

Hiding Inside
As Bloodshed
Flares in Syria

Coastal Residents Tell
of Neighbors Killed

By CHRISTINA GOLDBAUM and REHAM MOURSHED

TARTUS, Syria — The gunfire began at dawn on Friday in the town of al-Haffa on Syria's Mediterranean coast.

At first, Wala, a 29-year-old resident of the town, leaped off her bed to the corner of the room in her first-floor apartment, flattening herself as the rat-a-tat of gunshots sounded outside her bedroom window.

When the commotion grew louder, she said, she crept to the window and peeled back the curtain. Outside, dozens of people were fleeing down the road, many in their pajamas, as four men in forest green uniforms chased them. Then, the uniformed men opened fire. Within seconds, four of the fleeing people crumpled to the ground.

"I couldn't believe what I was seeing. I was terrified, terrified," said Wala, who asked to be identified by only her first name for fear of retribution.

The attack in her town was part of unrest that has shaken Syria's coast since Thursday night and has killed more than 1,000 people, the war monitoring group Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said Sunday. It was the bloodiest outbreak of violence since rebels ousted the longtime dictator, Bashar al-Assad, in early December, then sought to assert their rule over a country fractured by nearly 14 years of civil war.

The violence broke out on Thursday when armed men loyal to Mr. al-Assad ambushed government security forces in Latakia Province, where al-Haffa is. The ambush set off clashes between Assad loyalists and government forces.

Fresh fighting was reported on Sunday in the countryside of Latakia and Tartus Provinces. A spokesman for the Defense Ministry, Col. Hassan Abdul Ghani,

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NEWS ANALYSIS

Contradictions
Provide Trump
Political Cover

By ERICA L. GREEN

WASHINGTON — What does President Trump really believe? Does he want to run for a third term, or is that just a joke? Does he intend to seize control of Gaza and expel millions of Palestinians, or is that just a suggestion? Is Black History Month a waste of time and money, or worth a lavish celebration at the White House?

Anyone looking for definitive answers will have a hard time finding them.

Since storming back into office, Mr. Trump has used a dizzying rhetorical tactic of shifting positions like quicksand, muddying his messages and contradicting himself, sometimes in the same day. The inconsistencies have presented the American public with dueling narratives at every turn, allowing people to pick and choose what they want to believe about the president's intentions.

Mr. Trump has long dealt in distortions and lies, including in his first term. But as he executes a much more aggressive agenda at home and abroad, his contradictions have become more brazen and more pronounced.

"He says so much, you can't

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NATIONAL A9-15

MAGA Clash: Bannon vs. Musk

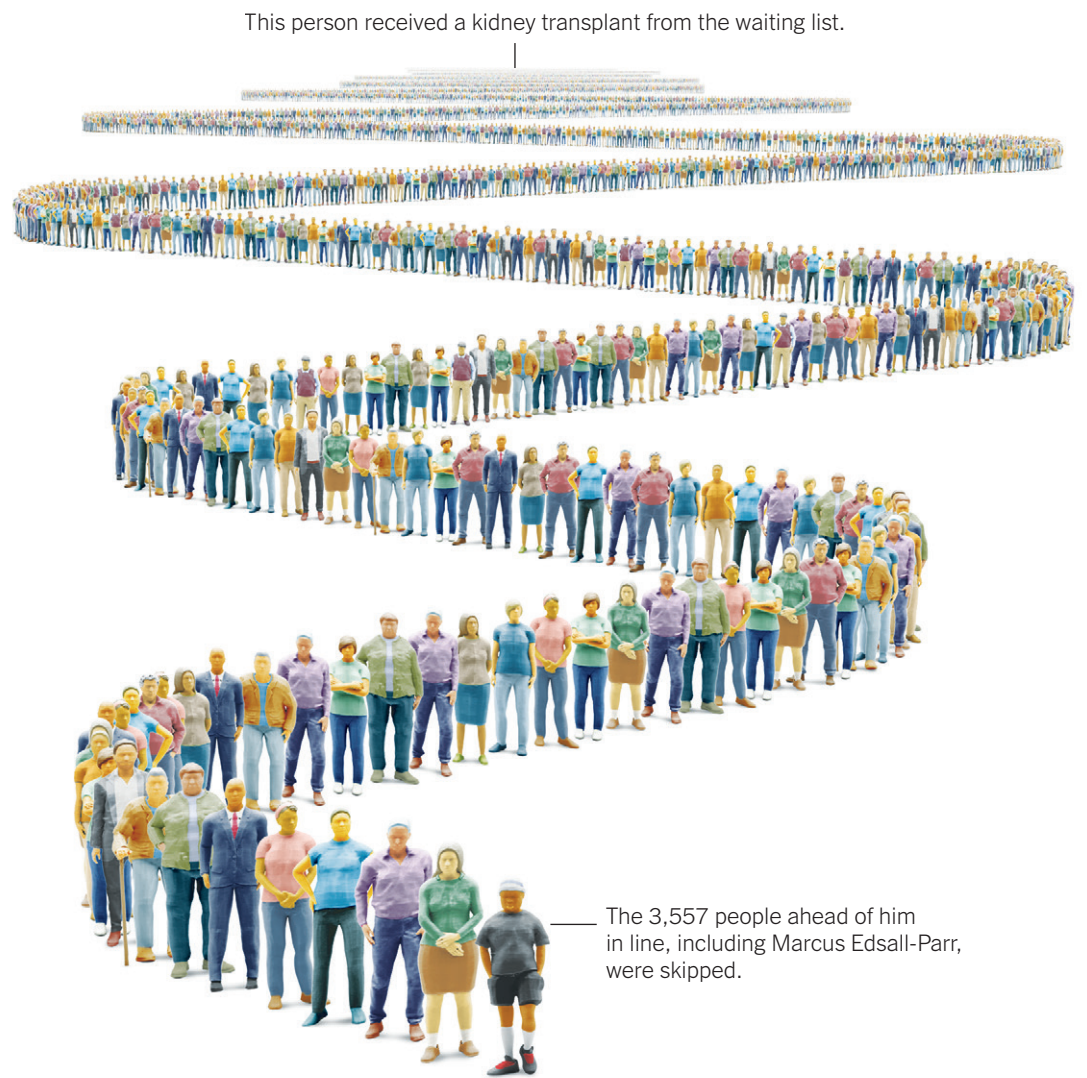
President Trump wants to keep both men and their allies within his base, but the tensions are growing. PAGE A14

