

Groton Daily Independent

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Mon, Dec. 29

Senior Menu: Sweet and sour pork, steamed rice, carrot and broccoli medley, corn, fruit.

No School

Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.

Floyd Farrand Tournament Girls Wrestling at SF Lincoln, 9 a.m.

5th/6th Volleyball Practice, 6 p.m.

Tues., Dec. 30

Senior Menu: Meat loaf, baked potato, mixed vegetables, fruit, whole wheat bread.

No School

GBB NSU Showcase, Groton vs. Lemmon, 3 p.m.

Boys BB hosts Webster (JV at 6 p.m., Varsity to follow)

7th Grade Girls Soccer Practice, 6 p.m.

Wed., Dec. 31

Senior Menu: Oven fried chicken, sweet potatoes, green beans, fruit, whole wheat bread.

No School

United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.

Groton C&MA: Kid's Club, Youth Group, Adult Bible Study, 7 p.m.

3rd/4th Volleyball Practice, 6 p.m.

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

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1440

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

Minnesota Fraud Probe

FBI Director Kash Patel said yesterday the agency was reallocating resources to Minnesota to continue investigating allegations of widespread fraud linked to federally funded programs.

The update came after investigative YouTuber Nick Shirley last week released a 42-minute documentary visiting the addresses of day care centers, adult home care companies, and other businesses. Many appeared to be inactive despite claiming millions of dollars in state-distributed taxpayer funds, including from the Education Department and Medicaid. In yesterday's announcement, Patel noted the FBI's work dismantling a \$250M scheme to siphon pandemic-era food assistance via the Feeding Our Future network. The amount of stolen taxpayer money—from the food aid scheme and others—reportedly exceeds \$1B.

More than 90 people have been indicted and more than 50 convicted to date, many of them of Somali descent. Gov. Tim Walz (D) has criticized President Donald Trump's language toward Somali Americans in Minnesota and has sought to defend his administration, which oversaw the distribution of the funds.

Brigitte Bardot Dies

French actress Brigitte Bardot died yesterday at age 91. The former sex symbol was hospitalized last month; no cause of death was given.

Bardot's breakout role came in 1956 when, at 23, she starred in "And God Created Woman," directed by her then-husband, Roger Vadim. Bardot would go on to act in more than two dozen films, including "The Bride Is Much Too Beautiful" (1956), "Babette Goes to War" (1959), and "The Vixen" (1969). Some films involved nudity, and one—"Viva Maria!" (1965)—earned her a BAFTA nomination for best foreign actress. She became the first celebrity whose facial features inspired Marianne, France's national symbol.

After retiring from acting, Bardot founded an animal rights organization. She was convicted and fined multiple times for inciting racial hatred, largely for comments criticizing Muslim approaches to slaughter rituals. She became an outspoken supporter of France's National Front (now National Rally), marrying an adviser to nationalist-populist leader Jean-Marie Le Pen.

Bomb Cyclone Hits Midwest

Tens of millions of people across the Upper Midwest are under winter weather alerts this morning, as an arctic storm swept down from Canada yesterday. Residents around the Great Lakes are expected to see near-hurricane-force winds and blizzard conditions through today, with some areas on track for up to 2 feet of snow and 50 mph gusts.

The arrival of the arctic blast came on the busiest travel day of the year, with an estimated 2.8 million air travelers returning home after the holiday. As of this writing, more than 3,200 flights have been delayed and another 350 canceled (see current status). Driven by a bomb cyclone weather pattern, temperatures will stay below average throughout much of the week in the region.

Despite the frigid conditions, last week saw unseasonably elevated temperatures, with the contiguous US notching the warmest Christmas Day on record with an average high of nearly 58 degrees.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Kennedy Center president vows to sue musician who canceled a performance after the center added President Donald Trump's name to the building.

Former University of Utah football coach Kyle Whittingham signs five-year deal to coach Michigan Wolverines.

Actor accuses Tyler Perry of sexual assault, seeks \$77M in damages in second lawsuit against the director in recent months.

Science & Technology

China releases draft rules governing human-like AI; models must reinforce "core socialist values," notify users at login and two-hour intervals they are using AI.

Scientists begin latest expedition to Antarctica's Thwaites Glacier; known as the "Doomsday glacier," the region is shedding 50 billion tons of ice per year and helps support the West Antarctic ice sheet.

Famous Bayeux Tapestry, depicting the 1066 Norman conquest of England, to be insured for roughly \$1B upon its transfer from France to the British Museum next year.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close mostly flat Friday (S&P 500 +0.2%, Dow -0.0%, Nasdaq -0.1%); S&P 500 ends week up 1.4% after hitting record high Wednesday.

Nvidia announces nonexclusive licensing agreement with AI chip startup Groq, shareholders will receive distributions valuing the company at \$20B; around 90% of Groq employees, including CEO Jonathan Ross, will join Nvidia, remaining employees will operate as a standalone entity.

Global dealmaking totaled around \$4.5T in 2025, up 50% from last year and the second-highest total on record; Netflix bidding war, Union Pacific-Norfolk Southern merger top biggest deals.

Politics & World Affairs

President Donald Trump meets with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in Palm Beach, Florida, to discuss a potential end to the Russia-Ukraine war.

Israel becomes first country to recognize Somaliland, which broke away from Somalia in 1991; decision precedes Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's meeting with President Donald Trump today.

Thailand and Cambodia sign new ceasefire agreement in bid to end recent border clashes that have killed dozens of people.

Myanmar completes first phase of voting in country's first general election since 2021 military coup.

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Family is \$67.10 per month or \$702.26 per year

Month-to-Month Rates

Student is \$35.15 per month
Single is \$40.48 per month
2-Person is \$59.78 per month
Family is \$72.43 per month

**While many other rates have gone up, ours has not.
Same rates for several years!**

“Keeping Us in Balance: The Work of the Kidneys”

Picture a man crawling through the desert in tattered clothing, whispering “water” as he nears an oasis. He isn’t thinking about his kidneys, yet they may be the main organ still keeping him alive.

The human body does an amazing job at maintaining the balance of our internal environment, known as homeostasis. The kidneys, those two bean-shaped organs at our sides, are vital for maintaining that balance. Through filtration, reabsorption, and

the secretion of hormones, the kidneys are one (or two) of our most important organs.

Each day, the kidneys filter roughly 50 gallons of blood, enough to fill a bathtub. In doing so, they remove waste products and toxins that would otherwise build up and cause harm. They also regulate electrolytes such as sodium, potassium, calcium, and phosphate, which are essential for proper muscle, nerve, and heart function.

The kidneys regulate our fluid balance. If we are dehydrated, they will reabsorb more fluid back into the bloodstream. Meanwhile, if there is excess, they will increase urine production. On a normal day, a healthy person usually only needs to drink when feeling thirsty. Anti-diuretic hormone is secreted by the brain when you start to get dehydrated, telling the kidneys to retain more fluid, and giving yourself the sensation of thirst.

The kidneys help regulate blood pressure through their control of salt and water retention or excretion. They maintain acid-base balance, keeping the body’s pH within a narrow, safe range. In addition, the kidneys secrete hormones involved in bone health and stimulate the bone marrow to produce red blood cells.

With all these responsibilities, preserving kidney health is essential. You can support your kidneys by preventing imbalance where possible. Eat a healthy diet low in salt and added sugar. See your healthcare provider regularly to screen for diabetes and monitor blood pressure, the two leading causes of chronic kidney disease. Avoid taking excessive amounts of medications such as ibuprofen or naproxen. Other prescription and over-the-counter drugs, supplements, and herbal preparations can strain the kidneys as well—so use them carefully and follow directions.

With the kidneys, balance is key. Avoid excess, protect your health, and your kidneys will likely manage the rest. Whether you are sleeping soundly at home or desperately seeking water under a desert sun, your kidneys continue their quiet work—filtering, regulating, protecting, and keeping your body in balance.



Andrew Ellsworth, MD

Dr. Andrew Ellsworth is a Family Medicine Physician at Avera Medical Group Brookings in Brookings, SD. He serves as one of the Prairie Doc Volunteer Hosts during its 24th Season providing Health Education Based on Science, Built on Trust. Follow The Prairie Doc® at www.prairiedoc.org, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and Tik Tok. Prairie Doc Programming includes On Call with the Prairie Doc®, a medical Q&A show (most Thursdays at 7pm on SDPB, YouTube and streaming on Facebook), 2 podcasts, and a Radio program (on SDPB, Sundays at 6am and 1pm).

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Monday, the 29th:

- Girls Wrestling @ SF Lincoln (9am)

Tuesday, the 30th:

- GBB @ NSU Showcase (3pm vs. Lemmon)

- BBB vs. Webster (C @ 5pm, JV @ 6pm, Varsity to follow)

Friday, the 2nd:

- Girls Wrestling @ McCook Central/Montrose (Salem @ 11am)

- Doubleheader vs. Vermillion (Boys C/Girls JV @ 2pm, Girls C/Boys JV @ 3:15pm, Girls Varsity @ 4:30pm, Boys Varsity to follow)



Lucky For Life Second Prize Winner Purchased in Sioux Falls

PIERRE, S.D. —A South Dakota Lottery player will get a late Christmas gift in the form of \$25,000 a year for life.

Saturday's Lucky for Life drawing resulted in a second prize winner. The winning ticket was purchased at Sunshine Foods, which is located at 530 S. 2nd Ave. in Sioux Falls.

The winning ticket matched 5 of 5 winning numbers and was just the Lucky Ball away from a jackpot win. The winning numbers are 8, 12, 24, 26 and 42 with a Lucky Ball of 17.

Lucky for Life's second prize gives the winning player the option of \$25,000 a year for life or a one-time payment of \$390,000.

The South Dakota Lottery advises the winner to sign the back of the ticket immediately and consult with a financial advisor before claiming the prize. The prize may be claimed by visiting any South Dakota Lottery redemption center. The South Dakota Lottery's Sioux Falls validation center is located at 3605 S. Western Ave., Suite B.

Wednesday's second prize winner marks the 13th Lucky for Life second prize winner since the game's South Dakota debut in 2017.

The state's General Fund, which supports K-12 schools, state universities and technical institutes, receives 70 percent of net revenue from lotto games such as Lucky for Life. The state's Capital Construction Fund receives the remaining 30 percent. This supports the Water and Environment Fund, the Ethanol Fuel Fund, and the State Highway Fund.

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What: Two vehicle fatal crash

Where: US Highway 14, mile marker 399, on the west edge of Arlington, SD

When: 7:06 p.m., Friday, December 26, 2025

Driver 1: 62-year-old male from Faribault, MN, fatal injuries

Vehicle 1: 2016 Mercedes-Benz Metris

Seat belt Used: Yes

Driver 2: 37-year-old male from Huron, SD, serious, non-life-threatening injuries

Vehicle 2: 2015 Chevrolet Silverado 2500

Seat belt Used: Yes

Kingsbury County, S.D.- A Minnesota man died and another was seriously injured in a two-vehicle crash Friday evening near Arlington, SD.

The names of the persons involved have not been released pending notification of family members.

Preliminary crash information indicates the driver of a 2016 Mercedes-Benz Metris was traveling eastbound on US 14 near mile marker 399 and crossed the center line, colliding head-on with a 2015 Chevrolet Silverado 2500 in the westbound lane.

The driver of the Mercedes died at the scene. The driver of the Chevrolet sustained serious, non-life-threatening injuries.

The South Dakota Highway Patrol is investigating the crash. All information released so far is only preliminary.

The Highway Patrol is an agency of the South Dakota Department of Public Safety.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Greater sage grouse advocates say new federal plan imperils habitat in states including SD

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR

rump administration land-management changes in eight Western states, including South Dakota, are worrying some conservationists concerned about the declining greater sage grouse population.

The Bureau of Land Management announced on Dec. 22 its decision to modify greater sage grouse land-use plans on about 65 million acres. The plan affects areas in Idaho, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nevada, California, Utah and Wyoming.

The bureau said its actions support Trump administration orders "unleashing American energy" and advancing "national energy independence." Acting Bureau of Land Management Director Bill Groffy said in a news release that the agency is "strengthening American energy security while ensuring the sage-grouse continues to thrive."

Greater sage grouse are known for their chunky bodies and mating dance. The bird has been eligible for Endangered Species Act protections since the early 2010s, according to the Arizona-based Center for Biological Diversity. Instead of listing sage grouse as endangered, the federal government adopted revised land management plans in 2015 establishing limits on mining, transmission lines and other heavy industry operations within priority sage grouse habitat areas.

Greater sage grouse have been in decline nationally, with populations reduced from millions to fewer than 800,000, according to the bureau. The decline in South Dakota has been caused by a loss of sagebrush, livestock overgrazing, fire, invasive plant species, oil and gas development, and increased mortality due to West Nile virus, according to the state Department of Game, Fish and Parks' Greater Sage Grouse Action Plan for 2022 to 2026.

"More frequent drought associated with climate change could also be a threat," the state plan says. "Overhunting was also a historic factor in the population decline."

South Dakota's action plan says the birds once spread across the western third of the state outside of the Black Hills. The birds now primarily inhabit only portions of Butte and Harding counties.



Populations of greater sage grouse have fallen due to habitat loss, according to the U.S. Bureau of Land Management. (Photo by Bob Wick/U.S. Bureau of Land Management via Flickr)

Activists push back

The Center for Biological Diversity said in a news release that the new federal plan removes protections from millions of acres of prime sage grouse habitat.

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"Trump's reckless actions will speed the extinction of greater sage grouse by allowing unfettered fossil fuel extraction and other destructive development across tens of millions of acres of public lands," said Randi Spivak, public lands policy director for the center, in the release. Spivak also said the center will "see Trump in court."

Spivak said earlier federal plans required the bureau to prioritize areas outside designated sage grouse nesting habitats — called leks — for oil and gas development, but that requirement is gone in the new plan. She said the change could make it harder for groups like hers to challenge leasing and development decisions.

Spivak also said the new plan removes an annual analysis meant to flag population declines. She said the system was designed to detect localized declines early enough for managers to "ring the alarm bell" and adjust actions before losses become irreversible.

Spivak said the changes matter in South Dakota because the state's sage grouse are "no longer self-sustaining" and survive partly through movement and habitat connectivity with populations in Montana and Wyoming.

"The birds don't stop at borders," Spivak said in an interview. She described the newly finalized plans as a shift from a federal standard toward state-by-state approaches, arguing that inconsistent management is risky for an interstate species.

The bureau's news release says its new plans were developed "in close partnership with Western governors and state wildlife managers" and reflect "better alignment on adaptive management and other conservation strategies."

Portions of this report were originally published by the Utah News Dispatch in a story by Alixel Cabrera.

