

What's News

Business & Finance

Instagram's top executive, Adam Mosseri, proposed a new industry panel to set safety standards for social-media platforms, telling a Senate panel the measure could help protect younger children from harm. **A1**

◆ **The DOJ** has informed Deutsche Bank that it may have violated a criminal settlement when it failed to tell prosecutors about an internal complaint. **B1**

◆ **GameStop** widened its loss and posted revenue growth last quarter as it continued efforts to revitalize its business. **B1**

◆ **Apple** won a U.S. appeals court reprieve in rolling out changes to the App Store ordered by a federal judge as part of its antitrust battle with Epic Games. **B1**

◆ **Elizabeth Holmes's** lawyers rested their case in her criminal-fraud trial after the Theranos founder testified over seven days. **B1**

◆ **The world's** biggest emerging markets have dodged contagion from Turkey's currency implosion, but other threats are looming. **B1**

◆ **Lego** plans to invest more than \$1 billion in a new factory in Asia. **B3**

◆ **Nestlé** has agreed to reduce its stake in L'Oréal in a \$10 billion deal. **B9**

◆ **U.S. job openings** continue to far outpace the number of available workers, with nearly five million more open positions than people seeking work. **A2**

◆ **The S&P 500**, Dow and Nasdaq rose 0.3%, 0.1% and 0.6%, respectively. **B10**

World-Wide

◆ **Pfizer and BioNTech** said that a third dose of their Covid-19 vaccine neutralized the Omicron variant in lab tests but that the two-dose regimen was significantly less effective at blocking the virus. **A1, A10**

◆ **Biden** committed the federal government to net-zero emissions by 2050, including directing agencies to make all of their vehicle purchases zero-emission units by 2035. **A3**

◆ **California** political leaders are looking for ways to provide financial and logistical support to women who come to the state seeking abortions if Roe v. Wade is overturned or severely curtailed. **A3**

◆ **Mark Meadows** sued Pelosi and members of the committee investigating the Capitol attack after the panel indicated it would move to hold Trump's final chief of staff in criminal contempt. **A4**

◆ **Lawyers** presented their closing arguments in Jussie Smollett's criminal trial for an alleged hate-crime hoax. **A6**

◆ **Biden** ruled out the unilateral use of U.S. force if Russia invades Ukraine. **A11**

◆ **Germany's** parliament elected Olaf Scholz chancellor, ending Angela Merkel's 16-year rule. **A11**

◆ **Britain** imposed new Covid restrictions in England as it warned infections caused by the Omicron variant are surging. **A11**

◆ **India's** top military official, Bipin Rawat, died in a helicopter crash along with 12 others, including his wife. **A13**

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Merkel Hands Over the Reins After 16 Years as Chancellor



BOUQUET: Angela Merkel poses with new German Chancellor Olaf Scholz during the official transfer of power in Berlin on Wednesday, after Germany's parliament elected Mr. Scholz, formally ending Ms. Merkel's 16-year rule. **A11**

Instagram Head Gets Pushback At Hearing on App's Impact

By RYAN TRACY
AND JOHN D. MCKINNON

WASHINGTON—Instagram's top executive clashed Wednesday with senators over the photo-sharing app's impact on young users, during a contentious hearing where lawmakers in both parties argued for stricter government oversight of social-media apps.

Adam Mosseri, head of Meta Platforms Inc.'s Instagram, asserted that many young users find Instagram makes their lives better.

"I'm proud of our work to

help keep young people safe, to support young people who are struggling, and to empower parents with tools to help their teenagers develop healthy and safe online habits," said Mr. Mosseri, whose parent company Meta also owns Facebook. Members of the Senate subcommittee on consumer protection painted a far different picture, citing internal documents disclosed by The Wall Street Journal showing that Instagram makes body-image issues worse for a substantial minority of teen girls and is blamed by teens for increases

in anxiety and depression. Several senators pointed to Instagram accounts that repeatedly appeared to push teenage girls toward harmful content.

"I am just a little bit frustrated," said Sen. Marsha Blackburn (R., Tenn.), the panel's top Republican. Parents "continue to hear from you that change is coming, that things are going to be different...Guess what? Nothing changes. Nothing."

Mr. Mosseri pushed back against some lawmakers' assertion that the company's social-

media products are addictive, saying he doesn't believe research shows that.

"We do have the same goal. We all want teens to be safe online," he said.

Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D., Minn.) shot back: "I think we are in diametrically opposed goals, the goals of parents out there and the goals of your company."

"Our kids aren't cash cows," she added. "When you look at what your company has done, it's to try and get more and more of them on board."

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One Ship Stuck for 54 Days

Halloween boots that missed Halloween. Chess sets and games late for Christmas shopping. The long wait for the container ship A Kinka off the California coast shows just how hard supply-chain delays have hit small businesses. **A8**



Japan's Seniors Find New Way To Stay Young: Team Videogaming

Average age on Matagi Snipers is 68; 'better than having nothing to do'

By MEGUMI FUJIKAWA

AKITA, Japan—Sixty-six-year-old Atsuko Oyama shares a goal held by many people a half-century younger. She wants to get 100 kills in the first-person shooter video game "Apex Legends."

True, she's a little rusty, having last faced off against digital enemies in a "Space Invaders" arcade game sometime in the latter part of the 20th century. But after joining Japan's first senior esports team in September, Ms. Oyama notched 10 kills in a month and feels her enthusiasm

growing. "Watching others play, I thought I couldn't do it," said the retired receptionist. "But I didn't let that to back off, so I decided to come here at least twice. And now I am into it."

Esports promoters who have seen Japan fall behind powerhouses such as the U.S. in video-game competitions think the senior market might be the way to catch up. And if the over-65 set feels a little more energized after blasting a few rival mercenaries, so much the better.

Japan is the world's oldest

Please turn to page A15

China's Central Bank Feels Grip Tighten in Shake-Up

By LINGLING WEI

The People's Bank of China has never been politically independent like a Western central bank, but it has nonetheless enjoyed a special status in the nation's economic hierarchy. Now, President Xi Jinping's shake-up of China's financial sector is stripping that away.

Earlier this week, pressured by senior leaders worried about plunging economic growth, the PBOC said it would ease banks' reserve requirements, effectively making more cash available for bank lending. The move went

against policy signals it had sent weeks earlier and came as the central bank and other financial institutions came under scrutiny by Beijing, part of Mr. Xi's effort to curb capitalist forces in the economy.

In recent weeks, Communist Party discipline inspectors from China's top anticorruption agency visited the central bank's headquarters in Beijing. Officials briefed on the matter said the inspectors asked questions, reviewed documents and brought an unusually stern message: Beijing has little tolerance for any talk of central-bank independence;

the monetary authority, just like any other part of the government, answers to the party.

Of all the financial institutions being scrutinized by Mr. Xi's discipline inspectors, the PBOC is arguably the most consequential. The central bank oversees one of the world's largest financial systems. Though it needs approval from the top bodies of government before it makes big decisions such as those about interest rates, the PBOC has worked for years to establish credibility among investors, at home and abroad, as China's markets be-

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Why Congress Won't Tackle Student Debt

Lawmakers know federal Plus loans burden millions with balances they can't afford

By REBECCA BALLHAUS
AND ANDREA FULLER

U.S. lawmakers know the federal Plus student-loan programs have plunged millions of families into debt. They aren't eager to fix the problem.

