

Former U.S. ambassador accused of aiding Cuba

Recordings from FBI sting deliver shock in diplomatic circles

BY DEVLIN BARRETT, MARY BETH SHERIDAN AND KAREN DEYOUNG

The Justice Department unsealed charges Monday against a retired ambassador, accusing him of being a “clandestine agent” for decades — allegedly betraying his country by acting on behalf of Cuba’s spy agency.

The arrest of Manuel Rocha, 73, capped a year-long undercover sting operation in which an FBI agent pretending to be a Cuban intelligence operative secretly recorded Rocha making incriminating statements about his life of diplomatic deception.

Attorney General Merrick Garland called the Rocha case “one of the highest-reaching and longest-lasting infiltrations of the United States government by a foreign agent,” adding that in those secretly recorded conversations, Rocha repeatedly referred to the United States as “the enemy.”

The news of Rocha’s alleged duplicity stunned his friends and colleagues in U.S. diplomatic and intelligence circles.

“I never suspected, never had the slightest suspicion that he might be living a double life like the charging document describes,” said Brian Latell, a former senior CIA intelligence official who met Rocha in the early 1980s.

“I think I knew him as well as SEE AMBASSADOR ON A2

In court, Trump cites fringe theories

Election fraud case filings point to baseless claims about Jan. 6

BY RACHEL WEINER AND ISAAC ARNSDORF

Ever since he was indicted on charges of interfering in the 2020 election results, Donald Trump has relished the chance to use the case in Washington as a venue to air his baseless claims of fraud. Now he is using it to circulate a new set of falsehoods: that the federal government staged or incited violence at the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, to discredit Trump and his supporters.

In court filings last week, the former president revealed that he has been pressing the Justice Department for information on far-right claims often elevated in his speeches, on his social media feeds and by his conservative allies in Congress — further blurring the line between his campaign and his court battles.

Trump’s legal filings typically include a political dimension, as the core of his defense is seeking to position the prosecutions as politicized, advisers said. He has frequently claimed in campaign speeches, without evidence, that President Biden ordered Trump’s SEE TRUMP ON A8



TAMIR KALIFA FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

On his 17th birthday, Noah Bseso got a surprise: He was taken from the cell he shared with eight other young Palestinians at Israel’s Damon Prison. Fingerprinted and photographed, he wondered if he was in for an unexpected transfer.

He had heard nothing of the agreement to exchange Palestinian prisoners for Israeli hostages held in Gaza. He didn’t know that his father was on his way to meet him, or that his mother was hurriedly hanging the birthday streamers they hadn’t thought they’d need.

Within hours, he was home, and free.

Bseso sat in his family’s living room Thursday, still reeling from finding himself one of the 240 Palestinians released from Israeli custody during the seven-day pause in the Gaza war. Like the more than 100 Israeli hostages and foreign citizens freed by Hamas before fighting resumed Friday, the Palestinian detainees knew less than almost anyone about the diplomatic maneuvering in which they had been pawns.

Palestinians exit Israeli prisons with stories of harsh treatment

Several detainees exchanged for hostages recount deprivation and, in some cases, physical abuse after Oct. 7

BY STEVE HENDRIX AND SUFIAN TAHA IN JERUSALEM

Noah Bseso, seen with his mother, Mona, on Thursday in East Jerusalem, was released after three months of detainment, some spent in solitary confinement.

They have emerged to learn the details of the Hamas-led attacks on Oct. 7 that killed more than 1,200 people in Israel. They’ve learned of the Israeli military campaign that has killed about 15,900 people and wounded more than 41,000 in Gaza since the war began, according to the Gaza Health Ministry.

Bseso, a skinny high school math whiz, was detained for three months. He spent some of his days in windowless solitary confinement.

“I wasn’t aware of anything,” he said. “Sometimes I didn’t know whether it was daytime or nighttime.”

The Palestinians released were women and teens. Some, like Bseso, were charged with offenses such as throwing rocks, fireworks or molotov cocktails at Israeli troops during raids on Palestinian towns. Almost half were boys ages 14 to 17. Several emerged with stories of deprivation and, in some cases, physical abuse.

