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What's News

Business & Finance

◆ **The Bank of Japan** said it would end negative interest rates after an eight-year experiment, symbolizing a broader shift away from unorthodox monetary easing. **A9**

◆ **Electric-vehicle maker** Fisker paused production for six weeks as it continues deal talks with a large automaker and works to keep its business running. **B1**

◆ **FedEx and Amazon** discussed a tie-up for the return of packages to the delivery giant's retail locations, according to a person familiar with the matter, although a deal wasn't reached. **B1**

◆ **The NHTSA** opened a probe into a fatal wreck involving a Ford SUV in which advanced-driver assistance technology may have been a factor. **B1**

◆ **Tech giants helped** lift major U.S. stock indexes, with the S&P 500, Nasdaq and Dow advancing 0.6%, 0.8% and 0.2%, respectively. **B11**

◆ **Senior Goldman executive** Stephanie Cohen joined an exodus of top female talent from the firm to become chief strategy officer at cloud-services provider Cloudflare. **B3**

◆ **Walt Disney won** the endorsement of a key proxy adviser in its fight against Nelson Peltz's Trian Partners, which is trying to get two seats on its board. **B2**

◆ **An appeals court** temporarily halted new rules issued by the SEC requiring public companies to disclose their climate-related risks. **B5**

◆ **Joblessness in China** rose for the third straight month, hitting 5.3% and reversing a previous stretch of declines in the unemployment rate. **A9**

World-Wide

◆ **The Supreme Court** seemed likely to reject a bid by GOP-led states to restrict the federal government from urging social-media companies to remove allegedly misleading posts or disinformation on their platforms unless there is a threat of official retribution. **A1**

◆ **Lawyers for Trump** said he was unable to obtain a bond to guarantee payment of a \$454 million civil-fraud judgment against him, despite trying to negotiate a deal with some of the world's largest suretors. **A3**

◆ **Congressional lawmakers** have resolved a snag over border funding, setting the stage for votes on annual spending bills in a race against the shutdown deadline. **A9**

◆ **Netanyahu agreed** to send officials to Washington to discuss U.S. concerns over Israel's planned military operation in Rafah, the White House said, as Israel and Hamas began a round of talks over hostages and a cease-fire proposal. **A6, A7**

◆ **Fresh from an election** in which he was the only viable contender, Russia's Putin vowed that peace in Ukraine would come only on his terms. **A8**

◆ **Developments in Ukraine** have led defense officials and scholars in Taiwan to conclude that the island would need heavy weapons to repel an attack by China. **A9**

◆ **Pakistan conducted** air assaults in Afghanistan aimed at militants that it said have been targeting its security forces in a worsening wave of attacks. **A8**

◆ **Died: James D. Robinson III**, 88, former American Express CEO, **B1** ... **Thomas P. Stafford**, 93, Apollo 10 astronaut. **A2**

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Talks on Rafah Set as Famine Fears Grow in Gaza



OUT OF REACH: Palestinians gather to receive aid Monday as evidence of widespread starvation was reported in the war-ravaged enclave, and Israel agreed to send negotiators to the U.S. to discuss its planned military operation in Rafah. **A6, A7**

Sales of Hybrid Cars Accelerate As Drivers Hesitate to Buy EVs

By SEAN McLAIN
AND RIVER DAVIS

Automakers have been working for years to transcend the image of hybrid cars as stodgy fuel sippers, remaking them with sportier designs and extra pep. Now, the once-niche hybrid is the hottest car on the lot.

Hybrids, which combine a gas engine with a battery-propelled motor to boost fuel efficiency, have been a small but steady slice of the U.S. car market since the Toyota Prius ushered in the technology more than two decades ago. In recent years, they have taken a

back seat to fully electric vehicles, as automakers introduced many EVs to challenge Tesla.

But car brands have been methodically expanding their hybrid offerings—partly to help meet tougher tailpipe-emissions rules—and for some, they have become a competitive edge. Hybrid leader Toyota Motor, for example, offers a hybrid version of nearly every gas-powered model in its U.S. showrooms. In some cases, such as Toyota's new Camry sedan or Sienna minivan, a hybrid is the only option.

The number of hybrid models on sale in the U.S. grew

40% over five years, to about 70 for the 2024 model year, Cox Automotive estimates. Hybrids now are available across more vehicle sizes and body styles than in past years: larger SUVs, pickups, jeeps and even sports cars.

"Hybrids now have very few compromises compared to their gas alternatives," said Andrew Frick, head of Ford Motor's gas and hybrid vehicle business. The hybrid version of the Ford F-150 pickup, for example, is now more powerful than most gas versions of the truck.

U.S. sales of hybrids jumped 50% in the first two

months of the year. That surge outpaced EV sales, which grew 13%, in both growth and volume. Hybrids flew off dealer lots in 25 days on average, nearly three times faster than EVs and twice as fast as gas-powered cars, according to research site Edmunds.

The buzz surrounding battery-powered vehicles also has fueled interest. Some EV-curious shoppers are stopping short of going fully electric and are driving off in hybrids

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◆ **Ailing EV maker Fisker** pauses output..... **B1**

Justices Skeptical Of GOP Claims of Censoring

Plaintiffs allege that government pressure led online platforms to muzzle their views

By JESS BRAVIN
AND JAN WOLFE

WASHINGTON—The Supreme Court seemed likely to reject a bid by GOP-led states to restrict the federal government from urging social-media companies to remove allegedly misleading posts or disinformation on their platforms, unless there is a threat of official retribution.

