

Groton Daily Independent

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Monday, Jan. 27

Senior Menu: Tater tot hot dish, mixed vegetables, vanilla pudding with oranges, whole wheat bread.
School Breakfast: Breakfast sliders.
School Lunch: Chicken patty, tiny whole potatoes.
Boys JH Wrestling at Ipswich, 6 p.m.
Pantry, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., Groton Community Center
Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.

Tuesday, Jan. 28

Senior Menu: Parmesean chicken, baked potato, peaches, California blend, whole wheat bread.
School Breakfast: Oatmeal.
School Lunch: Tacos.
Girls Basketball hosts Aberdeen Roncalli (JV at 6 p.m. followed by Varsity)
Common Cents Thrift Store, 3 p.m. to 6 p.m., 209 N Main.
Pantry, 4 p.m. to 8 p.m., Groton Community Center
United Methodist: Bible Study, 10 a.m.

Wednesday, Jan. 29

Senior Menu: Breaded cod, rice pilaf, tomato spoon salad, blushing pears, whole wheat bread.
School Breakfast: Cereal.
School Lunch: Chicken pasta, cooked broccoli.
Emmanuel Lutheran: Confirmation, 4 p.m.
Groton United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.

Groton Daily Independent
PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445
Paul's Cell/Text: 605-397-7460



Groton C&MA: Kid's Club, Youth Group, Adult Bible Study, 7 p.m.
St. John's Lutheran: Confirmation, 3:45 p.m.
High School Baseball Informational Meeting, 6:30 p.m., Groton Legion

Thursday, Jan. 30

Senior Menu: Goulash, corn, pineapple, breadstick.
School Breakfast: Pancake on stick.
School Lunch: Hamburgers, fries.
Boys JH Basketball hosts Webster in the GHS Gym, 7th at 4 p.m., 8th at 5 p.m.
Girls Basketball hosts Webster (C-5 p.m., JV-6:15, varsity to follow)

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1440

Why 1440? The printing press was invented around the year 1440, spreading knowledge to the masses and changing the course of history. More facts: In every day, there are 1,440 minutes. We're here to make each one count.

Colombia Tariffs

Editor's note: Overnight, Colombia and the US reportedly reached an agreement to avoid an escalating trade standoff.

President Donald Trump announced a 25% tariff on all goods entering the US from Colombia yesterday after the country refused to accept a pair of military cargo planes transporting deported Colombian migrants. Travel restrictions for Colombian officials were also imposed. Colombian President Gustavo Petro promptly responded with a 25% tariff on US goods entering Colombia.

Colombia is one of the largest US trade partners in Latin America, with the two exchanging nearly \$54B in goods and services annually. The US is also Colombia's biggest market, with its primary exports being crude petroleum (\$6B per year) and coffee (\$1.8B).

The planes reportedly had authorization to land upon departing from San Diego, which was revoked midflight. Petro said the deportees must be treated with "dignity and respect" before returning; Trump threatened to raise tariffs to 50% after one week.

Super Bowl LIX Set

The Kansas City Chiefs will face the Philadelphia Eagles in Super Bowl LIX (Feb. 9, 6:30 pm ET, Fox) after both teams won their conference championships yesterday. Kansas City outlasted the Buffalo Bills 32-29, while Philadelphia steamrolled the Washington Commanders 55-23.

The Chiefs, now in their fifth title game in six years, look to become the first team in NFL history to win three straight Super Bowls. Star quarterback Patrick Mahomes led the team with three total touchdowns and 245 yards passing.

The Eagles rode another stellar performance by running back Saquon Barkley, who had 118 yards and three touchdowns—including a 60-yard touchdown run on Philadelphia's first offensive play. Quarterback Jalen Hurts added four touchdowns with no turnovers in the rout.

New Orleans will host this year's title matchup, with a halftime performance featuring rap star Kendrick Lamar with a guest appearance by four-time Grammy-winning singer SZA.

President Yoon Indicted

South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol was indicted yesterday on charges of leading an insurrection by imposing martial law in December, making him the country's first sitting president to face criminal charges. Yoon declared martial law on Dec. 3, alleging the opposition were "antistate" North Korean sympathizers, which led to troops storming the National Assembly and sparked nationwide protests. Parliament rejected the measure and impeached Yoon on Dec. 14. He was arrested on Jan. 15.

The president will stand trial alongside his former defense minister and top military officials, who are accused of aiding in the alleged power grab. Yoon contends the martial law declaration was a strategic warning intended to resolve political tensions. If convicted, Yoon faces life imprisonment or the death penalty, though South Korea has not conducted executions in decades.

Separately, the Constitutional Court is deliberating whether to formally remove Yoon from office or reinstate his powers, with a decision expected by June.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

American Madison Keys upsets top seed Aryna Sabalenka to win her first Grand Slam title at the Australian Open.

World No. 1 Jannik Sinner beats Alexander Zverev to win his second straight Aussie Open title.

DJ Unk, rapper best known for "Walk It Out" and "2 Step," dies at age 43.

Rocker Marilyn Manson won't be charged with sexual assault following four-year investigation.

Spotify signs multiyear deal with Universal Music Group to provide direct licenses for Spotify to stream UMG artists.

Science & Technology

Researchers discover new way the microbiome of expecting mothers impacts their offspring's health; gut produces metabolites that help program stem cells during fetal development.

Astronauts' eyesight weakens during long stays in microgravity environments, study finds; effect is temporary upon return to Earth but may have implications for eventual trips to Mars.

Engineers develop 3D-printed ultralight material roughly five times stronger than titanium; process uses machine learning to produce strength-enhancing micro- and nanostructures.

Business & Markets

US stock markets drop Friday (S&P 500 -0.3%, Dow -0.3%, Nasdaq -0.5%), but all three indexes post second straight week of gains.

Bank of Japan raises interest rates to highest level in 17 years.

Sales of previously owned homes in the US fall to lowest level in nearly three decades; roughly 4.1 million such homes were sold last year, the lowest since 1995.

Trump administration reportedly negotiating TikTok deal that would give Oracle and a group of US investors control of the platform, with ByteDance retaining a minority stake.

Banks to sell up to \$13B in debt from 2022 loan to Elon Musk to purchase Twitter (now X).

Politics & World Affairs

Senate confirms Army veteran, former Fox News host Pete Hegseth as defense secretary in 51-50 vote; Vice President JD Vance casts tiebreaking vote, three Republicans vote no.

More than a dozen inspectors general fired across major federal agencies.

Hamas frees four female Israeli soldiers, Israel releases 200 Palestinian prisoners in second swap under negotiated ceasefire.

Supreme Court agrees to hear arguments over whether a religious charter school in Oklahoma can receive public funding.

CIA releases assessment finding COVID-19 more likely to have originated from a Chinese lab; conclusion made with "low confidence."

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Larry Rhoden to be Sworn In as 34th Governor of South Dakota

PIERRE, S.D. – Today, Larry Rhoden announced his plans to be sworn in as the 34th Governor of South Dakota. The oath of office will be administered on Monday, January 27, 2025, at 11:00 am CT/10:00 am MT by Chief Justice Steven R. Jensen in the Governor’s Office. The brief ceremony will be open to the press. Space will be limited to one individual per-media outlet. TV outlets will be permitted two individuals. RVSP with your plans to attend by emailing Mackenzie Decker.

A larger, public swearing-in ceremony will be held on February 8, 2025, in the State Capitol Rotunda. That ceremony will be open to the public and will be followed with a Capitol Ball that evening in the State Capitol Rotunda.



Groton Prairie Mixed Bowling League Week #10 Results

Team Standings: Chipmunks 9, Shihtzus 8, Cheetahs 6, Coyotes 5, Jackelopes 4, Foxes 4

Men’s High Games: Butch Farmen 200, Brad Larson 195, Vern Meyers 191

Women’s High Games: Sue Stanley 175, Nancy Radke 173, Brenda Waage 168

Men’s High Series: Brad Larson 543, Vern Meyers 494, Larry Frohling 491

Women’s High Series: Hayley Johnson 472, Nancy Radke 430, Brenda Madsen 414

Week 10 Fun Game – Most Picked up Splits – Chipmunks with 3!



This beloved mother, grandmother, and teacher is requesting a card shower.

Card Shower
Dorene Nelson will be celebrating her
on January 29, 2025.



Greetings may be sent to
PO Box 675
Groton, SD 57445

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Rylee Dunker was chosen as the 2025 Carnival of Silver Skates queen. Pulling the sleigh around the rink during the evening performance were Emily Overacker, Emma Davies and Mia Crank. (Photo lifted from GDILIVE.COM)



2024 Carnival of Silver Skates Queen Emma Schinkel goes back and forth in front of Emily Overacker, Mia Crank, Emma Davies and Rylee Dunker before picking the queen. (Photo lifted from GDILIVE.COM)



Emma Schinkel places the crown on Rylee Dunker. (Photo lifted from GDILIVE.COM)

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Weekly Vikings Roundup

By Jordan Wright

Sunday afternoon the Philadelphia Eagles and the Washington Commanders played for the right to represent the NFC in the Super Bowl. The Eagles have been an upper-echelon team since they won a championship in 2017 and were in the Super Bowl again just two years ago. The Commanders have been a bottom dweller for decades, with only eight winning seasons since 1993 – but new owners and a phenomenal rookie QB have our nation's capital finally feeling hopeful for the future.

The Commanders received the opening kickoff and had an 18-play drive that ended with three points on the board. The Eagles' offense then took the field and only needed one play to find the endzone, thanks to a 60-yard run by Saquon Barkley. Washington fumbled the ball on their next possession, followed by another Philly TD, and with 3:43 left in the first quarter, it was clear the Commanders were outclassed. When the final whistle blew, the Eagles were flying high with a 55-23 win and a ticket to the championship game.

Sunday evening the Buffalo Bills stampeded into Kansas City, hoping to finally get past the juggernaut that is the Chiefs. These two teams have met in the playoffs four times since January 2021, and Kansas City is now 4-0 in these matchups after a 32-29 win Sunday. Patrick Mahomes will now try to do something that has never been done in the NFL, winning three straight Super Bowls.

Unlike the game earlier in the day, this game was a nail-biter that came down to the last couple of minutes. The Bills went three-and-out on their first drive, and the Chiefs responded with a TD. The Bills did better on their second possession, scoring three points, and a Chiefs' fumble led to a Bills TD, giving Buffalo a 10-7 lead. Kansas City scored two more TDs in the first half, Buffalo added one of their own, and the score was 21-16 Chiefs heading into halftime.

KC punted on their opening possession of the second half, then a Buffalo TD gave the Bills a 22-21 lead, which was the score heading into the fourth quarter. KC scored five plays later, and a successful two-point conversion gave them a 7-point lead. Josh Allen then led the Bills on a long TD drive, tying the game 29-29 with six minutes left. Mahomes responded with a long drive of his own, but a sack on 1st and goal from the 10-yard line, followed by two incomplete passes, forced the Chiefs to kick a field goal. Down by three points, and with 3:33 left on the clock, Josh Allen had a chance to exercise his demons. Five plays later the Bills were facing 4th&5 near midfield, and to the horror of everyone watching in Buffalo, tight end Dalton Kincaid dropped the pass. Game over.

Looking ahead, the NFL Pro Bowl games begin this week. The Skills Showdown will be on Thursday evening on ESPN, and the actual Pro Bowl game will be on Sunday afternoon. Six Vikings were selected to the Pro Bowl: QB Sam Darnold, WR Justin Jefferson, CB Byron Murphy Jr., OLB Jonathan Greenard, OLB Andrew Van Ginkel, and long snapper Andrew DePaola. Seven other Vikings players were selected as alternates, so we may see even more Vikings players, depending on who opts out because of injury or other reasons. Skol!

EARTHTALK



Humans' increasingly large footprint across the planet is forcing plants & animals to adapt and is affecting some species' evolutionary path, such as in the case of up to half of female elephants not growing tusks in heavily poached regions of Africa. Credit: Robin Cafolla, FlickrCC.

Dear EarthTalk: How has the huge footprint of humanity forced other animal and plant species to evolve differently than they might otherwise have without people around? – Lois V., New York, NY

Humans have profoundly altered the planet, driving plants and animals to adapt in ways they never would have without our impact. Through activities like habitat destruction, pollution, climate change, hunting and introducing invasive species, humans have significantly accelerated evolutionary changes, transforming ecosystems in dramatic and often unpredictable ways.

One example is the rise of tuskless elephants. Decades of ivory poaching have created intense pressure on African elephants. In regions of heavy poaching, up to half of female elephants are now tuskless, an adaptation showing how humans can profoundly alter the genetic makeup of another animal population.

Urban environments have also become hotspots for what some researchers consider accelerated evolution. During the Industrial Revolution, peppered moths in England evolved darker colors to blend into soot-covered trees. Today, insects and city-dwelling birds are similarly adapting to human-made conditions. Pigeons have modified their eating habits to thrive on discarded food, and some mosquito species have adapted to reproduce in tiny water collections present in city environments. These alterations illustrate the adaptability of species adjusting to environments changed by humans.

Chemical resistance is another area where human influence is clear. The widespread use of pesticides and antibiotics has driven the evolution of resistant pests and bacteria. Farmers battle "superweeds" that can survive herbicides, and healthcare providers face rising concerns over antibiotic-resistant bacteria.

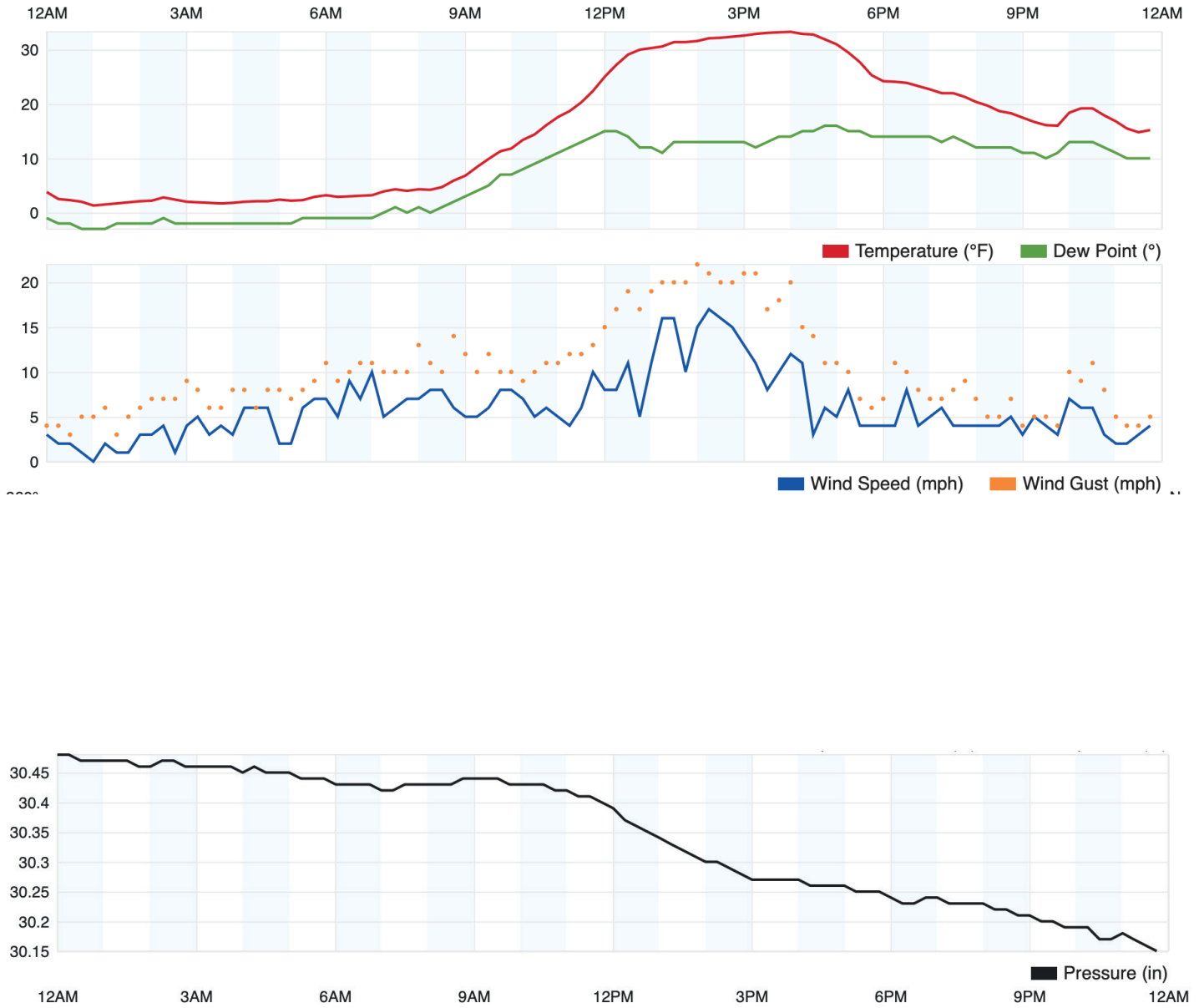
Climate change has further expedited evolutionary shifts. Animals are altering their migration patterns and breeding seasons to adapt to warmer temperatures. Birds like the great tit in Europe are laying eggs earlier in the spring to align with the availability of insects. Similarly, marine species are moving to cooler waters. This disrupts ecosystems and fisheries

These adaptations showcase the nature's incredible resilience, despite some notable drawbacks. Rapid evolution can lead to reduced biodiversity, as species unable to adapt face extinction. Ecosystem imbalances arise as invasive species prevail, pushing out native organisms. According to the National Wildlife Federation, human activities are driving an unprecedented rate of evolutionary change. To help, choose sustainably sourced products, reduce waste, and support conservation efforts to protect habitats and species. Advocacy for policies that address climate change and pollution is also key.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



High: 44 °F

Slight Chance
Flurries

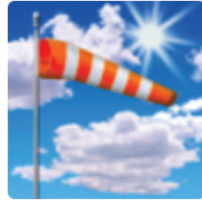
Tonight



Low: 24 °F

Partly Cloudy

Tuesday



High: 48 °F

Mostly Sunny
and Breezy

Tuesday Night



Low: 23 °F

Partly Cloudy

Wednesday



High: 43 °F

Sunny

Today



Highs in the 40s

Breezy west winds switching out of the northwest 15 to 25 mph. Gusts 35 to 40 mph.

