

“All the News  
That’s Fit to Print”

# The New York Times

**THE WEATHER**  
**Today**, mostly sunny, dry, milder, high 63. **Tonight**, clear, calm, low 48. **Tomorrow**, morning sunshine, afternoon clouds, dry, remaining mild, high 65. Weather map, Page B10.

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President Biden and China’s president, Xi Jinping, met in California to try to rescue the fraying relationship between their countries. DOUG MILLS/THE NEW YORK TIMES

## Delicate Dance As Biden Hosts China’s Leader

This article is by David E. Sanger, Katie Rogers and Peter Baker.

WOODSIDE, Calif. — President Biden said on Wednesday that his talks with President Xi Jinping of China brought “important progress” in stabilizing the relationship between the two major powers and vowed that the two leaders would try to resolve future disagreements by picking up the phone rather than pushing their nations to the edge of conflict.

Emerging from hours of talks with Mr. Xi outside San Francisco, Mr. Biden told reporters that the conversation had been the “most constructive and productive” between the two and announced modest agreements to resume military communications and combat the spread of fentanyl that has killed many thousands of Americans. But they produced no major breakthrough and left many issues unresolved.

“We’re in a competitive relationship, China and the United States,” Mr. Biden said at a news conference in Woodside, Calif. “But my responsibility is to make this rational and manageable so it doesn’t result in conflict. That’s what I’m all about. That’s what this is about. To find a place where we can come together and find mutual interests.”

But as Mr. Biden was leaving

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## Behind Rise of Catalytic Converter Crime Rings

This article is by Walt Bogdanich, Isak Hüllert and Eli Tan.

COLUMBUS, Mont. — One morning in September, a truck disgorged its load of pulverized rock with a resounding bang inside Stillwater Mining’s metallurgical plant north of Yellowstone National Park.

The mined ore contains platinum, palladium and rhodium, three of the earth’s rarest, most expensive metals — and vital components in the millions of catalytic converters that reduce polluting emissions from gasoline-powered vehicles.

At the opposite end of the plant

### Rare, Costly Metals and a Hot Resale Market

was another batch of metal, not from the mine but from used catalytic converters ground into powder for recycling. The new and the old metals would later be blended under intense heat, then shipped to a refinery.

Recycling catalytic converters costs less than mining the ore. But it carries a risk, as Stillwater discovered after paying more than \$170 million for used ones, many of them stolen, according to an in-

dictment handed up this spring on Long Island that implicated the mine. Stillwater was not charged and denied knowing the devices were stolen.

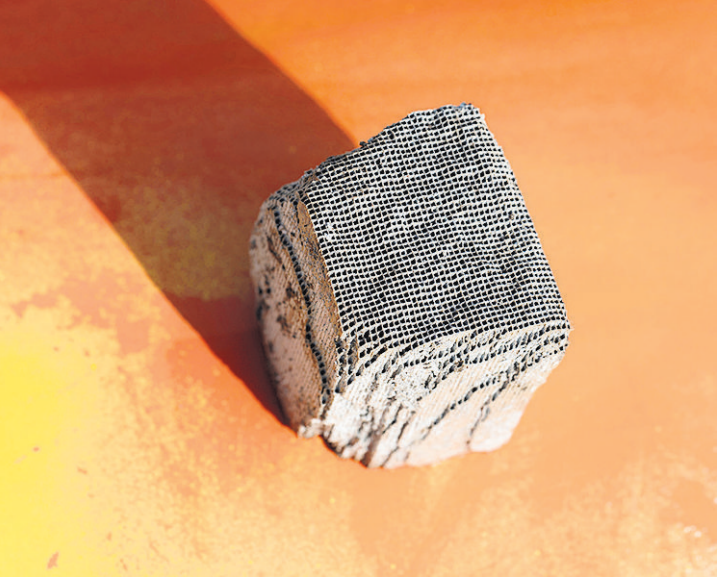
The indictment is an outgrowth of a billion-dollar epidemic of catalytic converter thefts that has not only disabled vehicles but also involved dozens of shootings, truck hijackings and other violence. Replacement devices are often hard to get and can cost \$1,000 or more.

Despite public attention on the thefts, little has been known about where the stolen metal goes, who benefits or why stopping the thievery has proved so difficult.

An examination of business records and social media posts, as well as interviews with more than 80 officials on three continents who have ties to the industry, showed that the stolen devices pass through middlemen, smelters and refineries in the United States and overseas. Along the way, their provenance becomes opaque, leaving beneficiaries of the thefts with plausible deniability and little incentive to stop them.

During processing, the metal is blended with legitimate supplies from mines and scrapyards, The New York Times found, before being sold primarily to companies that make catalytic converters for automakers, as well as pharmaceutical companies for cancer and other drugs, military contractors for weapons production, and banks for their precious-metals trading desks, among others.

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The innards of a catalytic converter infused with precious metals. JANIE OSBORNE FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

## Fatal Johannesburg Fire Exposes A Downtown’s Incendiary Blight

This article is by Lynsey Chutel, Selam Gebrekidan and John Eligon.

JOHANNESBURG — A fire that tore through a rundown building in Johannesburg in August left 77 dead. For years, the city had promised to catalog and fix dilapidated buildings like that one to prevent such disasters.

But it never did.

New York Times reporters scoured records, then went block by block, identifying at least 127 buildings in the city’s center that were in such a state of disrepair and neglect that another tragedy appeared inevitable.

Most of these buildings were overcrowded with illegal occu-

### Case of Neglect, Crime and Entrenched Rule

pants. Some had even been taken over by criminal gangs.