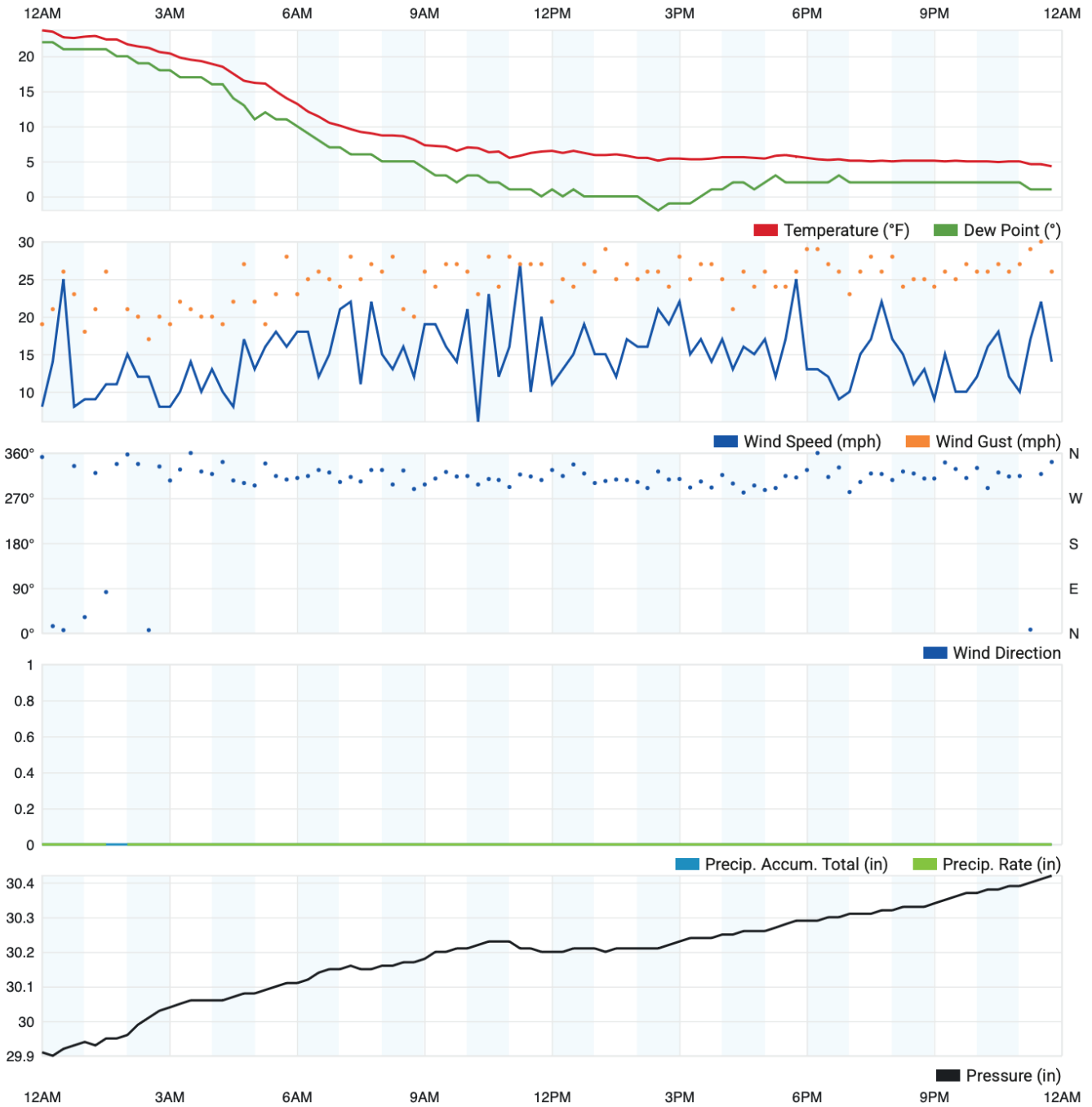
Joshua Haiar is a reporter based in Sioux Falls. Born and raised in Mitchell, he joined the Navy as a public affairs specialist after high school and then earned a degree from the University of South Dakota. Prior to joining South Dakota Searchlight, Joshua worked for five years as a multimedia specialist and journalist with South Dakota Public Broadcasting.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

December 28, 2025



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Today



High: 12 °F

Sunny

Tonight



Low: 10 °F↑↑

Increasing
Clouds

Tuesday



High: 34 °F

Mostly Sunny

Tuesday Night



Low: 11 °F

Mostly Cloudy

Wednesday



High: 20 °F

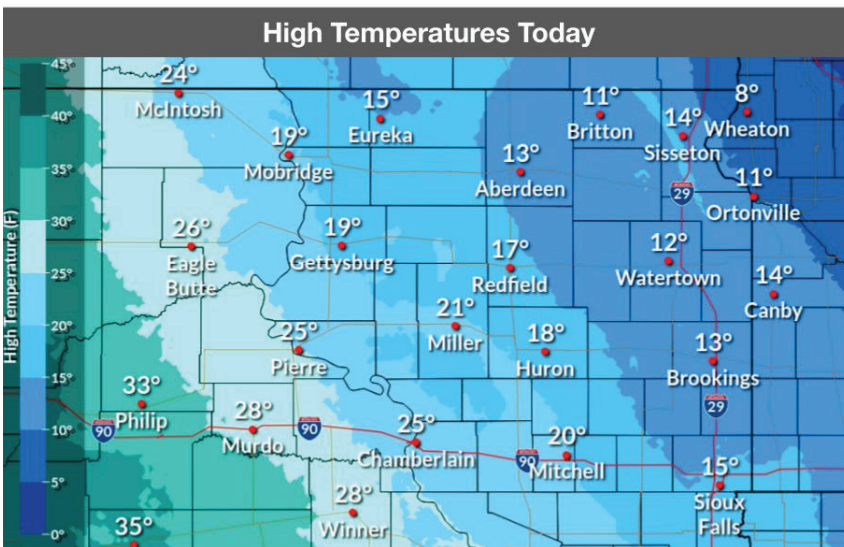
Slight Chance
Snow then
Mostly Cloudy



Cold Today, with diminishing winds

December 29, 2025
2:26 AM CST

- Winds will continue to slowly diminish today, with morning wind chills of -15 to -25 improving this afternoon
- Looking ahead: Temperatures warming above freezing Tuesday



	12/29			
	Mon			
	6am	9am	12pm	3pm
Aberdeen	-18	-13	-5	3
Miller	-17	-12	-1	8
Mobridge	-17	-12	-1	8
Murdo	-19	-14	4	18
Ortonville	-20	-19	-14	-4
Pierre	-15	-8	4	18
Sisseton	-24	-21	-14	-4
Watertown	-22	-19	-13	-5

The cold weather will continue today, with morning wind chills of -15 to -25 degrees. Winds will diminish and wind chills will moderate into the single digits above to around -10 degrees this afternoon. Temperatures over much of the area will warm above freezing Tuesday afternoon.

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Morning Wind Chills -15 to -25 degrees

Frostbite possible within 30 minutes

Cold Weather Safety

Follow These Simple Steps To Avoid Cold Temperature Related Illness This Winter



LIMIT
OUTDOOR TIME



WEAR
MITTENS



ALWAYS WEAR
A HAT



DRESS IN
LAYERS

 National Oceanic and
Atmospheric Administration
U.S. Department of Commerce

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Wind chill values this morning will be -15 to -25 degrees, before moderating into the single digits above to around -10 degrees this afternoon. To stay warm and reduce the potential for cold temperature related illness this winter, limit outdoor time when wind chills get cold, wear mittens, wear a hat, and dress in layers.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 24 °F at 12:03 AM

Low Temp: 5 °F at 11:13 PM

Wind: 31 mph at 10:04 PM

Precip: : 0.00 1-2" of Snow

Today's Info

Record High: 59 in 1999

Record Low: -35 in 1917

Average High: 25

Average Low: 4

Average Precip in Dec.: 0.57

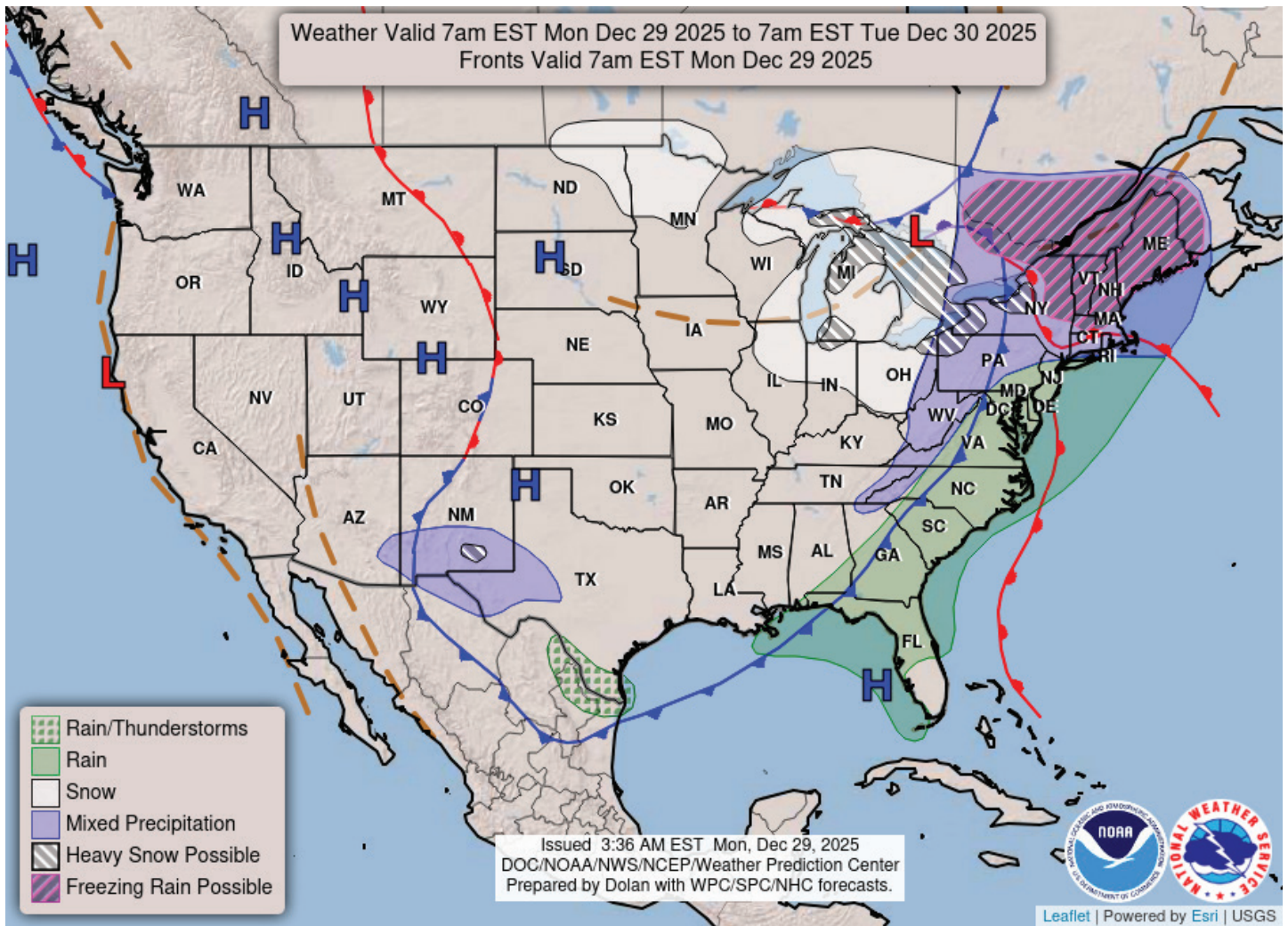
Precip to date in Dec.: 0.67

Average Precip to date: 21.78

Precip Year to Date: 25.48

Sunset Tonight: 4:56 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:12 am



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Today in Weather History

December 29, 2005: Heavy snow of 6 to 14 inches fell across parts of north-central and most of north-east South Dakota from the morning of the 29th through the early afternoon of the 30th. Big Stone and Traverse counties in west-central Minnesota had 7 to 8 inches of snow the evening of the 29th through the early afternoon of the 30th. Light rain and freezing rain fell before the snow, creating some slick roads which resulted in some accidents. Some snowfall amounts included 7 inches at Watertown, Big Stone City, and Artichoke Lake; 8 inches at Waubay, Browns Valley, and Wheaton; 9 inches northeast of Isabel and Hecla; 10 inches at Wilmot and Clear Lake; 12 inches at Milbank; and 14 inches at Summit.

1830 — A very heavy snowstorm ushered in the "winter of the deep snow." The storm produced 30 inches of snow at Peoria IL and 36 inches at Kansas City MO. Cold and snow continued until the middle of February causing great suffering among pioneers. (David Ludlum)

1876: The Pacific Express train was crossing the Ashtabula River in Ohio when the bridge collapsed. The bridge collapsed at 7:28 PM, during a snowstorm that left two feet of snow and produced 40 mph winds. The only railcar not to fall into the icy river below was the first locomotive.

1894 — A severe freeze hit Florida destroying fruit and causing considerable damage to trees. (David Ludlum)

1954 — Fort Scott, KS, was buried under 26 inches of snow in 24 hours to establish a state record. (28th-29th) (The Weather Channel)

1984 — One hundred cities in the central and eastern U.S. reported record high temperatures. Kansas City, MO, experienced its warmest December day of record with a morning low of 60 degrees and an afternoon high of 71 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Sandra and TI Richard Sanders - 1987)

1987 — A storm off the Middle Atlantic Coast produced heavy snow in the Appalachians and the north-eastern U.S. Snow and high winds created blizzard conditions in southeastern Massachusetts. Cape Cod received thirteen inches of snow, and snow drifts three feet deep were reported around Chatham MA. Strong winds produced wind chill readings as cold as 60 degrees below zero in southwestern New England. In the western U.S., a Pacific coast storm produced heavy snow in the Sierra Nevada Range of California, with 24 inches reported at Mammoth Mountain. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 — A cold front brought rain and snow to the northwestern U.S. The rainfall total of 2.70 inches at Astoria OR was a record for the date. High winds along the eastern slopes of the Northern Rockies gusted to 81 mph at Livingston MT. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

Can We Be Sure?

Because God wants you to be confident in your relationship with Him, His Word is filled with assurances.

1 John 5:1-13: 1 Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him.

2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments.

3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome.

4 For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.

5 Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

6 This is the One who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ; not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood. It is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth.

7 For there are three that testify:

8 the Spirit and the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement.

9 If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater; for the testimony of God is this, that He has testified concerning His Son.

10 The one who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself; the one who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has given concerning His Son.

11 And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.

12 He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.

13 These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.

Our Father wants us to know we have eternal life through Jesus. What assurances do we have that we are permanently secure?

God's love. One reason we can be sure of salvation is our heavenly Father's unconditional love. At the cross, He demonstrated just how much we mean to Him: He sent His Son to die so that we might have eternal life (1 John 4:9-10).

Christ's life and death. Because Jesus was without sin, He took the death penalty we deserved, and He did the saving work none of us could accomplish. The Savior rescued us from sin and death and secured our salvation (2 Corinthians 1:10).

Jesus' promise. We have our Lord's assurance that all who receive Him as Savior will spend eternity with Him. He promised that we can never be separated from Him and that no one can snatch us from His hand (John 10:28).