Congress in the 1990s created a way for parents to borrow essentially unlimited amounts to send their children to college. It did the same for graduate students roughly a decade later.

For undergraduate debt, the government imposes a dollar limit. The Parent Plus and Grad Plus programs let people borrow the total cost of attendance—room and board, books and personal expenses on top of tuition—for as many years

as it takes to get the degree. Lawmakers and administration officials in both parties acknowledge that the programs have left many borrowers with balances they will struggle to repay. Yet Congress has repeatedly punted on changing the programs. Among the reasons: resistance to restricting disadvantaged students' access to funds, fear of angering schools, and the fact that the programs—on paper—have historically made money for the government.

"You've got the universities and colleges who want free-flowing capital through these loan programs. For students and parents who want to go to school or want their offspring

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THE FUTURE OF EVERYTHING
THE INFORMATION EXPLOSION
R1-8

Late Edition
Today, periodic sunshine and clouds, chilly, high 42. **Tonight**, partly to mostly cloudy, low 35. **Tomorrow**, mostly cloudy, not so chilly, high 50. Weather map appears on Page B8.

The website has the trappings of popular social media, a young audience and explicit content on suicide that other parts of the internet don't allow. It is linked to a long line of lives cut short.

23-year-old male, Leeds, England • 25-year-old female, Pennsylvania • 18-year-old male, Houston • 49-year-old male, Darlington, England • 24-year-old female, Cumbria, England • 17-year-old male, Frisco, Texas • 25-year-old male, Connecticut • 20-year-old male, Texas • 32-year-old female, Missouri • 16-year-old female, Illinois • 19-year-old female, Richmond, Va. • 23-year-old female, Glasgow • 42-year-old male, Ohio • 30-year-old male, Canada • 35-year-old male, Mississippi • 20-year-old female, Costa Mesa, Calif. • 27-year-old male, Schertz, Texas • 21-year-old male, Langley, British Columbia • 20-year-old female, Radcliffe, England • 16-year-old male, Salt Lake City • 22-year-old male, Australia • 25-year-old male, Portadown, Northern Ireland • 58-year-old male, Texas • 22-year-old male, Perth, Australia • 35-year-old female, Kirkhill, Inverness, Scotland • 26-year-old male, North Carolina • 28-year-old female, New Jersey • 25-year-old female, Wisconsin • 19-year-old male, Rome • 19-year-old male, Rome • 18-year-old male, Bassano del Grappa, Italy • 20-year-old female, Palermo, Italy • 30-year-old female, Italy • 31-year-old female, Amherst, Ohio • 56-year-old, California • 28-year-old female, North Haven, Conn. • 29-year-old male, Widnes, England • 31-year-old male, Leiston, England • 21-year-old male, Sunderland, England • 31-year-old male, Kalamazoo, Mich. • 30-year-old male, Houston, Texas • 32-year-old male, Sunderland, England • 31-year-old male, Kalamazoo, Mich. • 30-year-old male, Houston, Texas • 32-year-old male, Sunderland, England

Where the Despairing Learn Ways to Die

By MEGAN TWOHEY
and GABRIEL J.X. DANCE

As Matthew van Antwerpen, a 17-year-old in suburban Dallas, struggled with remote schooling during the pandemic last year, he grew increasingly despondent. Searching online, he found a website about suicide.

"Any enjoyment or progress I make in my life simply comes across as forced," he wrote on the site after signing up. "I know it is all just a distraction to blow time until the end."

Roberta Barbos, a 22-year-old student at the University of Glasgow, first posted after a breakup, writing that she was

"unbearably lonely." Shawn Shatto, 25, described feeling miserable at her warehouse job in Pennsylvania. And Daniel Dal Canto, a 16-year-old in Salt Lake City, shared his fears that an undiagnosed stomach ailment might never get better.

Soon after joining, each of them was dead. Most suicide websites are about prevention. This one — started in March 2018 by two shadowy figures calling themselves Marquis and Serge — provides explicit directions on how to die.

The four young members were among tens of thousands around the world who have been pulled in. On the site's public forums, in live chats and through private messaging, they discuss hanging, poi-

son, guns and gas. Strangers seek out partners to meet face to face and kill themselves together.

Participants routinely nudge one another along as they share suicide plans, posting reassuring messages, thumbs-up and heart emojis, and praise for those who follow through: "brave," "a legend," "a hero."

Though members are anonymous, The New York Times identified 45 who had killed themselves in the United States, the United Kingdom, Italy, Canada and Australia — and found that the trail of deaths is likely much longer.

More than 500 members — a rate of

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NATO Haunted By Ukraine Vow As Putin Looms

By STEVEN ERLANGER

BRUSSELS — Ukraine presents NATO with a dilemma many years in the making — one the alliance, itself, helped create.

In 2008, NATO — an American-led alliance explicitly created to counter the Soviet Union — promised membership to two former Soviet republics, Ukraine and Georgia, but without specifying when or how.

Russia saw the offer as a potential threat on its borders and an encroachment into the heart of its sphere of influence, the result of a series of affronts and humiliations by the West since the fall of the Soviet Union. From the outset, some NATO nations questioned whether the offer of membership was a wise move, and it is not clear that the promise will ever be kept, but predictably, it has fed a lasting conflict with President Vladimir V. Putin.

With Ukraine a NATO partner but not a member, it does not benefit from NATO's core principle, the commitment to collective defense, though Ukraine has sent troops to fight in NATO missions in both Iraq and Afghanistan.

So, as thousands of Russian troops mass on Ukraine's borders, NATO is not bound by treaty to protect Ukraine militarily, nor is it likely to try. Asked on Wednesday about the possibility of dispatching U.S. forces to Ukraine, President Biden flatly ruled it out, telling reporters at the White House, "That is not on the table."

But NATO does have a compelling interest in trying both to deter Russia and to avoid provoking an invasion.

"It is important to distinguish

Continued on Page A14

Apps Aid Millions in Unlocking Government Aid

By JASON DEPARLE

WASHINGTON — In making his case that safety net programs should be easier to use, Jimmy Chen, a tech entrepreneur, recalled visiting a welfare office where people on food stamps endured long waits to submit routine paperwork.

They passed the time as people in lines do, staring at their phones — which had the potential to do the work online with greater convenience, accuracy and speed.

The image of aid-seekers waiting time with a solution literally in hand captures what critics call an overlooked challenge for people in poverty: Administrative burdens make benefits hard to obtain and tax the time and emotional re-

Making Programs Like Food Stamps More Accessible

sources of those who need help.

"Too much bureaucracy prevents people from getting the help they need," said Mr. Chen, whose start-up, Propel, offers a free app that five million households now use to manage their food stamp benefits.

Barriers to aid are as old as aid itself, and they exist for reasons as varied as concerns about fraud, the bureaucratic tension between accuracy and speed, and hostility toward people in need. But the

perils of red tape have drawn new attention since the coronavirus pandemic left millions of Americans seeking government help, many for the first time.