Science, Politics and Anxiety

Thousands protested the president's cuts to the federal work force and to federally funded science. PAGE A9



The sickest patients are supposed to get priority for lifesaving transplants. But more and more, they are being skipped over.



Organ Transplant System ‘in Chaos’
As Waiting Lists Are Ignored

This article is by Brian M. Rosenthal, Mark Hansen and Jeremy White.

By 15, Marcus Edsall-Parr had been waiting most of his life for a new kidney, and he knew the drill. Three days a week in exhausting dialysis sessions. No playing sports. No eating his favorite foods. And in nearly a decade on the transplant list, no luck getting an organ.

Then, last spring, his doctor called. There was a perfect match.

Marcus was at the top of the waiting list — the first in line. But the kidney didn't go to him. Or to the next person on the list, or the next. It went to a middle-aged man 3,557 spots further down.

That's because in more and more cases, the

list is a lie.

For decades, fairness has been the guiding principle of the American organ transplant system. Its bedrock, a national registry, operates under strict federal rules meant to ensure that donated organs are offered to the patients who need them most, in careful order of priority.

But today, officials regularly ignore the rankings, leapfrogging over hundreds or even thousands of people when they give out kidneys, livers, lungs and hearts. These organs often go to recipients who are not as sick, have not been waiting nearly as long and, in some cases, are not on the list at all, a New York Times investigation found.

Last year, officials skipped patients on the

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Once Undercover for the Taliban, Now a Taxman

By DAVID ZUCCHINO

KABUL, Afghanistan — He is the Taxman of Kabul, a bearded, black-turbaned Talib with a genial manner and the calculating mind of a computer-savvy accountant.

As director of the Taliban's Taxpayers Services Directorate, Abdul Qahar Ghorbandi has the unenviable task of raising revenue for the government of a wretchedly poor, isolated nation.

From his perch behind an enormous desk next to a black and white Taliban flag, Mr. Ghorbandi rides herd on hundreds of Afghan taxpayers each weekday. He makes sure they arrive with income documentation and leave with a fistful of tax forms to fill out.

Teachers, money changers,

truckers, wedding planners, grocers and others trudge the worn hallways of the imposing tax building, discussing their taxes with Talibs pecking away at computer terminals.

The Taliban have sought to ramp up tax collection after a severe economic contraction that followed their takeover in 2021. The authoritarian regime has been crippled by sanctions, in part over its harsh restrictions on

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Abdul Qahar Ghorbandi, right, the head of the Taliban's tax office, handing out forms in Kabul.

INTERNATIONAL A4-8

Calls to Annex the West Bank

Some 80 percent of white evangelical Christians voted for President Trump. Some want a change that would undermine a future Palestinian state. PAGE A4

A Ukraine Cease-Fire Plan

The publication of a detailed analysis was a sign that a stop to the fighting had gone from a theoretical exercise to an urgent and practical issue. PAGE A6

Reinforcing Poland's Army

As President Trump casts doubt on U.S. alliances, Poland needs to double its military manpower and consider nuclear weapons, its leader said. PAGE A7

BUSINESS B1-4

Signs of a Cultural Revolution?