The Holy Spirit. Another assurance of eternal security is the presence of God's Spirit within each believer. The Holy Spirit acts as a seal, guaranteeing that we belong to the Lord and serving as a pledge of our awesome, joyful future in heaven with Him (2 Corinthians 1:21-22).

Let's take a moment to thank God for salvation—and for filling His Word with His promises so we can be sure.

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

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The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition Subscription Form

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- Black & White \$48.99/year
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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:

12.26.25

9 19 31 63 64 7

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$138,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 14 Mins 58 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:

12.27.25

8 10 20 47 50 4

All Star Bonus: 5x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$10,800,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 29 Mins 59 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:

12.28.25

12 17 25 34 42 9

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 44 Mins 59 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:

12.27.25

8 14 15 20 30

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$156,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 44 Mins 59 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

12.27.25

13 22 33 61 62 20

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 13 Mins 59 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:

12.27.25

5 20 34 39 62 1

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$33,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 13 Mins 59 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the **AP** Associated Press

Bothun's 15 help North Dakota knock off Dakota State 88-56

By The Associated Press undefined

GRAND FORKS, N.D. (AP) — Matthew Bothun's 15 points helped North Dakota defeat Dakota State 88-56 on Sunday.

Bothun shot 5 for 5, including 3 for 3 from beyond the arc for the Fightin' Hawks (6-10). Marley Curtis added 11 points while going 4 of 8 from the floor, including 1 for 4 from 3-point range, and 2 for 3 from the foul line and grabbed seven rebounds. Zach Kraft shot 4 for 9, including 3 for 8 from beyond the arc to finish with 11 points.

Lukas Morgan finished with 13 points for the Trojans. Tyler Beckwith added 11 points for Dakota State. Desman Botts finished with nine points and two blocks.

The Associated Press created this story using technology provided by Data Skrive and data from Spor-tradar.

Bruns scores 23 as South Dakota defeats NAIA-member Mount Marty 85-61

By The Associated Press undefined

VERMILLION, S.D. (AP) — Isaac Bruns' 23 points helped South Dakota defeat Mount Marty 85-61 on Sunday.

Bruns added six rebounds for the Coyotes (8-7). Jordan Crawford scored 17 points while shooting 6 for 12, including 3 for 7 from beyond the arc and eight rebounds. Cameron Fens shot 5 of 6 from the field and 2 of 4 from the free-throw line to finish with 12 points, while adding nine rebounds.

Sutton Arend led the way for the Lancers with 17 points and seven rebounds. Jackson Edman added 11 points and two blocks for NAIA-member Mount Marty. Thalen Schroeder had nine points.

The Associated Press created this story using technology provided by Data Skrive and data from Spor-tradar.

Interoceanic Train derails in southern Mexico, killing at least 13 and injuring dozens

MEXICO CITY, Mexico (AP) — Officials said a train accident in southern Mexico killed at least 13 people and injured dozens, halting traffic along a rail line connecting the Pacific Ocean with the Gulf of Mexico.

The Interoceanic Train linking the states of Oaxaca and Veracruz went off the rails Sunday as it passed a curve near the town of Nizanda.

"The Mexican Navy has informed me that, tragically, 13 people died in the Interoceanic Train accident," Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum posted on X, adding that 98 people are injured, five of them seriously.

She said she instructed the secretary of the navy and the undersecretary of human rights of the Ministry of the Interior to travel to the site and personally assist the families.

In a message on X Sunday, Oaxaca state Gov. Salomon Jara said several government agencies had reached the site of the accident to assist the injured.

Officials said that 241 passengers and nine crew members were on the train when the accident occurred.

The Interoceanic Train was inaugurated in 2023 by then President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador. The rail service is part of a broader push to boost train travel in southern Mexico, and develop infrastructure along the isthmus of Tehuantepec, a narrow stretch of land between the Pacific Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico.

The Mexican government plans to turn the isthmus into a strategic corridor for international trade, with ports and rail lines that can connect the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. The Interoceanic train currently runs from the port of Salina Cruz on the Pacific Ocean to Coatzacoalcos, covering a distance of approximately 180 miles (290 kilometers) .

Chinese military stages drills around Taiwan to warn 'external forces' after US, Japan tensions

By KANIS LEUNG Associated Press

HONG KONG (AP) — China's military on Monday dispatched air, navy and rocket troops to conduct joint military drills around the island of Taiwan, a move Beijing called a "stern warning" against separatist and "external interference" forces. Taiwan said it was placing its forces on alert and called the Chinese government "the biggest destroyer of peace."

The drills came after Beijing expressed anger at U.S. arms sales to the territory and a statement by Japan's prime minister, Sanae Takaichi, saying its military could get involved if China were to take action against Taiwan, the self-governing island that the world's second-biggest economy says must come under its rule. But the Chinese military did not mention the United States and Japan in its statement on Monday morning.

Taiwan's Defense Ministry said in a post on X that rapid response exercises were underway, with forces on high alert to defend the island. In a separate statement, it said it had deployed appropriate forces in response, conducting combat readiness drills.

"The Chinese Communist Party's targeted military exercises further confirm its nature as an aggressor and the biggest destroyer of peace," the ministry said.

Senior Col. Shi Yi, spokesperson of China's People's Liberation Army's Eastern Theater Command, said the drills would be conducted in the Taiwan Strait and areas to the north, southwest, southeast and east of the island.

Shi said the activities will focus on sea-air combat readiness patrol, "joint seizure of comprehensive superiority" and blockades on key ports. It was also the first large-scale military drill where the command publicly mentioned one of the goals was "all-dimensional deterrence outside the island chain."

"It is a stern warning against 'Taiwan independence' separatist forces and external interference forces, and it is a legitimate and necessary action to safeguard China's sovereignty and national unity," Shi said.

China and Taiwan have been governed separately since 1949, when a civil war brought the Communist Party to power in Beijing. Defeated Nationalist Party forces fled to Taiwan. The island has operated since then with its own government, though the mainland's government claims it as sovereign territory.

Live firing exercises scheduled for Tuesday

The command on Monday deployed destroyers, frigates, fighters, bombers and unmanned aerial vehicles, alongside long-range rockets, to the north and southwest of the Taiwan Strait. It carried out live fire exercises against targets in the waters as well. Drills to test the capabilities of sea-air coordination and precise target hunting were also conducted in the waters and airspace to the east of the strait.

It said major military drills were scheduled to happen between 8 a.m. and 6 p.m. on Tuesday, saying it would organize live firing activities then, and its exercises would cover five areas around the island.

The command released themed posters about the drills online accompanied by provocative wording. One poster depicted two shields with the Great Wall alongside three military aircraft and two ships. Its social media post said the drills were about the "Shield of Justice, Smashing Illusion," adding that any foreign interlopers or separatists touching the shields would be eliminated.

Last week, Beijing imposed sanctions against 20 U.S. defense-related companies and 10 executives, a week after Washington announced large-scale arms sales to Taiwan valued at more than \$10 billion. If approved by the U.S. Congress, it would be the largest-ever American weapons package to the self-ruled territory.

Under U.S. federal law in place for many years, Washington is obligated to assist Taipei with its defense,

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a point that has become increasingly contentious with China. The U.S. and Taiwan had formal diplomatic relations until 1979, when President Jimmy Carter's administration recognized and established relations with Beijing.

Taiwanese army on high alert

Monday's drills heightened tensions on both sides. Karen Kuo, spokesperson for the Taiwanese president's office, said the operation was undermining the stability and security of the Taiwan Strait and Indo-Pacific region and openly challenging international law and order.

"Our country strongly condemns the Chinese authorities for disregarding international norms and using military intimidation to threaten neighboring countries," she said.

Taiwan's Defense Ministry released a video that featured its weapons and forces in a show of resilience. Multiple French Mirage-2000 aircraft conducted landings at an air force base.

Beijing sends warplanes and navy vessels toward the island on a near-daily basis, and in recent years it has stepped up the scope and scale of these exercises. In October, the Taiwanese government said it would accelerate the building of a "Taiwan Shield" or "T-Dome" air defense system in the face of the military threat from China.

The military tensions came a day after Taipei Mayor Chiang Wan-an said he hoped the Taiwan Strait would be associated with peace and prosperity, instead of "crashing waves and howling winds," during a trip to Shanghai.

Out with the old: With 2026 nigh, here's some wide-ranging intel on managing transitions

By DEEPTI HAJELA Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — It's that time — December's waning days, when we prepare to turn the calendar page. Many Americans take stock, review goals accomplished and unmet, ponder hopes and plans. How's our health? What's up with our money? What about the country? Will the coming year look like the departing one year, or be something entirely different?

Are we ready?

It can be an overwhelming period. So The Associated Press reached out to professionals with varying expertises — home organization, risk management, personal training, personal finance, and political science — to talk about their perspectives on changes and transitions.

And for something a little different, we gave each interviewee a chance to ask a question of one of the others.

So let's talk endings and beginnings.

The change expert: Milestones stir emotions

Transitions are professional organizer Laura Olivares' working life. As co-founder of Silver Solutions, she works with senior adults and their families to help make sure they're in safe environments, whether that means decluttering a lifetime of possessions, downsizing to another home, or helping families clear a house after a loved one's passing.

She offers this: Changes, even exciting ones, can unearth sadness or grief over places, things and people left behind. Acknowledging those feelings can help smooth the move from one chapter to another.

"When you let go of something that was meaningful to you, it deserves a moment," she says. "Whatever that moment is, could be a second, could just be an acknowledgement of it. Or maybe you set it on the on the mantle and you think about it for a while and when you're ready to let it go, you let it go."

NEXT QUESTION: Certified personal trainer Keri Harvey asked: "What small weekly habits can I build that will help me stay organized during the year?" Olivares' tips: In December, do a brain dump of thoughts, ideas, and goals. Then, before Jan. 1, schedule out tasks that move those priorities forward over the course of 2026. Olivares suggests three tasks on each of three days, so nine tasks per week.

The actuary: Planning is important — but sometimes fickle

Probably no group of people think more about the future than actuaries. Using data, statistics and prob-

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abilities, they devise models on how probable it is that certain events happen, and what it could cost to recover from them. Their work is vital to organizations like insurance companies.

Listen to R. Dale Hall talk, though, and he sounds almost ... philosophical. He's managing director of research at the Society of Actuaries. Asked how the general public could think about a new year, he readily brings up strategies like mapping out risk scenarios and how to respond.

There's a balance to be struck, he says: We can't control or predict everything and must accept the possibility of something unexpected. And the past isn't always a perfect guide; just because something happened doesn't mean it must again.

"It's the nature of taking risk, right? That yeah, there are going to be uncontrollable things," Hall says. "There are ways to maybe diversify those risks or mitigate those risks, but no one has that perfect crystal ball that's going to see three, six, nine, 12 months into the future."

NEXT QUESTION: From personal finance educator Dana Miranda: "Thinking about the variables we consider when making decisions or plans, how might the juxtaposition of the holiday season with the new year affect the way people are evaluating their finances and setting goals at the beginning of each year? ... What do you recommend they do to ensure the holiday experience doesn't skew financial goal-setting?"

Hall's advice: Keep 'em separate. He recommends people enjoy the holidays and hold off on financial goals until January.

The personal finance authority: Be intentional about money

In her work as a financial writer and a personal finance educator, Miranda encourages people to make conscious choices around their spending and saving, and understand that there's no absolute rule.

Miranda, author of "You Don't Need a Budget," says details are key. What works for one person may not work for another. And it's something Americans should consider as another year of goals and resolutions approaches. Insisting that the same technique works for everybody can leave people feeling stuck, Miranda says.

"We tend to be not good at talking about the nuances and that leaves people with, 'Here's the one right rule. It's not possible for me to achieve that perfection, so I'm just going to feel ashamed of every move that I make that is not moving toward that perfect goal.'"

NEXT QUESTION: From Jeanne Theoharis, a political science professor, who asked how Miranda gets people to look beyond the micro and consider the larger system of capitalism. "How does she also get people to think about more collective solutions—like union organizing, pressing City Council or Congress for changes?"

Miranda is quick to make it clear she's not an organizer but says she tries to evoke larger systemic issues when discussing personal finance. "The way that I try to move that needle just a little bit is to always bring in that political aspect to whatever conversation we're having ... to make the systemic and the cultural impact visible."

The trainer: Make goals attainable

When it comes to changes and new years, one of the most popular areas is fitness, the subject of many a (failed) resolution. Personal trainer Harvey, of Form Fitness Brooklyn, says you can make positive, lasting change in fitness (and generally) with one philosophy: Start small and build.

"We want to be mindful of making sure that we're not asking too much or trying to overcompensate for what we feel like we left behind this past year or what we feel like we left on the table this past year," she says. "It's very reasonable to try and have the goal of getting to the gym twice a week, maybe three times a week, and then building from there instead of saying 'Jan. 1, I'm starting, I'm gonna be at the gym five days a week, two hours a day.' That's not realistic and it's not kind to ourselves."

NEXT QUESTION: From Hall: "What advice do you have for me to transition to an even more robust workout schedule in 2026 without falling into the risk of injuring myself by doing too much too soon?"

Harvey emphasized warming up and having a mobility routine, and making the goal attainable by making it fun. "Find things that you actually enjoy doing and try and fit those in as well so that the idea of starting something new or adding to it isn't one that comes with a negative like, 'Oh, I don't want to have

to do this,' where you're dragging yourself into it."

The historian: Learn from your past

It's not just as individuals that we think about transitions. Nations and cultures have them, too.

We can learn from them if we look at our history honestly and not through the guise of trying to hide the ugly parts, says Theoharis, professor of political science and history at Brooklyn College and the City University of New York Graduate Center.

She points to the story of Rosa Parks, remembered as the catalyst of the Montgomery bus boycotts 70 years ago. But when Parks chose to resist, she didn't know what her arrest would mean or what the outcome would be. Theoharis sees a lesson there for people looking to make change in today's world and even individuals wanting to evolve.

"A number of us would be willing to do something brave if we knew that it would work," Theoharis says. "And we might even be willing to have some consequences. But part of what looking at the actual history of Rosa Parks or the actual history of the Montgomery bus boycott is in fact you have to make these stands with no sense that they will work."

NEXT (AND LAST) QUESTION: From Olivares, who wanted Theoharis' thoughts on today's civil rights battles. Theoharis referenced voting rights, which have been eroded in recent years. At the same time, remembrances of the turmoil during the Civil Rights years have become glossed over by a mythology of America overcoming its injustices.

There's a lesson there about what it takes to make real change for individuals, too, Theoharis says: It's difficult to move forward if you're not honestly addressing what's come before. "Part of how we've gotten here is by that ... lack of reckoning with ourselves, lack of reckoning with where we are, lack of reckoning with history."

US pledges \$2B for UN humanitarian aid as Trump slashes funding and warns agencies to 'adapt or die'

By JAMEY KEATEN and MATTHEW LEE Associated Press

GENEVA (AP) — The United States on Monday announced a \$2 billion pledge for U.N. humanitarian aid as President Donald Trump's administration continues to slash U.S. foreign assistance and warns United Nations agencies to "adapt, shrink or die" in a time of new financial realities.

The money is a small fraction of what the U.S. has contributed in the past but reflects what the administration believes is a generous amount that will maintain the United States' status as the world's largest humanitarian donor.

