

China Goes Big
Hoping to Alter
Energy's Future

Researching Fusion in
Bid to Outpace U.S.

This article is by Raymond Zhong, Chris Buckley, Keith Bradsher and Harry Stevens.

HEFEI, China — On a campus in eastern China, crews are working day and night to finish a mammoth round structure with two sweeping arms the length of aircraft carriers.

On former rice fields in the country's southwest, a hulking X-shaped building is being built with

POWER RULES
Government vs. Private Funds

equal urgency under great secrecy. That facility's existence wasn't widely known until researchers spotted it in satellite images a year or so ago.

Together, the colossal projects are China's most ambitious efforts yet to harness an energy source that could transform civilization: fusion.

Fusion, the melding together of atoms to release extraordinary energy, uses fuels that are plentiful, carries no risk of meltdowns and leaves no long-lived radioactive waste. It promises near-limitless energy that might not only satisfy the surging demand for electricity to power artificial intelligence but also end reliance on fossil fuels, which are perilously overheating the planet.

Scientists first mused a century ago about fusion, the energy of the stars. In recent decades, they have made major strides toward reproducing the process in the laboratory using magnets and lasers. Yet forcing unruly atoms to combine is vastly more difficult than splitting them, as in the fission process that produces nuclear power today.

A fusion reactor must first heat hydrogen to temperatures hotter than the sun, turning it into plasma, the fourth state of matter. Then it needs to hold this violent plasma together for long enough that the atoms fuse and disgorge energy. China, the United States and other countries are now racing to develop the machines that can pull all this off and survive to do it again and again, reliably enough to power a grid.

The world's two superpowers are in a tightening contest to dominate fusion.

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MANHUNT ENDS Outside a storage facility in Salem, N.H., where the Brown University shooting suspect's body was found Thursday.

FOOTAGE Security camera images the police said showed the suspect leaving the attack scene.

THE SEARCH Officers at a news conference showed maps of areas the suspect had been seen.

THE SUSPECT An image of a person the police later identified as Claudio Manuel Neves Valente.

THE CAR The tipster said the police needed to look into a Nissan with Florida plates.

STORAGE UNIT The police said the shooting suspect had shot himself at the Salem facility.

'Cat and Mouse' Encounter Led Police to Body of Suspect

This article is by Qasim Nauman, Dana Goldstein, Azam Ahmed and Michael Levenson.

In the days after a masked gunman burst into a classroom at Brown University and killed two students, the internet was flooded with the usual unhelpful junk: wild rumors, speculation, bigoted attacks on students who had nothing to do with it and A.I.-"enhanced" photos of the suspect walking on the street in a dark two-tone jacket.

But in the deluge, there was a nugget. Investigators received a tip that they should look at one particular post on Reddit.

"I'm being dead serious," the post said. "The police need to look into a grey Nissan with Florida plates, possibly a rental. That was the car he was driving."

That information "blew this case right open," Attorney General Peter F. Neronha of Rhode Island said at a news conference late Thursday night. The post, it turned out, was written by a man who had seen the suspect just hours before the shooting and had followed him around the campus in what he later called "a game of cat and mouse."

The information he provided led to a breakthrough that helped

Tip in Brown Shooting From Reddit Post

investigators piece together data from surveillance footage, license plate readers, a rental-car agreement and an email login. By Thursday night, they had found the suspect, identified as Claudio Manuel Neves Valente, 48, dead in a storage unit in Salem, N.H. The police said he had shot himself.

Officials said he was responsible not only for the attack at Brown last Saturday but also for

the fatal shooting, two days later, of a professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology at his home in Brookline, Mass. Investigators have not determined what Mr. Neves Valente's motive might have been, but some details have emerged of a life that began with early academic success that did not continue into adulthood.

Mr. Neves Valente was briefly a Ph.D. student in physics at Brown more than two decades ago and studied in Lisbon with the M.I.T. professor in the 1990s, officials said. His death ended a five-day search that had put both the

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E.U. Gives Kyiv
2-Year Lifeline
Of \$105 Billion

By JEANNA SMIALEK and CONSTANT MÉHEUT

BRUSSELS — European leaders agreed on Friday to help keep Ukraine funded for two years with a loan of 90 billion euros, or about \$105 billion, though they decided against using frozen Russian assets to pay for the support.

That ambitious frozen-asset plan was killed at the 11th hour as European heads of state and government met in Brussels — a show of division that risked making the European Union appear indecisive at a key moment.

Instead, European leaders announced that they will funnel money to Ukraine with a loan backed by the E.U. budget. Because the plan does not leverage the large stash of Russian savings immobilized in Europe, it is likely to cost more.

But because it will still get needed cash to Kyiv, officials celebrated it as a win.

"This will address the urgent financial needs of Ukraine," said a European Union spokesman.