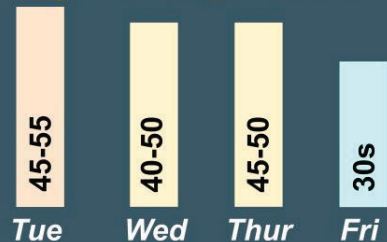
NWS Aberdeen, SD
weather.gov/abr



Rest of the work week

Dry. High temperatures 10 to near 30 degrees above normal, highest over the Missouri and James River Valleys.

High Temperatures



Temperatures will be 10 to near 30 degrees above normal through the work week. Breezy winds will gust 35-40 mph today. Higher gusts 40-50 mph will continue through mid-morning near the Sisseton Hills (Sisseton-Peever-Summit down through Clear Lake) - including portions of I-29.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 33 °F at 3:35 PM

Low Temp: 1 °F at 1:03 AM

Wind: 22 mph at 1:52 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 9 hours, 37 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 53 in 1934

Record Low: -34 in 1915

Average High: 24

Average Low: 2

Average Precip in Jan.: 0.49

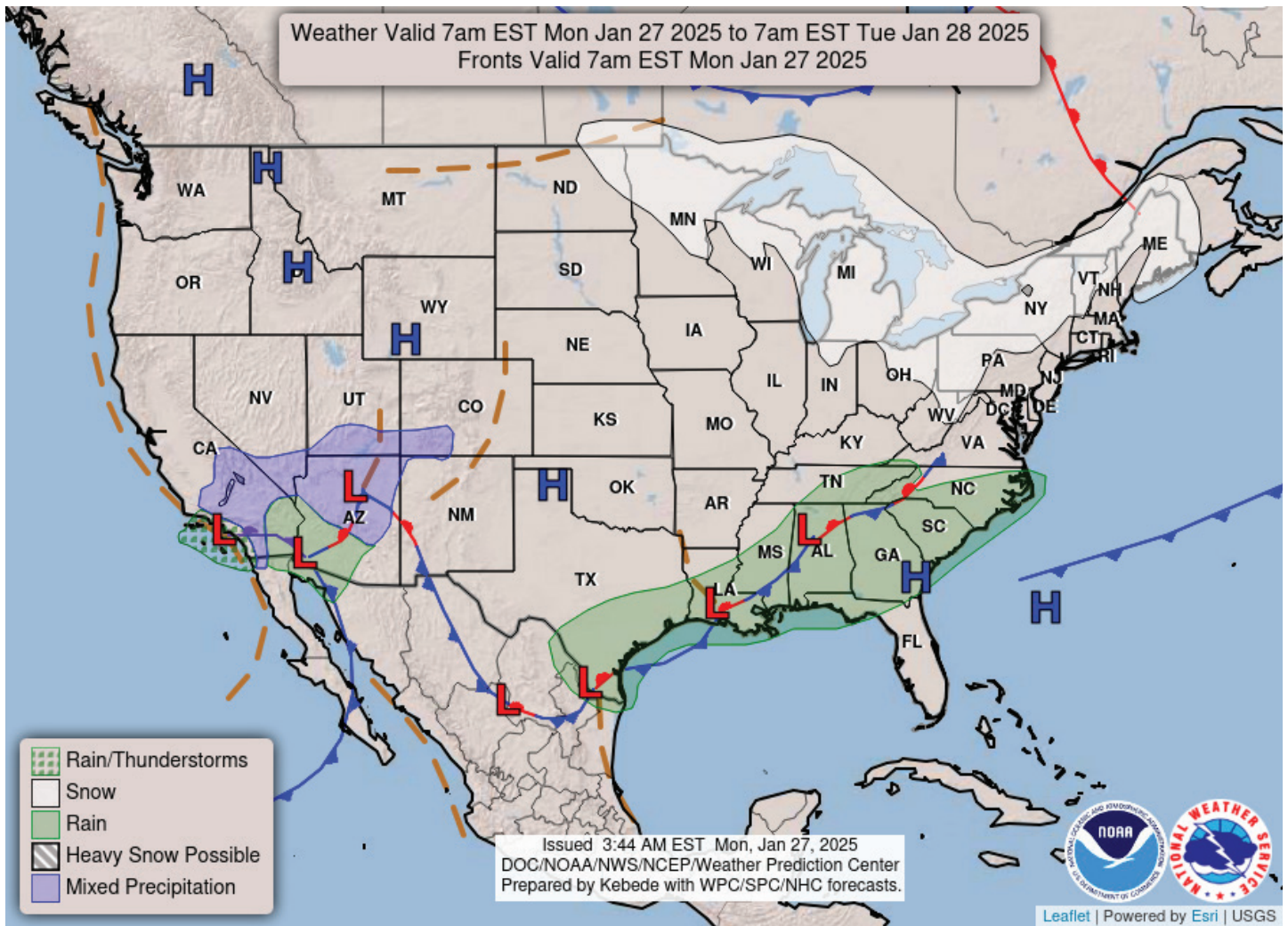
Precip to date in Jan.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 0.49

Precip Year to Date: 21.71

Sunset Tonight: 5:33:58 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:55:25 am



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Today in Weather History

January 27th, 1969: Snowfall of 7 to 10 inches combined with winds of 15 to 30 mph caused widespread low visibilities and heavy drifting from the 27th to the 29th across Minnesota. Many roads were blocked or remained blocked. Many schools were closed with many accidents.

1772 - The "Washington and Jefferson Snowstorm" occurred. George Washington reported three feet of snow at Mount Vernon, and Thomas Jefferson recorded about three feet at Monticello. (Sandra and TI Richard Sanders - 1987)

1922: On this date through the 29th, a significant snowstorm struck the East Coast from South Carolina to southeastern Massachusetts. Washington, DC, reported 28 inches of snow. The heavy snow on the Knickerbocker Theater's flat roof put a significant strain on the structure. On the evening of the 28th, during a showing of the silent comedy "Get-Rich-Quick Wallingford," the building collapsed, killing 98 people and injuring 130 others.

1966 - Oswego, NY, was in the midst of a five day lake effect storm which left the town buried under 102 inches of snow. (David Ludlum)

1967: Residents of Chicago, Illinois, began to dig out from the storm of the 26th and 27th, which produced 23 inches of snow in 29 hours, their worse snowstorm. The snow paralyzed the city and suburbs for days, and business losses were enormous.

1987 - A powerful storm moving into the western U.S. produced 13 inches of snow at Daggett Pass NV, and 16 inches in the Cascade Mountains of Oregon. Winds gusted to 63 mph at Reno NV, and wind gusts in Oregon exceeded 80 mph. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - The nation got a breather from winter storms, however, cold arctic air settled into the southeastern U.S. Hollywood FL reported a record low reading of 39 degrees. (National Weather Summary)

1989 - The last half of January was bitterly cold over most of Alaska. Nearly thirty stations established all-time record low temperatures. On this date Tanana reported a low of -76 degrees. Daily highs of -66 degrees were reported at Chandalar Lake on the 22nd, and at Ambler on the 26th. (The Weather Channel)

1989 - Low pressure in north central Alaska continued to direct air across northern Siberia and the edges of the Arctic Circle into the state. The temperature at Fairbanks remained colder than 40 degrees below zero for the eighth day in a row. Lows of 68 below at Galena, 74 below at McGrath, and 76 below at Tanana, were new records for the date. Wind chill readings were colder than 100 degrees below zero. (National Weather Summary)

1990 - Another in a series of cold fronts brought high winds to the northwestern U.S., and more heavy snow to some of the higher elevations. The series of vigorous cold fronts crossing the area between the 23rd and the 27th of the month produced up to 60 inches of snow in the Cascade Mountains of Washington State. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2005 - Month-to-date snowfall at Boston Logan International Airport totaled 43.1 inches, making January the snowiest month on record.



THE BEST ABILITY IS DEPENDABILITY

Old Faithful is a faithful geyser. It is not the biggest geyser or the highest geyser. But it is the most popular geyser because it is dependable.

Old Faithful received its name in 1870 by a group of explorers who stood in awe as it spewed its water nearly 200 feet into the air. But they were more amazed when they recognized that it erupted every ninety-one minutes. It is recognized as the most predictable geographical feature on earth by geologists and other scientists.

Being dependable is essential – especially for the Christian. The Psalmist wrote, “Help, O Lord, for the godly are fast disappearing! The faithful have vanished from the earth!”

The Christian can always count on God’s faithfulness. His Word reveals that time and time again: If He said it, He did it. And because of that fact we can have faith in Him and always count on Him.

But the question He asks of us is this: Can He always count on us? Will we be faithful to Him in our daily walk? Can He depend on us to honor Him in all things – as the Psalmist says – “because the godly are fast disappearing...and the faithful have vanished?”

What a sad statement! God is not seeking famous people but faithful people. More than any ability He has given us, He wants our dependability and faithfulness.

Prayer: We know, Father, that if You are first in our lives You will find us faithful to You, Your Word and Your ways. May You find us dependable at all times. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Help, Lord, for no one is faithful anymore; those who are loyal have vanished from the human race. Psalm 12:1

We all need the encouragement, comfort, and peace that comes through God’s grace. Our daily devotionals, known as Seeds of Hope, have been a means through which thousands of people have experienced this grace. Each devotional comes from God’s Word and we pray this good “seed” finds good soil in your heart. Our aim is that the Seeds of Hope will be a great source of daily encouragement to you and that God will use them to draw you near to Him

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The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition Subscription Form

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- Colored.....\$42.60/6 months
- E-Weekly*.....\$31.95/year

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paypal.me/paperpaul

Pay with Venmo: [@paperpaul](https://venmo.com/paperpaul) Phone Number to Confirm: 7460

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.24.25

8 12 43 52 62 18

MegaPlier: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$44,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 21 Mins 31 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.25.25

8 31 35 44 46 10

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$22,630,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 36 Mins 31 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.26.25

1 10 21 28 40 11

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 51 Mins 31 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.25.25

6 7 14 29 32

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$20,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 51 Mins 32 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.25.25

2 5 52 59 60 16

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 20 Mins 32 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.25.25

8 15 17 53 66 14

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$56,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 20 Mins 32 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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Upcoming Groton Events

- 01/05/2025 Pancake Sunday, Historical Society Fundraiser, 10am-1pm, Community Center
- 01/26/2025 Groton Robotics Pancake Feed at the Community Center 10am-1pm
- 01/26/2025 87th Carnival of Silver Skates 2pm & 6:30pm
- 02/02/2025 Pancake Sunday, Historical Society Fundraiser, 10am-1pm, Community Center
- 02/05/2025 FB Live Electronic Hwy 12 Sign Drawing City Hall 12pm
- 03/02/2025 Pancake Sunday, Historical Society Fundraiser, 10am-1pm, Community Center
- 03/22/2025 Spring Vendor Fair at the GHS Gym 10am-2pm
- 04/05/2025 Dueling Duo Baseball/Softball Fundraiser at the Legion Post #39, 6-11:30pm
- 04/06/2025 Pancake Sunday, Historical Society Fundraiser, 10am-1pm, Community Center
- 04/12/2025 Lion's Club Easter Egg Hunt at the City Park 10am Sharp
- 05/03/2025 Lion's Club Spring Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm
- 05/26/2025 Memorial Day Services Groton Union Cemetery with lunch at Legion Post #39, 12pm
- 06/07/2025 Day of Play
- 07/04/2025 Firecracker Couples Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course
- 07/13/2025 Lion's Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 9am-4pm
- 07/09/2025 Legion Auxiliary #39 Salad Buffet & Dessert Bar at the Groton Legion 11am-1pm
- 08/09/2025 2nd Annual Celebration in the Park/Rib Cook-Off 1-9:30pm
- 09/06/2025 Lion's Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm
- 10/31/2025 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm
- 11/27/2025 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1:30pm

News from the **AP** Associated Press

Tens of thousands return to devastated northern Gaza as Israel lifts its closure under truce

By WAFAA SHURAF, SAMY MAGDY and JOSEPH KRAUSS Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Tens of thousands of Palestinians streamed into the most heavily destroyed part of the Gaza Strip on Monday as Israel lifted its closure of the north for the first time since the early weeks of the 15-month war with Hamas in accordance with a fragile ceasefire.

Massive crowds of people walking with their belongings stretched along a main road running next to the coast in a stunning reversal of the mass exodus from the north at the start of the war that many Palestinians had feared Israel would make permanent.

Palestinians who have been sheltering in squalid tent camps and schools-turned-shelters for over a year are eager to return to their homes — even though they have likely been damaged or destroyed.

Yasmin Abu Amshah, a mother of three, said she walked 6 kilometers (nearly 4 miles) to reach her home in Gaza City, where she found it damaged but still habitable. She also saw her younger sister for the first time in over a year.

"It was a long trip, but a happy one," she said. "The most important thing is that we returned."

Many saw their return as an act of steadfastness after Israel's military campaign, which was launched in response to the Hamas militant group's Oct. 7, 2023, attack on southern Israel. The return was also seen as a repudiation of U.S. President Donald Trump's suggestion that large numbers of Palestinians be resettled in Egypt and Jordan.

'The joy of return'

Ismail Abu Matter, a father of four who waited for three days near the crossing point before moving north with his family, described scenes of jubilation on the other side, with people singing, praying and crying as they were reunited with relatives.

"It's the joy of return," said Abu Matter, whose relatives were among the hundreds of thousands of Palestinians who fled or were driven out of what is now Israel during the 1948 war surrounding its creation. "We had thought we wouldn't return, like our ancestors."

The opening was delayed for two days over a dispute between Hamas and Israel, which said the militant group changed the order of the hostages it released in exchange for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners. Mediators resolved the dispute overnight.

Hamas said the return was "a victory for our people, and a declaration of failure and defeat for the (Israeli) occupation and transfer plans."

The ceasefire is aimed at winding down the deadliest and most destructive war ever fought between Israel and Hamas and securing the release of dozens of hostages captured in the Oct. 7 attack. Militants killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, in that assault and abducted another 250.

Israel responded with an air and ground war that has killed over 47,000 Palestinians, more than half of them women and children, according to Gaza's Health Ministry. It does not say how many of the dead were combatants. Israel says it has killed over 17,000 militants, without providing evidence.

In the opening days of the war, Israel ordered the wholesale evacuation of the north and sealed it off shortly after ground troops moved in.

Around a million people fled to the south in October 2023, while hundreds of thousands remained in the north, which had some of the heaviest fighting and the worst destruction of the war. In all, around 90% of Gaza's 2.3 million people have been displaced.

Hostage dispute rattled week-old ceasefire

Israel had delayed the opening of the crossing, which was supposed to happen over the weekend, saying it would not allow Palestinians north until a female civilian hostage, Arbel Yehoud, was released. Israel said she should have been released before four young female soldiers, who were freed on Saturday.

It also accused Hamas of failing to provide information on whether the remaining hostages set to be freed in the first phase of the deal are alive or dead. Around 90 hostages are still inside Gaza, and Israel believes around a third of them are dead.

Hamas in turn accused Israel of violating the agreement by not opening the crossing.

The Gulf nation of Qatar, a key mediator with Hamas, announced early Monday that an agreement had been reached to release Yehoud along with two other hostages.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said in a statement that the hostage release — which will include female soldier Agam Berger — will take place on Thursday. Another three hostages are expected to be released on Saturday as previously planned.

Hamas also handed over a list of information about the hostages to be released in the ceasefire's six-week first phase.

Starting at 7 a.m., Palestinians were allowed to cross on foot without inspection via a coastal road passing through part of the so-called Netzarim corridor, a military zone bisecting the territory just south of Gaza City that Israel carved out early in the war. A checkpoint for vehicles opened later on Gaza's main north-south highway, where traffic was backed up for around 3 kilometers (2 miles).

Under the ceasefire agreement, vehicles are to be inspected for weapons before entering the north, but the mechanism for that was not immediately clear.

Defense Minister Israel Katz said Israel would continue to enforce the ceasefire, and that anyone violating it or threatening Israeli forces "will bear the full cost."

"We will not allow a return to the reality of Oct. 7," he wrote on the social media platform X.

A second and more difficult phase awaits

Under the first phase of the ceasefire, Hamas is to free a total of 33 hostages in exchange for the release of nearly 2,000 Palestinians imprisoned by Israel. So far under the truce, the militants have released seven hostages in exchange for more than 300 prisoners, including many serving life sentences for deadly attacks on Israelis.

The second — and far more difficult — phase of the agreement has not yet been negotiated. Hamas says it will not release the remaining 60 or so hostages unless Israel ends the war, while Netanyahu says he is still committed to destroying the militant group and ending its nearly 18-year rule over Gaza.

Auschwitz memorial holds observances on the 80th anniversary of the death camp's liberation

By VANESSA GERA Associated Press

OSWIECIM, Poland (AP) — The 80th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz by Soviet troops is being marked on Monday at the site of the former death camp, a ceremony that is widely being treated as the last major observance that any notable number of survivors will be able to attend.

Nazi German forces murdered some 1.1 million people at the site in southern Poland, which was under German occupation during World War II. Most of the victims were Jews killed on an industrial scale in gas chambers, but also Poles, Roma, Soviet prisoners of war, gay people and others who were targeted for elimination in the Nazi racial ideology.

Elderly camp survivors, some wearing blue-and-white striped scarves that recall their prison uniforms, walked together to the the Death Wall, where prisoners were executed, including many Poles who resisted the occupation of their country.

