



In a drone view, the site of a crash in Kazakhstan. Experts raised the possibility on Thursday that a Russian missile had hit the plane.

RUSSIA SUSPECTED
IN LETHAL CRASH

Air Defense May Be Tied
to Downing of Jet

By IVAN NECHEPURENKO

As authorities in several countries tried to determine what caused the deadly crash of a passenger airplane in Kazakhstan, investigators and experts were focusing Thursday on the possibility that a Russian air defense system had struck the plane.

Aviation experts cast doubt on a Russian agency's contention that the Azerbaijan Airlines jet had hit a flock of birds, saying images of the crash site show holes in the plane that appeared unlikely to have been caused by birds.

The jet had been flying on Wednesday morning from Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, to Grozny, in Russia's Chechnya republic, at a time when drone



Images posted on social media show the tail section of the crashed jet full of small holes.

strikes were taking place around Grozny and Russian air defense systems were responding, according to residents and local news media reports.

Two Azerbaijanis briefed on a government inquiry said Azerbaijani officials now believe that a Russian Pantsir-S defense system damaged the plane. They spoke on the condition of anonymity because the investigation was continuing. Caliber, a news outlet in Azerbaijan that is close to the government, also reported that the country's investigators believe a Russian Pantsir system was responsible.

U.S. intelligence agencies did not yet have definitive information.

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Trump's Picks Want Pharmaceutical Ads Off TV

By REBECCA ROBBINS

Since the late 1990s, drug companies have spent tens of billions of dollars on television ads, drumming up demand for their products with cheerful jingles and scenes of dancing patients.

Now, some people up for top jobs in the incoming Trump administration are attacking such ads, setting up a clash with a powerful industry that has long had the courts on its side.

Robert F. Kennedy Jr., President-elect Donald J. Trump's choice for health secretary, is a longtime critic of pharmaceutical advertising on TV, arguing that it leads broadcasters to more favorable coverage of the industry and does not improve Americans' health. He has repeatedly and enthusiastically called for a ban on such ads.

An Uphill Battle That
Has Failed Before,
Repeatedly

Elon Musk, who is spearheading a government cost-cutting effort, last month wrote on X, his social-media site, "No advertising for pharma."

And Brendan Carr, Mr. Trump's pick to lead the Federal Communications Commission, said that his agency could enforce any ban that is enacted. "I think we're way, way too overmedicated as a country," he said.

The push against TV drug ads threatens to dent the revenues of pharmaceutical companies, which can make back in sales five times as much as they spend on commercials, according to some

analysts. It could also create uncertainty for major television networks, which bring in substantial revenue from pharmaceutical advertisers trying to reach older viewers, who tend to take more medications.

Though it's not clear how such a ban might happen — Mr. Kennedy has called for an executive order — any attempt would face an uphill battle. Efforts to modestly restrict drug ads have repeatedly been defeated in the courts, often on First Amendment grounds. The first Trump administration tried to require that commercials mention the drug's price, but a judge blocked the move, saying that it lacked authority from Congress.

"No one's putting the genie back in the bottle at this point," said Dr. David Kessler, who was commissioner of the Food and

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Rising Ocean Swells Are Smashing California's Signature Piers

By AMY QIN and KATE SELIG

The towering waves that have hammered California's coast this week have been unusually destructive, killing at least one person and prompting warnings by officials to the public to stay away from the state's beaches.

The tumultuous surf also ripped apart a historic wharf in Santa Cruz, prompting new questions about the future of the state's beloved piers, as the sea grows ever more fierce amid climate change.

Every year, state and local officials — often with community support — pour millions of dollars into preserving the spindly wooden structures that have been a defining feature of California's coastline dating back to the Gold Rush.

In San Luis Obispo County, part of the Cayucos Pier has been roped off since it was damaged in a ferocious storm earlier this year. The partial closure came less than a decade after the pier underwent a \$3.5 million renovation that was supposed to sustain the structure for several decades.

In San Diego, the Ocean Beach pier, a nearly 2,000-foot concrete structure built in 1966, has been closed indefinitely, as city officials explore replacing it after having spent more than \$1.7 million on repairs following storms over the past five years.

And in Santa Cruz County, three wooden piers have been damaged or destroyed in storms and hazardous ocean swells since last



A building riding the ocean surf after a wharf partially collapsed Monday in Santa Cruz, Calif.

year. Earlier damage to the Santa Cruz Wharf, which was built in 1914 and is now the longest pier on the West Coast, led city officials to begin a \$4 million restoration project this year.

A team of workers was inspecting the section of the wharf that was under renovation and closed to the public on Monday when

powerful waves began to thrash the state's coastline. Three of the workers — two engineers and a project manager — were launched into the water. They were rescued and reported no injuries, according to officials. The entire wharf will remain closed until further notice and next steps are uncertain, city officials said on Tuesday.