Some people in China are saying they see a familiar authoritarian turn in the United States, their longtime role model for democracy. PAGE B1

A Difficult Job Search

Unemployment is low, but there isn't much room to move around, especially for many fired federal workers with government-specific skills. PAGE B1

Start-Ups See A.I.'s Benefits

In Silicon Valley, emerging companies find that they do not need to raise vast amounts of funds and hire armies of workers to grow quickly. PAGE B1

ARTS C1-8

He Brings People Together

Josef Fares worked as a filmmaker before pouring his creative energy into cooperative video games. PAGE C1

Recalling a Segregated Florida

A play highlights Tampa's often-overlooked civil rights history. Below, Mark Wildman and Kelli Vonshay. PAGE C1



SPORTS D1-8

A Champion of Journaling

Michael Phelps writes down his daily thoughts, a practice that's helping a writer with her own puzzles. PAGE D1

Post-Combine Mock Draft

A look at a possible first round for the N.F.L. draft that includes the Giants trading up for the No. 1 pick. PAGE D4

OPINION A16-17

Jessica Grose PAGE A17



Deepening Peril of Disease
As Trump Cuts Foreign Aid

With Safeguards Eroding, Scientists Warn
of Outbreaks That May Reach U.S.

By APOORVA MANDAVILLI

Dangerous pathogens left unsecured at labs across Africa. Halted inspections for mpox, Ebola and other infections at airports and other checkpoints. Millions of un-screened animals shipped across borders.

The Trump administration's pause on foreign aid has hobbled programs that prevent and snuff out outbreaks around the world, scientists say, leaving people everywhere more vulnerable to threatening viruses and bacteria.

That includes Americans. Outbreaks that begin overseas can travel quickly: The coronavirus may have first appeared in China, for example, but it soon appeared everywhere, including the United States. When polio or dengue appears in this country, cases are usually linked to international travel.

"It's actually in the interest of American people to keep diseases down," said Dr. Githinji Gitahi, who heads Amref Health Africa, a large nonprofit that relies on the United States for about 25 percent of its funding.

"Diseases make their way to the U.S. even when we have our best people on it, and now we are not putting our best people on it," he added.

In interviews, more than 30 current and former officials of the United States Agency for International Development, members of health organizations and experts in infectious diseases described a world made more perilous than it was just a few weeks ago.

Many spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of retaliation by the federal government.

The timing is dire: The Democratic Republic of Congo is experiencing the deadliest mpox outbreak in history, with cases exploding in a dozen other African countries.

The United States is home to a worsening bird flu crisis. Multiple hemorrhagic fever viruses are smoldering: Ebola in Uganda, Marburg in Tanzania, and Lassa in Nigeria and Sierra Leone.

In 2023, U.S.A.I.D. invested about \$900 million to fund labs and emergency-response preparedness in more than 30 countries. The pause on foreign aid froze those programs. Even payments to grantees for work already completed are being sorted out in the courts.

Waivers issued by the State Department were intended to allow some work to continue on containing Ebola, Marburg and mpox, as well as preparedness for bird flu.

But Trump administration appointees choked payment systems and created obstacles to implementing the waivers, according to a U.S.A.I.D. memo by Nicholas Enrich, who was the agency's acting assistant administrator for global health until March 2.

Then last month, the Trump administration canceled about 5,800 contracts, effectively shuttering most U.S.A.I.D.-funded initiatives, including many that had received permission to continue.

"It was finally clear that we were not going to be implementing" even programs that had waivers, Mr. Enrich recalled in an interview.

The decision is likely to result in

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Gov. Josh Shapiro of Pennsylvania, center, playing analyst for a University of Pittsburgh basketball broadcast last month.

Democrats' Plan to Connect:
Yak About Sports for a While

This article is by Reid J. Epstein, Katie Glueck and Kellen Browning.

"I hate the Packers," Gov. Tim Walz of Minnesota said of his state's rival football team from Wisconsin.

"Lamar Jackson was robbed," grumbled Gov. Wes Moore of Maryland, still bitter that the Baltimore Ravens quarterback had fallen just short of winning the N.F.L.'s Most Valuable Player Award.

"The Sixers suck right now," declared Gov. Josh Shapiro of Pennsylvania, lamenting the decline of Philadelphia's basketball team.

The hot takes are flowing as a parade of ambitious Democrats talk sports, trying to accentuate their salt-of-the-earth credentials and forge stronger bonds with voters.

These Democrats are flocking to sports radio shows and podcasts as their party tries to correct for what it widely takes as an article of faith: that President Trump won back power with help from young men who found themselves drawn to him through what was once an apolitical sphere of the media.

As their party reels from the impact of Mr. Trump's policies and struggles to craft a new strategy and message, Democrats have found that yakking about sports is perhaps the easiest way to reach skeptical or disengaged audiences who might not otherwise want to spend time listening to a politician.

Mr. Moore is a regular caller on Baltimore and Washington sports radio, where last fall he predicted football winners on Friday afternoons. Lately, he has had a lot of

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Meeting Young Men on
Their Own Turf