



THOMAS PETER/REUTERS

In Wartime, Finding a Reason to Celebrate
Ukrainians wore traditional costumes to sing Christmas carols in Kyiv on Wednesday, as Russia hit the country’s energy facilities.

Virus’s Spread in a Shantytown Could Have Global Implications

By STEPHANIE NOLEN
KINSHASA, Democratic Republic of Congo — Mireille Efonje got sick a few months ago, with a fever and painful blisters on her groin. She became too weak to move, so neighbors carried her to a health center with walls of plastic sheeting in Pakadjuma, a crowded, poor community in Kinshasa, the capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo.
There, a nurse called an ambulance to take her to a hospital. Soon lesions broke out on her head and the rest of her body, each one a hard nub of throbbing pain. Finally she was given a diagnosis: mpox. “I’d never heard of it,” Ms. Efonje said.
This was back in August, when the mpox virus — closely related to smallpox — was still almost unknown in Kinshasa, a city of 17 million people.
Some researchers now recall that time almost wistfully, because it might still have been possible then to fence in the mpox virus, to fend off disaster.
That window has probably closed, they say.
The detection of a new, fast-spreading strain of the virus in a remote mining town in eastern Congo led the World Health Organization to declare mpox a global public health emergency in August. Since then, its spread has only accelerated.
The virus is taking hold in crowded camps home to millions of displaced Congolese, who live crammed into rough shelters with limited access to water. And it has reached Congo’s enormous, congested capital and other cities.

Belated efforts to control mpox in Kinshasa — by isolating patients and vaccinating their contacts — have been halting and haphazard, far outpaced by the speed of the virus’s spread and change.
Congo’s response to the emergency has been choked by bureaucracy; clinicians and others involved say privately that their leaders are locked in fights over access to an influx of international funds. The effort has been complicated by the country’s vast size and feeble infrastructure, and by

Mpox Epidemic Rages in Congo’s Capital

the weakness of its health care system, whose workers are poorly and rarely paid.
A much-hyped vaccination campaign is unfolding at a glacial pace. Hundreds of thousands of vaccines sit in freezers, unused. Half of those infected are children, but not a single child has been vaccinated.

Only a fraction of mpox cases are confirmed with laboratory analysis. Few contacts of sick people are traced. And nowhere is the effort less effective than in Kinshasa, where two strains of the virus are now mingling within a particularly vulnerable population.
Mpox has historically been a rural disease in Congo, causing sporadic small outbreaks, mostly infecting children in isolated communities in the thick forest in the center and west of the country.
The current health crisis began

Continued on Page A11



VICTOIRE DOUNIAMA FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

An mpox patient receiving care in a health center in Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo.

U.S. Unleashed Monsters Who Drove Afghans to the Taliban

By AZAM AHMED
KUNDUZ, Afghanistan — The Taliban were inching closer, encroaching on land that had once seemed secure, the American officer warned. Four of his men had just been killed, and he needed Afghans willing to fight back.
“Who will stand up?” the officer implored a crowd of 150 Afghan elders.
The people in Kunduz Province were largely supportive of the Americans and opposed to the Taliban. But recruiting police officers

was slow going, and by the summer of 2009, local officials and the American officer — a lieutenant colonel from the Georgia National Guard — had landed on a risky approach: hiring private militias.
A murmur of discontent passed through the crowd.
“I don’t think this is a good idea,” an old man stood up and said, according to four people at the meeting. “We have seen this before. The militias will become a bigger problem than the Taliban.”
Over the grumbling, a onetime warlord named Mohammad

Vicious Militias Added to Quick ’21 Collapse

Omar sprung up and denounced the others as cowards.
“I will fight the Taliban!” he shouted.
The gathering in Kunduz, in northern Afghanistan, is not registered in any official history of the war. But people across the province say this seemingly unremarkable moment reshaped the

conflict in ways that Washington has never truly understood.
For years, the Americans supported militias in the north to fight the Taliban. But the effort backfired — those groups preyed on the populace with such cruelty that they turned a onetime stronghold of the United States into a bastion of the insurgency. People came to see the militias, and by extension the Americans, as a source of torment, not salvation.
Mr. Omar, for example, who was known as the Wall Breaker, became

Continued on Page A6

Pick for I.R.S. Pushed Policy With Troubles

Got Clients to Seek Tax Credits for Pandemic

By ANDREW DUEHREN
When Daniel Werfel, the commissioner of the Internal Revenue Service, testified before a House committee early this year, he tried to explain how a pandemic-era program had become an expensive government boondoggle.
Congress created the employee retention tax credit to support businesses and nonprofits that continued paying employees despite facing difficulty during the pandemic. But as time went on, and the public health crisis faded, more and more companies lined up to claim the government support, egged on by third-party companies that told them they could be eligible for millions, Mr. Werfel said.
“The further we got away from it, the more aggressive promoters and marketers started, in my opinion, taking advantage of honest small businesses and getting them to believe that they were eligible for a credit they truly weren’t eligible for,” Mr. Werfel told lawmakers in February.
Seated behind Mr. Werfel in the hearing room last February was Billy Long, whom President-elect Donald J. Trump would later name to lead the I.R.S. Mr. Long, a former Republican congressman, was in Washington working with Lifetime Advisors, a company that had developed a booming business encouraging organizations to claim the credit.
Mr. Long joined Lifetime’s network of salespeople soon after leaving Congress in 2023, pitching businesses and nonprofits in his former Missouri district, including swimming pool and roofing contractors, on taking the credit. He regularly sported a hat that said, “Ask me about E.R.T.C.” — the initials for the credit — as he sought out business.
Mr. Long referred his clients to Lifetime, which would prepare an application for the tax credit and keep a slice of the money from the I.R.S. One contract viewed by The New York Times showed Lifetime collecting 20 percent of a roughly \$300,000 tax credit, with half of the client’s fee due once Lifetime submitted the claim and the rest due upon receipt of the credit.
In an interview he recorded with another promoter of the tax credit, Mr. Long said Lifetime had helped clients claim \$1.3 billion in tax refunds. He said that “virtually every” business would qualify

