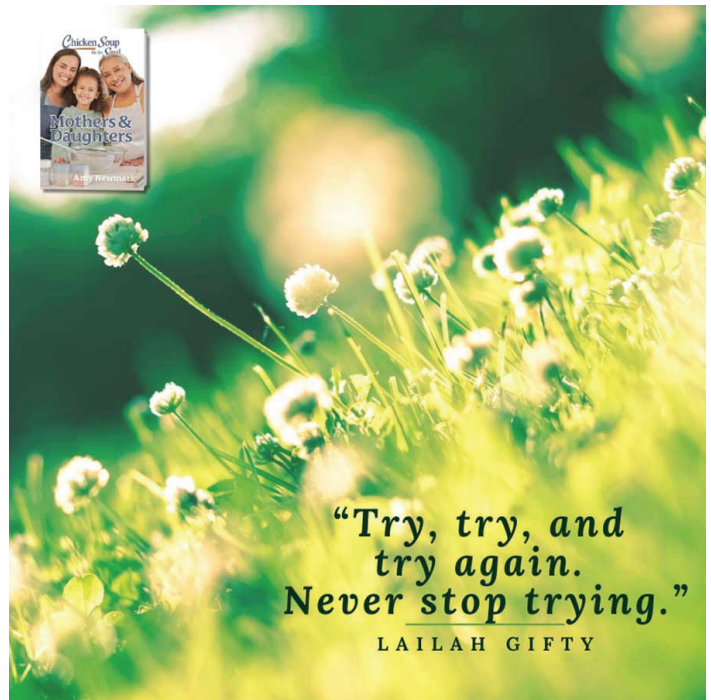


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Monday, April 8

Senior Menu: Ranch chicken breast, sweet potatoes mixed Monterey blend, applesauce bars, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Pancake on stick.

School Lunch: French bread pizza, cooked carrots.

State Smarter Balanced Testing (EIA/Math: April 8-12, Science (Grade 11) Week of April 15-19 (day TBD)

School Board meeting, 7 p.m.

Pantry Open 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Senior Citizen meet at the Groton Community Center, 1 p.m.

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

High School Baseball: Varsity at Dell Rapids 5 p.m., second game at 7 p.m.

Soccer uniform pickup, 5-8 p.m., Groton Community Center

Tuesday, April 9

ELECTION DAY!

Groton Area Opt-Out Election. Polls open 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.

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

Senior Menu: Lemon baked fish, baked potato with sour cream, California blend vegetables, peach crisp, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Scones.

School Lunch: Chicken patty, fries.

Cancelled: Track at Ipswich, 2:30 p.m.

JH Track at Milbank 4 p.m.

Thrift Store open 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.

Food Pantry open 4 p.m. to 8 p.m.

United Methodist: Bible Study, 10 a.m.

Wednesday, April 10

Senior Menu: Hamburger on bun, lettuce/tomato/onion, potato salad, fruit, cookie.

School Breakfast: Cereal

School Lunch: Chicken quesadilla, peas.

Groton CM&A: Kids' Club, Youth Group and Adult Bible Study begins at 7 pm

Emmanuel Lutheran: Confirmation, 6 p.m.

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

SD District Municipal League meeting at the Legion

No Bingo at the Legion

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

The recycling trailer is located west of the city shop. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.

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1440

In partnership with **smartasset**[™]

A total solar eclipse will pass over North America today, with almost 32 million Americans living in its path. It marks the last total solar eclipse visible in the US for the next 20 years. See here to track the eclipse's path.

No. 1 South Carolina won the women's NCAA basketball championship yesterday, beating Caitlin Clark and No. 1 Iowa by a score of 87-75. The victory caps a perfect 38-0 season for the Gamecocks and avenges a loss to the Hawkeyes in last year's semifinals.

Mexico severed diplomatic ties with Ecuador over the weekend, a decision that came after Ecuadorian authorities forcibly entered the Mexican embassy Friday to arrest former Ecuadorian Vice President Jorge Glas on corruption charges.

Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Singer and rapper Jelly Roll wins video of the year at the 2024 Country Music Television awards; see full list of winners here.

Oregon Powerball player wins nearly \$1.33B jackpot, ending three-month run without a winner; jackpot, equal to \$621M if taken in a lump sum, was the eighth largest in US history.

Washington Nationals pitcher Stephen Strasburg retires; the 35-year-old pitcher was the 2019 World Series MVP and former overall No. 1 draft pick but suffered multiple injuries and medical issues.

Science & Technology

Engineers determine technical issue causing Voyager 1, launched in 1977, to return garbled communications beginning late last year, raising hope of a potential fix. The space probe is the most distant human-made object from Earth, having entered interstellar space; see current location.

University of Rochester discloses findings from probe into high-profile academic fraud scandal by physicist Ranga Dias, alleged to have faked room-temperature superconductivity results.

Semaglutide, the key ingredient in new weight loss drugs like Ozempic and Wegovy, has been shown to reduce symptoms and physical limitations in patients with a common type of heart failure.

Business & Markets

Markets rebound Friday, closing up (Dow +0.8%, S&P 500 +1.1%, Nasdaq +1.2%); Dow sees worst week in 2024 despite Friday's gains.

Tesla reportedly suspends plans to build a low-cost entry-level sedan; decision comes amid slowing US electric vehicle market and competition from China. CEO Elon Musk denies reports, also says company will unveil a robotaxi vehicle Aug. 8.

Retail giant Target launches paid membership program, including one- or two-day shipping, in bid to compete with Amazon Prime and Walmart+.

Politics & World Affairs

Israel reduces its troop presence in the southern Gaza Strip, leaving one brigade reportedly to rest and resupply troops; the move comes at the six-month mark of the war and at the onset of renewed cease-fire talks with Hamas.