The government approved vast increases in spending but often struggled to deliver the assistance. While some programs reached most households quickly (stimulus checks), others buckled under soaring demand (unemployment benefits) or daunting complexity (emergency rental aid).

"The pandemic highlighted how difficult these programs can be to access," said Pamela Herd, a professor at Georgetown and an author, with Donald P. Moynihan, of "Administrative Burden,"

Continued on Page A18



Feeding the Manatees

Malnourished from a lack of food, the mammals are in need of a handout from humans. Page A16.

Adams Selects Longtime Ally To Run Schools

Founder of Network of All-Boy Academies

By ELIZA SHAPIRO

David C. Banks, a longtime New York City educator who rose to prominence after creating a network of public all-boys schools, has been chosen by Mayor-elect Eric Adams to be the next chancellor of New York City's public school system, the nation's largest, according to several people with knowledge of the matter.

Mr. Banks, the founder of the Eagle Academy for Young Men and a close friend and key adviser to Mr. Adams, will take over the system as it struggles to emerge from the educational wreckage of the pandemic, which disrupted learning for more than 18 months and strained the mental health of many of its roughly one million students.

Mr. Adams will announce his selection of Mr. Banks at a Thursday morning appearance at Public School 161, the elementary school in the Crown Heights neighborhood of Brooklyn that Mr. Banks attended as a child.

"I want to help transform the lives of so many of our children, but particularly Black and brown children who have struggled the most in this system," Mr. Banks said in an interview. "They need people to be bold on their behalf."

Mr. Banks said his first priorities would include expanding early childhood education options for the city's youngest children, improving career pathways for older students, and combating students' trauma.

Without sweeping changes, Mr. Banks said, "you're just going to play around in the margins."

The chancellorship, which Mr. Banks has eyed for years and comes with oversight of a roughly \$38 billion annual operating budget, is arguably the second-most influential education job in America, after the federal education secretary.

Mr. Banks, 59, comes to the role with crucial advantages, some of which his recent predecessors have lacked and which could help him become the most powerful city schools chancellor in more than a decade, since Joel I. Klein brought major, often disruptive, change to a system that had seen little of it for years.

A native New Yorker who has taught in and led several schools in the city, Mr. Banks now runs the foundation that provides support for the Eagle schools, and has the sort of deep knowledge of the city's byzantine educational bureaucracy that can take years for an outsider to master.

He created the Eagle Academy schools to address an urgent prob-

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PFIZER SUGGESTS BOOSTER SHIELDS AGAINST VARIANT

PRELIMINARY LAB TESTS

Drugmaker Says Results Show 2 Doses 'May Not Be Sufficient'

By SHARON LAFRANIERE

WASHINGTON — Pfizer and BioNTech said Wednesday that laboratory tests suggest a booster shot of their coronavirus vaccine offers significant protection against the fast-spreading Omicron variant of the virus.

The companies said that tests of blood from people who had received only two doses found much lower levels of antibodies protecting against Omicron than against an earlier version of the virus. That suggests that two doses "may not be sufficient to protect against infection" by the new variant, the companies said.

While limited in scope — to get fast results, the companies examined only about 39 samples — the findings provided a bit of hopeful news at a time of renewed uncer-



Pfizer-BioNTech's booster study was limited in scope.

ainty. Health departments are identifying close to 100,000 cases a day, hospitalizations are ticking up and deaths are again on the rise in the United States, almost all due to the Delta variant.

The companies summarized their findings in a news release and did not release any data. Their study followed a preliminary report on lab experiments in South Africa that also found Omicron seemed to dull the power of two doses of the Pfizer vaccine.

There were 43 cases of Omicron infection, most of them mild, in about 20 American states as of Wednesday, The Associated Press reported. Cases are rising much faster in South Africa and Europe; early modeling and analysis suggest that this latest variant may move twice as fast as Delta.

In South Africa, where Omicron

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De Blasio Got Warning on Ethics, Then Fought to Keep It a Secret

By WILLIAM NEUMAN

When Bill de Blasio first took office as mayor of New York in 2014, he called two powerful real estate developers who had active projects in the city, and asked them to donate money to a nonprofit organization that he had created to advance his political agenda.

The request to help his nonprofit, the Campaign for One New York, seemed to violate the city's ethics law, and a ban against asking for contributions from people who had business pending with the city. Within months of his solicitations, Mr. de Blasio was formally warned by the city's Conflicts of Interest Board — in a previously undisclosed letter — not to repeat the behavior.

But even after that warning, the

mayor continued to hit up well-connected donors for money, according to documents that the city has now released after years of an extraordinary legal campaign by the de Blasio administration to keep the documents secret.

In February 2015, the mayor made a call to Jeffrey Levine, chairman of Douglass Development, which had just won city approval for \$12 million in financing for an affordable housing complex, and had taken ownership of a parcel of city-owned land in the Bronx.

The next month, Mr. de Blasio called David Von Sperckelen, president of Toll Brothers, another developer. A stop-work order had recently been lifted on the

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BUSINESS B1-7

New Safety Concern for Tesla

An updated touch screen feature allows drivers to play video games while the vehicle is in motion. PAGE B1

A Suddenly Precious Chemical

The high price of urea is hitting Indian farmers, below, South Korean truckers, British soda makers and more. PAGE B1



INTERNATIONAL A4-14

End of an Era in Germany

After 16 years, Angela Merkel handed over the German chancellorship to Olaf Scholz, leaving behind a changed country and a polarizing legacy. PAGE A4

Defector Shares Flight Details

A man has been telling Poland what he knows about the diversion of a plane carrying a Belarus dissident. PAGE A12

SPORTS B8-10

Silence of the Sponsors

As the Beijing Games approach, it's time for corporations to speak up on human rights, Kurt Streeter writes. PAGE B9

NATIONAL A15-27

District's #MeToo Reckoning

Six teachers from a Long Island high school have been placed on leave as officials investigate claims of longtime sexual misconduct. PAGE A15

Rioters' Questionable Defense

Half a dozen defendants in the assault on the Capitol are using video to try to make a case that they were simply protecting themselves. PAGE A20

Path to Carbon Neutrality

A series of executive orders signed by President Biden would require federal agencies to commit to using only renewable resources. PAGE A21

ARTS C1-8

Fixing the Academy Awards

By bringing back a host and human moments, the Oscars could be made to see TV again. The Projectionist. PAGE C1

Arias That Fight Stereotypes

The creators of the opera adaptation of "The Snowy Day" want to change perceptions about Black identity. PAGE C1



THURSDAY STYLES D1-12

Out With Bare, In With Brash

The "no-makeup makeup" look has been abandoned for bold eye shadows and maximum self-expression. PAGE D4

Influence With a Side of Fries

Recent partnerships between fast-food chains and celebrities have proved to be a boon for both parties. PAGE D11

OPINION A28-29

Gail Collins

PAGE A28





Photographs by GARY COBONADO Los Angeles Times
GENERAL MANAGER Sharbel Eid grabs a sample of finished feed-stock compost at the Blossom Valley Organics South plant last week in Lamont, Calif. The mounds of biodegradables can be 400 yards long.

