



Debris from Hurricane Helene along Florida’s Pass-A-Grille Beach on Tuesday as another storm, Milton, barrels for the Gulf Coast. ZACK WITTMAN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

## Can Israel Dent Nuclear Assets Buried in Iran?

This article is by David E. Sanger, Eric Schmitt and Ronen Bergman.

WASHINGTON — Two years ago, dozens of Israeli fighter jets roared over the Mediterranean Sea, simulating a strike on Iran’s nuclear facilities, a drill the Israeli defense forces openly advertised as an exercise in “long-range flight, aerial refueling and striking distant targets.”

The point of the exercise was not simply to intimidate the Iranians. It was also designed to send a message to the Biden administration: The Israeli air force was training to conduct the operation alone, even though chances of success would be far higher if the United States — with its arsenal of 30,000-pound “bunker busters” — joined in the attack.

In interviews, former and current senior Israeli officials acknowledged doubts about whether the country has the capability to do significant damage to Iran’s nuclear facilities. Nonetheless, for the past few days, Pentagon officials have been wondering quietly whether the Israelis are preparing to go it alone, after concluding that they may never again have a moment like this one.

President Biden has warned them against striking nuclear or energy sites, saying any response should be “proportionate” to the Iranian attack on Israel last week, essentially acknowledging that some counterstrike is appropriate. Defense Secretary Lloyd J. Austin III has been clear with his Israeli counterpart, Yoav Gallant, that the United States wanted Israel to avoid retaliatory steps that would result in new escalation by the Iranians.

It is likely that Israel’s first re-

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## Battered by Helene and Now Bracing for Milton

This article is by Patricia Mazzei, Audra D. S. Burch, Jacey Fortin and Michael Levenson.

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — Hundreds of thousands of people fled Florida’s Gulf Coast on Tuesday, packing up belongings and draining gas stations as they moved out of the path of Hurricane Milton, in what could be one of the largest evacuations in state history.

The monster storm was forecast on Wednesday to slam into the Tampa Bay region, a metropolitan area of about three million people that hasn’t taken a direct hit from a hurricane in more than a century. The storm was then expected to wallop the Orlando area

### Millions Told to Flee as a Hurricane Churns Toward Florida

as it cut across the Florida Peninsula.

Milton was bearing down on Florida as some communities in the state were still littered with mountains of debris from Helene, which hit less than two weeks ago and also caused deadly floods in southern Appalachia.

About 5.5 million Floridians live in areas that were under mandatory or voluntary evacuation orders in at least 11 counties along

the state’s Gulf Coast, according to the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Many of them live in coastal and low-lying areas of Tampa, St. Petersburg and Clearwater, one of the fastest-growing metropolitan areas in the country, with about 3.5 million residents. Others are farther south, on barrier islands and in coastal towns that were hit by Hurricane Ian in 2022.

State officials said they were expecting the largest evacuation since Hurricane Irma in 2017 prompted the biggest hurricane evacuation in Florida history.

Milton, a Category 5 hurricane as of Tuesday afternoon, was heading toward Florida with sus-

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China’s Intrusive Fertility Campaign The government is knocking on doors and asking pushy questions to help lift its birth rate. Page A8. ANDREA VERDELLI FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

## He Got Millions in Gifts, and U.N. Got a Song About the Ocean

By DAVID A. FAHRENTHOLD and FARNAZ FASSIHI

WASHINGTON — A high-ranking United Nations official secretly took \$3 million in gifts from a British businessman while he steered more than \$58 million of the organization’s money to the man’s companies, according to a ruling from an internal U.N. court.

The decision provided a potential answer to a question that has

baffled the organization since news broke in 2022 of Vitaly Vanshelboim’s disastrous investments: Why did a 20-year veteran of the United Nations defy auditors and common sense by entrusting his agency’s entire investment portfolio to a man he purportedly met at a party?

The court found last week that Mr. Vanshelboim, a Ukrainian, had committed fraud and “blatant misconduct” by failing to disclose

### ‘Blatant Misconduct’ by Official, Court Rules

the gifts from the businessman, David Kendrick. It said Mr. Vanshelboim had received interest-free loans, home repairs, a new Mercedes and a \$1.2 million sponsorship for his teenage son, who was a tennis player.

“This is insane, how is this possible,” the son wrote back to his father at the time, according to an email cited in the court ruling. “I’m not even a good tennis player yet.”

“Part of my job is to make insane things happen,” Mr. Vanshelboim replied, the court said.

The United Nations now says that all \$58 million that Mr. Vanshelboim’s agency entrusted to

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## Anti-Trans Ads Become Focus For the G.O.P.

### Painting Democrats as Being Out of Touch

By SHANE GOLDMACHER

With just four weeks until the election, Donald J. Trump and Republican candidates nationwide are putting transgender issues at the center of their campaigns, tapping into fears about transgender women and girls in sports and about taxpayer-funded gender transitions in prisons.

