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The New York Times

THE WEATHER

Today, cloudy, breezy late, thunderstorms, high 80. Tonight, cloudy, showers and thunderstorms, low 69. Tomorrow, showers early, some sun, high 82. Weather map, Page 28.

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VADIM GHIRDA/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Officers in Chisinau, Moldova, watching protesters outside the Electoral Commission after the parliamentary elections in September.

How Russia Has Plotted to Exert Control in Tiny Moldova

This article is by **Michael Schwartz, Adam Goldman and Aaron Krolik.**

It resembled in many ways a summer camp. Barbecues and beach volleyball games were on offer. A wellness spa was called “Relax and Have Fun.” The men and women who attended the program at a resort complex in a remote part of Serbia also took part in more sinister activities, like learning to break through police cordons and set buildings on fire. They donned flak jackets and trained with assault rifles. Their counselors, it turned out, were operatives with ties to Russia’s military intelligence service, known as the GRU. Their purpose, according to intelligence officials from three countries who described the activities, was to build a cadre of disciplined shock troops trained in election interference.

The target was tiny Moldova, a country of about three million people that carries outside importance for President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia.

The Kremlin’s campaign included methods familiar elsewhere in the West, like hacking and disinformation. But in Moldova, its intervention went further than perhaps anywhere else outside Ukraine, and stands as one of the most extensive and audacious

plots to date in Mr. Putin’s effort to destabilize the West, the three Western intelligence officials say. Besides the camp in Serbia, Russian agents ran training programs in Bosnia and Moscow that were designed to turn pro-Russian Moldovans into foot soldiers. Moscow paid hundreds of Orthodox Moldovan priests to recruit voters and to push Russian narratives from the pulpit. And it spent

Training on Interfering in Votes, and \$1,000 Stipends to Priests

hundreds of millions of dollars on a sophisticated vote-buying scheme financed by a Moldovan billionaire in exile and conceived and operated from Skolkovo, the Kremlin’s knockoff Silicon Valley outside Moscow.

Moscow’s campaign has not stopped. This spring, Russian missiles targeted energy infrastructure that provided service to Moldova, polluting waterways and disrupting electricity flows.

This article is based on interviews with activists who took part in the Russian effort; senior Moldovan law enforcement and security officials; and more than half a dozen European and American

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U.S. Prosecutor Targeted a Firm With Judge Ties

By GLENN THRUSH

WASHINGTON — The U.S. attorney’s office in Chicago has spent the past year investigating a Democratic fund-raising firm once co-owned by the daughter of the judge in President Trump’s hush-money trial in New York, according to court filings and people familiar with the inquiry.

Last August, the U.S. attorney, Andrew S. Boutros of the Northern District of Illinois, directed Authentic Campaigns Inc. to turn over a broad range of internal communications with clients. They included former Vice President Kamala Harris, former President Joseph R. Biden Jr., Gov. Kathy Hochul of New York, Representative Hakeem Jeffries of New York, and the Democratic National Committee, according to a grand jury subpoena reviewed by The New York Times.

Loren Merchan, the daughter of Juan Merchan, a supreme court judge in Manhattan, was the firm’s vice president until late 2024 and was also on the list. The Merchan family has been a frequent target of Mr. Trump and his allies, who have made unsubstantiated claims that the judge was out to get him and that his daughter profited from accusations aired at the trial.

The trial ended with Mr. Trump’s conviction in 2024, in the midst of his campaign for a second term, on 34 felony counts stemming from his efforts to keep a porn star from publicizing her

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TOMAS MUNITA FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

After 5 Years Ruling Afghanistan, New Challenges

Above, after Pakistan airstrikes. Threats are emerging to the Taliban’s hegemony. Analysis. Page 6.

After Professor’s Death, Questions for Cambridge

This article is by **Mara Hvistendahl, Megan Specia, Leo Sands, Ali Watkins and Susan Dominus.**

CAMBRIDGE, England — When Cambridge University interviewed Jason Arday for one of the most prestigious sociology positions in the world, he was an early career scholar and underqualified, by the school’s own standards.

Cambridge’s requirements, reviewed by The New York Times, called for “an outstanding research record of international stature” and a “proven successful track record” supervising Ph.D. students. Dr. Arday had a modest publication record and had bounced from one university to the next — not staying long enough to oversee a full three-year-or-more doctorate.

Cambridge hired him anyway in 2023, making him, at 37, the university’s youngest Black professor at a time when the school was under pressure to diversify. In doing so, Cambridge thrust him into

the international limelight, giving him a platform at one of the world’s elite universities to champion academic diversity and making him a target for critics.

Dr. Arday was found dead in London on Friday, days after resigning his job amid accusations that he had plagiarized chunks of his papers, embellished parts of his recently published memoir and fabricated aspects of his life story. The controversy exploded along cultural fault lines — race,

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Cyclospora Reveals Flaws In the Food Safety System

Trump Administration Delayed a Rule That Might Have Sped Up the Response

By CHRISTINA JEWETT and JULIE CRESWELL

WASHINGTON — Cases of cyclosporiasis were mounting rapidly in Michigan and state health officials were homing in on a common thread: Many of those who had fallen ill had eaten at Taco Bell.

On July 1, they asked the company for its supply chain records, crucial information in tracing ingredients that may have caused the outbreak.

On July 3, they wrote and asked for the records again.

