



Mostly sunny 45/34 • Tomorrow: Rain 50/41 B6

Democracy Dies in Darkness

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 25, 2023 • \$3

## Russia, China plan for tunnel to Crimea

Executives discuss building a route that Ukraine can't attack

BY GREG MILLER AND MARY ILYUSHINA

KYIV — Russian and Chinese business executives with government ties have held secret discussions on plans to build an underwater tunnel connecting Russia to Crimea in hopes of establishing a transportation route that would be protected from attacks by Ukraine, according to communications intercepted by Ukraine's security services.

The talks, which included meetings in late October, were triggered by mounting Russian concerns over the security of an 11-mile bridge across the Kerch Strait that has served as a key logistics line for the Russian military but has been bombed twice by Ukraine and remains a vulnerable war target.

The negotiations underscore Russia's determination to maintain its grip on Crimea, a peninsula that it annexed illegally in 2014, as well as Moscow's growing dependence on China as a source of global support.

Constructing a tunnel near the existing bridge would face enormous obstacles, according to U.S. officials and engineering experts who said work of such magnitude, probably costing billions of dollars and taking years to complete, has never been attempted in a war zone.

But despite questions about  
SEE CRIMEA ON A9

ELECTION 2024

## Inflation is down, but gripes still going viral

Democrats fear that social media exaggerates economic issues

BY JEFF STEIN AND TAYLOR LORENZ

On Dec. 20, 2022, Topher Olive went to a McDonald's in the town of Post Falls, Idaho, and ordered a limited edition "smoky" double quarter pounder BLT with fries and a Sprite. The meal cost \$16.10, and he posted the receipt on TikTok.

Even though he had ordered a novelty item, Olive's video about a \$16 McDonald's order went viral, racking up hundreds of thousands of views. After a McDonald's revenue report recently, the same post went viral again earlier this month, with at least a half-dozen news outlets — including the Washington Examiner, the New York Post and Newsmax — picking up the story of Olive's pricey patties. One YouTube video from this month with 2 million views inaccurately describes it as "a Big Mac meal" that cost \$16. Posts on Reddit, the conservative site Twitchy and elsewhere tied the cost to President Biden's economic management.  
SEE ECONOMY ON A12

## Gaza enters fragile calm as first hostages freed



ARIEL SCHALIT/AP

Residents cheer in Tel Aviv as they hear news of the release of 13 Israeli hostages who were held by Hamas in Gaza. The Israeli women and children released Friday range in age from 5 to 85 and are the first group to be freed during a planned four-day pause in fighting.

## After weeks of agony, a wave of elation and relief

BY CLAIRE PARKER AND MOLLY HENNESSY-FISKE

TEL AVIV — After weeks without news, followed by days of anticipation and then tense hours Friday when it seemed like anything could go wrong, it happened all at once.

Around 6 p.m., a convoy of white International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) SUVs rolled toward the Rafah border crossing. Women and children could be glimpsed through the car windows; one elderly, white-haired woman raised her arm to wave.

The vehicles disappeared through the gate toward Egypt, and a nation exhaled. The first group of 13 Israeli hostages held by Hamas were safely out of Gaza.

The scene marked a watershed moment in the bloody seven-week-old conflict between Israel and Hamas — showing that diplo-

macy could provide some measure of relief to civilians.

Chen Dori-Roberts spotted his cousin, Doron Katz Asher, in footage of the convoy leaving the Gaza Strip, but didn't celebrate until her release was confirmed by the Israeli army and hostage family support groups.

Katz Asher, 34, was freed along with daughters Raz, 4, and Aviv, 2. They were abducted from a kibbutz near the Gaza border in southern Israel where they had been visiting her mother, Efrat Katz, on the Jewish holiday Shmini Atzeret. The family was later notified that Katz, 67, had been killed in the Oct. 7 assault by Hamas on Israel, and they held a funeral Oct. 26.