The pledge creates an umbrella fund from which money will be doled out to individual agencies and priorities, a key part of U.S. demands for drastic changes across the world body that have alarmed many humanitarian workers and led to severe reductions in programs and services.

The \$2 billion is only a sliver of traditional U.S. humanitarian funding for U.N.-backed programs, which has run as high as \$17 billion annually in recent years, according to U.N. data. U.S. officials say only \$8-\$10 billion of that has been in voluntary contributions. The United States also pays billions in annual dues related to its U.N. membership.

Critics say the Western aid cutbacks have been shortsighted, driven millions toward hunger, displacement or disease, and harmed U.S. soft power around the world.

A year of crisis in aid

The move caps a crisis year for many U.N. organizations like its refugee, migration and food aid agencies. The Trump administration has already cut billions in U.S. foreign aid, prompting them to slash spending, aid projects and thousands of jobs. Other traditional Western donors have reduced outlays, too.

The announced U.S. pledge for aid programs of the United Nations — the world's top provider of humanitarian assistance and biggest recipient of U.S. humanitarian aid money — takes shape in a preliminary deal with the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, or OCHA, run by Tom Fletcher, a

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former British diplomat and government official.

Even as the U.S. pulls back its aid, needs have ballooned across the world: Famine has been recorded this year in parts of conflict-ridden Sudan and Gaza, and floods, drought and natural disasters that many scientists attribute to climate change have taken many lives or driven thousands from their homes.

The cuts will have major implications for U.N. affiliates like the International Organization for Migration, the World Food Program and refugee agency UNHCR. They have already received billions less from the U.S. this year than under annual allocations from the previous Biden administration — or even during Trump's first term.

Now, the idea is that Fletcher's office — which last year set in motion a "humanitarian reset" to improve efficiency, accountability and effectiveness of money spent — will become a funnel for U.S. and other aid money that can be then redirected to those agencies, rather than scattered U.S. contributions to a variety of individual appeals for aid.

US seeks aid consolidation

The United States wants to see "more consolidated leadership authority" in U.N. aid delivery systems, said a senior State Department official, speaking on condition of anonymity to provide details before the announcement at the U.S. diplomatic mission in Geneva.

Under the plan, Fletcher and his coordination office "are going to control the spigot" on how money is distributed to agencies, the official said.

"This humanitarian reset at the United Nations should deliver more aid with fewer tax dollars — providing more focused, results-driven assistance aligned with U.S. foreign policy," said U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Michael Waltz.

U.S. officials say the \$2 billion is just a first outlay to help fund OCHA's annual appeal for money, announced earlier this month. Fletcher, noting the upended aid landscape, already slashed the request this year. Other traditional U.N. donors like Britain, France, Germany and Japan have reduced aid allocations and sought reforms this year.

"The agreement requires the U.N. to consolidate humanitarian functions to reduce bureaucratic overhead, unnecessary duplication, and ideological creep," the State Department said in a statement. "Individual U.N. agencies will need to adapt, shrink, or die."

"Nowhere is reform more important than the humanitarian agencies, which perform some of the U.N.'s most critical work," the department added. "Today's agreement is a critical step in those reform efforts, balancing President Trump's commitment to remaining the world's most generous nation, with the imperative to bring reform to the way we fund, oversee, and integrate with U.N. humanitarian efforts."

At its core, the reform project will help establish pools of funding that can be directed either to specific crises or countries in need. A total of 17 countries will be targeted initially, including Bangladesh, Congo, Haiti, Syria and Ukraine.

One of the world's most desperate countries, Afghanistan, is not included, nor are the Palestinian territories, which officials say will be covered by money stemming from Trump's as-yet-incomplete Gaza peace plan.

The project, months in the making, stems from Trump's longtime view that the world body has great promise, but has failed to live up to it, and has — in his eyes — drifted too far from its original mandate to save lives while undermining American interests, promoting radical ideologies and encouraging wasteful, unaccountable spending.

Fletcher praised the deal, saying in a statement, "At a moment of immense global strain, the United States is demonstrating that it is a humanitarian superpower, offering hope to people who have lost everything."

What music and television to stream: A New Year's Eve tradition

By The Associated Press undefined

It's the end of the year and there are fewer new streaming options headed to a device near you.

But it's a great time to catch up on some of best movies,television,music and video games of 2025. The

Associated Press has comprehensive guides on the best releases of the year on its Year in Review page. One of the new offerings this week doubles as a music and television option, just in time for New Year's Eve.

New Year's Eve entertainment streaming Dec. 31

— The new year is nearly upon us. Why not ring it in with a few all-star performances? There is no shortage of New Year's Eve specials to watch, but give "Dick Clark's New Year's Rockin' Eve with Ryan Seacrest," available to stream online at ABC.com, a whirl. Catch performances from Chappell Roan, 50 Cent, Diana Ross, Chance the Rapper, 4 Non Blondes, 6lack, AJR, BigXThaPlug, Busta Rhymes, Demi Lovato, Charlie Puth, Ciara and many more.

Trump and Netanyahu are to meet in Florida at a crucial moment for the US-backed Gaza ceasefire

By WILL WEISSERT, SAM MEDNICK and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

PALM BEACH, Fla. (AP) — President Donald Trump is scheduled to meet with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Monday, as Washington looks to create fresh momentum for a U.S.-brokered ceasefire in Gaza that could be in danger of stalling out before a complicated second phase.

Trump could use the face-to-face at his Mar-a-Lago estate to try to leverage his strong relationship with Netanyahu and look for ways to speed up the peace process, especially as Israel's leader has been accused of not pushing his side to move fast enough.

The ceasefire between Israel and Hamas that Trump has championed has mostly held, but progress has slowed recently. Both sides accuse one another of violations, and divisions have emerged among the U.S., Israel and Arab countries about the path forward.

The truce's first phase began in October, days after the two-year anniversary of the initial Hamas-led attack on Israel that killed around 1,200 people. All but one of the 251 hostages taken then have been released, alive or dead.

Now comes the next, far more complicated part. Trump's 20-point plan — which was approved by the U.N. Security Council — lays out an ambitious vision for ending Hamas' rule of Gaza.

The two leaders also could discuss non-Gaza topics, including Iran, whose nuclear capabilities Trump continues to insist were "completely and fully obliterated" following U.S. strikes on its nuclear sites in June.

There are many key facets of the ceasefire's second phase that Israel's leader doesn't support or has even openly opposed, said Mona Yacoubian, director and senior adviser of the Middle East Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

"This is going to be a really tall order, I think, for President Trump to get Netanyahu to agree," she said.

"How he does that, what kind of pressure he puts on Netanyahu, I think, is going to be important to watch for," said Yacoubian, who also said the two could exhibit "a broader clash of approaches to the region."

Next phase is complex

If successful, the second phase would see the rebuilding of a demilitarized Gaza under international supervision by a group chaired by Trump and known as the Board of Peace. The Palestinians would form a "technocratic, apolitical" committee to run daily affairs in Gaza, under Board of Peace supervision.

It further calls for normalized relations between Israel and the Arab world, and a possible pathway to Palestinian independence. Then there are thorny logistical and humanitarian questions, including rebuilding war-ravaged Gaza, disarming Hamas and creating a security apparatus called the International Stabilization Force.

The Board of Peace would oversee Gaza's reconstruction under a two-year, renewable U.N. mandate. Its members had been expected to be named by the end of the year and might even be revealed following Monday's meeting, but the announcement could be pushed into next month.

Netanyahu was the first foreign leader to meet Trump at the White House in his second term, but this will be their first in-person meeting since Trump went to Israel in October to mark the start of the ceasefire's initial phase. Netanyahu has been to Mar-a-Lago before, including in July 2024 when Trump was still

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seeking reelection.

Much remains unsettled

Their latest meeting comes after U.S. Mideast envoy Steve Witkoff and the president's son in law, Jared Kushner, recently huddled in Florida with officials from Egypt, Qatar and Turkey, which have been mediating the ceasefire.

Two main challenges have complicated moving to the second phase, according to an official who was briefed on those meetings. Israeli officials have been taking a lot of time to vet and approve members of the Palestinian technocratic committee from a list given to them by the mediators, and Israel continues its military strikes.

Trump's plan also calls for the International Stabilization Force, proposed as a multinational body, to maintain security. But it, too, has yet to be formed. Whether details will be forthcoming after Monday's meeting is unclear.

A Western diplomat said there is a "huge gulf" between the U.S.-Israeli understanding of the International Stabilization Force's mandate and that of other major countries in the region, as well as European governments.

All spoke on the condition of anonymity to provide details that haven't been made public.

The U.S. and Israel want the force to have a "commanding role" in security duties, including disarming Hamas and other militant groups. But countries being courted to contribute troops fear that mandate will make it an "occupation force," the diplomat said.

Hamas has said it is ready to discuss "freezing or storing" its arsenal of weapons, but insists it has a right to armed resistance as long as Israel occupies Palestinian territory. One U.S. official said a potential plan might be to offer cash incentives in exchange for weapons, echoing a "buy-back" program Witkoff has previously floated.

Questions about Gaza reconstruction

Israeli bombardment and ground operations have transformed neighborhoods in several Gaza cities into rubble-strewn wastelands, with blackened shells of buildings and mounds of debris stretching in all directions.

Egypt, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Turkey are pressing for a negotiated deal on disarming Hamas, and on an additional Israeli withdrawal from Gaza before moving to next elements of the plan. Those include deployment of the international security force and reconstruction, three Arab officials told The Associated Press.

That appears to run against ideas floated by U.S. officials to quickly start building temporary housing for Palestinians in parts of southern Gaza still controlled by Israeli troops. Three officials said the United Arab Emirates has agreed to fund reconstruction in Gaza, including new communities, although they said discussions are ongoing and plans remain unsettled.

A proposed map created by the U.S. and obtained by the AP shows an area labelled "UAE Temporary Emirates housing complex" inside an Israeli-controlled area of Gaza. The map shows a "U.S. planned community area" surrounding the UAE area.

An Arab official said he was aware of the map, but said it was a suggestion from the U.S. and Israel that was put to the Emiratis and other countries.

The UAE did not respond to multiple requests for comment about whether it has agreed to the plans or to fund the communities. It is not known if the money would be contingent on gestures from Israel and Hamas, such as a commitment to Palestinian statehood or disarmament.

Zohran Mamdani has bold promises. Can he make them come true as New York City mayor?

By ANTHONY IZAGUIRRE Associated Press

Zohran Mamdani has promised to transform New York City government when he becomes mayor. Can he do it?

Mamdani, a 34-year-old democratic socialist, already faces intense scrutiny, even before taking office in

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one of the country's most scrutinized political jobs. Republicans have cast him as a liberal boogeyman. Some of his fellow Democrats have deemed him too far left. Progressives are closely watching for any signs of him shifting toward the center.

On Jan. 1, he will assume control of America's biggest city under that harsh spotlight, with the country watching to see if he can pull off the big promises that vaulted him to office and handle the everyday duties of the job. All while skeptics call out his every stumble.

For Mamdani, starting off strong is key, said George Arzt, a veteran Democratic political consultant in New York who worked for former Mayor Ed Koch.

"He's got to use the first 100 days of the administration to show people he can govern," he said. "You've got to set a mindset for people that's like, 'Hey, this guy's serious.'"

That push should begin with Mamdani's speech on the day of his inauguration, where Arzt said it will be important for the new mayor to establish a clear blueprint of his agenda and tell New Yorkers what he plans to do and how he plans to do it.

From there, he said Mamdani will have to count on the seasoned hands he's hired to help him handle the concrete responsibilities of the job, while he and his team also pursue his ambitious affordability agenda.

Managing expectations as a movement candidate

Mamdani campaigned on a big idea: shifting the power of government toward helping working class New Yorkers, rather than the wealthy.

His platform — which includes free child care, free city bus service and a rent freeze for people living in rent stabilized apartments — excited voters in one of America's most expensive cities and made him a leading face of a Democratic Party searching for bright, new leaders during President Donald Trump's second term.

But Mamdani may find himself contending with the relentless responsibilities of running New York City. That includes making sure the trash is getting picked up, potholes are filled and snow plows go out on time. When there's a subway delay or flooding, or a high-profile crime or a police officer parks in a bicycle lane, it's not unusual for the city's mayor to catch some heat.

"He had a movement candidacy and that immediately raises expectations locally and nationally," said Basil Smikle, a Democratic political strategist and Columbia University professor, who added that it might be good for Mamdani to "Just focus on managing expectations and get a couple of good wins under your belt early on."

"There's a lot to keep you busy here," he said.

A large part of Mamdani's job will also be to sell his politics to the New Yorkers who remain skeptical of him, with Smikle saying "the biggest hurdle" is getting people comfortable with his policies and explaining how what he's pushing could help the city.

"It's difficult to have this all happen on day one," he said, "or even day 30 or even day 100."

Challenges and opportunities

Mamdani's universal free child care proposal — perhaps one of his more expensive plans — is also one that has attracted some of the strongest support from New York Gov. Kathy Hochul, a moderate from Buffalo who endorsed the mayor-elect.

Hochul is eager to work with Mamdani on the policy and both leaders consider the program a top priority, although it's not yet clear how exactly the plan could come to fruition. The governor, who is up for reelection next year, has repeatedly said she does not want to raise income taxes — something Mamdani supports for wealthy New Yorkers — however she has appeared open to raising corporate taxes.

"I think he has allies and supporters for his agenda, but the question is how far will the governor go," said state Senate Deputy Leader Michael Gianaris, a Mamdani ally.

"There's an acknowledgement that the voters have spoken, and there's very clear policies that were associated with his successful campaign," he said, "so to not make progress on them would be us thumbing our noses at the voters."

Mamdani's pledge to freeze the rent for roughly 1 million rent stabilized apartments in the city would

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not require state cooperation.

But that proposal — perhaps the best known of his campaign — is already facing headwinds, after the city's departing mayor, Eric Adams, made a series of appointments in recent weeks to a local board that determines annual rent increases for the city's rent stabilized units.

The move could potentially complicate the mayor-elect's ability to follow through on the plan, at least in his first year, although Mamdani has said he remains confident in his ability to enact the freeze.

Other challenges await

His relationship with some of the city's Jewish community remains in tatters over his criticisms of Israel's government and support for Palestinian human rights.

The Anti-Defamation League, a prominent Jewish advocacy organization, plans to track Mamdani's policies and hires as it pledged to "protect Jewish residents across the five boroughs during a period of unprecedented antisemitism in New York City."

Earlier this month, a Mamdani appointee resigned over social media posts she made more than a decade ago that featured antisemitic tropes, after the Anti-Defamation League shared the posts online.

The group has since put out additional findings on others who are serving in committees that Mamdani set up as he transitions into his mayoral role. In response, Mamdani said the ADL often "ignores the distinction" between antisemitism and criticism of the Israeli government.

The mayor-elect's past call to defund the city's police department continue to be a vulnerability. His decision to retain Jessica Tisch, the city's current police commissioner, has eased some concerns about a radical shakeup at the top of the nation's largest police force.

And then there's Trump.