California's climate fight needs your kitchen waste

Starting Jan. 1, food scraps must be tossed into the green bin for composting.

BY JAMES RAINEY

Trash never dies. Sometimes it's not even trash.

That's the concept behind a state law that on Jan. 1 will require Californians to separate organic material from their other garbage. It's a landmark reform that aims to transform the state's throwaway culture — not just to ease pressure on landfills but to reduce the climate-warming fallout of our trashy norm.

Senate Bill 1383 mandates that Californians toss unused food, coffee grounds, egg shells, banana peels and other leftovers into bins they use for other "green" waste, such as garden trimmings, lawn clippings and leaves.

Waste haulers will divert the organic material away from traditional landfills to facilities that will turn the biological mishmash into products such as compost, mulch and natural gas.

In future years, individuals and businesses that don't adequately separate their green waste could face fines of up to \$500 daily. Cities that don't comply could be forced to pay as much as \$10,000 a day per violation.

The state Legislature and then Gov. Jerry Brown passed the law in 2016, seeking many benefits: reducing the flow of refuse to overburdened landfills and returning organics to the land, thereby improving soil quality, enhancing drought resistance, bolstering crops [See *Compost*, A10]



THE GOAL of using compost is to return organics to the land, and thereby improve crops, soil quality and drought resistance while cutting greenhouse gases.

Executive order tackles emissions

Biden signs a climate plan calling for a carbon-neutral U.S. government by 2050.

BY MATTHEW DALY

WASHINGTON — President Biden on Wednesday signed an executive order to make the federal government carbon-neutral by 2050, aiming for a 65% reduction in planet-warm-

ing greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 and an all-electric fleet of cars and trucks five years later.

The White House said the order shows how the government will "leverage its scale and procurement power to lead by example in tackling the climate crisis." The order will reduce emissions across federal operations, as part of a government-wide effort to confront climate change.

"As the single largest land owner, energy consumer and employer in the nation, the

federal government can catalyze private-sector investment and expand the economy and American industry by transforming how we build, buy and manage electricity, vehicles, buildings and other operations to be clean and sustainable," the order said.

It directs that government buildings use 100% carbon-pollution-free electricity by 2030; that the U.S. fleet of cars and trucks become all-electric by 2035; and that federal contracts for goods

and services be carbon-free by 2050.

Government buildings should be carbon-free by 2045, including a 50% emissions cut by 2032, Biden said.

The executive action is a part of Biden's commitment to support the growth of clean energy and clean technology industries, while accelerating U.S. progress toward achieving a carbon-pollution-free electricity sector by 2035, the White House said in a statement.

[See *Climate*, A10]

A growing list of vanishing activists

China has expanded its crackdown on civil society to those who are lesser known.

BY ALICE SU

BEIJING — Wang Jianbing visited dying construction workers, Sophia Huang Xueqin investigated China's earliest #MeToo cases, Fang Ran wanted to empower factory workers in the south. This year, all three disappeared.

The recent censorship of Peng Shuai, a tennis player who was erased from the Chinese internet after accusing a former party leader



ACTIVIST Wang Jianbing is among those in secret detention in China. He disappeared in September.

of sexual abuse, has drawn a global outcry of concern for her safety and freedom. But lesser-known individuals such as Wang, Huang and Fang have been vanishing as China tightens restrictions for activism on gender, labor and other issues.

The three activists were held in a form of secret detention called "residential surveillance at a designated location," or RSDL, which allows the state to lock up people in "black jails" without trial. The human rights group Safeguard Defenders estimates that 45,000 to 55,000 people have been subjected to RSDL since Xi Jinping became president in 2013, including as many as [See *China*, A4]

A TIMES INVESTIGATION

Racist texts among cops uncovered

Interviews, records reveal names of 12 Torrance officers in a scandal that threatens many criminal cases.

BY JAMES QUEALLY

The caption read "hanging with the homies."

The picture above it showed several Black men who had been lynched. Another photo asked what someone should do if their girlfriend was having an affair with a Black man. The answer, according to the caption, was to break "a tall light on his car so the police will stop him and shoot him."

Someone else sent a picture of a candy cane, a Christmas tree ornament, a star for the top of the tree and an "enslaved person."

"Which one doesn't belong?" the caption asked.

"You don't hang the star," someone wrote back.

The comments represent a silver of a trove of racist text messages exchanged by more than a dozen current and former Torrance police officers and recruits.

Through interviews with sources with direct knowledge of the investigation, public records requests and a review of district attorney's office records, The Times examined some of the contents of the until-now secret texts and identified a dozen Torrance police officers under investigation for exchanging them.

The broad scope of the racist text conversations, which prosecutors said went on for years, has created a crisis for the Torrance Police Department and could jeopardize hundreds of criminal cases in which the officers either testified or made arrests. California Atty. Gen. Rob Bonta said Wednesday

his office will investigate the department in the wake of the scandal.

The officers' comments spared no color or creed: They joked about "gassing" Jewish people, assaulting members of the LGBTQ community, using violence against suspects and lying during an investigation into a police shooting, according to district attorney's office records reviewed by The Times.

Frequently, hateful comments were targeted at Black people. Officers called Black men "savages" and several variations of the N-word, according to documents reviewed by The Times. The officers also shared instructions on how to tie a noose and a picture of a stuffed animal being lynched inside Torrance's police headquarters, according to the documents.

While no officers currently face criminal charges in direct relation to the text messages, the racist exchanges have led to the dismissal of at least 85 criminal cases involving the officers implicated in the scandal. County prosecutors had [See *Torrance*, A12]

Texas rural strategy: Just lose by less

Beto O'Rourke hopes to pave country inroads for Democrats in run for governor.

BY MELANIE MASON

DE LEON, Texas — Nobody expects Beto O'Rourke to win Comanche County in the Texas gubernatorial race — least of all, Beto O'Rourke.

Nestled in rolling hills two hours southwest of Dallas-Fort Worth, this patchwork of cotton and hay fields, cattle ranches and the occasional town is rock-ribbed Republican territory; 85% of voters backed President Trump last year.

So when O'Rourke pitched his candidacy to 15 of the county's remaining Democrats gathered at a roadside diner, he floated a seemingly modest goal: Build from Joe Biden's lopsided loss here to a slightly less lopsided 20 to 80.

Royce Leslie, a lifelong Comanche resident and O'Rourke supporter, dared to dream even bigger, positing that if the El Paso Democrat "could get somewhere 8 to 10% more of the voters in Comanche and these rural counties to vote for you ... I think that small amount of margin could do it."

Such is the reality for Democrats in rural America, where success is defined as losing less badly.

As O'Rourke launches his second statewide campaign in four years, he's hoping a go-everywhere approach will both win him the governorship and help thaw the icy reception in the countryside for candidates with a D behind their names.

