

# The Washington Post

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SU V1 V2 V3 V4



Sunny, windy 45/31 • Tomorrow: Partly sunny 47/28 B8

Democracy Dies in Darkness

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## A show of force at the Capitol



MATT MCCLAIN/THE WASHINGTON POST

Pennsylvania National Guard troops muster Thursday outside the Capitol, where the House had canceled its session over security concerns connected to the assertion among some extremist group members that March 4 was the day former president Donald Trump would return to power. The day passed without incident. **Stories, A4 and B1**

## Rosier outlook stiffens opposition to stimulus bill

BY JEFF STEIN,  
HEATHER LONG  
AND ERICA WERNER

The pandemic was exacting a brutal toll when, six days before his inauguration, President-elect Joe Biden first released his \$1.9 trillion relief proposal. The economic recovery was backsliding, coronavirus cases were surging, and vaccines were just start-

ing to get out.

Nearly two months later, as the Senate on Thursday began to debate a nearly identical package, the economic and public health outlook appear to have changed. The economy is doing better, coronavirus cases have plateaued at a high but much-reduced level, and Biden has said there would be vaccines for every American adult by the end of May.

For policy experts and even members of Biden's own party, the improving picture is raising questions about whether the stimulus bill is mismatched to the needs of the current moment.

Some economists say it's too focused on providing funding to states, cities and schools — some of which, they argue, could be used instead for long-term economic investments or simply re-

duced altogether. Other critics question whether Democrats are squandering a unique opportunity to enact more lasting programs to reduce poverty, given how much in new funding they are approving as part of the legislation.

SEE STIMULUS ON A18

**Close vote:** Senate to open debate on bill without GOP support. **A18**

## Asian Americans staying absent from classrooms

Families fear infection in multigenerational homes, harassment at school

BY MORIAH BALINGIT,  
HANNAH NATANSON  
AND YUTAO CHEN

It's happening in well-to-do Pakistani households in the suburbs of Washington and among Chinese restaurant workers in Philadelphia. It's happening among weary Filipino nurses in Queens, Hmong refugee families in Minneapolis and in Silicon Valley's Asian American community.

As school buildings start to reopen, Asian and Asian American families are choosing to keep their children learning from home at disproportionately high rates. They say they are worried about elderly parents in cramped, multigenerational households, distrustful of prom-

ised safety measures and afraid their children will face racist harassment at school. On the flip side, some are pleased with online learning and see no reason to risk the health of their family.

In New York City, Asian American children make up the smallest share of children back in classrooms — just under 12 percent — even though they represent 18 percent of all students. In Tennessee, less than half of Asian families enrolled in Metro Nashville Public Schools opted for in-person learning, compared with nearly two-thirds of White children.

In Chicago, two-thirds of White students chose in-person learning, while just a third of Asian, Black and Latino students decided to head back. And in Fairfax County Public Schools, the largest district in Virginia, just over 30 percent of Asian families selected face-to-face instruction this spring, by far the smallest return rate reported among any racial group.

SEE STUDENTS ON A24

## LOST DECADE



MIGUEL BUENO/INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL AND FORUM ON HUMAN RIGHTS

**Mazen al-Hamada, shown in 2017, left Syria after his release from prison and shared his story with the world. Since his return, he has disappeared.**

## Tortured in Syria, he still chose to return

Arab Spring activist's decision leaves a trail of questions

BY LIZ SLY

LONDON — With his gaunt frame, haunted face and copious tears, Mazen al-Hamada became a poster boy for the suffering of Syrian torture victims. After escaping from Syria to the Netherlands, he traveled widely, sharing with audiences across the United States and Europe stories of the horrors he endured in a Damascus prison.

And then, mysteriously, inexplicably and perhaps suicidally, just over a year ago he returned to Syria, to risk once again the cruelties of the government he had so strenuously denounced.

Hamada has since disappeared, leaving friends and family to agonize over what prompted a man so scarred by his experiences to return to the arms of his tormentors — and what they fear is another stint in the nightmare of Syria's prison system.

SEE SYRIA ON A10

## In pandemic, mailed ashes replace a final ride in hearse

BY MARY JORDAN

Lately, nine or 10 times a month, Jason Oszczakiewicz, a Pennsylvania funeral home director known as "Oz," walks into his local post office. Each time, he carries the same special package: the ashes of someone who has just died.

"I seem to be mailing a lot to Georgia, North Carolina, Florida, New York," Oz said, after sending "a gentleman, a son, to his mother in Florida."

The pandemic that has changed the rhythms and rituals of life is doing that in death, too.

Eulogies are delivered over Zoom. Memorial services are often held months later, if at all. More people are opting for cremation, accelerating the shift from burying bodies. And with out-of-state relatives unable to travel to pick up the cremated remains because of health risks, the U.S. Postal

SEE ASHES ON A20

## IN THE NEWS



GREGORY BULL/ASSOCIATED PRESS

**Dying off** Hundreds of butterfly species are vanishing across the West as the region grows hotter and drier, researchers found. **A5**

**Drone strikes** The Biden administration has imposed restrictions on attacks targeting people outside of war zones. **A14**

**THE NATION**  
**As fractures** emerge among the far-right Proud Boys group, experts warn of a shift toward extremist violence. **A3**  
**A drop** in coronavirus testing since January has officials on edge as new variants continue to spread. **A6**  
**The House** approved a bill that would create uniform national voting standards and outlaw partisan redistricting, but its chances in the Senate are uncertain. **A7**

**THE WORLD**  
**Police in Kenya** are

using Twitter to become known as crime fighters, not killers. **A9**  
**At least 38 people** were killed in anti-coup protests in Myanmar as security forces fired automatic weapons to disperse crowds, the United Nations said. **A12**  
**Souring relations** between South Korea and Japan complicate President Biden's effort to restore U.S. alliances strained under the "America First" approach. **A13**  
**Italy blocked** the export of 250,000 AstraZeneca vaccine doses amid European Union

frustration over delivery shortfalls. **A15**

**THE ECONOMY**  
**A new U.S. Postal** Service restructuring plan could increase bureaucracy and slow delivery, experts warned. **A16**

**THE REGION**  
**Top private schools** in D.C., not bound by strict guidelines, can offer more in-person instruction in the upper grades than public schools. **B1**  
**Maryland** investigators identified a former Laurel police chief as an alleged serial arsonist after the release of surveillance footage in 2019. **B1**

**Virginia Gov.** Ralph Northam endorsed Del. Jerrald C. "Jay" Jones (D-Norfolk) for state attorney general over two-term incumbent Mark R. Herring. **B3**  
**A losing bidder** filed a protest against Maryland's recent selection of two Australian firms to develop key toll lanes, officials said. **B5**

**STYLE**  
**David Brooks,** the New York Times columnist, has written favorably about a Facebook-linked project he started without disclosing to Times readers that he is getting a salary for his work on the initiative, BuzzFeed reported. **C1**

## INSIDE



**WEEKEND**  
**The best books** about D.C.

These 18 picks capture the spirit and essence of living in the nation's capital.

**STYLE**  
**To selfie or not to selfie?**

Why not everyone is sharing the social media joy of those getting vaccinated. **C1**

BUSINESS NEWS.....A16  
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TELEVISION.....C3  
WORLD NEWS.....A9

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