

# Groton Daily Independent

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## Friday, Nov. 28

No senior meal.  
NO SCHOOL - Thanksgiving break

## Sunday, Nov. 30

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship with communion and baptism, 9 a.m.; Sunday School, 10:15 a.m.; Choir 6 p.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Worship at St. John's, 9 a.m., and Zion, 11 a.m.; Sunday School, 9:45 a.m.

United Methodist: Worship at Conde, 8:15 a.m.; at Groton, 9:30 a.m. (3rd graders receiving Bibles); at Britton, 11:15 a.m.; Coffee Hour, 10:30 a.m.; No Sunday School.

Catholic: SEAS Confession, 7:45-8:15 a.m.; SEAS Mass, 8:30 a.m.; Turton Confession, 10:30-10:45 a.m.; Turton Mass, 11 a.m.

First Presbyterian Church: Bible Study, 9:30 a.m.; Worship, 11 a.m.

Groton CM&A: Sunday School, 9:15 a.m.; worship, 10:30 a.m.

Snow Queen Contest, 4 p.m.

4th grade GBB practice, 2 p.m.

1st grade GBB practice, 3:30 p.m.

2nd grade GBB practice, 4 p.m.

Dance Team practice, 5 p.m.



## Mon., Dec. 1

Senior Menu: Hot beef combination, mashed potatoes, carrots, fruit

School Breakfast: Eggs.

School Lunch: Hot dogs, chips.

4th Grade GBB, 4 p.m.

JV/MS Boys BB at Faulkton Invite, 5:30 p.m.

5th Grade BBB, 6 p.m.

MS GBB hosts Clark/Willow Lake, 6:15 p.m.

Wrestling Kick-off Fundraiser, 6:30 p.m.

**Groton Daily Independent**  
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## Global News Roundup

### United States News

Across much of the country, Thanksgiving travel surged to near-record levels as airlines reported packed flights and major airports moved into peak-holiday operations. The TSA screened more than 2.7 million passengers Thursday, one of the highest totals of the year, though weather-related delays remained limited. In the Midwest and Great Lakes, lingering light snow created pockets of slick road conditions, but no widespread disruptions were reported.

In Washington, officials confirmed that federal health agencies are monitoring a slight seasonal rise in respiratory illnesses, including RSV and influenza. Hospitals in some states, particularly in the upper Midwest and Northeast, have urged families to take precautions as holiday gatherings continue. The CDC emphasized that overall case levels remain manageable and far below last year's peaks.

Meanwhile, in the South, emergency crews in parts of Louisiana and Mississippi responded to flooding concerns after heavy rains pushed bayous and smaller rivers above their banks. Local officials said the water levels were expected to recede by the weekend.

### Politics & World Affairs

Diplomatic attention turned sharply toward the Middle East on Friday after U.S. and European leaders urged restraint following another series of cross-border exchanges between Israel and militant groups in southern Lebanon. American officials said the White House remains in "hour-by-hour contact" with Israeli and regional leaders to prevent a wider confrontation. The latest violence comes as humanitarian agencies continue demanding expanded aid corridors into Gaza, where the United Nations reported intensified shortages of fuel, medical supplies, and clean water.

In Europe, tensions flared between Poland and Belarus after Warsaw accused Belarusian aircraft of briefly entering Polish airspace, a claim Belarus denies. Poland's defense ministry placed several units on heightened readiness, though analysts characterized the incident as part of an ongoing pattern of border-area brinkmanship rather than the start of a more serious conflict.

The war in Ukraine remained locked in positional fighting around the eastern cities of Avdiivka and Bakhmut. Ukrainian commanders said Russian forces attempted several small assaults but gained little ground. Western intelligence agencies reported that both sides are trying to reposition drones and artillery ahead of winter.

On the Pacific front, the Philippines lodged a new diplomatic protest against China, accusing Chinese vessels of using water cannons to block resupply missions to a Philippine-held outpost in the South China Sea. Washington reiterated its defense commitments to Manila, saying the U.S.-Philippine mutual defense treaty applies to attacks against Philippine vessels in the region.

### Business & Markets

U.S. stock markets closed higher in a shortened post-holiday session Friday as investors reacted to new data showing consumer spending remained resilient in early November. Retail analysts project a strong turnout for Black Friday and Cyber Monday, with discount-heavy categories such as electronics and appliances expected to lead early sales.

Treasury yields dipped slightly as new inflation readings continued to show gradual cooling. Economists noted that the Federal Reserve is unlikely to raise interest rates again this year, though policymakers are keeping options open depending on wage and housing trends. Oil prices also steadied after several days of volatility tied to reports that OPEC+ members were considering deeper output cuts. Energy markets, analysts said, remain highly reactive to shifting production signals and ongoing Middle East instability.

In corporate news, Boeing announced that it had completed initial testing on a redesigned 737 MAX component aimed at addressing recent quality-control concerns. The company said it remains on schedule for deliveries promised to major airlines by mid-2026. Meanwhile, Amazon reported strong early holiday traffic and confirmed it had hired tens of thousands of seasonal workers nationwide.

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## Science & Technology

NASA scientists said Friday that the James Webb Space Telescope captured new high-resolution images of an expanding stellar nursery nearly 1,300 light-years away, offering unprecedented detail of early star formation. Researchers said the findings could improve models of how gaseous clouds eventually consolidate into planetary systems.

Closer to home, tech companies continued grappling with new AI-related policy proposals. A bipartisan group of U.S. senators outlined a framework recommending federal certification requirements for advanced AI models and stricter data-security standards. Industry groups praised the focus on safety but warned that over-regulation could slow innovation. Several states, including California, are considering their own AI governance rules, raising the possibility of future regulatory overlap.

In health science, researchers published new findings suggesting an experimental Alzheimer's treatment may slow cognitive decline modestly when used early, though the therapy still requires larger trials. The study raised optimism but also concerns about cost and accessibility if the treatment ultimately receives approval.

## Sports

NFL teams wrapped up their Thanksgiving slate with a trio of nationally televised games. The Detroit Lions' late rally fell short in a high-scoring loss to Green Bay, while Dallas extended its home winning streak with a dominant performance over Washington. In the nightcap, San Francisco's balanced offense overwhelmed Seattle to tighten the NFC West race.

In the NBA, several Western Conference teams continued to jockey for tournament seeding in the league's in-season competition, now entering the final weekend of group play. LeBron James and the Lakers picked up a needed win, while Minnesota maintained its strong start behind another standout outing from Anthony Edwards.

In college sports, early-season basketball tournaments produced several upsets, with unranked programs knocking off Top-25 opponents in neutral-site holiday events.

## Entertainment & Culture

Hollywood's awards season accelerated this week as studios began positioning their year-end prestige films. Bradley Cooper and Carey Mulligan continued generating momentum with renewed attention on Maestro, which expanded into more theaters ahead of its wider rollout. Meanwhile, Emma Stone drew strong early reviews for her performance in Poor Things, prompting speculation that she could emerge as a frontrunner in this year's Best Actress race.

In music news, Morgan Wallen announced new 2026 dates to extend his ongoing stadium tour, adding cities after record-setting ticket demand earlier in the year. At the same time, Taylor Swift's The Eras Tour film remained a holiday-weekend draw, continuing to climb among the highest-grossing concert films of all time.

Broadway also saw an uptick in holiday tourism, with shows such as Hugh Jackman's revival of The Music Man and Lea Michele's run in Funny Girl fueling strong box office numbers heading into December. Producers said the holiday week typically brings bigger audiences, and early estimates suggest a healthy rebound from last month's slower pace.

On the streaming front, Netflix reported major viewership for Chris Hemsworth's new documentary Limitless, while Disney+ saw a surge in families watching Gael García Bernal in Cassandro and rewatching holiday classics featuring Tim Allen, whose The Santa Clauses continues trending in the Top 10.

## ...WINTER WEATHER ADVISORY REMAINS IN EFFECT FROM NOON TODAY TO NOON CST SATURDAY...

- \* WHAT...Snow expected. Total snow accumulations between 3 and 5 inches.
- \* WHERE...McPherson and Brown Counties.
- \* WHEN...From noon today to noon CST Saturday.
- \* IMPACTS...Plan on slippery road conditions. The hazardous conditions could impact the Friday evening commute.

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## Fall Athletic Awards



### Cross Country Awards

**Riley Shellenberger – Most Improved, State Qualifier; Ryelle Gilbert – Most Valuable Runner, Conference Place Winner – 3rd place, State Place Winner - 22nd place ; Kella Tracy – Leader of the Pack, Conference Place Winner – 15th place, State Qualifier; Ashlynn Warrington – Rookie of the Year; and Jayden Schwan – Leader of the Pack, Heart Award, Conference Place Winner – 2nd place, State Qualifier.** (Photo Courtesy Kristi Peterson)



### Volleyball Awards

**Jerica Locke – Defensive Player of the Year, Academic All-State, NEC All Conference Team, NEC Defensive Player of the Year, Class A Honorable Mention All-State; Tevan Hanson – Rookie of the Year; Taryn Traphagen – Hitting Efficiency Award; Jaedyn Penning – ACE Award, Academic All-State; Rylee Dunker – Offensive Player of the Year, Academic All-State, NEC All Conference Team; Not Pictured: Talli Wright – Spirit of the Tiger, Academic All-State and Chesney Weber – MVP, NEC All Conference Team.** (Photo Courtesy Kristi Peterson)

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## Football Awards

**Ben Hoelt - 11B Academic All-State; Ryder Johnson – NEC All-Conference Team, 11B Academic All-State; Tucker Hardy – Defensive MVP, NEC All-Conference Team; Logan Warrington – Most Improved Offensive Player, NEC All-Conference Team Honorable Mention, 11B Academic All-State; Lincoln Krause – Most Improved Defensive Player; Karter Moody – MVP Lineman, NEC All-Conference Team Honorable Mention, 11B Academic All-State; and Keegen Tracy – Offensive MVP, NEC All-Conference Team, 11B Academic All-State, 11B All- State Honorable Mention.** (Photo Courtesy Kristi Peterson)



## Boys Golf Awards

**Jarrett Erdmann – NEC Conference Place Winner – 10th Place; Nolan Rose – Most Improved; Jace Johnson – Top Medalist, NEC Conference Place Winner – 5th Place, State Qualifier; Not Pictured: Liam Johnson – NEC Conference Place Winner – 12th Place.** (Photo Courtesy Kristi Peterson)



## Cheerleading Award

**Breslyn Jeschke – Friday Night Lights Spirit Award.** (Photo Courtesy Kristi Peterson)

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## Girls Soccer Awards

**Carly Gilbert – Academic All-State; Ashlynn Warrington – Most Improved; Jerica Locke – Gamechanger, First Team All-State, Academic All-State; Mia Crank – Best Teammate, First Team All-State, Academic All-State; Taryn Traphagen – Best Defensive Player; McKenna Tietz – Best Offensive Player, Honorable Mention All-State; and Jaedyn Penning – Tiger MVP, First Team All-State, Academic All-State.** (Photo Courtesy Kristi Peterson)



## Boys Soccer Awards

**Jace Hofer – Rising Star; JJ Muller – Best Defensive Player; Karsten Flihs – Leadership/ Team Spirit Award, Academic All-State; Drake Peterson – Unsung Hero; Karson Zak – Best Offensive Player, Most Valuable Player, First Team All-State; Gage Sippel – Academic All-State, First Team All-State and Becker Bosma – Academic All-State.** (Photo Courtesy Kristi Peterson)



## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### One of the National Guard members shot in attack in D.C. has died, Trump says

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY

WASHINGTON — West Virginia National Guard member U.S. Army Spc. Sarah Beckstrom, 20, one of the victims of a shooting near the White House, died Thursday, President Donald Trump said.

"She's just passed away," Trump said. "She's no longer with us. She's looking down at us."

Trump, who was speaking with members of the military via video, said she was "magnificent in every way."

A White House official said Trump spoke with Beckstrom's parents on Thursday night.

The other victim, U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Andrew Wolfe, 24, underwent surgery and remained hospitalized in Washington, D.C., in critical condition.

"The other young man is fighting for his life," Trump said.

Earlier Thursday, federal law enforcement officials examined evidence collected from the home of the alleged lone gunman, who drove to the nation's capital from Washington state to target the troops, officials said.

They did not disclose a motive for the attack in a busy area of offices and retail just blocks from the White House, the day before Thanksgiving.

Beckstrom and Wolfe underwent surgery and were hospitalized after the suspect allegedly shot them in broad daylight Wednesday, according to Jeanine Pirro, U.S. attorney for the District of Columbia.

A military press release said Beckstrom, of Summersville, was assigned to the 863rd Military Police Company, 111th Engineer Brigade. Wolfe, of Martinsburg, was assigned to the Force Support Squadron, 167th Airlift Wing.

Wolfe entered service on Feb. 5, 2019 and had been on orders in the district since the beginning of the mission in August. Beckstrom entered service on June 26, 2023 and also had been in the district since August.

"Their families are with them now. They are critical. I think you understand the meaning of that," Pirro told reporters at a Thursday morning briefing.

The suspect, Rahmanullah Lakanwal, a 29-year-old Afghan refugee who worked with U.S. forces in Afghanistan, is currently facing three counts of assault with intent to kill while armed and possession of a



**FBI Director Kash Patel, left, at a press conference on Nov. 27, 2025, looks at photos of the two West Virginia National Guard soldiers shot in Washington, D.C., the previous day. They were identified as Andrew Wolfe, 24, and Sarah Beckstrom, 20.** (Photo by Andrew Leyden/Getty Images)

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firearm during a crime of violence, Pirro said, adding the charges are "appropriate" for now.

"It's not clear, you know, how this is going to end up. But let me be perfectly clear about how it will end up in this office if one of them is to pass. And God forbid that happens, this is a murder one (charge). Period. End of the story," Pirro said.

U.S. Attorney General Pam Bondi told Fox News Thursday morning the Department of Justice will seek the death penalty if either of the guard members succumbs to their injuries.

Bondi said Beckstrom had volunteered to work over the holiday.

Brig. Gen. Leland Blanchard, commanding general of the National Guard in the District of Columbia, told reporters, "Regardless of the outcome, we know that their lives, their family life, their families' lives are all changed forever because one person decided to do this horrific and evil thing."

Pirro said the suspect "drove his vehicle across the country from the state of Washington with the intended target of coming to our nation's capital."

Trump mobilized 800 National Guard members to the district in August, on the grounds of a "crime emergency," despite a nearly 30-year low in violent crime in the city.

Some of the guard troops were instructed they would be carrying service weapons while deployed in the district, according to an Aug. 17 report in the Wall Street Journal.

Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth told reporters Wednesday the administration will send an additional 500 National Guard troops to the district.

## **Fellow guard troops responded 'immediately'**

Shortly after 2 p.m. Eastern on Wednesday, at 17th and I streets NW, near the Farragut West Metro station, Lakanwal allegedly shot the first guard member, then "leans over and strikes the guardsman again," Pirro said, not identifying which member was initially struck.

Lakanwal then struck the second guard member "several times," she said.

"Fellow guardsmen who were there responded immediately, engaging the suspect, neutralizing the threat, and subduing him at the scene. He was transported to a local hospital, where he remains as we speak, under heavy guard. Thanks to the swift and coordinated response of the National Guard and the Metropolitan Police Department, no additional victims were harmed, and the scene was secured within minutes," Pirro said.

Kash Patel, director of the FBI, said the agency searched Lakanwal's home last night in Bellingham, Washington, seizing multiple electronic devices and interviewing family members. Patel said the suspect is believed to have five children.

The gun Lakanwal used in the attack, a .357 Smith & Wesson revolver, is being analyzed at the FBI lab in Quantico, Virginia, Patel said.

