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The New York Times

THE WEATHER
Today, sunny, very warm, light wind, high 83. **Tonight**, clear, light wind, low 62. **Tomorrow**, plenty of sunshine, very warm, a light breeze, high 79. Weather map, Page 23.

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Prices in Canada may be higher

\$6.00

In Shutdown, A Civil Service Turns Political

Messages of Blame on Official Channels

By EILEEN SULLIVAN

WASHINGTON — The Trump administration's levying of political attacks on Democrats through federal agency websites and out-of-office email messages of furloughed workers challenges the foundation of a nonpartisan civil service, a move that could deepen distrust in the government, according to experts and federal employees.

The deluge of messages blaming the “radical left” and Senate Democrats for the ongoing government shutdown that were shared across official channels serves as one of the most significant hits yet to the longstanding wall between federal workers and politics while they are on the job, historians said.

The messages immediately drew concerns that they may violate the Hatch Act, a Depression-era law intended to ensure that the federal work force operates free of political influence or coercion. Federal employees can engage in politics, but not while working.

“We have had lots of shutdowns,” said Don Kettl, an emeritus professor at the University of Maryland who studies the civil service, but “never before have top officials tried to use their employees as human shields in the partisan battle.”

The political messages put federal employees in an untenable position, said Kevin Owen, a lawyer with Gilbert Employment Law, who has been representing fired federal workers this year.

“What is going on right now is running counter to the trainings that some of these employees have had for 15, 20 years,” Mr. Owen said. “It’s bedrock principles of the civil service.”

Many current and former federal workers expressed shock at the administration’s decision to push employees into the partisan fray by having political language in the outgoing email messages of



HAIYUN JIANG/THE NEW YORK TIMES

A banner of President Trump at the Department of Labor in Washington on Thursday.



DAVID GUTTENFELDER/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Few have returned to Kibbutz Nir Oz since Hamas attacked the small Israeli farming community near the Gaza border two years ago.

As Grim Anniversary Nears, Israel Is at War With Itself

By ROGER COHEN

KIBBUTZ NIR OZ, Israel — At the kibbutz, time is frozen. The tricycles, dollhouses and washing detergent piled outside charred homes testify to lives that stopped two years ago when a Hamas assault left 117 people dead, kidnapped or missing from this small Israeli farming community near the Gaza border. Wind chimes tinkle over the collapsed swings of absent children.

Of the 384 residents of Kibbutz Nir Oz at the time of the Hamas at-

tack on Oct. 7, 2023, a handful have returned, but like Israel as a whole, they find themselves gripped still by a horror that the creation of the Jewish state in 1948 was intended to prevent. “Every conversation ends with the 7th of October,” said Ola Metzger, who recently came back with her family.

Her husband, Nir Metzger, whose father was taken hostage by Hamas and killed last year in the southern Gaza city of Khan Younis, is the general secretary of the kibbutz. A big issue con-

A Divided Nation More Isolated Than Ever

fronting him is whether to demolish burned and shattered houses or to preserve them as a memory.

“It’s a heated debate,” he said, sitting in the bright kitchen of his newly constructed house. “I say demolish and rebuild. I don’t want kids passing incinerated homes. It’s time to move forward.”

But how? Whether in a divided and more isolated Israel, or in a devastated Gaza, the future is for now shackled by new levels of distrust and hatred. Although Hamas said on Friday that it had agreed to release all of the remaining Israeli hostages, live and dead, it did not say that it would accept most aspects of a plan presented by President Trump, including the demand that it disarm. Mr. Trump welcomed the statement, and Israel said it would work with him.

The longest war of an endless

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In New Focus on Autism, Some Worry the Spectrum Is Too Broad

By AZEEN GHORAYSHI

As a child, Jodie Singer barely spoke. She could repeat words that people said to her or recite the book “Madeline” from beginning to end, but she could not answer yes or no when her mother asked if she wanted juice.

Sometimes she hurt herself, compulsively tearing at the skin and hair on the nape of her neck. She threw tantrums, thrashing and refusing to be comforted.

When she was almost 3, Jodie was given a diagnosis of autism. Now 28, she still speaks only in short, repetitive phrases and requires round-the-clock care, including help eating, getting dressed and using the toilet.

At the time Jodie’s diagnosis was first made, the definition of

autism was expanding, as it would continue to do over the next 25 years. Once primarily limited to severely disabled people, autism began to be viewed as a spectrum that included far less impaired children and adults. Along the way, it also became an identity, embraced by college graduates and even by some of the world’s most successful people, like Elon Musk and Bill Gates.

That broadening of the diagnosis, autism experts believe, along with the increasing awareness of the disorder, is largely responsible for the steep rise in autism cases that Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. has called “an epidemic” and has attributed to theo-

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MONTIQUE MONROE FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Eileen Lamb with her son Charlie as he used an augmentative device that helps people with speech impairment communicate.