Tensions between Trump and Mamdani have appeared to cool — for now — after months of rancor led into a surprisingly friendly Oval Office meeting. Future clashes may emerge given the sharp political differences between them, particularly on immigration enforcement, along with anything else that could set off the mercurial president.

Winter storm brings blizzard conditions and dangerous wind chills

By LEAH WILLINGHAM and JEFF MARTIN Associated Press

A potent winter storm threatened blizzard-like conditions, treacherous travel and power outages in parts of the Upper Midwest as other areas of the country braced Monday for plunging temperatures, strong winds and a mix of snow, ice, and rain.

The snow and strengthening winds began spreading Sunday across the northern Plains, where the National Weather Service warned of whiteout conditions and possible blizzard conditions that could make travel impossible in some areas. Snowfall totals were expected to exceed a foot (30 centimeters) across parts of the upper Great Lakes and as much as double that along the south shore of Lake Superior.

"Part of the storm system is getting heavy snow, other parts of the storm along the cold front are getting higher winds and much colder temperatures as the front passes," said Bob Oravec, a lead forecaster at the National Weather Service office in College Park, Maryland. "They're all related to each other — different parts of the country will be receiving different effects from this storm."

The weather service warned of "dangerous wind chills" as low as minus 30 degrees Fahrenheit (minus 34.4 degrees Celsius) in North Dakota and into Minnesota from Sunday night into Monday.

In the South, meteorologists warned severe thunderstorms are likely to signal the arrival of a sharp cold front — bringing a sudden drop in temperatures and strong north winds that will abruptly end days of record warmth throughout that region.

The high temperature in Atlanta was around 72 F (22 C) on Sunday, continuing a warming trend after climbing to 78 F (about 26 C) to shatter the city's record high temperature for Christmas Eve, the National Weather Service said. Numerous other record high temperatures were seen across the South and Midwest on the days after Christmas.

But the incoming cold front was expected to drop rain on much of the South late Sunday night into

Monday, and a big drop in temperatures Tuesday. Forecasters said the low temperature in Atlanta to 25 F (minus 3.9 C) by early Tuesday morning. The colder temperatures in the South are expected to persist through New Year's Day.

In Dallas, Sunday temperatures in the lower 80s (upper 20s C) could drop down to the mid 40s (single digits Celsius). In Little Rock, high temperatures of around 70 (21 C) on Sunday could drop down to highs in the mid-30s on Monday.

"We're definitely going back towards a more winter pattern," Oravec said.

The storm is expected to intensify as it moves east, drawing energy from a sharp clash between frigid air plunging south from Canada and unusually warm air that has lingered across the southern United States, according to the National Weather Service.

4 dead, dozens injured in Syria during clashes between Alawites and counterdemonstrators

By OMAR ALBAM Associated Press

LATAKIA, Syria (AP) — Clashes broke out on Syria's coast between protesters from the Alawite religious minority and counterdemonstrators Sunday, killing at least four people and injuring dozens of others, health officials said.

The clashes came two days after a bombing at an Alawite mosque in the city of Homs killed eight people and wounded 18 others during prayers. Thousands of protesters gathered in the coastal cities of Latakia and Tartous, and elsewhere.

Officials have said that preliminary investigations indicate that explosive devices were planted inside the mosque in Homs, but authorities haven't publicly identified a suspect in Friday's bombing. Funerals for the dead were held Saturday.

A little-known group calling itself Saraya Ansar al-Sunna claimed responsibility for the attack in a statement posted on its Telegram channel, in which it indicated that the attack intended to target members of the Alawite sect, an offshoot of Shiite Islam whom hard-line Islamists consider to be apostates.

Sunday's demonstrations were called for by Ghazal Ghazal, an Alawite sheikh living outside of Syria who heads a group called the Supreme Alawite Islamic Council in Syria and the Diaspora.

An Associated Press photographer in Latakia saw pro-government counterprotesters throw rocks at the Alawite demonstrators, while a group of protesters beat a counterdemonstrator who crossed to their side. Security forces tried to break up the two sides and fired into the air in an attempt to disperse them.

Syria's state-run television reported that two members of the security forces were wounded in the area of Tartous after someone threw a hand grenade at a police station, and cars belonging to security forces were set on fire in Latakia.

Later, state-run news agency SANA reported that a member of the security forces was killed by gunfire.

The AP photographer in Latakia saw the bodies of four people killed in the clashes in local hospitals. Three of them had head wounds that appeared consistent with being hit by rocks, while one had a bullet wound in the chest.

The state-run SANA news agency said 60 people were wounded by "stabblings, blows from stones, and gunfire targeting both security personnel and civilians."

The country has experienced several waves of sectarian clashes since the fall of former President Bashar Assad in a lightning rebel offensive in December 2024 that brought to an end nearly 14 years of civil war. Assad, an Alawite, fled the country to Russia.

In March, an ambush carried out by Assad's supporters against security forces triggered days of violence that left hundreds of people dead, most of them Alawites. Since then, although the situation has calmed, Alawites have been targeted sporadically in sectarian attacks. They have also complained of discrimination against them in public employment since Assad's fall and of young Alawite men detained without charges.

During the rein of the Assad dynasty, Alawites were overrepresented in government jobs and in the

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army and security forces.

Government officials condemned Friday's attack and promised to hold perpetrators accountable, but haven't yet announced any arrests.

"We went out to protest the incidents of killing and the marginalization and arrests and detentions and the employees who were fired," said Hussein Abbas, an engineer who joined the Alawite protest.

Counterprotester Mohammed Ismail from Latakia blamed spoilers who benefited from the former system under Assad for sowing discord.

"We are calling for one Syria and one people, and they don't want that," he said. "They want to return us to chaos so they can benefit."

The moon and sun figure big in the new year's lineup of cosmic wonders

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — The moon and sun share top billing in 2026.

Kicking off the year's cosmic wonders is the moon, drawing the first astronauts to visit in more than 50 years as well as a caravan of robotic lunar landers including Jeff Bezos' new supersized Blue Moon. A supermoon looms on Jan. 3 and an astronomical blue moon is on the books for May.

The sun will also generate buzz with a ring-of-fire eclipse at the bottom of the world in February and a total solar eclipse at the top of the world in August. Expect more auroras in unexpected places, though perhaps not as frequently as the past couple years.

And that comet that strayed into our turf from another star? While still visible with powerful backyard telescopes, the recently discovered comet known as 3I/Atlas is fading by the day after swinging past Earth in December. Jupiter is next on its dance card in March. Once the icy outsider departs our solar system a decade from now, it will be back where it belongs in interstellar space.

It's our third known interstellar visitor. Scientists anticipate more.

"I can't believe it's taken this long to find three," said NASA's Paul Chodas, who's been on the lookout since the 1980s. And with ever better technology, "the chance of catching another interstellar visitor will increase."

Here's a rundown on what the universe has in store for us in 2026:

Next stop, moon

NASA's upcoming moonshot commander Reid Wiseman said there's a good chance he and his crew will be the first to lay eyeballs on large swaths of the lunar far side that were missed by the Apollo astronauts a half-century ago. Their observations could be a boon for geologists, he noted, and other experts picking future landing sites.

Launching early in the year, the three Americans and one Canadian will zip past the moon, do a U-turn behind it, then hustle straight back to Earth to close out their 10-day mission. No stopping for a moonwalk — the boot prints will be left by the next crew in NASA's Artemis lunar exploration program.

More robotic moon landings are on the books by China as well as U.S. companies. Early in the year, Amazon founder Bezos is looking for his Blue Origin rocket company to launch a prototype of the lunar lander it's designing for NASA's astronauts. This Blue Moon demo will stand 26 feet (8 meters), taller than what delivered Apollo's 12 moonwalkers to the lunar surface. The Blue Moon version for crew will be almost double that height.

Back for another stab at the moon, Astrobotic Technology and Intuitive Machines are also targeting 2026 landings with scientific gear. The only private entity to nail a lunar landing, Firefly Aerospace, will aim for the moon's far side in 2026.

China is targeting the south polar region in the new year, sending a rover as well as a so-called hopper to jump into permanently shadowed craters in search of ice.

Eclipses

The cosmos pulls out all the stops with a total solar eclipse on Aug. 12 that will begin in the Arctic and

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cross over Greenland, Iceland and Spain. Totality will last two minutes and 18 seconds as the moon moves directly between Earth and the sun to blot out the latter. By contrast, the total solar eclipse in 2027 will offer a whopping 6 1/2 minutes of totality and pass over more countries.

For 2026, the warm-up act will be a ring-of-fire eclipse in the Antarctic on Feb. 17, with only a few research stations in prime viewing position. South Africa and southernmost Chile and Argentina will have partial viewing. A total lunar eclipse will follow two weeks after February's ring of fire, with a partial lunar eclipse closing out the action at the end of August.

Parading planets

Six of the solar system's eight planets will prance across the sky in a must-see lineup around Feb. 28. A nearly full moon is even getting into the act, appearing alongside Jupiter. Uranus and Neptune will require binoculars or telescopes. But Mercury, Venus, Jupiter and Saturn should be visible with the naked eye shortly after sunset, weather permitting, though Mercury and Venus will be low on the horizon.

Mars will be the lone no-show. The good news is that the red planet will join a six-planet parade in August, with Venus the holdout.

Supermoons

Three supermoons will lighten up the night skies in 2026, the stunning result when a full moon inches closer to Earth than usual as it orbits in a not-quite-perfect circle. Appearing bigger and brighter, supermoons are a perennial crowd pleaser requiring no equipment, only your eyes.

The year's first supermoon in January coincides with a meteor shower, but the moonlight likely will obscure the dimmer fireballs. The second supermoon of 2026 won't occur until Nov. 24, with the third — the year's final and closest supermoon — occurring the night of Dec. 23 into Dec. 24. This Christmas Eve supermoon will pass within 221,668 miles (356,740 kilometers) of Earth.

Northern and southern lights

The sun is expected to churn out more eruptions in 2026 that could lead to geomagnetic storms here on Earth, giving rise to stunning aurora. Solar action should start to ease, however, with the 11-year solar cycle finally on the downslide.

Space weather forecasters like Rob Steenburgh at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration can't wait to tap into all the solar wind measurements coming soon from an observatory launched in the fall.

"2026 will be an exciting year for space weather enthusiasts," he said in an email, with this new spacecraft and others helping scientists "better understand our nearest star and forecast its impacts."

Trump says Ukraine and Russia are 'closer than ever' to peace after talks with Zelenskyy

By WILL WEISSERT, SEUNG MIN KIM and ELISE MORTON Associated Press

PALM BEACH, Fla. (AP) — President Donald Trump on Sunday insisted Ukraine and Russia are "closer than ever before" to a peace deal as he hosted Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy at his Florida resort, but he acknowledged the negotiations are complex and could still break down, leaving the war dragging on for years.

The president's statements came after the leaders met for talks following what Trump said was an "excellent," two-and-a-half-hour phone conversation with Russian President Vladimir Putin, whose invasion of Ukraine launched the war nearly four years ago. Trump insisted he believed Putin still wants peace, even as Russia launched another round of attacks on Ukraine while Zelenskyy flew to the United States for the latest round of negotiations.

"Russia wants to see Ukraine succeed," Trump said during a late afternoon news conference as he stood with Zelenskyy after their meeting. He repeatedly praised his counterpart as "brave."

Trump and Zelenskyy both acknowledged thorny issues remain, including whether Russia can keep Ukrainian territory it controls, as well as security guarantees for Ukraine to ensure it's not invaded again in the future. After their discussion, they called a wide group of European leaders, including Ursula von der

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Leyen, president of the European Commission, and the leaders of Finland, France, Germany, the United Kingdom and Poland.

Zelenskyy said Trump had agreed to host European leaders again, possibly at the White House, sometime in January. Trump said the meeting could be in Washington or "someplace."

Zelenskyy thanked Trump for his work. "Ukraine is ready for peace," he said.

Trump and Putin will speak again

Trump said he'd follow the meeting with another call to Putin. Earlier Sunday, Putin's foreign affairs adviser Yuri Ushakov said the Trump-Putin call was initiated by the U.S. side and was "friendly, benevolent and businesslike." Ushakov said Trump and Putin agreed to speak again "promptly" after Trump's meeting with Zelenskyy.

But Ushakov added that a "bold, responsible, political decision is needed from Kyiv" on the fiercely contested Donbas region in eastern Ukraine and other matters in dispute for there to be a "complete cessation" of hostilities.

Both leaders identified deciding the future of the Donbas region as a major sticking point.

Trump said the parties were inching closer to agreement. "That's a very tough issue but one that I think will get resolved," he said.

Zelenskyy said: "Our attitude is very clear. That's why President Trump said this is a very tough question and, of course, we have with Russia different positions on it."

Trump said, however, that he still believes Putin is "very serious" about ending the war, even as Russia continued striking targets in Ukraine as Zelenskyy traveled to the U.S. Trump said, "I believe Ukraine has made some very strong attacks also."

He held out the possibility that negotiations could still fall apart.

"In a few weeks, we will know one way or the other, I think," Trump said. "We could have something where one item that you're not thinking about is a big item, breaks it up. Look, it's been a very difficult negotiation. Very detailed."

Trump and Zelenskyy's sit-down underscored the apparent progress made by Trump's top negotiators in recent weeks as the sides traded draft peace plans to end the fighting. Zelenskyy told reporters Friday that the 20-point draft proposal negotiators have discussed is "about 90% ready" — echoing a figure, and the optimism, that U.S. officials conveyed when Trump's chief negotiators met with Zelenskyy in Berlin this month.

During the recent talks, the U.S. agreed to offer certain security guarantees to Ukraine similar to those offered to other members of NATO. The proposal came as Zelenskyy said he was prepared to drop his country's bid to join the security alliance if Ukraine received NATO-like protection that would be designed to safeguard it against future Russian attacks.

'Intensive' weeks ahead

Zelenskyy also spoke on Christmas Day with U.S. special envoy Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law. The Ukrainian leader said they discussed "certain substantive details" and cautioned "there is still work to be done on sensitive issues" and "the weeks ahead may also be intensive."

The U.S. president has been working to end the war in Ukraine for much of his first year back in office, showing irritation with both Zelenskyy and Putin while publicly acknowledging the difficulty of ending the conflict. Gone are the days when, as a candidate in 2024, he boasted that he could resolve the fighting in a day. Indeed, on Sunday, Trump referred multiple times to the complexity of the negotiations.

After hosting Zelenskyy at the White House in October, Trump demanded that both Russia and Ukraine halt fighting and "stop at the battle line," implying that Moscow should be able to keep the territory it has seized from Ukraine.

Zelenskyy said last week that he would be willing to withdraw troops from Ukraine's eastern industrial heartland as part of a plan to end the war, if Russia also pulls back and the area becomes a demilitarized zone monitored by international forces.

Putin wants Russian gains kept, and more

Putin has publicly said he wants all the areas in four key regions that have been captured by his forces, as well as the Crimean Peninsula, illegally annexed in 2014, to be recognized as Russian territory. He also has insisted that Ukraine withdraw from some areas in eastern Ukraine that Moscow's forces haven't captured. Kyiv has publicly rejected all those demands.

