



DIEGO IBARRA SANCHEZ FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

A Kiss for Luck and She’s on Her Way

Since the fall of Syria’s regime, many, like Hamdia Abdel Karim, left, who had fled to Lebanon, will return to uncertainty. Page A11.

A Pretty Face
Overshadows
A Grisly Act

From the moment the world saw the smiling, unmasked face of the young man in the New York City hostel, memes began spreading about his looks. In the days since, after Luigi Mangione was identified and charged in the murder of the UnitedHealthcare chief executive Brian Thompson, it has been impossible to escape his photo. Or photos. They are proliferating.

They are on television, in the newspaper and all over social media. Not just pictures of Mr. Mangione from his booking at a police station in Altoona, Pa., or his mug shots in prison orange, but photos of him in earlier times, in a navy blazer, crisp white shirt and tie. Images of him hiking shirtless in the hills. In all of them, he is clean-shaven, curly-haired, often flashing a bright, white grin. Even his Tinder profile has made it into the public, with more pics featuring his six-pack. One commentator compared the stream of pictures to “an endless photo shoot.” And with them have come the comments. The swooning. The fan cams.

“If the guy is fit, you must acquit,” went one post on X. “He’s even hotter with his mask and shirt off,” went another. Indeed, it didn’t take long for Mr. Mangione to be popularly christened “the hot assassin.” Even before a suspect had been named, much was written about the killer’s elevation to folk hero status. He was cast in the role of what the historian Eric Hobsbawm called the “social bandit” — one man seeming to take a stand against an unfair system. Then, once Mr. Mangione had been accused of shooting and killing Mr. Thompson, what forensic psychologists call the “halo effect” came into play. The official term for the tendency of the public to equate innocence with attractiveness, the halo effect when combined with the social bandit phenomenon creates a combustible pop-

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SUSPECT’S NOTEBOOK Entries described going to a conference and killing an executive. PAGE A18



INTERNATIONAL A4-13

Saudis Get 2034 World Cup

FIFA officials bent their own rules to clinch it, and also approved a six-country bid for the 2030 event. PAGE A9

Endgame in South Korea

Rival parties wrangled over how and when President Yoon Suk Yeol should leave office. PAGE A5

Fever for Gold Drives Both Sides in Sudan’s War

By DECLAN WALSH

JUBA, South Sudan — The luxury jet touched down in Juba, the capital of South Sudan, on a mission to collect hundreds of pounds of illicit gold. On board was a representative of a ruthless paramilitary group accused of ethnic cleansing in Sudan’s sprawling civil war, the flight manifest showed. The gold itself had been smuggled from Darfur, a region of famine and fear in Sudan that is largely under his group’s brutal control. Porters grunted as they heaved cases filled with gold, about \$25 million worth, onto the plane, said three people involved with or briefed on the deal. Airport officials discreetly maintained a pe-

Weapons and Influence
Are Bought as Famine
Stalks the Land

rimeter around the jet, which stood out at the main airport of one of the world’s poorest countries. After 90 minutes, the jet took off again, landing before dawn on March 6 at a private airport in the United Arab Emirates, flight data showed. Its gleaming cargo soon vanished into the global gold market. As Sudan burns and its people starve, a gold rush is underway. War has shattered Sudan’s

economy, collapsed its health system and turned much of the once-proud capital into piles of rubble. Fighting has also set off one of the world’s worst famines in decades, with 26 million people facing acute hunger or starvation. But the gold trade is humming. The production and trade of gold, which lies in rich deposits across the vast nation, has actually surpassed prewar levels — and that’s just the official figure in a country rife with smuggling. Indeed, billions of dollars of gold is flowing out of Sudan in virtually every direction, helping to turn the Sahel region of Africa into one of the world’s largest gold producers at a time when prices are hitting record highs.

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IVOR PRICKETT FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Gold shops showed signs of looting in Omdurman, Sudan, after paramilitary forces were ousted.

An Elite School and the Criminal It Welcomed

By KATHERINE ROSMAN

Less than a month into Winston Nguyen’s teaching career at Saint Ann’s, an elite private school in Brooklyn, his eighth-grade students discovered that he was a felon. While leading an algebra lesson, Mr. Nguyen had shown the class a TikTok video, which led the students, inevitably, to search for him on the internet. What they found was a startling

Teacher Arrest Follows
Fraud Conviction

torrent of headlines from about four years before, when Mr. Nguyen had been charged with siphoning hundreds of thousands of dollars from an older couple he worked for in Manhattan. That evening, in October 2021, Vincent Tompkins, the head of

Saint Ann’s School at the time, emailed class members’ parents, acknowledging the teacher’s criminal conviction and saying they had nothing to worry about. “I can assure you that as with any teacher we hire, we are confident in Winston’s ability and fitness to educate and care for our students,” Mr. Tompkins wrote. His promise proved hollow. Within a year Mr. Nguyen, 38, was posing as a teenage boy on

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Recent Stream
Of Immigrants
Is Largest Ever

Surpassing Peak Years
of Ellis Island Era

By DAVID LEONHARDT

The immigration surge of the past few years has been the largest in U.S. history, surpassing the great immigration boom of the late 1800s and early 1900s, according to a New York Times analysis of government data. Annual net migration — the number of people coming to the country minus the number leaving — averaged 2.4 million people from 2021 to 2023, according to the Congressional Budget Office. Total net migration during the Biden administration is likely to exceed eight million people. That’s a faster pace of arrivals than during any other period on record, including the peak years of Ellis Island traffic, when millions of Europeans came to the United States. Even after taking into account today’s larger U.S. population, the recent surge is the most rapid since at least 1850.

