



PAUL RATJE FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

On Tuesday, Mexican National Army soldiers at the site of a tent facility for deportees that was being set up in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico.

## Without Delay, Hamas Is Back In Public View

**By ADAM RASGON and IYAD ABUHEWEILA**

JERUSALEM — The morning the cease-fire in Gaza went into effect, masked members of Hamas’s military wing drove through the streets of Gaza in clean, white pickups, carrying Hamas flags and automatic rifles.

The militants were also carrying an unambiguous message: However weakened, Hamas survived Israel’s 15-month bombing campaign in Gaza and remains the most powerful Palestinian party in the territory.

Since the cease-fire started on Sunday, Hamas has been working overtime in an attempt to show it still controls Gaza, even after Israel killed thousands of its members and demolished its tunnels and weapons factories in retaliation for the Oct. 7, 2023, cross-border



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Hamas fighters escorted a Red Cross vehicle Sunday in Gaza City to collect Israeli hostages.

der attack that killed an estimated 1,200 people.

Throughout the war, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel has vowed to eliminate Hamas, but he never offered a plan for a realistic alternative that could take control of Gaza, leaving behind a vacuum that the armed group filled.

Even for many residents of Gaza, however, the swift re-emergence of the fighters, some in official uniforms, was a surprise.

“They came out of hiding in a snap of a finger,” said Mohammed, 24, who requested his last name be withheld to avoid possible retribution from Hamas. “We had no idea where these people were during the war.”

Later on the first day of the

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## Mexico’s All-Hands Plan to Welcome Deportees

**By EMILIANO RODRÍGUEZ MEGA and ANNIE CORREAL**

MEXICO CITY — Mexico’s plan to receive thousands of its deported citizens from the United States is nothing short of ambitious. Plans are underway to build nine reception centers along the border — massive tents set up in parking lots, stadiums and warehouses — with mobile kitchens operated by the armed forces.

Details of the initiative — called “Mexico Embraces You” — were revealed only this week, although Mexican officials said they had been devising it for the past few months, ever since Donald J. Trump pledged to conduct the largest expulsion of undocumented immigrants in U.S. history.

Nearly every branch of government — 34 federal agencies and 16

### Some Experts Question Ability to Cope With Influx Long Term

state governments — is expected to participate in one way or another: busing people to their hometowns, organizing logistics, providing medical attention, enrolling the recently returned in social welfare programs like pensions and paid apprenticeships, along with handing out cash cards worth about \$100 each.

Officials say they are also negotiating agreements with Mexican companies to link people to jobs.

“We are ready to receive you on this side of the border,” Mexico’s interior minister, Rosa Icela Rodríguez, said at a news conference

this week. “Repatriation is an opportunity to return home and be reunited with family.”

President Claudia Sheinbaum of Mexico has called the expected large-scale deportations a “unilateral move” and has said she does not agree with them. But as the country with the single largest number of unauthorized citizens living in the United States — an estimated four million people as of 2022 — Mexico has found itself obligated to prepare.

The government’s plan is focused on Mexicans deported from the United States, though the president has indicated the country could temporarily receive foreign deportees, too.

Mexico is not alone in preparing: Guatemala, its neighbor to the south that also has a large undocumented population in the

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## A Showdown for Spreadsheet Glory (and a Wrestling-Style Belt)

**By YAN ZHUANG**

LAS VEGAS — Like soccer players taking the field in a giant stadium, the 12 finalists ran through a glowing “hype tunnel,” some wearing jerseys with sponsorship logos. As an announcer bellowed introductions and cameras captured their every move, they approached a neon-lit stage to raucous cheers.

Then the men sat down at desktop computers, opened their Microsoft Excel spreadsheets and began to type.

Excel, a program that does complex math on a human’s behalf, is often associated, rightly, with corporate drudgery. But last month, in a Las Vegas e-sports arena that typically hosts Fortnite and League of Legends tournaments, finance professionals fluent in spreadsheets were treated like minor celebrities as they gathered to solve devilishly complex Excel puzzles in front of an audience of about 400 people, with more watching an ESPN3 livestream.

Organizers call the event the Microsoft Excel World Championship. “Yes, it is a thing,” the official website says.

At stake was a \$5,000 prize, a wrestling-style championship belt and the title of world’s best spreadsheeter. But the organizer, Andrew Grigolyunovich, is dreaming bigger. He hopes to turn competitive Excel into a popular



MIKAYLA WHITMORE FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

The Microsoft Excel World Championship in Las Vegas drew about 400 spectators in December.

e-sport where pros compete for million-dollar prizes and big-league glory.

“Excel was always thought of as a back-office product,” said Mr. Grigolyunovich, a Sudoku champion from Latvia. But in Vegas, “these people who are working, I don’t want to say boring jobs — but, you know, regular jobs — they could become stars.”