But this playbook, which he followed to limited success in his 2018 Senate race, [See *O'Rourke*, A8]

Pfizer touts its booster in COVID fight

A third shot may provide important protection against the new Omicron variant, the drugmaker says. **NATION, A6**

Taiwan invite angers China

The island, which Beijing claims, will be taking part in Biden's democracy summit. **PERSPECTIVES, A2**

Weather
Occasional rain.
L.A. Basin: 56/44. **B6**



Committee points to Meadows's Jan. 6 role

Chair describes emails, texts as panel moves toward contempt charge

BY JACQUELINE ALEMAN AND JOSH DAWSEY

The House committee investigating the Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol said it is preparing to hold Mark Meadows in criminal contempt for not complying with its subpoena as it laid out evidence Wednesday showing the former White House chief of staff's support for efforts to overturn the 2020 election.

Committee Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-Miss.), in a letter to Meadows attorney George Terwilliger III, criticized Meadows's decision to no longer cooperate with the panel. The onetime North Carolina congressman reversed course this week, arguing the panel was pressuring him to discuss issues that former president Donald Trump said are protected by executive privilege.

"There is no legitimate legal basis for Mr. Meadows to refuse to cooperate with the Select Committee and answer questions about the documents he produced, the personal devices and accounts he used, the events he was about in his newly released book, and, among other things, his other public statements," Thompson wrote in a letter sent to Terwilliger on Tuesday night and released publicly Wednesday.

In his letter, Thompson details some of the emails and text messages Meadows had already handed over to the committee, providing one of the first glimpses of internal communications the panel has obtained that illuminate the actions of Trump and

SEE MEADOWS ON A11

Jan. 6 financier: Low-profile heiress is put in the spotlight. A10

'Smoothly, respectfully and amicably': Germany changes chancellors



MARKUS SCHREIBER/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Olaf Scholz, the newly installed chancellor of Germany, gives flowers to predecessor Angela Merkel, who held the office from 2005 until her retirement this year. Scholz, a Social Democrat, takes the reins with a coalition government that signals a fresh approach and includes the Greens and the Free Democratic Party. **Story, A18**

Boosters may help stem omicron, studies suggest

BY CAROLYN Y. JOHNSON AND JOEL ACHENBACH

A sobering portrait of the omicron variant is emerging from the first burst of laboratory studies on the coronavirus's latest incarnation, showing that the mutated virus can slip past a shield of protection provided by the standard two-shot vaccine regimen.

But the studies, including one released Wednesday by Pfizer and its vaccine partner BioNTech, point to a potential path for slowing omicron's march: Booster shots could help control the variant by raising virus-fighting antibodies high enough to block

Early research finds variant is formidable — but not unstoppable

the pathogen.

The data is preliminary and leaves some of the most urgent questions about omicron — including how it will behave in the real world outside of laboratories — unanswered. Collectively, the new research suggests omicron can dodge some of the most important immune defenses triggered by vaccines, but only par-

tially.

As expected, virus-blocking antibodies generated by two shots of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine dropped steeply in the face of omicron's many mutations. But building a higher wall of immune protection appeared to restore protective levels of antibodies. Booster shots are one way to do that. The research also suggests that people who have been infected with the coronavirus and then get the two-shot regimen generate sufficient antibodies to keep omicron at bay.

"With omicron, with these data over the past 24 hours, I'd say it's unequivocal that boosting for the

winter is important," said Shane Crotty, an immunologist at La Jolla Institute for Immunology who was not involved in the studies released this week. "For the general public, the good news is the boosters are going to work, full stop."

Anthony S. Fauci, President Biden's chief medical adviser for the pandemic, said at a Washington Post Live event that "the booster shot could be the answer to the challenge that we're facing with the omicron."

SEE BOOSTER ON A8

Unprepared: The world isn't ready for future threats, report says. A2

Strained nurses hit the road, tripling their pay as rovers

Exodus from staff jobs is roiling health industry as coronavirus persists

BY LENNY BERNSTEIN

Wanderlust, and the money to fund it, made Alex Stow's decision easy. After working a couple of years in an intensive care unit, he signed up to be a travel nurse, tripling his pay to about \$95 an hour by agreeing to help short-staffed hospitals around the country for 13 weeks at a time.

"Travel" proved a bit of a misnomer. His current assignment is in Traverse City, Mich., only a few hours from his old full-time job in Lansing — close enough that he still works per-diem shifts at his previous hospi-

tal.

Now Stow, 25, is buying a truck and a camper and preparing to hit the road. He'll work where he wants and take time off to see the country between nursing assignments.

"As soon as I found out that was a thing, I thought, 'That's got my name written all over it,'" said Stow, who agreed to discuss his new work life if the hospitals were not named.

If 2020 was the year travel nursing took off, with 35 percent growth over the pre-pandemic year of 2019, this year has propelled it to new heights, with an additional 40 percent growth expected, according to an independent analyst of the healthcare workforce.

The continued pandemic; an aging, burned-out and retiring nurse workforce; the return of

SEE NURSES ON A6

A brief pontificate marked by mystery

Pope John Paul I's death generated rumors from the start. The story is still evolving.

BY CHICO HARLAN AND STEFANO PITRELLI

VATICAN CITY — On the morning of Sept. 29, 1978, the Vatican issued a short and stunning bulletin, announcing that Pope John Paul I was dead of a heart attack, his body discovered in bed by a priest who served as his personal secretary.

That was the first version of what happened, at least.

Within days, rumors of foul play were spreading. Cardinals in the Roman Curia pressed for clarification. When an Italian wire service revealed that the Vatican had misidentified the person who'd found the corpse, the sense of mystery only grew: What might explain

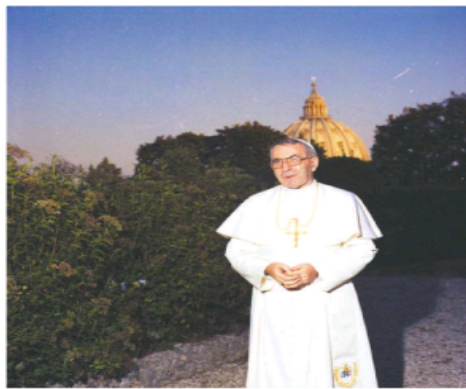
how a pope, at age 65, could die after just 33 days on the job?

Four decades later, John Paul I is on the trajectory toward sainthood. The Vatican has announced that he will be beatified, after a first miracle — the healing of a critically ill 11-year-old girl in Buenos Aires in 2011 — was attributed to his intervention.

But to the extent he is remembered, it is primarily for the suspicions about his death.

Over the years, a small number of people have plunged into the case, each taking drastically different approaches — and only some heaving to the facts. John Paul I's legacy has come to be defined not only by mystery and

SEE POPE ON A16



VATICAN MEDIA

Pope John Paul I rose to the pontificate in August 1978. Thirty-three days later, the 65-year-old was found dead in his bed at the Vatican. Books have offered various explanations for the death.