Patel said the FBI is also interviewing interested parties in San Diego but would not provide further details on the "ongoing investigation."

## **A 'relationship' with 'partner forces' in Afghanistan**

Patel told reporters that he spoke to CIA Director John Ratcliffe Wednesday night and obtained "confirmation now that the subject had a relationship in Afghanistan with partner forces."

"We are fully investigating that aspect of his background as well, to include any known associates that are either overseas or here in the United States of America," Patel said.

Patel would not answer reporters' questions about whether and when Lakanwal had been granted asylum in the U.S.

The Department of Homeland Security did not immediately respond to States Newsroom's request for a timeline.

Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem issued a statement Wednesday night confirming Lakanwal arrived in the U.S. on Sept. 8, 2021, as part of the Operation Allies Welcome.

The program was established after the U.S. military's withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan "to support

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vulnerable Afghans, including those who worked alongside us in Afghanistan for the past two decades, as they safely resettle in the United States," according to Department of Homeland archived information.

Noem did not provide any further information on Lakanwal's asylum process.

The administration announced Wednesday night it will immediately halt any immigration requests from Afghan nationals.

Lakanwal had worked with a CIA-backed military unit in the southern Afghan province of Kandahar, Fox News reported Wednesday night. The CIA did not immediately respond to States Newsroom's request for comment.

## Guard deployment in the courts

Last week, a District of Columbia federal judge found the Trump administration's deployment of the National Guard in the city illegal. However, Judge Jia Cobb paused her order for three weeks to give the Trump administration time to remove the guard members along with appealing her ruling.

More than 2,000 members of the guard have remained in the district, and are expected to stay until the end of February, according to Cobb's order.

The Trump administration on Wednesday asked the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit in an emergency motion to intervene.

*Ashley Murray covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include domestic policy and appropriations.*

## Frosty is Back!!!

Please check the Groton Daily Independent for daily clues as to who the Groton Area Mystery Frosty is. The unveiling of Frosty will take place at the Groton Area Snow Queen Contest on Sunday, November 30th, at 4:00 pm.

## 2025 Frosty Clues

24. Once had a fish named "more Sam" who was named after the original "Sam"

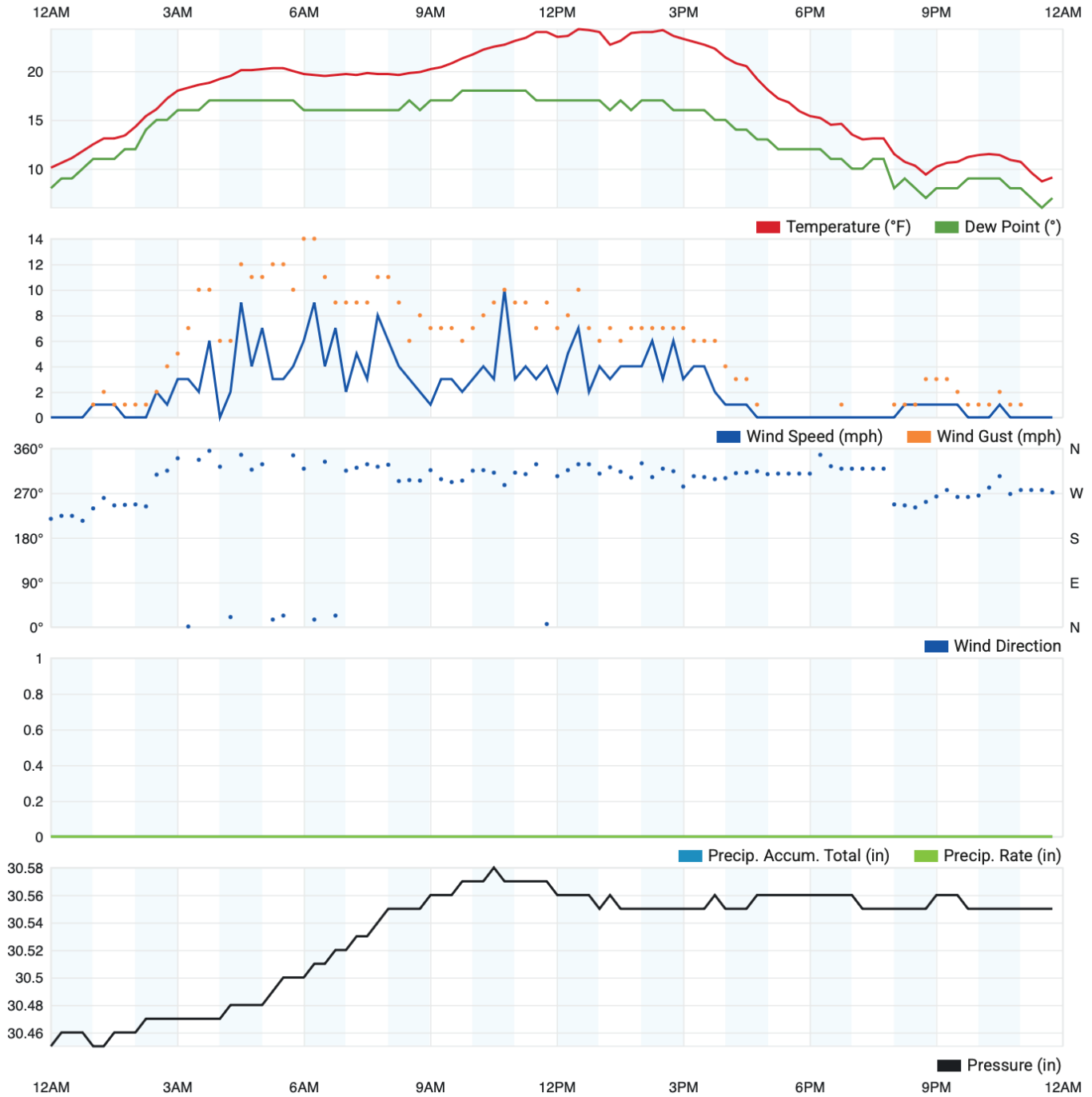


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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

November 27, 2025



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Winter Weather Advisory				
Today	Tonight	Saturday	Saturday Night	Sunday
				
20% → 80%	90%	80% → 20%		
<b>High: 21 °F</b>	<b>Low: 14 °F</b>	<b>High: 19 °F</b>	<b>Low: -1 °F</b>	<b>High: 10 °F</b>
Slight Chance Snow and Patchy Fog then Snow	Snow	Snow then Slight Chance Snow	Mostly Cloudy	Cold



## Winter Storm Today Through Saturday

November 28, 2025  
3:46 AM

Be Weather Aware Especially if you are Traveling Today and Saturday!

### Key Messages

- A band of snow will move into central SD this morning and shift eastward through the day
- **The bulk of the snowfall is expected this afternoon through Saturday morning**
- Snow departs Saturday afternoon

### Snow/Winds

- Light fluffy snow
- Wind gusts 20 to 35 mph
- Less blowing snow compared to last Tuesday's storm. However, drifting snow across roads is still possible

### NEW What Has Changed

- Winter Weather Advisory issued for Jones and Big Stone Counties, snow totals increased slightly

### Next Scheduled Update

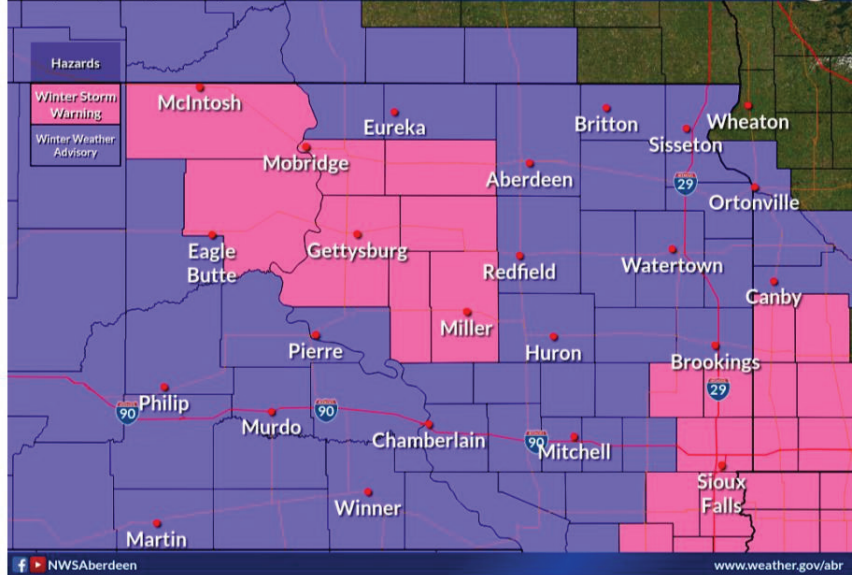
- Friday afternoon



### Winter Weather Headlines

Midday Today Through Saturday

Weather Forecast Office  
Aberdeen, SD  
Issued Nov 28, 2025 3:03 AM CST



NWSAberdeen

www.weather.gov/abr

National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

A band of snow will move into central SD this morning and shift eastward through the day. The bulk of the snowfall is expected this afternoon through Saturday morning, departing Saturday afternoon/evening. Jones and Big Stone counties have been added to the Winter Weather Advisory. If traveling, please keep up to date on the latest weather and road conditions.

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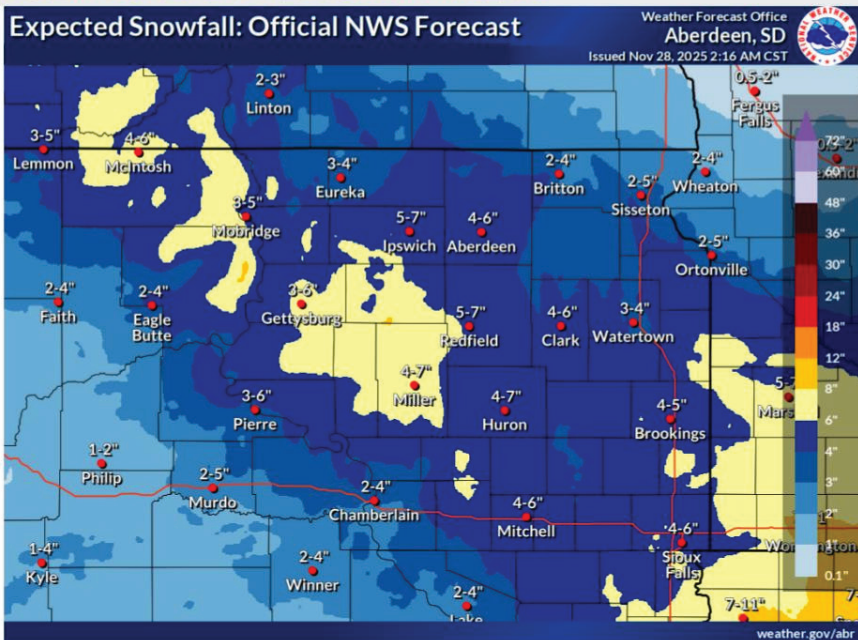


## Snowfall Amounts Today Through Saturday

November 28, 2025  
3:52 AM

A Storm System will deliver snow to South Dakota and west central Minnesota

- A band of snow will move into central SD this morning and shift eastward through the day. Snow continues Saturday gradually tapering off and ending by Saturday evening.
- **The bulk of the snowfall is expected this afternoon into Saturday morning.**
  - ◆ Highest snowfall amounts of 4 to 7 inches, with locally heavier snowfall amounts, will extend along and near a line from McIntosh southeast to Huron
- **There is some uncertainty in the location of highest snowfall amounts. Any shift in the track north or south will shift where the most snow will fall.**
- Be sure to stay up to date on the latest forecast, especially if you are traveling.



National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

The bulk of the snowfall is expected this afternoon into Saturday morning. Highest snowfall amounts of 4 to 7 inches, with locally heavier amounts, will extend along and near a line from McIntosh southeast to Huron.



## Wind Forecast and Timing

November 28, 2025  
3:55 AM

### Key Messages

- Winds increase today into Saturday
  - Wind gusts top out at 20 to 35 mph
  - **Minor blowing & drifting snow** with upcoming snowfall
    - Times when snow could be falling are outlined in the **pink** box

### Maximum Wind Gust Forecast (mph)

	11/28 Fri			11/29 Sat			11/30 Sun					
	12am	6am	12pm	6pm	12am	6am	12pm	6pm				
<b>Aberdeen</b>	8	12	17	17	18	22	22	17	14	14	14	9
<b>Britton</b>	9	12	17	17	16	21	23	18	14	15	16	12
<b>Brookings</b>	5	12	16	17	18	23	26	24	18	17	17	9
<b>Chamberlain</b>	13	25	29	25	16	25	29	24	14	13	14	9
<b>Clark</b>	10	17	22	22	21	22	25	22	18	16	16	9
<b>Eagle Butte</b>	14	32	32	24	23	28	28	20	16	14	13	13
<b>Ellendale</b>	10	10	16	16	17	21	23	16	16	15	15	10
<b>Eureka</b>	10	22	25	23	18	21	23	18	16	15	16	10
<b>Gettysburg</b>	9	28	30	26	21	24	26	20	16	16	14	12
<b>Huron</b>	6	16	22	20	16	22	28	22	16	15	15	7
<b>Kennebec</b>	14	32	35	30	22	31	35	26	17	14	14	13
<b>McIntosh</b>	10	28	29	22	20	24	26	18	14	13	13	13
<b>Milbank</b>	8	8	13	12	13	17	22	22	18	17	17	10
<b>Miller</b>	9	22	26	22	18	25	28	21	16	15	15	10
<b>Mobridge</b>	12	25	28	23	18	22	24	18	15	13	13	10
<b>Murdo</b>	20	33	35	26	24	31	32	23	16	13	13	15
<b>Pierre</b>	15	29	31	26	18	25	28	22	14	12	13	10
<b>Redfield</b>	6	17	23	18	18	24	26	20	15	15	15	8
<b>Sisseton</b>	20	9	14	12	13	17	22	20	17	17	17	12
<b>Watertown</b>	8	13	20	20	18	22	25	23	18	17	17	12
<b>Webster</b>	10	15	20	20	20	22	25	22	18	17	17	12
<b>Wheaton</b>	13	7	10	10	12	16	20	18	17	17	17	10



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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 24 °F at 12:53 PM