All of these buildings are within two miles of the mayor’s office. They are symbols of years of corruption and neglect.

The blaze had swept through a government property at 80 Albert Street, a deathtrap of a building where squatters pilfered electricity, built indoor shacks out of cardboard and cooked on paraffin stoves.

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## Argentina’s Presidential Race Becomes the Wild West of A.I.

By JACK NICAS and LUCÍA CHOLAKIAN HERRERA

BUENOS AIRES — The posters dotting the streets of Buenos Aires had a certain Soviet flare to them.

There was one of Argentina’s presidential candidates, Sergio Massa, dressed in a shirt with what appeared to be military medals, pointing to a blue sky. He was surrounded by hundreds of older people — in drab clothing, with serious, and often disfigured, faces — looked toward him in hope.

The style was no mistake. The illustrator had been given clear instructions.

“Sovietic Political propaganda

### Fake Campaign Images and Voter Confusion

poster illustration by Gustav Klut-sis featuring a leader, massa, standing firmly,” said a prompt that Mr. Massa’s campaign fed into an artificial-intelligence program to produce the image. “Symbols of unity and power fill the environment,” the prompt continued. “The image exudes authority and determination.”

Javier Milei, the other candidate in Sunday’s runoff election, has struck back by sharing what

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## Israeli Capture of Hospital May Shape Course of War

### Army Defends Raid, but Global Concerns Could Limit Duration of Offensive

By PATRICK KINGSLEY and IYAD ABUHEWEILA

JERUSALEM — Since Israel’s ground troops invaded Gaza 19 days ago, the fate of its war has become largely entwined with the fate of the territory’s largest hospital.

Israeli soldiers on Wednesday morning stormed that hospital, Al-Shifa, searching its corridors and rooms for evidence to support Israel’s assertion that the sprawling medical complex doubles as a secret military command center. Over the course of the day, they hunted for weapons and interrogated those they found inside, according to both Israeli officials and Palestinians at the hospital.

The early-morning raid was seen by both sides as a watershed moment in the conflict, capable of shaping the pace and extent of the war.

Israel says Al-Shifa, in Gaza City, conceals an underground military base and has presented its capture as a key metric of Israeli success. The Israelis also say that Hamas’s use of the hospital highlights how the group defends itself with human shields.

Hamas and the hospital’s leadership have denied the Israeli assertions. Al-Shifa, they say, is nothing other than a medical center and sanctuary for thousands of people uprooted by Israel’s strikes on Gaza. For Palestinians, the Israeli military’s focus on a major hospital, when such facilities are typically off-limits during times of war, is proof of its disre-

gard for Palestinian life.

What Israel finds — or doesn’t — in the hospital could affect international sentiment about the invasion and influence the negotiations taking place on freeing more than 200 hostages being held by Hamas.

Eighteen hours after the raid on the hospital began, the Israeli military released photos and video that it said backed its assertions. It distributed images of 13 guns that it said its soldiers had discovered in the hospital, as well as a statement saying that it had found a military command center in the hospital’s M.R.I. unit.

In a video taken at the hospital, a military spokesman, Lt. Col. Jonathan Conricus, displayed caches of guns, ammunition, protective vests and Hamas military uniforms, some of which, he said, had been hidden behind M.R.I. machines and others in nearby storage units.

The New York Times was unable to verify the provenance of the weapons and equipment in the images or assess the claim of the command center’s existence. Apart from a gunfight outside the hospital at the start of the raid, there were no reports of clashes with Hamas gunmen at the site.

In a statement, Hamas dismissed the Israeli account as “a fabricated story that no one would believe.”

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Alex Finkel, left, and Mustafa Abdu at the Jerusalem Y.M.C.A. AFIF AMIREH FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

## Teenagers Find Place of Peace At a Swim Club in Jerusalem

By MIRIAM JORDAN

JERUSALEM — The rule was unspoken, but the Israeli and Palestinian teenagers in the Greater Jerusalem swim club had abided by it forever without even thinking.

No politics in the pool.

They lived on opposite sides of Jerusalem, coming together six afternoons a week to train in lanes reserved for their team at the Y.M.C.A. After two hours of laps, they plunged into a Jacuzzi, where they joshed for a few minutes before calling it a day.

They swam together, went on beach outings together, barbecued together. The best Jewish swimmers represented Israel in international meets. The best swimmers from East Jerusalem competed for a team comprising Palestinians at meets in the Arab world.

“We don’t think about the team as Israelis and Palestinians,” said Avishag Ozeri, 16, an Israeli swimmer who recalled being taught to swim by a Palestinian from East

### Friendships Challenged by Oct. 7 Attacks

Jerusalem.

“It is so normal to be together,” she said before a recent practice. “It’s weird even talking about it.”

But then came the Oct. 7 Hamas-led attacks, the Israel bombardment of Gaza that followed, and a series of social media interactions that would test the team’s unspoken rule.

The swimmers train at the Y.M.C.A., a Christian nonprofit open to people of all faiths, in the heart of Jewish West Jerusalem, and Emanuel May has been the team’s volunteer coach for years.

An experienced coach with a gentle demeanor, Mr. May, 70, was raised in a farm collective, known as a kibbutz. Although he has trained champion swimmers, he said his passion was not to produce winners. It’s to foster unity among young people in Je-

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The devices can efficiently heat and cool homes, but a slow rollout of federal incentives has hindered sales. PAGE B1

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Fueled by the Israel-Hamas conflict, antisemitic and Islamophobic views have spread on social media. PAGE B1

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After a production of “Oklahoma!” was halted in conservative Sherman, Texas, the school board surprisingly sided with transgender students. PAGE A13

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