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The funeral in September for Rebecca Cheptegei, who was an Olympic runner for her native Uganda but lived in Kenya since age 2.

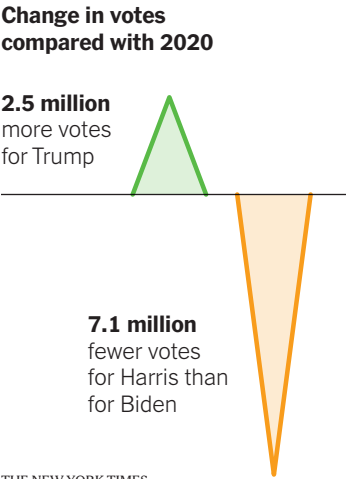
IN MODI’S INDIA,
POWER BY FORCE

Claims of Kidnappings to
Seize Rule in States

By MUJIB MASHAL
MUMBAI, India — The law-makers had finished a routine assembly vote and were scattering into the Mumbai night. Nitin Deshmukh, who represented a district 350 miles away, planned to take an overnight train. But first came an invitation to have dinner in the suburbs with a senior official from their party in the Indian state of Maharashtra. They would share a car ride, and Mr. Deshmukh could catch the train from there. It was all a ruse. As the car approached its destination, it kept speeding along, and eventually joined a caravan of other vehicles. That, Mr. Deshmukh said, is when he realized he was being kidnapped. The car was heading across state lines, where he would be held in a hotel behind locked gates and later restrained and drugged after trying to flee. Mr. Deshmukh had become a pawn in what is known as “resort politics,” a longstanding practice unique to India’s rough-and-tumble democracy. The senior party official in the car with Mr. Deshmukh that night in June 2022 had secretly re-

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The Keys to Victory
Donald J. Trump found new voters, but Kamala Harris’s failure to match Joseph R. Biden Jr. was just as consequential. Page A14.



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Should Germany’s Scholz Exit?
Increasing numbers in his own center-left party say he should, arguing for a more charismatic leader who might better their electoral chances. PAGE A10

U.K.’s Economic Dilemma
Britain may be forced to choose between its most powerful ally and its biggest trading partner. PAGE A9

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Dawn of the Doppelgängers
Lately, celebrity look-alike competitions have been functioning as refreshingly apolitical democratic events. PAGE C1

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A Powerhouse Stalls Out
Germany is facing a second year of zero growth, with industry leaders gloomy and worried about U.S. tariffs. PAGE B1

Rebrand of Schwan’s Closes
The frozen food company, known for its yellow trucks, never really thrived after renaming itself Yelloh. PAGE B1



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Eavesdropping by China
Hackers are said to have listened to calls and read texts by exploiting aging equipment in the networks that connect U.S. telecom systems. PAGE A21

\$5 Billion Boost for Housing
A City Council committee’s proposal to ease curbs on housing growth in New York is likely to pass. PAGE A20

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36 Hours in Atlanta
In the South’s de facto capital, a 22-mile walking and biking path is connecting old parts of town in fresh ways. PAGE C8

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Army Aims for Perfection
Behind a fanatical coach, the Black Knights’ football team is undefeated and marching toward its first berth in the College Football Playoff. But there is no margin for error. PAGE B8

A Sin City Sequel
After hosting its first Grand Prix a year ago, Formula 1 racing returns to the Las Vegas Strip this weekend, managing local impact and gearing up for a heated late-season title fight. PAGE B11

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Michelle Goldberg PAGE A25

SPECIAL SECTION: GIFT GUIDE



POLITICAL MEMO

A Trump Orbit
Full of Intrigue
To Test Musk

Newcomer Will Learn
There’s but One Star

By THEODORE SCHLEIFER
WASHINGTON — For the first 53 years of his life, Elon Musk barely spent any time with Donald J. Trump. Then, beginning on the night of Nov. 5, he spent basically no time without him. And so Mr. Musk, more than any other key player in the presidential transition, finds himself in a cram session to learn the courtier politics of Mr. Trump’s inner circle. For the world’s richest person — not known for his humility or patience — it is a social engineering challenge far trickier and less familiar than heavy manufacturing or rocket science. Doubts abound as to whether he will graduate in 2028 with a four-year degree in Trumpism: It is now a parlor game in Washington and Silicon Valley to speculate just how long the Musk-Trump relationship will last. The answer, as discarded aides from Mr. Trump’s first term will tell you, may depend on Mr. Musk’s ability to placate the boss and keep a relatively low profile — but also to shiv a rival when the time comes. In short, how to play the politics of Trumpworld. Most of the people who now surround Mr. Trump in the transition are battle-tested aides from his past fights, or decades-long personal friends. Mr. Musk is neither. What he brings instead are his 200 million followers on X and the roughly \$200 million he spent to help elect Mr. Trump. Both of those have greatly impressed the president-elect. Mr. Trump, gobsmacked by Mr. Musk’s willingness to lay off 80 percent of the staff at X, has said the tech billionaire will help lead a Department of Government. *Continued on Page A16*

