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Democracy Dies in Darkness

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A Russian attempt to intimidate Ukraine

Attack with new missile stirs fears, but analysts call it just more bravado

BY DAVID L. STERN, SIOBHÁN O'GRADY AND ELLEN FRANCIS

KYIV — By launching a new nuclear-capable intermediate-range ballistic missile at Ukraine on Thursday, Russia was warning Kyiv and its Western allies to stop Ukrainian strikes with Western-supplied weapons on Russian territory — or else.

The attack on the eastern city of Dnipro has spurred fears in the West over a major escalation in the war and prompted Ukraine to request new air defense capabilities from Washington to help intercept this type of missile.

But analysts and officials in Ukraine and the West, speaking Friday, said that while the attack had been accompanied by a major increase in threatening statements, it was ultimately just more Kremlin bravado.

Moscow aimed to “intimidate those who support Ukraine,” NATO spokeswoman Farah Dakhllallah said in an email. “Deploying this capability will neither change the course of the conflict nor deter NATO Allies from supporting Ukraine.”

Ukraine’s defense intelligence agency, the GUR, released new details about the missile on Friday. It flew at roughly 11 times the speed of sound and took about 15 minutes to reach Dnipro from Russia’s coastal Astrakhan region. It was fitted with six warheads, the agency said, each of which contained six submunitions.

SEE UKRAINE ON A8



PHOTOS BY LUIS ANTONIO ROJAS FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

U.S. got its man. Sinaloa got 400 killings.

Capture of ‘El Mayo’ set off a cartel bloodbath and raises a question: Are kingpin busts worth it?

BY MARY BETH SHERIDAN IN CULIACAN, MEXICO

When a Mexican drug lord was bundled aboard a small Beechcraft jet and secretly flown to the United States in July, the U.S. government called it a major blow to fentanyl traffickers.

“We should be celebrating what happened in Sinaloa,” U.S. Ambassador Ken Salazar said recently.

But the capture of Ismael “El Mayo” Zambada has ignited an all-out battle for control of the Sinaloa cartel, one of the world’s most famous drug gangs. Homicides have exploded in Sinaloa state, with around 400 people killed in the last two months, quadruple the number during the same period last year. The capital, Culiacan, has become a ghost town at night, its residents locked indoors as gunmen throw up flaming barricades and trade shots in the streets.



TOP: Soldiers on Oct. 22 in Culiacan, Mexico, the day a drug operator was caught in a bloody battle. ABOVE: Guadalupe Gress, whose son was dragged away by armed men, hugs an activist at a protest.

The violence has revived a long-simmering debate: Does the U.S. pursuit of kingpins cripple organized crime groups or simply set off power fights that leave Mexico awash in blood?

The question is especially critical as President-elect Donald Trump promises to escalate the battle against Mexican drug gangs. Trump told the News-Nation cable network last month that “we need a military operation” against the traffickers, although he’s provided few details.

JD Vance, the incoming vice president, told a recent campaign rally that hundreds of thousands of U.S. military personnel “are pretty pissed off at the Mexican cartels. I think we’ll send them in to do battle with the Mexican drug cartels.”

SEE MEXICO ON A9

AI is guzzling up electricity — and threatening U.S. climate goals

BY EVAN HALPER

The explosion of data center development across the United States to serve the artificial intelligence industry is threatening decades of progress cutting greenhouse gas emissions, as utilities lay plans for scores of new gas power plants to meet soaring electricity demand.

The fast-rising emissions from electricity use have emerged as

Utilities are building more gas power plants to meet industry demand

one of the most vexing — and unexpected — challenges for world leaders as they negotiate agreements for containing global warming this month at the U.N.

Climate Conference in Baku, Azerbaijan, called COP29. Even as wind and solar projects are rapidly coming online around the world, experts say energy demand from data centers that are needed for artificial intelligence is growing much faster.

Europe and Asia face a data center dilemma similar to the United States, with the industry’s power needs helping drive a gas boom that imperils regional cli-

mate goals. Ireland, the Netherlands and Singapore have all stopped allowing power grid hookups to large new data centers amid climate and grid stability worries.

