

“All the News
That’s Fit to Print”

The New York Times

THE WEATHER
Today, mostly cloudy, breezy, cool, periodic rain and drizzle, high 66. Tonight, showers, cloudy, low 57. Tomorrow, warmer, mostly cloudy, high 73. Weather map, Page A24.

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Fight at NBC Over Left Tilt From MSNBC

Ratings Rise, but Some Rue a Partisan Shift

By JIM RUTENBERG
and MICHAEL M. GRYNBAUM

MSNBC placed a big bet on becoming comfort TV for liberals. Then it doubled down.

Time slots on the cable network once devoted to news programming are now occupied by Trump-bashing opinion hosts. The channel has become a landing spot for high-profile alumni of President Biden’s administration like Jen Psaki, who went from hosting White House press briefings to hosting her own show. On Super Tuesday, when producers aired a portion of a live speech by former President Donald J. Trump, Rachel Maddow chastised her bosses on the air.

The moves have been a hit with viewers. MSNBC has leapfrogged past its erstwhile rival CNN in the ratings and has seen viewership rise over the past year, securing second place in cable news behind the perennial leader, Fox News.

But MSNBC’s success has had unintended consequences for its parent company, NBC, an original Big Three broadcaster that still strives to appeal to a mass American audience.

NBC’s traditional political journalists have cycled between rancor and resignation that the cable network’s partisanship — a regular target of Mr. Trump — will color perceptions of their straight news reporting. Local NBC stations between the coasts have demanded, again and again, that executives in New York do more to preserve NBC’s nonpartisan brand, lest MSNBC’s blue-state bent alienate their red-state viewers.

Even Comcast, NBC’s corporate owner, which is loath to intervene in news coverage, took the rare step of conveying its concern to MSNBC’s leaders when some hosts and guests criticized Israel as the Hamas attack was unfolding on Oct. 7, according to three people with knowledge of the discussions. An abrupt course correction to that coverage followed.

This account of the tensions roiling NBC and its corporate overseers is based on interviews with more than two dozen people with knowledge of the company’s inner workings, almost all of whom insisted on anonymity to share details of internal discussions.

NBC declined to make its top executives available for interviews. The chairman of the NBC-Universal News Group, Cesar Conde, has said he wants his division — which encompasses MSNBC, CNBC, a digital streaming service, Telemundo and journalistic stalwarts like “Nightly News,” “Meet the Press” and “Today” — to be a big tent.

Yet his recent efforts to include more conservative voices on the airwaves generated newsroom suspicion and ultimately led to an embarrassing rebellion over the hiring of Ronna McDaniel, a former Republican Party chair who aided Mr. Trump’s attempt to overturn his 2020 election loss.

MSNBC hosts, for their part, Continued on Page A22



Security officials scrambled after getting Prime Minister Robert Fico of Slovakia into a car and tackling a suspect behind a metal barrier. RADOVAN STOKLASA/REUTERS

A Flirty ‘Chelsea’ Asked for Nudes. It Was a Trap.

By SARAH MASLIN NIR

The Instagram message popped up from a girl named Chelsea: “Howdy.”

David didn’t know anyone named Chelsea, but he clicked through her profile: She had brown hair and a nice smile; under her name was a quote from the Bible. He thought it was sort of weird that she was messaging him, a stranger, in the middle of a workday, but her pouty selfies made that easy to ignore.

He was hesitant when she asked him to chat, but soon her flirty messages escalated to a volley of explicit pictures, and David, a 32-year-old pharmacy techni-

Sextortion Is Targeting Boys and Young Men, Sometimes Fatally

cian, got carried away. When she asked him for a nude, he hardly thought twice, he said. He slipped into the bathroom at the New Jersey hospital where he works, took a picture and hit send.

Within seconds, the threats began.

David’s phone lit up with messages: pictures he had sent with his genitals exposed alongside screenshots of his Instagram fol-

lowers with whom he shares a last name — his family. “She said: ‘I’m demanding \$500. If not, I’m going to send it to all of these people,’” said David, who asked that only his middle name be used to protect his privacy. “Then she started a countdown.”