Low Temp: 9 °F at 11:28 PM

Wind: 15 mph at 4:31 AM

Precip: 0.00

## Today's Info

Record High: 60 in 2020

Record Low: -21 in 1985

Average High: 36

Average Low: 14

Average Precip in Nov.: 0.70

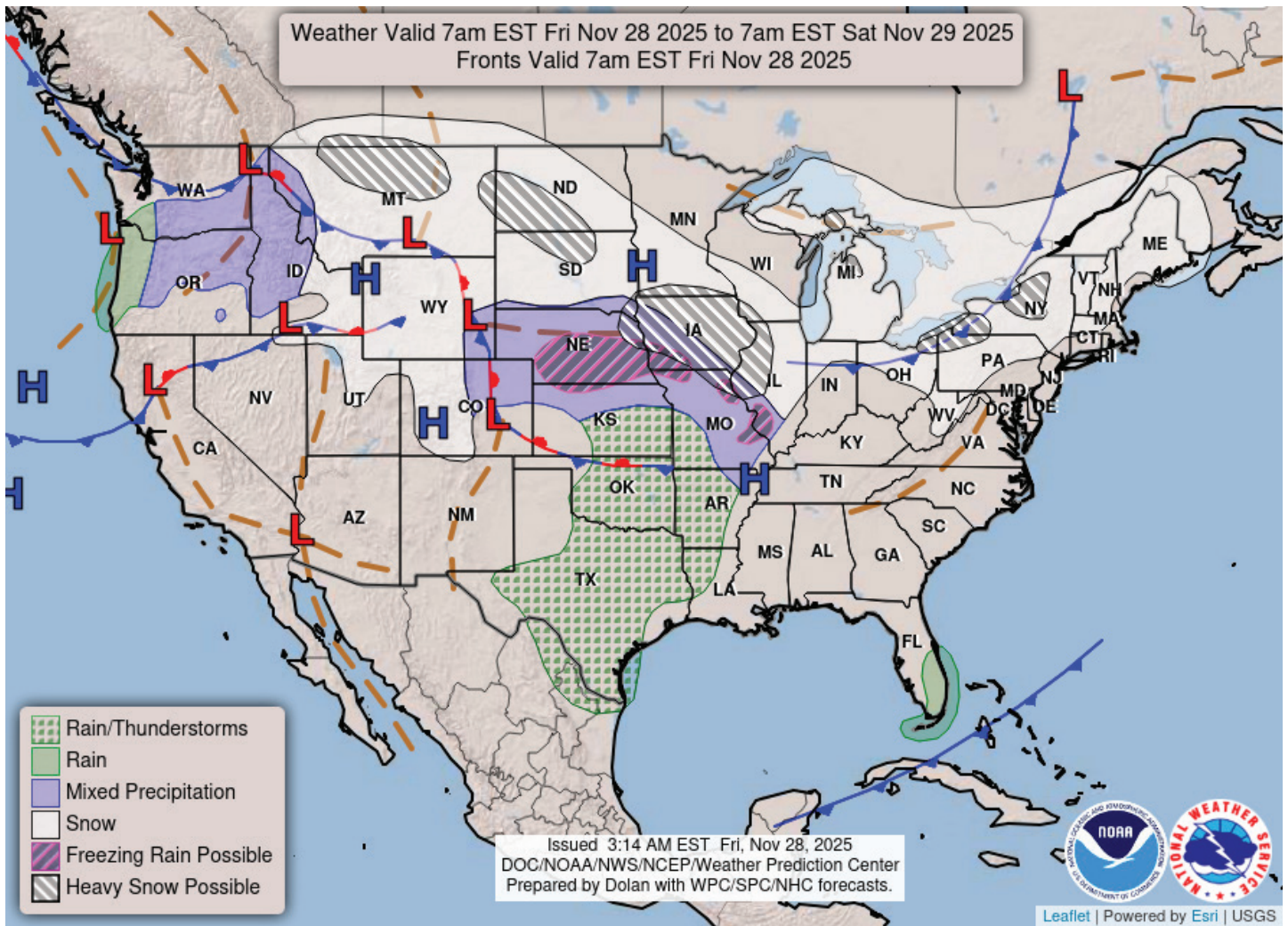
Precip to date in Oct.: 1.00

Average Precip to date: 21.11

Precip Year to Date: 24.51

Sunset Tonight: 4:52 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:50 am



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## Today in Weather History

November 28, 2000: Heavy snow of 6 to 9 inches fell across parts of northeast South Dakota, causing travel difficulties and school closings. Some snowfall amounts included 6 inches at Britton, Roy Lake, Webster, Waubay, Summit, and Wilmot; 8 inches at Columbia and south of Bristol; and 9 inches at Houghton.

November 28, 2005: A significant winter storm visited the region on November 27-29, 2005, producing a wide range of wintry precipitation across the area. Snow and blizzard conditions occurred across central and north central South Dakota, while freezing rain and ice accumulations took front stage in northeast South Dakota and west central Minnesota. Across most of central and north central South Dakota, snow began in the late afternoon and early evening hours of the 27th, with significant snowfall accumulations occurring by the time the snow ended later in the day on the 28th. Snowfall accumulations ranged from as little as two inches to as much as 20 inches. Strong northwest winds of 30 to 50 mph, with gusts to 70 mph, caused widespread blizzard conditions from the early morning until the late afternoon hours of the 28th. Visibilities were reduced to zero many times across the area with snowdrifts of 5 to 10 feet in some places. Some power lines were also brought down in the Pierre and Fort Pierre area due to snow accumulation and high winds. Many roads, including Interstate 90, were closed due to the treacherous travel conditions. Several accidents occurred during the storm, and many motorists were also stranded. Several people had to be rescued. Schools, businesses, government offices, and many other organizations were closed. FEMA, state officials, and the governor surveyed the storm damage. Some of the significant snowfall amounts included 7 inches at Eureka, 8 inches at Onaka, 10 inches at Onida and Fort Thompson, 11 inches near Presho, 16 inches at Highmore, and 21 inches at Kennebec. To the east of this heavy snow and blizzard area, widespread freezing rain began during the morning to early afternoon of the 27th, creating significant ice accumulations of 1 to over 2 inches. The freezing rain changed to snow on the 28th, and northwest winds increased to 30 to 40 mph, gusting to 60 mph. The high winds and heavy ice accumulations caused several thousand power poles (some steel), along with several thousand miles of power lines, to come down, resulting in widespread power outages. The ice and winds also damaged several hundred miles of high-voltage power lines and towers. Some power substations were also shut down by the ice and wind. Thousands of trees were also either damaged or downed due to the heavy ice accumulations and the wind. Many of the fallen trees and branches caused damage to homes and vehicles. The radio station in Milbank went off the air due to its collapsing radio tower. Tens of thousands of people in many communities and rural areas were without power for several days, with some people without power for as long as two weeks. Telephone and cellular phone service was also down for several days. Countless schools, businesses, government offices, and other organizations were closed for several days. FEMA, state officials, and the governor also toured this damaged area, resulting in a presidential disaster declaration. Hundreds of utility workers from South Dakota, Minnesota, and nine other surrounding states worked 14- to 18-hour days in cold conditions to bring power back to the area. The National Guard also helped with getting generators, cots, blankets, and meals to storm shelters. Generators supplied power to many communities and rural areas, while others continued without power. Shelters were set up for those who did not have generator power or another place to go. There were also problems with livestock with the water supplies cut off for some time. One electric cooperative stated that repairs to the infrastructure would continue for months and years to restore a system that took decades to build. Roads were treacherous with many accidents and rollovers, some resulting in injuries. Due to the icy road conditions, many roads were closed, including Interstate 29. Around noon on the 27th, on US Highway 212 two miles west of Zell in Faulk County, a 59-year old man was killed when his car spun out of control and hit an oncoming pickup truck. Around 1:30pm on the 28th, on Day County Road One about two miles south of Waubay, a 17-year old girl was killed and three others were injured when one vehicle spun out of control and struck a truck in the oncoming lane. Air traffic was also brought to a halt across much of the area. This was one of the largest ice storms in the region's history. One electric cooperative said it was the most damage they had in their 65 years of existence. After the icing came snowfall of 2 to 12 inches, which combined with the high winds to bring blizzard conditions and low wind chills to northeast South Dakota and west central Minnesota from the morning of the 28th until the early morning of the 29th. Some of the significant snowfall amounts included 7 inches at Watertown, 8 inches at Waubay, 10 inches at Redfield, and 12 inches at Sisseton.

## Praising in Troubled Times

**When challenges come, celebrate God's past faithfulness and rely on Him for help.**

2 Chronicles 20:1-13: Jehoshaphat Defeats Moab and Ammon

1 After this, the Moabites and Ammonites with some of the Meunites[a] came to wage war against Jehoshaphat.

2 Some people came and told Jehoshaphat, "A vast army is coming against you from Edom,[b] from the other side of the Dead Sea. It is already in Hazezon Tamar" (that is, En Gedi). 3 Alarmed, Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the Lord, and he proclaimed a fast for all Judah. 4 The people of Judah came together to seek help from the Lord; indeed, they came from every town in Judah to seek him.

5 Then Jehoshaphat stood up in the assembly of Judah and Jerusalem at the temple of the Lord in the front of the new courtyard 6 and said:

"Lord, the God of our ancestors, are you not the God who is in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. Power and might are in your hand, and no one can withstand you. 7 Our God, did you not drive out the inhabitants of this land before your people Israel and give it forever to the descendants of Abraham your friend? 8 They have lived in it and have built in it a sanctuary for your Name, saying, 9 'If calamity comes upon us, whether the sword of judgment, or plague or famine, we will stand in your presence before this temple that bears your Name and will cry out to you in our distress, and you will hear us and save us.'

10 "But now here are men from Ammon, Moab and Mount Seir, whose territory you would not allow Israel to invade when they came from Egypt; so they turned away from them and did not destroy them. 11 See how they are repaying us by coming to drive us out of the possession you gave us as an inheritance. 12 Our God, will you not judge them? For we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you."

13 All the men of Judah, with their wives and children and little ones, stood there before the Lord.

Praise is a celebration of the Lord, but when we are in trouble, celebrating seems out of place. In today's passage, Jehoshaphat faced his difficulty by applauding God's past work and faithfulness and by recalling His promises. When we respond in a similar way, we will be able to proceed with courage, just as he did.

The natural human response to a troubling time is self-pity, and rehashing the details only makes it seem more threatening. Praise focuses our attention on God instead. If we are looking to Him, then we can't help but recognize His sovereignty. Every trial comes through His permissive will, which means He has complete control and is faithful to see us through it.

Recalling the Lord's mighty acts and focusing on His sovereignty in everyday life reminds us of our dependence upon Him (2 Chron. 20:7-12). The king expected that God would intervene because recorded history showed He always acted to rescue His people. Israel's recognition of her own helplessness is what brought about divine deliverance.

The more we read and study, the better we understand God's many attributes and assurances. Then when difficulty comes, we can celebrate His past faithfulness to Christians while awaiting His promised help.

*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*

# Groton Daily Independent

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## Upcoming Groton Events

- 11/15/2025 Legion Post #39 Turkey Party 6:30pm
- 11/27/2025 Community Thanksgiving 11:30am-1:30pm Community Center (Thanksgiving)
- 11/30/2025 Snow Queen Contest, 4 p.m.
- 12/06/2025 Olive Grove Holiday Party and Silent Live Auction Fundraiser

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## WINNING NUMBERS

### MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:

11.25.25

11 15 31 32 59 18

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$80,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 1 Mins 24 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:

11.26.25

7 19 25 26 28 7

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$8,120,000**

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 16 Mins 24 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:

11.27.25

8 12 13 16 45 13

TOP PRIZE:

**\$7,000/week**

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 31 Mins 24 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:

11.26.25

1 8 11 17 22

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$102,000**

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 31 Mins 24 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

11.26.25

6 19 28 39 53 15

TOP PRIZE:

**\$10,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 24 Mins 24 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:

11.26.25

7 8 15 19 28 3

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$719,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 24 Mins 24 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

## News from the **AP** Associated Press

### **Hungary's Viktor Orbán meets Russia's Vladimir Putin in Moscow for energy talks**

By JUSTIN SPIKE Associated Press

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán met Russian President Vladimir Putin for talks at the Kremlin on Friday, a rare step from a European leader as Russia's almost four-year war rages in Ukraine.

The trip to Moscow is the second since last year for Orbán, who is widely considered Putin's closest partner among all European Union leaders.

In comments to state media before departing for Moscow early Friday, Orbán said the focus of his talks with Putin would be Hungary's continued access to "cheap Russian oil and gas," resources that have come under sanctions by the U.S. government.

Hungary is one of only a few EU countries to continue importing large quantities of Russian fossil fuels, and has strongly opposed efforts by the bloc to wean its 27 member nations off Russian energy supplies. Earlier this month, Orbán traveled to Washington for a meeting with U.S. President Donald Trump and succeeded in securing an exemption to sanctions the Trump administration placed on Russian energy companies Lukoil and Rosneft — an allowance Orbán said ensured Hungary's continued energy security.

Orbán said Friday that following Hungary's exemption from U.S. sanctions, "now all we need is oil and gas, which we can buy from the Russians. I am going there to ensure Hungary's energy supply at an affordable price both this winter and next year."

Orbán has long argued Russian energy imports are indispensable for his country's economy, and that switching to fossil fuels sourced from elsewhere would cause an immediate economic collapse — a claim some critics dispute. As the rest of Europe has gradually cut off Russian energy, Hungary has maintained and even increased its imports, and argued against an EU plan to eliminate all Russian fossil fuels by the end of 2027.

Trump's envoy expected in Moscow for talks on peace plan

The Trump administration has said it is seeing signs that its sanctions on major Russian oil producers are crimping the economic engine that has allowed Moscow to continue to fund its war in Ukraine. Prices for Russian oil have plunged as major Indian and Chinese buyers moved to comply with U.S. sanctions before they went into effect last week, according to a senior Treasury Department official.

Meanwhile, Trump last week released a plan for ending the nearly four-year war. The 28-point proposal heavily favored Russia, prompting Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to quickly engage with American negotiators. European leaders, fearing for their own future facing Russian aggression, scrambled to steer the negotiations toward accommodating their concerns.

Trump said Tuesday that his plan to end the war had been "fine-tuned", and that he's sending envoy Steve Witkoff to Russia to meet with Putin and Army Secretary Dan Driscoll to meet with Ukrainian officials. He suggested he could eventually meet with Putin and Zelenskyy, but not until further progress has been made in negotiations.

Putin said Thursday that U.S. officials are expected in Moscow "in the first half of" next week, and that it "apparently" will be Witkoff. The Russian president himself will travel to India on Dec. 4-5 for talks with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Kremlin said Friday.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov on Friday refused to announce a date for Witkoff's visit, saying only that the Kremlin will announce it "in due time." He said that the "main parameters" of the peace plan, revised during Ukraine-U.S. talks in Geneva last weekend, were relayed to Russia, and there will be "a discussion in Moscow" next week.

In other developments, Russia's Defense Ministry reported Friday that its air defenses intercepted 136 Ukrainian drones over a number of Russian regions and the annexed Crimea overnight. Damage to cars, residential buildings and houses was reported by authorities in the Rostov and Voronezh regions near the

border with Ukraine.

## **Israeli forces kill at least 10 in southern Syria raid, officials and residents say**

By ABDULRAHMAN SHAHEEN Associated Press

DAMASCUS, Syria (AP) — Israeli forces in southern Syria raided a village and opened fire when they were confronted by residents on Friday, killing at least 10, Syrian officials said, as Israel fights on a number of fronts while the shaky ceasefire in Gaza moves forward.

Syria's foreign ministry said in a statement Friday that the attack was "a horrific massacre" and said women and children were among those killed.

The Syrian state news agency SANA said Israeli forces entered the village of Beit Jin aiming to detain local men and opened heavy fire after protests by residents. Dozens of families fled the area.

Israel said Friday it conducted an operation following intelligence information to apprehend suspects from Jamaa Islamiya, or Islamic Group, operating in Beit Jin to attack Israeli civilians. During the raid, several militants fired at Israeli troops, injuring half a dozen soldiers who were evacuated to a hospital, the military said.

Israeli troops fired at the militants and also responded with aerial assistance, the military said. It said the operation had concluded, all of the suspects were apprehended and a number of militants were killed.

Israel has regarded the new authorities in Syria warily since the fall of former President Bashar Assad in a lightning offensive led by Islamist insurgents in December 2024. Since Assad's fall, Israeli forces have seized a formerly U.N.-patrolled buffer zone in southern Syria set up under a 1974 disengagement agreement. Israel has launched hundreds of airstrikes on Syrian military sites, and pushed for a demilitarized zone south of Damascus.

The two countries, which do not have diplomatic relations, have been negotiating a potential security agreement to deescalate.

Syrian officials have condemned the Israeli incursions as a violation of Syria's sovereignty. On Friday the government called for the international community to take "urgent action" to halt Israeli incursions.

