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# The New York Times

**THE WEATHER**  
Today, warm and humid, partly cloudy, high 88. **Tonight**, cloudy, humid, light winds, low 75. **Tomorrow**, some sunshine, an afternoon storm, high 87. Weather map, Page D8.

VOL. CLXXIII . . . No. 60,209      © 2024 The New York Times Company      MONDAY, JULY 8, 2024      Prices in Canada may be higher      \$4.00

## 6 TOP DEMOCRATS PRIVATELY SAYING BIDEN SHOULD GO

### HOUSE LEADERS MEET

Allies of President Insist  
He Must Do More to  
Reassure Voters

*This article is by Luke Broadwater, Robert Jimison and Annie Karni.*

President Biden’s base of support among key Democrats on Capitol Hill began to crumble on Sunday as a half-dozen top members of the House privately told colleagues he should withdraw from the presidential race amid growing concerns about his age and ability to win re-election.

During a virtual private meeting, the House Democrats — all senior members of powerful committees — discussed how to use their collective influence to convince Mr. Biden he had little chance of defeating former President Donald J. Trump, according to five people familiar with the confidential discussion, including three who were present, all of whom insisted on anonymity to discuss it.

The consensus during the session, which was convened by Representative Hakeem Jeffries, Democrat of New York and the minority leader, was that a change at the top of the ticket was needed to preserve the party’s chances of holding the White House and prevailing in the fight for control of Congress, the people said.

Among those saying explicitly that Mr. Biden should end his candidacy were Representatives Jerrold Nadler of New York, the top Democrat on the Judiciary Committee; Adam Smith of Washington, the ranking member of the Armed Services Committee; Mark Takano of California, the

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**UKRAINE** A nation at war strains to stay neutral as the U.S. presidential race intensifies. PAGE A10

## Israeli Protests Seek Cease-Fire And an Election

**By ISABEL KERSHNER**  
JERUSALEM — Israelis on Sunday marked nine months since the devastating Hamas-led attack of Oct. 7 and the start of the ensuing war in Gaza with a nationwide day of antigovernment protests at a time that many here view as a pivotal juncture in the conflict.

Primarily calling for a cease-fire deal with Hamas that would see hostages return from captivity and for new elections in Israel, protesters brought traffic to a standstill at several major intersections in cities and on highways across the country. Much of central Tel Aviv was blocked in one of the biggest protests in months.

Some progress has been made in recent days for a resumption of negotiations toward a tentative deal after weeks of an impasse, even as the fighting continues in Gaza, where an Israeli strike hit in the area of a U.N. school on Saturday, and across Israel’s northern border with Lebanon.

But many Israelis, among them the families of some hostages, fear that the cease-fire efforts could be torpedoed not only by Hamas, but also by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel who, they say, might prioritize the survival of his government over a deal that could topple it.

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PHOTOGRAPHS BY MERIDITH KOHUT FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES  
Conservationists fear SpaceX operations are damaging the surrounding Boca Chica, Texas, region. From left, a dead Atlantic green sea turtle, a great blue heron and a damaged snowy plover egg.

## French Election Yields Deadlock as Left Surges

**By ROGER COHEN**  
PARIS — France faced a hung parliament and deep political uncertainty after the three main political groups of the left, center and right emerged from snap legislative elections on Sunday with large shares of the vote but nothing approaching an absolute majority.

Projections based on preliminary results upended widespread predictions of a clear victory for the National Rally, Marine Le

**Macron’s Party at No. 2  
— Far Right Loses  
Projected Lead**

Pen’s anti-immigrant party that dominated the first round of voting a week ago. Instead, the left-wing New Popular Front appeared to hold the lead, with between 172 and 208 seats, according to several polling institutes.

The centrist Renaissance party of President Emmanuel Macron, who cast the country into turmoil a month ago by calling the election, was in second place with between 150 and 174 seats, the projections indicated. Trailing them was the National Rally, which took between 113 and 152 seats.

The details of the outcome may still shift, but it is clear that, to a remarkable degree, a scramble by centrists and the left to form a “Republican front” to confront the

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POOL PHOTO BY OHAD ZWIGENBERG  
The Israeli military transporting a group of soldiers and journalists inside the southern Gaza Strip.

## In Gaza, Seeing Scarred Land and Eerie Stillness

**By ADAM GOLDMAN**  
RAFAH, Gaza Strip — The armed convoy of jeeps filled with reporters rumbled into a dusty Rafah, passing flattened houses and battered apartment buildings.

As we dismounted our Humvees, a stillness gripped this swath of southern Gaza, near the border with Egypt. Slabs of

concrete and twisted rebar dotted the scarred landscape. Kittens darted through the wreckage.

Streets once bustling with life were now a maze of rubble. Everyone was gone.

More than a million people have fled to avoid an Israeli onslaught that began two months ago. Many have been displaced repeatedly and now live in tent cities that stretch for miles,

where they face an uncertain future as they mourn the loss of loved ones.

As Israel says it is winding down its operation against Hamas in Rafah, the Israeli military invited foreign journalists into the city on a supervised visit. The military says that it has fought with precision and restraint against Hamas fighters embedded in civilian areas.

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## At SpaceX, Wildlife Safety Takes Back Seat to Launch

Musk Exploits Conflicting Agency Missions  
to Achieve His Goals, Inquiry Finds

**By ERIC LIPTON**

BOCA CHICA, Texas — As Elon Musk’s Starship — the largest rocket ever manufactured — successfully blasted toward the sky last month, the launch was hailed as a giant leap for SpaceX and the United States’ civilian space program.

Two hours later, once conditions were deemed safe, a team from SpaceX, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and a conservation group began canvassing the fragile migratory bird habitat surrounding the launch site.