If that seems too ambitious, we’d like to introduce you to Erik Oehm, a software developer from San Francisco, who watched the action from the front row.

“This is the Super Bowl for Excel nerds,” Mr. Oehm said. “If Excel is the center of your universe, this is like hanging out with LeBron James and Kobe Bryant.”

The “LeBron James of Excel,”

as he was introduced in Vegas, was Diarmuid Early, 39, an Irish financial consultant in New York, who entered the arena in jeans, sandals and a jersey patterned to resemble abdominal muscles. The Kobe Bryant was Andrew Ngai, 37, a soft-spoken actuary from Australia known as the Annihila-

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## HEGSETH NEARING SENATE APPROVAL DESPITE CONCERN

### ABUSE CLAIM REBUFFED

### G.O.P. Clears Way for a Final Vote on Trump’s Pick for Defense

**By KAROUN DEMIRJIAN**

WASHINGTON — A divided Senate on Thursday voted to move toward confirming Pete Hegseth as secretary of defense, in a strong signal that allegations about his personal conduct, including a new one from a former sister-in-law, were unlikely to derail his nomination.

On a 51-to-49 vote that came down almost entirely along party lines, Republicans broke a Democratic filibuster, clearing away the final hurdle to a confirmation vote now expected on Friday evening. The action came as Democrats, who have called President Trump’s nominee to lead the Pentagon unfit, worked to persuade a handful of G.O.P. senators to join them in opposition.

“We cannot risk installing a leader who may have a history that is exploitable by our adversaries,” Senator Jack Reed of Rhode Island, the top Democrat on the Armed Services Committee, said in a floor speech on Thursday. “Nor can we risk confirming a secretary of defense who has shown that he is incapable of being responsible, accountable and law abiding 24 hours a day, seven days a week, as that job requires.”

In his statement, Mr. Reed referred to a sworn statement submitted to the Senate on Tuesday by a former sister-in-law of Mr. Hegseth’s who described him as frequently intoxicated and “abusive” toward his second wife. Mr.

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**BLOCKED** A judge has temporarily halted the president’s order to end birthright citizenship. **PAGE A13**

**BUDGET CUTS** Republicans float reductions for Medicaid and many other programs. **PAGE A15**

## The Struggle To Make Tests A.I. Can’t Ace

SAN FRANCISCO — If you’re looking for a new reason to be nervous about artificial intelligence, try this: Some of the smartest humans in the world are struggling to create tests that A.I. systems can’t pass.

For years, A.I. systems were measured by giving new models a variety of standardized benchmark tests. Many of these tests consisted of challenging, SAT-caliber problems in areas like math, science and logic. Comparing the models’ scores over time served as a rough measure of A.I. progress.

But A.I. systems eventually got too good at those tests, so new, harder tests were created — often with the types of questions graduate students might encounter on their exams.

Those tests aren’t in good shape, either. New models from companies like OpenAI, Google and Anthropic have been getting high scores on many Ph.D.-level challenges, limiting those tests’ usefulness and leading to a chilling question: Are A.I. systems getting too smart for us to measure?

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The frequency and strength of storms in the Mediterranean have increased, and are expected to worsen. **PAGE A6**

**Same-Sex Nuptials in Thailand**

A mass wedding was held in Bangkok as the country became one of the few places in Asia to legalize the unions. **PAGE A5**

**BUSINESS B1-5**

**Trump-Era Changes at CNN**

The network announced job cuts, a wave of hiring, changes to its schedule, and a new streaming service. **PAGE B1**

**D.E.I. Orders Create Confusion**

President Trump signals that businesses and organizations could be investigated over diversity. **PAGE B1**

**OBITUARIES, B10-11**

**Elevated Vietnamese Cuisine**

Charles Phan married the best local ingredients with the food he grew up on and buoyed other chefs from immigrant families. He was 62. **PAGE B11**



**NATIONAL A10-19**

**Bird Flu Detected in Pet Cats**

Officials have linked some of the cases to virus-laden raw milk, but other cats had consumed raw pet food. **PAGE A19**

**Fireproof House, Singed Spirit**

The Vogts built their Malibu house to withstand disasters. They weren’t ready for the mental toll of the fires. **PAGE A10**

**WEEKEND ARTS C1-10**

**Wide-Open Oscar Race**

In a year with no clear favorite in the best-picture category, the film “Emilia Pérez” led the way with 13 nominations, while “The Brutalist” and “Wicked” received 10 nominations apiece. **PAGE C1**

**Where Anne Frank Hid**

Covered windows, peeling wallpaper: For the first time outside of Amsterdam, an exhibition reconstructs the girl’s secret annex during the devastation of the Holocaust. **PAGE C1**

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**Pico Iyer** **PAGE A20**



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**A Winning Combination**

When Madison Keys, above, asked her husband to serve as her coach, he reluctantly agreed. Now, she’s reached the finals of the Australian Open. **PAGE B8**