Continued on Page A14

LOCAL OFFICIALS MULL THEIR ROLE ON IMMIGRATION

TO ASSIST, OR TO RESIST

San Diego Board Weighs Its Cooperation With Federal Enforcers

By TIM ARANGO and HAMED ALEAZIZ
The San Diego region, like many communities that hug the southern border, saw a sharp drop in migrants entering the United States after the Biden administration made it harder to apply for asylum.
But thousands of newcomers who had crossed the border haven’t been forgotten, and even as many of them made their way to other corners of the country, some remain in and around San Diego, still undocumented.
Now, with President-elect Donald J. Trump pledging to carry out mass deportations, leaders in San Diego have been weighing how far to go in trying to protect people vulnerable to deportation and how much local law enforcement should cooperate with federal agents.
Such discussions are unfolding around the country after Mr. Trump won back the White House promising to curb immigration and tighten up border security.
But few places have been seeing the debate play out as dramatically as San Diego County, which sits on California’s border with Mexico, and where for a few weeks this year, the number of crossings was higher than in Texas and Arizona.
After Mr. Trump’s victory, the Board of Supervisors for San Diego County moved to bolster protections for migrants by requiring federal agents to obtain a judicial warrant for any undocumented immigrants they want to pick up from a local jail, banning any investigative interviews by immigration officials inside jails and prohibiting the use of county resources for immigration enforcement.
But even in a state with some of the strongest shields for undocumented immigrants, San Diego County was ratcheting up the fight over immigration enforcement, and the new protections drew swift and pointed criticism.
And it wasn’t just the Trump administration’s designated border czar who denounced the warrant

Continued on Page A15

Born Into the House of Lords And Preparing to Be Evicted

By MARK LANDLER
LONDON — Godfrey John Bewicke-Copley, the 7th Baron Cromwell, traces his family’s title back to 1375. His forebears fought the French at the Battle of Agincourt. For the last decade, Lord Cromwell’s day job has been in Britain’s House of Lords, where he mulls legislation, runs to committee meetings and briskly greets fellow lawmakers in Parliament, many of whom are elected.
His right to be there is rooted in his ancestry: Hereditary peers inherit their seats, in his case from his father, the 6th Baron Cromwell. But Lord Cromwell insists that his aristocratic lineage has little bearing on his work as a public servant in the halls of Westminster.
“We are not the port-swilling, fox-hunting hoorays on vast Downtown Abbey-esque estates of popular imagination,” he said. “Indeed, sometimes people are rather disappointed when they find that we are typically hard-



ANDREW TESTA FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Godfrey John Bewicke-Copley inherited his Parliament seat.

working professionals of one sort or another.”
For Lord Cromwell that includes a career in private banking, advising companies on doing business in Russia — something he no longer does — and running the family farm in Leicestershire. Gregarious, well-informed and opinionated, Lord Cromwell, 64, has spoken up regularly in de-

Continued on Page A10



INTERNATIONAL A4-11
Baring Anti-Migrant Feelings
A cyclone in the French territory of Mayotte has intensified calls to deport undocumented immigrants. PAGE A4

Preparing for a Huge Wave
The 2004 Indian Ocean catastrophe led to a revolution in detecting developing tsunamis. PAGE A8

NATIONAL A12-16
A Fight to Slash U.S. Spending
The task won’t be easy: A new efficiency department will have limited scope to change the fiscal trajectory. PAGE A13

Parting Shots From Biden
The president’s public comments have offered a glimpse into what is on his mind as his term winds down. PAGE A15

OBITUARIES A17, 20
Hitmaker for Streisand
Richard Perry, a sought-after pop music producer in the 1970s and ’80s, also worked with Carly Simon and the Pointer Sisters. He was 82. PAGE A20



THURSDAY STYLES D1-8
Royal Treasure in Our Midst
Four remnants of France’s crown jewels, bought in 1887 by Tiffany & Company, are kept in New Jersey. PAGE D2

A Look Back at the Forgotten
Between 2024’s major news events were smaller, stranger, sillier moments that are worth revisiting. PAGE D4

BUSINESS B1-4
A.I. Progress Slowing Down
Companies like OpenAI and Google are running out of the data used to train artificial intelligence systems and must try new methods. PAGE B1

SPORTS B5-8
Expansion South of the Border
Adam Silver, the N.B.A.’s commissioner, sees Mexico City as a logical place to add a franchise, but several complicated issues could get in the way. PAGE B5

OPINION A18-19
Thomas L. Friedman PAGE A18



ARTS C1-6
Gather ’Round, People
“A Complete Unknown,” James Mangold’s film about Bob Dylan’s early years in New York, has Timothée Chalamet in the lead role. PAGE C1