The Kremlin also wants Ukraine to abandon its bid to join NATO. It warned that it wouldn't accept the deployment of any troops from members of the military alliance and would view them as a "legitimate target."

Putin also has said Ukraine must limit the size of its army and give official status to the Russian language, demands he has made from the outset of the conflict.

Ushakov told the business daily Kommersant this month that Russian police and national guard would stay in parts of Donetsk -- one of the two major areas, along with Luhansk, that make up the Donbas region -- even if they become a demilitarized zone under a prospective peace plan.

Ushakov cautioned that trying to reach a compromise could take a long time. He said U.S. proposals that took into account Russian demands had been "worsened" by alterations proposed by Ukraine and its European allies.

Trump has been somewhat receptive to Putin's demands, arguing that the Russian president can be persuaded to end the war if Kyiv agrees to cede Ukrainian land in the Donbas region and if Western powers offer economic incentives to bring Russia back into the global economy.

Pipe bomb suspect told FBI he targeted US political parties because they were 'in charge,' memo says

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The man accused of placing two pipe bombs in Washington on the eve of the Jan. 6, 2021, riot at the U.S. Capitol told investigators after his arrest that he believed someone needed to "speak up" for people who believed the 2020 election was stolen and that he wanted to target the country's political parties because they were "in charge," prosecutors said Sunday.

The allegations were laid out in a Justice Department memo arguing that Brian J. Cole Jr., who was arrested earlier this month on charges of placing pipe bombs outside the headquarters of the Democratic and Republican national committees, should remain locked up while the case moves forward.

The memo provides the most detailed government account of statements Cole is alleged to have made to investigators and points to evidence, including bomb-making components found at his home after his arrest, that officials say connects him to the act. The homemade bombs did not detonate and were discovered Jan. 6, the afternoon that rioters supporting President Donald Trump stormed the Capitol in an effort to halt the certification of his election loss to Democrat Joe Biden.

Cole denied to investigators that his actions were connected to Congress or the events of Jan. 6, the memo says. But after initially disputing that he had any involvement in the pipe bombs, prosecutors say, he confessed to placing them outside the RNC and DNC and acknowledged feeling disillusioned by the 2020 election, fed up with both political parties and sympathetic to claims by Trump and some of his allies that the contest had been stolen.

According to the memo, he told agents who interviewed him that if people "feel that, you know, something as important as voting in the federal election is being tampered with, is being, you know, being — you know, relegated null and void, then, like, someone needs to speak up, right? Someone up top. You know, just to, just to at the very least calm things down."

He said "something just snapped" after "watching everything, just everything getting worse" and that he wanted to do something "to the parties" because "they were in charge," according to the Justice Department's memo. Prosecutors say when Cole was asked why he had placed the explosives at the RNC and DNC, he responded, "I really don't like either party at this point."

Cole was arrested on the morning of Dec. 4 at his Woodbridge, Virginia, house in what law enforcement officials described as a major breakthrough in their nearly five-year-old investigation. His lawyers

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will also have an opportunity to state their position on detention ahead of a hearing set for Tuesday in Washington's federal court.

During a search of Cole's home and car after his arrest, prosecutors say, investigators found shopping bags of bomb-making components. He at first denied having manufactured or placed the pipe bombs, prosecutors say, and when pressed about his whereabouts on the evening of Jan. 5, 2021, initially told investigators he had driven by himself to attend a protest related to the 2020 election.

"I didn't agree with what people were doing, like just telling half the country that they — that their — that they just need to ignore it. I didn't think that was a good idea, so I went to the protest," the memo quotes him as saying.

But over the course of hours of questioning, prosecutors say, Cole acknowledged he went to Washington not for a protest but rather to place the bombs. He stowed the explosives in a shoebox in the back seat of his Nissan Sentra and placed one apiece outside the RNC and DNC headquarters, setting the timer on each for 60 minutes, the memo says.

Neither device exploded, a fact Cole says he was "pretty relieved" about because he planted them at night because he did not want to kill anyone, the memo says.

The fact that the devices did not detonate is due to luck, "not lack of effort," prosecutors said in arguing that Cole poses a danger to the community and must remain detained pending trial.

"The defendant's choice of targets risked the lives not only of innocent pedestrians and office workers but also of law enforcement, first responders, and national political leaders who were inside of the respective party headquarters or drove by them on January 6, 2021, including the Vice President-elect and Speaker of the House," prosecutors wrote.

Winter storm sweeps across US with snow, ice and severe weather

By LEAH WILLINGHAM and JEFF MARTIN Associated Press

A powerful winter storm was sweeping east from the Plains on Sunday, driven by what meteorologists describe as an intense cyclone that is taking aim at much of the country with a mixture of snow, ice, rain and strong winds.

"Part of the storm system is getting heavy snow, other parts of the storm along the cold front are getting higher winds and much colder temperatures as the front passes," said Bob Oravec, a lead forecaster at the National Weather Service office in College Park, Maryland. "They're all related to each other — different parts of the country will be receiving different effects from this storm."

Snow and strengthening winds spread Sunday across the Upper Midwest, where the National Weather Service warned of whiteout conditions and possible blizzard conditions that could make travel impossible in some areas. Snowfall totals were expected to exceed a foot (30 centimeters) across parts of the upper Great Lakes, with up to 2 feet (60 centimeters) possible along the south shore of Lake Superior.

Waves on Lake Superior will likely top 25 feet (7.6 meters) by dawn Monday, with towering waves also projected for the other Great Lakes, forecasters said.

"Since the infamous Edmund Fitzgerald storm in '75, we've had zero major incidents on the lake," said Ben Warren, a National Weather Service meteorologist in Marquette, Michigan.

Forecasts have improved substantially since 29 people perished when the Edmund Fitzgerald iron ore freighter was swallowed by Lake Superior on Nov. 10, 1975. The weather service had forecast waves of up to 16 feet (4.9 meters) shortly before the Edmund Fitzgerald sank.

The National Weather Service warned of "dangerous wind chills" as low as minus 30 degrees Fahrenheit (minus 34.4 degrees Celsius) in North Dakota and into Minnesota from Sunday night into Monday.

In the South, meteorologists warned of severe thunderstorms expected to signal the arrival of a sharp cold front — sometimes referred to as a "Blue Norther" — bringing a sudden plunge in temperatures and strong north winds that will end days of record warmth around the region.

The snowy holiday season in the Upper Midwest and Northeast comes as springlike warmth continued in much of the nation's midsection and South amid record high temperatures.

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The high temperature in Atlanta was around 72 F (22 C) on Sunday, continuing a warming trend after climbing to 78 F (about 26 C) to shatter the city's record high temperature for Christmas Eve, the National Weather Service said. Numerous other record high temperatures were seen across the South and Midwest on the days after Christmas.

But that record heat is quickly coming to an end, forecasters say.

A cold front is expected to bring rain to much of the South late Sunday night into Monday, bringing much colder weather by Tuesday. The abrupt change will drop the low temperature in Atlanta to 25 F (minus 3.9 C) by early Tuesday morning. The colder temperatures in the South are expected to persist through New Year's Day.

In Dallas, Sunday temperatures in the lower 80s (upper 20s C) could drop down to the mid 40s (single digits Celsius). In Little Rock, high temperatures of around 70 (21 C) on Sunday could drop down to highs in the mid-30s on Monday.

"We're definitely going back towards a more winter pattern," Oravec said.

Over the next 48 hours, the cyclone is expected to produce heavy snow and blizzard conditions in the Midwest and Great Lakes, freezing rain in New England, thunderstorms across the eastern U.S. and South, and widespread strong winds.

The storm is expected to intensify as it moves east, drawing energy from a sharp clash between frigid air plunging south from Canada and unusually warm air that has lingered across the southern United States, according to the National Weather Service.

It follows thousands of flight delays and cancellations across the Northeast and Great Lakes regions earlier this weekend due to snow, as thousands took to the roads and airports during the busy travel period between Christmas and New Year's. Delays and cancellations continued Sunday.

On the other side of the country, California was experiencing a fairly dry weekend after powerful storms battered the state with heavy rains, flash flooding and mudslides.

Midair helicopter crash in New Jersey leaves 1 dead and another critically injured

By CHRISTINE FERNANDO and MINGSON LAU Associated Press

HAMMONTON, N.J. (AP) — Two helicopters crashed midair in New Jersey on Sunday, killing one person and critically injuring another, authorities say.

Hammonton Police Chief Kevin Friel said rescuers responded to a report of an aviation crash at about 11:25 a.m. Video from the scene shows a helicopter spinning rapidly to the ground. Police and fire crews subsequently extinguished flames that engulfed one of the helicopters.

The Federal Aviation Administration described the crash as a midair collision between an Enstrom F-28A helicopter and Enstrom 280C helicopter over Hammonton Municipal Airport. Only the pilots were on board each aircraft. One was killed, and the other was transported to a hospital with life-threatening injuries.

Sal Silipino, owner of a cafe near the crash site, said the pilots were regulars at the restaurant and would often have breakfast together. He said he and other customers watched the helicopters take off before one began spiraling downward, followed by the other.

"It was shocking," he said. "I'm still shaking after that happened."

Hammonton resident Dan Dameshek told NBC10 that he was leaving a gym when he heard a loud snap and saw two helicopters spinning out of control.

"Immediately, the first helicopter went from right side up to upside down and started rapidly spinning, falling out of the air," Dameshek told the TV station. "And then it looked like the second helicopter was OK for a second, and then it sounded like another snap or something ... and then that helicopter started rapidly spinning out of the air."

Hammonton is a town of about 15,000 people located in Atlantic County in the southern part of New Jersey, about 35 miles (56 kilometers) southeast of Philadelphia. The town has a history of agriculture and is located near the Pine Barrens, a forested wilderness area that covers more than 1 million acres

(405,000 hectares).

The FAA and National Transportation Safety Board will be investigating the crash, Friel said.

Investigators will likely first look to review any communications between the two pilots and whether they were able to see each other, said Alan Diehl, a former crash investigator for the FAA and NTSB.

"Virtually all midair collisions are a failure to what they call 'see and avoid,'" Diehl said. "Clearly they'll be looking at the out-of-cockpit views of the two aircraft and seeing if one pilot was approaching from the blind side."

Although it was mostly cloudy at the time of the crash, winds were light and visibility was good, according to the weather forecasting company AccuWeather.

Preliminary results show Prime Minister Kurti's party won Kosovo snap vote convincingly

By ZANA CIMILI Associated Press

PRISTINA, Kosovo (AP) — Kosovo's Prime Minister Albin Kurti appeared set for another term in office after his party on Sunday convincingly won an early parliamentary election in the Balkan country, preliminary results showed.

The Vetevendosje, or Self-Determination, party won nearly 50% of the ballots, far ahead of the opposition Democratic Party of Kosovo with 21%, and the Democratic League of Kosovo with nearly 14%, the state election, authorities said after nearly all the ballots were counted.

"Congratulations on the biggest victory in the history of the country," a cheerful Kurti said after results were announced. "Now we have a lot of work ahead of us."

The snap ballot on Sunday was scheduled after the Self-Determination party failed to form a government despite also winning the most votes in a Feb. 9 election, which led to a monthslong political deadlock.

It was not immediately clear whether the Self-Determination party has won 61 seats in the 120-member parliament to be able to rule alone. Kurti said a new parliament and a government will be formed as soon as possible.

"We don't have time to lose and must move forward together as quickly as possible," he said.

Hundreds of ruling party supporters gathered outside the party offices in Pristina in celebration, chanting Kurti's name.

The previous postelection stalemate marked the first time Kosovo could not form a government since it declared independence from Serbia in 2008 following a 1998-99 war that ended in a NATO intervention.

Kosovo has not approved a budget for next year, sparking concern over the already poor economy in the country of 2 million people. Lawmakers also are set to elect a new president in March as current President Vjosa Osmani's mandate expires in early April.

After voting Sunday, Kurti urged Kosovo's 1.9 million voters to turn out in large numbers to grant "more legitimacy for our institutions."

Turnout was at around 44%, according to the state election authorities.

According to Kosovo's election laws, 20 parliamentary seats are automatically assigned to ethnic Serb representatives and other minority parties.

Opposition parties have accused Kurti of authoritarianism and of alienating Kosovo's U.S. and European Union allies since he came to power in 2021. Kurti also briefly served as prime minister in 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Lumir Abdixhiku from the Democratic League of Kosovo earlier on Sunday urged voters to "move away from the gloom, the deadlock and the division that has accompanied us for these years."

A former political prisoner during Serbia's rule in Kosovo, the 50-year-old Kurti has taken a tough stand in talks mediated by the European Union on normalizing relations with Belgrade. In response, the EU and the United States imposed punitive measures.

Kurti has promised to buy military equipment to boost security.

Ilmi Deliu, a 71-year-old pensioner from the capital, Pristina, said he hoped the election will bring a

change or "we will end up in an abyss."

"Young people no longer want to live here," he said.

Tensions with restive ethnic Serbs in the north exploded in clashes in 2023 when scores of NATO-led peacekeepers were injured. In a positive step, ethnic Serb mayors this month took power peacefully there after a municipal vote.

Kurti has also agreed to accept third-country migrants deported from the United States as part of tough anti-immigration measures by the administration of President Donald Trump. One migrant has arrived so far, authorities have told The Associated Press.

Kosovo has one of the poorest economies in Europe. It is one of the six Western Balkan countries striving to eventually join the EU, but both Kosovo and Serbia have been told they must first normalize relations.

Winter rain floods Gaza camps as Netanyahu heads for US meeting

By WAFAA SHURAFI and SALLY ABOU ALJOUND Associated Press

KHAN YOUNIS, Gaza Strip (AP) — Winter rain lashed the Gaza Strip over the weekend, flooding camps with ankle-deep puddles as Palestinians displaced by two years of war attempted to stay dry in tents frayed by months of use.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu traveled for an expected meeting on Monday with U.S. President Donald Trump in Florida about the second phase of the ceasefire. The first phase that took effect on Oct. 10 was meant to bring a surge in humanitarian aid for Gaza, including shelter.

Netanyahu made no public statement as he departed.

Nowhere to escape

In the southern city of Khan Younis, blankets were soaked and clay ovens meant for cooking were swamped. Children wearing flip-flops waded through puddles. Some people used shovels or tin cans to remove water from tents. Others clawed at the ground to pry collapsed shelters from the mud.

"Puddles formed, and there was a bad smell," said Majdoleen Tarabein, displaced from Rafah in southern Gaza. "The tent flew away. We don't know what to do or where to go."

She and family members tried to wring muddy blankets dry by hand.

"When we woke up in the morning, we found that the water had entered the tent," said Eman Abu Riziq, also displaced in Khan Younis. "These are the mattresses. They are all completely soaked."

She said her family is still reeling from her husband's death less than two weeks ago.

"Where are the mediators? We don't want food. We don't want anything. We are exhausted. We just want mattresses and covers," said Fatima Abu Omar as she tried to prop up a collapsing shelter.

At least 12 people, including a 2-week-old infant, have died since Dec. 13 from hypothermia or weather-related collapses of war-damaged homes, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, part of the Hamas-run government.

