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Last protester in detention after Trump's campus crackdown has been released

MARCH 17, 2026 · 2:56 AM ET

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By The Associated Press

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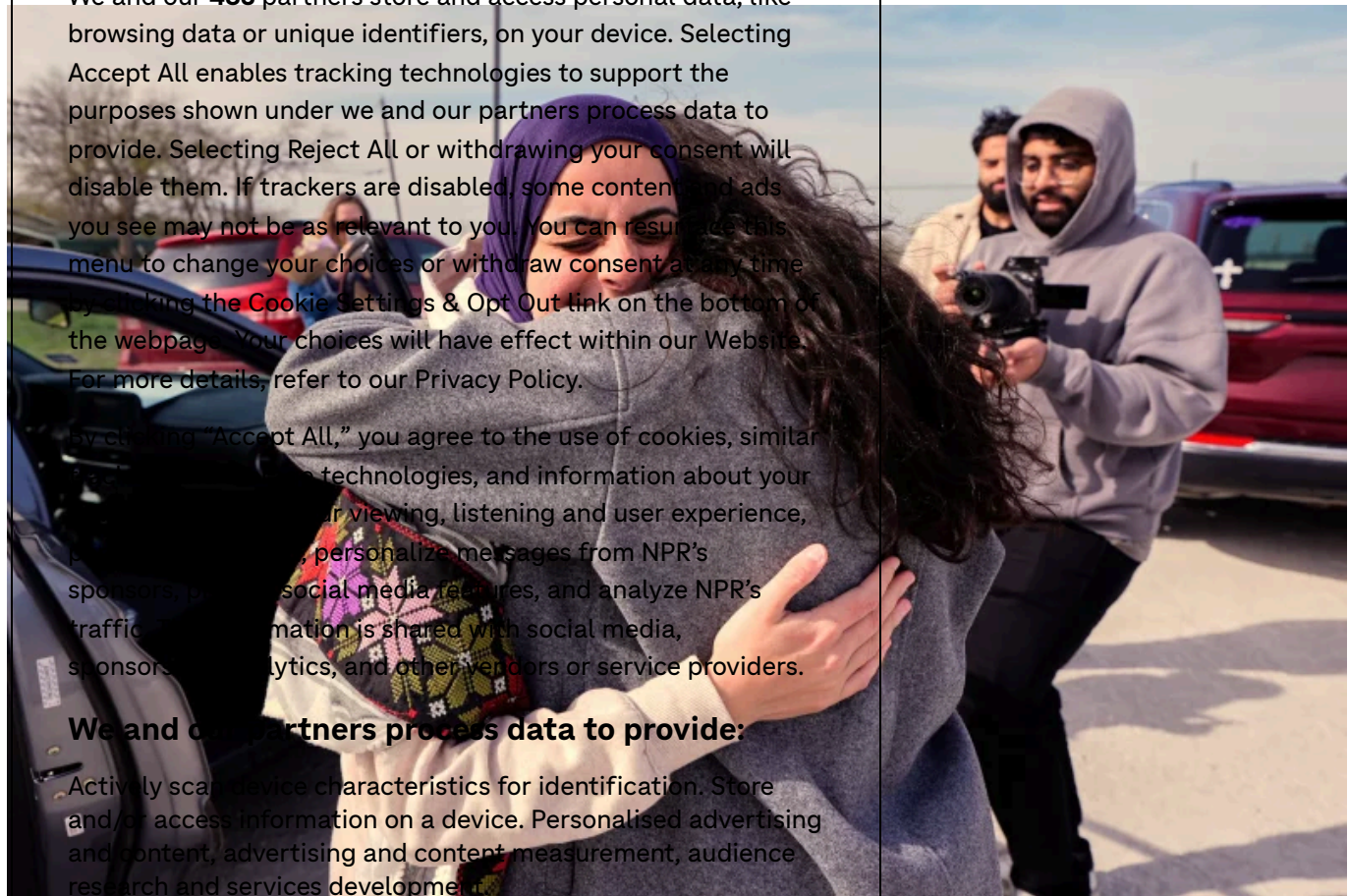
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Leqaa Korfa, left, embraces friends, family and supporters after being released from the Prairieland Detention Center in Alvarado, Texas, Monday, March 16, 2026.

