



Partly sunny 85/65 • Tomorrow: Partly sunny 83/64 B6

Democracy Dies in Darkness

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 20, 2024 • \$3

Working to adapt to a ‘new norm’ of threats

Secret Service chief says agency is stretched thin and needs funding boost

BY MARIA SACCHETTI, CAROL D. LEONNIG, JACQUELINE ALEMANY AND JOSH DAWSEY

Acting Secret Service director Ronald L. Rowe Jr. is urging Congress to heavily invest in the protective agency after two apparent assassination attempts against former president Donald Trump, saying the service must confront its shortcomings and better position itself to handle a dangerous “new reality.”

Rowe, in a wide-ranging interview with The Post, said the guardians of U.S. presidents, former presidents and other top officials are desperate for more counter-snipers and investigators, upgraded armored limousines for motorcades, and a greater supply of ballistic glass.

He said that the agency’s aging Maryland training center lacks studios to train agents for real-world attacks and that agents are working more hours in a state of hypervigilance than anyone should.

“We are running our people at levels that we have not seen in our protective operations,” Rowe said this week. “We are burning everything hot right now.”

The agency operates with a \$3 billion yearly budget and more than 7,000 employees, including the elite protective details.

Homeland Security Secretary SEE SECRET SERVICE ON A8

Florida: Parallel investigation prompts legal concerns. A8



Wael Hamzeh/EPA-EFE/SHUTTERSTOCK

Mourners at a funeral Thursday in Beirut carry the coffin of a person killed by an exploding electronic device. Based on death notices, most of the 37 people killed in this week’s blasts are believed to have been Hezbollah fighters, but two children also died. **Story, A13**

Escalating attacks reveal Washington’s weakening handle on crisis

BY JOHN HUDSON

The deadly explosion of pagers and walkie-talkies across Lebanon this week dealt another blow to President Joe Biden’s beleaguered efforts to reduce tensions in the Middle East, even as his top diplomats were present in the region reciting calls for calm.

The absence of a full-blown war between Israel and Hezbollah has been touted by U.S. officials as a core achievement of the past 11 months amid failures to broker a cease-fire between Israel and Hamas, and halt the enormous civilian death toll and re-

strictions on humanitarian aid in the war-ravaged Gaza Strip.

But with Israel moving forces north and flying warplanes over Beirut, Hezbollah calling Israel’s apparent sabotage of electronic devices an “act of war,” and rockets and missiles flying in both directions, Washington’s grip on the crisis appears more tenuous than ever.

The detonation of the communications devices on Tuesday and Wednesday killed at least 37 people in Lebanon, including Hezbollah operatives, children and health-care workers, and coincided with U.S. Secretary of State

Antony Blinken’s trip to Egypt, where he urged “all parties” to avoid any steps that could “further escalate the conflict that we’re trying to resolve.”

Washington’s effort to urge de-escalation has been met with increasingly brazen assaults by its ally Israel and deadly rocket and missile volleys by Iranian-backed Hezbollah and Houthi militants — all of which threaten ongoing efforts to forge a deal to pause the fighting in Gaza and secure the release of hostages taken from Israel a year ago.

“Secretaries of state should travel to the region in a crisis, but

the risk you run is eventually becoming part of the political furniture: You get taken for granted,” said Aaron David Miller, a Middle East expert who has advised both Republican and Democratic administrations. “Unless you husband your currency, the Israelis, the Palestinians, the Arab states look at American officials as part of the furniture. They get used to them.”

U.S. diplomats hold little sway over Iran and Hezbollah but wield significant leverage over Israel, the single largest cumula-

SEE DIPLOMACY ON A14

Jets roar over a vengeful Beirut

NASRALLAH: BLASTS ARE ‘ACT OF WAR’

Hezbollah vows response as Israel ramps up fight

BY CLAIRE PARKER, MOHAMAD EL CHAMAA, LIOR SOROKA AND SHIRA RUBIN

CAIRO — Hezbollah leader Hasan Nasrallah blamed Israel on Thursday for the explosion of electronic devices across Lebanon this week, calling the operation an “act of war” and vowing to respond, as the Israeli military signaled it was moving ahead with plans for a new phase of the conflict along the two countries’ border.

“It is an act of war against the people of Lebanon, Lebanon’s sovereignty. It is a declaration of war,” Nasrallah said in a televised address, his first remarks since pagers used by Hezbollah began exploding simultaneously on Tuesday, followed by the detonation of hundreds of walkie-talkies and other devices Wednesday.

As he spoke, the rumble of warplanes and large sonic booms could be heard over Beirut. “They will face a severe reckoning,” he said of Israel, adding that the attacks, which killed at least 37 and injured nearly 3,000, had

SEE LEBANON ON A14

Walkie-talkies: Japanese firm had stopped making the devices. A12

Supply chains: Operation brings about a long-feared threat. A15

Home buyers are poised to pounce as rates decline

BY ABHA BHATTARAI AND RACHEL SIEGEL

For Americans mulling a home purchase, this week’s interest rate cut meant just one thing: It’s time to get back in the game.

The Federal Reserve lowered interest rates by half a percentage point on Wednesday, the first roll-back in four years. Average mortgage rates, which peaked at 7.8 percent last fall, have since dropped to 6.09 percent.