They were joined by Polish President Andrzej Duda, whose nation lost 6 million citizens during the war. He carried a candle and walked with Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum director Piotr Cywinski. At the wall, the two men bowed their heads, murmured prayers and crossed themselves.

"We Poles, on whose land — occupied by Nazi Germans at that time — the Germans built this extermination industry and this concentration camp, are today the guardians of memory," Duda said to reporters afterward.

He spoke of the "unimaginable harm" inflicted on so many people, especially the Jewish people.

"May the memory of all the dead live on, may they rest in peace," he said.

In all, the Germans murdered 6 million Jews from all over Europe, annihilating two-thirds of Europe's Jews and one-third of all Jews worldwide. In 2005, the United Nations designated Jan. 27 as International Holocaust Remembrance Day.

Across Europe, officials and others were pausing to remember.

"As the last survivors fade, it is our duty as Europeans to remember the unspeakable crimes and to honor the memories of the victims," European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, who is German, said on X.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, whose leads a nation defending itself against Russia's brutal invasion, placed a candle at the Babyn Yar Holocaust memorial in Kyiv, where tens of thousands of Jews were executed during the Nazi occupation.

"The evil that seeks to destroy the lives of entire nations still remains in the world," he wrote on his Telegram page.

Commemorations will culminate later Monday when world leaders and royalty will join with elderly camp survivors, the youngest of whom are in their 80s, at Birkenau, the part of Auschwitz where the mass murder of Jews took place.

Politicians, however, have not been asked to speak this year. Due to the advanced age of the survivors, about 50 of whom are expected, organizers are choosing to make them the center of the observances. Ronald Lauder, the president of the World Jewish Congress, will also speak.

Among the leaders expected to attend are Germany's Chancellor Olaf Scholz and President Frank-Walter Steinmeier. Germany has never sent both of its highest state representatives to the observances before, according to German news agency dpa.

It is a sign of Germany's continued commitment to take responsibility for the nation's crimes, even amid a growing far-right movement that would like to forget.

French President Emmanuel Macron and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau will also attend, while Britain's King Charles III will also be there, along with kings and queens from Spain, Denmark and Norway.

Russian representatives were in the past central guests at the anniversary observances in recognition of the Soviet liberation of the camp on Jan. 27, 1945, and the huge losses suffered by Soviet forces in the Allied defeat of Nazi Germany. But they have not been welcome since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Fear and gunshots after Rwanda-backed rebels claim takeover of eastern Congo's largest city

By JUSTIN KABUMBA, CHINEDU ASADU, SAM MEDNICK and CHRISTINA MALKIA Associated Press
GOMA, Congo (AP) — Residents in eastern Congo's largest city, Goma, were fleeing on Monday after Rwanda-backed rebels claimed to have captured the regional hub from Congolese forces as fighting escalated in recent days despite calls from the U.N. Security Council for the insurgents to withdraw.

Gunshots rang out across Goma overnight before dozens of rebels in military uniform early Monday morning marched into the capital of North Kivu province, which sits on the border with Rwanda. The Congolese government has not confirmed the fall of Goma, 1,500 kilometers (930 miles) east of capital Kinshasa, after severing ties with Rwanda on Saturday.

The Rwanda-backed M23 rebels are one of about 100 armed groups vying for a foothold in the mineral-rich region in the decades-long conflict, one of Africa's largest. The rebels temporarily took over Goma in 2012, before they were forced to pull out under international pressure, and resurfaced in late 2021, with increasing support from Rwanda, according to Congo's government and United Nations experts. Rwanda has denied such support.

Analysts have warned the latest escalation of hostilities could further destabilize the region, which is already home to one of the world's largest humanitarian crises with more than 6 million people displaced. More than a third of North Kivu's population are among the displaced, according to a U.N. report.

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UN calls on the rebels to withdraw

In a statement late Sunday, the U.N. Security Council called on the M23 to immediately reverse its advances.

"The members of the Security Council condemned the ongoing flagrant disregard for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the DRC ... and that the M23 put an end to the establishment of parallel administrations in the DRC territory," the statement added, referring to Congo's formal name, the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The rebels announced early Monday they had captured the city just as a deadline they gave to Congolese security forces to surrender was about to expire. The rebels asked the Congolese military to assemble at the central stadium and urged residents to remain calm.

Congolese government officials have said the country is "in a war situation" and accused Rwanda of committing "a frontal aggression (and) a declaration of war." Congo cut ties with Rwanda over the weekend as recent attempts at diplomatic talks between the two countries failed.

The advance into Goma is the culmination of a prolonged battle between the rebels and the Congolese security forces that saw several towns along the Rwandan border falling to the insurgents.

Residents seek safety across the border in Rwanda

On Sunday, hundreds of residents marched in the heat and through the night along roads with heavy traffic as they tried to flee Goma into Rwanda, carrying their babies, clothes and other belongings on their backs and heads. Many were still on the run on Monday morning.

"We are fleeing because we saw soldiers on the border with Rwanda throwing bombs and shooting," said Safi Shangwe, who was among those on the move.

The U.N. special representative for Congo Bintou Keita told an emergency meeting of the U.N. Security Council late Sunday that "we are trapped," with the airport shut down and roads blocked.

At least 13 U.N. peacekeepers have been killed in the hostilities in the past week. The U.N. peacekeeping force, also known as MONUSCO, entered Congo more than two decades ago and has around 14,000 peacekeepers on the ground.

The Uruguayan army, in Goma serving with the U.N. peacekeeping mission, said in a statement on the social platform X late Sunday that more than 100 Congolese soldiers were laying down their weapons.

South Korean plane crash report says bird remains were found in engines, but no cause yet revealed

By HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — The first report on last month's Jeju Air crash in South Korea confirmed traces of bird strikes in the plane's engines, though officials haven't determined the cause of the accident that killed all but two of the 181 people on board.

The preliminary accident report released by South Korea's Aviation and Railway Accident Investigation Board on Monday said that feathers and bird blood stains were found in both engines.

"The samples were sent to specialized organizations for DNA analysis, and a domestic organization identified them as belonging to Baikal teals," the report said, referring to a migratory duck.

The report also said the plane's two black boxes — the flight data recorder and cockpit voice recorder — stopped recording about 4 minutes before the crash. This could complicate efforts to find the cause of the crash.

The Boeing 737-800 skidded off the runway at Muan International Airport on Dec. 29 after its landing gear failed to deploy, slamming into a concrete structure and bursting into flames. The flight was returning from Bangkok and all of the victims were South Koreans except for two Thai nationals.

Many analysts said the concrete structure, which housed a set of antennas called a localizer that guides aircraft during landings, should have been built with lighter materials that could break more easily upon impact. South Korea's Transport Ministry announced last week that it will remove the concrete structure at the airport.

Investigators earlier said that air traffic controllers warned the pilots about possible bird strikes two minutes before the aircraft issued a distress signal confirming that a bird strike had occurred, after which the pilots attempted an emergency landing.

The preliminary report said the pilots also noticed a group of birds while approaching the runway at the Muan airport and that a security camera filmed the plane coming close to birds during an aborted landing as well.

The report said authorities will disassemble the engines, examine their components in depth, analyze the black box and air traffic control data, and investigate the embankment, localizer and bird strike evidence.

"These all-out investigation activities aim to accurately determine the cause of the accident," the report said.

The Transport Ministry said the preliminary report has been sent to the International Civil Aviation Organization, Thailand, the United States and France. It said the plane was built in the U.S. and its engines in France.

It said the Muan airport will remain closed until April 18.

What to expect after South Korean president's indictment on rebellion charges

By HYUNG-JIN KIM and FOSTER KLUG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol has become the country's first leader to be indicted, less than two weeks after he was the first to be detained.

The impeached, jailed president, who had been holed up in his presidential compound for weeks after issuing a shocking martial law decree last month, now faces rebellion charges that are punishable by the death penalty or life in prison.

It's part of a tortuous saga that has plunged South Korea into political turmoil and further riven an already divided society.

And it's not the only legal headache Yoon faces. A separate proceeding will determine whether to formally dismiss Yoon as president or reinstate him.

As Seoul prepares for double court hearings, continuing chaotic protests and increasingly harsh rhetoric from pro-and anti-Yoon forces, here's what to expect next:

What happens now?

Yoon will stay in jail.

He will be brought from a detention facility to a Seoul court for hearings in the rebellion trial, which is expected to last about six months.

Prosecutors say that Yoon directed a rebellion when he briefly imposed martial law on Dec. 3.

Yoon has presidential immunity from most criminal prosecutions, but not on charges of rebellion or treason.

Yoon's defense minister, police chief and several other military commanders have already been arrested and indicted on alleged rebellion, abuse of power and other charges related to the martial law decree.

Meanwhile, rival protests look likely to continue in downtown Seoul.

After a local court on Jan. 19 approved a formal arrest warrant to extend Yoon's detention, dozens of his supporters stormed the court building, destroying windows, doors and other property. They also attacked police officers with bricks, steel pipes and other objects. The violence left 17 police officers injured, and police detained 46 protesters.

What about his other court case?

Yoon also has to worry about the Constitutional Court, which has until June to determine whether to formally dismiss or reinstate him as president.

Observers expect a ruling to come sooner than the deadline.

In the cases of two past impeached presidents, Roh Moo-hyun in 2004 and Park Geun-hye in 2016, the court spent 63 days and 91 days respectively before determining to reinstate Roh and dismiss Park.

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If the Constitutional Court removes Yoon from office, an election to choose his successor must be held within two months.

Recent public surveys show that governing and opposition party candidates are running neck-and-neck in a possible presidential by-election race.

How are the two camps taking the indictment?

Both are promising that this is just the beginning.

Shin Dong-wook, a spokesperson for the governing conservative People Power Party, is warning that prosecutors will face unspecified legal and political consequences for their "wrong indictment" of Yoon.

Yoon's defense team says the prosecutors who indicted the president are trying to curry favor with political forces who want Yoon gone. They called the indictment "a shame in the history of South Korean prosecutors."

The main opposition liberal Democratic Party, which led Yoon's Dec. 14 impeachment, called his indictment and arrest "the beginning of the punishment of the ringleader of a rebellion."

Party spokesperson Han Min-soo warned Yoon to stop what he called his attempt to incite far-right supporters based on "groundless delusion."

Yoon has steadfastly denied any wrongdoing and says his declaration of martial law was a legitimate act of governance meant to raise public awareness of the danger of the liberal-controlled National Assembly, which obstructed his agenda.

After declaring martial law on Dec. 3, Yoon sent troops and police officers to the assembly, but enough lawmakers still managed to enter an assembly chamber to unanimously vote down Yoon's decree, forcing his Cabinet to lift it.

The martial law imposition, the first of its kind in South Korea in more than four decades, lasted only six hours. But it evoked painful memories of the military-backed rulers who used martial law and emergency decrees to suppress opponents in the 1960s through the '80s.

A destroyed Israeli kibbutz on the Lebanese border starts to pick up the pieces. Who will return?

By MELANIE LIDMAN Associated Press

KIBBUTZ MANARA, Israel (AP) — Kibbutz Manara in northern Israel is so close to the Lebanese border that patrons of a local pub joke, with gallows humor, that the militant group Hezbollah could see if they were eating sunflower seeds or potato chips with their beers.

The proximity made Manara so vulnerable in the war between Israel and Hezbollah that rockets and explosive drones damaged the majority of homes, turning the tiny community into a symbol of the heavy price of fighting. The kibbutz's 300 residents were among the 60,000 Israelis evacuated by the government from communities along the Lebanese border during the 14-month war.

A tenuous ceasefire has largely held, though it was tested on Sunday as a 60-day deadline passed for Israel and Hezbollah to withdraw their forces from southern Lebanon. Health officials in Lebanon said at least 22 people were killed by Israeli fire when demonstrators attempted to enter villages still under Israeli control. Israel says it is committed to withdrawing but says the process will take additional time.

For now, residents of Israel's north are taking their time returning, uncertain when — or if — they will go back to shattered communities. Many wonder what future they can have in a place so exposed to violence. The vast majority of displaced families still haven't returned home.

In hard-hit places like Manara, some who have ventured back have found unlivable, blackened homes. It will take years to rebuild.

"We are trying to understand what we can fix, what we can do better, how we can prepare for the next round (of fighting)," said Igor Abramovich, who remained in Manara during the war and believes it's just a matter of time before fighting erupts.

All homes on the ridge facing Lebanon are destroyed, with gaping holes left by missile strikes or fires that burned so hot that cars partly melted. Because the kibbutz is so exposed, 70 meters (yards) from

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the border in some places, firefighters sometimes couldn't respond to the blazes. Instead, the emergency squad was forced to watch on security cameras as fires burned.

Hezbollah began launching rockets and missiles toward Israeli border communities on Oct. 8, 2023, a day after the deadly Hamas attack that sparked the war in Gaza. Soon after, Israel evacuated dozens of towns, villages and kibbutzim along the border, including Manara.

In Lebanon, at the height of the war, more than 1 million people were displaced, and reconstruction will take years there as well. Piles of rubble that were once homes can be seen in towns across the border.

Hezbollah rockets killed 77 people in Israel, more than half of them civilians. No one was killed in Manara. Israeli air and ground assaults killed more than 4,000 people in Lebanon, including hundreds of civilians.

Israel made returning the displaced residents to their homes an aim in its war against Hezbollah and has promised incentives to entice them back. The return has been slow, in part because many residents are skeptical of the government's pledges to ensure their safety and because much work remains to rehabilitate communities.

Remote kibbutzim on the borders

Manara is prone to howling winds and snow usually once a winter, attracting a hardy, close-knit group of people.

Such remote kibbutzim were an integral element of the Israeli pioneer ethos, and Israel as a fledgling state once relied on them to protect its borders in the face of threats from neighboring Arab countries. Those threats appeared to have waned until Hamas attacked into southern Israel and Israeli authorities assessed that Hezbollah was planning a similar cross-border raid in the north.

The war was a clear reminder for Israelis that the country still depends on the border communities and needs to ensure their viability so that the country doesn't collapse toward its center.

Many in Manara are determined to return and restore their homes.

"It's really a physical thing. They miss the air here," said Orna Weinberg, 58, who has lived on the kibbutz her entire life.

Weinberg was displaced to a town about 45 minutes south, but she coordinated with the army and returned to Manara almost every day during the war, helping other evacuated residents who asked her to save photo albums, transfer the kibbutz's archives or carry out other tasks to keep the community from falling apart.

Now she's involved in coordinating Manara's rehabilitation, both physical and emotional. She and Abramovich spend hours walking through the kibbutz with appraisers for different government agencies to determine the financial losses and compensation. They also need to check the kibbutz's infrastructure, including gas, water and electricity lines. All suffered damage.

The question no one asks

Out of 157 homes or apartments in the kibbutz, 110 were damaged, including 38 that were completely destroyed. In the part of Manara that faces Lebanon, all houses were destroyed. The ones facing the valley and the city of Kiryat Shmona are damaged but likely salvageable.

Abramovich said an initial estimate of rebuilding costs is at least NIS 150 million (\$40 million).

"We're having this weird discussion now, who has it better, someone whose house is partially destroyed or totally destroyed," said Hagar Erlich, 72, whose father was one of Manara's founders and is living in a hotel in the city of Tiberias with other kibbutz members. It may be cheaper and faster to demolish and rebuild rather than renovate, she said.

The kibbutz is committed to reopening the nursery school by Sept. 1, convinced that if young families don't return as soon as possible, the community's future is in danger, Abramovich said.

So far, none of Manara's residents have announced they are leaving. The Abramovich family — Igor, his wife and two daughters — will return in February, the first family to do so.

"It's hard for people to say, 'I'm not coming back,'" Erlich said. "We decided that we are not asking that question, not as an organization, and not as individuals."

The community even wants to continue an expansion of 92 housing units that was planned before the

war started.

Signs of life are reemerging.

In late December, 50 Manara residents gathered to work in the community garden, the hub of the kibbutz where they mark important celebrations and gatherings. The older members cooked a feast as children ran through the weeds and removed rocks from the garden beds to get them ready for new plants.

"It was the first time since the war began where I heard voices of people talking and chatting around here," Weinberg said. "Whenever I think about that, that's home."

Middle East latest: Israel allows Palestinians to return to heavily destroyed north of Gaza Strip

By The Associated Press undefined

Israel on Monday began allowing Palestinians to return to the heavily destroyed north of the Gaza Strip for the first time since the early weeks of the 15-month war with Hamas, in accordance with a fragile ceasefire.

Thousands of Palestinians headed north after waiting for days to cross. Associated Press reporters saw people crossing the so-called Netzarim corridor shortly after 7 a.m. when the checkpoints were scheduled to open.

The opening was delayed for two days over a dispute between Hamas and Israel, which said the militant group had changed the order of the hostages it released in exchange for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners.

The ceasefire is aimed at winding down the deadliest and most destructive war ever fought between Israel and Hamas and securing the release of dozens of hostages captured in the militants' Oct. 7, 2023, attack, which triggered the fighting.

Haitian migrants in Springfield, Ohio, turn to faith amid deportation fears

By LUIS ANDRES HENAO and JESSIE WARDARSKI Associated Press

SPRINGFIELD, Ohio (AP) — At the end of his Sunday service, the pastor of the First Haitian Evangelical Church of Springfield, Ohio, asked ushers and musicians to form a circle around him as he knelt in prayer, flanked by the flags of Haiti and the United States.

Many had come to receive his blessing and hear his guidance on how to deal with federal agents in case of raids stemming from President Donald Trump's crackdown on immigration. Other congregants stayed home out of fear and growing uncertainty.

"I asked God to protect my people," the Rev. Reginald Silencieux said after the service, reflecting on his final prayer. "I prayed especially for the Haitian community, and I prayed for U.S.A. too, because Trump is our president. As a church, we have an obligation to pray for him because he's our political leader right now."