Tony Gutierrez/AP

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ALVARADO, Texas — A Palestinian woman who was the last person still in immigration detention after the Trump administration's 2025 crackdown on pro-Palestinian activism on college campuses was freed Monday after a year in custody.





POLITICS

For some students who protested war in Gaza, fear and silence is a new campus reality

Leqaa Kordia, a 33-year-old from the West Bank who has lived in New Jersey since 2016, had been held in a U.S. immigration detention center in Texas since last March. Her detention was linked, in part, to her participation in a protest outside Columbia University in 2024.

"I don't know what to say. I'm free! I'm free! Finally, after one year," Kordia, with a beaming smile, told reporters after emerging from the detention center.

An immigration judge had ordered her released on bond three times. The government challenged the first two rulings, but Kordia was freed Monday on \$100,000 bond after it did not challenge the third.

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Kordia said she was looking forward to going home and hugging her mother "so hard." But she also said she would keep fighting on behalf of people still being held at the detention center.

"There is a lot of injustice in this place," she said. "There is a lot of people that shouldn't be here the first place."

Kordia was among a number of people arrested last year after the Trump administration began using its immigration enforcement powers on noncitizens who had criticized or protested Israel's military actions in Gaza, many students and scholars at American universities.

NATIONAL

Radio Diaries: Columbia protester Leqaa Kordia is still detained

Among them was Mahmoud Khalil, a former Columbia University graduate student involved in campus protests. He spent three months detained in a Louisiana

immigration jail before being freed. Rumaysa Öztürk, a Tufts University student who co-authored an op-ed criticizing her university's response to Israel and the war, was detained for six weeks.

Others did not fight to stay — one Columbia doctoral student fled the U.S. after her visa was revoked and immigration agents showed up at her university apartment.

Arrests of activists like Khalil drew condemnation from elected officials and advocates. But Kordia was not a student or part of a group that might have provided support, so her case remained largely out of the public eye while her detention carried on.

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Kordia said she joined a 2024 demonstration outside Columbia University after Israel killed scores of her relatives in Gaza, where she maintains deep personal ties. She was around 100 people arrested by city police at that protest, but the charges against her were dismissed and sealed. Information about her arrest was later given to the Trump administration by the New York City Police Department, which said it was told the records were needed as part of a money laundering investigation.

Kordia was arrested during a March 13, 2025, check-in with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement in New Jersey. She was detained immediately and flown to Prairieland Detention Center, south of Dallas.

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Federal officials have accused Kordia of overstaying her visa, while scrutinizing payments she sent to relatives in the Middle East. Kordia said the money was meant to help family members suffering during the war.

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IMMIGRATION

The controversial and obscure law being used against immigrant student protesters

Tricia McLaughlin, a spokesperson for the Department of Homeland Security, had previously criticized Kordia for what she said was "providing financial support to individuals living in nations hostile to the U.S."

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changed. Leqaa Kordia is in the country illegally after violating the terms of her visa."

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"The Trump administration is committed to restoring the rule of law and common sense to our immigration system, and will continue to fight for the arrest, detention, and removal of aliens who have no right to be in this country," read the statement.

An immigration judge found "overwhelming evidence" that Kordia was telling the truth about the payments.

Kordia was recently hospitalized for three days following a seizure after fainting and hitting her head at the privately run detention facility.

At a hearing Friday, Kordia's attorneys said she had a neurological condition that had worsened while in custody, putting her at an elevated risk of seizure. They reiterated that she could stay with U.S. citizen family members and did not pose a flight risk.

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The immigration judge, Tara Naslow, agreed.

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"I've heard testimony. I've seen thousands of pages of evidence presented by the respondent, and very little evidence presented by the government in any of this," Naslow said.

New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani said on X that he asked for her release when he met with President Donald Trump last month.

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"I am grateful that Legaa has been released this evening from ICE custody after more than a year in detention for speaking up for Palestinian rights," Mamdani said.