And near Boston, real estate broker Dana Bull’s phone is buzzing nonstop. Sidelined home buyers are dusting off mortgage pre-approvals and lining up homes to tour. Others, who bought in the past year, are asking when they should refinance.

“It’s the moment we’ve all been waiting for: People are reinvigorated,” Bull said. “They’ve had this number in their head — ‘If rates are in the 5’s, even though that’s higher than we’re used to, it’s something we can work with.’ Part of it is affordability, and part of it is psychology.”

Mortgage rates, though not directly controlled by the Fed, are heavily influenced by the central bank’s every move. The housing market is one of the most interest-rate-sensitive parts of the economy and is among the first to react to fluctuations in the federal

SEE HOME BUYERS ON A16

RUSSIA, REMASTERED



CAO YANG/XINHUA NEWS AGENCY/GETTY IMAGES

Military vehicles take part in a Victory Day parade, commemorating the end of World War II, on May 9 in Moscow. President Vladimir Putin has sought to build a militarized Russian society.

Deterrent eludes a West wary of conflict

Governments yet to define plan to counter Russia’s pugilistic leader

BY ROBYN DIXON AND MICHAEL BIRNBAUM

Moments after he greeted Americans newly released from Russian prisons last month, President Joe Biden was asked if he had any message for Vladimir Putin. “Stop,” he replied.

But whether Biden meant jailing innocent foreigners, persecuting Russian dissidents, in-

vading Ukraine, violating international law or challenging the U.S.-led global order, Putin has shown no sign of backing down.

And that means one of the most deeply vexing questions facing Western leaders — including Biden and whoever succeeds him next year — is what to do about it.

On each side of the Atlantic, there is uncertainty about how

to counter Putin’s aggression without stoking a direct conflict with the man who controls the world’s largest nuclear arsenal.

That fear — and the inability, even of Western diplomats with decades of experience dealing with the Kremlin, to see a viable path forward — has revived calls for Cold War-style containment: restricting contacts with

SEE RUSSIA ON A10

They opened their hearts. Then China shut the door.

Md. couple faces adoption program’s abrupt end 5 years after vowing to bring a girl to U.S.

BY MICHAEL LARIS

There’s a whiteboard beside the quilt-covered bed their daughter has never slept in.

On it are written a few of the promises Colin Pitts and Fan Pat made to a bright-eyed Chinese girl they committed to adopt in September 2019 — things they would do as a family once they received the final permission to bring her to America.

Read good uplifting story books
Play games
Make kites
Go sledding (and survive)

But now the Maryland couple are facing a crushing prospect: They probably won’t be allowed to keep those promises.

On Sept. 5, China’s Foreign Ministry suddenly, and with little explanation, announced an end to the country’s three-decade-old foreign adoption program, which has sent more than 82,000 children to the United States, more than any other country.

Chinese civil affairs officials “will not continue to process cases at any stage,” the State Department said. That will stop hundreds of families who have been matched with children by Chinese authorities from completing their adoptions, even those in the final stage of what can be a years-long process, adoption advocates said.

The change has injected grief into the lives of once-hopeful par-



COURTESY OF COLIN PITTS

Colin Pitts, left, and Fan Pat, in a selfie the couple sent the girl of the reading nook they set up in anticipation of her arrival.

ents. But many of them, like Pitts, who grew up in Maryland, and Pat, who was born in southern China before moving with her family to Hong Kong, are still trying to hold on.

Sitting in their bright suburban townhouse in Montgomery County 45 minutes north of Washington, the couple is surrounded by photographs of the girl they’ve longed to bring home — and the practical and whimsical steps they’ve taken to get ready for her arrival.

Pitts bought her a kid-size electric guitar. There’s a hand-scrawled sign — at cat-eye level —

SEE ADOPTIONS ON A12

IN THE NEWS

Pandemic origin Genetic evidence from a new report suggests the covid outbreak most likely spilled over from animals in Wuhan. A3

‘Staying in this race’ N.C. GOP gubernatorial nominee Mark Robinson vowed to continue his campaign amid fallout over a story about comments he made on a porn site. A7

THE NATION Prosecutors accused an Alaska man of threatening six justices on the Supreme Court. A2
Local Teamsters unions in swing states are rushing to endorse Kamala Harris. A4

Critics warned of chaos as pro-Trump Georgia election officials considered requiring the hand-counting of ballots. A6
A Mississippi sheriff’s office that had a “Goon Squad” faces a federal civil rights probe. A7

THE WORLD Devastating wildfires in Portugal burned tens of thousands of acres and left at least three firefighters dead. A9

THE ECONOMY A report from the FTC assailed social media and streaming companies for failing to safeguard users’ privacy. A15

THE REGION Virginia Senate Democrats introduced legislation to restrict cellphone use in schools, furthering a move by Gov. Glenn Youngkin. B1
D.C. officials closed Canna Coffee in Adams Morgan after a video showed its owner berating a delivery driver. B1

SPORTS Shohei Ohtani, in his first season with the Dodgers, became the first MLB player to hit 50 home runs and steal 50 bases in a season. D1

WEEKEND Ten deals in the D.C. area that let you slurp fresh oysters after work for as little as \$1 each.

BUSINESS NEWS.....A15
COMICS.....C5
OBITUARIES.....B4
OPINION PAGES.....A17
TELEVISION.....C4
WORLD NEWS.....A9

CONTENT © 2024
The Washington Post
Year 147, No. 53980

