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Voters in Derry, above, and the rest of New Hampshire will head to the polls on Tuesday for the year’s first presidential primary.

E.U. and Israel
Can’t Close Rift
On Gaza’s Fate

This article is by *Matina Stevis-Gridneff, Hiba Yazbek, Adam Rasgon, Monika Pronczuk and Michael Levenson.*

European foreign ministers pressed their Israeli counterpart on Monday to agree to the creation of a Palestinian state, in a meeting that left European diplomats bewildered about postwar Israeli plans for the Gaza Strip and reinforced the deep disconnect between Israel and much of the world.

The two sides appeared to be having two different conversations. Josep Borrell Fontelles, the European Union’s top diplomat, said after the meeting in Brussels



FATIMA SHBAIR/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Palestinians fleeing from Khan Younis, Gaza, on Monday.

that European nations were resolute that “sustainable, lasting peace” must include Palestinian statehood, an option that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel has doubled down on opposing in recent days.

Israel’s foreign minister, Yisrael Katz, presented to the Europeans a plan involving an artificial island off Gaza’s coast — a plan that did not address the future governance of the territory, according to officials in the meeting.

While the diplomats talked past each other, heavy fighting intensified in southern Gaza on Monday, with medical personnel reporting major exchanges of gunfire and a surge of Israeli tanks and troops into areas around hospitals.

The Palestinian Red Crescent Society and the Gazan Health Ministry said many people had been killed or wounded on Monday in Khan Younis, southern Gaza’s largest city, without providing

Continued on Page A8

Biden Can’t Bank on Good Economic Sentiment

By JEANNA SMIALEK

WASHINGTON — Low approval ratings and rock-bottom consumer confidence figures have dogged President Biden for months now, a worrying sign for the White House as the country enters a presidential election year. But recent data suggests the tide is beginning to turn.

Americans are feeling more confident about the economy than they have in years, by some measures. They increasingly expect inflation to continue its descent, preliminary data indicates, and they think interest rates will soon moderate.

Returning optimism, if it persists, could bolster Mr. Biden’s chances as he pushes for re-election — and spell trouble for former

Increase in Confidence
Is Not a Guarantee
of More Votes

President Donald J. Trump, who is the front-runner for the Republican nomination and has been blasting the Democratic incumbent’s economic record.

But political scientists, consumer sentiment experts and economists alike said it was too early for Democrats to take a victory lap around the latest economic data and confidence figures. Plenty of economic risks remain that could derail the apparent progress. In fact, models that try to predict election outcomes

based on economic data currently point to a tossup come November.

“We’re still very early in the election cycle, from the perspective of economic factors,” said Joanne Hsu, who heads one of the most frequently cited sentiment indexes as director of consumer surveys at the University of Michigan. “A lot can happen.”

The University of Michigan’s preliminary survey for January showed an unexpected surge in consumer sentiment: The index climbed to its highest level since July 2021, before inflation surged. While the confidence measure

Continued on Page A17

ABORTION The president backed new provisions to protect access to reproductive care. PAGE A17

Wartime Russia
Dims the Lights
On Party People

By PAUL SONNE

The Russian pop star winced as the black kitten he was cuddling in Russian-occupied Ukraine licked the crook of his neck for about the 15th time.

Several weeks earlier, the musician, Dima Bilan, had been in Moscow, mingling in a see-through shirt with celebrities at an “almost naked” theme party that caused an uproar in Russia and threatened to end his career.

Now Mr. Bilan, who once won the Eurovision song contest, was on an image rehabilitation tour in a winter war zone — the newly prescribed path for celebrities who find themselves out in the cold in wartime Russia and wish to return to the Kremlin’s embrace.

He petted dogs and stroked kittens at animal shelters outside Donetsk. He handed out plush toys to convalescing children at a medical trauma center. He delivered new air-conditioning units to a facility in need.

“Simply from a human perspective, I am worried,” he said in one video from the trip.

Public backlash has persisted since a leading Russian television personality hosted entertainment stars, including Mr. Bilan, at a he-

Continued on Page A10



AUGUSTIN LIGNIER

Saying Cheese

Thanks to a scientifically inclined photographer in Paris, the world now has what is essentially a photo booth for rats. PAGE D8.

In New Hampshire Sprint,
Haley Tries to Stay in Race

Machine Supporting
Ex-President Has
One Target Left

This article is by *Lisa Lerer, Jazmine Ulloa and Michael C. Bender.*

With only about 48 hours left to campaign in the New Hampshire primary, Nikki Haley finally got the two-person race she wanted.

It might not live up to her expectations.

For months, it has been an article of faith among Ms. Haley’s supporters and a coalition of anti-Trump Republicans that the only way to defeat Donald J. Trump was to winnow the field to a one-on-one contest and consolidate support among his opponents.

That wishcasting became reality on Sunday afternoon, when Gov. Ron DeSantis of Florida ended his White House bid.

And yet, as the race reached the final day, there was little sign that Mr. DeSantis’s departure would transform Ms. Haley’s chances of winning.

Ms. Haley quickly learned that the role of last woman standing against Mr. Trump meant serving as the last target for a party racing to line up behind the former president.

Two former rivals in the race — Senator Tim Scott of South Carolina, and Mr. DeSantis — both endorsed the former president. The head of the party’s Senate campaign arm proclaimed Mr. Trump to be the “presumptive nominee.” And Mr. Trump’s campaign strategists vowed that she would be “absolutely embarrassed and demolished” in her home state of South Carolina, the next big prize on the calendar.