But there was no Chelsea. The real person behind the account, David said, was a man who, over the course of three fraught days, inadvertently revealed he was in Nigeria as he demanded hundreds of dollars to keep David’s pictures private. As he paid up, David joined the thousands of other people cowed under a new scam that has exploded over the

Continued on Page A16

Slovak Premier Is Gravely Hurt By a Gunman

This article is by Cassandra Vinograd, Andrew Higgins and Richard Pérez-Peña.

A gunman shot Prime Minister Robert Fico of Slovakia, who is known for defying his fellow leaders in the European Union, multiple times at close range on Wednesday, in the most serious attack on a European leader in decades.

Mr. Fico was shot after emerging from the House of Culture in Handlova, a town in central Slovakia, as he greeted a small crowd in Banikovo Square. He was rushed to a nearby hospital, then airlifted to another hospital for emergency surgery.

Hours later, the deputy prime minister, Tomas Taraba, told the BBC that Mr. Fico’s situation was no longer life-threatening, and he expected the prime minister to survive.

The gunman, identified by Slovak news outlets as a 71-year-old poet, was immediately wrestled to the ground by security officers.

The interior minister, Matus Sutaj Estok, said at a news conference that Mr. Fico was shot five times and that the initial evidence “clearly points to a political motivation.” Asked to name the attacker, he said, “Not today.”

The attempted assassination stoked fears that Europe’s increasingly polarized and venomous political debates had tipped into violence.

Mr. Fico began his three-decade political career as a leftist but over the years shifted to the right. He served as prime minister from 2006 to 2010 and from 2012 to 2018, before returning to power in elections last year. After being ousted

Continued on Page A9



NANNA HEITMANN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Putin’s Message Takes Hold

A display of captured tanks helps sell the idea that Russia is fighting the West and winning. Page A9.

BIDEN AND TRUMP AGREE TO DEBATE TWICE IN SUMMER

JUNE 27 AND SEPT. 10

Meetings Would Exclude Kennedy and Bypass Commission

By JONATHAN SWAN
and MAGGIE HABERMAN

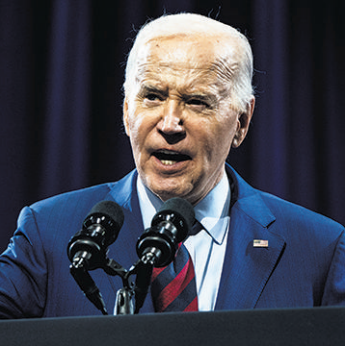
President Biden and Donald J. Trump have agreed to two debates, one on June 27 on CNN and one on Sept. 10 on ABC News, the first onstage clashes between the former president and his successor in more than three years.

While some of the details were still being hammered out, the agreement to the two debates, reached in a series of social-media posts Wednesday morning, raises the likelihood of the earliest general-election debate in modern history and immediately delivered a jolt of electricity to a campaign that had settled into something of a rut.

Both Mr. Trump and Mr. Biden believe firmly that if the American people get a look at their opponent on a debate stage they will be less likely to vote for them.

Mr. Biden opened the exchange on Wednesday by saying he was willing to debate Mr. Trump twice before the election, and as early as June, but on the condition that the arrangements bypassed the nonpartisan organization that has managed presidential debates since 1988.

Mr. Biden and his top aides want the debates to start much sooner than the dates proposed by the organization, the Commission on Presidential Debates, so voters can see the two candidates side by side well before early voting be-



HAIYUN JIANG FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

President Biden proposed having no in-person audience.

gins in September. They want the debate to occur inside a TV studio, with microphones that automatically cut off when a speaker’s time limit elapses.

And they want it to be just the two candidates and the moderator — without the raucous in-person audiences that Mr. Trump feeds on and without the participation of Robert F. Kennedy Jr. or other independent or third-party candidates.

It remains unclear whether the Trump campaign will agree to the Biden campaign’s proposed rules, including the mic cutoff and lack of an audience.