MUSK IN TEXAS The billionaire has transformed the state, surprising local officials. PAGE A12

For Kenya’s Elite Women Runners, a Shared Fear

By JACOB WHITEHEAD
The Athletic
ITEN, Kenya — Rebecca Cheptegei loved chickens. She reared them and collected their eggs each morning. Her family would gently joke she loved them too much. “She was always laughing,” says her mother, Agnes. “You always knew when she was home.” Cheptegei had a chicken coop wherever she lived. This year, she built a house in the Kenyan village of Kinyoro, funded by her recent success — she won the World Mountain Running Championships in 2022 and finished second in last year’s Florence Marathon. On the afternoon of Sept. 1, while Cheptegei was at church, her estranged partner Dickson Ndiema Marangach lowered himself inside the coop, with its solid wooden walls. When she returned

Brutal Killings Reveal
a Pattern of Abuse
Faced by Athletes

home, she went outside to check on her flock. Marangach burst out of the coop and threw gasoline in her eyes. While she stumbled, he used the gasoline can to soak the rest of her body — and set her on fire. Her 17-year-old sister, Dorcas, ran out to help, clawing at Cheptegei’s black jacket, her finest church wear, but fled after being threatened by Marangach’s machete. “I can’t forget it,” Dorcas said. “I keep dreaming of her calling for help.” Watching from inside were Cheptegei’s daughters from a previous marriage, Joy, 12, and Charity, 9. As Cheptegei collapsed onto the grass, Marangach walked over and emptied the rest of the gasoline on her. He seriously burned himself in the process. By the time help came, the only parts of Cheptegei that had not been covered with second- or third-degree burns were her forearms and shins. “Mama, why was there no one there to save me?” she wept to her pastor, Caroline Atieno, in the hospital that evening. For the first 24 hours, Cheptegei was able to speak and describe the attack. She worsened over the coming days. One by one, her organs shut down. While she could still speak, Cheptegei repeated two things in Swahili. “Why couldn’t Dickson have seen one good thing in me, so he wouldn’t have done this?” *Continued on Page A10*

Holiday Heist
That’s Befitting
Of Mouse King

By KATE CHRISTOBEK
The 40th annual performance of “The Nutcracker” in Canton, Mich., was weeks away, and June Smith was anxiously awaiting one of her last Sunday rehearsals with dozens of her student dancers. But before Ms. Smith, the artistic director of the Plymouth-Canton Ballet Company, even walked into the rehearsal space on Nov. 17, she noticed that something was off: The trailer holding many of the ballet’s props was missing. The police said that a white pickup truck had hauled away the 24-foot trailer earlier that day, at about 3:30 a.m., hours before Ms. Smith arrived. Key set pieces from the ballet worth thousands of dollars, including the expandable Christmas tree, the grandfather clocks and the throne, as well as a few props the company had used since its very first production, had vanished in moments. Now the ballet company is racing against time to replace what was stolen as it prepares for its two shows on Dec. 7 and 8. But what started as a devastating setback has instead turned a spotlight on a community’s Christmas. *Continued on Page A20*

NEWS ANALYSIS

As Ukraine Fires U.S. Missiles, Putin Sends West a Message

By ANTON TROIANOVSKI
In many ways, President Vladimir V. Putin seems to be winning. Russian forces are pushing ahead in Ukraine. President-elect Donald J. Trump is returning to the White House. War fatigue is spreading across Europe. North Korean troops have boosted the ranks of his army. And yet on Thursday, Mr. Putin appeared weary, threatened and newly aggrieved as he took his bellicose threats against his Western adversaries to a new level. Even with the prospect of a friendlier American administration around the corner, he has found himself struggling anew to confront perhaps the biggest failure of his war: Russia’s inability to deter the West from providing colossal amounts of military aid to Ukraine. As a result, Mr. Putin is bringing Russia closer to a direct conflict with the United States than at any point in decades. He announced Thursday evening that Russia had struck Ukraine with a new intermediate-range missile, one with nuclear capabilities, using a televised speech to cast the West as an aggressor that left Moscow with no choice but to respond. On Friday, Mr. Putin told a meeting of military leaders that Russia would continue using and begin regular production of the new missile. Two months from now, Mr. Trump’s second presidency could give Mr. Putin the chance to strike a peace deal with Ukraine that he could portray as a victory. But until then, people who study the Kremlin say, Mr. Putin is intent on driving home the chilling message that America risks nuclear war as it expands its support for Kyiv. “The Russian side has clearly demonstrated its capabilities,” Dmitri S. Peskov, the Kremlin’s spokesman, said on Friday. “The contours of further retaliatory actions, if our concerns are not taken into account, have also been quite clearly outlined.” Capturing the mood, one of *Continued on Page A8*



TYLER HICKS/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Ukrainian soldiers shooting at Russian troops near the Pokrovsk area in eastern Ukraine last week.