Some of Springfield's estimated 15,000 Haitians are seeking solace and divine intervention in their churches or at shops that sell spiritual products. Community leaders say many are overwhelmed by fears Trump will end or let expire the Temporary Protected Status program that allows them to remain in the U.S. legally.

"The community is panicking," said Viles Dorsainvil, the leader of Springfield's Haitian Community Help and Support Center. "They see the arrests on TV in other parts of the country and they don't know what's going to happen."

"The majority of immigrants in the U.S.A. are not criminals, and they're hard-working people," he added. "Any administration with common sense would rather work with those kinds of immigrants than deport them."

Last year, Trump falsely accused Haitians in Springfield of eating their neighbor's cats and dogs. The false rumors exacerbated fears about division and anti-immigrant sentiment in the mostly white, blue-collar city of about 59,000.

In the weeks after his comments, schools, government buildings and the homes of elected officials were

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targeted with dozens of bomb threats.

"Before, we had a different type of fear — it was a fear of retaliation, whether it was the far right, the Proud Boys," said Jacob Payen, a Haitian community leader and owner of Milokan Botanica, a religious shop that sells Haitian spiritual and natural healing products.

"Now, there's a fear of deportation. That keeps a lot of people from going out and has caused a lot of people to have left," he said, pointing to the usually busy commercial plaza where his business is located and that was now more quiet than usual.

Between selling religious candles and spiritual ointments, Payne guided customers with immigration forms, employment authorization cards and questions on their TPS applications.

Brutus Joseph, 50, who works installing solar panels, said he came to the botanica to find spiritual relief. But he also wanted to speak his mind.

"I don't feel right at all. I have a lot in my chest," Joseph said in Creole through an interpreter. "My wife and I can't even sleep because we're so worried. We're law-abiding citizens — all we did is to be Haitian. We didn't think we'd be treated like this by the (Trump) administration. I'm praying to God that the president changes his mind."

Joseph especially worries about the future for his five children, including one who is a senior in high school in Springfield and plans to attend college this year.

"If I leave here, there's no future for my children. My children can get raped and killed if I go back, so I have everything to lose," he said, making an appeal to Trump as a fellow family man who is married to an immigrant.

The Rev. Philomene Philostin, one of the pastors at the First Haitian Evangelical Church, bemoaned the lower-than-usual attendance at Sunday's service.

"They don't have to be scared. They have to be alert," she said. "They shouldn't be scared to the point where they don't come to church."

The migration concerns of clergy and other community members in Springfield are shared by many faith leaders nationwide. In several cities, including New York, Philadelphia and Portland, Oregon, interfaith groups are discussing how to provide security and support to migrants in their communities, including those who are undocumented.

During his first administration, Trump used bluntly vulgar language to question why the U.S. would accept immigrants from Haiti and "shithole countries" in Africa. His 2024 campaign focused heavily on illegal immigration, often referring in his speeches to crimes committed by migrants.

Thousands of temporary Haitian migrants have legally landed in Springfield in recent years under the TPS program, as longstanding unrest in their home country has given way to violent gangs ruling the streets.

"Everything changed because Trump is president. People are scared right now. Most are staying in their homes — they don't want to go outside," said Romane Pierre, 41, who settled in Springfield in 2020 under the TPS program after fleeing violence in his native Haiti.

"I love my country, but you can't live there; it's terrible right now," said Pierre, who works at the Rose Gaute, a popular Haitian restaurant in Springfield. "So where do you go back to?"

Last year, his 8-year-old daughter got ill in the middle of the night. Gunshots rang in their neighborhood in the capital of Port-Au-Prince, and her mother felt it was too dangerous to take her to the hospital. She died in the morning in front of the hospital entrance. Pierre couldn't get a permit on time to return for her funeral.

"Sometimes, life is difficult," he said pensively on a break from work.

The TPS, which allows him and thousands of others to remain legally in Springfield, expires on February 2026. He still hopes Trump will keep in mind the violence in Haiti and renew it.

"Think about Haitians because Haiti is not a place to return to right now," he said. "God, talk to Mr. Trump and do something for Haitians."

The migrants' fears were echoed by the president of Haiti's transitional presidential council, who said the Trump administration's decisions to freeze aid programs, deport migrants and block refugees will be

“catastrophic” for Haiti.

Leslie Voltaire made the comment in an interview with The Associated Press in Rome on Saturday following a meeting with Pope Francis at the Vatican.

The pontiff and Voltaire discussed the dire situation in Haiti where gangs have killed civilians and operate across the Caribbean nation with impunity. Half of Haiti’s 11.4 million people are already hungry, according to Voltaire, and losing humanitarian assistance will make the situation dramatically worse.

North Dakota’s ban on gender-affirming care for kids heads to trial

By JACK DURA Associated Press

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — A lawsuit seeking to strike down North Dakota’s ban on gender-affirming medical care for minors will go to trial Monday, more than a year after families of transgender children and a doctor filed the suit that argued the law violates the state’s constitution.

North Dakota is one of more than two dozen states that have banned gender-affirming care. Like North Dakota, many of those states have faced court challenges to the laws.

“Our argument is that all North Dakotans have a right to access health care that helps improve their lives and well-being, and our clients are no different,” said lead counsel Brittany Stewart, senior staff attorney at Gender Justice, a nonprofit advocating gender equity.

Court rulings have significantly reduced the scope of the North Dakota case, filed in late 2023. Earlier this month, a state district judge dismissed from the case some of the claims as well as the children and families who were plaintiffs, leaving only a pediatric endocrinologist as a plaintiff.

The trial in Bismarck, the state capital, is expected to last eight days. It’s unclear when the judge will rule.

Then-Gov. Doug Burgum signed the bill into law in April 2023 after it overwhelmingly passed the Republican-led Legislature. It makes it a misdemeanor for a health care provider to prescribe or give hormone treatments or puberty blockers to a transgender child, and a felony to perform gender-affirming surgery on a minor.

Lawmakers who supported the bill that became law said it would protect children from what they said are irreversible treatments and operations.

“We were creating an atmosphere where if you felt you had that situation, that you were of that mentality, that we would go ahead and cut off body parts and affirm where you’re at without trying to guide you through it,” said Republican Rep. Bill Tveit, who introduced the bill. “Maybe it was a wrong thought at that age, and if you want to make that decision when you’re of age ... that’s your prerogative once you’re an adult.”

He said he hopes the trial’s outcome affirms the law. North Dakota Attorney General Drew Wrigley declined to comment on the case.

Opponents said the legislation would have harmful effects on transgender kids, and noted that gender-affirming surgeries are not performed on minors in North Dakota.

A U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention survey last year found that transgender and gender-questioning teens reported higher rates of bullying at school than their peers and that about 1 in 4 transgender teens said they had attempted suicide in the past year.

Stewart said, “When you ban the only medically supported care for a specific condition and only for young people who are under 18, you’re not protecting those kids. You’re actively harming those children.”

The law contains an exemption for children who were already receiving treatments before the ban’s effective date. But attorneys for the plaintiffs said providers held off due to perceived vagueness in the law. That led the families to travel and miss work and school to seek care for their kids — including an eight-hour round trip drive for one family to attend a 30-minute appointment, Stewart said.

The judge later said the law does not apply to any minors who were receiving gender-affirming care before North Dakota’s ban took effect, including the three plaintiff children. The judge said they “can receive any gender-affirming care they could have received” previously. But their access remains unchanged because that ruling was not enough of a final decision to satisfy attorneys for health care organizations,

Stewart said.

At least two pediatric endocrinologists in North Dakota were providing gender-affirming care before the ban, Stewart said.

"As far as the number of patients, I can't really say, but honestly whether it's a lot or a few is really irrelevant to whether this is constitutional," she said.

President Donald Trump recently signed an executive order declaring only two sexes, male and female, are recognized by the federal government. State laws on sports participation, bathroom use, gender-affirming care and other issues are not directly affected.

Every major U.S. medical group, including the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Medical Association, has opposed such bans and said that gender-affirming treatments can be medically necessary and are supported by evidence. Research has further shown that transgender youths and adults can be prone to suicidal behavior when forced to live as the sex they were assigned at birth.

At least 26 states have adopted laws restricting or banning gender-affirming medical care for transgender minors, and most of those states face lawsuits. Federal judges have struck down the bans in Arkansas and Florida as unconstitutional, though a federal appeals court has stayed the Florida ruling. A judge's order is in place temporarily blocking enforcement of the ban in Montana.

The states that have passed laws restricting or banning gender-affirming medical care for transgender minors include Alabama, Arkansas, Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, West Virginia and Wyoming.

Dubai's ceaseless boom is putting strains on its residents

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Skyscraper-studded Dubai has been on a hot streak for the last five years — and some residents are starting to feel burned.

The city-state has seen record-breaking real estate transactions and as more and more people come to live there, and its state-owned airline Emirates is booking record earnings. But all that growth comes with strains for the city's population.

Traffic feels worse than ever on Dubai's roads. The price of housing continues to spike even with new real estate projects being announced almost daily. Caught in the middle are both its Emirati citizens and the vast population of foreigners who power its economy — sparking rare public expressions of concern.

"Dubai is on steroids but affordability risks are increasing," warned Hasnain Malik in a starkly titled report he wrote for the global data firm Tellimer, where he's a managing director.

Skyrocketing housing prices

Under Dubai's current plans, the city aims to have 5.8 million residents by 2040, adding more than half its current estimated population in just 15 years. Since 1980, its population has already soared from around 255,000 to around 3.8 million.

Real estate lit the fire in Dubai's growth in 2002, when the desert sheikdom began allowing foreigners to own property. After sharp falls during both the 2008-2009 financial crisis and Dubai's brief coronavirus lockdown, prices have been soaring.

Today, average prices per square foot are at all-time highs, according to Property Monitor. Rental prices increased as much as 20% in key neighborhoods last year, with further rises likely this year, with some residents moving to communities further out in the desert, the real estate firm Engel & Völkers said.

Jammed roads

Even before the boom, some people who worked in Dubai chose to live in the neighboring emirate of Sharjah, some 20 kilometers (12 miles) north of the city's downtown, or further away. Some 1 million commuters from other emirates jam the 12-lane Sheikh Zayed Road that runs through the center of the city and other highways every day, as studies suggest that as many as four out of five employees drive to work alone.

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That traffic has only intensified with Dubai's new arrivals.

While the rest of the world saw as much as a 4% increase in the number of registered vehicles in the last two years, the city's Road and Transportation Authority says there's been a 10% increase in the number of vehicles.

So many vehicles have been registered that the city has had to make license plates longer.

And while the city keeps building new flyovers and other road improvements, more cars are coming from more directions than ever before.

"Dubai is very attractive, more and more people are coming," said Thomas Edelmann, the founder and managing director of RoadSafetyUAE, which advocates about traffic issues. "I think it's easier to get people quickly to come to Dubai and to convince them about Dubai, then to build a new intersection or a new highway."

Boom concerns also raised by Emiratis

Congestion has got so bad that it's driving even prominent Emiratis to break their customary silence on public affairs.

Habib Al Mulla, a prominent Emirati lawyer, wrote on the social platform X in December that while authorities were working on congestion, the problem demanded "a set of immediate and long-term mechanisms." He followed up by publishing an opinion piece twice mentioning "congestion" as being among "pressing issues" for global cities like Dubai.

While phrased in mild language, Al Mulla's comments represented rare public criticism in the United Arab Emirates, where speech is tightly controlled by criminal law and social norms favor raising issues at a "majlis" — a semiprivate setting convened by a traditional ruler.

"The concentration of wealth and opportunities created in global cities may cause income inequality that pushes out lower-income residents," Al Mulla warned in the English-language Khaleej Times newspaper on Jan. 15.

"The problem becomes acute when the wealth and opportunities remain inaccessible to segments of the national population who witness the city's allure being seized by outsiders. This may carry significant social risks, if not mitigated."

Then there's demographic concerns as the Emirati share of the population dwindles. While the number of citizens isn't public, a back-of-the-envelope, informal calculation shared for years by experts suggests Emirati citizens represent around 10% of the country's overall population of more than 9 million people, a number that's likely falling as foreigners rush in.

In December, sermon scripts issued for the Dec. 13 Friday's prayers directly touched on the duty of having more children.

"Increasing offspring is both a religious obligation and a national responsibility, as it contributes to the protection and sustainability of nations," the sermon read, according to a transcript issued by the federal government's General Authority of Islamic Affairs and Endowments.

A search for high-tech solutions

For Dubai's autocratic government, overseen by ruler Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, possible solutions to the grinding traffic have ranged from the practical to the fanciful. The government in recent months has repeatedly encouraged companies to allow more remote work options, including in a report released in November that also suggested staggered and flexible working hours.

Adding as many as five remote workdays a month, along with the other steps, "can reduce morning peak travel time across Dubai by 30%," the study stated.

Dubai's road toll system, known as Salik, has added gates to charge drivers more and will institute surge pricing at the end of the month. Dubai's Metro, which boasts the world's longest self-driving rail line, will also grow beyond its broadly north-south routes in a nearly \$5 billion expansion.

Then there's the flying taxi project. Since 2017, Dubai has been announcing plans for airborne cabs in the city. A first "vertiport" is being built by Dubai International Airport with the aim of offering the service from next year.

Dubai also plans 3,300 kilometers (2,050 miles) of new pedestrian paths, although during Dubai's sum-

mer months pedestrians have to contend with high humidity and heat of around 45 degrees Celsius (113 degrees Fahrenheit).

"In the coming years, residents of Dubai will be able to move around by walking, cycling, its extensive network of roads and bridges, the Metro and its new lines, water taxis, or flying taxis on specific air routes," Sheikh Mohammed said on X in December.

But for now, Dubai keeps attracting more people and more cars — and the traffic jams only get longer.

The Chiefs get more Mahomes magic and advance to 3rd straight Super Bowl, beating the Bills 32-29

By DAVE SKRETTA AP Sports Writer

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP) — Everything looked oh-so familiar at Arrowhead Stadium on Sunday night: Patrick Mahomes hoisting the AFC championship trophy as confetti rained down, Andy Reid hugging Chiefs owner Clark Hunt, and Travis Kelce kissing Taylor Swift, grabbing the mic and imploring fans to once more party the night away.

The two-time defending Super Bowl champions had earned a chance at an unprecedented three-peat. And once again, they had brushed aside the Buffalo Bills on the way.

This time, it was Mahomes' arm and his legs — 245 yards passing and a touchdown, two more scores rushing — and some key stops by the Kansas City defense that preserved a 32-29 victory over the Bills in the AFC championship game.

"It's just so hard to get to the Super Bowl and I don't take it for granted, and to do it again at Arrowhead Stadium was special," Mahomes said. "You get that trophy on that stage and you look around here and there's not an empty seat — it's special."

The Chiefs will get a familiar foe in the big game in the Eagles, whom they beat two years ago for the title. Philadelphia romped to a 55-23 victory over the Commanders earlier Sunday to earn a shot at the champs on Feb. 9 in New Orleans.

It's the fourth time since January 2021 that the Chiefs have ended the Bills' season in the playoffs. And like all the rest, it came after a heavyweight fight between two of the top teams in the AFC, one that was tied 29-all after Buffalo quarterback Josh Allen found Curtis Samuel in the back of the end zone to set up a little more drama in the conference championship game.

Mahomes was simply unflappable, though. He completed four consecutive passes on the ensuing possession, setting up Harrison Butker's go-ahead field goal with 3:33 left, and put the Bills in another do-or-die situation in Kansas City.

Allen got their drive going by running for a first down, but his next two throws were batted at the line of scrimmage. He hit Amari Cooper for a short gain on third down, and the Bills chose to go for it — they were 4 of 5 on fourth downs at that point — and the Kansas City blitz forced Allen to loft up a prayer that Dalton Kincaid was unable to corral deep downfield.

The Chiefs took over, picked up a couple of first downs and began to celebrate once again.

"I've always said it: It's not about one guy. It's not about a couple guys. It's about the whole entire team," Mahomes said. "When we needed the defense to get stops, they got stops. Offense, we made plays. That's why we're so special."

Kareem Hunt had a touchdown run and Xavier Worthy had six catches for 85 yards and a score for Kansas City, which became just the fourth franchise to reach at least three consecutive Super Bowls with its ninth consecutive playoff victory.

"Every one of these is so special," said Clark Hunt, whose father Lamar's name adorns the AFC championship trophy. "What a game today. Travis, Patrick and their teammates always find a way to get it done. That was true this whole year. And it's a credit to coach Reid and his amazing staff. Now we get to do something that's never been done before."

Allen threw for 237 yards and two scores for Buffalo, while James Cook ran for 85 yards and two touch-

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downs of his own.

Yet the Bills still have not been to the Super Bowl since a run of four straight during the 1990-93 seasons. "I told them they've got nothing to be ashamed of," Bills coach Sean McDermott said, "and I love them."

The Bills and Chiefs have become well acquainted over the years, meeting eight times now since Kansas City beat Buffalo under the exact same circumstances — the AFC title game at Arrowhead Stadium — to reach the Super Bowl in January 2021.

Buffalo has won all four games in the regular season. Kansas City has won the four that mattered in the postseason.

All of that familiarity, along with the fact that McDermott once worked for Reid, was evident as the game transpired. The Bills refused to let Kelce beat them, like he did against the Texans in the divisional round, while Kansas City did everything it could to keep Allen from beating him with his legs — or his arm, for that matter.

It was the Chiefs who took a 21-16 lead into the locker room after a topsy-turvy first half.

Mahomes and Kareem Hunt ran for scores and Worthy had a touchdown reception as the teams traded the lead. Cook reached the end zone for Buffalo, and a spectacular touchdown catch by Mack Hollins just before halftime kept the Bills in the game.

It remained a game of inches in the second half: Cook barely reached across the goal line for a touchdown, the Chiefs stopped Allen inches shy of the marker on fourth down, Mahomes bulldozed into the end zone for a score, and the Bills answered with a 70-yard drive in which their MVP-candidate quarterback hit Samuel on fourth-and-goal to tie the game at 29-all.