Before the Biden campaign’s debate proposal Wednesday Continued on Page A18

When Did Everything Turn Into a ‘Journey’?

By LISA MILLER

Drew Barrymore has been talking with Gayle King about her perimenopause “journey,” and the soccer phenom Carli Lloyd has just divulged her fertility “journey.” By sharing her breast cancer story, Olivia Munn has said she hopes she will “help others find comfort, inspiration, and support on their own journey.”

A recent interview with Anne Hathaway has been posted on In-

Once Mere Experience, Now So Much More

stagram with a headline highlighting her “sobriety journey,” and Kelly Clarkson has opened up about what Women’s Health calls her “weight loss journey.” On TikTok, a zillion influencer-guides lead pilgrims on journeys through such ephemeral realms as faith,

healing, grief, friendship, mastectomy, and therapy — often selling courses, supplements or eating plans as if they were talismans to help safeguard their path.

“Journey” has decisively taken its place in American speech. The word holds an upbeat utility these days, signaling struggle without darkness or detail, and expressing — in the broadest possible way — an individual’s experience of travails over time.

Continued on Page A21

If a Menendez Is Corrupt, It’s Ms., Defense Says

By BENJAMIN WEISER
and TRACEY TULLY

A lawyer for Senator Robert Menendez on Wednesday laid blame for the bribery charges the senator faces squarely on his wife — a woman he found “dazzling” but who, his lawyer said, hid her past dire finances and the source of her newfound income from her powerful husband.

She had kept him in the dark about “what she was asking oth-

Finger-Pointing as Trial for Senator Begins

ers to give her,” the lawyer, Avi Weitzman, told a jury in opening statements at the start of the senator’s federal corruption trial in Manhattan.

The gold and some of the cash that the F.B.I. found in a search of the senator’s New Jersey home —

items that prosecutors say were bribes — were kept in a locked closet where his wife, Nadine Menendez, stored her clothing, Mr. Weitzman said.

“He did not know of the gold bars that existed in that closet,” Mr. Weitzman added, describing Mr. Menendez as an American patriot and “lifelong public servant” who “took no bribes.”

Prosecutors have charged Mr. Menendez, 70, and his wife with Continued on Page A17



INTERNATIONAL A4-12

Polarizing Royal Portraits

A painting of King Charles is far from the first rendering of a British monarch to get a mixed reception. PAGE A6

Strife Over Job Quotas

North Macedonia is trying to ensure diversity with hiring quotas, but critics say the system isn’t fair. PAGE A4

NATIONAL A13-25

PEN America’s War of Words

An organization devoted to free speech faces questions about its response to the conflict in Gaza. PAGE A25

Murder Trial Transfixes Boston

Passions are swirling around the trial of a woman accused of murdering her police officer boyfriend. PAGE A13

OBITUARIES B11-12

Photographer of Dylan’s Rise

Daniel Kramer captured intimate images of the singer-songwriter over 366 days as he changed the look and sound of the 1960s. He was 91. PAGE B12



ARTS C1-6

An Inexhaustible Energy

The techno pioneer Jeff Mills’s new LP tries to approximate the experience of traveling through a black hole. PAGE C1

No Monkeying Around

Why is the long-running “Planet of the Apes” series so gripping? Because it takes things seriously. PAGE C1

BUSINESS B1-6

Big Donors Warm to Trump

Wall Street’s biggest names appear to be increasingly on board for a second term, despite disparaging comments they made in the past. PAGE B1

SPORTS B7-10

Trash-Talking Golf Star

As Scottie Scheffler has risen to No. 1 in the world, he has worked to tame his competitive fire. But those who’ve seen it have stories they love to tell. PAGE B7

OPINION A26-27

Cyrus R. Vance Jr.

PAGE A27



THURSDAY STYLES D1-6

A Display of Heritage

Native Fashion Week, held in New Mexico, showed the diversity and potency of Indigenous designers. Above, the designer Peshawn Bread. PAGE D5