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POP CULTURE HAPPY HOUR

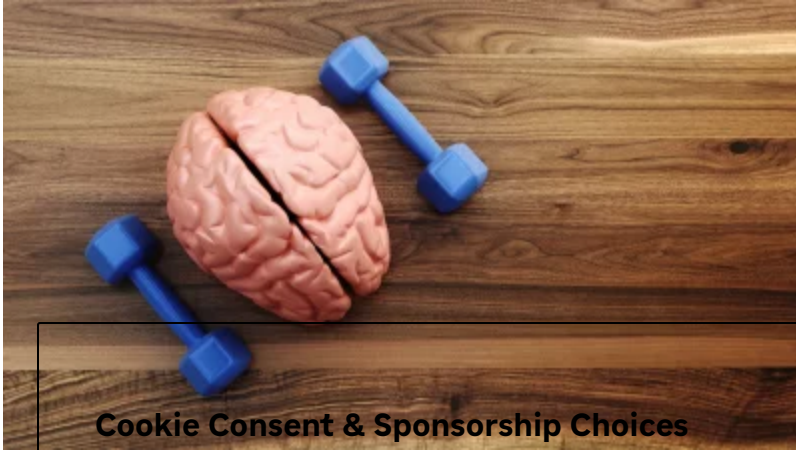
The embarrassing truth of dating men : Pop Culture Happy Hour

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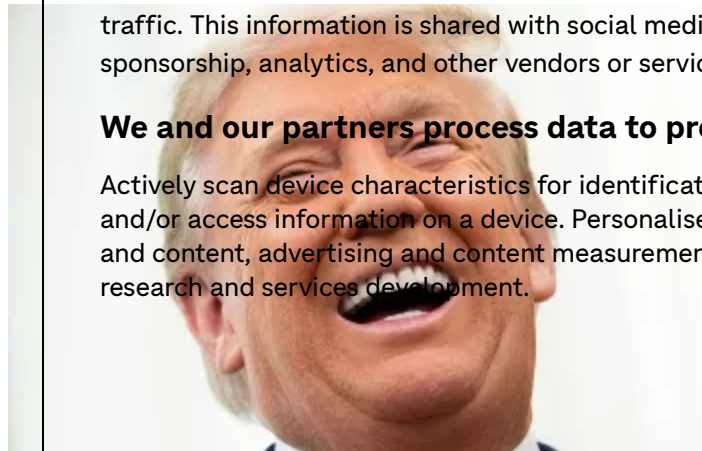
LIFE KIT