A local official in the village, Walid Okasha, told The Associated Press that those killed were civilians, and one of them had celebrated his wedding the day before.

"The situation is miserable," he said.

In a previous raid on Beit Jin in June, Israeli forces captured several people who they said were Hamas members — a characterization disputed by residents — and killed a man whose family said had a history of schizophrenia.

Ongoing conflicts in the region have fueled concerns that unrest could spill over and undermine the fragile truce in Gaza.

The deaths in Syria followed a series of strikes by Israel's air force in parts of southern Lebanon on Thursday. Israel says its ongoing strikes are aimed at preventing Hezbollah from rebuilding after a devastating war last year ended with a ceasefire.

The United Nations on Tuesday said Israel had killed at least 127 civilians, including children, in its strikes on Lebanon since the ceasefire a year ago. Things escalated earlier this week with a rare strike in Lebanon's capital, Beirut, killing a senior Hezbollah official whom Israel described as the group's chief of staff.

## **Anti-corruption raid targets Zelenskyy's prominent chief of staff**

By ILLIA NOVIKOV Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Anti-corruption units have raided the home and reportedly also the office of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's chief of staff, Andrii Yermak, in an unwelcome distraction for Kyiv officials as they battle to defeat Russia's invasion and persuade U.S. officials to accommodate their concerns in peace proposals.

Two national agencies fighting entrenched corruption in Ukraine said their searches targeted Yermak. Yermak, a powerful figure in Ukraine and a key participant in talks with the United States, confirmed they searched his apartment inside the presidential compound in downtown Kyiv, where checkpoints limit public access. Media reports said Yermak's office was also searched, but investigators declined to comment on that.

It was not clear where Zelenskyy was at the time of the morning raid.

"The investigators are facing no obstacles," Yermak wrote on the messaging app Telegram. He added that he was cooperating fully with them and his lawyers were present.

The National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine and the Specialized Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office are Ukrainian anti-corruption watchdogs. They are behind a major investigation into a \$100 million energy sector corruption scandal involving top Ukrainian officials.

Investigators suspect that Tymur Mindich, a one-time business partner of Zelenskyy, was the plot's mastermind. Mindich has fled the country, with any criminal proceedings against him likely to be carried out in absentia. Two top government ministers have resigned in the scandal.

Two of Yermak's former deputies — Oleh Tatarov and Rostyslav Shurma — left the government in 2024 after watchdogs investigated them for financial wrongdoing. A third deputy, Andrii Smyrnov, was investigated for bribes and other wrongdoing but still works for Yermak.

The scandal has heaped more problems on Zelenskyy as he seeks continued support from Western countries for Ukraine's war effort and tries to ensure continued foreign funding. The European Union, which Ukraine wants to join, has told Zelenskyy he must crack down on graft.

Zelenskyy faced an unprecedented rebellion from his own lawmakers earlier this month after investigators published details of their energy sector investigation.

Although Yermak was not accused of any wrongdoing, several senior lawmakers in Zelenskyy's party said Yermak should take responsibility for the debacle in order to restore public trust. Some said that if Zelenskyy didn't fire him, the party could split, threatening the president's parliamentary majority. But Zelenskyy defied them.

Zelenskyy urged Ukrainians to unite and "stop the political games" in light of the U.S. pressure to reach a settlement with Russia.

Yermak met Zelenskyy over 15 years ago when he was a lawyer venturing into the TV production business and Zelenskyy was a famous Ukrainian comedian and actor.

He oversaw foreign affairs as part of Zelenskyy's first presidential team and was promoted to chief of staff in February 2020.

Yermak has accompanied Zelenskyy on every trip abroad since Russia's invasion in February 2022, and the president's trust in him has made Yermak's power appear almost untouchable.

Domestically, officials describe Yermak as Zelenskyy's gatekeeper, and he is widely believed to have chosen all top government appointees, including prime ministers and ministers.

Individuals connected to Yermak and the president's office have come under investigation before.

## Death toll from floods in Thailand reach 145 as receding water reveals widespread damage

BANGKOK (AP) — The death toll from flooding in southern Thailand has reached at least 145, officials said Friday, as receding waters started to reveal devastating damage across the region.

More than 1.2 million households and 3.6 million people have been affected by floods triggered by heavy rains in 12 southern provinces, the Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation said Friday.

Government spokesperson Siripong Angkasakulkiat said in a news conference in Bangkok that flooding has killed 145 people in eight provinces, particularly in Songkhla province which recorded at least 110 deaths.

He said search and rescue efforts have become more successful as floodwaters started to recede further.

Songkhla province recorded a sharp increase in the death toll after flooding began to subside. News reports showed rescuers gained more access to residential areas that had previously been submerged.

under high water and recovered more bodies, particularly in Hat Yai, the largest city in the south.

The disaster department reported Friday morning that waters have receded in most of the affected areas, but levels remain high in some locations. The Meteorological Department said rainfall has decreased in the south but warned of thunderstorms in some areas.

The flooding caused severe disruption, leaving thousands of people stranded, rendering streets impassable and submerging low-rise buildings and vehicles.

Videos and photos from the affected areas on Friday show damaged roads, fallen power poles, household appliances and debris washed away by floodwaters piled along the streets. Abandoned cars were overturned or stacked atop one another, apparently swept away by powerful currents.

## US-Russian crew of 3 starts 8-month mission on the International Space Station

MOSCOW (AP) — A U.S.-Russian crew of three began a mission on the International Space Station after being launched there on a Russian spacecraft Thursday.

A Soyuz booster rocket lifted off at 2:27 p.m. from the Russia-leased Baikonur launch facility in Kazakhstan to put the Soyuz MS-28 into orbit.

The spacecraft carried NASA astronaut Chris Williams and Russian crewmates, Sergei Mikaev and Sergei Kud-Sverchkov. The craft docked at the International Space Station at 5:34 p.m.

The three are expected to spend about eight months at the orbiting outpost. NASA said this is the first spaceflight for Williams, a physicist, and Mikaev, a military pilot. This is the second flight for Kud-Sverchkov.

Already on the space station are NASA astronauts Mike Fincke, Zena Cardman and Jonny Kim, Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency's astronaut Kimiya Yui and Russian cosmonauts Sergei Ryzhikov, Alexei Zubritsky and Oleg Platonov.

Williams will conduct scientific research and technology demonstrations aimed at advancing human space exploration and benefiting life on Earth, NASA said.

Russia's space agency, Roscosmos, said in a statement Thursday evening that the crew was "in good health" after the flight. Back in Baikonur, however, a routine inspection of the launch pad, conducted after the liftoff, identified "damage to several launch pad components."

The extent of the damage was being assessed, but "all necessary spare components are available for repairs, and the damage will be repaired shortly," Roscosmos said.

## Dozens more bodies recovered after Hong Kong blaze, raising death toll to 128

By DAVID RISING and CHAN HO-HIM Associated Press

HONG KONG (AP) — Hong Kong firefighters found dozens more bodies Friday during an intensive apartment-by-apartment search of a high-rise tower complex, after a massive fire engulfed seven of its eight buildings. The death toll in one of the city's deadliest blazes is now at least 128.

Crews prioritized apartments from which they received more than two dozen calls for assistance during the blaze but were unable to reach, Derek Armstrong Chan, a deputy director of Hong Kong Fire Services, told reporters.

The toll was increased by 34 after more bodies were found in the blackened towers, and Secretary for Security Chris Tang told reporters at the scene that the search for victims was continuing and the numbers could still rise.

Eighty-nine of the recovered bodies have not yet been identified, Tang said. Some 200 people remain unaccounted for. Overall, he said he expected the investigation into the fire to last at least three to four weeks.

Andy Yeung, the director of Hong Kong Fire Services, said that first responders found that some fire alarms in the complex were not functioning and that there could be legal consequences.

The fire started midafternoon Wednesday in one of the Wang Fuk Court complex's eight towers, jumping rapidly from one to the next as bamboo scaffolding covered in netting in place for renovations caught ablaze until seven buildings were engulfed.

It took firefighters some 24 hours to bring the blaze under control, and even nearly two days later, smoke continued to drift out of the charred skeletons of the buildings from the occasional flare-up.

It was not declared fully out until Friday morning.

In total, 2,300 firefighters and medical personnel were involved in the operation, and 12 firefighters were among the 79 people injured overall, Yeung said. One firefighter was also killed, he had said previously.

It was unclear how many people could still be inside the buildings, at the complex in Tai Po district, a northern suburb near Hong Kong's border with mainland China, which had almost 2,000 apartments and some 4,800 residents.

Most of the casualties were in the first two buildings to catch fire, Chan said.

The apartment complex housed many older people. It was built in the 1980s and had been undergoing a major renovation. Hong Kong's anti-corruption agency said on Thursday it was investigating possible corruption relating to the renovation project.

Three men — the directors and an engineering consultant of a construction company — have been arrested on suspicion of manslaughter, and police said company leaders were suspected of gross negligence.

Police have not identified the company where the suspects worked, but The Associated Press confirmed Prestige Construction & Engineering Company was in charge of renovations in the tower complex. Police have seized boxes of documents from the company, where phones rang unanswered Thursday.

Authorities suspected some materials on the exterior walls of the high-rise buildings did not meet fire resistance standards, allowing the unusually fast spread of the fire.

Police also said they found plastic foam panels — which are highly flammable — attached to the windows on each floor near the elevator lobby of the one unaffected tower. The panels were believed to have been installed by the construction company but the purpose was not clear.

Authorities planned immediate inspections of housing estates undergoing major renovations to ensure scaffolding and construction materials meet safety standards.

The fire was the deadliest in Hong Kong in decades. A 1996 fire in a commercial building in Kowloon killed 41 people. A warehouse fire in 1948 killed 176 people, according to the South China Morning Post.

## Here's what to know about the federal ban threatening the market for THC-infused drinks and snacks

By STEVE KARNOWSKI and GENE JOHNSON Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — The production lines at Indeed Brewing moved quickly, the cans filling not with beer, but with THC-infused seltzer. The product, which features the compound that gets cannabis users high, has been a lifeline at Indeed and other craft breweries as alcohol sales have fallen in recent years.

But that boom looks set to come to a crashing halt. Buried in the bill that ended the federal government shutdown this month was a provision to ban those drinks, along with other impairing beverages and snacks made from hemp, which have proliferated across the country in recent years. Now the \$24 billion hemp industry is scrambling to save itself before the provision takes effect in November 2026.

"It's a big deal," said Ryan Bandy, Indeed's chief business officer. "It would be a mess for our breweries, for our industry, and obviously for a lot of people who like these things."

Here's what to know about the looming ban on impairing products derived from hemp.

Congress opened the door in 2018

Marijuana and hemp are the same species. Marijuana is cultivated for high levels of THC in its flowers. Low-THC hemp is grown for its sturdy fibers, food or wellness products. "Rope, not dope" was long the motto of farmers who supported legalizing hemp.

After states began legalizing marijuana for adult use over a decade ago, hemp advocates saw an open-

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ing at the federal level. As part of the 2018 farm bill, Congress legalized the cultivation of industrial hemp to give farmers, including in Republican Sen. Mitch McConnell's home state of Kentucky, a new cash crop.

But the way that law defined hemp — as having less than 0.3% of a specific type of THC, called delta-9 — opened a huge loophole. Beverages or bags of snacks could meet that threshold and still contain more than enough THC to get people high. Businesses could further exploit the law by extracting a non-impairing compound, called CBD, and chemically changing it into other types of impairing THC, such as delta-8 or delta-10.

The result? Vape oil, gummy candies, chips, cookies, sodas and other unregulated, untested products laden with hemp-derived THC spread around the country. In many places, they have been available at gas stations or convenience stores, even to teens. In legal marijuana states, they undercut heavily taxed and regulated products. In others, they evaded the prohibition on recreational use of weed.

Some states, including Indiana, have reported spikes in calls to poison-control centers for pediatric exposure to THC.

A patchwork of state regulations

Dozens of states have since taken steps to regulate or ban impairing hemp products. In October, Democratic California Gov. Gavin Newsom signed a bill banning the sale of intoxicating hemp products outside the state's legal marijuana system.

Texas, which has a massive hemp market, is moving to regulate sales of impairing hemp, such as by restricting them to those over 21. In Nebraska, lawmakers have instead considered a bill to criminalize the sale and possession of products containing hemp-based THC.

Washington state adopted a program to regulate hemp growing. But the number of licensed growers has cratered since the state banned intoxicating hemp products outside of the regulated cannabis market in 2023. Five years ago, there were 220, said Trecia Ehrlich, cannabis program manager with the state agriculture department. This year, there were 42, and with a federal ban looming, she expects that number to drop by about half next year.

Minnesota made infused beverages and foods legal in 2022 for people 21 and older. The products, which must be derived from legally certified hemp, have become so popular that Target is now offering THC drinks at some of its stores in the state.

They've also been a boon to liquor stores and to small Minneapolis brewers like Indeed, where THC drinks make up close to one-quarter of the business, Bandy said. At Bauhaus Brew Labs, a few blocks away, THC drinks account for 26% of their revenues from distributed products and 11% of revenues at the brewery's taproom.

A powerful senator moves to close the loophole

None of that was what McConnell intended when he helped craft the 2018 farm bill. He finally closed the loophole by inserting a federal hemp THC ban in the measure to end the 43-day federal government shutdown, approved by the Senate on Nov. 10.

"It will keep these dangerous products out of the hands of children, while preserving the hemp industry for farmers," McConnell said. "Industrial hemp and CBD will remain legal for industrial applications."

Some in the legal marijuana industry celebrated, as the ban would end what they consider unfair competition.

They were joined by prohibitionists. "There's really no good argument for allowing these dangerous products to be sold in our country," said Kevin Sabet, president and CEO of Smart Approaches to Marijuana.

But the ban doesn't take effect for a year. That has given the industry hope that there is still time to pass regulations that will improve the hemp THC industry — such as by banning synthetically derived THC, requiring age restrictions on sales, and prohibiting marketing to children — rather than eradicate it.

"We are very hopeful that cooler heads will prevail," said Jonathan Miller, general counsel of the industry group U.S. Hemp Roundtable. "If they really thought there was a health emergency, there would be no year-long period."

The federal ban would jeopardize more than 300,000 jobs while costing states \$1.5 billion in lost tax money, the group says.

Drew Hurst, president and chief operating officer at Bauhaus Brew Labs, has no doubt his company would be among the casualties.

"If this goes through as written currently, I don't see a way at all that Bauhaus could stay in business," Hurst said.

What comes next?

A number of lawmakers say they will push for regulation of the hemp THC industry. Kentucky's second senator, Republican Rand Paul, introduced an amendment to strip McConnell's hemp language from the crucial government-funding bill, but it failed on a lopsided 76-24 vote.

Minnesota's Democratic U.S. senators, Amy Klobuchar and Tina Smith, are among those strategizing to save the industry. Klobuchar noted at a recent news conference that the ban was inserted into the unrelated shutdown bill without a hearing. She suggested the federal government could allow states to develop their own regulatory frameworks, or that Minnesota's strict regulations could be used as a national model.

Kevin Hilliard, co-founder of Insight Brewing in Minneapolis, said the hemp industry needs a solution before planting time next spring.

"If a farmer has uncertainty, they're not going to plant," Hilliard said.

## Trump criticizes the program that brought Afghan refugees to the US who fought the Taliban

By JEFFREY COLLINS Associated Press

The man accused of shooting two National Guard members in Washington is one of about 76,000 Afghans brought to the United States after the chaotic withdrawal of the U.S. from their country as the Taliban took over, authorities said.