As part of the U.S. pledge to cut its total greenhouse gas emissions in half by the end of the decade, compared to 2005 levels, President Joe Biden has vowed to eliminate all power grid emissions by 2035.

But there are 220 new gas-burning power plants in various stages of development nationwide, according to the market data firm Yes Energy. Most of those plants are targeted to come online before 2032. Each has a lifespan of 25 to 40 years, meaning most would not be fully paid off —

SEE GRID ON A12

COP29: Rich nations would pay \$250 billion a year under deal. **A12**

Trump presses on with flurry of picks

Treasury, Labor, HUD, FDA choices are named a day after Gaetz’s exit

BY ISAAC ARNSDORF, MARIANNE LEVINE AND ASHLEY PARKER

President-elect Donald Trump quickly put behind him the loss of his first choice for attorney general, his top-priority position, while Senate Republicans expressed relief that they had avoided an ugly, drawn-out standoff with the incoming president.

The day after former congressman Matt Gaetz withdrew his name from consideration to lead the Justice Department, Trump pushed ahead with a burst of fresh announcements for planned appointments and nominations, including some controversial picks. The president-elect also showed no sign of shrinking from his choice of former Fox News host Pete Hegseth for secretary of defense or any of his other picks facing tough confirmation fights. Still, his team is taking a more cooperative approach to the upper chamber after initially demanding to bypass confirmation

SEE TRANSITION ON A4

A change in rice farming in India yields more smog

No one expected that an effort to save groundwater would worsen New Delhi’s already miserable air

BY KARISHMA MEHROTRA

BATHINDA, INDIA — An Indian initiative to preserve vanishing groundwater by delaying the annual sowing of rice has led to a dramatic worsening of air pollution in New Delhi and the surrounding region, already infamous for its suffocating smog, according to farmers and researchers. And no one saw it coming.

For decades, farmers have burned the field stubble that remains after harvesting rice to prepare for the next crop.

But when government officials ordered a delay in the summer sowing of rice by a few weeks in part of India to take advantage of

the coming monsoon rain, they did not consider that winds would have shifted by harvest time. Now, the harvest coincides with winter weather, and the winds blow the smoke across the plains of northern India.

The agricultural mandate, first adopted in 2008, has caused up to a 20 percent increase in smoke particles in northern Indian cities, including Delhi, according to a team of researchers from the United States, India and elsewhere.

This week, Delhi’s poisonous air reached its worst level in five years. In response, the government shut down schools, construction and some offices.

SEE INDIA ON A7



SHAMS IRFAN FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

A farmer sets fire to rice paddy stubble in India’s Punjab state. An order to delay the annual sowing of rice means farmers now do postharvest burns later in the year, when winds carry smoke to New Delhi.

IN THE NEWS

Biden races to safeguard legacy The White House is scrambling to get billions of dollars out the door tied to infrastructure, climate and semiconductor industry legislation. **A3**

From console to concert A Washington-area orchestra that plays video game soundtracks is gearing up ahead of its fall performance. **B1**

THE NATION
In Texas, officials approved an optional Bible-based elementary school curriculum. **A4**
A bathroom ban at the Capitol leaves members of the trans community anxious and angry. **A5**

THE WORLD
Trump’s tariffs could spark “Europe’s worst economic nightmare.” Here’s what to know. **A6**
A giant emerald will return to Brazil after over 15 years of disputes, a U.S. judge ruled. **A8**

THE ECONOMY
Despite bird flu and inflation, grocery store turkeys are surprisingly affordable this holiday season. **A10**
A Nippon Steel executive has been trying to drum up support, whether from Biden or Trump, for its bid to acquire U.S. Steel. **A12**

THE REGION
In Maryland, a man was convicted of murder in the 2022 killings of his girlfriend and their unborn child. **B1**
After an outcry, a pregnant Georgetown Law student was granted an extended deferral date for her criminal law exam. **B1**

STYLE
In a new book, Keke Palmer details the trek from child star to household name, with some drama along the way. **C1**
SPORTS
Esteban Ocon, the son of a mechanic from the French countryside, has found a place behind the wheel in Formula 1. **D1**

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