7 kinds of rest (other than sleep) : Life Kit

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CODE SWITCH CODE SWITCH



CODE SWITCH

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CULTURE

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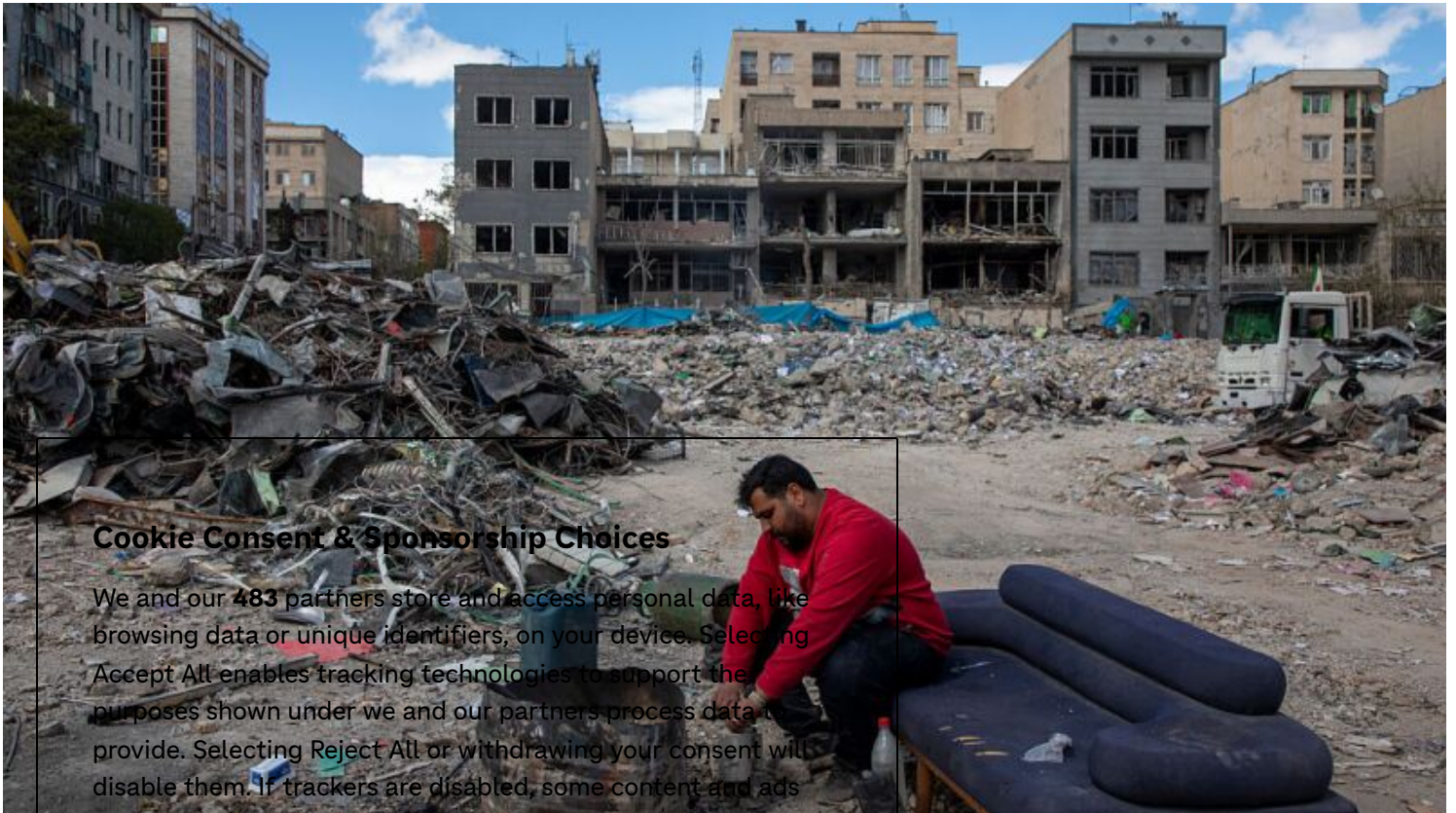
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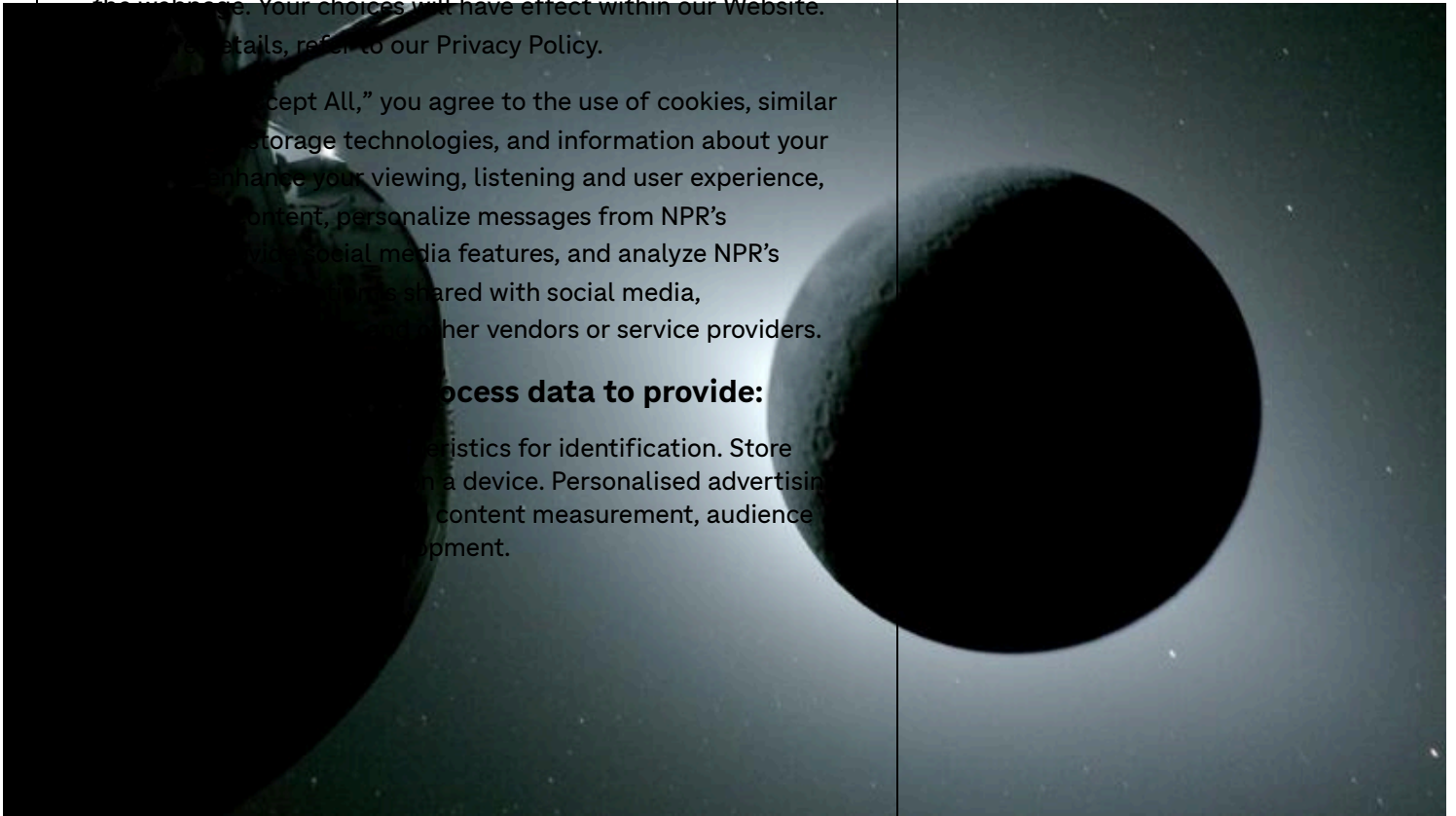
U.S. and Iran agree to 2-week ceasefire, suspending Trump's threat to annihilate Iran

