



Hostage families renew push for release

Tenuous hopes pinned to cease-fire in Lebanon, presidential transition

BY SHIRA RUBIN

TEL AVIV — When President Joe Biden vowed that the cease-fire between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon this week would be followed by a renewed push for a truce in the Gaza Strip, Jonathan Dekel-Chen made a deliberate effort not to get his hopes up.

“I try to avoid the term ‘optimism,’” said Dekel-Chen, whose son, Sagui, and some 250 other Israelis were dragged by Hamas-led militants from Kibbutz Nir Oz into Gaza last October.

And yet Dekel-Chen and members of six other families of American hostages have met for marathon sessions with Biden administration representatives, including national security adviser Jake Sullivan, and with associates of President-elect Donald Trump. They are conveying the message they’ve repeated for more than 400 days: For their loved ones, held in brutal conditions in Gaza, each passing moment could mean death.

More than 100 people remain captive in Gaza; dozens are believed to still be alive.

The families are pinning tenuous hopes of seeing their people again on the prospect that the U.S. presidential transition period could finally bring an end to their ordeal.

“Clearly, Hamas and the Israeli government have no intention of ending this,” Dekel-Chen said. “So we are trying to mobilize both incoming and outgoing administrations, to make every possible effort to get them to agree.”

The American hostage families said they were “encouraged” by the Lebanon deal. In a statement, they said they planned to mark Thanksgiving with the symbol that has become achingly familiar: an empty chair at the dinner table.

Aviva Siegel, who was taken into Gaza last Oct. 7 and held for

SEE ISRAEL ON A8

Lebanon: Israeli strikes targets in the south in test of cease-fire. **A8**



CAROLYN VAN HOUTEN/THE WASHINGTON POST

Returning Afghans not fazed by Taliban limits on women

Delight at safety and new infrastructure rankles relatives who chafe under restrictions

BY RICK NOACK
IN KABUL

For the first time since the Taliban takeover three years ago, Afghans living outside the country have begun flocking back to their homeland, usually to visit relatives who have remained in Afghanistan.

Upon their return, few seem preoccupied by the Taliban’s increasingly draconian restrictions on women — including bans on women going to university and school above sixth grade — or by the reluctance of many local women to leave their homes out of fear of encountering the morality police, according to interviews with residents and visitors.

Instead, many of the visitors, carrying foreign passports or visas, marvel about the sense of security and the construction of new roads under Taliban rule. They post photos of their favorite Afghan dishes, discuss business plans and shop in the Kabul airport’s new duty-free store.

During a recent family trip to Kabul — her first since the Taliban takeover three years ago after years of war — Zahra, 34, was pleasantly surprised. “There’s free-

dom now,” said Zahra, an Afghan who lives in London. She indulged herself in shopping for gold jewelry and is already planning another trip to Afghanistan next year.

For Afghan women who have had to live under Taliban rule, the enthusiasm of visiting relatives can be puzzling and, increasingly, frustrating.

The Taliban further tightened its restrictions three months ago, even banning women from raising their voices in public. But visitors often spend so much time at relatives’ homes that the absence of women in many public spaces can go unnoticed, some hosting families said in interviews. Many visitors also spend their time primarily in more affluent parts of Kabul, where enforcement by the morality police remains relatively rare.

Some of the returning Afghans actually appear drawn to life under the Taliban because their own experiences in the West have proved to be more challenging than expected.

SEE AFGHANISTAN ON A7

For Afghan women living under Taliban rule, the enthusiasm of relatives visiting from abroad can be frustrating.

For Virginia’s Mattaponi, it’s time for recognition

Tribe doesn’t officially exist to the federal government, despite a treaty predating the Constitution

BY GREGORY S. SCHNEIDER

RICHMOND — Mattaponi tribal Chief Mark T. Falling Star Custalow parked his white Chevy Silverado in front of the Virginia Executive Mansion and, with the help of his son and brother, unloaded a deer carcass onto the brick pavement.

Tied by the legs to a cedar pole, the nine-point buck was a tribute from the Mattaponi to the state governor. For all of Custalow’s life, and his father’s life, and his grandfather’s and on back 347 years, the tribe has made a ceremonial offering of wild game just before Thanksgiving to honor the 1677 Treaty of Middle Plantation between Indigenous people and Virginians.

But despite having a tribal reservation that predates the U.S. Constitution by more than a century, the Mattaponi do not officially exist in the eyes of the federal government. Virginia’s “paper genocide” of the 1920s

SEE MATTAPONI ON A5



JOHN C. CLARK FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Mattaponi Chief Mark Falling Star Custalow presents Gov. Glenn Youngkin an annual tribute Tuesday.

Online social casinos spin out of control

Virtual gambling games that are being marketed as ‘sweepstakes’ are unregulated — and addictive

BY RICK MAESE

It was only about a year ago, Erik says, that he started gambling online. He wagered just \$10 or \$20 at first but soon found himself putting up hundreds of dollars at a time — money, he says, he couldn’t afford to lose.

“It’s almost like I blacked out,” he says. “I remember how fast it went. It’s such an embarrassing thing. These are such childlike little games. I don’t even know how it happened.”

It’s a familiar tale. But Erik’s habit doesn’t involve casino visits, basement poker games or mobile sports betting. Though online casino games are illegal in most every state, Erik is among millions of Americans who have played slots and blackjack online, winning and losing real money

faster than they could in Las Vegas.

Erik was playing what the gaming industry calls a “sweepstakes” game.

With names such as Chumba Casino and McLuck, sweepstakes social casinos are at the forefront of a booming, multibillion-dollar industry operating in a legal gray area. Players have the option of playing for free — or they can feed money into the games, unlocking a secondary “currency” that effectively turns their smartphone into a slot machine, blackjack table or roulette wheel. Sweepstakes operators aren’t regulated, licensed in the United States or subject to gaming taxes, and though they target American consumers, the biggest ones operate from offshore locales including Cyprus, Malta and Gibraltar.

SEE GAMBLING ON A4

IN THE NEWS

Missiles rain on Ukraine Russia unleashed a barrage targeting the energy grid hours after President-elect Donald Trump named a special envoy to the warring nations. **A2**

Reinventing UDC A new strategic plan aims to uplift students while rebranding the school as Washington’s flagship public university. **B1**

THE NATION
As enrollments fall, universities serving rural areas are eliminating large numbers of programs and majors, leaving their students feeling shortchanged and frustrated. **A3**

THE WORLD
Seoul this week saw its heaviest November snowfall in more than 100 years. **A6**
One of China’s top military officials is under investigation, Beijing announced. **A6**

THE ECONOMY
Microsoft is facing a broad antitrust investigation by the Federal Trade Commission in the waning weeks of the Biden administration. **A2**
Elon Musk, viewed as a GOP counterweight to donor George Soros, is eyeing challenges to progressive prosecutors. **A12**

THE REGION
Montgomery County plans to keep using an incinerator to burn about 550,000 tons of garbage every year until, likely, 2031, despite pleas to shut it down. **B1**
Forget the trot — this Zumba community turkey twerks before the Thanksgiving meal. **B1**

STYLE
Need some stylish holiday gift ideas that will surprise and delight recipients? Our guide can help you out. **C1**

WEEKEND
Tom Sietsema serves up four dining bargains in the region from José Andrés and other big-name chefs.

BUSINESS NEWS.....A12
COMICS.....C7
OBITUARIES.....B4
OPINION PAGES.....A9
TELEVISION.....C6
WORLD NEWS.....A6

CONTENT © 2024
The Washington Post
Year 147, No. 54050

