

Ire in Pr. George’s over data center bid

The mostly Black county hit by federal cuts weighs potential harm, benefits

BY LATESHIA BEACHUM

Taylor Frazier McCollum remembers when Landover Mall in her Prince George’s County neighborhood was a staple in family moments.

It was the place where she felt safe trick-or-treating in a costume for the mall’s annual Halloween party. She can still taste the salt and heat from fresh Boardwalk Fries. Somewhere in her home, she said, are old buttons from a mall kiosk that offered the fun of printing a loved one’s picture on clothing.

For more than two decades, the site of the demolished mall has sat idle, leaving residents in the now-predominantly Black Maryland county with the desire to have something in its place as shrubbery and other greenery push through the rubble of what was once a major weekend draw.

After some false starts for the site, residents who live near the former mall are now facing something unfamiliar that, though local officials say it would generate millions of dollars in much-needed tax revenue, has stirred controversy: a proposal for a massive data center.

“I feel it’s going to affect all of us as residents and as a whole,” said Frazier McCollum, who lives within one mile of the Landover Mall site and is behind a movement to stop the nearly 90-acre plot from being converted to a “hyperscale” data center that would feature five buildings and use 820 megawatts of electricity, enough to power 656,000 homes at any given time.

Frazier McCollum’s June petition SEE DATA CENTER ON A8



LORENZO TUGNOLI/FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Portraits of a Palestinian diaspora

Whether in Lebanon, Egypt or Jordan, theme of exile runs through identity, culture and politics

BY LORENZO TUGNOLI AND CLAIRE PARKER

The dream of return has animated the Palestinian struggle for more than seven decades. In 1948, more than 700,000 Palestinians fled or were expelled from their homes during the violence surrounding the creation of Israel. That foundational trauma — known to Palestinians as the Nakba, or “catastrophe” — continues to ripple across generations and borders.

Palestinian refugees, in neighboring Arab countries and around the world, claim a right to return to their ancestral homes. They see a historic injustice unaccounted for and an ongoing occupation that hems their people into ever-smaller spaces with fewer rights. Israel sees an existential threat to its identity as a Jewish state.

The resulting conflict has become one of the world’s

most intractable, erupting with fresh ferocity on Oct. 7, 2023. That’s when Palestinian militants led by Hamas, the Islamist movement that has ruled Gaza since 2007, stormed southern Israel, killed about 1,200 people — many of them civilians — and took 251 hostage. In response, Israel unleashed one of the most ferocious assaults in modern warfare on the Gaza Strip, as The Washington Post has previously reported based on visual forensic analysis, sparking fears among Palestinians and in Arab countries of another Nakba.

Today, the global Palestinian population has reached close to 15 million, according to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics. Half of them live outside of historic Palestine, mostly in Arab countries. More than a third are

SEE PALESTINIANS ON A10

More than 35,000 Palestinian refugees of Gazan heritage live in Jordan’s Jerash camp; most aren’t eligible for Jordanian citizenship and struggle to access public services.

Zohran Mamdani is sworn in as mayor of New York City

BY GAYA GUPTA AND SARAH ELLISON

NEW YORK — Zohran Mamdani, a 34-year-old democratic socialist, was sworn in publicly as the mayor of New York City on Thursday afternoon outside City Hall in Manhattan, ushering in a generational shift for the city’s leadership.

“Beginning today, we will govern expansively and audaciously. We may not always succeed, but never will we be accused of lacking the courage to try,” Mamdani said after he was sworn in. “To those who insist that the era of big government is over, hear me when I say this: No longer will City Hall hesitate to use its power to improve New Yorkers’ lives.”

Hours earlier, Mamdani was officially sworn in in an intimate ceremony in the old City Hall subway station that took place at midnight.

He is the first Muslim mayor and the youngest in generations to run the United States’ largest and wealthiest city.