Emergency workers have warned people not to stay in damaged buildings, because they could collapse. But with much of the territory in rubble, there are few places to escape the rain. In July, the United Nations estimated that almost 80% of buildings in Gaza have been destroyed or damaged.

Since the ceasefire between Israel and Hamas began, 414 people have been killed and 1,142 wounded in Gaza, according to the Health Ministry. The overall Palestinian death toll from the war is at least 71,266. The ministry, which does not distinguish between militants and civilians in its count, is staffed by medical professionals and maintains detailed records viewed as generally reliable by the international community.

The Israel-Hamas war began with the Hamas-led attack in southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023 that killed about 1,200 people and saw 251 taken hostage,

Aid groups call for more help

Humanitarian deliveries into Gaza are falling far short of the amount called for under the U.S.-brokered ceasefire, according to aid organizations and an Associated Press analysis of the Israeli military's figures.

The Israeli military body in charge of humanitarian aid said in the past week that 4,200 trucks with aid entered Gaza, plus eight garbage trucks to assist with sanitation, as well as tents and winter clothing. It refused to elaborate on the number of tents. Aid groups have said the need far outstrips the number that

have entered.

Since the ceasefire began, around 72,000 tents and 403,000 tarps have entered, according to Shelter Cluster, an international coalition of aid providers led by the Norwegian Refugee Council.

"People in Gaza are surviving in flimsy, waterlogged tents and among ruins," Philippe Lazzarini, commissioner-general of the top U.N. group overseeing aid in Gaza, wrote on social media. "There is nothing inevitable about this. Aid supplies are not being allowed in at the scale required."

Ceasefire's next phase

Though the ceasefire agreement has mostly held, its progress has slowed.

Israel has said it refuses to move to the next phase while the remains of the final hostage are still in Gaza. Hamas has said the destruction in Gaza has hampered efforts to find remains.

Challenges in the next phase include the deployment of an international stabilization force, a technocratic governing body for Gaza, the disarmament of the Hamas militant group and further Israeli troop withdrawals from the territory.

Both Israel and Hamas have accused each other of truce violations.

Guineans vote in first election since 2021 coup with junta leader likely to win

CONAKRY, Guinea (AP) — Guineans voted on Sunday to choose a new president in the country's first election since a 2021 coup, as analysts say a weakened opposition will result in a likely win for junta leader Gen. Mamadi Doumbouya.

Sunday's election was the culmination of a transition process that began four years ago after Doumbouya ousted President Alpha Condé. The junta leader has proceeded to clamp down on the main opposition and dissent, critics say, leaving him with no major opposition among the eight other candidates in the race.

Despite Guinea's rich mineral resources — including as the world's biggest exporter of bauxite, used to make aluminum — more than half of its 15 million people are experiencing record levels of poverty and food insecurity, according to the World Food Program.

"This vote is the hope of young people, especially for us unemployed," said Idrissa Camara, an 18-year-old resident of Conakry, who said he has been unemployed since graduating from university five years ago. "I'm forced to do odd jobs to survive. I hope this vote will improve the standard of living and the quality of life in Guinea," he added.

Calls to boycott the election

While voting was largely smooth across the country, the voter turnout was low in many polling stations due in part to opposition parties who were not on the ballot calling on voters to boycott the election.

Voting officially closed at 7 p.m. local time as electoral officials started counting votes across the polling units. The election results are expected within 48 hours and there will be a runoff if no candidate wins a majority of the votes.

The election was held under a new constitution that revoked a ban on military leaders running for office and extended the presidential mandate from five to seven years. That constitution was overwhelmingly approved in a September referendum despite opposition parties asking voters to boycott it.

Surge in coups

The vote is the latest such election among African countries that have seen a surge in coups in recent years. At least 10 countries in the young continent have experienced soldiers forcefully taking power after accusing elected leaders of failing to provide good governance and security for citizens.

"This election will open a new page in Guinea's history and mark the country's return to the league of nations," said Guinea political analyst Aboubacar Sidiki Diakit . "Doumbouya is undoubtedly the favorite in this presidential election because the main opposition political parties have been sidelined and the General Directorate of Elections, the body that oversees the presidential election, is under the supervision of the government."

A weakened opposition

In addition to a weakened opposition, activists and rights groups say Guinea has since the coup seen civil society leaders silenced, critics abducted and the press censored. More than 50 political parties were dissolved last year in a move authorities claimed was to "clean up the political chessboard" despite widespread criticism.

There was heavy security in Conakry and other parts of Guinea with nearly 12,000 police officers among security forces mobilized and checkpoints set up along major roads. Authorities had said on Saturday that security forces "neutralized" an armed group with "subversive intentions threatening national security" after gunshots were heard in Conakry's Sonfonia neighborhood.

A total of nine candidates contested the election, and Doumbouya's closest challenger is the little-known Yero Baldé of the Democratic Front of Guinea party, who was education minister under Condé.

2 opposition candidates excluded

Two opposition candidates, former Prime Minister Lansana Kouyaté and former government minister Ousmane Kaba, were excluded on technical grounds while longtime opposition leaders Cellou Dalein Diallo and Sidya Toure have been forced into exile.

While Baldé has hinged his campaign on promises of governance reforms, anti-corruption efforts and economic growth, Doumbouya has built his around major infrastructure projects and reforms launched since taking power four years ago.

The junta's most important project has been the Simandou iron ore project, a 75% Chinese-owned mega-mining project at the world's largest iron ore deposit which began production last month after decades of delays.

Authorities say that a national development plan tied to the Simandou project aims to create tens of thousands of jobs and diversify the economy through investments in agriculture, education, transport, technology and health.

"In four years, he (Doumbouya) has connected Guinean youth to information and communication technologies," said Mamadama Touré, a high school student wearing a T-shirt with Doumbouya's image in the capital of Conakry, as he cited digital skills training programs put in place by the authorities.

About 6.7 million registered voters were to cast ballots.

In Conakry, 22-year-old student Issatou Bah said he is still undecided about whether to vote in the election. "This is the third time I've voted in Guinea, hoping things will change. But nothing has changed," said Bah, adding that he hopes the election will improve "this country that has everything but struggles to take off."

Brigitte Bardot, 1960s French sex symbol turned militant animal rights activist, dies at 91

By THOMAS ADAMSON and ELAINE GANLEY Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — Brigitte Bardot, the French 1960s sex symbol who became one of the greatest screen sirens of the 20th century and later a militant animal rights activist and far-right supporter, has died. She was 91.

Bardot died Sunday at her home in southern France, according to Bruno Jacquelin, of the Brigitte Bardot Foundation for the protection of animals. Speaking to The Associated Press, he gave no cause of death, and said that no arrangements had been made for funeral or memorial services. She had been hospitalized last month.

Bardot became an international celebrity as a sexualized teen bride in the 1956 movie "And God Created Woman." Directed by then husband Roger Vadim, it triggered a scandal with scenes of the long-legged beauty dancing on tables naked.

At the height of a cinema career that spanned more than two dozen films and three marriages, Bardot came to symbolize a nation bursting out of bourgeois respectability. Her tousled, blond hair, voluptuous figure and pouty irreverence made her one of France's best-known stars, even as she struggled with depression.

Such was her widespread appeal that in 1969 her features were chosen to be the model for "Marianne,"

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the national emblem of France and the official Gallic seal. Bardot's face appeared on statues, postage stamps and coins.

"We are mourning a legend," French President Emmanuel Macron said in an X post.

Bardot's second career as an animal rights activist was equally sensational. She traveled to the Arctic to blow the whistle on the slaughter of baby seals. She also condemned the use of animals in laboratory experiments, and she opposed Muslim slaughter rituals.

"Man is an insatiable predator," Bardot told The Associated Press on her 73rd birthday, in 2007. "I don't care about my past glory. That means nothing in the face of an animal that suffers, since it has no power, no words to defend itself."

Her activism earned her compatriots' respect and, in 1985, she was awarded the Legion of Honor, the nation's highest recognition.

Turn to the far right

Later, however, she fell from public grace as her animal protection diatribes took on a decidedly extremist tone. She frequently decried the influx of immigrants into France, especially Muslims.

She was convicted and fined five times in French courts of inciting racial hatred, in incidents inspired by her opposition to the Muslim practice of slaughtering sheep during annual religious holidays.

Bardot's 1992 marriage to fourth husband Bernard d'Ormale, a onetime adviser to far-right National Front leader Jean-Marie Le Pen, contributed to her political shift. She described Le Pen, an outspoken nationalist with multiple racism convictions of his own, as a "lovely, intelligent man."

In 2012, she supported the presidential bid of Marine Le Pen, who now leads her father's renamed National Rally party. Le Pen paid homage Sunday to an "exceptional woman" who was "incredibly French."

In 2018, at the height of the #MeToo movement, Bardot said in an interview that most actors protesting sexual harassment in the film industry were "hypocritical," because many played "the teases" with producers to land parts.

She said she had never had been a victim of sexual harassment and found it "charming to be told that I was beautiful or that I had a nice little ass."

Privileged but 'difficult' upbringing

Brigitte Anne-Marie Bardot was born Sept. 28, 1934, to a wealthy industrialist. A shy child, she studied classical ballet and was discovered by a family friend who put her on the cover of Elle magazine at age 14.

Bardot once described her childhood as "difficult" and said that her father was a strict disciplinarian who would sometimes punish her with a horse whip.

Vadim, a French movie producer who she married in 1952, saw her potential and wrote "And God Created Woman" to showcase her provocative sensuality, an explosive cocktail of childlike innocence and raw sexuality.

The film, which portrayed Bardot as a teen who marries to escape an orphanage and then beds her brother-in-law, had a decisive influence on New Wave directors Jean-Luc Godard and François Truffaut, and came to embody the hedonism and sexual freedom of the 1960s.

The film was a box-office hit, and it made Bardot a superstar. Her girlish pout, tiny waist and generous bust were often more appreciated than her talent.

"It's an embarrassment to have acted so badly," Bardot said of her early films. "I suffered a lot in the beginning. I was really treated like someone less than nothing."

Bardot's unabashed, off-screen love affair with co-star Jean-Louis Trintignant eradicated the boundaries between her public and private life and turned her into a hot prize for paparazzi.

Bardot never adjusted to the limelight. She blamed the constant media attention for the suicide attempt that followed 10 months after the birth of her only child, Nicolas. Photographers had broken into her house two weeks before she gave birth to snap a picture of her pregnant.

Nicolas' father was Jacques Charrier, a French actor who she married in 1959 but who never felt comfortable in his role as Monsieur Bardot. Bardot soon gave up her son to his father, and later said she had been chronically depressed and unready for the duties of being a mother.

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"I was looking for roots then," she said in an interview. "I had none to offer."

In her 1996 autobiography "Initiales B.B.," she likened her pregnancy to "a tumor growing inside me," and described Charrier as "temperamental and abusive."

Bardot married her third husband, West German millionaire playboy Gunther Sachs, in 1966, and they divorced three years later.

Among her films were "A Parisian" (1957); "In Case of Misfortune," in which she starred in 1958 with screen legend Jean Gabin; "The Truth" (1960); "Private Life" (1962); "A Ravishing Idiot" (1964); "Shalako" (1968); "Women" (1969); "The Bear And The Doll" (1970); "Rum Boulevard" (1971); and "Don Juan" (1973).

With the exception of 1963's critically acclaimed "Contempt," directed by Godard, Bardot's films were rarely complicated by plots. Often they were vehicles to display Bardot in scanty dresses or frolicking nude in the sun.

"It was never a great passion of mine," she said of filmmaking. "And it can be deadly sometimes. Marilyn (Monroe) perished because of it."

Bardot retired to her Riviera villa in St. Tropez at the age of 39 in 1973 after "The Woman Grabber." As fans brought flowers to her home Sunday, the local St. Tropez administration called for "respect for the privacy of her family and the serenity of the places where she lived."

Middle-aged reinvention

She emerged a decade later with a new persona: An animal rights lobbyist, her face was wrinkled and her voice was deep following years of heavy smoking. She abandoned her jet-set life and sold off movie memorabilia and jewelry to create a foundation devoted exclusively to the prevention of animal cruelty.

Depression sometimes dogged her, and she said that she attempted suicide again on her 49th birthday.

Her activism knew no borders. She urged South Korea to ban the sale of dog meat and once wrote to U.S. President Bill Clinton asking why the U.S. Navy recaptured two dolphins it had released into the wild.

She attacked centuries-old French and Italian sporting traditions including the Palio, a free-for-all horse race, and campaigned on behalf of wolves, rabbits, kittens and turtle doves.

"It's true that sometimes I get carried away, but when I see how slowly things move forward ... my distress takes over," Bardot told the AP when asked about her racial hatred convictions and opposition to Muslim ritual slaughter,

In 1997, several towns removed Bardot-inspired statues of Marianne after the actress voiced anti-immigrant sentiment. Also that year, she received death threats after calling for a ban on the sale of horse meat.

Environmental campaigner Paul Watson, who was beaten on a seal hunt protest in Canada alongside Bardot in 1977 and campaigned with her for five decades, acknowledged that "many disagreed with Brigitte's politics or some of her views."

"Her allegiance was not to the world of humans," he said. "The animals of this world lost a wonderful friend today."

Bardot once said that she identified with the animals that she was trying to save.

"I can understand hunted animals, because of the way I was treated," Bardot said. "What happened to me was inhuman. I was constantly surrounded by the world press."

Thai and Cambodian top diplomats meet in China to solidify ceasefire

By SIMINA MISTREANU Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — Top diplomats from Thailand and Cambodia kicked off two days of talks in China on Sunday as Beijing seeks to strengthen its role in mediating the two countries' border dispute, a day after they signed a new ceasefire.

The ceasefire agreement calls for a halt to weeks of fighting along their contested border that has killed more than 100 people and displaced over half a million in both countries.

Thai Foreign Minister Sihasak Phuangketkeow and Cambodian Foreign Minister Prak Sokhonn were set to meet in China's southwestern Yunnan province for talks mediated by their Chinese counterpart, Wang Yi.

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China has sought to position itself as a mediator in the crisis, along with the United States and Malaysia. U.S. President Donald Trump, who threatened to withhold trade privileges unless Thailand and Cambodia agreed to a July ceasefire, suggested Sunday that the fighting between Thailand and Cambodia "will stop momentarily" and boasted that the U.S. "has become the REAL United Nations."

In a post on his social media site from his Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida, where he's been spending the winter holidays, Trump wrote that both sides "will go back to living in PEACE" and referenced his past comments about helping to broker a ceasefire that largely hasn't held.

"I want to congratulate both great leaders on their brilliance in coming to this rapid and very fair conclusion. It was FAST & DECISIVE, as all of these situations should be!" Trump wrote.

The talks in China aim to ensure a sustained ceasefire and promote lasting peace between the countries, according to a statement by Sihasak's office.

Wang was scheduled to join both bilateral meetings with each of the diplomats and a trilateral talk on Monday.

China has welcomed the ceasefire announcement, which freezes the front lines and allows for displaced civilians to return to their homes near the border.

