes of Health, concluded.

It's not because people don't

know about the drug — most do but the reluctance seems to come from doctors worried about interactions with other drugs and people wary of a possible rebound case or the metallic aftertaste.

Regional differences offer a clue, with uptake highest in the Democratic strongholds of the Northeast and the Pacific Northwest regions of the United States and lowest in red areas, including Florida and Indiana. Yet no careful study has clarified why so few people used the medication, which

Continued on Page A17

# Moscow Finds A New Enemy

### By ANDREW HIGGINS

VILNIUS, Lithuania — When the International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant last year for President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia, a Moscow court launched a surprise counterattack: It ordered the arrest of a 70-year-old retired judge in Lithuania.

The judge, Kornelija Maceviciene, was not connected in any way to the case against Mr. Putin in The Hague or to investigations into Russian war crimes in Ukraine.

Her "crime," as the Moscow court sees it, was handing down "unjust" guilty verdicts against former Soviet officers, nearly all Russians, for their role in a brutal crackdown against pro-independence protesters who had gathered at a television tower in Vilnius, the Lithuanian capital, on Jan. 13,

In a bloody episode that helped seal the demise of Soviet power, 14 protesters - one of them a young woman crushed by a tank — were killed and hundreds of others were injured when Soviet forces stormed the tower in an abortive last-ditch attempt to prevent Lithuania from escaping Moscow's

After examining copious evidence showing who in 1991 gave the orders to use deadly force and who carried them out, Ms. Maceviciene and two fellow judges

Continued on Page A6

Menendez Case Offers Glimpse

Of Qatar's Efforts to Build Clout

dez arrived in Qatar in 2022 to attend the country's lavish production of the men's soccer World Cup, he gave an unusual interview to the authoritarian government's agency praising the progress that Qatar had made on

By VIVIAN NEREIM

and TARIQ PANJA

When Senator Robert Menen-

The tiny Gulf state was facing an onslaught of international criticism over its preparations for the world's biggest sporting event, including over the exploitation of migrant workers who built the tournament's infrastructure. But Mr. Menendez, a New Jersey Democrat, said he preferred to

# Across the World highlight positive aspects of the

A Nation Is Cultivating

Ties to the Powerful

games, and the host nation.

Traveling to Qatar gave Mr. Menendez "the experience to say wow!" he said, according to the Qatari state news agency. "My short visit to Doha was joyful and I saw that the global community came to Oatar and were well received and well respected."

Less than a year later, Mr. Menendez, 70, was charged in a fed-Continued on Page A10

# Weighing the Fate of a Robber Who Got Caught Pink-Handed

# By DAN BARRY

The man left the bank like a satisfied customer who hadn't just robbed it. With an envelope of cash smoldering in his right pocket, he began walking down a Newark street with studied nonchalance.

A few steps into his casual getaway, a dye pack inside the envelope exploded like an ill-timed gender reveal, into a misty puff of pink. Only then did he hurry away, leaving in his wake a cartoonish contrail and some surveillancevideo distraction for the Covid-infected summer of 2021.

When the man, Esau Grant, was arrested two days later, a Newark police official could not resist joking that he had been caught "redhanded." And public attention moved on to the next viral moment of human folly.

Perhaps there is no profound takeaway in the case of Mr. Grant. Perhaps it offers nothing more than a chance to imagine yourself in the pink-stained sneakers of a



Video of a dye pack exploding was used at Esau Grant's trial.

desperate, hapless bank robber as I did when I served on the jury that recently heard the state's case against him.

On the cool, wet Saturday morning of July 3, 2021, Mr. Grant joined a long line in the small Capital One bank on Springfield Avenue. It was the beginning of the month and the day before the Fourth: busy banking time.

Tall and lanky, the 27-year-old man wore a light blue durag, a Continued on Page A16

# Protesters Are Swept Out of a Berkeley Park The University of California has been trying for years to build student housing at the site. Page A11.

# By KAROUN DEMIRJIAN

WASHINGTON Speaker Mike Johnson and scores of House Republicans converged in Eagle Pass, Texas, on Wednesday to call for a crackdown on migrants at the border, they had a somewhat unlikely host.

It was only months ago that Representative Tony Gonzales, the Texas Republican who represents the busy border crossing and the majority-Hispanic district that surrounds it, broke with his party in opposition to parts of its hard-line approach on immigra-

tion. Back then, he warned his colleagues against an overly draconian approach and urged them not to politicize the issue.

Now Mr. Gonzales, who has faced a constituent backlash and multiple primary opponents in his competitive district, has swung into line with the zeal of a convert,

becoming a chief champion of the Republicans' strict border enforcement bill and a proponent of efforts to use it as political lever age against President Biden.

He has endorsed calls to make border security improvements a precondition of securing military Continued on Page A12

# **INTERNATIONAL A4-10**

### Soon-to-Be Queen of Denmark Princess Mary, a common-born former

Australian, never dreamed of royalty. "I wanted to be a veterinarian." PAGE A7

# **Balloons Float Over Taiwan**

Some analysts say the objects are a calculatedly ambiguous reminder to voters that China is watching. PAGE A10 **NATIONAL A11-17, 20** 

# Oligarch Sues Sotheby's

At a trial next week, a Russian billionaire is accusing the auction house of helping an art dealer trick him into wildly overspending. PAGE A15

From Skeptic to Champion of G.O.P.'s Hard Line on Immigration

# A Busy January for Trump

The former president faces Iowa's caucuses and New Hampshire's primary as he pursues the G.O.P. nomination, but he also has two trials.

Subway Collision in Manhattan A subway train struck a work train near West 96th Street, causing it to derail. Two dozen people were injured, none of them seriously, officials said. PAGE A20 **BUSINESS B1-4** 

# Oil Flows Despite Attacks

Militia raids on tankers in the Red Sea leave operators with a choice: Accept the risks or lose business.

### French Retailer Drops PepsiCo The supermarket chain Carrefour says

the maker of Pepsi, Lay's and 7-Up is "unacceptably" expensive.

**OBITUARIES B9-10** 

### Her Forecast Delayed D-Day Maureen Sweeney detected stormy

weather and helped save General Eisenhower's Normandy invasion from potential disaster. She was 100. PAGE B9



# WEEKEND ARTS C1-12

# An Expensive Fantasy

A blockbuster restaging of Luna Luna, an "art amusement park," aims to recover the lost element of fun.

# Somehow, Life Goes On

In the film "Good Grief," Daniel Levy applies a light but wise hand to a man navigating life after loss.

SPORTS B5-8

# Rich College Sports Deal

The N.C.A.A. and ESPN reached a \$920 million deal for broadcast rights to 40 college championships.

# The All-Free-Agent Team

Shohei Ohtani and Yoshinobu Yamamoto are spoken for, but plenty of fine players remain on the market. PAGE B7

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**OPINION A18-19** 

Charles M. Blow