Fifty-three minutes and 45 seconds had been rendered moot. Everything came down to the last 6:15 of the game.

"That's football, you know. The loss hurts. That's what makes this game what it is," Bills pass rusher Von Miller said. "We did everything in our power to win. And just, you know, ran out of time."

Injuries

Bills cornerback Christian Benford was carted off in the first quarter and declared out with a concussion. He had spent the week in the concussion protocol before getting cleared to play Sunday.

Up next

The Chiefs are headed to the Big Easy to face the Eagles in the Super Bowl for the second time in three years. In the first game, they rallied from a 24-14 halftime deficit with Butker hitting a 27-yard field goal for the 38-35 win.

White House says Colombia agrees to take deported migrants after Trump tariff showdown

By REGINA GARCIA CANO, ZEKE MILLER and ASTRID SUÁREZ Associated Press

BOGOTA, Colombia (AP) — The White House claimed victory in a showdown with Colombia over accepting flights of deported migrants from the U.S. on Sunday, hours after President Donald Trump threatened steep tariffs on imports and other sanctions on the longtime U.S. partner.

Long close partners in anti-narcotics efforts, the U.S. and Colombia clashed Sunday over the deportation of migrants and imposed tariffs on each other's goods in a show of what other countries could face if they intervene in the Trump administration's crackdown on illegal immigration. The White House held up the episode as a warning to other nations who might seek to impede his plans.

Earlier, the U.S. president had ordered visa restrictions, 25% tariffs on all Colombian incoming goods, which would be raised to 50% in one week, and other retaliatory measures sparked by President Gustavo Petro's decision to reject two Colombia-bound U.S. military aircraft carrying migrants after Petro accused Trump of not treating immigrants with dignity during deportation. Petro also announced a retaliatory 25% increase in Colombian tariffs on U.S. goods.

Trump said the measures were necessary because Petro's decision "jeopardized" national security in the

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U.S. by blocking the deportation flights.

"These measures are just the beginning," Trump wrote on his social media platform Truth Social. "We will not allow the Colombian Government to violate its legal obligations with regard to the acceptance and return of the Criminals they forced into the United States."

Press secretary Karoline Leavitt said in a late Sunday statement that the "Government of Colombia has agreed to all of President Trump's terms, including the unrestricted acceptance of all illegal aliens from Colombia returned from the United States, including on U.S. military aircraft, without limitation or delay."

Leavitt said the tariff orders will be "held in reserve, and not signed." But Leavitt said Trump would maintain visa restrictions on Colombian officials and enhanced customs inspections of goods from the country, "until the first planeload of Colombian deportees is successfully returned."

The Colombian government late Sunday said it considered as "overcome" the episode with the Trump administration and Petro reposted the statement from the White House on X.

"We have overcome the impasse with the United States government," said Colombian Foreign Minister Luis Gilberto Murillo. "We will continue to receive Colombians who return as deportees, guaranteeing them decent conditions as citizens subject to rights."

Murillo added that the South American country's presidential aircraft is available to facilitate the return of migrants who were to arrive hours earlier on the U.S. military airplanes.

Earlier Sunday, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio announced he was authorizing the visa restrictions on Colombian government officials and their families "who were responsible for the interference of U.S. repatriation flight operations." They were being imposed on top of the State Department's move to suspend the processing of visas at the U.S. Embassy in Colombia's capital, Bogota.

Petro had said earlier that his government would not accept flights carrying migrants deported from the U.S. until the Trump administration creates a protocol that treats them with "dignity." Petro made the announcement in two X posts, one of which included a news video of migrants reportedly deported to Brazil walking on a tarmac with restraints on their hands and feet.

"A migrant is not a criminal and must be treated with the dignity that a human being deserves," Petro said. "That is why I returned the U.S. military planes that were carrying Colombian migrants... In civilian planes, without being treated like criminals, we will receive our fellow citizens."

After Trump's earlier tariff threat, Petro said in a post on X that he had ordered the "foreign trade minister to raise import tariffs from the U.S. by 25%."

Colombia has traditionally been the U.S.'s top ally in Latin America. But their relationship has strained since Petro, a former guerrilla, became Colombia's first leftist president in 2022 and sought distance from the U.S.

Colombia accepted 475 deportation flights from the U.S. from 2020 to 2024, fifth behind Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and El Salvador, according to Witness at the Border, an advocacy group that tracks flight data. It accepted 124 deportation flights in 2024.

Colombia is also among the countries that last year began accepting U.S.-funded deportation flights from Panama.

The U.S. government didn't immediately respond to a request for comment from The Associated Press regarding aircraft and protocols used in deportations to Colombia.

"This is a clear message we are sending that countries have an obligation to accept repatriation flights," a senior administration official told AP. The official spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss issue publicly.

Rubio in a statement said Petro "canceled his authorization" for the flights when the aircraft were in the air.

Colombians emerged in recent years as a major presence on the U.S. border with Mexico, aided in part by a visa regime that allows them to easily fly to Mexico and avoid trekking through the treacherous Darien Gap. They ranked fourth with 127,604 arrests for illegal crossings during a 12-month period through September, behind Mexicans, Guatemalans and Venezuelans.

Mexico hasn't imposed visa restrictions on Colombians, as they have on Venezuelans, Ecuadoreans and Peruvians.

Petro's government in a statement later announced that the South American country's presidential aircraft had been made available to facilitate the return of migrants who were to arrive hours earlier on the U.S. military airplanes and guarantee them "dignified conditions."

As part of a flurry of actions to make good on Trump's campaign promises to crack down on illegal immigration, his government is using active-duty military to help secure the border and carry out deportations.

Two U.S. Air Force C-17 cargo planes carrying migrants removed from the U.S. touched down early Friday in Guatemala. That same day, Honduras received two deportation flights carrying a total of 193 people.

Colombia is the U.S.'s fourth-largest overseas supplier of crude oil, shipping about 209,000 barrels of oil per day last year, although booming domestic production has reduced the U.S.' dependence on foreign oil. The South American country is also the U.S.'s largest supplier of fresh cut flowers.

Trump's Palestinian refugee idea falls flat with Arab allies and confounds a Republican senator

By WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

DORAL, Fla. (AP) — President Donald Trump's push to have Egypt and Jordan take in large numbers of Palestinian refugees from besieged Gaza fell flat with those countries' governments and left a key congressional ally in Washington perplexed on Sunday.

Fighting that broke out in the territory after ruling Hamas attacked Israel in October 2023 is paused due to a fragile ceasefire, but much of Gaza's population has been left largely homeless by an Israeli military campaign. Trump told reporters Saturday aboard Air Force One that moving some 1.5 million people away from Gaza might mean that "we just clean out that whole thing."

Trump relayed what he told Jordan's King Abdullah when the two held a call earlier Saturday: "I said to him, 'I'd love for you to take on more because I'm looking at the whole Gaza Strip right now, and it's a mess.'"

He said he was making a similar appeal to Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi during a conversation they were having while Trump was at his Doral resort in Florida on Sunday. Trump said he would "like Egypt to take people and I'd like Jordan to take people."

Egypt and Jordan, along with the Palestinians, worry that Israel would never allow them to return to Gaza once they have left. Both Egypt and Jordan also have perpetually struggling economies and their governments, as well as those of other Arab states, fear massive destabilization of their own countries and the region from any such influx of refugees.

Jordan already is home to more than 2 million Palestinian refugees. Egypt has warned of the security implications of transferring large numbers of Palestinians to Egypt's Sinai Peninsula, bordering Gaza.

Trump suggested that resettling most of Gaza's population of 2.3 million could be temporary or long term.

Jordan's foreign minister, Ayman Safadi, said Sunday that his country's opposition to what Trump floated was "firm and unwavering." Some Israel officials had raised the idea early in the war.

Egypt's foreign minister issued a statement saying that the temporary or long-term transfer of Palestinians "risks expanding the conflict in the region."

Trump does have leverage to wield over Jordan, which is a debt-strapped, but strategically important, U.S. ally and is heavily dependent on foreign aid. The U.S. is historically the single-largest provider of that aid, including more than \$1.6 billion through the State Department in 2023.

Much of that comes as support for Jordan's security forces and direct budget support.

Jordan in return has been a vital regional partner to the U.S. in trying to help keep the region stable. Jordan hosts some 3,000 U.S. troops. Yet, on Friday, new Secretary of State Marco Rubio exempted security assistance to Israel and Egypt but not to Jordan, when he laid out the details of a freeze on foreign assistance that Trump ordered on his first day in office.

Meantime, in the United States, even Trump loyalists tried to make sense of his words.

"I really don't know," said Sen. Lindsey Graham, when asked on CNN's "State of the Union" about what Trump meant by the "clean out" remark. Graham, who is close to Trump, said the suggestion was not

feasible.

"The idea that all the Palestinians are going to leave and go somewhere else, I don't see that to be overly practical," said Graham, R-S.C. He said Trump should keep talking to Mideast leaders, including Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and officials in the United Arab Emirates.

"I don't know what he's talking about. But go talk to MBS, go talk to UAE, go talk to Egypt," Graham said. "What is their plan for the Palestinians? Do they want them all to leave?"

Trump, a staunch supporter of Israel, also announced Saturday that he had directed the U.S. to release a supply of 2,000-pound bombs to Israel. Former President Joe Biden had imposed a hold due to concerns about their effects on Gaza's civilian population.

Egypt and Jordan have made peace with Israel but support the creation of a Palestinian state in the occupied West Bank, Gaza and east Jerusalem, territories that Israel captured in the 1967 Mideast War. They fear that the permanent displacement of Gaza's population could make that impossible.

In making his case for such a massive population shift, Trump said Gaza is "literally a demolition site right now."

"I'd rather get involved with some of the Arab nations, and build housing in a different location," he said of people displaced in Gaza. "Where they can maybe live in peace for a change."

Hurts, Barkley each rush for 3 TDs to help Eagles reach Super Bowl with 55-23 win over Commanders

By DAN GELSTON AP Sports Writer

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — Saquon Barkley consulted with his family before the star running back decided — yes, it was time to leave his only professional home with the Giants and sign with the Eagles.

His youngest daughter, Jada, had one question for dad as he told her the family was headed to Philadelphia.

Does this mean dad will win now?

As Barkley lay on a football field littered with confetti and cradled his daughter against his chest, the answer was undeniable: You bet Barkley and the Eagles are going to win now — with a chance at the biggest one of the season still ahead with a date in the Super Bowl.

Barkley dashed 60 yards for a touchdown on Philadelphia's first play and finished with 118 yards and three scores, Jalen Hurts rushed for three TDs and the Eagles soared into the Super Bowl with a 55-23 win over the Washington Commanders on Sunday.

Hurts and the Eagles are in the Super Bowl for the second time in three seasons, and this time Barkley is along for the ride. They will play former Eagles coach Andy Reid's Kansas City Chiefs in the Super Bowl for the second time in three seasons.

"I came to Philly to be part of games like this," Barkley said. "And there's nothing better than a game where you can advance to the Super Bowl."

The 55 points are the most any team has scored in a conference championship game since the 1970 merger.

Hurts, wearing a brace on his left knee, also threw for 246 yards and a touchdown pass and the Eagles had a towel-waving crowd in a frenzy for the NFC championship game at Lincoln Financial Field.

"I don't want anybody else leading this team at quarterback other than him. He's a winner," coach Nick Sirianni said. "Again, he deals with so much criticism which just blows my mind because of the questions I have to answer. I don't look too much into that. The questions I have to answer it's just like, man, this guy wins. He's won his entire life."

A.J. Brown caught six passes for 96 yards and a touchdown — and faked tossing the NFC championship trophy off a platform — and an Eagles team at just 2-2 headed into the bye week scored a season high in points to usher the franchise into their fifth Super Bowl.

The Commanders played a role in getting the NFC title game to Philly with two straight road wins — including last week's stunner at No. 1 seed Detroit that set the stage for the second-seeded Eagles to host.

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Jayden Daniels threw for 255 yards with one touchdown, one interception and fell short in his bid to become the first rookie quarterback to lead his team to the Super Bowl. The Commanders were doomed by four turnovers, including a lost fumble by Austin Ekeler in the third quarter and the Commanders down 34-23.

"We believed that we belonged here," Daniels said. "It was just another game for me. That's how I treated it."

The Eagles won their only Super Bowl in the 2017 season and Nick Foles, the QB in that game against New England, was the honorary captain.

The Eagles cut to other stars from that game in attendance on the big screen and now — two years after Eagles lost to the Chiefs in the Super Bowl — the franchise has a chance at winning their second one.

Much as he has all season, Barkley led the way for the Eagles.

After the Commanders opened the game with an 18-play drive and a field goal that quieted a raucous crowd, Barkley whipped the fans that included actor Bradley Cooper into a frenzy on the Eagles' first offensive play from scrimmage.

Only the ninth running back to rush for 2,000 yards in a season, Barkley took the pitch from Hurts and cut left, spun around a pair of defenders and took off on the touchdown run.

The Eagles recovered a fumble on the next drive and Barkley added a 4-yard run — making him 2 for 2 on carries and touchdowns — for a 14-3 lead.

Including the playoffs, Barkley extended an NFL record Sunday with his seventh rushing touchdown of 60-plus yards in a season.

"When he does it early, it doesn't really matter who gets the party started, just for us to gain some momentum as an offense and gain a rhythm, (we) keep going," Hurts said.

Daniels, who led the Commanders to six consecutive victories, made his share of big plays that included a 36-yard touchdown pass to Terry McLaurin that pulled them to 14-12.

"I had a lot of confidence in what we would do and how we would play," Commanders coach Dan Quinn said.

Hurts, who hurt his knee when he was sacked last week by the Rams, had his best game yet in a post-season where the Eagles played all three games at home. He closed the first half with a tush push 1-yard touchdown and threw a 4-yard scoring pass to Brown to send the Eagles into halftime with a 27-15 lead.

"I guess he let me out of my straitjacket a little bit today," Hurts said of Sirianni's offense.

Hurts secured the Super Bowl berth with a tush push touchdown in the fourth quarter — after a humorous moment when an official said he'd award the Eagles a touchdown if Washington didn't stop jumping offside — and his ninth career postseason rushing score gave them a 41-23 lead.

Small amounts of green confetti started to fly from the upper deck at that point at the countdown was officially on for the Super Bowl.

The Commanders' desperate gasp at another late comeback win ended with a thud when Nolan Smith sacked Daniels on fourth down in the fourth quarter. Will Shipley gave Barkley a needed breather in the blowout and punched in a 2-yard touchdown run for a 55-23 lead. The "E-A-G-L-E-S! Eagles!" chants began in earnest and it's sure to ring loud in New Orleans.

Injuries

Eagles: Pro Bowl center Cam Jurgens was active and played through a back injury. ... G Landon Dickerson suffered a knee injury. ... RB Kenneth Gainwell was evaluated for a concussion suffered in the third quarter.

Up next

The Eagles head to New Orleans for a Feb. 9 matchup against the two-time defending champion Chiefs. Barkley turns 28 that day. Patrick Mahomes and the Chiefs beat the Eagles 38-35 two years ago in Super Bowl 57.

Southern California rain helps firefighters but creates risk of flooding and toxic ash runoff

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Rain fell on parts of Southern California on Sunday and the scattered showers were expected to continue overnight, boosting the risk of toxic ash runoff in areas scorched by Los Angeles-area wildfires.

Flood watches were in effect through 4 p.m. Monday for burn areas from recent fires that broke out around the Pacific Palisades neighborhood in Los Angeles, Altadena and Castaic Lake, said Joe Sirard, a meteorologist for the National Weather Service in Oxnard.

"All these fresh burns are very susceptible to rapid runoff," Sirard said, warning of even small amounts of rain in a few minutes' time. "What that means is we have a fairly high danger of mud and debris flows once we get above those thresholds."

A portion of the Pacific Coast Highway in Los Angeles County was closed as of Sunday afternoon due to mudflows in Topanga Canyon, the California Department of Transportation said. A flood advisory was issued for parts of Ventura County through Sunday evening, and forecasters expected snow to fall in the mountains.

One benefit that could come from the rain: It may help firefighters who are reining in multiple wildfires after weeks of windy and dry weather.

Los Angeles County crews spent much of the past week removing vegetation, shoring up slopes and reinforcing roads in devastated areas of the Palisades and Eaton fires, which reduced entire neighborhoods to rubble and ash after breaking out during powerful winds on Jan. 7.

The Palisades Fire, the largest of the blazes that destroyed thousands of homes and killed at least 11 people, reached 90% containment Sunday. The Eaton Fire, which broke out near Altadena and has killed at least 16 people, was 98% contained.

The Hughes Fire, which ignited last week north of Los Angeles and caused evacuation orders or warnings for more than 50,000 people, was 95% contained as of Sunday evening.

In San Diego County, firefighters made progress to contain the smaller Border 2 Fire as it burned through a remote area of the Otay Mountain Wilderness near the U.S.-Mexico border.

Most of the region was forecast to get about an inch (about 2.5 centimeters) of precipitation over several days, but the National Weather Service warned of a risk of localized cloudbursts causing mud and debris to flow down hills.

"So the problem would be if one of those showers happens to park itself over a burn area," weather service meteorologist Carol Smith said on social media. "That could be enough to create debris flows."

Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass issued an executive order last week to expedite cleanup efforts and mitigate the environmental impacts of fire-related pollutants. LA County supervisors also approved an emergency motion to install flood-control infrastructure and expedite and remove sediment in fire-impacted areas.

Fire crews filled sandbags for communities, while county workers installed barriers and cleared drainage pipes and basins.

Officials cautioned that ash in recent burn zones was a toxic mix of incinerated cars, electronics, batteries, building materials, paints, furniture and other household items. It contains pesticides, asbestos, plastics and lead. Residents were urged to wear protective gear while cleaning up.