Since the beginning of August, Republicans have poured more than \$65 million into television ads in more than a dozen states on these topics in some of the country’s most competitive races, according to a New York Times analysis of advertising data compiled by AdImpact.

The flood of ads in races for the House, Senate and White House inflame cultural divisions and cast Democrats as outside the mainstream. They are a sign that Republican strategists believe they have found a potent third leg for their messaging stool in 2024, along with the mainstays of inflation and immigration.

Republicans are returning to a message that was tried, mostly unsuccessfully, in the 2022 midterms, as they attempt to motivate their base and curb their losses with female voters repelled by the party’s stance on abortion.

Mr. Trump’s most aired ad about Vice President Kamala Harris in recent weeks ends with the tagline: “Kamala is for they/them. President Trump is for you.”

In Ohio since the start of September, every ad about Senator Sherrod Brown from the leading Senate Republican super PAC has touched on transgender topics, such as accusing him of “allowing transgender biological males in girls’ sports.” Mr. Brown is one of the nation’s most vulnerable Democratic incumbents.

In Montana, five ads have deployed similar lines about transgender women in sports and bathrooms as Republicans press the case that Senator Jon Tester, another endangered Democrat up for re-election, is too liberal for the heavily Republican state.

“It’s one of the issues where Democrats are furthest from the center of the country,” said Brad Todd, a Republican ad maker who has produced commercials on transgender issues in multiple races this year. “They are doing something that is totally illogical to appease a tiny slice that is very radical in their base.”

Republicans acknowledged that there are relatively few instances in which transgender athletes compete in youth sports. But they said highlighting the unwilling-

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## NEW POLL GIVES HARRIS AN EDGE AGAINST TRUMP

### FIRST LEAD SINCE JULY

### Voters Are More Likely to See Her as a Break in the Status Quo

This article is by Adam Nagourney, Ruth Igielnik and Camille Baker.

Voters are now more likely to credit Vice President Kamala Harris than Donald J. Trump with representing change and caring about people like them, as Ms. Harris takes a slim lead nationally in the race for the White House, according to the latest New York Times/Siena College poll.

The finding is the first time Ms. Harris has led Mr. Trump in the Times/Siena poll since July, when President Biden dropped out of the race and Democrats rallied behind Ms. Harris as his replacement. It comes as the contest moves into its final month, and surveys from the battleground states find the race to be one of the closest in modern history.

While the Times/Siena poll shows some solid advantages for Mr. Trump, the results suggest Ms. Harris is making gains, if small ones, on questions about temperament, trust and change that can be critical in a presidential race.

The poll, conducted from Sept. 29 to Oct. 6 among 3,385 likely voters, found that Ms. Harris led Mr. Trump, the Republican, by 49 percent to 46 percent, a slight lead that is within the poll’s margin of error.

Mr. Trump and Ms. Harris were even, at 47 percent each, in a mid-September Times/Siena poll, after the two candidates met in their first — and probably only — presidential debate.

Ms. Harris has since shored up her support among older voters and has begun making inroads among Republicans: 9 percent said they planned to support her, up slightly from 5 percent last month. She also appears to have closed the gap on the question of change, a critical factor in an election where voters have repeatedly told pollsters they believe the nation is heading in the wrong direction.

Mr. Trump, 78, who was voted out of the White House in 2020, has presented himself as an agent of change, and has regularly tried to saddle Ms. Harris with unpopular parts of Mr. Biden’s record. But the Times/Siena poll found voters said Ms. Harris was the candidate representing change in this election, 46 percent to 44 percent. The

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## Study of Life Spans Suggests Humans May Be at Their Peak

By DANA G. SMITH

The oldest human on record, Jeanne Calment of France, lived to the age of 122. What are the odds that the rest of us get there, too?

Not high, barring a transformative medical breakthrough, according to research published Monday in the journal Nature Aging.

The study looked at data on life expectancy at birth collected between 1990 and 2019 from some of the places where people typically live the longest: Australia, France, Italy, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. Data from the United States was also included, though the country’s life expectancy is lower.

The researchers found that while average life expectancies in-

creased during that time in all of the locations, the rates at which they rose slowed. The one exception was Hong Kong, where life expectancy did not decelerate.

The data suggests that after decades of life expectancy marching upward thanks to medical and technological advancements, humans could be closing in on the limits of what’s possible for average life span.

“We’re basically suggesting that as long as we live now is about as long as we’re going to live,” said S. Jay Olshansky, a professor of epidemiology and biostatistics at the University of Illinois Chicago, who led the study. He predicted maximum life expectancy will end up around 87 years — approximately 84 for

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Luis Tiant, who baffled with twisty windups, had a poignant tale bound to Cuban politics. He was 83. PAGE A22

**Gospel Star of Singing Dynasty**  
Cissy Houston won Grammys, sang backup and guided her daughter Whitney to fame. She was 91. PAGE A19

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