Several dozen of the prisoners were swept up in the surge of SEE PRISONERS ON A14

At 5 years old, he’s a trailblazer for rare diseases

Boy born without an immune system is thriving, thanks to experimental gene therapy



ADRIANA ZEBRAUSKAS FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Hataalii Tiisyononii “HT” Begay, 5, who has what was famously known as “bubble boy disease,” rides a toy horse next to his brother Hastiin, 7, at the family ranch on the Navajo Nation in Arizona.

BY CAROLYN Y. JOHNSON

TUBA CITY, ARIZ. — Hataalii Tiisyononii “HT” Begay, a Native American boy who is Diné, or Navajo, rolls toy trucks around in the dirt. He chases chickens into their coop. He pauses to watch his dad deftly gut a sheep for a ceremonial feast. Then he climbs onto a picnic table with his brother and cousins, chanting “Lava!” while pretending the ground has turned into molten rock.

To his family, HT is a typical 5-year-old — a smiling, curious, busy blur who roams across his family’s ranch, where the land seems to stretch all the way to the sky.

To his doctors, he is a marvel. HT was born with a form of severe combined immunodeficiency, or SCID, which meant he had virtually no immune defenses. About 70 children are born with SCID each year in the United States and Canada, though only two or three will have the same type as HT. Without treatment, children with SCID typically die in the first two years of life.

On the sixth day of HT’s life, he and his family returned to the hospital where he’d been born in SEE GENE THERAPY ON A10

War pushes to south Gaza

ISRAEL’S OFFENSIVE ENTERS NEW PHASE

Focal points include road designated for evacuation

BY HAZEM AL-BALOUSHA, HAJAR HARB, KAREEM FAHIM AND MIRIAM BERGER

AMMAN, JORDAN — Dozens of Israeli military vehicles have crossed into southern Gaza, new satellite imagery showed Monday, signaling the long-expected beginning of a new phase of Israel’s war against Hamas in the densely populated enclave.

Witnesses said that Israel established a new checkpoint outside the key city of Khan Younis as residents scrambled to stay clear of the advancing army, and a territory-wide communications blackout hampered the humanitarian response.

A focal point of the operations Monday was Gaza’s Salah al-Din Road, which Israel had previously designated as an evacuation route for civilians fleeing from the north to the south. The Israel Defense Forces, for the first time, announced Monday that a segment of the road, north of Khan Younis, was a “battlefield” and that residents should no longer approach it.

The IDF identified “bypass” roads it said residents should travel on instead, adding to the thicket of evacuation orders Israel has issued in recent days that it says are aimed at reducing civilian casualties. But aid groups have warned the directives are becoming impossible to navigate, while Palestinians in Gaza say the guidance is of little use in a SEE GAZA ON A14

Conflict: Biden faces protests over the war at nearly every event. A7

U.S. Muslims: War, LGBTQ rights complicate domestic alliances. B1

Year sets a grim record for U.S. mass shootings: 38

BY BONNIE BERKOWITZ

In less than 90 minutes on Sunday afternoon, two 911 calls led police in Texas and Washington to two mass shootings that pushed the nation to a gruesome milestone.

They were the 37th and 38th shootings this year in which four or more victims were killed, the highest number of mass killings in any year since at least 2006. Last year’s 36 was the previous record.

In Dallas, a 21-year-old man who was supposed to be wearing an ankle monitor because of a previous aggravated assault charge walked into a house and shot five people, killing a toddler and three adults. He fled in a stolen car, police said, but fatally shot himself as highway patrol officers chased him. In a suburb of Vancouver, Wash., five family members died in what sheriff’s SEE SHOOTINGS ON A11

Gun trafficking: DOJ has charged over 250 people under new law. A3

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A closer look Some in Congress say it’s time to review the government’s relationships with Elon Musk’s companies. A8

Rails to trails As old train routes are repurposed, the head of a D.C.-based group envisions the transformed spaces as the nation’s new town squares. B1

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THE ECONOMY The Supreme Court is set to hear a case that could make it easier for employees’ discrimination complaints to succeed. A17
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THE REGION A Prince George’s County police officer charged with murdering a handcuffed man took the stand at his trial. B1
A rabbi’s proposal to hold a menorah lighting at a Virginia festival — and its subsequent rejection — has led to accusations of bigotry. B1

STYLE Krampus, the demonic “anti-Santa,” is spreading holiday terror across the country. C1

HEALTH & SCIENCE While cherophobia, or fear of happiness, is not a recognized mental illness, research suggests it’s a real issue for many — such as this writer. E1

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