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SPACE

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THE PICTURE SHOW

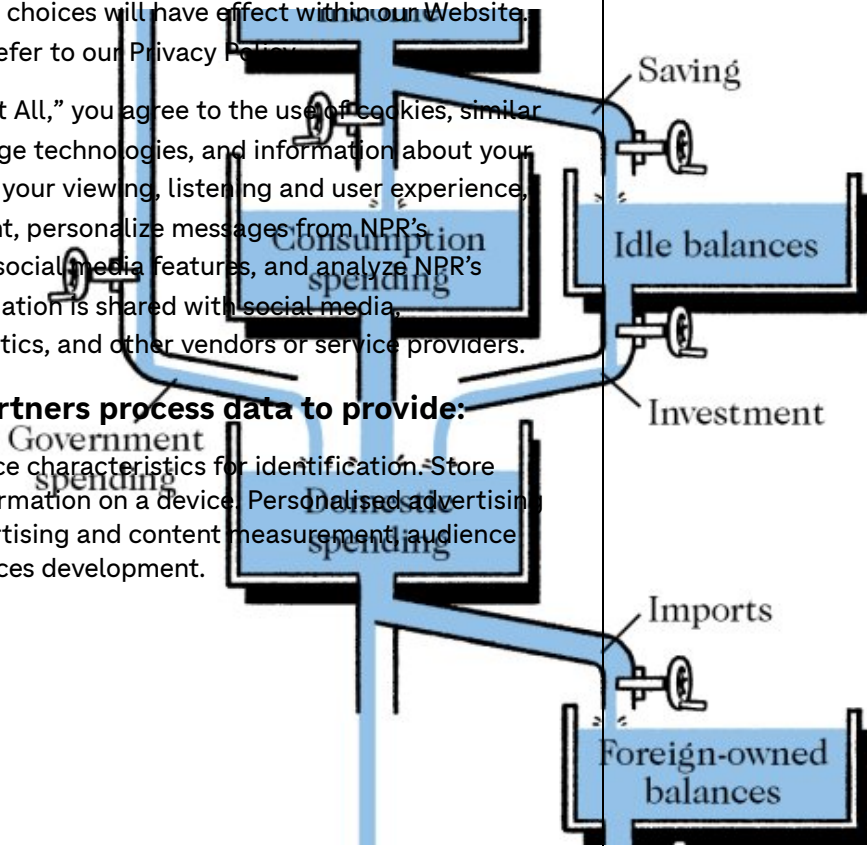
Photos: NASA releases first images from moon flyby