"Everybody's celebrating right now," Dori-Roberts, 46, a live-event producer based in Austin, told The Washington Post. "But we  
SEE HOSTAGES ON A10

### AID BEGINS TO POUR IN AMID 4-DAY PAUSE

Swaps of captives are set to continue in batches

This article is by Steve Hendrix, Claire Parker, Sarah Dadouch, Hazem Balousha, Louisa Loveluck and Amanda Coletta

JERUSALEM — The guns and fighter jets that pummeled the Gaza Strip for the past seven weeks fell silent on Friday, the first day of a negotiated four-day pause in combat that allowed the release of a first group of Israeli hostages for Palestinians held in Israeli prisons, enabled truckloads of aid to rush in and brought an uneasy calm to the besieged enclave.

The brief respite — a 96-hour intermission before the war is expected to resume — followed weeks of delicate negotiations between Hamas and Israel mediated by Qatar. The start was delayed 24 hours by last-minute wrangling over logistics, according to Qatari mediators, and while the first day of exchanges appeared to be relatively orderly, the halt was still fragile.

Thirteen Israeli hostages — women and children ranging in age from 2 to 85 — were turned over by Hamas to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), which transported them from Gaza into Egypt to be flown to hospitals for private reunions with loved ones. They were the first of 50 Israeli women and children to be released in exchange for 150 Palestinian women and children held in Israeli prisons over the next several days.

At least 10 Thai workers and one Filipino, who were taken hostage by Hamas on Oct. 7, when militants launched a surprise attack on Israeli towns that left 1,200 dead, were also released, Thai and Egyptian officials said.

At the Rafah border crossing between Gaza and Egypt, onlookers held up phones to capture the moment the ICRC delivered the hostages from Gaza into  
SEE GAZA ON A7

**Fearful in L.A.:** Threats, anxiety grow for Palestinian Americans. A5

**'A start':** Biden touts the hostage deal, but complications remain. A10

RIISING INDIA, TOXIC TECH

## New Delhi's taming of Twitter

With rules and pressure, Modi's government has set a global standard for online censorship

BY KARISHMA MEHROTRA AND JOSEPH MENN

NEW DELHI — For years, a committee of executives from U.S. technology companies and Indian officials convened every two weeks in a government office to negotiate what could — and could not — be said on Twitter, Facebook and YouTube.

At the "69A meetings," as the secretive gatherings were informally called, officials from India's information, technology, security and intelligence agencies presented social media posts they wanted removed, citing threats to India's sovereignty and national security, executives and officials who were present recalled. The tech representatives sometimes pushed back in the name of free speech. One company resisted the most: Twitter.

But two years ago, these interactions took a fateful turn. Where officials had once asked for a  
SEE CENSORSHIP ON A8



ILLUSTRATION BY SHUBHADEEP MUKHERJEE FOR TWP; MANISH SWARUP/AP; IMTIYAZ KHAN/ANADOLU AGENCY/GETTY IMAGES; ALTAF QADRI/AP

**THE REGION**  
**Police union lawyers** say a Maryland law opening disciplinary records should not apply to those created before its passage. B1  
**A new scholarship** will offer Prince George's residents a chance to attend the county's community college free. B1

**A blockade** on hundreds of military promotions by Sen. Tommy Tuberville includes approval of the Naval Academy's first female superintendent. B1  
**In a Virginia county** that's been torn over a Confederate statue, voters took a stand against divisive politics. B1

**STYLE**  
**The songs** of the Avett Brothers navigate the course for Arena Stage's "Swept Away." C1

**SPORTS**  
**Marvin Harrison Jr.**, the dazzling Ohio State receiver atop NFL draft boards, works to leave no holes in his game. D1

BUSINESS NEWS.....A11  
COMICS.....C5  
OPINION PAGES.....A13  
OBITUARIES.....B5  
TELEVISION.....C3  
WORLD NEWS.....A6

CONTENT © 2023  
The Washington Post  
Year 146, No. 53680



## IN THE NEWS

**Violence in Dublin** Right-wing rioters rampaged through the streets after a stabbing they believed involved someone with an immigrant background. A6

**Commanders fire Del Rio** A day after a rout in Dallas, the defensive coordinator is out, along with the defensive backs coach. D1

**THE NATION**  
**Air travel is back** in full force after the pandemic, hurting long-term emissions goals. A2  
**While some shoppers** descended on stores, most Black Friday bustle has been online. A3

**THE ECONOMY**  
**Car dealerships** aren't driven to sell electric vehicles, frustrating U.S. consumers. A11  
**A start-up says** it can remove CO2 from the air by turning plant waste into bricks. A12