The program, called Operation Allies Welcome, was created after the 2021 decision to leave Afghanistan following 20 years of American intervention and billions of dollars of aid.

Democratic President Joe Biden, who oversaw the withdrawal started by his predecessor — Republican President Donald Trump — said the U.S. owed it to the interpreters and translators, the fighters and drivers and others who opposed the Taliban to give them a safe place outside of Afghanistan.

But others — including Trump and many Republicans — said the refugees were not properly vetted in a resettlement process they said was as chaotic and poorly planned as leaving the country to the Taliban.

"This individual — and so many others — should have never been allowed to come here. Our citizens and servicemembers deserve far better than to endure the ongoing fallout from the Biden Administration's catastrophic failures," CIA Director John Ratcliffe said.

Accused shooter worked with CIA before coming to US as refugee

The accused shooter, identified by law enforcement officials as Rahmanullah Lakanwal, worked with the CIA "as a member of a partner force in Kandahar," Ratcliffe said in a statement Thursday. It didn't specify what Lakanwal did for America's spy agency.

The Kandahar region in southern Afghanistan was in the Taliban heartland of the country and saw fierce fighting between the Taliban and NATO forces after the U.S.-led invasion in 2001 following the al-Qaida attacks on Sept. 11. The CIA relied on Afghan staff for translation, administrative and front-line fighting with their own paramilitary officers in the war.

Little is known about Lakanwal's four years in the U.S. or why he drove across the country from his home in Bellingham, Washington, where a former landlord said he lived with his wife and five children.

Lakanwal was granted asylum in April under the Trump administration, according to #AfghanEvac, a group of veterans and others working to get Afghans who helped the U.S. out of the country in exchange for their help.

Like all asylum seekers, he would have had to undergo fingerprinting and iris scans, a full background check and interview and a risk assessment, the organization said.

Operation Allies Welcome brought tens of thousands of Afghans to the US

Groups that help resettle Afghans said the actions of one man shouldn't reflect negatively on the tens

of thousands who have gone through the various legal pathways to resettling in the U.S. and the others who find themselves in limbo after Trump suspended almost all resettlement programs for nations across the world when he took office in January.

"I don't want people to leverage this tragedy into a political ploy," said Shawn VanDiver, president of #AfghanEvac.

After leaving Afghanistan, tens of thousands of those seeking resettlement ended up in sprawling air-conditioned tent villages at military bases like Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst in central New Jersey, Fort McCoy in Wisconsin or at Fort Bliss in Texas.

After months of health screenings and background checks many were resettled in established Afghan communities in northern Virginia and the surrounding Washington area, as well as Northern California and Texas. States where between 1,000 and 3,000 have settled include Arizona, New York, Florida, Georgia, Colorado, Nebraska and Pennsylvania, according to State Department data.

Trump stops aid for resettlement after taking office

Trump's executive order shortly after taking office in January suspending federal funding for resettlement agencies made it tougher to help refugees with basic necessities like food and rent, handcuffing the mostly religious groups that help them.

The president, who has described Afghanistan as "a hellhole on earth," already planned to review every Afghan who entered the country under Operation Allies Welcome and reiterated that goal after Wednesday's shooting.

"If they can't love our country, we don't want them," Trump said in a message released on social media, adding that the shooting was "a crime against our entire nation."

Trump administration wants to shut the door to most refugees

Trump also used his message to attack refugees from Somalia who have settled in Minnesota, saying they are "ripping apart that once-great state."

It's part of this administration's goal both to deport people in the country illegally and close the country to most refugees. Trump said he wants to remove anyone "who does not belong here or does not add benefit to our country."

One of the Afghans who made it to the U.S. was Mohammad Saboor, a father of seven children, worked as an electrician and A/C technician with international and U.S. forces for 17 years. He resettled earlier this year in California and told The Associated Press he looked forward to sending his kids to school and giving back to the country that took his family in.

"I believe that now we can live in a 100% peaceful environment," Saboor said.

## **A crystal Fabergé egg crafted for Russian royalty is expected to sell for more than \$26 million**

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — A rare crystal and diamond Fabergé egg crafted for Russia's ruling family before it was toppled by revolution is going up for auction, valued at more than 20 million pounds (\$26.4 million).

Christie's auction house says the Winter Egg is just one of seven of the opulent ovoids remaining in private hands. It will be offered for sale at Christie's London headquarters on Tuesday.

The 4-inch (10-centimeter) tall egg is made from finely carved rock crystal, covered in a delicate snowflake motif wrought in platinum and 4,500 tiny diamonds. It opens to reveal a removable tiny basket of bejewelled quartz flowers symbolizing spring.

Margo Oganessian, the head of Christie's Russian art department, likened it to a luxurious Kinder Surprise chocolate.

The Winter Egg is a superb example of craft and design, "the 'Mona Lisa' for decorative arts," Oganessian said.

One of just two created by female designer Alma Pihl, the egg was commissioned by Czar Nicholas II for his mother Dowager Empress Maria Feodorovna as an Easter present in 1913. Pihl's other egg is owned

by Britain's royal family.

Craftsman Peter Carl Fabergé and his company created more than 50 of the eggs for Russia's imperial family between 1885 and 1917, each elaborately unique and containing a hidden surprise. Czar Alexander III started the tradition by presenting an egg to his wife each Easter. His successor, Nicholas II, extended the gift to his wife and mother.

The Romanov royal family ruled Russia for 300 years before it was ousted by the 1917 revolution. Nicholas and his family were executed in 1918.

Bought by a London dealer for 450 pounds when the cash-strapped Communist authorities sold off some of Russia's artistic treasures in the 1920s, the egg changed hands several times. It was believed lost for two decades until it was auctioned by Christie's in 1994 for more than 7 million Swiss francs (\$5.6 million at the time). It sold again in 2002 for \$9.6 million.

Now it is expected to surpass the record \$18.5 million paid at a 2007 Christie's auction for another Fabergé egg created for the Rothschild banking family.

There are 43 surviving imperial Fabergé eggs, most in museums.

## **Trump says one of the two West Virginia National Guard members shot by Afghan national has died**

By JOSH BOAK, BEN FINLEY, ANTHONY IZAGUIRRE and ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press WEST PALM BEACH, Florida (AP) — President Donald Trump said that one of the two West Virginia National Guard members shot by an Afghan national near the White House had died, calling the suspect, who had worked with the CIA in his native country, a "savagemonster."

As part of a Thanksgiving call with U.S. troops, Trump announced that he had just learned that Specialist Sarah Beckstrom, 20, had died, while Staff Sgt. Andrew Wolfe, 24, was "fighting for his life."

"She's just passed away," Trump said. "She's no longer with us. She's looking down at us right now. Her parents are with her."

The president called Beckstrom an "incredible person, outstanding in every single way." The White House said he spoke to her parents after his remarks.

Trump used the announcement to say the shooting was a "terrorist attack" and criticized the Biden administration for enabling Afghans who worked with U.S. forces during the Afghanistan War to enter the U.S. The president has deployed National Guard members in part to assist in his administration's mass deportation efforts.

Trump brandished a print-out of a news photo of Afghan evacuees sitting on the floor of a military plane during the chaotic evacuation from Kabul in 2021 during his remarks. He suggested that the shooter was mentally unstable after the war and departure from Afghanistan.

"He went cuckoo. I mean, he went nuts," the president said. "It happens too often with these people."

The shooter worked with U.S. forces in Afghanistan

The suspect charged with the shooting is Rahmanullah Lakanwal, 29. The suspect had worked in a special CIA-backed Afghan Army unit before emigrating from Afghanistan, according to two sources who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the situation, and #AfghanEvac, a group that helps resettle Afghans who assisted the U.S. during the two-decade war.

Trump blamed the asylum process in which Afghans who worked with U.S. forces arrived by plane for being ineffective and failing to ensure people were properly vetted.

"We have no greater national security priority than ensuring that we have full control over the people that enter and remain in our country," Trump said. "For the most part, we don't want them."

Jeanine Pirro, the U.S. attorney for the District of Columbia, declined to provide a motive for Wednesday afternoon's brazen act of violence which occurred just blocks from the White House. The presence of troops in the nation's capital and other cities around the country has become a political flashpoint.

Pirro said that the suspect launched an "ambush-style" attack with a .357 Smith & Wesson revolver. As

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of Thursday morning, the suspect faced charges of assault with intent to kill while armed and possession of a firearm during a crime of violence, but Pirro suggested the charges would be upgraded if one of the National Guard members died, as happened later on Thursday.

The rare shooting of National Guard members on American soil comes amid court fights and a broader public policy debate about the Trump administration's use of the military to combat what officials cast as an out-of-control crime problem.

Trump issued an emergency order in August that federalized the D.C. police force and sent in National Guard troops. The order expired a month later. But the troops have remained in the city, where nearly 2,200 troops currently are assigned, according to the government's latest update.

The guard members have patrolled neighborhoods, train stations and other locations, participated in highway checkpoints and been assigned to pick up trash and guard sports events. The Trump administration quickly ordered 500 more National Guard members to Washington following Wednesday's shooting.

The suspect also was shot and had wounds that were not believed to be life-threatening, according to a law enforcement official who was not authorized to discuss the matter publicly and spoke to AP on condition of anonymity.

### Shooting raises questions about legacy of Afghanistan War

A resident of the eastern Afghan province of Khost who identified himself as Lakanwal's cousin said Lakanwal was originally from the province and that he and his brother had worked in a special Afghan Army unit known as Zero Units in the southern province of Kandahar. A former official from the unit, who spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the situation, said Lakanwal was a team leader and his brother was a platoon leader.

The cousin spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisals. He said Lakanwal had started out working as a security guard for the unit in 2012, and was later promoted to become a team leader and a GPS specialist.

Kandahar is in the Taliban heartland of the country. It saw fierce fighting between the Taliban and NATO forces after the U.S.-led invasion in 2001 following the al-Qaida attacks on Sept. 11. The CIA relied on Afghan staff for translation, administrative and front-line fighting with their own paramilitary officers in the war.

Zero Units were paramilitary units manned by Afghans but backed by the CIA and also served in front-line fighting with CIA paramilitary officers. Activists had attributed abuses to the units. They played a key role in the chaotic U.S. withdrawal from the country, providing security around Kabul International Airport as the Americans and withdrew from the country.

CIA Director John Ratcliffe said in a statement that Lakanwal's relationship with the U.S. government "ended shortly following the chaotic evacuation" of U.S. servicemembers from Afghanistan.

Lakanwal entered the U.S. in 2021 through Operation Allies Welcome, a Biden administration program that evacuated and resettled tens of thousands of Afghans after the U.S. withdrawal from the country, officials said. Lakanwal applied for asylum during the Biden administration, but his asylum was approved under the Trump administration, #AfghanEvac said in a statement.

The initiative brought roughly 76,000 people to the U.S., many of whom had worked alongside U.S. troops and diplomats as interpreters and translators. It has since faced intense scrutiny from Trump and others over allegations of gaps in the vetting process, even as advocates say there was extensive vetting and the program offered a lifeline to people at risk of Taliban reprisals.

Lakanwal has been living in Bellingham, Washington, about 79 miles (127 kilometers) north of Seattle, with his wife and five children, said his former landlord, Kristina Widman.

On Wednesday night, Trump called for the reinvestigation of all Afghan refugees who had entered under the Biden administration. The director of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services Joseph Edlow said in a statement that the agency would take additional steps to screen people from 19 "high-risk" countries "to the maximum degree possible."

Edlow didn't name the countries. But in June, the administration banned travel to the U.S. by citizens of 12 countries and restricted access from seven others, citing national security concerns.

## **Pope Leo XIV encourages Turkey to be a force for peace on his first foreign trip**

By NICOLE WINFIELD, SUZAN FRASER, SERRA YEDIKARDES and ANDREW WILKS Associated Press ANKARA, Turkey (AP) — Pope Leo XIV encouraged Turkey to be a source of stability and dialogue in a world riven by conflict, as he opened his first foreign trip as pope on Thursday with a plea for peace amid efforts to end wars in Ukraine and Gaza.

The American pope emphasized a message of peace as he arrived in Ankara, welcomed on the tarmac by a military guard of honor and at the presidential palace by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Speaking to Erdogan and the country's diplomatic corps at a library in the palace complex, Leo praised Turkey's historic role as a bridge between East and West, at the crossroads of religions and cultures.

"May Turkey be a source of stability and rapprochement between peoples, in service of a just and lasting peace," he said, speaking in front of a giant globe. "Today, more than ever, we need people who will promote dialogue and practice it with firm will and patient resolve."

Leo's visit comes as Turkey, a country of more than 85 million people of predominantly Sunni Muslims, has cast itself as a key intermediary in efforts to end the conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza.

Ankara has hosted rounds of talks with Russia and with Ukraine and offered to take part in the stabilization force in Gaza to help oversee a fragile ceasefire. Israel, which has had rocky relations with Turkey for years, accuses Ankara of supporting Hamas and has ruled out any role for Turkish troops in a stabilization force.

Leo didn't cite the conflicts specifically, but he quoted his predecessor, Pope Francis, in lamenting that the wars ravaging the world today amount to a "third world war fought piecemeal," with resources spent on armaments instead of fighting hunger and poverty and protecting creation.

After two world wars, "we are now experiencing a phase marked by a heightened level of conflict on the global level," he said. "We must not give into this! The future of humanity is at stake."

In his address, Erdogan said the Palestinian issue is central to achieving peace in the region and praised what he described as the Vatican's "steadfast stance" on it.

Erdogan said immediate steps must be taken to strengthen the ceasefire reached in Gaza, protect civilians and ensure the uninterrupted delivery of humanitarian aid.

A word about valuing women

The speech was closely watched, since the first speech of any pope trip sets the tone for his visit. That's all the more true for this first trip abroad for the first American pope, who will be delivering all his remarks in Turkey in English in a departure for the Italian-centric Vatican. It was thus significant that Leo also commented on the plight of women in Turkey.

"Women, in particular, through their studies and active participation in professional, cultural and political life, are increasingly placing themselves at the service of your community and its positive influence on the international scene," Leo said.

"We must greatly value then the important initiatives in this regard, which support the family and the contribution that women make toward the full flowering of social life."

Women's rights activists continue to denounce Erdogan's 2021 withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention, a landmark European treaty signed in Istanbul in 2011 to protect women from violence. Critics say the move weakened safeguards.

According to the advocacy group We Will Stop Femicide, 237 women have been killed in Turkey so far in 2025, most by husbands, partners, or relatives, while another 247 women were found dead under suspicious circumstances.

This week, Erdogan unveiled a new five-point plan to combat violence against women, including promoting a culture of respect, strengthening legal protections, and rehabilitating perpetrators.

After Ankara, Leo heads to Istanbul for the meetings and prayers with Orthodox Christian leaders as well as representatives of Turkey's majority Muslim community. He then travels to Lebanon on Sunday.

## Historic anniversary

The main impetus for Leo to travel to Turkey is to mark the 1,700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, an unprecedented gathering of at least 250 bishops from around the Roman Empire.

It happened at a time when the Eastern and Western churches were still united. They split in the Great Schism of 1054, a divide precipitated largely by disagreements over the primacy of the pope.

The visit will also allow Leo to reinforce the church's relations with Muslims. Leo is due to visit the Blue Mosque and preside over an interfaith meeting in Istanbul.

Asgin Tunca, a Blue Mosque imam who will be receiving the pope, said the visit would help advance Christian-Muslim ties and dispel popular prejudices about Islam.

"We want to reflect that image by showing the beauty of our religion through our hospitality — that is God's command," Tunca said.

Speaking to reporters on board his plane, Leo acknowledged the historic nature of his first foreign trip and said he has been looking forward to it because of what it means for Christians and for promoting peace in the world.