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 Disposed advertising spending



PLANET MONEY NEWSLETTER

How Bill Phillips used flowing water to model the economy



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HEALTHY Telehealth abortion will remain available for now, after a federal judge's ruling

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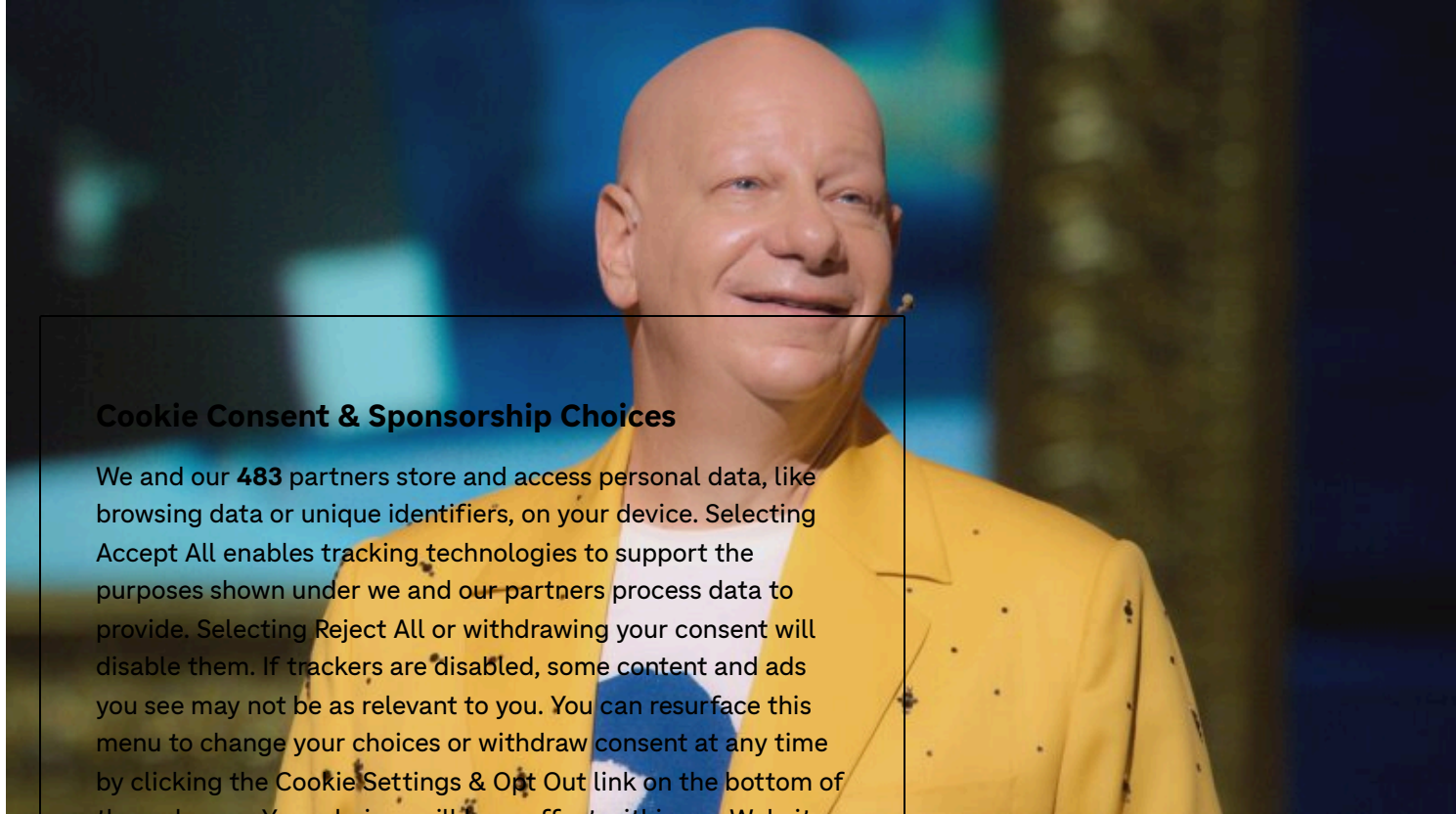
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MUSIC