"China stands ready to continue to provide (the) platform and create conditions for Cambodia and Thailand to have fuller and more detailed communication," a Chinese Foreign Ministry statement read.

The ceasefire agreement comes with a 72-hour observation period, at the end of which Thailand agreed to repatriate 18 Cambodian soldiers it has held as prisoners since earlier fighting in July. Their release has been a major demand of the Cambodian side.

Prak Sokhonn, in a statement after his meeting with Wang, expressed deep appreciation for China's "vital role" in supporting the ceasefire.

China also announced 20 million yuan (\$2.8 million) of emergency humanitarian aid for Cambodia to assist the displaced.

The first batch of Chinese aid, including food, tents and blankets, arrived in Cambodia on Sunday, Wang Wenbin, Chinese ambassador to Cambodia, wrote on Facebook.

Sihasak said Sunday he hoped the meetings would convey to China that it should both support a sustainable ceasefire and send a signal to Cambodia against reviving the conflict or attempting to create further ones.

"Thailand does not see China merely as a mediator in our conflict with Cambodia but wants China to play a constructive role in ensuring a sustainable ceasefire by sending such signals to Cambodia as well," he said.

Myanmar holds first election since military seized power but critics say the vote is a sham

By TIAN MACLEOD JI and GRANT PECK Associated Press

YANGON, Myanmar (AP) — Voters went to the polls Sunday for the initial phase of Myanmar's first general election in five years, held under the supervision of its military government while a civil war rages throughout much of the country.

Final results won't be known until after two more rounds of voting are completed later in January. It's widely expected that Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing, who has governed Myanmar since an army takeover in 2021, will then assume the presidency.

The military government has presented the vote as a return to democracy, but its bid for legitimacy is marred by the absence of formerly popular opposition parties and reports that soldiers used threats to force voters' participation.

Military-backed party favored

While more than 4,800 candidates from 57 parties are competing for seats in national and regional legislatures, only six are competing nationwide with the possibility to gain political clout in parliament. The military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party is by far the strongest contender.

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Voting is taking place in three phases, with Sunday's first round being held in 102 of Myanmar's 330 townships. Subsequent phases will take place on Jan. 11 and Jan. 25, but 65 townships won't participate in the election because of ongoing armed conflicts.

Final results are expected to be announced by February. It wasn't clear if or when the authorities would release aggregate figures of Sunday's voting, although counts were publicly announced at local polling stations.

Critics of the current system say that the election is designed to add a facade of legitimacy to the status quo. Military rule began when soldiers ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi in February 2021. It blocked her National League for Democracy party from serving a second term despite winning a landslide victory in the 2020 election.

They argue that the results will lack legitimacy because of the exclusion of major parties and government repression.

'Theater of the absurd'

The expected victory of the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party makes the nominal transition to civilian rule a chimera, say opponents of military rule and independent analysts.

"An election organized by a junta that continues to bomb civilians, jail political leaders, and criminalize all forms of dissent is not an election — it is a theater of the absurd performed at gunpoint," Tom Andrews, the U.N.-appointed human rights expert for Myanmar, posted on X.

However, the election may provide an excuse for neighbors like China, India and Thailand to say that the vote represents progress toward stability. Western nations have maintained sanctions against Myanmar's ruling generals because of the military's anti-democratic actions and the brutal war against opponents.

According to a count carried out at one polling station in Yangon after the polls closed, only 524 of 1,431 registered voters — just under 37% — cast their ballots.

Of those, 311 voted for the pro-military Union Solidarity and Development Party, suggesting that opposition calls for a voter boycott may have been heeded.

Khin Marlar, 51, who cast her ballot in Yangon's Kyauktada township, said that she felt that she should vote, because she hoped that peace would follow afterward. She explained that she had fled her village in the town of Thaungta in the central Mandalay region because of the fighting.

"I am voting with the feeling that I will go back to my village when it is peaceful," she told The Associated Press.

Voter intimidation reports

A resident of southern Mon state, who asked to be identified only by her first name, Khin, for fear of arrest by the military, told the AP that she felt compelled to go to a polling station because of pressure from local authorities.

"I have to go and vote even though I don't want to, because soldiers showed up with guns to our village to pressure us yesterday," Khin said, echoing reports from independent media and rights groups.

Suu Kyi, Myanmar's 80-year-old former leader, and her party aren't participating in the polls. She is serving a 27-year prison term on charges widely viewed as spurious and politically motivated. Her party, the National League for Democracy, was dissolved in 2023 after refusing to register under new military rules.

Other parties also refused to register or declined to run under conditions they deem unfair, and opposition groups have called for a voter boycott.

Amael Vier, an analyst for the Asian Network for Free Elections, noted a lack of genuine choice, pointing out that 73% of voters in 2020 cast ballots for parties that no longer exist.

Violence and repression

According to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, more than 22,000 people are currently detained for political offenses, and more than 7,600 civilians have been killed by security forces since 2021.

Armed resistance arose after the army used lethal force to crush nonviolent protests against its 2021 takeover. The ensuing civil war has left more than 3.6 million people displaced, according to the U.N.

A new Election Protection Law imposes harsh penalties and restrictions for virtually all public criticism

of the polls.

There were no reports of major interference with the polls, though opposition organizations and armed resistance groups had vowed to disrupt the electoral process.

Both the military and its opponents believe power is likely to remain with Min Aung Hlaing, who led the 2021 seizure of power.

"I am the commander in chief. I am a civil servant. I cannot say that I want to serve as a president. I am not the leader of a political party," he told journalists after casting his vote. "There is a process for electing a president from parliament only when it is convened. I think it is appropriate to speak about it only then."

Hounded by photographers for years, Bardot identified with the animals she later set out to save

By ANGELA CHARLTON and ELAINE GANLEY. Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — Brigitte Bardot felt each pop of the flashbulb like the impact of a high-powered rifle bullet. And so it was, she said, that years of implacable hounding by the world's paparazzi turned a woman idolized as a sultry sex kitten into a militant animal rights crusader.

Bardot, who died Sunday at age 91, was just 22 when she rocketed to international fame with the 1956 film sensation "And God Created Woman," a cinematic ode to her hourglass figure, sultry pout and tousled blond mane.

Bardot would spend another decade and a half in the limelight — and among the paparazzi's preferred prey, including just days before she gave birth — before she retired from the cinema to devote her life to protecting animals.

"I understand wild animals, under the fire of machine guns or hunters' rifles, so well," Bardot said in a 1982 interview. The paparazzi "didn't shoot to kill, but they certainly killed something inside me by photographing me like that with their zoom lenses. They were like the arms of war, like bazookas."

A sex symbol turned animal rights activist

Bardot earned the title of one of the greatest sex symbols of the 20th century after her teenage breakthrough role dancing naked on tables in "And God Created Woman," directed by the first of her four husbands, Roger Vadim.

At the height of her cinema career, Bardot came to symbolize a nation bursting the seams of bourgeois respectability. Her tousled, blond mane, fabulous figure and pouty irreverence were among France's most visible natural assets. Air France, the state-run air carrier, once used Bardot in an advertising campaign.

Bardot's second career as animal rights activist was equally sensational. She traveled to the Arctic to blow the whistle on the slaughter of baby seals; she condemned the use of animals in laboratory experiments; and she vigorously opposed Muslim sheep-slaughtering rituals.

"Man is an insatiable predator," Bardot told The Associated Press on her 73rd birthday in 2007. "I don't care about my past glory. That means nothing in the face of an animal that suffers, since it has no power, no words to defend itself."

Her activism earned her compatriots' respect and, in 1985, she was awarded the Legion of Honor. Later, however, she fell from public grace as her animal protection diatribes took on a decidedly extremist ring.

She was convicted five times in French courts of inciting racial hatred, including for criticism of the Muslim practice of slaughtering sheep during the annual Aid el-Kebir and Eid Al-Adha festivals.

Her fourth husband was Bernard d'Ormale, a one-time adviser to far-right leader Jean-Marie Le Pen, also repeatedly convicted of racism. Bardot denied being racist, but frequently decried the influx of immigrants into France, especially Muslims.

Made famous by her first husband

Bardot was born Sept. 28, 1934, to a wealthy industrialist, studied classical ballet and was discovered by a family friend who put her on the cover of Elle magazine at the age of 14. She said her father was a strict disciplinarian who would sometimes "punish me with a horse whip."

It was French movie producer Vadim, whom she married in 1952, who saw her potential and wrote "And

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God Created Woman" to showcase her provocative sensuality, an explosive cocktail of childlike innocence and raw sexuality.

The film, which portrayed Bardot as a bored newlywed who beds her brother-in-law, had a decisive influence on New Wave directors Jean-Luc Godard and Francois Truffaut, and it came to embody the hedonism and sexual freedom of the 1960s.

The film was a box-office hit and it made Bardot a superstar. Her girlish pout, tiny waist and generous bustline were more appreciated than her talent. "It's an embarrassment to have acted so badly," Bardot said of her early films. "I suffered a lot in the beginning. I was really treated like someone less than nothing."

Bardot's unabashed, off-screen love affair with co-star Jean-Louis Trintignant further shocked the nation. It eradicated the boundaries between her public and private life and turned her into fair game for paparazzi who pursued her relentlessly.

Hounded by paparazzi

She never adjusted to the limelight and blamed the constant press attention for a suicide attempt shortly after the birth of her only child, Nicolas. Photographers broke into her house only two weeks before she gave birth to snap a picture of her pregnant.

Nicolas' father was Jacques Charrier, a handsome French actor who never liked his role as Monsieur Bardot. Bardot soon gave up her son to his father, and later said she had been chronically depressed and unready for the duties of being a mother. "I was looking for roots then," she said in an interview. "I had none to offer."

In her 1996 autobiography, "Initiales B.B.," she likened her pregnancy to "a tumor growing inside me," and described Charrier as "temperamental and abusive." Bardot married her third husband, West German millionaire playboy Gunther Sachs, in 1966. They divorced three years later.

Among her films were "A Parisian" (1957); "In Case of Misfortune," in which she starred in 1958 with Jean Gabin, France's Clark Gable; "The Truth" (1960); "Private Life" (1961); "A Ravishing Idiot" (1963); "A Happy Heart" (1967); "Shalako" (1968); "Women" (1969); "The Bear And The Doll" (1970); "Rum Boulevard" (1971); and "Don Juan" (1973).

The films were rarely complicated by plots and had little psychological depth. Most were vehicles to display Bardot in scanty dress or frolicking nude in the sun.

"It was never a great passion of mine," she said of filmmaking. "And it can be deadly sometimes. Marilyn (Monroe) perished because of it."

A new Bardot, revered but later reviled

Bardot retired to her Riviera villa in St. Tropez at the age of 39 in 1973 after "The Woman Grabber." She emerged a decade later with a new persona: animal rights lobbyist, face wrinkled and voice deepened by years of heavy smoking.

She abandoned her jet-set life and sold off movie memorabilia and jewelry to create a foundation devoted exclusively to the prevention of animal cruelty.

Her activism knew no borders. She urged South Korea to ban the sale of dog meat and once wrote to then-U.S. President Bill Clinton asking why the U.S. Navy recaptured two dolphins it had released into the wild. She attacked centuries-old French and Italian sporting traditions including the Palio, a free-for-all horse race, and campaigned on behalf of wolves, rabbits, kittens and turtle doves.

Actress Pamela Anderson, also an animal rights activist, called Bardot "my mother of the heart and my absolute idol," in an interview with the AP in 2008.

In 1997, several towns removed Bardot-inspired statues of Marianne — the bare-breasted statue representing the French Republic — after she voiced anti-immigrant sentiment. Also that year, she received death threats after calling for a ban on the sale of horse meat.

In 2018, at the height of the #MeToo movement, Bardot said in an interview that most actors protesting sexual harassment in the film industry were "hypocritical" and "ridiculous" because many played "the teases" with producers to land parts.

She said she had never had been a victim of sexual harassment and found it "charming to be told that

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I was beautiful or that I had a nice little ass.”

Bardot once said she identified with the animals she tried to save.

“I can understand hunted animals because of the way I was treated,” she told an interviewer. “What happened to me was inhuman. I was constantly surrounded by the world press.”

A building collapse in South Africa kills three people, including a 1-year-old

Associated Press undefined

JOHANNESBURG (AP) — Three people, including a one-year-old child, died when a two-story building collapsed in South Africa’s Soweto township, west of Johannesburg, in the early hours of Sunday morning, authorities said.

Three others sustained injuries during the incident and were receiving treatment at the Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital.

According to authorities, a total of six people were inside the building when it collapsed and emergency personnel rescued the three people injured who were trapped under the rubble.

“Tragically, three lives were lost in this incident, two adult females and one child. The incident has been handed over to the relevant authorities for further investigation,” said Xolile Khumalo, spokesperson for Johannesburg Emergency Management Services.

On Dec. 12, five people died when a multistory building at the site of a Hindu temple collapsed near the coastal city of Durban.

The building was being constructed on top of the temple in the town of Verulam, about 25 kilometers (15 miles) north of Durban, when it collapsed.

One person was reported dead at the time, but search teams later pulled four more bodies from the rubble, bringing the death toll to five.

Today in History: December 29, the Wounded Knee Massacre

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Monday, Dec. 29, the 363rd day of 2025. There are two days left in the year.

On Dec. 29, 1890, the Wounded Knee massacre took place in South Dakota as more than 250 Lakota people were killed by U.S. troops sent to disarm them.

In 1170, Thomas Becket, the archbishop of Canterbury, was killed in Canterbury Cathedral by knights loyal to King Henry II.

In 1940, during World War II, the German Luftwaffe dropped incendiary bombs on London, setting off what came to be known as “The Second Great Fire of London.”

In 1978, during the Gator Bowl, Ohio State football coach Woody Hayes punched Clemson player Charlie Bauman, who had intercepted an Ohio State pass. (Hayes was fired the next day.)

In 1989, dissident and playwright Vaclav Havel (VAHTS’-lahv HAH’-vel) assumed the presidency of Czechoslovakia. In 1993, he would become the first president of the newly independent Czech Republic after Czechoslovakia peacefully dissolved.

In 2021, British socialite Ghislaine Maxwell was convicted in New York of helping lure teenage girls to be sexually abused by the late Jeffrey Epstein; the verdict capped a monthlong trial featuring accounts of the sexual exploitation of girls as young as 14. (Maxwell would be sentenced to 20 years in prison.)

In 2024, Jimmy Carter, a Georgia peanut farmer who was elected president in the years after the Watergate scandal and served one tumultuous term starting in 1977, died at age 100. After his presidency, Carter worked tirelessly as a global humanitarian, winning the Nobel Peace Prize in 2002.

Today’s Birthdays: Actor Jon Voight is 87. Actor Ted Danson is 78. Actor Patricia Clarkson is 66. Filmmaker Lilly Wachowski is 58. Actor Jennifer Ehle is 56. Actor Jude Law is 53. Actor Mekhi Phifer (mih-KY’ FY’-fuhr) is 51. Actor Diego Luna is 46. Actor and producer Alison Brie is 43. Actor Jane Levy is 36. Actor Dylan Minnette is 29.