Over the course of his campaign last year, he rose from a little-known New York State Assembly member to a nationally recognized political force, defeating former governor Andrew M. Cuomo’s famed Democratic political dynasty.

Mamdani’s social-media-fueled campaign tightly focused on affordability, running on a platform that promised to freeze the



ANDRES KUDACKI/AP

Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vermont) administers the oath of office to Zohran Mamdani on Thursday.

rent on the city’s nearly 1 million rent-stabilized apartments, make buses fast and free, and deliver universal child care. He plans to fund these ideas by raising taxes on the ultra-wealthy, including the city’s billionaires, who spent big last year to defeat him.

Mamdani was joined at his

public swearing-in by two high-profile political allies, Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vermont) and Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-New York), highlighting the democratic socialist wing of the Democratic Party at a time when beleaguered party leaders are clawing back from 2024’s decisive loss to

President Donald Trump.

“Zohran’s opponents have called the agenda that he campaigned on radical, communistic — oh, and absolutely unachievable. Really? That’s not what we believe. In the richest country in the history of the world, making

SEE MAMDANI ON A2

At Social Security, cuts and cratering service

BY LISA REIN, MERYL KORNFIELD AND HANNAH NATANSON

The Social Security Administration — the sprawling federal agency that delivers retirement, disability and survivor benefits to 74 million Americans — began the second Trump administration with a hostile takeover.

It ended 2025 in turmoil. A diminished workforce has struggled to respond to up to 6 million pending cases in its processing centers and 12 million transac-

tions in its field offices — record backlogs that have delayed basic services to millions of customers, according to internal agency documents and dozens of interviews.

Long-strained customer services at Social Security have become worse by many key measures since President Donald Trump began his second term, agency data and interviews show, as thousands of employees were fired or quit, and hasty policy changes and reassignments left inexperienced staff to handle the

SEE SOCIAL SECURITY ON A6

Strain that makes the older sicker behind rising flu cases

BY DAVID OVALLE

Cases of influenza in the United States are rising, driven by a new strain that public health officials worry current vaccines may not protect against as effectively.

Health officials and researchers say that although the flu season has not reached its peak, the spike in cases is not historically unusual — and they stress vaccines probably still offer protection against the worst effects of the strain.

The number of hospitalizations, emergency room and outpatient visits, and deaths associated with the flu have shot up, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, although the U.S. isn’t likely to reach peak until early in the year, possibly February.

“It seems to be a bit of a swift increase, but it’s not atypical,” said Jennifer Nuzzo, an epidemiologist and director of the Pandemic Center at the Brown University

SEE FLU ON A2

IN THE NEWS

A potential breakthrough Following years of complaints from families of disabled students about no-show buses and long waits, D.C. has agreed to GPS bus tracking. B13

Bowser kicks off final year In her last “Fresh Start” 5K race as D.C.’s leader, Mayor Muriel E. Bowser “runs through the tape.” B13

THE NATION Day cares say they’re being unfairly punished over a video alleging fraud in Minnesota. A3
Back-to-back cargo thefts of oyster, lobster and crab have recently hit New England. A3

THE WORLD Conflicts in Gaza, Ukraine, Sudan and elsewhere killed at least 240,000 in 2025. A9

CLIMATE Vegan pet food is gaining fans, as brands meet nutritional needs. A15

THE ECONOMY For many teachers, the holiday break means having to take on second jobs as their salaries aren’t keeping up with their expenses. A18
Your personal information is probably on the dark web. We tell you what you can do about it. A18

STYLE Margo Martin holds sway at the White House, not with policy pitches but an iPhone camera to fuel Trump’s influencer machine. B1

SPORTS The French-speaking moms of three young Wizards are forging bonds, too. B7

THE REGION As 2025 came to a close, Washington Post reporters revisited some of the people in the area who made headlines. B13

WEEKEND Let’s put the past year behind us by laughing at the biggest movie duds, the trash heap of bombs with 1.5 stars or less.

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The Washington Post
Year 149, No. 54449