"And to invite all people to come together to search for greater unity, greater harmony, and to look for the ways that all men and women can truly be brothers and sisters in spite of differences, in spite of different religions, in spite of different beliefs."

Leo also shared some more light-hearted moments with reporters, noting that Thursday was Thanksgiving in the United States.

"To the Americans here, Happy Thanksgiving!" he said to the 80 or so reporters who are travelling aboard the papal plane. "It's a wonderful day to celebrate."

At least two journalists presented Leo with pumpkin pies. He was also gifted a baseball bat once owned by legendary White Sox player Nellie Fox, and a pair of White Sox-branded slippers and socks.

The latter gift was a reference to Leo's quip last week that he only wears white socks, a play on words about his beloved Chicago baseball team.

## Reaction in Turkey

Though support for Palestinians and for an end to the war in Ukraine is widespread in Turkey, for many, international politics is a secondary concern, as they face an ongoing cost-of-living crisis, owing to market turmoil induced by shake-ups in domestic politics.

That could explain why Leo's visit has largely escaped the attention of many in the country, at least outside the country's small Christian community.

Fatma Cicek Geyik, a 57-year-old artist, said the visit would bring some joy but should not be exaggerated. She said Turkey is a land with a powerful history and she didn't see the need to "elevate" others' presence.

"He's welcome, his visit will bring joy. But I don't see it as something to exaggerate too much," she said. "They will leave just as they came."

## Israeli forces kill Palestinian men in West Bank after they appear to surrender

By MEGAN JANETSKY, BASSEM MROUE and JULIA FRANKEL Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israeli forces on Thursday killed a pair of Palestinian men in the occupied West Bank after they appeared to surrender to troops, drawing Palestinian accusations that the men were executed "in cold blood." The Israeli military said it was investigating.

The killings, captured in videos shown on two Arab TV stations, came as Israel pressed ahead with its latest offensive in the West Bank, where the army has stepped up its activities over the past two years. Israel says it is cracking down on militants, but Palestinians and rights groups accuse Israel of using excessive force and say dozens of unarmed civilians have been killed.

Israel has been fighting on a number of fronts as a shaky ceasefire in Gaza moves forward. On Thursday, Israel carried out another round of airstrikes on suspected Hezbollah sites in southern Lebanon. Ongoing conflicts in the region have fueled concerns that unrest could spill over and undermine the fragile truce

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in Gaza.

A Palestinian-American teenager held in Israeli detention for nine months was also released on Thursday night. The 16-year-old emerged visibly thin and was embraced by his crying family.

Israeli forces accused of executing Palestinian men in West Bank

The Israeli military and national police announced they were opening an investigation into the deaths Thursday of the two men, who were shot by members of the border police, a special unit that often operates alongside the Israeli military.

In a video shown on Palestine TV, which has no sound, the two men come out of a garage holding their hands up and lifting their shirts to show they are not carrying explosives. They are ordered to the ground and kicked by one of the policemen. They are then ordered back to the garage. In a video shown by Egyptian TV station Al-Ghad, the men are ordered back to the entrance of the garage. As they are on the ground and surrounded by troops, gunshots are heard and the men slump down, apparently lifeless. At least one soldier is seen firing his weapon.

In a statement, the Israeli military said the two men were wanted militants in the northern town of Jenin who had thrown explosives and opened fire at troops.

It said that after the men surrendered and exited a building, "fire was directed toward the suspects." It said the incident was "under review" and would be referred "to the relevant professional bodies."

Palestinians and human rights groups say such investigations yield few results, and Israeli troops are rarely prosecuted.

Israel's far-right national security minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, who oversees the national police, praised the Israeli forces, saying they had acted "exactly as they are expected to — terrorists must die!"

In Ramallah, the Palestinian prime minister's office accused Israel of executing the men "in cold blood." It called the shooting "an outright extrajudicial killing in blatant violation of international humanitarian law."

Palestinian authorities identified the men as Al-Muntasir Abdullah, 26, and Yousef Asasa, 37, and said Israel had taken away their bodies.

The incident was reminiscent of the case of Elor Azaria — a soldier convicted of manslaughter in 2017 for fatally shooting an already wounded Palestinian attacker. That case deeply divided the nation, with nationalistic politicians defending the soldier. Azaria was released early from prison after serving a nine-month sentence.

Escalation in the West Bank

The shooting is part of a larger operation in a northeastern region of the West Bank. Israel's military has detained more than 100 people since Tuesday in the town of Tubas, according to Abdullah al-Zaghari, spokesman for the advocacy group Palestinian Prisoners' Club.

The military has said the operation was a response to "attempts to establish terrorist strongholds and construction of terror infrastructures in the area." On Nov. 19, Palestinian attackers stabbed an Israeli to death and wounded three more at a West Bank intersection before being shot down by troops.

Israel's military has scaled up military operations in the West Bank since the Oct. 7, 2023 Hamas attack, which triggered the war in Gaza.

The latest operation comes amid a rising tide of Israeli settler violence in the West Bank. Israeli leaders have played down the settler attacks as the work of a small minority. But Palestinians say the attacks are frequent, often in close proximity to Israeli troops, and the settlers are rarely punished.

Strikes on Lebanon ahead of the pope's visit

Israel's air force carried out another series of strikes in parts of southern Lebanon on Thursday. Israel says its ongoing strikes are aimed at preventing Hezbollah from rebuilding after a devastating war last year.

But the United Nations on Tuesday said Israel had killed at least 127 civilians, including children, in its strikes on Lebanon since the ceasefire came into effect one year ago. Things escalated earlier this week with a rare strike in Lebanon's capital of Beirut, killing Hezbollah's chief of staff.

On Thursday, Lebanese Prime Minister Nawaf Salam criticized Hezbollah for not disarming in a rare rebuke of the group, saying the Iran-backed militants have failed to deter Israeli airstrikes, protect the Lebanese

people or even safeguard the lives of its own leaders.

Pope Leo XIV is scheduled to visit the country on Sunday, when he will meet the crisis-hit nation's political and religious leaders.

American teen released from Israeli jail

Mohammed Ibrahim, an American teenager held in Israeli custody for nine months, was released Thursday evening and immediately checked into a hospital, his uncle told the AP.

Visibly thin, head shaven and still in a grey jumpsuit, Ibrahim wiped tears away as he was embraced by family members shortly after his release in videos taken by the family. His father, Zaher Ibrahim, kissed his son and began to cry.

"He's skinny and pale, his eyes are sunken in and he still has signs of scabies," said Zeyad Kadur, the uncle.

The teen was visiting family in the West Bank with his parents when he was arrested at his family's home at night for allegedly throwing rocks at Israeli settlers in the West Bank, according to the Council on American-Islamic Relations and several members of Congress. In an affidavit, Mohammed said he only confessed to stone-throwing after he was threatened by interrogators with a beating.

His family and lawyers said he was held in poor conditions, suffered a scabies infection and lost weight in jail.

## **Fleet of UPS planes grounded after deadly crash expected to miss peak delivery season**

By SARAH RAZA Associated Press

A fleet of planes that UPS grounded after a deadly crash isn't expected to be back in service during the peak holiday season due to inspections and possible repairs, the company said Wednesday in an internal memo.

The airline expects it will be several months before its McDonnell Douglas MD-11 fleet returns to service as it works to meet Federal Aviation Administration guidelines, said the memo from UPS Airlines president Bill Moore to employees. The process was originally estimated to take weeks but is now expected to take several months.

A fiery MD-11 plane crash on Nov. 4 in Louisville, Kentucky, killed 14 people and injured at least 23 when the left engine detached during takeoff. Cargo carriers grounded their McDonnell Douglas MD-11 fleets shortly after, ahead of a directive from the FAA.

"Regarding the MD-11 fleet, Boeing's ongoing evaluation shows that inspections and potential repairs will be more extensive than initially expected," Moore wrote in the memo.

A UPS spokesperson said in a statement that the company will rely on contingency plans to deliver for customers throughout the peak season, and it "will take the time needed to ensure that every aircraft is safe."

The 109 remaining MD-11 airliners, averaging more than 30 years old, are exclusively used to haul cargo for package delivery companies. MD-11s make up about 9% of the UPS airline fleet and 4% of the FedEx fleet.

Boeing, which took over as the manufacturer of MD-11s since merging with McDonnell Douglas in 1997, said in a statement that it is "working diligently to provide instructions and technical support to operators" so that they can meet the FAA's requirements.

The FAA said Boeing will develop the procedures for inspections and any corrective actions, pending approval from the FAA.

## Deposed Guinea-Bissau President Embaló arrives in neighboring Senegal as soldiers name junta leader

By CHINEDU ASADU and ASSANA SAMBU Associated Press

BISSAU, Guinea-Bissau (AP) — Soldiers in Guinea-Bissau on Thursday announced a new junta leader, cementing a forceful takeover of power that began after this week's disputed presidential election and led to deposed President Umaro Sissoco Embaló departing for neighboring Senegal.

The military high command in the West African nation inaugurated Gen. Horta Inta-a as the head of the military government, which will oversee a one-year transition period, according to a declaration broadcast on state television.

Embaló, meanwhile, arrived in Senegal with a flight chartered by the Senegalese government which has been "in direct communication with all concerned Guinea-Bissau actors," Senegal's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement, as the country promised to work with partners to restore democracy in Guinea-Bissau.

Guinea-Bissau, one of the world's poorest countries, has been dogged by coups and attempted coups since its independence from Portugal more than 50 years ago, including a coup attempt in October. The country of 2.2 million people is known as a hub for drug trafficking between Latin America and Europe, a trend that experts say has fueled its political crises.

### Opposition calls for protests against coup

Hours after the opposition called for protests against the coup and to demand the publication of election results earlier scheduled for Thursday, the military authorities issued a statement banning public protests and "all disturbing actions of peace and stability in the country."

In an earlier statement, Inta-a, who was the army chief of staff until the coup and a close ally of the deposed president, said: "The inability of political actors to stem the deterioration of the political climate ultimately prompted the intervention of the armed forces."

The military authorities earlier said Embaló and other prominent people arrested during the coup were in good health and would remain in custody. It was not immediately clear the terms of Embaló's departure to Senegal.

The Chairperson of the African Union Commission Mahmoud Ali Youssouf condemned the coup, calling for unconditional release of Embaló and other detained officials and for the respect of the electoral process.

West Africa's regional bloc known as ECOWAS also held a virtual meeting of heads of state where it condemned the coup and Embaló's "unlawful detention." "Our response will be firm, principled, and consistent with our history," said Sierra Leone President Julius Maada Bio, who serves as ECOWAS chairman.

Several other countries including France condemned the coup and called for respect for the constitutional order.

The opposition, meanwhile, purported that Embaló had "fabricated" the coup to avoid an election defeat in Sunday's closely contested presidential vote. The military takeover and the reported arrest of Embaló were manufactured to disrupt election results, according to his rival Fernando Dias, who, like Embaló, claimed to have won the vote.

The Associated Press could not independently verify the claims by Dias, a member of the Social Renewal Party.

Activities returned to normal in the capital Bissau on Thursday, with businesses and public transport gradually picking up.

### The latest in a string of coups

The coup is the latest in a surge of military takeovers in West Africa, where democracy recently has been challenged by disputed elections that analysts say could embolden militaries.

It followed presidential and legislative elections which were held at a critical time for the African country as Embaló, a 53-year-old former army general, faced a legitimacy crisis. The opposition said his tenure had long expired and refused to recognize him as president.

The coup and past ones in Guinea-Bissau are tied to "how much (state) institutions have been undermined and weakened," said Beverly Ochieng, a senior security analyst at the consultancy Control Risks. Under

Embaló, she said, "the legislature was dissolved unilaterally, the judiciary was operating under capacity, and there were deep-seated sentiments around political influence."

Gunshots rang out in the main city of Bissau on Wednesday just days after the tense presidential election, which Embaló and Dias both claimed to have won.

In a scene that has become familiar in the region, military officers appeared on state television and claimed they had seized power while the election commission's office was sealed.

Dias, 47, said in a video statement that he escaped custody "through a back door" after reports he was arrested by soldiers. He vowed to fight back.

The military officers who announced they had deposed the president cited the "discovery of an ongoing plan ... to manipulate electoral results," according to a spokesperson, Dinis N'Tchama, who was flanked by others during the televised statement.

The "scheme was set up by some national politicians with the participation of a well-known drug lord, and domestic and foreign nationals," N'Tchama said.

## At least 94 dead as Hong Kong firefighters battle burning towers for a second day

By CHAN HO-HIM and HUIZHONG WU Associated Press

HONG KONG (AP) — Firefighters battled for a second day to extinguish a blaze at a high-rise apartment complex in Hong Kong on Thursday, as the death toll rose to 94 in one of the deadliest blazes in the city's modern history.

Rescuers holding flashlights were going from apartment to apartment at the charred towers as thick smoke poured out from some windows at the Wang Fuk Court complex, a dense cluster of buildings housing thousands of people in Tai Po district, a northern suburb near Hong Kong's border with the mainland.

Officials said firefighters were still working on a handful of apartments and trying to enter all of the units in the seven towers to ensure there were no further casualties.

"Our firefighting operation is almost complete," said Derek Armstrong Chan, deputy director of Fire Services Operations. Firefighters were working hard "to prevent the debris and embers from flaring up. What's next is the search and rescue operation," he added.

It was unclear how many people remained missing or trapped. Hong Kong leader John Lee said contact had been lost with 279 people early Thursday. Authorities did not provide updates on the missing people or how many were still inside the ravaged buildings Thursday during a press conference.

Video showed rescuers searching in some apartments in the dark. Orange flames were still seen from inside several windows, though the whole complex was now largely a blackened ruin.

Firefighters have been trying to control the flames since midafternoon Wednesday, when the fire was believed to have started in bamboo scaffolding and construction netting and then spread across seven of the complex's eight buildings.

Chan said the blaze spread "exceptionally fast" across the towers, and emergency workers struggled to gain access inside.

"Debris and scaffolding were falling from upper floors," he told reporters. "There are also other reasons like high temperature, darkness ... (and) emergency vehicle access was blocked by fallen scaffolding and debris, making our access to the building very difficult."

More than 70 people were injured, including 11 firefighters, as well as the 94 killed, the Fire Services Department said. About 900 people were evacuated to temporary shelters overnight.

Pope Leo XIV sent a telegram to Hong Kong's bishop Thursday, saying he was saddened by the fire and offering prayers for the injured, their families and emergency workers.

Resident Lawrence Lee was waiting for news about his wife, who he believed was still trapped in their apartment.

"When the fire started, I told her on the phone to escape. But once she left the flat, the corridor and stairs were all filled with smoke and it was all dark, so she had no choice but to go back to the flat," he

said, as he waited in one of the shelters overnight.

Winter and Sandy Chung, who lived in one of the towers, said they saw sparks fly around as they evacuated Wednesday afternoon. Although they were safe, they were worried about their home. "I couldn't sleep the entire night," Winter Chung, 75, told The Associated Press on Thursday.

Three arrested on suspicion of manslaughter

Three men, the directors and an engineering consultant of a construction company, were arrested on suspicion of manslaughter. Police have not directly named the company where they work.

"We have reason to believe that those in charge of the construction company were grossly negligent," said Eileen Chung, a senior superintendent of police.

Police on Thursday also searched the office of Prestige Construction & Engineering Company, which the AP confirmed was in charge of renovations in the tower complex. Police seized boxes of documents as evidence, according to local media. Phones for Prestige rang unanswered.

Authorities suspected some materials on the exterior walls of the high-rise buildings did not meet fire resistance standards, allowing the unusually fast spread of the fire.

