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Prices in Canada may be higher

\$6.00

GHOSTS ON THE GLACIER



JANET JOHNSON

An American climbing expedition in Argentina. Two mysterious deaths. Fifty years of theories.
And then a camera emerges from the receding ice. SPECIAL SECTION

World Economy Faces a Jumble Of Risk in 2024

By PATRICIA COHEN

LONDON — The attacks on crucial shipping traffic in the Red Sea straits by a determined band of militants in Yemen — a spill-over from the Israeli-Hamas war in Gaza — is injecting a new dose of instability into a world economy already struggling with mounting geopolitical tensions.

The risk of escalating conflict in the Middle East is the latest in a string of unpredictable crises, including the Covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, that have landed like swipes of a bear claw on the global economy, smacking it off course and leaving scars.

As if that weren't enough, more volatility lies ahead in the form of a wave of national elections whose repercussions could be deep and long. More than two billion people in roughly 50 countries — including India, Indonesia, Mexico, South Africa, the United States and the 27 nations of the European Parliament — will head to the polls. Altogether, participants in 2024's elections olympiad account for 60 percent of the world's economic output.

In robust democracies, elections are taking place as mistrust in government is rising, electorates are bitterly divided and there is a profound and abiding anxiety over economic prospects.

Even in countries where elections are neither free nor fair, leaders are sensitive to the economy's health. President Vladimir V. Putin's decision this fall to require exporters to convert foreign cur-

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Putin Quietly Signals Openness to Ukraine Deal

This article is by Anton Troianovski, Adam Entous and Julian E. Barnes.

But No Hint He Would Yield Captured Land

President Vladimir V. Putin's confidence seems to know no bounds.

Buoyed

by Ukraine's failed counteroffensive and flagging Western support, Mr. Putin says that Russia's war goals have not changed. Addressing his generals on Tuesday, he boasted that Ukraine was so beleaguered that Russia's invading troops were doing "what we want."

"We won't give up what's ours,"

he pledged, adding dismissively, "If they want to negotiate, let them negotiate."

But in a recent push of back-channel diplomacy, Mr. Putin has been sending a different message: He is ready to make a deal.

Mr. Putin has been signaling through intermediaries since at least September that he is open to a cease-fire that freezes the fight-

ing along the current lines, far short of his ambitions to dominate Ukraine, two former senior Russian officials close to the Kremlin and U.S. and international officials who have received the message from Mr. Putin's envoys say.

In fact, Mr. Putin also sent out feelers for a cease-fire deal a year earlier, in the fall of 2022, according to American officials. That quiet overture, not previously reported, came after Ukraine routed Russia's army in the country's northeast.

Mr. Putin indicated that he was satisfied with Russia's

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HANNAH REYES MORALES FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Moments of Misery and Bliss

The Year in Pictures recalls the events that traumatized us, mixed with some joy. SPECIAL SECTION

With Ex-Clerks and Allies, Thomas Builds Power Bloc

'Extended Family' Shares Justice's Ideology and Wields Influence in High Posts

By ABBIE VANSICKLE and STEVE EDER

In late August, amid a rising outcry over revelations that Justice Clarence Thomas had received decades of undisclosed gifts and free luxury travel, a lawyer in Chicago fired off an email to her fellow former Thomas clerks.

"Many of us have been asked recently about the justice," wrote the lawyer, Taylor Meehan. "In response, there's not always the opportunity to tell his story and share what it was like to work for him. And there's rarely the opportunity for us to do so all together."

Ms. Meehan attached a letter in support of Justice Thomas. Minutes later came a reply. "I just had to jump up right away and say bravo for this," wrote Steven G. Bradbury, a Heritage Foundation fellow who served in the George W. Bush and Trump administrations. Within days Fox News viewers were hearing about the letter, now signed by 112 former clerks and testifying that the justice's "integrity is unimpeachable." Among the signers was the popular Fox host Laura Ingraham.

In turn, the justice's wife, the conservative activist Virginia Thomas, soon took to the clerks' private email listserv. "We feel less alone today, because of you all!!! 🌟🌟🌟" she wrote, offering special thanks to the letter's coordinators and all "who stepped into our fire!!!"

In the 32 years since Justice Thomas came through the fire of his confirmation hearings and onto the Supreme Court, he has assembled an army of influential acolytes unlike any other — a network of like-minded former clerks who have not only rallied to his defense but carried his idiosyncratic brand of conservative legal thinking out into the nation's law schools, top law firms, the judiciary

and the highest reaches of gov-

ernment.