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Stefanik Drops Out of the Race for N.Y. Governor

By NICHOLAS FANDOS

Representative Elise Stefanik of New York, a top Republican with close ties to President Trump, abruptly suspended her campaign for governor on Friday and announced that she would give up her seat in Congress next year.

The decision was a stunning turnabout for one of the Republican Party's most ambitious stars, and it upended what was set to be a high-wattage governor's race.

In a statement posted on social media, Ms. Stefanik framed her motivation as a mix of political pragmatism and family priorities. But allies privately acknowledged that years of intraparty fighting and a series of embarrassing disappointments at the hands of Mr. Trump had taken a toll.

"While spending precious time with my family this Christmas season, I have made the decision to suspend my campaign for governor and will not seek re-election to Congress," Ms. Stefanik wrote on Friday. "I did not come to this decision lightly for our family."

Ms. Stefanik, 41, was a Harvard-educated phenom when she took office a decade ago, becoming the youngest woman to serve in the history of the House up to that point. But over the years, she went to extraordinary and sometimes brazen lengths to transform herself from a moderate Republican in the mold of George W. Bush into a full MAGA warrior.

Embracing Mr. Trump helped propel her into a national figure,

beloved by many conservatives and loathed by Democrats. She shot up through congressional leadership ranks, briefly becoming the highest-ranking woman in the House, and nearly became ambassador to the United Nations.

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President Trump and Representative Elise Stefanik last week. Ms. Stefanik also said she would not seek another House term.

U.S. Mounts Retaliatory Strikes
On Islamic State Targets in Syria

By ERIC SCHMITT

WASHINGTON — The United States carried out major airstrikes against the Islamic State in Syria on Friday, fulfilling President Trump's vow to avenge the deaths of two U.S. Army soldiers and a civilian U.S. interpreter killed in a terrorist attack in the central part of the country last Saturday.

American fighter jets, attack helicopters and artillery fired more than 100 munitions at more than 70 suspected Islamic State targets at several locations across central Syria, including weapons storage areas and other buildings to support operations, the military's Central Command said in a statement. It said Jordanian warplanes assisted in the operation.

The American air and artillery attacks were expected to last several hours, deep into early Saturday morning in Syria, in what U.S. officials said was "a massive attack."

Social media accounts in Syria reported explosions across wide swaths of the country.

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth sought to tamp down fears that the United States might reopen a major new war in the Middle East, but also suggested that increased attacks against the Islamic State would continue.

"This is not the beginning of a war — it is a declaration of vengeance," Mr. Hegseth said on social media. "The United States of America, under President Trump's leadership, will never hesitate and never relent to defend our people."

Mr. Hegseth added: "Today, we hunted and we killed our enemies. Lots of them. And we will continue." He offered no other details about the strikes.

The soldiers slain last Saturday were the first American casualties in the country since the fall of the dictator Bashar al-Assad last year. They were supporting counterterrorism operations against the Islamic State in Palmyra, a city in central Syria, when they came under fire from a gunman, American and Syrian officials said.

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General's Tiananmen Defiance

The secret trial of Xu Qinxian, who in 1989 refused orders to clear pro-democracy protests, has leaked online. PAGE A4

Australia Debates New Laws

Leaders seek legislation to restrict hate speech and protests after an attack at a Hanukkah celebration. PAGE A10

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An Uninhibited Second Term

Many of President Trump's supporters love his pro-wrestling style of leadership. But it is wearing thin for some of his allies. News Analysis. PAGE A17

Big Scandal in Minnesota

Prosecutors said they were now investigating fraud worth billions of dollars in more than a dozen social services programs in the state. PAGE A18

Tribe's Fight for Recognition

The change for the Lumbees opens access to federal support for a community stuck in poverty. PAGE A19



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Sense and Semiquincentennial

Jane Austen, who was born 250 years ago this month, has had an effect on culture that is ever increasing. PAGE C2

Mozart, Slimmed Down

The Metropolitan Opera aims for a new audience with Julie Taymor's abridged version of "The Magic Flute." PAGE C1

BUSINESS B1-5

Chinese Cars Making Inroads

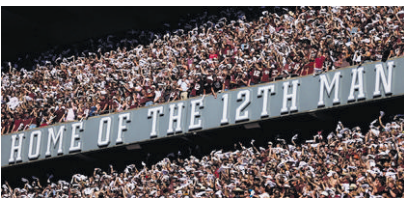
BYD, Chery and other Chinese automakers are winning over drivers in Britain, where tariffs are low and buyers have been opening up to new brands. PAGE B1

Japan Raises Interest Rates

The Bank of Japan moved to slow inflation as the prime minister is borrowing more to fund an ambitious effort intended to build up industry and support households. PAGE B1

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Carlos Lozada PAGE A22



SPORTS B6-10

Can the Aggies Deliver?

Texas A&M has been branded a "sleeping giant" because of its unrealized potential. Now the team is being tested in its first playoff appearance. PAGE B6