Concerns about post-fire debris flows have been especially high since 2018, when the town of Montecito, up the coast from Los Angeles, was ravaged by mudslides after a downpour hit mountain slopes burned bare by a huge blaze. Hundreds of homes were damaged and 23 people died.

The rain was expected to snap a near-record streak of dry weather for Southern California. Much of the region has received less than 5% of the average rainfall for this point in the water year, which began Oct. 1, the Los Angeles Times reported Saturday.

Most of Southern California is currently in "extreme drought" or "severe drought," according to the U.S. Drought Monitor.

Top Trump administration officials in Chicago for start of immigration enforcement crackdown

By SOPHIA TAREEN and ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — Top Trump administration officials, including “border czar” Tom Homan and the acting deputy attorney general, visited Chicago on Sunday to witness the start of ramped-up immigration enforcement in the nation’s third-largest city as federal agencies touted arrests around the country.

Few details of the operation were immediately made public, including the number of arrests. But the sheer number of federal agencies involved showed President Donald Trump’s willingness to use federal law enforcement beyond the Department of Homeland Security to carry out his long-promised mass deportations.

Immigration and Customs Enforcement said it made 956 arrests nationwide on Sunday and 286 on Saturday. While some of the operations may not have been unusual, ICE averaged 311 daily arrests in the fiscal year that ended Sept. 30.

Acting Deputy Attorney General Emil Bove said he observed immigration agents from the DHS along with agents from the FBI, Drug Enforcement Administration and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. He didn’t offer details on the operation, which came days after DHS expanded immigration authority to agencies in the Department of Justice, including the DEA and ATF.

“We will support everyone at the federal, state, and local levels who joins this critical mission to take back our communities,” Bove said in a statement. “We will use all available tools to address obstruction and other unlawful impediments to our efforts to protect the homeland. Most importantly, we will not rest until the work is done.”

“Dr. Phil” McGraw, a daytime television psychologist, interviewed Homan and livestreamed the Chicago operation on his multiplatform TV network MERIT TV, and several other reporters were also invited to Sunday’s operation. The Associated Press plans to observe operations this week.

The DEA’s Chicago office posted pictures on X showing Bove and Homan with agents from ATF and Customs and Border Protection.

Since Trump took office, similar immigration enforcement operations have been publicized around the country, which U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement says are ongoing. Social media posts from other DEA and Homeland Security offices noted additional weekend operations in at least Arizona, California, Colorado, Georgia, Nebraska and Texas.

Operation targets members of Venezuelan gang in Colorado

The DEA posted pictures Sunday on social media of an operation at a location in the Denver area, where roughly 50 people were taken into custody.

Jonathan Pullen, special agent in charge for the DEA Rocky Mountain field division, said the Colorado operation targeted drug trafficking by Tren de Aragua, a Venezuelan gang. He said about 100 agents and officers, including from the DEA, ICE, ATF and Homeland Security Investigations, carried out a federal search warrant for drug trafficking around 5 a.m. Sunday at a location where Tren de Aragua members were having a party.

ICE detained nearly 50 people and transported them on a bus to one of its processing centers in nearby Aurora, Pullen said. As of Sunday afternoon, about 40 people remained in ICE custody, he said.

“They ran all of the information while they were on scene and they determined, ICE determined, that they were here illegally or they had some other violation in the immigration system, and they detained and arrested them,” Pullen said.

A “handful” of U.S. citizens were also at the site, Pullen added.

Agents seized drugs including cocaine, multiple handguns and cash, Pullen said, adding that the investigation started under the Biden administration and is continuing under the Trump administration. The DEA and ICE have been cooperating for decades and there was nothing new about the two agencies coordinating, he said.

A Trump executive order paves the way for criminal organizations such as Tren de Aragua to be named

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"foreign terrorist organizations." Armed members of the Venezuelan gang were caught on video entering an Aurora apartment complex unit last summer in footage that drew Trump's attention during the presidential campaign.

Chicago residents were on edge before Sunday's operation

ICE spokesman Jeff Carter said the agency "began conducting enhanced targeted operations" Sunday in Chicago but declined other details. Spokesmen for the FBI, ATF and the DEA confirmed their involvement but didn't give other information.

Chicago residents, especially in immigrant circles, have already been on edge for months in anticipation of large-scale arrests touted by the Trump administration. The atmosphere has been especially tense the past week as top Trump officials vowed to start immigration enforcement operations in Chicago the day after Trump's inauguration before walking back those statements.

Last week, Bove issued a memo ordering federal prosecutors to investigate state or local officials who they believe are interfering with the Trump administration's crackdown on immigration, in an apparent warning to the dozens of so-called sanctuary jurisdictions across America.

Chicago bars city police cooperation with immigration agents

Chicago has some of the strongest sanctuary protections, which bar cooperation between city police and immigration agents.

Immigrant rights groups have tried to prepare for the aggressive crackdown with campaigns for immigrants to know their rights in case of an arrest. City officials have done the same, publishing similar information at public bus and train stations.

On Friday, Chicago Public Schools officials mistakenly believed ICE agents had come to a city elementary school and put out statements to that effect before learning the agents were from the Secret Service. Word of immigration agents at a school — which have long been off limits to immigration agents until Trump ended the policy last week — drew swift criticism from community groups and Gov. JB Pritzker.

The Democratic governor, a frequent Trump critic, questioned the aggressive approach of the operations and the chilling effect for others, particularly for law-abiding immigrants who have been in the country for years.

"We need to get rid of the violent criminals. But we also need to protect people, at least the residents of Illinois and all across the nation, who are just doing what we hope that immigrants will do," Pritzker said Sunday on CNN's "State of the Union."

Immigrant rights groups seek injunction stopping certain types of raids

On Saturday, several Chicago-based immigrant rights groups filed a lawsuit against ICE, seeking an injunction prohibiting certain types of immigration raids in Chicago.

"Immigrant communities who have called Chicago their home for decades are scared," said Antonio Gutierrez from Organized Communities Against Deportation, one of the plaintiffs. "We refuse to live in fear and will fight any attempts to roll back the work we've done to keep families together."

Belarus strongman wins a 7th term in an election the opposition calls a farce

By YURAS KARMANAU Associated Press

The smiling face of President Alexander Lukashenko gazed out from campaign posters across Belarus on Sunday as the country held an orchestrated election virtually guaranteed to give the 70-year-old autocrat yet another term on top of his three decades in power.

"Needed!" the posters proclaim beneath a photo of Lukashenko, his hands clasped together. The phrase is what groups of voters responded in campaign videos after supposedly being asked if they wanted him to serve again.

And according to a nighttime statement by the Central Election Commission, the strongman leader won by a landslide, garnering nearly 87% percent of the vote.

But his opponents, many of whom are imprisoned or exiled abroad by his unrelenting crackdown on dis-

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sent and free speech, would disagree. They call the election a sham — much like the last one in 2020 that triggered months of protests that were unprecedented in the history of the country of 9 million people.

The crackdown saw more than 65,000 arrests, with thousands beaten, bringing condemnation and sanctions from the West.

His iron-fisted rule since 1994 — Lukashenko took office two years after the demise of the Soviet Union — earned him the nickname of “Europe’s Last Dictator,” relying on subsidies and political support from close ally Russia.

He let Moscow use his territory to invade Ukraine in 2022, and even hosts some of Russia’s tactical nuclear weapons, but he still campaigned with the slogan “Peace and security,” arguing he has saved Belarus from being drawn into war.

“It’s better to have a dictatorship like in Belarus than a democracy like Ukraine,” Lukashenko said in his characteristic bluntness.

Fearing a repeat of election unrest

His reliance on support from Russian President Vladimir Putin — himself in office for a quarter-century — helped him survive the 2020 protests.

Observers believe Lukashenko feared a repeat of those mass demonstrations amid economic troubles and the fighting in Ukraine, and so scheduled the vote in January, when few would want to fill the streets again, rather than in August. He faces only token opposition.

According to official results, announced in the early hours of Monday, Lukashenko won 86.82% of the vote - compared to his nearest rival’s 3.21%. According to the Central Election Commission, 3.60% of voters spoiled their ballots.

In 2020, the electoral body claimed Lukashenko had taken 80.10% of the vote.

“The trauma of the 2020 protests was so deep that Lukashenko this time decided not to take risks and opted for the most reliable option when balloting looks more like a special operation to retain power than an election,” Belarusian political analyst Valery Karbalevich said.

Lukashenko repeatedly declared that he wasn’t clinging to power and would “quietly and calmly hand it over to the new generation.”

His 20-year-old son, Nikolai, traveled the country, giving interviews, signing autographs and playing piano at campaign events. His father hasn’t mentioned his own health, even though he was seen having difficulty walking and occasionally spoke in a hoarse voice.

“The successor issue only becomes relevant when a leader prepares to step down. But Lukashenko isn’t going to leave,” Karbalevich said.

Top political opponents imprisoned or exiled

Leading opponents have fled abroad or were thrown in prison. The country holds nearly 1,300 political prisoners, including Nobel Peace Prize laureate Ales Bialiatski, founder of the Viasna Human Rights Center.

Since July, Lukashenko has pardoned more than 250 people. At the same time, authorities have sought to uproot dissent by arresting hundreds more in raids targeting relatives and friends of political prisoners.

Authorities detained 188 people last month alone, Viasna said. Activists and those who donated money to opposition groups have been summoned by police and forced to sign papers saying they were warned against participating in unsanctioned demonstrations, rights advocates said.

Lukashenko’s four challengers on the ballot are all loyal to him.

“I’m entering the race not against, but together with Lukashenko, and I’m ready to serve as his vanguard,” said Communist Party candidate Sergei Syrankov, who came in second place. He favors criminalizing LGBTQ+ activities and rebuilding monuments to Soviet leader Josef Stalin.

Candidate Alexander Khizhnyak, head of the Republican Party of Labor and Justice, led a voting precinct in Minsk in 2020 and vowed to prevent a “repeat of disturbances.”

Oleg Gaidukevich, head of the Liberal Democratic Party, supported Lukashenko in 2020 and urged fellow candidates to “make Lukashenko’s enemies nauseous.”

The fourth challenger, Hanna Kanapatskaya, managed 1.7% of the vote in 2020 and says she’s the “only

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democratic alternative to Lukashenko," promising to lobby for freeing political prisoners but warning supporters against "excessive initiative."

Opposition leader calls election 'a senseless farce'

Opposition leader-in-exile Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, who fled Belarus under government pressure after challenging the president in 2020, told The Associated Press that Sunday's election was "a senseless farce, a Lukashenko ritual."

Voters should cross off everyone on the ballot, she said, and world leaders shouldn't recognize the result from a country "where all independent media and opposition parties have been destroyed and prisons are filled by political prisoners."

"The repressions have become even more brutal as this vote without choice has approached, but Lukashenko acts as though hundreds of thousands of people are still standing outside his palace," she said.

The European Union rejected the election in Belarus on Sunday as illegitimate and threatened new sanctions.

"Today's sham election in Belarus has been neither free, nor fair," EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas and EU enlargement commissioner Marta Kos said in a joint statement.

Shortly after voting in Minsk on Sunday, accompanied by his white Pomeranian dog, Lukashenko told journalists that he did not seek recognition or approval from the EU.

"The main thing for me is that Belarusians recognize these elections and that they end peacefully, as they began," he said.

Speaking at an hourslong news conference, Lukashenko said that he didn't rule out running for the top job again in 2030.

Media freedom watchdog Reporters Without Borders filed a complaint against Lukashenko with the International Criminal Court over his crackdown on free speech that saw 397 journalists arrested since 2020. It said that 43 are in prison.

Fears of vote-rigging

According to the Central Election Commission, there are 6.8 million eligible voters. However, about 500,000 people have left Belarus and aren't able to vote.

After polls closed at 8 p.m. local time (1700 GMT), the commission said that turnout stood at a record 85.70%, but a dearth of independent monitoring made that figure near-impossible to verify.

At home, early voting that began Tuesday has created fertile ground for irregularities with ballot boxes unguarded until election day, the opposition said. A record 41.81% of voters cast ballots in five days of early voting. Meanwhile, Viasna activists reported internet issues across the country, and alleged Lukashenko's government was blocking access to VPN services commonly used to evade censorship.

Polling stations have removed the curtains covering ballot boxes, and voters are forbidden from photographing their ballots — a response to the opposition's call in 2020 for voters to take pictures to make it more difficult for authorities to rig the vote.

Police conducted large-scale drills before the election. An Interior Ministry video showed helmeted riot police beating their shields with truncheons as a way to prepare for protest dispersals. Another featured an officer arresting a man posing as a voter, twisting his arm next to a ballot box.

Increasing dependence on Russia

Lukashenko's support for the war in Ukraine has led to the rupture of Belarus' ties with the U.S. and the EU, ending his gamesmanship of using the West to try to win more subsidies from the Kremlin.

He spoke of Russian nuclear weapons deployed in Belarus as a guarantee of peace, and said he would pick Moscow as his first official visit if he's reelected.

"Until 2020, Lukashenko could maneuver and play Russia against the West, but now when Belarus' status is close to that of Russia's satellite, this North Korea-style election ties the Belarusian leader to the Kremlin even stronger, shortening the leash," said Artyom Shraybman, a Belarus expert with the Carnegie Russia and Eurasia Center.

After the election, Lukashenko could try to ease his total dependence on Russia by again seeking to reach out to the West, he predicted.

22 reported killed in Lebanon before agreement to extend deadline for Israeli forces to withdraw

By KAREEM CHEHAYEB and ABBY SEWELL Associated Press

MAYS AL-JABAL, Lebanon (AP) — Israeli forces in southern Lebanon on Sunday opened fire on protesters demanding their withdrawal in line with a ceasefire agreement, killing at least 22 and injuring 124, Lebanese health officials reported.

Hours later, the White House said Sunday that Israel and Lebanon had agreed to extend the deadline for Israeli troops to depart southern Lebanon until Feb. 18, after Israel requested more time to withdraw beyond the 60-day deadline stipulated in a ceasefire agreement that halted the Israel-Hezbollah war in late November.

Israel has said that it needs to stay longer because the Lebanese army has not deployed to all areas of southern Lebanon to ensure that Hezbollah does not reestablish its presence in the area. The Lebanese army has said it cannot deploy until Israeli forces withdraw.

The White House said in a statement that "the arrangement between Lebanon and Israel, monitored by the United States, will continue to be in effect until February 18, 2025." It added that the respective governments "will also begin negotiations for the return of Lebanese prisoners captured after October 7, 2023."

There was no immediate comment from the Israeli government, but Lebanese caretaker Prime Minister Najib Mikati confirmed the extension.

The announcement came hours after demonstrators, some of them carrying Hezbollah flags, attempted to enter several villages to protest Israel's failure to withdraw from southern Lebanon by the original Sunday deadline.

The dead included six women and a Lebanese army soldier, the Health Ministry said in a statement. People were reported wounded in nearly 20 villages in the border area.

The Israeli army blamed Hezbollah for stirring up Sunday's protests.

It said in a statement that its troops fired warning shots to "remove threats in a number of areas where suspects were identified approaching." It added that a number of suspects in proximity to Israeli troops were apprehended and were being questioned.

The development in Lebanon comes as Israel kept thousands of Palestinians from returning to their homes in northern Gaza on Sunday, accusing Hamas of violating a fragile ceasefire by changing the order of hostages it has released.

Lebanese President Joseph Aoun said in a statement addressing the people of southern Lebanon on Sunday that "Lebanon's sovereignty and territorial integrity are non-negotiable, and I am following up on this issue at the highest levels to ensure your rights and dignity."

He urged them to "exercise self-restraint and trust in the Lebanese Armed Forces." The Lebanese army, in a separate statement, said it was escorting civilians into some towns in the border area and called on residents to follow military instructions to ensure their safety.

Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri, whose Amal Movement party is allied with Hezbollah and who served as an interlocutor between the militant group and the U.S. during ceasefire negotiations, said that Sunday's bloodshed "is a clear and urgent call for the international community to act immediately and compel Israel to withdraw from occupied Lebanese territories."

An Arabic-language spokesperson for the Israeli military, Avichay Adraee, posted on X that Hezbollah had sent "rioters" and is "trying to heat up the situation to cover up its situation and status in Lebanon and the Arab world."

He called Sunday morning for residents of the border area not to attempt to return to their villages.

U.N. Special Coordinator for Lebanon Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert and the head of mission of the U.N. peacekeeping force known as UNIFIL, Lt. Gen. Aroldo Lázaro, called in a joint statement for both Israel and Lebanon to comply with their obligations under the ceasefire agreement.

"The fact is that the timelines envisaged in the November Understanding have not been met," the statement said. "As seen tragically this morning, conditions are not yet in place for the safe return of citizens

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to their villages along the Blue Line.”

UNIFIL said that further violence risks undermining the fragile security situation in the area and “prospects for stability ushered in by the cessation of hostilities and the formation of a government in Lebanon.”

It called for the complete withdrawal of Israeli troops, the removal of unauthorized weapons and assets south of the Litani River, the redeployment of the Lebanese army in all of south Lebanon and ensuring the safe and dignified return of displaced civilians on both sides of the Blue Line.

An AP team was stranded overnight at a UNIFIL base near Mays al-Jabal after the Israeli army erected roadblocks Saturday while they were joining a patrol by peacekeepers. The journalists reported hearing gunshots and booming sounds Sunday morning from the base, and peacekeepers said that dozens of protesters had gathered nearby.

In the village of Aita al Shaab, families wandered over flattened concrete structures looking for remnants of the homes they left behind. No Israeli forces were present.

“These are our houses,” said Hussein Bajouk, one of the returning residents. “However much they destroy, we will rebuild.”

Bajouk added that he is convinced that former Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah, who was killed in an Israeli strike in Beirut’s southern suburbs in September, is really still alive.

“I don’t know how much we’re going to wait, another month or two months... but the Sayyed will come out and speak,” he said using an honorific for Nasrallah.