ISRAEL ON BRINK OF HOSTAGE DEAL, NETANYAHU SAYS

A U.S. CEASE-FIRE PLAN

Negotiations to Resume, Though Many Details Remain Unclear

This article is by **Aaron Boxerman, Natan Odenheimer and Adam Rasgon.**

JERUSALEM — A day after Hamas signaled a willingness to release Israeli hostages as part of President Trump’s cease-fire proposal, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel said on Saturday that he, too, hoped to finalize a deal.

In a six-minute nighttime speech, he said that Israel was “on the brink of a great achievement” that could lead to the release of the remaining hostages in Gaza.

There were other positive signs. The Israeli government said on Saturday that it was preparing for the “immediate implementation” of the first steps of Mr. Trump’s proposal. Hours earlier, Hamas said in a statement that it was willing to release all its remaining hostages in exchange for prisoners in Israel, a key part of the plan.

But reaching an agreement to fully carry out Mr. Trump’s ambitious proposal — which would compel Hamas to disarm and relinquish any role in the postwar government of Gaza — remains a serious challenge.

Mr. Trump exuded confidence on Friday that a deal was imminent, saying it was a “big day,” while exhorting Israel to stop bombing Gaza. But he conceded that negotiators still needed “to get the final word down in concrete.”

Hamas’s statement did not say whether it would accept many of the conditions in Mr. Trump’s plan, including laying down its weapons. And it was unclear if Israel was willing to negotiate major changes to the plan’s postwar vision for Gaza, which Mr. Netanyahu said he supported during a visit to the White House last week.

In his speech, in which he repeatedly rebuked those who have demanded an end to the conflict in hopes of a hostage release, Mr. Netanyahu insisted that Hamas was only willing to free the hostages now because of the military and political pressure that he and Mr. Trump had applied.

“I withstood immense pressure from home and abroad to end the war,” he said.

Negotiations were getting back on track on Saturday. The Egyptian foreign ministry announced that it planned to host delegations from Israel and Hamas on Monday for indirect talks.

Steve Witkoff, Mr. Trump’s Middle East envoy who was involved in drafting the cease-fire plan, was

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Cow Smart Collars: Deeper Data and More Milk

By ELI TAN

MERCED, Calif. — The cow at the edge of Tony Louters’s dairy farm in Merced, Calif., held 11 gallons of milk and a secret: In the next 48 hours, she would become sick.

On many farms, the health signs would have gone undetected, costing hundreds of dollars in lost milk. But thanks to a high-tech collar that each of Mr.

Louters’s 700 cows wears around its neck — fitted with movement sensors and Wi-Fi — he learned the cow’s diagnosis at 5:30 a.m. when his computer pinged with an alert about its biometric data.

By 6 a.m., Mr. Louters had given the cow a remedy of probiotics and warm water that solved the problem before it began.

“It’s the closest we can get to talking to the cows,” he said.

Mr. Louters, 52, has used the collars since they debuted in 2013,

back when the devices were no more advanced than a pedometer. But in recent years, Merck, the health care company that makes the collars, has added new kinds of sensors and software to the wearables and artificial intelligence to help process the data.

The devices are part of an industry known as precision farming, a data-driven approach for optimizing production that is booming with the addition of A.I.

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Japan on Track for First Female Prime Minister

This article is by **Javier C. Hernández, River Akira Davis and Hisako Ueno.**

TOKYO — Sanae Takaichi, a hard-line conservative lawmaker, won a critical leadership vote on Saturday, putting her on track to become Japan’s first female prime minister, a milestone in a country where women are vastly underrepresented in politics.

Ms. Takaichi, 64, prevailed in an

election by the governing Liberal Democratic Party after two rounds of voting by lawmakers and rank-and-file members. Her victory could herald a rightward shift in Japan, where anti-establishment politicians have recently made gains with voters concerned about stagnant wages, rising prices and an influx of foreign workers and tourists.

Ms. Takaichi, in a short speech after her victory before a crowd of L.D.P. leaders gathered at party

headquarters in Tokyo, promised to “work, work and work” and exhorted her colleagues to “work as hard as a carriage horse.”

“I am determined to confront various issues rather than feel happy,” she said.

Ms. Takaichi, who is expected to be named prime minister of Japan’s coalition government during an extraordinary session of Parliament in mid-October, would succeed Shigeru Ishiba, who an-

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THE MAGAZINE	METROPOLITAN	ARTS & LEISURE	SUNDAY BUSINESS	SUNDAY OPINION
America’s Vigilantes While leading the fight against the Taliban in Afghanistan, the Green Berets fostered a culture of lawlessness, and then they brought it home.	Mayoral Race Homestretch The three candidates, Zohran Mamdani, Andrew M. Cuomo and Curtis Sliwa, were presented with 10 questions in interviews with The Times.	The Confident Channing Tatum For years, the actor battled impostor syndrome. With the movie “Roofman,” he’s more assured, and now thinks that he can hold his own.	A Fire Brings Out His Anger After his house burned down, the reality TV star Spencer Pratt re-emerged as a community activist — and a magnet for Republicans.	Megan K. Stack
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