IN THE NEWS



MATTHEW JOSEPH/THE WASHINGTON POST

Balancing media A D.C.-based mentor program encourages positive content creation to counteract violence on social media. B1

Medals of Honor The Biden administration will give the top combat distinction to three who fought in Iraq and Afghanistan. A24

THE NATION A Trump-era program that requires asylum seekers to wait outside U.S. territory while claims are processed has returned. A2

A prosecutor told jurors that former Minnesota police officer Kim Potter violated her training and oath when she fatally shot Daunte Wright in April. A3

Conservatives on the Supreme Court were critical of a Maine tuition program that does not allow public funds to go to schools that promote religious instruction. A4

President Biden ruled out putting U.S. combat troops in Ukraine for now and reiterated his vow to punish Russia if it invades. A12

THE WORLD "Freda," a Haitian film about a family navigating the country's crises, is winning acclaim abroad and inspiring pride at home. A13

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson was under fire after video surfaced of his staff joking about a Christmas party that was allegedly held during lockdown. A17

A helicopter carrying

India's top military official crashed, killing him and 12 other people. A18

THE ECONOMY Lawmakers were unimpressed with proposals from Instagram head Adam Mosseri to address the platform's potentially harmful impact on young users. A19

Despite a financial boost from the infrastructure package, Amtrak is struggling with a worker shortage that could threaten service. A20

The White House said it plans to spend billions on electric vehicles, upgrade federal buildings and change government electricity purchases. A24

THE REGION **Lanette Washington**, a 17-year-old with military aspirations, was the ninth juvenile killed during the worst period of homicides in the District since 2003. B1

The Maryland General Assembly passed a new congressional map that will solidify Democrats' political advantage for a decade, prompting GOP objections. B1

Gov.-elect Glenn Youngkin said he will use executive action to pull Virginia out of the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative. B1

Loudoun County moved to rename John Mosby and Harry Byrd highways. B4

INSIDE



LOCAL LIVING **Coat check**

As the real cold approaches, here's everything you need to know about selecting the perfect winter wear.

STYLE **A soaring soul** "Flyboy in the Buttermilk" author Grant Tinker, a top American writer and thinker, was hip, hip-hop and hippie. C1

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Las razones de Gallardo para seguir otro año en River

deportes



El técnico anunció su decisión en conferencia de prensa

A. GUYOT

AUMENTAN LOS TESTEOS PARA COVID EN LA CIUDAD

—coronavirus

En un mes, pasaron de 10.000 a 15.000 por día en los centros oficiales; también aumentaron los casos, de 200 a 300 por día en las últimas tres semanas. **Página 18**

LA NACION

JUEVES 9 DE DICIEMBRE DE 2021 | LANACION.COM.AR

Fernández dijo que Cristina avala un acuerdo con el FMI, pero que es él quien decide

NEGOCIACIÓN. "Está claro que en muchas cosas no pensamos igual", dijo respecto de su vice

Alberto Fernández buscó transmitir ayer la certeza de que cuenta con el apoyo de Cristina Kirchner en las negociaciones con el Fondo Monetario Internacional (FMI), al mismo tiempo que destacó que tiene diferencias de criterio con su vicepresidenta y que quien decide al final es él.

"Está claro que Cristina y yo en

muchas cosas no pensamos igual, el que decide finalmente soy yo", dijo en una entrevista que concedió a Ian Bremmer, fundador de la consultora global Eurasia Group, en el contexto de una cumbre de geopolítica regional.

Aunque buscó destacar su autoridad por sobre quien lo promovió a la presidencia, señaló: "Hay una

predica mediática que plantea a Cristina como oponiéndose a mi decisión y a mi voluntad de encontrar un acuerdo [con el FMI], y eso no es cierto. Cristina acompaña esto".

Advirtió que está "muy seguro" del rumbo económico que debe seguir el país y que "es el mismo que quiere Cristina". **Página 8**

MERCOSUR

Jair Bolsonaro decidió que la cumbre del Mercosur sea virtual. En Brasil hablan de malestar por la visita de Lula a la Argentina. **Página 12**

EL ESCENARIO

Alberto y la vicepresidenta se tiran con plazas

Carlos Pagni

—LA NACION—

Más allá de los esfuerzos publicitarios del oficialismo para disimularlo, las elecciones de este año fueron catastróficas para el Frente de Todos. En dos años perdió 5.200.000 votos. Fue una caída del 40% con respecto a la cosecha que había logrado en 2019. Continúa en la **página 10**

Los penales coronaron a Boca en la Copa Argentina

deportes— Otra vez los penales fueron los mejores aliados de Boca en la Copa Argentina: después del 0-0 con Talleres en la final, se impuso por 5-4 en los remates; el arquero Rossi volvió a ser decisivo con una atajada, como ante River, en los octavos de final, y ante Patronato, en cuartos.



Izquierdoz, con la copa, inició el festejo tras la consagración en Santiago del Estero

GETTY IMAGES

Por las tasas bajas, caen los depósitos a plazo fijo

DUDAS. Para los analistas, la salida se profundizó por la inestabilidad cambiaria

Javier Blanco
LA NACION

El stock de depósitos a plazo fijo en pesos, tanto los tradicionales pactados a tasa fija como los que indexan el capital por inflación, cerró noviembre en caída por segundo mes consecutivo. La tasa anual oscila entre 30,5% y 37%.

La masa de ahorro e inversión más extendida—hay en la actualidad 4,1 millones de colocaciones minoristas y casi 200.000 mayoristas de empresas o individuos con depósitos de más de \$1 millón—se contrajo 2% en términos reales a nivel general al finalizar el mes pasado. Continúa en la **página 14**

Drogas: apartan a una jueza que acusó a un fiscal

CORUPCIÓN. Arroyo Salgado deberá dejar la causa

La Cámara Federal de San Martín apartó a la jueza Sandra Arroyo Salgado de la causa en la que había procesado al fiscal de San Isidro Claudio Scapolan, a otros funcio-

narios judiciales, a policías y abogados por la presunta participación en una asociación ilícita que robaba cargamentos de drogas y extorsionaba a narcos. **Página 22**

Por una deuda de ABL, el Jockey Club cede terrenos

SAN ISIDRO. Le dará casi dos hectáreas al municipio

El Jockey Club cederá por 25 años casi dos hectáreas de terrenos de sus instalaciones a San Isidro porque esa exclusiva institución debe \$480 millones de la tasa de

alumbrado, barrido y limpieza (ABL) a ese municipio. El acuerdo fue votado por los socios en una asamblea y resta la aprobación del Concejo Deliberante. **Página 20**

Scholz asumió en Alemania, tras el fin de la era Merkel

CAMBIO. El nuevo canciller lidera una inédita coalición: ovación para la exjefa del gobierno. **Página 2**

retomada do turismo

De Caraíva a Nova York, brasileiros matam a saudade de viajar p. 1

+ Cruzeiros voltam com protocolos após infecções em navios p. 5 a p. 7

+ Hotéis oferecem 'detox urbano' a 3 horas de Manaus p. 15



BC eleva juro em 1,5 ponto para 9,25%, maior taxa em 4 anos

Escalada inédita desde 2002 para frear a inflação deverá prosseguir em fevereiro para 10,75% ao ano, indica comitê

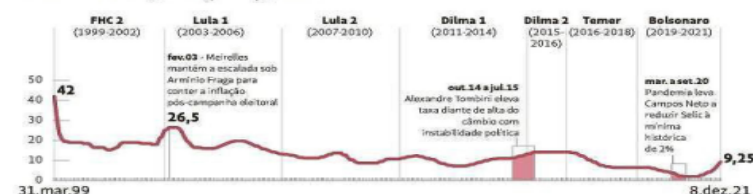
O Comitê de Política Monetária do Banco Central votou ontem a elevar a taxa básica de juros — a sétima alta seguida, de 1,5 ponto — para 9,25% ao ano. É o maior patamar desde junho de 2017. Em comunicado, o Copom indicou que tornará a aumentar a taxa, para 10,75%, na reunião de fevereiro.