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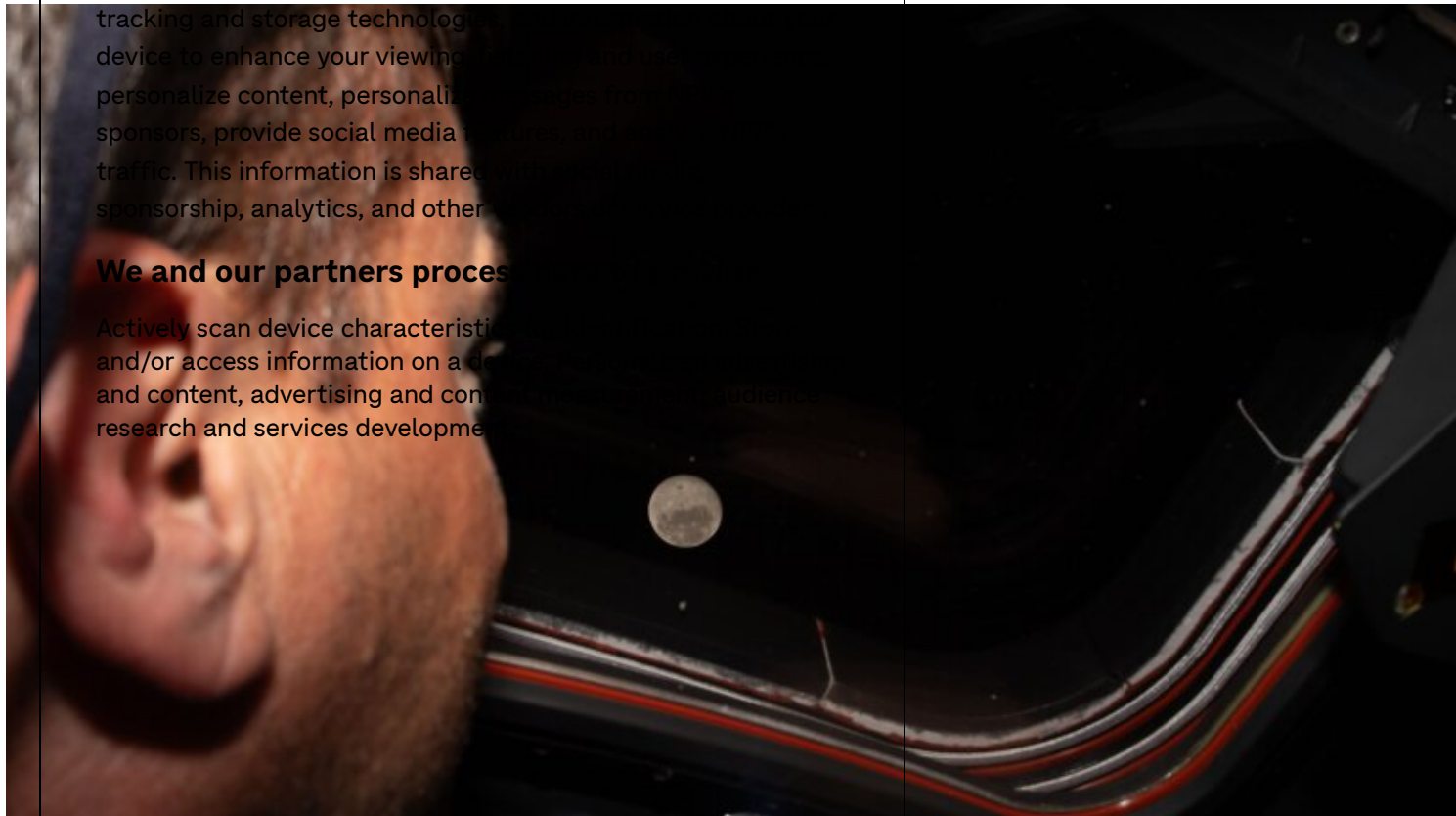
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Now cancer-free, 'Roastmaster' comic Jeff Ross still finds humor in loss

