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Democracy Dies in Darkness

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Incursion into Russia thwarts secret talks

Ukraine’s push halts bid for both sides to stop energy-sector attacks

BY ISABELLE KHURSHUDYAN, SIOBHÁN O’GRADY, JOHN HUDSON AND CATHERINE BELTON

KYIV — Ukraine and Russia were set to send delegations to Doha this month to negotiate a landmark agreement halting strikes on energy and power infrastructure on both sides, diplomats and officials familiar with the discussions said, in what would have amounted to a partial cease-fire and offered a reprieve for both countries.

But the indirect talks, with the Qataris serving as mediators and meeting separately with the Ukrainian and Russian delegations, were derailed by Ukraine’s surprise incursion into Russia’s western Kursk region the week before last, according to the officials. The possible agreement and planned summit have not been previously reported.

For more than a year, Russia has pounded Ukraine’s power grid with a barrage of cruise missiles and drone strikes, causing irreparable damage to power stations and rolling blackouts across the country. Meanwhile, Ukraine has struck Russia’s oil facilities with long-range drone attacks that have set ablaze refineries, depots and reservoirs, reducing Moscow’s oil refining by an estimated 15 percent and raising gas prices around the world.

Some involved in the negotiations hoped they could lead to a more comprehensive agreement to end the war, according to the officials who like others spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the sensitive diplomacy.

The willingness to engage in the talks signaled something of a shift for both countries, at least for a limited cease-fire. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has said Kyiv would consider a full cease-fire only if Russia first with-

SEE UKRAINE ON A21



JOSHUA LOTT/THE WASHINGTON POST

A classic car show in late July in Kenosha, Wis., is one scene encountered while tracing a route between the convention cities, through urban sprawl and rural towns. America’s political variety was on full display, offering a sense of the national mood, including voters who feel energized — or quite the opposite. **Photos, A14 and A15**

With little control over Trump’s plans, his campaign seeks to regain footing

BY MICHAEL SCHERER AND JOSH DAWSEY

Donald Trump’s top brass gathered reporters in West Palm Beach, Fla., this month to showcase the inner workings of the former president’s campaign and exude a we-have-it-under-control confidence.

As PowerPoints flashed on a screen, they laid out their 90-day plan — the 11 percent of the U.S. population they had identified as “target persuadables,” a ground strategy that would motivate Republicans and discourage Democrats and the five-word frame to dismantle his new rival, Vice President Kamala Harris, as “failed, weak and dangerously liberal.”

The only thing missing was the candidate, who sat a few miles away at his Mar-a-Lago estate with his own plans for blowing up the news cycle.

Hours after the Aug. 8 briefing ended, Trump appeared on cable news networks for a news conference filled with false or unsupported claims unrelated to the campaign’s plan to defeat Harris — his crowd sizes, the “unconstitutional” elevation of Harris as the nominee, a near-helicopter crash with former San Francisco mayor Willie Brown that Brown says never happened. Trump decided to hold a news conference because he heard his team was holding the briefing, but he wanted to see TRUMP ON A8

Democratic convention to highlight historic rise of new standard-bearer

BY TOLUSE OLORUNNIPA

One month ago, Democrats watched with envy and dismay as Republicans demonstrated their energy and unity with a lively party convention that showcased Donald Trump’s dominant position in the race against President Joe Biden.

Now, after one of the most momentous shifts in political atmospheres in modern history, Democrats have been buoyed by a new standard-bearer and sense of optimism as they prepare to begin their own nominating convention Monday in Chicago.

Biden will speak on the first day of the convention before leaving town, a symbolic changing of

the guard that highlights how his decision to abruptly end his reelection bid upended the race.

Vice President Kamala Harris, who has ridden a wave of enthusiasm in a party that had been riven by angst over Biden’s weak poll numbers, will cap the programing Thursday with a speech designed to introduce herself to the nation and highlight the historic nature of her unexpected candidacy. The unprecedented turn of events has added to the sense of unpredictability that has marked an election already rocked by a history-changing debate, one candidate’s felony convictions and an assassination attempt during a political rally.

SEE HARRIS ON A13

Slender edge for Harris in poll

DEMOCRATS GAINING AS DYNAMICS SHIFT

Findings point to a tight election in November

BY DAN BALZ, SCOTT CLEMENT AND EMILY GUSKIN

Vice President Kamala Harris holds a narrow lead over former president Donald Trump in the presidential election, a notable improvement for Democrats in a contest that a little more than a month ago showed President Joe Biden and Trump in a dead heat, according to a Washington Post-ABC News-Ipsos poll.