On the other side of the border in the kibbutz of Manara, Orna Weinberg surveyed the devastation of the recent conflict on her neighbors and the Lebanese villages on the other side of the frontier. The sound of gunfire sporadically popped in the distance.

“Unfortunately, we have no way of defending our own children without harming their children,” Weinberg, 58, said. “It’s a tragedy to all sides.”

Some 112,000 Lebanese remain displaced, out of over 1 million who fled their homes during the war.

Trump wants Egypt and Jordan to take in Palestinians from Gaza. Here’s why the idea is rejected

By JOSEPH KRAUSS Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — President Donald Trump’s suggestion that Egypt and Jordan take in Palestinians from the war-ravaged Gaza Strip was met with a hard “no” Sunday from the two U.S. allies along with the Palestinians themselves, who fear Israel would never allow them to return.

Trump floated the idea on Saturday, saying he would urge the leaders of the two Arab countries to take in Gaza’s now largely homeless population, so that “we just clean out that whole thing.” He added that resettling most of Gaza’s population of 2.3 million could be temporary or long term.

“It’s literally a demolition site right now,” Trump said, referring to the vast destruction caused by Israel’s 15-month war with Hamas, now paused by a fragile ceasefire.

“I’d rather get involved with some of the Arab nations, and build housing in a different location, where they can maybe live in peace for a change,” Trump said.

Hamas and the Western-backed Palestinian Authority condemned the idea. Jordan’s foreign minister, Ayman Safadi, told journalists that his country’s rejection of the proposed transfer of Palestinians was “firm and unwavering.”

The temporary or long-term transfer of Palestinians “risks expanding the conflict in the region and undermines prospects of peace and coexistence among its people,” Egypt’s foreign ministry said in a statement.

There was no immediate comment from Israel.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s far-right governing partners have long advocated what they describe as the voluntary emigration of large numbers of Palestinians and the reestablishment of Jewish settlements in Gaza. Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, who is now a crucial member of Netanyahu’s governing coalition, called Trump’s proposal a “great idea.”

Human rights groups have already accused Israel of ethnic cleansing, which United Nations experts have

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defined as a policy designed by one ethnic or religious group to remove the civilian population of another group from certain areas "by violent and terror-inspiring means."

Omar Shakir, the Israel and Palestine director at Human Rights Watch, said Trump's proposal, if implemented, "would amount to an alarming escalation in the ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian people and exponentially increase their suffering."

A history of displacement

Before and during the 1948 war surrounding Israel's creation, some 700,000 Palestinians — a majority of the prewar population — fled or were driven from their homes in what is now Israel, an event the Palestinians commemorate as the Nakba — Arabic for catastrophe.

Israel refused to allow them to return because it would have resulted in a Palestinian majority within its borders. The refugees and their descendants now number around 6 million, with large communities in Gaza, where they make up the majority of the population, as well as the Israeli-occupied West Bank, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.

In the 1967 Mideast war, when Israel seized the West Bank and Gaza Strip, 300,000 more Palestinians fled, mostly into Jordan.

The decades-old refugee crisis has been central to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and was one of the thorniest issues in peace talks that last broke down in 2009. The Palestinians claim a right of return, while Israel says they should be absorbed by surrounding Arab countries.

Many Palestinians view the latest war in Gaza, in which entire neighborhoods have been shelled to oblivion and 90% of the population have been forced from their homes, as a new Nakba. They fear that if large numbers of Palestinians leave Gaza, then they too may never return.

Steadfastly remaining on one's land is central to Palestinian culture, and was on vivid display in Gaza on Sunday, when thousands of people tried to return to the most heavily destroyed part of the territory.

A red line for countries that made peace with Israel

Egypt and Jordan fiercely rejected the idea of accepting Gaza refugees early in the war, when it was floated by some Israeli officials.

Both countries have made peace with Israel but support the creation of a Palestinian state in the occupied West Bank, Gaza and east Jerusalem. They fear that the permanent displacement of Gaza's population could make that impossible.

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi has also warned of the security implications of transferring large numbers of Palestinians to Egypt's Sinai Peninsula, bordering Gaza.

Hamas and other militant groups are deeply rooted in Palestinian society and are likely to move with the refugees, which would mean that future wars would be fought on Egyptian soil. That could unravel the historic Camp David peace treaty, a cornerstone of regional stability.

"The peace which we have achieved would vanish from our hands," el-Sissi said in October 2023, after Hamas' attack on southern Israel triggered the war. "All for the sake of the idea of eliminating the Palestinian cause."

That's what happened in Lebanon in the 1970s, when Yasser Arafat's Palestine Liberation Organization, the leading militant group of its time, transformed the country's south into a launchpad for attacks on Israel. The refugee crisis and the PLO's actions helped push Lebanon into a 15-year civil war in 1975. Israel invaded twice and occupied southern Lebanon from 1982 until 2000.

Jordan, which clashed with the PLO and expelled it under similar circumstances in 1970, already hosts more than 2 million Palestinian refugees, the majority of whom have been granted citizenship.

Israeli ultranationalists have long suggested that Jordan be considered a Palestinian state so that Israel can keep the West Bank, which they view as the biblical heartland of the Jewish people. Jordan's monarchy has vehemently rejected that scenario.

Can Trump force Egypt and Jordan to accept refugees?

That depends on how serious Trump is about the idea and how far he is prepared to go.

U.S. tariffs — one of Trump's favorite economic tools — or outright sanctions could be devastating for Jordan and Egypt. The two countries receive billions of dollars in American aid each year, and Egypt is

already mired in an economic crisis.

But allowing an influx of refugees could also be destabilizing. Egypt says it is currently hosting some 9 million migrants, including refugees from Sudan's civil war. Jordan, with a population of less than 12 million, is hosting over 700,000 refugees, mainly from Syria.

U.S. pressure would also risk alienating key allies in the region with whom Trump has had good relations — not only el-Sissi and Jordan's King Abdullah II, but the leaders of Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey, all of whom support the Palestinian cause.

That would potentially complicate efforts to broker a historic agreement between Saudi Arabia and Israel to normalize relations, something Trump tried to do during his previous term and expects to complete in his current one.

Qatar says a deal is reached to release an Israeli hostage and allow Palestinians into northern Gaza

By WAFAA SHURAF, SAMY MAGDY and JOSEPH KRAUSS Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Qatar announced early Monday that an agreement has been reached to release an Israeli civilian hostage and allow Palestinians to return to northern Gaza, easing the first major crisis of the fragile ceasefire between Israel and Hamas.

The statement from Qatar, a mediator in ceasefire talks, said Hamas will hand over the civilian hostage, Arbel Yehoud, along with two other hostages before Friday. And on Monday, Israeli authorities will allow Palestinians to return to northern Gaza.

The office of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in a statement said the hostage release — which will include soldier Agam Berger — will take place on Thursday, and confirmed that Palestinians can move north on Monday. Israel's military said people can start crossing on foot at 7 a.m.

Under the ceasefire deal, Israel on Saturday was to begin allowing Palestinians to return to northern Gaza. But Israel put that on hold because of Yehoud, who Israel said should have been released on Saturday. Hamas accused Israel of violating the agreement.

The release of Yehoud and two others is in addition to the one already set for next Saturday, when three hostages should be released.

In addition, Hamas in a statement said the militant group had handed over a list of required information about all hostages to be released in the ceasefire's six-week first phase. The Israeli prime minister's office confirmed it had received it.

Thousands of Palestinians have gathered, waiting to move north through the Netzarim corridor bisecting Gaza, while local health officials on Sunday said Israeli forces fired on the crowd, killing two people and wounding nine.

U.S. President Donald Trump meanwhile suggested that most of Gaza's population be at least temporarily resettled elsewhere, including in Egypt and Jordan, to "just clean out" the war-ravaged enclave. Egypt, Jordan and the Palestinians rejected that, amid fears that Israel might never allow refugees to return.

Senior Hamas official Bassem Naim said Palestinians would never accept such a proposal, "even if seemingly well-intentioned under the guise of reconstruction." He said the Palestinians can rebuild Gaza "even better than before" if Israel lifts its blockade.

Dispute and shootings test fragile ceasefire

Israeli forces fired on the waiting crowds on three occasions overnight and into Sunday, killing two people and wounding nine, including a child, according to Al-Awda Hospital, which received the casualties.

Israel's military in a statement said it fired warning shots at "several gatherings of dozens of suspects who were advancing toward the troops and posed a threat to them."

Israel has pulled back from several areas of Gaza under the ceasefire, which came into effect last Sunday. The military has warned people to stay away from its forces, which still operate in a buffer zone inside Gaza along the border and in the Netzarim corridor.

Hamas freed four female Israeli soldiers on Saturday, and Israel released some 200 Palestinian prisoners,

most of whom were serving life sentences after being convicted of deadly attacks. But Israel said Yehoud should have been released ahead of the soldiers.

Hamas said it had told mediators — the United States, Egypt and Qatar — that Yehoud was alive and provided guarantees that she would be released.

Frustration grew among the Palestinians waiting to go north as some warmed around bonfires against the winter cold.

"We have been in agony for a year and a half," said Nadia Qasem.

Fadi al-Sinwar, also displaced from Gaza City, said "the fate of more than a million people is linked to one person," referring to Yehoud.

"See how valuable we are? We are worthless," he said.

Ending the war will be difficult

The ceasefire is aimed at ending the 15-month war triggered by Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023, attack and freeing hostages still held in Gaza in return for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners. Around 90 hostages are still in Gaza, and Israeli authorities believe at least a third, and up to half, have died.

Itzik Horn, the father of hostages Iair and Eitan Horn, called any resumption of fighting "a death sentence for the hostages" and criticized government ministers who want the war to go on.

The ceasefire's first phase runs until early March and includes the release of 33 hostages and nearly 2,000 Palestinian prisoners. The second — and far more difficult — phase, has yet to be negotiated. Hamas has said it will not release the remaining hostages without an end to the war, while Israel has threatened to resume its offensive until Hamas is destroyed.

Hamas-led militants killed some 1,200 people in the Oct. 7 attack, mostly civilians, and abducted around 250. More than 100 were freed during a weeklong ceasefire in November 2023. Israeli forces have rescued eight living hostages and recovered the remains of dozens more, at least three of them mistakenly killed by Israeli forces. Seven have been freed in the latest ceasefire.

Israel's military campaign has killed over 47,000 Palestinians, more than half of them women and children, according to Gaza's Health Ministry. It does not say how many of the dead were combatants. The Israeli military says it has killed over 17,000 fighters, without providing evidence.

Israeli bombardment and ground operations have flattened wide swaths of Gaza and displaced around 90% of its population of 2.3 million people. Many who have returned home since the ceasefire began have found only mounds of rubble.

Russia says its troops have captured a strategic town in eastern Ukraine

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russia on Sunday claimed its troops had captured a strategically important town in eastern Ukraine as part of a grinding campaign to weaken Kyiv's grip on the country's industrial heartland, while uncertainty over the continued flow of U.S. funding has reportedly halted the work of some Ukrainian NGOs, including those helping war veterans.

Russia's Defense Ministry announced the fall of Velyka Novosilka, which had around 5,000 residents before the war, following a months long battle. Its statement could not be independently verified, and Ukraine claimed its troops had only strategically withdrawn from certain areas.

But if confirmed, it would make Velyka Novosilka the first significant town to capitulate in 2025 under Moscow's onslaught in the eastern Donetsk region against Ukraine's weary and short-handed army. The war is set to reach its three-year milestone in February.

Ukrainian forces withdrew from certain parts of Velyka Novosilka to avoid encirclement, the 110th Separate Mechanized Brigade said in a statement on its official Telegram channel Sunday. The brigade is active in that patch of the frontline.

Analysts have long predicted that it's only a matter of time until Russian forces capture the settlement, which lies only 15 kilometers (9 miles) from the neighboring Dnipropetrovsk region.

The brigade said though they have approximate parity with Russian forces in terms of artillery and

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drones, the Russians have a huge advantage in manpower.

"Our units, using the weather conditions, skillfully withdrew from areas where there was a threat of encirclement. This does not mean that we have completely left the city, the fighting in Velyka Novosilka continues. All actions are aimed at minimizing our own losses and maximum damage to the enemy," the statement said.

The brigade said the withdrawal will make it topographically difficult for Russians to advance by making the river an obstacle for further advance.

"The enemy (...) will have no peace, any movement is cut off by shells and drones," the statement said.

Russia captured the Donetsk cities of Avdiivka and Vuhledar last year after long and grueling battles. Those cities were largely leveled by Russian artillery, glide bombs and drones before they fell.

Russian forces have also been trying for months to capture the key Donetsk strongholds of Pokrovsk and Chasiv Yar.

Elsewhere, Ukrainian NGOs catering to the needs of war veterans and their families have claimed a suspension of U.S. funding is forcing them to halt their work, days after newly sworn in U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio announced he would pause foreign aid grants for 90 days.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy later claimed that military aid to Ukraine would continue, but did not clarify whether humanitarian aid had been paused. Kyiv relies on the U.S. for 40% of its military needs.

According to news reports, Ukrainian NGOs receiving funding from Washington this weekend began receiving "stop work" orders, requiring them to pause all projects and related travel.

Veteran Hub, an NGO that provides legal and psychological support to war veterans and their families, was forced to halt operations of two of its three largest service units as a result, the organization said in its official Facebook page.

It said the suspension has led it to ask for public donations for the first time.

"Since 2018, we have refrained from public fundraising because we believe that donations are primarily needed for the military. Today, we are forced to publicly ask for support for the first time," the organization said.

With the Trump administration questioning the future of U.S. aid to Ukraine, stressing the need to quickly broker a peace deal, both Moscow and Kyiv are seeking battlefield successes to strengthen their negotiating positions ahead of any prospective talks.

For the past year, Russian forces have been waging an intense campaign to punch holes in Ukraine's defenses in the eastern Donetsk region. The sustained and costly offensive has compelled Kyiv to give up a series of towns, villages and hamlets.

As Hegseth takes charge at the Pentagon, here's what changes could be in store

By LOLITA C. BALDOR and TARA COPP Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — When Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth starts his first official day on Monday morning, he will face a daunting array of issues to tackle — from global conflicts and border security to administrative tasks.

At the top of his list is addressing President Donald Trump's priority to strengthen the U.S. military presence along the southern border and reviewing whether active-duty forces should be used for law enforcement — something done rarely.

Dozens of other issues will compete for his attention, including developing the Pentagon's massive budget, decisions about aid to Ukraine, support for the ceasefire in Gaza, troop deployments in the Middle East. Not to mention Trump directives to rid the federal government of diversity programs and personnel as well as moves to cut waste and remove any lingering Biden administration backers.

In a message to the force shortly after he was sworn in Saturday, Hegseth cited the challenges he sees ahead. Some are ones his predecessors also faced, such as reorienting the military from decades of a

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Mideast focus and better deterring China. Continued conflict in the region, including the October 2023 attack on Israel by Hamas, has made that shift impossible to execute.

Hegseth also told service members about other priorities, including strengthening the defense industrial base and getting the Pentagon to pass an audit, while ensuring that the U.S. remains "the strongest and most lethal force in the world."

He made an unannounced stop to the Pentagon on Saturday after the swearing-in ceremony at the Eisenhower Executive Office Building. There was no media coverage of his arrival. The Pentagon later released an official photo saying Hegseth was "ready to get to work on behalf of America's warriors."

Already, support staff have been meeting with military leaders, including Gen. CQ Brown Jr., chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. But Hegseth will get to experience what many describe as "drinking from a firehose" as he works to quickly get up to speed on what his 2.1 million service members and 780,000 civilians in the department are doing. Among them are tens of thousands serving overseas, including in combat zones.

Then there are the cultural issues that Hegseth railed on as a media personality that did not make it into Hegseth's message to the military. Many expect they will surface in the coming days.

Here are some key issues that Hegseth, who was confirmed in a tiebreaking vote Friday by Vice President JD Vance, will face right away:

Border deployments

In trying to meet Trump's demand of securing the border, Hegseth will face a barrage of information about what troops are available, what assistance the Border Patrol needs and where, as well as how to house, feed and transport the troops and border personnel and how to ensure none of this affects other national security requirements.

One of his first big decisions is whether he will recommend that active-duty troops deployed to the border get involved in law enforcement, a move that military leaders in recent years have pushed to avoid.

Active-duty forces are prohibited from doing law enforcement duties on U.S. soil under the Posse Comitatus Act. Trump has signed an executive order directing that his defense and homeland security secretaries report back within 90 days on whether they think he should invoke the 1807 law called the Insurrection Act, which allows troops to be used for civilian law enforcement on U.S. soil during emergencies.

During previous deployments, troops have been used for transportation, intelligence, logistics, wall-building and other support tasks, freeing up the Border Patrol to interact with migrants and conduct the law enforcement duties.

Transgender troops

In his first executive order, Trump again stripped protections for transgender troops that Democratic President Joe Biden had restored after Trump banned those members from serving during his first term in office.

The ban previously faced legal challenges, and lawyers who represented transgender forces last time are readying to take it up in the courts again. While Trump has not announced a ban, his decision to revoke protections is seen as a first step toward that.

It is unclear how many troops would be affected. The Defense Department has no exact figure on the number of transgender troops serving because not every transgender person is in the same state of medical transition and not every transgender person identifies as such in military paperwork.

The department has referred queries on how many transgender troops there are to the services; the services have said they have no way to track.

The budget and Ukraine

Hegseth will have to become familiar with the complicated construction of the Pentagon budget, which right now is about \$850 billion. Trump ran on a vow to make the U.S. military more lethal — something Hegseth has echoed. But they also have spoken extensively about cutting waste.

So Hegseth's imprint on the budget will be studied to determine how that's being done.

Woven into those discussions will be security assistance to Ukraine. The State Department has ordered a freeze on new funding for almost all U.S. foreign aid, and there was no indication of a waiver for military

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assistance for Ukraine like there was for Israel and Egypt.