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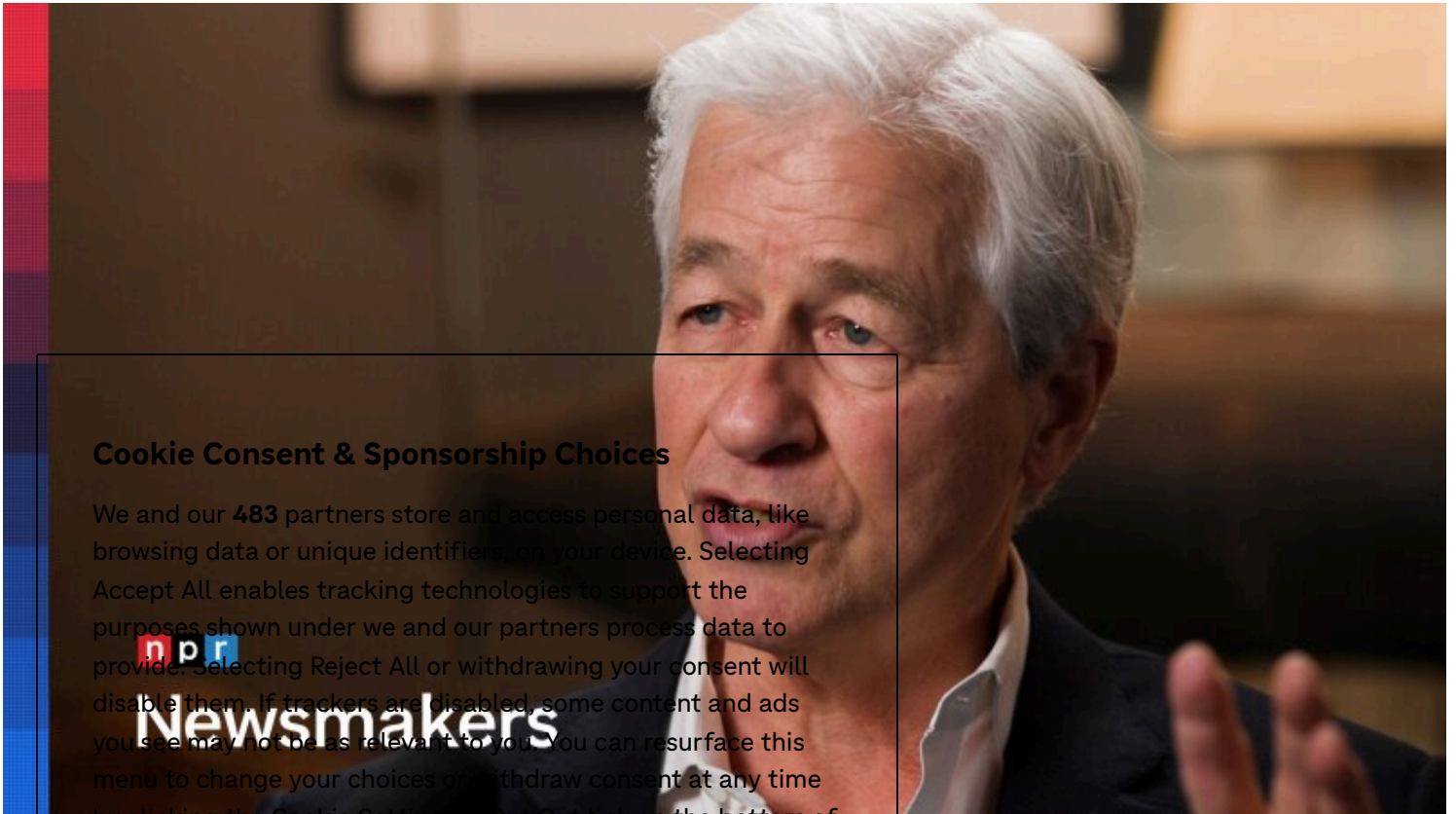
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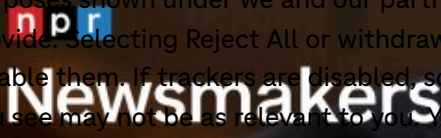
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