The Republican attorneys general of Missouri and Louisiana, along with several individuals who complained that online platforms such as Facebook suppressed their views against vaccines and lockdowns during the Covid-19 pandemic at the government's demand, filed the First Amendment suit in 2022.

Lower courts have largely sided with the plaintiffs, finding that Biden administration officials' content requests amounted to government coercion, but the high court during oral arguments on Monday voiced more sympathy with the administration's defense.

The social-media companies themselves aren't involved in the case, and liberal justices questioned whether any plaintiffs suffered harms that gave them a right to sue. And justices across the spectrum expressed skepticism that the government's interactions with the platforms, even if heated, amounted to official restraint.

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◆ **A TikTok ban would spur** test of free speech..... **A2**

China Tries To Woo Foreigners, But It Is A Hard Sell

China's government is rolling out a charm offensive to lure back foreigners, part of an effort to shed years of pandemic-induced isolation that is sapping the world's second-largest economy.

It's a tougher sell than it used to be.

By Liza Lin in
Singapore and
Yoko Kubota in Beijing

In recent months, China has made it simpler and cheaper for business travelers and tourists to get visas and scrapped visa requirements for some entirely. It has extended tax incentives to make life for foreign residents more appealing. Chinese Premier Li Qiang pledged further moves to rebuild the "Invest-in-China" brand at the country's annual legislative meetings earlier this month.

The campaign marks an effort to restore the global tie that helped power China's decades of record-breaking growth, which Beijing severed during the pandemic as President Xi Jinping elevated security above all else.

Now China is trying to regain its allure for foreigners in a different era, with a slowing economy and tightening social controls. A rising chorus in Washington portrays engagement with China as suspect.

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◆ **China's economy shows** pockets of weakness..... **A9**

INSIDE



U.S. NEWS

Trump says he can't obtain a bond to guarantee payment of a fraud judgment. **A3**



PERSONAL JOURNAL

College seniors use unexpected tactics and connections to find first jobs. **A12**

Overworked South Koreans Unwind With Their Pet Rocks

Bizarre fad of 1970s America gets a new life in Asia; 'kind of like talking to your dog'

By JIYOUNG SOHN

SEOUL—Lee So-hee, a 30-year-old office worker, used to live alone in Seoul. That changed in November when a friend gave her a rock.

"If you really think of your rock as a pet, I do think it makes things a bit less lonely and more fun," she said.

Pet rocks, a kooky and best-forgotten fad of 1970s America, are resurfacing in South Korea. Unlike the stone-in-a-box craze nearly five decades ago, the sequel is more about serenity than shtick.

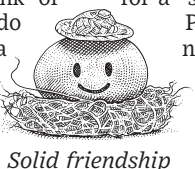
South Koreans, who endure one of the industrialized

world's longest workweeks, have a tradition of unwinding in unusual ways. They have lain in coffins for their own mock funerals, checked into prison to meditate and gathered in a Seoul park each year for a "space-out" contest.

Pet rocks are the latest new thing. Lee, a 30-year-old researcher at a pharmaceutical company, calls her pet rock—a girl, she said—Hongduggae.

She made it a winter blanket from an old towel. It came into her life during a demanding stretch at work when she was working long hours in the lab, often late into the night.

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Solid friendship

ESPN Boss's Chaotic Race To Remake Network

Cable TV's collapse is forcing sports giant out of its comfort zone

By ISABELLA SIMONETTI
AND ROBBIE WHELAN

ESPN boss Jimmy Pitaro was keeping a big secret.

In January, Pitaro and executives at ESPN-parent Disney hosted a contingent of top NFL officials—including Commissioner Roger Goodell, and team owners Robert Kraft and Jerry Jones—at Disney's Burbank, Calif., headquarters to discuss a potential deal.

On the table was a strategic partnership that would involve the NFL taking an equity stake in ESPN and coordinating streaming and TV efforts, said people familiar with the talks.

What the league didn't know: Pitaro's team at ESPN was quietly working on a totally separate deal to join forces with rival media companies on a sports-streaming service. When that venture was announced in February, the league was blindsided—and furious at being out of the loop.

As he gathered a few days later at the Super Bowl in Las Vegas with his team and a gaggle of sports celebrities, Goodell complained to one associate, "Why would Disney treat a partner this way?"

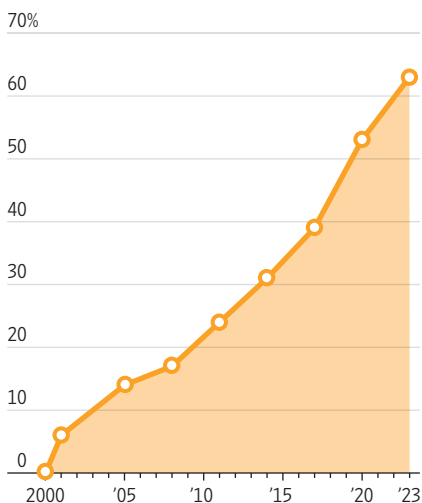
An NFL spokesman de-

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Abortion Pill Use Jumps

Medication abortions have become more common despite the elimination of federal protections for the procedure, new data show. The method has risen to account for almost two-thirds of abortions in the U.S., according to the Guttmacher Institute, which supports abortion rights. **A3**

Percentage of medication abortions among all U.S. abortions



Note: Abortions in formal healthcare settings
Source: Guttmacher Institute