Israel Loosened Limits
On Strikes, Multiplying
Risks to Gaza Civilians

Flawed Methods for Assessing Targets

This article is by Patrick Kingsley, Natan Odenheimer, Bilal Shbair, Ronen Bergman, John Ismay, Sheera Frenkel and Adam Sella.

JERUSALEM — At exactly 1 p.m. on Oct. 7, 2023, Israel's military leadership issued an order that unleashed one of the most intense bombing campaigns in contemporary warfare.

Effective immediately, the order granted mid-ranking Israeli officers the authority to strike thousands of militants and military sites that had never been a priority in previous wars in Gaza. Officers could now pursue not only the senior Hamas commanders, arms depots and rocket launchers that were the focus of earlier campaigns, but also the lowest-ranking fighters.

In each strike, the order said, officers had the authority to risk killing up to 20 civilians.

The order, which has not previously been reported, had no precedent in Israeli military history. Mid-ranking officers had never been given so much leeway to attack so many targets, many of which had lower military significance, at such a high potential civilian cost.

It meant, for example, that the military could target rank-and-file militants as they were at home surrounded by relatives and neighbors, instead of only when they were alone outside.

In previous conflicts with Hamas, many Israeli strikes were approved only after officers concluded that no civilians would be hurt. Sometimes, officers could risk killing up to five civilians and only rarely did the limit rise to 10 or above, though the actual death toll was sometimes much higher.

On Oct. 7, the military leadership changed its rules of engagement because it believed that Is-

rael faced an existential threat, according to a senior military officer who answered questions about the order on the condition of anonymity.

Hours earlier, Hamas-led terrorists had stormed into southern Israel, seizing towns and army bases, committing atrocities, firing thousands of rockets at civilian areas, killing up to 1,200 people and taking roughly 250 hostages. As Israelis battled Hamas fighters inside their borders, the officer said, Israel's leaders also feared an invasion from the group's allies in Lebanon and believed that they



Israeli officers could use heavy bombs to hit low-level targets.

had to take drastic military action.

"All of the places where Hamas was deployed, in this city of evil, all of the places where Hamas has been hiding and operating from — we will turn them into rubble," Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel said in a speech on Oct. 7.

An investigation by The New York Times found that Israel severely weakened its system of safeguards meant to protect civilians; adopted flawed methods to find targets and assess the risk of civilian casualties; routinely failed to conduct post-strike reviews of civilian harm or punish officers for wrongdoing; and ignored warnings from within its

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New York Law
Makes Polluters
Pay on Climate

By HILARY HOWARD

Gov. Kathy Hochul of New York on Thursday signed a law that requires companies that are big fossil fuel polluters to help pay to repair damage caused by extreme weather, which is becoming more common because of greenhouse gas emissions.

The legislation, called the Climate Change Superfund Act, mandates that the companies responsible for the bulk of carbon emissions build up between 2000 and 2024 pay about \$3 billion each year for 25 years.

"With nearly every record rainfall, heat wave, and coastal storm, New Yorkers are increasingly burdened with billions of dollars in health, safety, and environmental consequences due to polluters that have historically harmed our environment," Governor Hochul said.

The law was modeled on the original Superfund law, which was established in 1980 and requires companies to pay for the cleanup of toxic waste wrought by incidents like oil and chemical spills.

New York's new law focuses on pollution produced by the combustion of fossil fuels, which results in the warming of the atmosphere, causing extreme weather, like floods and storms, to be more

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INTERNATIONAL A4-10

The Radish Is Their Canvas

In Mexico, a city dazzles with a celebration of its rich culture and history through vegetable carving.

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Released Prisoner Seeks Swaps

A vehement Putin critic didn't want to be part of a prisoner exchange. Now he's lobbying for more trades.

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NATIONAL A11-14

Being Blunt About Crime

Efforts by New Mexico's governor to confront a rise in crime have caused a rift with fellow Democrats.

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Freedom Caucus in Control

Some lawmakers in Wyoming worry that the newly ascendant conservatives want to "burn it all down."

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OBITUARIES A15

Indian Prime Minister

Manmohan Singh, the country's first Sikh premier, introduced free-market reforms that turned India into an economic powerhouse. He was 92.



WEEKEND ARTS C1-10

Beyoncé's Halftime Showcase

The Christmas Day production had a supporting cast that seemed on the level of a cinematic blockbuster.

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Exhibition of Celestial Forces

A show on Buddhist art at the Met has works that served as cosmic charts, meditation aids and more.

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SPORTS B5-7

A Fresh Start in Utah

The N.H.L. franchise that relocated from the Phoenix area to Salt Lake City is still without an official name, but the fans are engaged and the players are feeling right at home.

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Let's Get Physical

Most of the players in the Professional Women's Hockey League grew up competing in youth leagues where bodychecking was prohibited, so a new rule is forcing them to adapt.

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OPINION A16-17

Elizabeth Spiers

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BUSINESS B1-4

Milking Macau for More

The former Portuguese colony has become the world's most lucrative gambling mecca, but Beijing has a broader vision for the territory.

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