Campaigning across New Hampshire on Sunday, Ms. Haley and her supporters celebrated the DeSantis campaign’s demise.

“Can you hear that sound?” she asked more than 1,000 gathered in a high school gymnasium in Exeter, N.H., her best-attended event in the state. “That’s the sound of a two-person race.”

Thirty-five miles north, in Rochester, N.H., Mr. Trump told his crowd to expect a victory so decisive it would effectively end the primary. “That should wrap it up,” he said.

Ms. Haley’s supporters in the state said they were feeling that pressure. Some worried aloud that she had pulled punches with Mr. Trump for so long that her aggressiveness in the primary’s final weekend would be inadequate to persuade flinty New Hampshire voters that she had enough fight in her to win against the brawling former president.

One Republican activist backing Ms. Haley said he kept his lawn sign in his garage because Mr. Trump’s victory felt inevitable

Continued on Page A16

Holding On to Hope
as Trump’s Final
G.O.P. Rival

By REID J. EPSTEIN
and JAZMINE ULLOA

MANCHESTER, N.H. — Nikki Haley raced across New Hampshire on Monday to hustle for voters in what may amount to her last, best chance to prevent or at least delay a 2024 rematch between President Biden and former President Donald J. Trump.

In the final day of campaigning before Tuesday’s first-in-the-nation primary election, Ms. Haley and Mr. Trump embodied the increasingly lopsided nature of a race in which the former president has methodically drained the political life out of his rivals. His latest victim was Gov. Ron DeSantis of Florida, who on Sunday ended his campaign with a desultory video in which he endorsed Mr. Trump.

While Ms. Haley dashed to half a dozen events in New Hampshire, Mr. Trump began the day in New York for an optional court appearance in his civil defamation trial that ended up being postponed. He had no public appearances planned until the evening, when he was to hold a rally in Laconia, N.H., with three van-



RUTH FREMSON/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Nikki Haley’s stops included Concord, N.H., on Monday.

quished opponents turned supporters: Senator Tim Scott of South Carolina, Vivek Ramaswamy and Gov. Doug Burgum of North Dakota.

Ms. Haley — whose starriest endorsement by a onetime Republican presidential competitor came over the weekend from former Gov. Asa Hutchinson of Arkansas — insisted there was still hope for her cause.

“America doesn’t do coronations,” she said at her first event of the day in Franklin, N.H. “We believe in choices. We believe in democracy, and we believe in freedom. I have said I love the live-free-or-die state, but you know what? I want to make it a live-free-or-die country.”

Yet polls show Mr. Trump inching closer to the crown. He led Ms. Haley by 57 percent to 38 percent

Continued on Page A16

Elections and Disinformation
Collide in Year Ripe for Chaos

This article is by *Tiffany Hsu, Stuart A. Thompson and Steven Lee Myers.*

Billions of people will vote in major elections this year — around half of the global population, by some estimates — in one of the largest and most consequential democratic exercises in living memory. The results will affect how the world is run for decades to come.

At the same time, false narratives and conspiracy theories have evolved into an increasingly global menace.

Baseless claims of election fraud have battered trust in democracy. Foreign influence campaigns regularly target polarizing

domestic challenges. Artificial intelligence has supercharged disinformation efforts and distorted perceptions of reality. All while major social media companies have scaled back their safeguards and downsized election teams.

“Almost every democracy is under stress, independent of technology,” said Darrell M. West, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution think tank. “When you add disinformation on top of that, it just creates many opportunities for mischief.” It is, he said, a “perfect storm of disinformation.”

More than 80 countries in nearly every part of the world have major votes scheduled in 2024; some, like Taiwan, have al-

Continued on Page A6

NATIONAL A13-19

Prosecutor’s Case Unsealed

A judge unsealed the divorce papers of a lawyer in the case against former President Donald J. Trump. PAGE A18

Striking Faculty in California

Thousands of academic staff members in the state university system are seeking higher compensation. PAGE A19



INTERNATIONAL A4-12

Diversifying the Global Diet

The U.S. global food security envoy is pushing to bring back traditional African crops that American policies helped to sideline. PAGE A4

Bolstering Moscow’s Army

Russia is starting to deploy North Korean arms in Ukraine, worsening Kyiv’s troubles as artillery runs low. PAGE A12

OBITUARIES B10-11

Makeup Artist for Monroe

Marie Irvine, 99, who helped Marilyn Monroe prepare for major moments, was a recent TikTok sensation. PAGE B10

BUSINESS B1-4

Power of ‘Magnificent Seven’

With a recent boom, a handful of dominant tech companies have had an outsize impact on the performance of the S&P 500. PAGE B1

Los Angeles Times Tension

The biggest news organization on the West Coast is facing the potential layoffs of roughly 100 employees. PAGE B1

SCIENCE TIMES D1-8

A.I.’s Geometrical Whiz

A researcher has devised a system that solves Mathematical Olympiad problems at a near gold medal level. PAGE D1

ARTS C1-8

Building ‘Hazbin Hotel’

Vivienne Medrano’s idea went from sketches drawn in school to YouTube to a full-fledged series on Amazon. PAGE C2

No Path Forward

The prospect of costly repairs may spell the end for a celebrated environmental art installation in Iowa. PAGE C1



SPORTS B6-9

The Modern Closer Archetype

How a broken arm, and an unbroken spirit, took Billy Wagner “from nothing” to the Hall of Fame’s doorstep. PAGE B6

Lessons Abound in the Playoffs

The Bills can learn from Kansas City, while everyone could learn from the historically dominant Ravens. PAGE B9

OPINION A20-21

Paul Krugman

PAGE A21



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