

"All the News That's Fit to Print"

# The New York Times

### THE WEATHER

Today, plenty of sunshine, mild, high 58. Tonight, patchy cloudiness, low 46. Tomorrow, a mix of sunshine and clouds, rain moving in at night, high 56. Weather map is on Page B12.

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Prices in Canada may be higher

\$4.00



BILAL SHBAIR FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

A store selling sweets and pastries in Deir al Balah, where the ground is slick with sewage and Israel's bombing can shatter the calm.

## Chop First and Fix Later: How Musk Tames Costs

### Billionaire's Business Practices May Foretell His Plans for the Federal Budget

This article is by Ryan Mac, Kate Conger, Jack Ewing and Eric Lipton.

On a Saturday morning in December 2022, Elon Musk summoned finance executives at Twitter, which he had bought six weeks earlier, to a conference call. Then he drilled into a spreadsheet that contained the social media company's expenditures. Mr. Musk was angry, three people who were on the call said. Even though Twitter had just shed more than three-quarters of its employees — leaving it with just over 1,500 workers, down from nearly 8,000 — the company's spending still appeared to be out of control, the billionaire told attendees.

Over the next six hours, Mr. Musk read out the spreadsheet line by line and asked workers to account for each item. He ordered some items — such as car services for executives — to be cut completely. At one point, he confronted an employee who was responsible for a multimillion-dollar contract related to website security and said his electric vehicle company, Tesla, spent far less on the same task. After the employee pushed back, Mr. Musk said she was no longer with Twitter.

The meeting was characteristic of the approach that Mr. Musk has taken to cutting costs. Frugal to a fault, the 53-year-old has been intimately involved in hacking budgets at his companies, including Tesla, SpaceX and Twitter, which he renamed X. Over nearly three decades as a tech entrepreneur, he has honed his penny-pinching by digging into minutiae and cutting as deeply as possible — often preferring to cut too much rather than too little, according to 17 current and former employees and others with knowledge of Mr. Musk's strategies.

Perhaps most important, Mr. Musk has been brutally un sentimental about the cuts, paying little regard to norms and conventions. The mogul has been unabashed about slashing costs to the point that corporate processes — and sometimes even product safety — break down, philosophizing that he can just fix things later, the people said. And he has been unafraid to offend, stiffing vendors to negotiate better prices and sidestepping traditional suppliers to manufacture cheaper parts from scratch.

"He used to be a deity," said Jim Cantrell, SpaceX's first vice president of business development. Continued on Page A18



AL DRAGO FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES  
Elon Musk often prefers to cut too much rather than too little.

## Amid Gaza's Rubble, Desperation for Normalcy

By VIVIAN YEE and BILAL SHBAIR

DEIR AL BALAH, Gaza Strip — At long last, something to celebrate: People were saying that the Chef Warif restaurant, whose Syrian-style shawarma sandwiches were famous in Gaza City before the war, had reopened. Not in the city itself, which the war had reduced largely to rubble. And not the same quality of meat, which the restaurant's owner now had to buy frozen and at steep prices from traders importing it to the Gaza Strip.

But it was shawarma, shawarma from home. Long lines

### Finding Small Pockets of Ordinary Life as a Famine Looms

formed this July as workers sawed the first slices of roasting beef or chicken off the spit and bundled it in flatbread with the restaurant's signature garlic sauce.

Many of those in line were longtime customers who had fled Gaza City, in the north, for Deir al Balah, the city in central Gaza where Chef Warif had reopened. Living

in tents or crammed shelters under smoky skies, their ears painfully accustomed to the thunder of Israeli airstrikes, they had been desperate for this — a normal moment.

"When I heard about Chef Warif, I jumped for joy," said Naela al-Danaf, 40, a secretary at a local clinic who escaped Gaza City early in the war. It was a relief to see the owner standing there, she said, dishing out lunch like everything was fine.

In parts of Deir al Balah, once known for its restful olive and date palm groves, the trees are gone or have turned gray with ash and

Continued on Page A12

## Blitz by Saudis Seeks to Erase Fuel Phase-Out

By LISA FRIEDMAN

WASHINGTON — As United Nations climate talks enter their final week in Azerbaijan and Group of 20 leaders gather in Brazil, diplomats from Saudi Arabia, the world's top oil exporter, are working to foil any agreement that renews a pledge to transition away from fossil fuels, negotiators said.

"Maybe they've been emboldened by Trump's victory, but they are acting with abandon here," said Alden Meyer, senior associate with E3G, a London-based climate research organization, who is at the talks in Azerbaijan. "They're just being a wrecking ball."

Negotiators say it's part of a yearlong campaign by Saudi Arabia to stymie an agreement made last year by 200 nations to move away from oil, gas and coal, the burning of which is dangerously heating the planet.

Saudi Arabia was one of the signatories to that deal but has been working ever since to bury that pledge and make sure it's not repeated in any new global agreements, according to five diplomats who requested anonymity to discuss the closed-door negotiations.

Continued on Page A9

## Trump Stands by Defense Pick Who Denies Sex Assault Claim

By MAGGIE HABERMAN

President-elect Donald J. Trump has told advisers he is standing by his nominee for defense secretary, Pete Hegseth, after the transition team was jolted by an allegation he had sexually assaulted a woman in an interaction he insists was consensual.

Mr. Trump made his view plain to aides after a conversation with Mr. Hegseth days ago, after the team learned that a woman had accused him of assault in 2017, according to two people briefed on the discussion. They also learned that Mr. Hegseth had entered into a financial settlement with the woman that had a confidentiality clause.

On Sunday, Steven Cheung, the president-elect's communications director, did not address Mr.