As Democrats gather this weekend in Chicago for their upcoming national convention, Harris stands at 49 percent to Trump’s 45 percent among registered voters in a head-to-head matchup. When third-party candidates are included in the survey, Harris is at 47 percent and Trump at 44 percent, with Robert F. Kennedy Jr. at 5 percent. In early July, Trump stood at 43 percent, Biden at 42 percent and Kennedy at 9 percent.

Given the margin of error in this poll, which tests only national support, Harris’s lead among registered voters is not considered statistically significant. The vice president’s three-percentage-point advantage in a race that includes third-party candidates is slightly smaller than Biden’s 4.5-point popular vote margin in 2020, which translated into an electoral college majority.

Though the dynamics of the

SEE POLL ON A12

The Sunday Take: VP’s campaign is lively but largely untested. **A2**

Immigration: Harris presses for tough diplomacy at the border. **A5**

Protest preparation: Chicago seeks balance of safety, rights. **A13**

In Maryland, a small town wrestles with second chances

Hiring of a man convicted in a rape stirs anger

BY LATESHIA BEACHUM, SALVADOR RIZZO AND PAUL DUGGAN

By the time residents of little Brentwood, Md., confronted their mayor at a town council meeting, they were angry, confused and demanding answers: Why had the vice mayor resigned? Why had the police chief been demoted? And why had the town given a job to a convicted rapist?

“It’s disgraceful,” one woman declared that evening in July. Another pleaded, “People really want to know if he’s safe.”

They were talking about Eric Reyes, 36, who spent 16½ years behind bars before being released eight months ago. The mayor’s decision to hire him as a public maintenance laborer has caused trepidation in the community and tumult at town hall.

The part-time mayor, Rocio C. Treminio-Lopez, who has preached the virtue of second chances, sat on the council dais, listening and nodding. Heeding advice from Brentwood’s lawyer, she barely responded to the half-dozen people who rose to complain.

To Treminio-Lopez’s left, the council seat once held by the vice mayor was empty. He resigned in protest in June, calling it “grossly irresponsible” to put Reyes on the payroll. The police chief’s chair was vacant, too. Amid the turmoil over Reyes, the mayor ousted the head of Brentwood’s four-officer force, demoting him to lieutenant. An attorney for the former chief said the demotion was retaliation because his client raised concerns about the town employing Reyes, a registered sex offender who admitted to taking part in a horrific assault when he was a teenager.

Now residents were pressing for explanations.

“This is putting people on edge,” Pamela Moyer, 54, said at the lectern. Gesturing in frustration, she said: “That’s why people are talking. Because they’re scared. ... They want to know: Is this person going to be moving freely through the neighborhoods? What kind of interactions will he have with the public?”

“A rapist!” said Amber Shrewsbury, 38, scowling at the mayor. “Do you know the details of what he did to this lady?”

SEE BRENTWOOD ON A11

Kushner’s planned Albania resort sparks blowback

As the nation seeks to attract tourists, environmentalists fear such growth will damage fragile habitats



ILIR TSOUKO FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Zverniec, Albania, seen in June, is part of the Vjosa-Narte Protected Landscape. The stretch of Mediterranean coastline contains habitats for pelicans, flamingos and several endangered species.

BY CHICO HARLAN, MICHAEL KRANISH AND ISAAC STANLEY-BECKER

ZVERNEC, ALBANIA — In one of his several trips to Albania over the past few years, Jared Kushner went hiking along a stretch of Mediterranean coastline with pristine sand dunes and cliff-lined beaches. The place, he said in an interview, was “magnificent” and “natural.”

It was also, he said, an “incredible canvas” for his dreams of developing luxury projects. “It’s a place where people would love to be.”

Now, Kushner is seeking to transform this stretch of Albania into the kind of luxury resort that his father-in-law, former president Donald Trump, would brag about. It would be Kushner’s biggest project yet using part of his roughly \$3 billion private equity fund — financed largely by investors in Saudi Arabia and other Middle East petrostates — bringing international tourism to an area that stagnated under years of communism and neglect.

But Kushner’s planned development is facing local and international blowback because of its

SEE KUSHNER ON A6

METRO
Missing woman’s brother says she last called home to Nepal in July.

SPORTS
The death of Billy Bean, a leading MLB voice for inclusion, leaves a void.



TRAVEL
Hobby horse lovers take the sport offline in first U.S. championships.

ARTS & STYLE
In his art about race, Hank Willis Thomas sees what America can’t say.



BOOK WORLD
“Living on Earth” is a look at how living things transform our planet.

BUSINESS
A booming industry of AI age scanners, aimed at children’s faces.

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