Police also said they found plastic foam panels -- which are highly flammable -- attached to the windows on each floor near the elevator lobby of the one unaffected tower. It was believed to have been installed by the construction company but the purpose was not clear. Secretary for Security Chris Tang said they would investigate the materials further.

Buildings were covered in scaffolding

The housing complex consisted of eight buildings with almost 2,000 apartments for about 4,800 residents, including many older people. It was built in the 1980s and had been undergoing a major renovation. Hong Kong's anti-corruption agency said on Thursday it was launching a probe into possible corruption relating to the renovation project.

Officials said the fire started on the external scaffolding of a 32-story tower, then spread on the bamboo scaffolding and construction netting to the inside of the building and then to the other buildings, likely aided by windy conditions.

Bamboo scaffolding is a common sight in Hong Kong at building construction and renovation projects, though Lee said officials will meet with industry representatives to discuss a switch to metal scaffolding amid safety concerns.

"While we know that bamboo scaffolding has a long history in Hong Kong, its flame retardancy is inferior to that of metal scaffolding. For safety reasons, the government believes that a complete switch to metal scaffolding should be implemented in suitable working environments," said Eric Chan, the Chief Secretary for Administration.

Authorities will also be carrying out immediate inspections of all housing estates that are undergoing major renovation work to ensure scaffolding and construction materials meet safety standards.

The fire was the deadliest in Hong Kong in decades. In November 1996, 41 people died in a commercial building in Kowloon in a fire that lasted for around 20 hours.

## **Fuzzy Zoeller, two-time major champion haunted by racist joke about Tiger Woods, dies at 74**

By DOUG FERGUSON AP Golf Writer

Fuzzy Zoeller, a two-time major champion and one of golf's most gregarious characters whose career was tainted by a racially insensitive joke about Tiger Woods, has died, according to a longtime colleague. He was 74.

A cause of death was not immediately available. Brian Naugle, the tournament director of the Insuperity Invitational in Houston, said Zoeller's daughter called him Thursday with the news.

Zoeller was the last player to win the Masters on his first attempt, a three-man playoff in 1979. He famously waved a white towel at Winged Foot in 1984 when he thought Greg Norman had beat him, only to defeat Norman in an 18-hole playoff the next day.

But it was the 1997 Masters that changed his popularity.

Woods was on his way to a watershed moment in golf with the most dominant victory in Augusta National history. Zoeller had finished his round and had a drink in hand under the oak tree by the clubhouse when he was stopped by CNN and asked for his thoughts on the 21-year-old Woods on his way to the most dominant win ever at Augusta National.

"That little boy is driving well and he's putting well. He's doing everything it takes to win. So, you know what you guys do when he gets in here? You pat him on the back and say congratulations and enjoy it and tell him not serve fried chicken next year. Got it?," Zoeller said.

He smiled and snapped his fingers, and as he was walking away he turned and said, "Or collard greens or whatever the hell they serve."

That moment haunted him the rest of his career.

Zoeller apologized. Woods was traveling and it took two weeks for him to comment as the controversy festered. Zoeller later said he received death threats for years after that moment.

Writing for Golf Digest in 2008, he said it was "the worst thing I've gone through in my entire life."

"If people wanted me to feel the same hurt I projected on others, I'm here to tell you they got their way," Zoeller wrote. "I've cried many times. I've apologized countless times for words said in jest that just aren't a reflection of who I am. I have hundreds of friends, including people of color, who will attest to that.

"Still, I've come to terms with the fact that this incident will never, ever go away."

It marred a career filled with two famous major titles, eight other PGA Tour titles and a Senior PGA Championship among his two PGA Tour Champions titles.

More than winning was how he went about it. Zoeller played fast and still had an easygoing nature to the way he approach the game, often whistling between shots.

He made his Masters debut in 1979 and got into a three-way playoff when Ed Sneed bogeyed the last three holes. Zoeller defeated Sneed and Tom Watson with a birdie on the second playoff hole, flinging his putter high in the air.

"I've never been to heaven, and thinking back on my life, I probably won't get a chance to go," Zoeller once said. "I guess winning the Masters is as close as I'm going to get."

Zoeller was locked in a duel with Norman at Winged Foot in the 1984, playing in the group behind and watching Norman make putt after putt. So when he saw Norman make a 40-footer on the 18th, he assumed it was for birdie and began waving a white towel in a moment of sportsmanship.

Only later did he realize it was for par, and Zoeller made par to force a playoff. Zoeller beat him by eight shots in the 18-hole playoff (67-75). Zoeller's lone regret was giving the towel to a kid after he finished in regulation.

"If you happen to see a grungy white towel hanging around, get it for me, will you?" he once said.

He was born Frank Urban Zoeller Jr. in New Albany, Indiana. Zoeller said his father was known only as "Fuzzy" and he was given the same name. He played at a junior college in Florida before joining the powerful Houston golf team before turning pro.

His wife, Diane, died in 2021. Zoeller has three children, including daughter Gretchen, with whom he used to play in the PNC Championship. Zoeller was awarded the Bob Jones Award by the USGA in 1985, the organization's highest honor given for distinguished sportsmanship.

## Lake effect snow piles up in Great Lakes region, impacting Thanksgiving travel

By ISABELLA VOLMERT Associated Press

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — Residents of the Great Lakes region are in for a snowy Thanksgiving, as a weather system continues to drop precipitation across the area, particularly in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan.

Snowfall that began Wednesday persisted Thursday with winds and snow bands out of the north and northwest. A blizzard warning is in effect in Alger County, east of Marquette, Michigan, until 7 p.m. Thursday night.

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The heaviest snowfall is expected to hit west of the town of Munising, according to the National Weather Service, with up to 13 inches (33 centimeters) of additional snow accumulation possible. The snow bands will likely taper off starting in the western counties of the Upper Peninsula as the day progresses.

Lily Chapman, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Marquette, said 15 inches (38 centimeters) of snow were measured at her office Thursday morning. Near Bessemer, Michigan, about 113 miles (182 kilometers) east of Duluth, Minnesota, Chapman said the National Weather Service received reports of over 18 to 28 inches (46 to 71 centimeters) of snow.

"It varies pretty quickly depending on things like elevation or where any of our stronger bands have been able to line up," Chapman said.

What is lake effect snow?

Lake effect snow is characterized by thin bands of clouds that can produce heavy snowfall. Some areas can see much more snow than others nearby thanks to the narrow bands.

The phenomenon occurs when cold air from Canada is blown over the warmer water of the Great Lakes: Superior, Michigan, Huron, Ontario and Erie. Warm air from the lakes pushes the moisture in the sky higher into a zone most conducive to snowfall. The clouds that form as a result can dump 2 to 3 inches (5 to 8 centimeters) per hour and sometimes more.

The weather particularly affects Michigan, Ohio and New York, but lake effect snow can also happen over other large bodies of water, like the Great Salt Lake in Utah.

About 10 miles (16 kilometers) west from Bessemer near Montreal, Wisconsin, the National Weather Service reported 33 inches (84 centimeters) of snow in one location early Thursday morning. Roy Eckberg, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Green Bay, said the elevation of the area creates an even better environment for clouds to create snow.

"So you not only have the lake effect, you've got the lift of the terrain," he said. "So that area can get some pretty interesting snow totals like this event."

Dangerous driving on Thanksgiving

The traveling bands of lake effect snow can cause sudden and extreme whiteouts, making driving hazardous. Travel was difficult across the Upper Peninsula on Thursday with low visibility, Chapman said.

Additionally, strong winds of up to 45 mph (72 kph) posed a threat of creating large snow drifts over roads and power outages. Over 1,000 power outages were reported near Houghton, Michigan, about 100 miles (160 kilometers) west of Marquette on Thursday morning, according to the utility provider the Upper Peninsula Power Company.

Similar power outages were reported by Consumers Energy on the coast of Lake Michigan near Holland, about 170 miles (274 kilometers) west of Detroit. The National Weather Service of Grand Rapids expected about two inches of snow Thursday with high gusts of wind of 45 mph (72 kph) near the lakeshore. The weather service warned of slick roads.

The lake effect snow is expected to ease west to east as Friday approaches. However, a different storm system is forecasted to blanket the Great Plains and Midwest regions with snow starting Friday heading into the weekend. The National Weather Service said Chicago could see six inches of accumulated snow through Sunday.

About 2 to 3 inches of snow were reported near Buffalo, New York, on Thanksgiving morning, and a lake effect snow warning was in effect until early Saturday morning.

## Scientists capture the crackling sounds of what they believe is lightning on Mars

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — Scientists have detected what they believe to be lightning on Mars by eavesdropping on the whirling wind recorded by NASA's Perseverance rover.

The crackling of electrical discharges was captured by a microphone on the rover, a French-led team reported Wednesday.

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The researchers documented 55 instances of what they call “mini lightning” over two Martian years, primarily during dust storms and dust devils. Almost all occurred on the windiest Martian sols, or days, during dust storms and dust devils.

Just inches (centimeters) in size, the electrical arcs occurred within 6 feet (2 meters) of the microphone perched atop the rover’s tall mast, part of a system for examining Martian rocks via camera and lasers. Sparks from the electrical discharges — akin to static electricity here on Earth — are clearly audible amid the noisy wind gusts and dust particles smacking the microphone.

Scientists have been looking for electrical activity and lightning at Mars for half a century, said the study’s lead author Baptiste Chide, of the Institute for Research in Astrophysics and Planetology in Toulouse.

“It opens a completely new field of investigation for Mars science,” Chide said, citing the possible chemical effects from electrical discharges. “It’s like finding a missing piece of the puzzle.”

The evidence is strong and persuasive, but it’s based on a single instrument that was meant to record the rover zapping rocks with lasers, not lightning blasts, said Cardiff University’s Daniel Mitchard, who was not involved in the study. What’s more, he noted in an article accompanying the study in the journal *Nature*, the electrical discharges were heard — not seen.

“It really is a chance discovery to hear something else going on nearby, and everything points to this being Martian lightning,” Mitchard said in an email. But until new instruments are sent to verify the findings, “I think there will still be a debate from some scientists as to whether this really was lightning.”

Lightning has already been confirmed on Jupiter and Saturn, and Mars has long been suspected of having it too.

To find it, Chide and his team analyzed 28 hours of Perseverance recordings, documenting episodes of “mini lightning” based on acoustic and electric signals.

Electrical discharges generated by the fast-moving dust devils lasted just a few seconds, while those spawned by dust storms lingered as long as 30 minutes.

“It’s like a thunderstorm on Earth, but barely visible with a naked eye and with plenty of faint zaps,” Chide said in an email. He noted that the thin, carbon dioxide-rich Martian atmosphere absorbs much of the sound, making some of the zaps barely perceptible.

Mars’ atmosphere is more prone than Earth’s to electrical discharging and sparking through contact among grains of dust and sand, according to Chide.

“The current evidence suggests it is extremely unlikely that the first person to walk on Mars could, as they plant a flag on the surface, be struck down by a bolt of lightning,” Mitchard wrote in *Nature*. But the “small and frequent static-like discharges could prove problematic for sensitive equipment.”

These aren’t the first Mars sounds transmitted by Perseverance. Earthlings have listened in to the rover’s wheels crunching over the Martian surface and the whirring blades of its no-longer-flying helicopter sidekick, Ingenuity.

Perseverance has been scouring a dry river delta at Mars since 2021, collecting samples of rock for possible signs of ancient microscopic life. NASA plans to return these core samples to Earth for laboratory analysis, but the delivery is on indefinite hold as the space agency pursues cheaper options.

## Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade brings Pac-Man and Labubu to Manhattan

NEW YORK (AP) — The Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade brought balloons depicting Buzz Lightyear and Pac-Man to the New York City skies on Thursday, as floats featuring Labubu and Lego graced the streets.

The parade, which started on Manhattan’s Upper West Side and closed at the iconic Macy’s Herald Square flagship store on 34th Street, included dozens of balloons, floats, clown groups and marching bands.

It was a chilly day in the city, with temperatures in the 40s, but wind gusts between 25 mph (40 kph) and 30 mph (48 kph), making it feel colder, according to David Stark, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in New York.

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Officials watched the forecast closely, since city law prohibits Macy's from flying full-size balloons if sustained winds exceed 23 mph (37 kph) or wind gusts are over 35 mph (56 kph). Weather has grounded the balloons only once, in 1971, but they also sometimes have soared lower than usual because of wind.

But a little cold wasn't a big deal for Megan Christy, who traveled to the city from Greensboro, North Carolina, for the parade, donning a warm onesie as she staked out a spot along the route.

"It's not raining. We're very excited about that. And it's not too bad. Not too cold," she said. "It's just a great day for a parade."

A star-studded lineup of performances was sprinkled throughout the show, along with a slew of marching bands, dancers and cheerleaders.

Performers included "Wicked" star Cynthia Erivo, Conan Gray, Lainey Wilson, Foreigner, Lil Jon, and Audrey Nuna, EJAE and Rei Ami of HUNTR/X, the fictional girl group at the heart of this year's Netflix hit "KPop Demon Hunters." The Radio City Rockettes were also there, as were cast members from Broadway's "Buena Vista Social Club," "Just in Time" and "Ragtime."

The parade featured a few new balloons, including a large onion carriage featuring eight characters from the world of "Shrek." "KPop Demon Hunters" was also represented in the sky with the characters Derpy Tiger and Sussie.

The event aired on NBC, hosted by Savannah Guthrie and Al Roker from "Today" and their former colleague Hoda Kotb. On Telemundo, the hosts were Andrea Meza, Aleyda Ortiz and Clovis Nienow. The parade was also simulcast on NBC's Peacock streaming service.

## **Putin sees US peace plan as a starting point as he warns Ukraine's army to withdraw**

By KATIE MARIE DAVIES Associated Press

U.S. proposals to end the war between Russia and Ukraine offer a starting point for talks, Russian President Vladimir Putin said Thursday, as he told Ukrainian forces to pull back or be overrun by Russia's bigger army.

"We need to sit down and discuss this seriously," Putin told reporters at the end of a three-day visit to Kyrgyzstan. "Every word matters."

He described U.S. President Donald Trump's plan as "a set of issues put forward for discussion" rather than a draft agreement.

"If Ukrainian troops withdraw from the territories they occupy, hostilities will cease. If they don't withdraw, we will achieve this by force," the Russian leader said.

Kremlin officials have had little to say so far about the peace plan put forward last week by Trump. Since Russia's invasion of its neighbor, Putin has shown no willingness to budge from his goals in Ukraine despite Trump's push for a settlement.

Putin has previously demanded that Ukraine completely withdraw from the entirety of Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhia regions before Russia considers any sort of "peace negotiations" — notably including areas of each of those oblasts that Russia does not occupy. He also wants to keep Ukraine from joining NATO and hosting any Western troops, allowing Moscow to gradually pull the country back into its orbit.

U.S. special envoy Steve Witkoff is set to visit Moscow next week, the Kremlin says, while U.S. Army Secretary Dan Driscoll, who in recent weeks has played a high-profile role in the peace efforts, may be heading to Kyiv.

The initial U.S. peace proposals appeared heavily skewed toward Russian demands, but an amended version emerged from talks in Geneva on Sunday between American and Ukrainian officials. Sidelined European leaders, fearing for their own security amid Russian aggression, are angling for deeper involvement in the process.

Putin looks to outlast the West's commitment, analysts say

Analysts say Putin is attempting to outwait the commitment of Western countries to supporting Ukraine's war effort. Trump has previously signaled he could walk away from efforts to stop the fighting if there is

no progress. European officials say Putin is stalling because Russia wants to grab more of Ukraine before accepting any deal.

Russian officials have claimed they have battlefield momentum in Ukraine, even though their slow progress has been costly in terms of casualties and armor.