The former clerks' public defense of the justice was "unparalleled in the history of the court," said Todd C. Peppers, a professor of public affairs at Roanoke College and the author of "Courts of the Marble Palace: The Rise and Influence of the Supreme Court Law Clerk." "It's frankly astonishing."

For Justice Thomas, the letter came at a time of both trial and triumph. He had become the face of long-simmering questions about the high court's ethical guidelines. But he was also at the height of his influence. The court's senior justice, he had spent years on the losing side of cases, writing minority opinions grounded in his strict originalist interpretations of the Constitution. Now that former President Donald J. Trump had given

the court a conservative supermajority, Justice Thomas was a guiding voice for a new judicial mainstream.

He was playing a long game, and his former clerks were among its most important players. The Thomases did not respond to requests for comment, but in a 2008 interview, the justice said, "I tell my law clerks that we're not writing current events — we're writing for a much longer period," adding that his opinions were based on "principles that are locked down and that will be here when the tides turn" in 50 years.

Now the tides have turned, and at least 18 of those former clerks have served as state, federal or

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During a Wartime Christmas, There's Rubble in the Manger

By YARA BAYOUMY and SAMAR HAZBOUN

BETHLEHEM, West Bank — There will be no musical festivities. No tree-lighting ceremony. No extravagant decorations that normally bedeck the West Bank city of Bethlehem

at Christmas. With the war in Gaza raging, this is a city in mourning.

In perhaps the most overt display of how Israel's war in Gaza has dampened Christmas celebrations in the city seen as the birthplace of Jesus, a Lutheran church put up its crèche, but with a sad and symbolic twist. The baby Jesus — wrapped in a keffiyeh, the black-and-white checkered scarf that has become a badge of Palestinian identity — is lying not in a makeshift cradle of hay and

wood. Instead, he lies among the rubble of broken bricks, stones and tiles that represent so much of Gaza's destruction.

"We've been glued to our screens, seeing children pulled from under the rubble day after day. We're broken by these images," said the Rev. Munther Isaac, the pastor at the Evangelical Lutheran Christmas Church who created the crèche. "God is under the rubble in Gaza, this is where we find God right now."

The war began on Oct. 7, in response to Hamas's surprise attack on Israel that left about 1,200 dead. As the conflict enters its third month, some of the most ubiquitous images of the death and destruction have been of dead Palestinian children being

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Prime Rib, a Culinary Luxury of the Past, Is Still What's for Holiday Dinner

By BRIAN GALLAGHER

CHICAGO — On a biting December evening, the St. Clair Supper Club in Chicago's West Loop neighborhood offered an escape out of the weather — and into America's culinary past.

In the dimly lit basement dining

room, wood paneling covered the walls, and paper place mats cheerily proclaimed, "We're glad you're here!" A cushioned leather strip ran around the lip of the long bar; inviting guests to lean in for a while. Over the speakers, Frank Sinatra's "My Way" gave way to Gordon Lightfoot crooning "The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald."

Enjoying the ambience were young couples on dinner dates and groups of friends gathering for holiday martinis. And on nearly every table, wading in pools of redolent jus, were great rosy slabs of prime rib — the charismatic megaprotein that for so many decades defined a sense of middle-class American plenty.

But the year, despite all appearances, was 2023.

The St. Clair Supper Club simulates a dining experience that once was widespread, one that still can be found in any number of towns in Wisconsin, Illinois or Pennsylvania. But it is run by Grant Achatz, one of the most inventive chefs in the United States.

He has created a sort of prime-rib museum, honoring not just the lavish cuts of beef on the plate but what they symbolize: a lost dining culture of accessible, midcentury abundance.

This notion is particularly pow-

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An enduring and powerful symbol of American abundance, medium rare.

INTERNATIONAL 4-11

Hinterland of Opportunity

Thousands of students from India have come to a remote region of Canada for an education and a better life. And their tuition keeps the school afloat. PAGE 4

METROPOLITAN

Revisiting a Fatal Shooting

Karen Dannett hardly knew her father. But freeing the man imprisoned for killing him in a bodega in 1982 became a decades-long mission. PAGE 1

SUNDAY BUSINESS

The LG Succession Saga

A lawsuit pits family members against one another and challenges the patriarchal traditions of a \$10 billion conglomerate, and South Korea itself. PAGE 6

ARTS & LEISURE

The Riches of 'Color Purple'

A new film adaptation shows how profound Alice Walker's novel is, and how the source material can lend itself to unconventional storytelling. PAGE 10

SUNDAY OPINION

Bryce Covert

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