The Biden administration provided Kyiv with more than \$66 billion in military aid and weapons during the war with Russia. It had left unspent about \$3.85 billion in congressionally authorized funding to send more weapons to Ukraine from existing U.S. stockpiles — a sum that is not affected by the foreign aid freeze. But it is now up to Hegseth and Trump to decide whether or not to spend it, and Trump hasn't said what he will do on Ukraine aid.

Diversity, equity and inclusion rollbacks

Hegseth will take over the Pentagon's push to implement Trump's executive order to get rid of DEI programs, coming as military officers fret over whether they will be fired for being "woke," as Hegseth has pledged to do.

During his Senate hearing, Hegseth said DEI policies "divide" troops and do not prioritize "meritocracy." In post Sunday on X, Hegseth said the department would comply immediately with Trump's order. "Those who do not comply will no longer work here," he wrote on secretary of defense stationery, as seen in a photo.

Officials said the Defense Department doesn't have any full-time workers assigned to DEI so they don't expect to have to fire people, as other federal agencies have.

But senior leaders have been poring over their websites to delete pages that mention diversity. Lacking clear guidance, staffers were pulling websites down in often inconsistent ways. The Army, for example, temporarily removed its sexual assault guidelines before they later came back online.

Hegseth also has railed against women in combat in his books and on podcasts and said standards were lowered for them, which is not true. He has since toned down his criticism after substantial pushback from lawmakers.

He most recently told senators that he's not aware that Trump wants to roll back the decision to allow women to serve in all combat jobs. Instead, he has talked about doing a review of standards.

Reproductive care

After the Supreme Court in 2022 ended constitutional protections for abortion that were set out in *Roe v. Wade*, then-Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin came out with a policy that would allow service members to take leave and be reimbursed for travel expenses to obtain reproductive care — including abortions and in-vitro fertilization — if the military base they were assigned to was in a state that had banned that care.

It's not clear whether Hegseth will seek to further revise that policy to remove the reimbursement provisions. It has been only scarcely used, and the department does not break down what the travel was for due to medical privacy laws.

Trump wants Jordan and Egypt to accept more Palestinian refugees and floats plan to 'clean out' Gaza

By WILL WEISSERT and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

ABOARD AIR FORCE ONE (AP) — President Donald Trump said he would like to see Jordan, Egypt and other Arab nations increase the number of Palestinian refugees they are accepting from the Gaza Strip, potentially moving out enough of the population to "just clean out" the war-torn area to create a virtual clean slate.

During a 20-minute question-and-answer session Saturday with reporters aboard Air Force One, Trump also said he has ended his predecessor's hold on sending 2,000-pound bombs to Israel. That lifts a pressure point meant to reduce civilian casualties during Israel's war with Hamas in Gaza, which is now halted by a tenuous ceasefire.

"We released them today," Trump said of the bombs. "They've been waiting for them for a long time." Asked why he lifted the ban on those bombs, Trump responded, "Because they bought them."

Trump has built his political career around being unapologetically pro-Israel. On his larger vision for Gaza, Trump said he had call earlier in the day with King Abdullah II of Jordan and would speak Sunday with President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi of Egypt.

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"I'd like Egypt to take people, and I'd like Jordan to take people," Trump said. "You're talking about probably a million and a half people, we just clean out that whole thing."

Trump said he complimented Jordan for having successfully accepted Palestinian refugees and that he told the king, "I'd love for you to take on more, cause I'm looking at the whole Gaza Strip right now, and it's a mess. It's a real mess."

Such a drastic displacement of people would openly contradict Palestinian identity and deep connection to Gaza. Still, Trump said the part of the world that encompasses Gaza, has "had many, many conflicts" over centuries. He said resettling "could be temporary or long term."

"Something has to happen," Trump said. "But it's literally a demolition site right now. Almost everything's demolished, and people are dying there." He added: "So, I'd rather get involved with some of the Arab nations, and build housing in a different location, where they can maybe live in peace for a change."

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, in a statement Sunday, thanked Trump for "keeping your promise to give Israel the tools it needs to defend itself." He did not mention Trump's suggestion on Palestinian refugees.

But Jordan's foreign minister, Ayman Safadi, told reporters that his country's rejection of the proposed transfer of Palestinians was "firm and unwavering."

Sen. Lindsay Graham, a Trump ally, was asked on CNN's "State of the Union" about what Trump meant with his remark about Palestinians. "You know, I really don't know," said Graham, R-S.C.

"The idea that all the Palestinians are going to leave and go somewhere else, I don't see that to be overly practical," Graham said. He added, though, that Trump should keep talking to Mideast leaders, including Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and officials in the United Arab Emirates and Egypt.

"I don't know what he's talking about. But go talk to MBS, go talk to UAE, go talk to Egypt," Graham said. "What is their plan for the Palestinians? Do they want them all to leave?"

Trump has offered nontraditional views on the future of Gaza in the past. He suggested after he was inaugurated on Monday that Gaza has "really got to be rebuilt in a different way."

The new president added then, "Gaza is interesting. It's a phenomenal location, on the sea. The best weather, you know, everything is good. It's like, some beautiful things could be done with it, but it's very interesting."

Resuming delivery of large bombs, meanwhile, is a break with then-President Joe Biden, who halted their delivery in May as part of an effort to keep Israel from launching an all-out assault on the southern Gaza city of Rafah. A month later, Israel did take control of the city, but after the vast majority of the 1 million civilians that had been living or sheltering in Rafah had fled.

"Civilians have been killed in Gaza as a consequence of those bombs and other ways in which they go after population centers," Biden told CNN in May when he held up the weapons. "I made it clear that if they go into Rafah ... I'm not supplying the weapons that have been used historically to deal with Rafah, to deal with the cities, that deal with that problem."

The Biden pause had also held up 1,700 500-pound bombs that had been packaged in the same shipment to Israel, but weeks later those bombs were delivered.

Trump's action comes as he has celebrated the first phase of a ceasefire between Hamas and Israel that has paused the fighting and seen the release of some hostages held by Hamas in Gaza in return for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners held by Israel.

Negotiations have yet to begin in earnest on the more difficult second phase of the deal that would eventually see the release of all hostages held by Hamas and an enduring halt to the fighting.

If the remaining hostages are not released, the Israeli government has threatened to resume its war against Hamas, which launched a massive assault against Israel on Oct. 7, 2023.

Alaskans say Trump can change the name of Denali but can't make people call it Mount McKinley

By MARK THIESSEN Associated Press

ANCHORAGE, Alaska (AP) — North America's tallest peak is a focal point of Jeff King's life.

The four-time winner of the 1,000-mile (1,609-kilometer) Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race operates his kennel and mushing tourism business just 8 miles (12.87 kilometers) from Denali National Park and Preserve's entrance, and the 20,310-foot (6,190-meter) mountain looms large as he trains his dogs on nearby trails.

King and many others who live in the mountain's shadow say most Alaskans will never stop calling the peak Denali, its Alaska Native name, despite President Donald Trump's executive order that the name revert to Mount McKinley -- an identifier inspired by President William McKinley, who was from Ohio and never set foot in Alaska.

For many who live near Denali, Trump's suggestion was peculiar.

"I don't know a single person that likes the idea, and we're pretty vocal about it," King said. "Denali respects the Indigenous people that have been here and around Denali for tens of thousands of years."

The mountain was named after McKinley when a prospector walked out of the Alaska wilderness in 1896, and the first news he heard was that the Republican had been nominated for president.

The name was quickly challenged, but maps had already been circulated with the mountain's name in place.

At the time, there was no recognition of the name Denali, or "the high one," bestowed on the mountain in interior Alaska by Athabascan tribal members, who have lived in the region for centuries.

The McKinley name stuck until 2015, when President Barack Obama's administration changed it to Denali as a symbolic gesture to Alaska Natives on the eve of his Alaska visit to highlight climate change.

Trump said he issued the order to "restore the name of a great president, William McKinley, to Mount McKinley, where it should be and where it belongs. President McKinley made our country very rich through tariffs and through talent."

The area lies solely in the United States, and Trump, as president, has the authority to change federal geographical names within the country.

In Ohio, Trump's move drew praise.

"I was really excited to see President Trump do that executive order," former U.S. Rep. Bob Gibbs, R-Ohio, told The Associated Press by telephone Thursday. McKinley "was a great president," Gibbs said. "It was the appropriate thing to do."

That's not how Alaskans see it.

Trump injected "a jarring note" into Alaska affairs, Steve Haycox, professor emeritus of history at the University of Alaska Anchorage, wrote in the Anchorage Daily News.

"Historical analysis confirms that William McKinley is the wrong public figure for Alaskans to commemorate," he said.

McKinley served as president from 1897 until he was assassinated in 1901. He was an imperial colonialist who oversaw the expansion of the American empire with the occupation of Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam, the Philippines and Hawaii, pushed by business interests and Christian missionaries wanting to convert Indigenous peoples, Haycox said.

"Trump's push to rescind the name Denali for the colonialist and white elitist McKinley is insulting to all Alaskans, especially to Alaska's Native people, and should be soundly rejected," Haycox said.

John Wayne Howe, who unsuccessfully ran for U.S. House last year representing the Alaskan Independence Party, which holds that Alaskans should be allowed to vote on becoming an independent nation, said he is tired of "people changing the names of stuff, period."

He also is not in favor of naming anything after people because "the persons that we consider absolutely perfect change over time, and it just leads to confusion."

Howe said he prefers Denali because he knows McKinley's history and it's the name most preferred by Alaskans.

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This past week, two resolutions were introduced in the Alaska Legislature to keep the name Denali.

Republican Gov. Mike Dunleavy, a Trump ally who praised another order by the president aimed at spurring resource development in the state, said he had not had a chance to speak with Trump about the issue but hoped to have a conversation next month in Washington about what Denali means to Alaskans, Americans and "our Native folks."

But Sarah Palin, a former Republican governor who is also a Trump supporter, said the McKinley name should never have been removed.

Palin's Secret Service code name was Denali in 2008 when she was GOP presidential nominee John McCain's running mate the year they lost to Obama and Joe Biden.

But in an interview with Al Arabiya News this past week, Palin said she didn't see why the mountain's name needed to be changed to begin with.

"It's always been Mount McKinley," said Palin, who didn't respond to a message from The Associated Press. "Nobody was begging for a change in name in that peak. Just put it back the way it was, more common sense."

Alaska's U.S. senators, Republicans Lisa Murkowski and Dan Sullivan, have supported the name Denali. U.S. Rep. Nick Begich, a first-term Republican, sidestepped the debate.

"I'm focused on job creation, opportunities in Alaska," Begich told Politico. "And what we call a mountain in Alaska is of little concern to me."

The Alaska Native Heritage Center, the statewide Indigenous cultural center in Anchorage, supports preserving Indigenous place names.

"Restoring and honoring them acknowledges the deep, millennia-old connection Indigenous peoples maintain with these lands and is a step toward respect and reconciliation," the center's president, Emily Edenshaw, said in a statement.

The quirky Alaska community of Talkeetna, about 140 miles (225.3 kilometers) south of the park and where a cat was once mayor, is the jumping off point for climbers before making the ascent of the peak. The historic community long rumored to be the inspiration for the 1990s television series "Northern Exposure" is also a popular tourist stop.

Joe McAneney of Talkeetna worked as a summer raft-guide for two years before moving to Alaska full time in 2012. He's now a pilot for an air taxi company, ferrying climbers and tourists to the mountain in a small airplane outfitted with skis to land at base camp, located on Kahiltna Glacier at 7,200 feet (2,194.6 meters) above sea level.

He knows once tourist season comes around, he will have to answer their questions of what he thinks about Trump changing the name. He knows what his answer will be.

"It's always been Denali, and it always will be," he said.

The executive order can instigate the name change, but compliance is another issue.

"The only people that are going to adhere to that are probably the people that would have been still calling it McKinley anyway," McAneney said

There is a long-standing Alaska trait of ignoring what the rest of the world thinks, and it's usually expressed like this: "We don't care how they do it Outside." Outside, which is always capitalized, refers to every place that is not Alaska.

"I think unofficially and officially in Alaska, it'll always be Denali," McAneney said. "I don't think the president can change that."

For King, the decorated Iditarod musher and fan favorite, Trump's decision had a whiff of arrogance.

"I'm surprised he doesn't want to name it Trump Mountain," he said.

South Korean prosecutors indict impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol over his martial law

By HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Korean prosecutors on Sunday indicted impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol on rebellion in connection with his short-lived imposition of martial law, a criminal charge that could incur the death penalty or life imprisonment if convicted.

This is the latest blow to Yoon, who was impeached and arrested over his Dec. 3 martial law decree that plunged the country into political turmoil, shook its financial markets and hurt its international image. Separate from criminal judicial proceedings, the Constitutional Court is now deliberating whether to formally dismiss Yoon as president or reinstate him.

Yoon has become South Korea's first president who has been indicted while in office. He will remain jailed and be escorted from a detention facility to a Seoul court for hearings in the trial, which is expected to last about six months.

Prosecutors said in a statement that they indicted Yoon on charges that he directed a rebellion when he imposed martial law. Investigative authorities have earlier alleged that Yoon's imposition of martial law amounted to rebellion, because he staged riots with the purpose of undermining the constitution.

Yoon's defense team lashed out at the indictment, calling it "the worst decision" by prosecutors who they say are trying to curry favor with political forces who want Yoon's exit.

"Today's indictment of the president will remain as a shame in the history of South Korean prosecutors that they cannot erase," Yoon's defense team said in a statement. "We stress once again that a president's declaration of martial law can never be rebellion."

Yoon has presidential immunity from most criminal prosecutions, but the privilege doesn't extend to allegations of rebellion or treason. By law in South Korea, the leader of a rebellion can face a life sentence or capital punishment.

Yoon, a conservative, has steadfastly denied any wrongdoing, describing his declaration of martial law as a legitimate act of governance meant to raise public awareness of the danger of the liberal-controlled National Assembly, which obstructed his agenda and impeached top officials. During his announcement of martial law, Yoon called the assembly "a den of criminals" and vowed to eliminate "shameless North Korea followers and anti-state forces."

After declaring martial law on Dec. 3, Yoon sent troops and police officers to the assembly, but enough lawmakers still managed to enter an assembly chamber to vote down Yoon's decree unanimously, forcing his Cabinet to lift it.

The martial law imposition, the first of its kind in South Korea in more than four decades, lasted only six hours. However, it evoked painful memories of past dictatorial rules in South Korea in the 1960s-80s when military-backed rulers used martial laws and emergency decrees to suppress opponents.

South Korea's constitution gives the president the power to declare martial law to keep order in wartime and other comparable emergency states, but many experts say the country wasn't under such conditions when Yoon declared martial law.

Yoon insists that he had no intentions of disrupting assembly work, including its floor vote on his decree and that deploying troops and police forces was meant to maintain order. But commanders of military units sent to the assembly have told assembly hearings or investigators that Yoon ordered them to drag out lawmakers to prevent them from overturning his decree.

Investigations on Yoon have intensified the country's already serious internal division, with rival protesters regularly staging rallies in downtown Seoul.

After a local court on Jan. 19 approved a formal arrest warrant to extend Yoon's detention, dozens of his supporters stormed the court building, destroying windows, doors and other property. They also attacked police officers with bricks, steel pipes and other objects. The violence left 17 police officers injured, and police said that they detained 46 protesters.

Yoon earlier resisted efforts by investigative authorities to question or detain him. He then was appre-

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hended on Jan. 15 in a huge law enforcement operation at his presidential compound.

Leading Yoon's investigation was the Corruption Investigation Office for High-Ranking Officials, but Yoon has refused to attend CIO questioning sessions since being detained, saying it has no legal authority to investigate rebellion allegations. The CIO has said that it can investigate Yoon's rebellion allegation because it's related to his purported abuse of power and other allegations.

The CIO handed over Yoon's case to the Seoul prosecutors' office on Friday and asked it to indict him on charges of rebellion, abuse of power and obstruction of the National Assembly. Prosecutors said they indicted Yoon only on rebellion, considering that Yoon had presidential immunity from other charges.

Yoon's defense minister, police chief and several other military commanders have already been arrested on alleged rebellion, abuse of power and other charges related to the martial law decree.

If the Constitutional Court rules to drive Yoon out of office, a national election to choose his successor must be held within two months. Recent public surveys show that governing and opposition party candidates are running neck-and-neck in a possible presidential by-election race.

Today in History: January 27, Auschwitz and Birkenau concentration camps liberated by Soviet troops

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Monday, Jan. 27, the 27th day of 2025. There are 338 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Jan. 27, 1945, during World War II, Soviet troops liberated the Nazi concentration camps Auschwitz and Birkenau in Poland.

Also on this date:

In 1756, composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was born in Salzburg, Austria.

In 1880, Thomas Edison received a patent for his electric incandescent lamp.

In 1967, astronauts Virgil I. "Gus" Grissom, Edward H. White and Roger B. Chaffee died in a flash fire during a test aboard their Apollo spacecraft at Cape Canaveral, Florida.

In 1973, the Vietnam peace accords were signed in Paris, ending direct U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War.

In 1984, singer Michael Jackson suffered serious burns to his scalp when pyrotechnics set his hair on fire during the filming of a Pepsi-Cola TV commercial at the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles.

In 2013, a fire started by pyrotechnics in the Kiss nightclub in Santa Maria, Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, killed 242 people and injured over 600.

In 2017, President Donald Trump barred all refugees from entering the United States for four months, declaring the ban necessary to prevent "radical Islamic terrorists" from entering the country.

Today's birthdays: Actor James Cromwell is 85. Rock musician Nick Mason (Pink Floyd) is 81. Ballet star Mikhail Baryshnikov is 77. U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts is 70. Political and sports commentator Keith Olbermann is 66. Actor Bridget Fonda is 61. Actor Alan Cumming is 60. Country singer Tracy Lawrence is 57. Rock singer Mike Patton is 57. Rapper Tricky is 57. Actor-comedian Patton Oswalt is 56.