The numbers in the Times analysis include both legal and illegal immigration. About 60 percent of immigrants who have entered the country since 2021 have done so without legal authorization, according to a Goldman Sachs report based on government data.

The combined increases of legal and illegal immigration have caused the share of the U.S. population born in another country to reach a new high, 15.2 percent in 2023, up from 13.6 percent in 2020. The previous high was 14.8 percent, in 1890.

Several factors caused the surge, starting with President Biden’s welcoming immigration policy during his first three years in office. Offended by Donald J. Trump’s harsh policies — including the separation of families at the border — Mr. Biden and other Democrats promised a different approach. “We’re a nation that says, ‘If you want to flee, and you’re fleeing oppression, you should come,’” Mr. Biden said during his 2020 presidential campaign.

After taking office, his administration loosened the rules on asylum and other immigration policies, making it easier for people to enter the United States. Some have received temporary legal status while their cases wend through backlogged immigration courts. Others have remained without legal permission. Outside causes have also

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TRUMP BREATHED
LIFE INTO CHOICE
AT DEFENSE DEPT.

SEEN AS TEST OF POWER

Prospects of Hegseth Are
Salvaged Even Amid
Personal Scandals

By JONATHAN SWAN
and MAGGIE HABERMAN

WASHINGTON — Just last week, Pete Hegseth was twisting in the wind. President-elect Donald J. Trump’s choice to lead the Pentagon was battered by damaging headlines: Drinking. Extramarital affairs. An allegation of sexual assault, which he denied. Republican senators — emboldened after tanking Mr. Trump’s first choice for attorney general, the scandal-ridden Matt Gaetz — were going public with their concerns. Mr. Trump was getting sick of hearing about it all, and he told confidants he was serious about picking Gov. Ron DeSantis of Florida to replace him.

But within 48 hours, Mr. Trump had changed his mind. He was going to see if Mr. Hegseth could survive. People close to the president-elect had been telling him that this was a moment that would test his power as he prepared to return to Washington. It would be catastrophic, they argued, if he allowed Republican senators, like Joni Ernst of Iowa, to obstruct his mandate.

This was about something more than Mr. Hegseth, they said. The sequence that followed — resuscitating Mr. Hegseth in less than a week from dead man walking to a man with a real shot of being confirmed by the Senate — was a test case of power and intimidation in the Trump era. It was a reminder of Mr. Trump’s ability to summon an on-line swarm, even while spending minimal personal capital of his own. It showed that he has at his disposal a powerful movement, which jumped into action once his desires became clear. And it highlighted the role of Elon Musk, who has bottomless wealth to enforce

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F.B.I. Director to Step Down

President-elect Donald J. Trump had already signaled his intention to replace Christopher A. Wray with a longtime loyalist. Page A15.

Real Estate Stars and Brothers
Face Charges of Sex Trafficking

This article is by Benjamin Weiser, Patricia Mazzei and Debra Kamin.

MIAMI — Two star luxury real estate brokers and their brother are accused of using their wealth and status to lure, drug and then sexually assault and rape dozens of women, according to a federal indictment made public on Wednesday. Oren Alexander, his older brother Tal Alexander and Alon Alexander, Oren’s twin, were arrested at homes in and near Miami Beach on Wednesday. The twins also face separate state felony charges of sexual battery connected to three separate assaults, according to arrest warrants released on Wednesday by prosecutors in Miami. Until this summer, Oren, 37, and Tal Alexander, 38, were among the biggest names in real estate in New York and Miami, and their sales and moves were chronicled in the tabloids. They reached the top ranks at Douglas Elliman, one of the largest real estate broker-



NATALIE KEYSSAR FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Tal Alexander, left, and Oren, his brother, real estate agents.

ages in the country, and helped broker the sale of a nearly \$240 million penthouse — at the time, the most expensive residential sale in U.S. history. They then co-founded their own real estate brokerage, Official. Alon Alexander, 37, did not work in real estate, but he socialized with them. According to the federal indictment, the three brothers had conspired in the sex trafficking scheme for at least 14 years. Co-

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NATIONAL A14-22

Climate Activists’ Game Plan

Some young organizers galvanized by Trump’s first presidency are taking a different approach now. PAGE A14

Drone Mystery Deepens

Dozens more flying objects have been reported in New Jersey and New York, and officials are stumped. PAGE A22

BUSINESS B1-5

Inflation Up, but Fed Is Buoyed

The fight against price increases is not over, but the details of a report probably have given central bank officials enough confidence to cut rates. PAGE B1



ARTS C1-8

Struggles of a Soprano

Elza van den Heever, now in a starring role with the Met Opera, no longer sees dyslexia as a hindrance. PAGE C1

Jamie Foxx Opens Up

His show is both an act of gratitude and a fan favorite special. It’s one of four new comedy hours worth watching. PAGE C1

OBITUARIES A23

Cleveland’s Baseball ‘Curse’

Rocky Colavito was a top hitter and a fan favorite, only to be traded away in 1960 in the most infamous deal in the club’s history. He was 91.

SPECIAL SECTION

Trust in an Age of Distrust

The big themes from this year’s Deal-Book Summit were Donald J. Trump, inflation, artificial intelligence, the news media and the Elon Musk effect.

OPINION A24-25

Helen Ouyang PAGE A24



THURSDAY STYLES D1-7

Meaning in a Medal

The television host and author Padma Lakshmi rarely takes off her St. Christopher necklace, a reminder of a significant relationship in her life. PAGE D6



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