A escalada atual, que partiu de 2% de juros em março, é a mais agressiva desde 2002 e produzirá a maior diferença entre taxa inicial e final desde a criação do sistema de metas para inflação, em 1999. Com o choque, o BC quer inibir o crédito e com isso frear o avanço inflacionário visto desde 2020.

Mesmo assim, nos 12 meses até outubro os preços ao consumidor saltaram 10,7%. A alta da chamada Selic muda a correção da poupança, do FGTS e de financiamentos. Mercado A13

Senado aprova conta em dólar para pessoa física, e texto vai a sanção A18

Taxa básica de juros (Selic), em %



Fontes: Bloomberg e Banco Central

Senado promulga PEC dos Precatórios

O Congresso promulgou ontem a PEC dos Precatórios, ou PEC do Calote, que deve dar fôlego ao governo para pagar o Auxílio Brasil de ao menos R\$ 400 a 17 milhões de famílias até o fim de 2022.

A medida, após acordo para faturar a proposta de emenda à Constituição, abre R\$ 62,2 bilhões no Orçamento para despesas em 2022. Outra PEC a ser votada pode liberar mais R\$ 48,6 bilhões.

Às custas do adiamento do pagamento de dívidas do governo, a verba viabiliza o programa que Jair Bolsonaro usará de bandeira em sua campanha à reeleição no ano que vem. Mercado A15

Doria afirma que São Paulo adotará passaporte vacinal

O governador João Doria (PSDB) afirmou que, se o governo federal não aderir ao passaporte vacinal até dia 15, passará a exigir o documento a partir dessa data no estado. A medida valerá a quem entrar por qualquer via, terrestre, aérea ou marítima. Saúde B2

Comprados com emendas, itens antisseca definham

O governo mantém em estoque dezenas de cisternas, caixas-d'água, tratores e outros itens comprados com recursos de emendas parlamentares, centro da política do chamado tomá lá dá cá — criticado por Jair Bolsonaro em 2018, mas depois consolidado em sua gestão.

Vários equipamentos são mantidos amontoados em depósitos da Codevasf em Petrolina (PE), a 713 km do Recife, e já dão sinais de desgaste. Moradores suspeitam que os produtos estejam sendo guardados para distribuição no ano eleitoral de 2022. Poder A4 e A5

Pfizer neutraliza ômicron com 3 doses, diz empresa

Saúde B1

A pandemia em 8.dez

Dados das 20h

POPULAÇÃO VACINADA

No Brasil

Ao menos uma dose (dose única ou 1ª dose)

77,1 %

1ª ciclo vacinal completo (dose única ou 2ª dose)

64,8 %

Dose de reforço

9,0 %

ESTÁGIO DA DOENÇA

Óbitos

Média móvel

183

↓ -15,8 %*

Em 24 h

231

Total

616.298

Casos ↓ -7,4 %* (desacelerado)

*Variação em relação a 14 dias

Cida Bento Juntar forças para mudar o rumo

Não faltam dispositivos legais e orçamentários para programas que fortaleçam ações afirmativas em toda a educação básica. Mas temos de zelar por eles, produzir subsídios conceituais e metodológicos para a sociedade civil realizar o controle social. Mercado A22

Exército tentou driblar decisão do STF sobre armas

Documentos apontam que o Exército tentou inviabilizar o julgamento do Supremo sobre a revogação de três portarias de abril de 2020 que aumentavam o controle e rastreamento de armas. Procurado, o comando da corporação não se manifestou. Cotidiano B3

Nubank é banco de maior valor na América Latina com IPO A19

Olaf Scholz assume na Alemanha e encerra era Merkel

Mundo A11

Médico Carlos Carloti Júnior é novo reitor da USP

Cotidiano B4

Esporte B7
Para não cair à Série B, Grêmio precisa vencer Atlético-MG e torcer por tropeços

Ilustrada C1
Spielberg atualiza 'West Side Story' e declara que o mundo hoje precisa de amor

Guia C8
Tan Tan, em SP, é o único brasileiro na lista de 100 melhores bares do mundo

EDITORIAIS A2

Prática e discurso
Acerca de medida de Bolsonaro contra o ômicron

Avanço chileno
Sobre aprovação do casamento gay naquele país.





Mons. Valenzuela reclamó a los políticos renunciar a las riquezas malhabidas

La Iglesia señala a la corrupción como raíz de los males del país

“Solo gozaron de buena salud quienes se adjudicaron casi todas las licitaciones y compras de emergencia sobrefacturadas.”

“No es justo que los altos miembros del Estado, en vez de usar los servicios de salud de la colectividad, gasten el dinero público en seguros privilegiados.”

“Necesitamos un Poder Judicial verdaderamente independiente y no subordinado a personas influyentes y grupos de poder.”

Tirón de orejas. El obispo de Caacupé, Mons. Ricardo Valenzuela, pintó la situación del país ante miles de fieles y exhortó a reencauzar rumbos.

PÁGINA 2 a la 7



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Mañana saldría sentencia RGD desde la cárcel seguía presionando a sus víctimas

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Alegan error aritmético Nenecho refuta a la CGR, pero no acerca ordenanza que amplía gasto

PÁGINA 21

Anuncio para alejar temores Pfizer afirma que tres dosis de su vacuna frenan a variante ómicron

PÁGINA 40

Humilde familia de secuestrado pide comprensión a los criminales

PÁGINA 44

Copetrol, Petropar y Petrosur reducen precios de combustibles

PÁGINA 17





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LE CHEF GUSTAVO DUDAMEL
TRIOMPHE AVEC « TURANDOT »
À BASTILLE PAGE 32

LE FIGARO LITTÉRAIRE
CES ÉCRIVAINS RATRAPÉS
PAR LA POÉSIE
NOTRE SUPPLÉMENT



ÉTATS-UNIS
Joe Biden veut
unir les pays libres
face aux régimes
coercitifs
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Condamné, Griset
démissionne,
Lemoine
le remplace
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Un rapport
épingle le plan
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Des études
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des vaccins
face à Omicron
PAGE 13

CHAMPS LIBRES

- Que reste-t-il du Parti radical, 120 ans après sa naissance ?
- Les chroniques de Guillaume Perrault, de Charles Jaigu et de Luc Ferry
- L'appel de vingt-cinq intellectuels pour le boycott des JO d'hiver
- Un entretien avec Jean-Yves Camus
- L'analyse d'Aziliz Le Corre

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DÉCOUVREZ COMMENT META AMÉLIORE L'EXPÉRIENCE PUBLICITAIRE DES UTILISATEURS TOUT EN RESPECTANT LEUR VIE PRIVÉE

PAGE 28

Macron veut faire de l'Europe un tremplin pour 2022

Le chef de l'État présente ce jeudi ses priorités pour la présidence française de l'Union européenne. L'occasion de revenir dans le jeu alors que la campagne présidentielle s'accélère.