The impact was obvious. The launch had unleashed an enormous burst of mud, stones and fiery debris across the public lands encircling Mr. Musk’s \$3 billion space compound. Chunks of sheet metal and insulation were strewn across the sand flats on one side of a state park. Elsewhere, a small fire had ignited, leaving a charred patch of park grasslands — remnants from the blastoff that burned 7.5 million pounds of fuel.

Most disturbing to one member of the entourage was the yellow smear on the soil in the same spot that a bird’s nest lay the day before. None of the nine nests recorded by the nonprofit Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program before the launch had survived intact.

Egg yolk now stained the ground.

“The nests have all been messed up or have eggs missing,” Justin LeClaire, a Coastal Bend wildlife biologist, told a Fish and Wildlife inspector as a New York Times reporter observed nearby.

The outcome was part of a well-documented pattern.

On at least 19 occasions since 2019, SpaceX operations have caused fires, leaks, explosions or other problems associated with the rapid growth of Mr. Musk’s complex in Boca Chica. These incidents have caused environmental damage and reflect a broader debate over how to balance tech-

nological and economic progress against protections of delicate ecosystems and local communities.

That natural tension is heightened by Mr. Musk’s influence over American space aspirations. Members of Congress and senior officials in the Biden administration have fretted privately and publicly about the extent of Mr. Musk’s power as the U.S. government increasingly relies on SpaceX for commercial space operations and for its plans to travel to the moon and even Mars.

An examination of Mr. Musk’s tactics in South Texas shows how he exploited the limitations and competing missions of the various agencies most poised to be a check on the ferocious expansion of the industrial complex he calls Starbase. Those charged with protecting the area’s cultural and natural resources — particularly officials from the Interior Department’s Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Park Service — repeatedly lost out to more powerful agencies, including the Federal Aviation Administration, whose goals are intertwined with Mr. Musk’s.

In the end, South Texas’ ecology took a back seat to SpaceX’s — and the country’s — ambitions.

Executives from SpaceX declined repeated requests in person and via email to comment. But Gary Henry, who until this year served as a SpaceX adviser on Pentagon launch programs, said the company was aware of the officials’ complaints about environmental impact and was committed to addressing them.

Kelvin B. Coleman, the top F.A.A. official overseeing space launch licenses, said he was convinced that his agency was doing its duty, which is to foster space travel safely.

“Blowing debris into state parks or national land is not what we prescribed, but the bottom line

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## Mexico City’s Burning Debate: Subdue Salsas for Foreigners?

**By JAMES WAGNER**  
MEXICO CITY — Gerardo Medina runs the Taqueria Los Amigos, a 24-hour stand that sits at a busy intersection in an upscale neighborhood.

With more customers from abroad eating his tacos, he began noticing similar reactions to his pico de gallo: red faces, sweat, complaints about the spiciness.

So Mr. Medina, 30, got rid of the serrano peppers, leaving just tomatoes, onions and cilantro. While he still offers an avocado salsa with serrano and a red salsa with morita chiles and chiles de árbol, he wanted to provide a non-spicy option for international visitors unaccustomed to intense heat.

“It attracts more people,” he said.

Chiles are fundamental to Mexican cuisine and, in turn, to the country’s identity. Mexicans put them, often in the form of salsas, on everything: tacos, seafood, chips, fruit, beer and, yes, even sorbet.

“Food that isn’t spicy practically isn’t good food for the majority of Mexicans,” Isaac Palacios, 37, who lives in Mexico City, said after consuming tacos smothered in salsa.

But since the pandemic, the country’s capital — with a metropolitan area of 23 million people, a temperate climate and rich cultural offerings — has become hugely popular as both a tourist destina-



LUIS ANTONIO ROJAS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES  
“If you lower the heat on a salsa,” one Mexico City resident said, “now it’s a dressing.”

tion and a new home for international transplants who can work remotely and whose earnings in dollars or euros makes the city more affordable. (Americans are the biggest group.)

As a result, in certain neighborhoods, the gentrification has been inescapable.

English is often heard on the streets. Rents have ballooned. Boutiques and coffee shops are increasingly common.

But another key manifestation of this international shift — the lowering of the heat levels of salsas at some of the city’s many taquerias — has caused consternation.

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**Desert Perils for Migrants**  
Researchers say the trek across the Sahel and the Sahara is more dangerous than crossing the sea. PAGE A4

**Circuslike Election in Japan**  
Fifty-six people ran to be governor of Tokyo and its surrounding prefecture. Many were far from serious. PAGE A8

**DNA and the Tulsa Massacre**  
After more than a century, researchers hope to finally identify the victims of one of the worst racial attacks in American history. PAGE A11

**Undeterred by Drownings**  
The hot weekend brought crowds to New York beaches, where the tally of swimming deaths is now four. PAGE A16

**Bard for a Troubled World**  
Stanley Moss, 99, made free-verse observations on things like friends’ deaths and the Holocaust. PAGE A20



**His Big Step Forward**  
Success had eluded Grégory Milan in dance and choreography. Then came gymnastics and Simone Biles. PAGE C1

**Rebound in San Francisco**  
Arts groups are succeeding in luring back audiences, but attendance remains down from prepandemic levels. PAGE C1

**Paramount Agrees to a Merger**  
The deal with the media outfit Skydance, approved by Paramount’s board, ushers in a new chapter for the company, which owns CBS and the movie studio behind “Top Gun.” PAGE B4

**A Six-Day Workweek?**  
Greece, which already has the European Union’s longest average workweek, wants to add another day in some cases, bucking a growing global trend toward shorter weeks. PAGE B1

**Farah Stockman** PAGE A18



**New and Used Stars for Sale**  
Deals between car dealerships and college athletes, once scandalous, are now commonplace. The bargain: free rides for social media posts. PAGE D1