On July 6, they wrote a third time.

“With the rapid nature of this outbreak and the number of people affected, we need to ensure we are completing traceback in a timely manner to preserve public health,” Lauren Edwards, an epidemiologist on the state’s rapid response team, said in an email to executives at Yum Brands, which owns Taco Bell. (The New York Times obtained the correspondence under Michigan’s open records law.)

Later that day, Taco Bell provided some records to the state, which by then was working with the federal Food and Drug Administration. The F.D.A. asked for additional records two days later. Finally, on July 13, the agency received all the records it needed to pinpoint lettuce from a Taylor Farms plant in Mexico as a source of the outbreak.

A federal rule that had been scheduled to take effect in January would have required Taco Bell to send those records within 24 hours. But last year, the Trump administration delayed the implementation of that rule until mid-2028, saying companies needed more time to prepare.

Food safety experts say the postponement has hindered the response to the outbreak, the largest cluster in a record number of

cyclospora cases in the United States this year.

“Time translates into illnesses and lives,” said Thomas Gremillion, director of food policy at the Consumer Federation of America, who reviewed the emails from Michigan. He added: “We would have had a much better response to this outbreak if they hadn’t delayed that rule.”

Cyclospora, which can cause explosive diarrhea, cramps and other severe symptoms, has been a recognized driver of foodborne illness for nearly 30 years. But this year’s massive toll — totaling more than 24,500 confirmed or suspected cases so far and two deaths — reveals shortcomings in the U.S. food safety system that may leave Americans more vulnerable to future pathogens, public health experts say.

Many point to an erosion of food safety oversight during the Trump administration, stemming in part from its aggressive efforts to roll back regulations and shrink the federal government.

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NICK HAGEN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

A laboratory in Michigan, where cyclospora has sickened more than 12,000 people and contributed to two deaths.

A Castro Linked to Smuggling Becomes an Envoy to the U.S.

By DAVID C. ADAMS and FRANCES ROBLES

Raúl Castro was on an official state visit in Paris a decade ago as Cuba’s president when a hulky bodyguard in his entourage stood out.

The man kept so close to Mr. Castro while they walked the red carpet at the Élysée Palace that a member of the French honor guard tried pulling him back.

Even François Hollande, France’s president at the time, waved him back.

The security escort who kept inserting himself in official photos was none other than Mr. Castro’s grandson, Raúl G. Rodríguez Castro, a colonel in the interior ministry.

Today, the once largely unknown bodyguard has become a key figure in Cuba’s talks with the United States, even though he has never held public office. His name has even come up as someone the Trump administration might find acceptable to become Cuba’s next leader.

“He exemplifies how that government operates,” said Tim Riesen, a foreign policy aide to former Senator Patrick Leahy, a Democrat from Vermont, who met Mr. Rodríguez Castro several times. “It’s a lot like a family business, and so someone who was described to us a decade ago as President Castro’s bodyguard has for whatever reason, by whatever means, become something much more than that.”

But Mr. Rodríguez Castro, who has met with some of the most senior people in the Trump admin-



RAMON ESPINOSA/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Raúl G. Rodríguez Castro, left, with his grandfather Raúl Castro at the May Day parade in Havana last year.

istration, may have also used his considerable influence to protect a large-scale smuggling operation that moved people out of Cuba and brought illicit goods into the country, according to interviews and court records.

Mr. Rodríguez Castro, 42, was accused of helping funnel goods purchased with stolen credit cards into the country, receiving luxury items as bribes and allowing wanted criminals to roam free on the island, the interviews and court records show.

The scheme was the target of a federal investigation that resulted in the convictions of at least 21 people and decades-long sentences. Mr. Rodríguez Castro has

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A Plan Shaking Up Greenland

A U.S. oil company says it could be on the verge of a major discovery in a remote area. The project’s boosters include Dr. Phil. PAGE 4

Unready for the Heat

Europe is warming fast, and many countries are unprepared, especially cooler ones like Belgium, where hospitals were overwhelmed. PAGE 8

Pushing Boundaries in Iran

The hosts of Azad, a popular online debate forum on YouTube, have become adept at walking a tightrope in an authoritarian system. PAGE 11



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Race to Stake Mining Claims

Prospectors are eyeing deposits within two national monuments on land now unprotected from development. PAGE 16

Back in Fight for Senate Seat

Sherrod Brown is hoping his economic populist message will still resonate among voters in Ohio. PAGE 15

SUNDAY STYLES

Sources for Looking Your Best

In an industry upended by online shopping, many New York clothing stores have persevered. The Styles Desk has picked some of the finest ones. PAGE 4

METROPOLITAN

Another Look at Bathhouses

Two New York State lawmakers propose repealing a health code that prohibits establishments like bathhouses from allowing sexual activity. PAGE 1

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REAL ESTATE

The Vanity Is Back in Style

The dressing table is making a comeback as online influencers discover one of the world’s oldest stages. PAGE 7

SUNDAY BUSINESS

Seeking a Piece of the A.I. Pie

As a new digital landscape appears, policymakers around the country are scrambling to ensure that the public, and not just Silicon Valley, will have a stake in the wealth. PAGE 4

Silicon Valley Farm’s Last Days

Andy Mariani grows exotic and ethereally delicious stone fruit in the shadow of tech giants. But at age 80, he thinks it’s time to give up the land. PAGE 1