L'exercice est suffisamment rare pour être signalé. Pour la seconde fois depuis le début du quinquennat, Emmanuel Macron organise ce jeudi une conférence de presse

à l'Élysée. Objectif : présenter l'agenda et les grands axes de la présidence française de l'Union européenne, qui débutera le 1^{er} janvier. Lutte contre l'immigration

illégale, relance économique, souveraineté, climat... autant d'enjeux qui entrent en résonance avec ceux de la campagne présidentielle. Alors que ses adversaires

montent en puissance, Emmanuel Macron entend donc profiter de la séquence pour poser les premiers jalons de sa candidature. Et tenter, à nouveau, d'utiliser la ques-

tion européenne pour fracturer la droite et la gauche. Mais, derrière l'évidente stratégie politique, l'impact sur les Français pourrait se révéler limité.

➔ **LES VASTES CHANTIERS ÉCONOMIQUES DE LA PRÉSIDENTIE FRANÇAISE DE L'UE** ➔ **LE RISQUE D'UN EFFET PSCHITT SUR LA SCÈNE NATIONALE**
➔ **À BRUXELLES, ON ATTEND UN PRÉSIDENT, PAS UN CANDIDAT** PAGES 2, 3 ET L'ÉDITORIAL



L'Allemagne dit adieu à Angela Merkel et entre dans l'ère Olaf Scholz

Mercredi, le social-démocrate est devenu, à 63 ans, le neuvième chancelier de la République fédérale d'Allemagne, prenant la succession d'Angela Merkel, qui s'est éclipse sous les applaudissements après seize ans au pouvoir. PAGES 4 ET 5

ÉDITORIAL par Vincent Trémolet de Villers vtremolet@lefigaro.fr

Les pièges d'une présidence

« Quand j'entends le mot *Europe*, je sors mon oreiller » : la célèbre formule de Claude Imbert résonne encore. C'est dire si le pari d'Emmanuel Macron - faire de sa présidence à la tête de l'Union européenne un tremplin national - est risqué. Certes, la fonction impressionne, mais elle l'associe à une institution qui indiffère, quand elle n'exécute pas une grande part de l'opinion. Certes, beaucoup de solutions à nos problèmes doivent être élaborées à l'échelle du continent (frontières extérieures, indépendance numérique, guerre commerciale), mais la Commission, le Parlement, la Cour de justice composent le triangle des Bermudes dans lequel disparaissent, trop souvent, les initiatives politiques les plus ambitieuses. Le prestige des grands ensembles vous distingue des simples présidents de région, il vous éloigne aussi dangereusement des préoccupations des Français.

Face à Marine Le Pen ou à Éric Zemmour, l'effet de contraste permettrait toutefois à Macron, dans une dialectique périlleuse,

se, de séparer, selon les termes convenus, le camp de l'« ouverture » et celui du « repli ». Face à Valérie Pécresse, c'est une autre histoire. Les deux rivaux ont la construction européenne en partage, mais l'une arpentera la France, quand l'autre, nécessairement, sera sur la photo entre Charles Michel et Ursula von der Leyen. C'est tout à fait flatteur mais, on en conviendra, ce n'est pas un formidable aimant électoral.

En Europe, tout se marchande

Cette présidence en pleine campagne présente enfin un danger plus profond. Le chef de l'État, en effet (qui peut le lui reprocher ?), aura à cœur de mettre en avant des résultats spectaculaires. Mais, en Europe, tout se marchande : décisions politiques, industrielles, énergétiques. Pour obtenir un gain ici, la tentation sera grande de céder là. Si l'on veut afficher un nouvel élan franco-allemand, ce ne sera pas gratuit. On connaît le coût, parfois mirobolant, des profits politiques immédiats. ■

L'emploi salarié dépasse largement son niveau d'avant-crise

L'embellie sur le marché du travail se confirme : entre juin et septembre, l'économie française, en forte croissance, a encore enregistré 108 300 créations nettes de postes dans le privé et le public. Alors qu'avec la pandémie on craignait une explosion du chômage, le niveau de l'emploi salarié était, à la fin du troisième trimestre, supérieur de plus de 260 000 postes à celui de 2019. Pourtant, les entreprises peinent toujours à embaucher. PAGE 22

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PM triggers Covid plan B as party scandal engulfs No 10

● Working from home and vaccine passports to come in from next week

● Johnson apologises and aide resigns over leaked party joke video

● Experts warn UK will hit 1 million Omicron cases by end of month

Rowena Mason
Hannah Devlin

Boris Johnson rushed forward new national Covid restrictions yesterday amid fears of an exponential rise in the Omicron variant, as his government was engulfed in a crisis of credibility sparked by the Christmas party scandal.

With government experts warning of 10,000 UK Omicron infections currently, rising to 1 million by the end of the month and up to 2,000 hospitalisations a day, Johnson insisted now was time to act.

But last night's announcement to implement plan B measures came amid allegations his own staff had broken lockdown rules last December by holding a party, provoking Labour to claim he had lost his "moral authority" and some of his own MPs to question why the public would now follow official advice.

Earlier yesterday, in an attempt to calm the furore, Johnson apologised in the Commons over a leaked video showing his aide, Allegra Stratton, laughing and joking about the party held on 18 December last year.

Later, at a No 10 press conference, Johnson said people must work from home where possible from Monday and masks would be a legal requirement in most public indoor areas such as theatres and cinemas from tomorrow, with exemptions for eating and drinking in hospitality venues.



▲ Boris Johnson explaining new restrictions in an effort to slow the spread of the Omicron variant of Covid-19

PHOTOGRAPH: ADRIAN DENNIS/PA WIRE

▼ Allegra Stratton resigning her government role yesterday amid the scandal over a video in which she joked about a No 10 party



Vaccine passports available to the double vaccinated on the NHS app will be necessary for those wanting to attend large crowded venues such as nightclubs from next week. But Johnson insisted there was no need to cancel Christmas parties or nativity plays, and nightclubs would remain open.

There will be a vote on restrictions next week, with the government expected to face a substantial rebellion. Sajid Javid, the health secretary, was heckled in the Commons as he announced plan B.

Johnson came under pressure immediately over the decision to bring in new restrictions at a time when No 10 is under fire over the Christmas party when socialising was banned last year.

Inside

How the day unfolded Plan B is passed - but the mood among MPs and ministers is mutinous [Page 6](#) →

'It was just a joke to them' No 10 Christmas party scandal prompts fury and disbelief [Page 10](#) →

Rachel Clarke While some people partied, others were left fighting for air [Journal, page 4](#) →

Leader comment The Downing Street party scandal exposes a regime founded in dishonesty [Journal, page 2](#) →

William Wragg, a Tory MP, accused the prime minister of a "diversionary tactic", while Mark Harper, a former chief whip, questioned why anyone should "do things that people working in No 10 Downing Street are not prepared to do".

Johnson came under further fire from Douglas Ross, the leader of the Scottish Tories, who said the prime minister should resign if he had misled the Commons, and Ruth Davidson, a former Scottish Tory leader, who said:

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