Trump's thinking, but said, "President Trump is nominating high-caliber and extremely qualified candidates to serve in his administration."

He added, "Mr. Hegseth has vigorously denied any and all accusations, and no charges were filed. We look forward to his confirmation" by the Senate.

Last week, the Monterey Police Department in California said it had investigated an allegation of sexual assault involving Mr. Hegseth in 2017 at the address of the Hyatt Regency Monterey Hotel and Spa. The statement released by the police said the department had filed no charges against Mr. Hegseth.

Mr. Trump announced on Tuesday. Continued on Page A17



SOPHIE PARK FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

### Battered but Beloved

The Pink House has stood on a marsh north of Boston for 99 years. It remains, for now. Page A14.

## Ready for School Day but Nowhere to Call Home

By CLAIRE FAHY

When a fire broke out in Jessica Beltran's Brooklyn apartment last year, she and her two children moved into a homeless shelter while they figured out their next steps.

Ms. Beltran, 37, had worked as a receptionist in medical and dental offices, but she had lost her job after she could not find child care for her 5-year-old son, Logan, who is autistic. A year after the fire drove them out of their home, she is still

### 1 in 8 Children Affected by a Growing Crisis

trying to get together the paperwork to apply for government-subsidized housing.

This can happen to anyone, Ms. Beltran said. Flooding, fire, the loss of a job — all it takes is one unexpected problem to cause a person to end up homeless. And in New York City, more children than

ever are.

At least 146,000 public school students in New York City, about one in eight, did not have permanent housing at some point during the past school year, a record number and a 23 percent increase from the year before, according to Advocates for Children of New York. The group released the data, gathered by the New York State Education Department, on Monday.

Almost all of those students

Continued on Page A21

## Robots Still Lack Human Touch in Warehouses

By PETER EAVIS

NASHVILLE — In the out-bound dock of an Amazon warehouse near Nashville, a robotic arm named Cardinal on a recent day stacked packages, Tetris-style, into six-and-a-half-foot-high carts. Then Proteus, an autonomous platform, moved the carts to the loading bay, flashing electronic eyes designed to make the robot more appealing to human colleagues.

As robots become more capable, they are performing an increasing number of tasks in warehouses and delivery centers with varying degrees of aptitude and speed. Machines can load and unload trucks. They can place goods on pallets and take them off. Robots can shift items around in inventory, pick up packages and move goods on warehouse floors. And they can do all this without a



NICK FANCHER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES  
Robots at a DHL-run warehouse in Columbus, Ohio.

human minder guiding their every move.

Yet, even though robots are starting to take over some repetitive and cumbersome jobs, there are still many tasks they are not good at, making it difficult to know when or if robots will be able to

fully automate this industry.

Despite the rise in automation, warehouses remain big employers of humans. Federal data show that nearly 1.8 million people work in this corner of the supply chain. While that number is down 9 percent from its peak in 2022, when logistics companies went on a hiring spree to handle the pandemic e-commerce boom, it is still up more than 30 percent since early 2020.

There are many crucial, simple tasks that humans are far better at. They can reach into a container of many items and move some out the way to extract the piece they want, a task industry officials refer to as picking. Robotics engineers struggle to say when their creations will be able to do that fast enough to be viable replacements for human workers.

Artificial intelligence compa- Continued on Page A19

### INTERNATIONAL A4-13

#### In Venezuela, a Plea to Trump

In interviews, the country's opposition leader calls on Donald J. Trump to save her nation's democracy by pushing Nicolás Maduro from office. PAGE A6

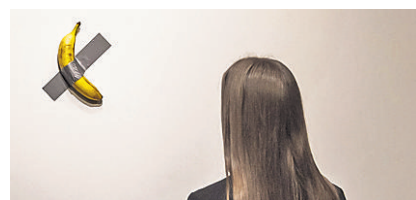
#### Ukraine Poised to Hit Harder

Kyiv said the U.S.-approved long-range strikes against Russia will come soon and without warning. PAGE A4

### OBITUARIES B10-11

#### Famed Gymnastics Coach

Bela Karolyi, a revered leader of Olympic teams, was later caught up in abuse scandals. He was 82. PAGE B11



ARTS C1-6

#### The Art of the 'Trump Bump'

After the U.S. election, auctioneers are looking to woo wary bidders back. The banana, above, might help, too. PAGE C1

#### Expecting to Be Monetized

Especially on social media, pregnancy is now a stage for promoting a growing range of consumer items. PAGE C1

### NATIONAL A14-21

#### Adult Obesity Rates Soar

A sweeping new paper reveals that three-quarters of American adults are obese or overweight, a striking rise from just over half in 1990. PAGE A19

#### Toll Is Back. So Are the Critics.

New York City's congestion pricing program got the go-ahead to start in January, reigniting a backlash. PAGE A20

### SPORTS B6-9, 12

#### Billie Jean King Still Fighting

At 80, the tennis icon has had as much impact on sports as perhaps anyone. She isn't ready to stop now. PAGE B6



SCIENCE TIMES D1-8

#### After the Performances End

Behind the scenes at a Chicago zoo, ex-Hollywood chimps are trying to find a home among the other apes. PAGE D1

#### Where the Rivers Run Red

As South America's glaciers retreat, the supply of fresh water is dwindling and its quality is getting worse. PAGE D1

### BUSINESS B1-5

#### Social Media Veers Right

The recent election underscored the ascendancy of conservative platforms, leaving liberals frozen out. PAGE B1

#### Spirit Files for Bankruptcy

The low-fare carrier has struggled to find its footing after a judge blocked its planned merger with JetBlue. PAGE B1

### OPINION A22-23

#### John Vaillant

PAGE A23



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