The Institute for the Study of War on Wednesday cast doubt on Russian claims that its invasion is unstoppable as it is still struggling to capture cities in the eastern Donetsk region.

"Data on Russian forces' rate of advance indicates that a Russian military victory in Ukraine is not inevitable, and a rapid Russian seizure of the rest of Donetsk Oblast (region) is not imminent," the Washington-based think tank said. "Recent Russian advances elsewhere on the front line have largely been opportunistic and exploited seasonal weather conditions."

In the latest example of tension between Moscow and European countries, Russia's Foreign Ministry said Thursday that it had ordered the closure of Poland's Consulate General in the eastern city of Irkutsk.

The tit-for-tat move follows the closure of Russia's Consulate General in the Polish city of Gdansk in November. In a statement, the Russian Foreign Ministry said that Moscow would not "allow such actions to go unanswered."

Poland announced the closure of the Gdansk consulate after a railway line close to Warsaw was sabotaged in mid-November. Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk later said that two Ukrainian citizens working for Russia were suspected of carrying out the attack.

Long-range attacks continue

The diplomatic developments have come against a backdrop of continued fighting.

A 53-year-old man was killed in a Russian drone attack in Ukraine's northern Sumy region, officials said Friday. Also, Russia attacked Ukraine's Odesa and Dnipropetrovsk regions early Thursday, injuring three people and starting fires, local authorities said. Russia launched 142 drones at Ukraine overnight, according to Ukraine's air force.

Meanwhile, Russian air defenses downed 118 Ukrainian drones overnight above various Russian regions and the Black Sea, the Russian Defense Ministry said.

Ukraine's army isn't only under pressure on the battlefield. Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's government is mired in a major corruption scandal and is short of money.

In a development offering some relief, Ukraine reached an agreement for the International Monetary Fund to provide \$8.1 billion over four years, according to a statement by the institution. The money comes from a fund that helps countries facing medium-term payment difficulties.

But Ukraine's state budget and military needs for 2026 and 2027 are estimated at \$153 billion.

## French president unveils new military program for volunteers aged 18 and 19

VARCES, France (AP) — President Emmanuel Macron on Thursday unveiled a new program meant to bolster France's armed forces by training thousands of volunteers aged 18 and 19 starting next year, part of a broader response to concerns over Russia's threat to European nations beyond the war in Ukraine.

The young volunteers will serve in uniform for 10 months in France's mainland and oversea territories only, not in military operations abroad, Macron said in a speech at the Varcès military base, which is located in the French Alps.

"A new national service is set to be gradually established, starting from this summer," Macron said. "In this uncertain world where power prevails over law and war is an ever-present reality, our nation has no right to fear, panic, unpreparedness, or division."

The program will start with 3,000 youth to be selected next summer and will gradually increase to 10,000 per year by 2030. France has ambitions to reach up to 50,000 volunteers per year by 2035, a figure that will be adjusted depending on the global context, Macron added.

A path for reservists

Volunteers will hold military status and receive wages and equipment. After a month of training, they

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will be assigned for nine months to a unit in which they will perform the same missions as active military personnel, he detailed.

They will then join the military reserve and continue their education or start working.

Those who wish will be able to start a professional career in the active military, Macron said. Regular soldiers in France generally enlist for a 2- to 10-year renewable periods of time.

Conscription, which France ended in 1996, is not being considered.

Only under "exceptional circumstances" may parliament authorize enlisting those whose skills were identified during a one-day defense course, which all youths go through, and make national service mandatory for those people, Macron said.

Retired Gen. Jean-Paul Paloméros, a former head of the French Air Force, said training the young volunteers could take a toll on the French military's already stretched resources. But he said the new program would help France better prepare for future threats.

"It's good, it's a difficult path," especially because it requires financing and other resources, he said in a phone interview with The Associated Press. "But nevertheless I think it was needed somewhere to make sure that the young generations understand that freedom and peace are not taken for granted and it doesn't come as a free lunch."

Macron previously said France is seeking to boost its defenses as Russia's war in Ukraine puts the European continent at "great risk."

A growing sense of threat

France's new army chief of staff, Gen. Fabien Mandon, last week sent a warning about the nation's need to get prepared to "lose its children" in the event of a potential conflict with Russia – words that prompted an outcry across the political spectrum.

Russia annexed 20% of Georgia's territory in 2008, Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula in 2014 and launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Gen. Mandon said.

"Unfortunately, Russia today, based on the information I have access to, is preparing for a confrontation with our countries by 2030. It is organizing itself for this, it is preparing for this, and it is convinced that its existential enemy is NATO," he said.

France to increase defense spending

Macron has announced 6.5 billion euros (\$7.6 billion) in extra military spending in the next two years.

He said France will aim to spend 64 billion euros in annual defense spending in 2027, the last year of his second term. That would be double the 32 billion euros in annual spending when he became president in 2017.

The planned defense budget for the 2026-2030 period includes an additional expenditure of over 2 billion euros for the national service, Macron said.

France's military currently comprises around 200,000 active personnel and over 40,000 reservists, making it the second largest in the European Union, just behind Poland. France wants to increase the number of reservists to 80,000 by 2030.

European nations bolster military capabilities

France is not the only European nation bolstering its military capabilities.

Germany is redoubling its efforts to attract more recruits, notably via a new voluntary military service. The plan remains to be approved by parliament.

Belgium's defense minister sent a letter this month to 17-year-olds to encourage them to sign up for military service next year, with the aim to select 500 candidates between 18 and 25 to launch the program in September.

Poland has recently started rolling out a new voluntary military training program and aims to train 100,000 volunteers per year from 2027 as it seeks to build an army of reservists with worries about Russia growing. It isn't considering a return to universal military service, but rather a reserve system.

Ten EU countries have compulsory military service: Austria, Cyprus, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, and Sweden. Norway, which is not a member, has mandatory military service for both men and women. The length of service ranges from as little as two months in Croatia to up to

19 months in Norway.

## Wisconsin seeks to block Morgan Geyser's conditional release after escape from group home

By SCOTT BAUER and TODD RICHMOND Associated Press

WAUKESHA, Wis. (AP) — Wisconsin authorities have asked a state court to revoke the conditional release of Morgan Geyser, the woman who in 2014 almost killed her sixth grade classmate in the name of horror villain Slender Man and escaped from a group home earlier this week.

A Waukesha County Circuit Court judge agreed on Wednesday to seal the petition filed by the Department of Corrections late Tuesday seeking to revoke Geyser's conditional release. A Waukesha County judge earlier this year approved releasing Geyser from a state mental institution to live in a group home.

Geyser cut off her GPS monitoring bracelet on Saturday night and fled the group home in Madison, Wisconsin, with a 43-year-old companion, authorities said. Geyser was found by police outside of Chicago on Sunday night, about 170 miles (274 kilometers) from Madison.

Geyser did not fight her extradition to Wisconsin in a Chicago court appearance Tuesday. Online records show she had been brought back to Wisconsin and was being held in the Waukesha County jail late Wednesday.

Geyser's attorney, Tony Cotton, did not respond to an email Wednesday seeking comment on the state's request to revoke her release.

The judge set a motion hearing for Dec. 22.

If Geyser's conditional release is revoked, she could be sent back to the mental institution where she spent most of the past eight years. She also could face new charges in connection with her escape.

Geyser's companion has been charged with trespassing and obstruction, but The Associated Press isn't naming the companion because the person hasn't been charged with aiding Geyser's escape. The AP's attempts to contact that person have been unsuccessful.

The companion did call WKOW-TV on Monday, however, saying the two became friends at church and had seen each other daily for the past month. Geyser decided to flee because she was afraid her group home would no longer allow them to see each other, the person said.

"She ran because of me," the friend told the television station.

Geyser and her companion took a bus overnight into Illinois, the friend said.

Geyser and her friend, Anissa Weier, lured one of their classmates, Payton Leutner, to a Waukesha park in 2014. Geyser stabbed Leutner 19 times, narrowly missing her heart, while Weier cheered her on. All three girls were 12 years old at the time. Leutner barely survived.

Geyser and Weier later told investigators they attacked Leutner in hopes of impressing Slender Man and becoming his servants. They said they were afraid Slender Man would hurt their families if they didn't carry out the attack.

Slender Man was created online by Eric Knudsen in 2009 as a mysterious figure photo-edited into everyday images of children at play. He grew into a popular boogeyman, appearing in video games, online stories and a 2018 movie.

Both Geyser and Weier were ultimately committed to a state mental institution — Geyser for 40 years and Weier for 25. Wisconsin law allows people committed to state institutions to petition for release. Weier earned conditional release in 2021. Geyser, now 23, won conditional release in September after four requests and was placed in the group home.

State health officials tried to block her release in March, telling the judge that Geyser didn't volunteer to her therapy team that she had read "Rent Boy," a novel about murder and selling organs on the black market. They also alleged that she has been communicating with a man who collects murder memorabilia, and has sent him her own sketch of a decapitated body and a postcard saying she wants to be intimate with him.

The judge concluded that Geyser wasn't trying to hide anything and proceeded with her release, which was finalized in September.

## Kremlin confirms US envoy will visit as talks on ending war in Ukraine gain momentum

By ILLIA NOVIKOV and SAM MCNEIL Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — A senior Kremlin official confirmed Wednesday that U.S. special envoy Steve Witkoff is set to visit Moscow next week as efforts pick up speed to find a consensus on ending the nearly four-year war between Russia and Ukraine.

But Yuri Ushakov, Russian President Vladimir Putin's foreign affairs adviser, insisted that Kremlin officials haven't officially received the initial U.S. peace proposal, although they have acknowledged that they have seen a copy obtained through back channels. Representatives of the United States, Russia and Ukraine held talks earlier this week in the United Arab Emirates.

"Contact is ongoing, including via telephone, but no one has yet sat down at a roundtable and discussed this point by point. That hasn't happened," Ushakov told Russian state media.

Ukrainian officials didn't confirm whether U.S. Army Secretary Dan Driscoll, who in recent weeks has played a high-profile role in the peace efforts, would be in Kyiv in the coming days, as U.S. President Donald Trump indicated Tuesday.

### Russia cautious on peace prospects

Trump's plan for ending the war became public last week, setting off diplomatic maneuvering. The initial version appeared heavily slanted toward Russian demands for halting Moscow's invasion of its neighbor.

After weekend talks in Geneva between U.S. and Ukrainian officials, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said the plan could be "workable," although key points remain unresolved. A Ukrainian official said Zelenskyy hoped to meet with Trump in the coming days.

Witkoff's role in the peace efforts came under a renewed spotlight Tuesday when a report indicated that he coached Ushakov, the Putin aide, on how Russia's leader should pitch Trump on the Ukraine peace plan.

Trump described Witkoff's reported approach to the Russians in the call as "standard" negotiating procedure.

"He's got to sell this to Ukraine. He's got to sell Ukraine to Russia," Trump told reporters Tuesday night. "That's what a deal maker does."

Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said that he "wouldn't exaggerate (the) significance" of the leaked call, Russian state news outlet Tass reported.

However, "it's clear that there will be a very large number of people in various countries, including the United States, who will try to disrupt these efforts toward peace," Peskov said from Kyrgyzstan, where Putin traveled this week.

Asked whether a peace agreement is closer than ever, Peskov told reporters, "It's a little too early to say that," according to Tass.

### Russian drones hit a Ukrainian university dorm

The southern Ukrainian city of Zaporizhzhia came under a large Russian drone attack overnight, damaging more than 50 residential buildings, including a university dormitory filled with people, the head of the regional military administration, Ivan Fedorov, said Wednesday.

The attack wounded at least 19 people, he said.

Russian air defenses, meanwhile, downed 33 Ukrainian drones overnight over various Russian regions and the Black Sea, according to the Russian Defense Ministry.

Ukrainian forces struck a manufacturing plant in Cheboksary, western Russia, that produces equipment and components for cruise and ballistic missiles, Ukraine's General Staff said Wednesday.

### Europe wants to be heard

European countries, which are alarmed by Russia's aggression and see their own future at stake in negotiations over Ukraine, are fighting to make their voices heard in the talks as Washington takes the lead.

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz said Wednesday that Europe wants the war to end as quickly as possible.

"But an agreement negotiated by great powers without the approval of the Ukrainians and without the

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approval of the Europeans won't be a basis for a real, sustainable peace in Ukraine," Merz told lawmakers in Berlin. "Europe is not a plaything, but a sovereign actor for its own interests and values."

The head of the European Union's executive, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, was upbeat about recent developments, saying there is "an opportunity here to make real progress" toward peace.

She insisted that any settlement must include future security guarantees for Ukraine. At the same time, she said a deal can't contain limitations on Ukraine's armed forces or block its path to NATO membership. Those limits were part of the initial proposal.

"There can be no limitations on Ukraine's armed forces that would leave the country vulnerable to future attacks," she said during a speech at the European Parliament. "This is as much about deterrence as it is about Europe's security, because Ukraine's security is Europe's security."

Kaja Kallas, the EU's top diplomat, expressed doubt about Russia's willingness to engage in peace talks. "Right now, we see zero indication that Russia is ready for a ceasefire. Russia is not winding down its military machine, but ramping it up," Kallas said after a meeting of foreign ministers of the 27 EU nations in Brussels.

Additional pressure on Russia, such as more economic sanctions and seizing Moscow's frozen assets, is needed to push Moscow to the negotiation table, she told a news conference: "We still need to get from a situation where Russia pretends to negotiate to a situation where they need to negotiate."

## Today in History: November 28, the debut of the Grand Ole Opry

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Friday, Nov. 28, the 332nd day of 2025. There are 33 days left in the year. Today is Thanksgiving in the United States.

Today in history:

On Nov. 28, 1925, the Grand Ole Opry (known then as the WSM Barn Dance) debuted on radio station WSM in Nashville, Tennessee; it continues today as the longest-running radio broadcast in U.S. history.

Also on this date:

In 1520, Portuguese navigator Ferdinand Magellan reached the Pacific Ocean after passing through the South American strait that now bears his name.

In 1942, fire engulfed the Coconut Grove nightclub in Boston, killing 492 people in the deadliest nightclub blaze ever.

In 1943, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and Soviet leader Josef Stalin met in Tehran, Iran, for the first time to discuss Allied cooperation during World War II.

In 1961, halfback Ernie Davis of Syracuse University became the first Black college football player to be named winner of the Heisman Trophy.

In 1964, the United States launched the space probe Mariner 4 on a course toward Mars, which it flew past in July 1965, sending back pictures of the red planet.

In 2001, Enron Corp., once the world's largest energy trader, collapsed after would-be rescuer Dynegy Inc. backed out of an \$8.4 billion takeover deal. (Enron filed for bankruptcy protection four days later.)

In 2022, Payton Gendron, a white gunman who massacred 10 Black people at a Buffalo supermarket, pleaded guilty to murder and hate-motivated terrorism charges in an agreement that gave him life in prison without parole.

Today's Birthdays: Recording executive Berry Gordy Jr. is 96. Football Hall of Famer Paul Warfield is 83. Former "Late Show" band leader Paul Shaffer is 76. Actor Ed Harris is 75. Actor S. Epatha (eh-PAY'-thah) Merkerson is 73. Actor Judd Nelson is 66. Film director Alfonso Cuarón (kwahr-OHN') is 64. Rock drummer Matt Cameron is 63. Comedian and talk show host Jon Stewart is 63. Actor Colman Domingo is 56. Musician apl.de.ap (Black Eyed Peas) is 51. Actor Mary Elizabeth Winstead is 41. R&B singer Trey Songz is 41. Actor Karen Gillan is 38. Actor-rapper Bryshere Gray is 32.