Los Angeles heist at a money storage facility believed to yield \$30M over Easter weekend in one of the largest cash thefts in US history; FBI reportedly investigating the incident.

Trump campaign raises \$50.5M at Florida fundraiser over the weekend, surpassing \$26M haul from a late March fundraiser held by the Biden campaign.

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The boys group (above) and the girls group (left) each had a musical selection in the show choir performance.

(Photo by Paul Kosel)



2024 POPS Concert



This is the pit crew for the show choir. Tanner Shultis on trap set, Blade Lord on aux. percussion, Desiree Yeigh on bass keyboard, Emily Clark on piano, Brody Lord and Logan Clocksene on trombone, Kyleigh Kroll on trumpet and Cadence Feist on alto/tenor sax. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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The show choir, as a whole, performed five selections at the end of the POPS Concert. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



Anna Bisbee sang, "How Great Thou Art." (Photo by Paul Kosel)



Carlee Johnson played, "Intermezzo No. 1." (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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The masters of ceremony were seniors Emily Clark, Anna Bisbee, Cadence Feist and Camryn Kurtz. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



Emily Clark played a piano solo entitled, "Redemption." (Photo by Paul Kosel)



Camryn Kurtz sang, "Vienna." (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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The Chamber Choir sang "Flowers." (Photo by Paul Kosel)



The High School Choir sang, "Viva La Vida." (Photo by Paul Kosel)



The Flex Band performed, "The Best of Queen," "Sweet Georgia Brown" and "Megalovania."
(Photo by Paul Kosel)

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The high school drumline performed, "Take out the trash." (Photo lifted from GDILIVE.COM Video)



Anna Bisbee and Divya Pelmelay sang a duet entitled, "Yang Patah Tumbuh, Yang Hilang Berganti." (Photo by Paul Kosel)



Rebecca Poor played and sang, "Unopened Windows." (Photo by Paul Kosel)



Natalia Warrington sang, "Speechless."
(Photo by Paul Kosel)

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15 N Main St. - Ste. 101
Downtown Groton

Call/Text Paul: 605-397-7460
Call/Text Tina: 605-397-7285



Bones need strong muscles for support.
Not exercising weakens those supporting muscles.
Weak muscles put more stress on joints. - Mayo Clinic

EMPLOYMENT

Position available for full-time Public Works Laborer. Formal training and/or experience preferred. Salary negotiable DOE. Benefits include medical insurance, life insurance, and SD State Retirement. Please send application and resume to the City of Groton, PO Box 587, Groton, SD 57445, or email to city.doug@nvc.net. Applications will be accepted until 5pm on April 16, 2024. Full job description and application may be found at <https://www.grotonsd.gov/o/grotoncity/page/employment-options>. For more information, please call 605-397-8422. Equal opportunity employer.

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Names Released in Minnehaha County Fatal Crash

What: Single vehicle fatal crash

Where: Interstate 29, mile marker 95, three miles NW of Baltic, SD

When: 10:30 a.m., Monday, April 1, 2024

Driver 1: Bhanu Manideep Vejendla, 27-year-old male from Madison, SD, serious non-life-threatening injuries

Vehicle 1: 2024 Volvo XC60 Recharge T8 Plus

Seatbelt Use: Yes

Passenger 1: Revanth Aachanta, 21-year-old male from Madison, SD, fatal injuries

Seatbelt Use: Under investigation

Passenger 2: Fnu Venkatesh, 25-year-old male, serious non-life-threatening injuries

Seatbelt Use: No

Passenger 3: Ankith Boddani, 23-year-old male, serious non-life-threatening injuries

Seatbelt Use: No

Minnehaha County, S.D.- A passenger in a single vehicle crash suffered fatal injuries Monday morning, April 1, on Interstate 29 near Baltic, SD.

Preliminary crash information indicates Bhanu M. Vejendla, the driver a 2024 Volvo, left the roadway and entered the median after losing control of the vehicle due to poor weather conditions. The vehicle rolled before coming to a final rest. There were four occupants in the vehicle and three were ejected from the vehicle, one of which, Revanth Aachanta, a 21-year-old male from Madison, SD, received fatal injuries. The other three occupants received serious non-life-threatening injuries and were transported to a nearby hospital. Seatbelt use is under investigation.

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.

Codington County Fatal Crash

What: Single vehicle fatal crash
Where: 45050 164th St., 7 miles NW of Watertown, SD
When: 8:15 p.m., Saturday, April 6, 2024

Driver 1: Male, 53, fatal injuries
Vehicle 1: 2016 Chrysler 300S
Seatbelt Use: Yes

Codington County, S.D.- A 53-year-old male suffered fatal injuries in a single vehicle crash Saturday evening near Watertown, SD.

The name of the person involved has not been released pending notification of family members.

Preliminary crash information indicates the driver a 2016 Chrysler 300S was traveling westbound on 164th Street near 450th Avenue and failed to navigate the curve. The vehicle entered the north ditch and rolled. The driver died as a result of his 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.

EARTHTALK ™

Dear EarthTalk: Why is protecting the greater sage grouse such a hot button issue across the American West?

- P.L., Salt Lake City, UT

The greater sage grouse, best known for its unusual mating dance and bulky, turkey-like appearance, has long been an emblem of the American West. However, researchers have found that this iconic bird species is in jeopardy. The effects of climate change and habitat destruction have caused greater sage grouse populations to decline by 80 percent since 1965 and by 40 percent since 2002—and they will likely continue to decline if proactive conservation practices are not implemented to protect their habitats within the bioregion often referred to as the “sagebrush sea.”

But this issue extends well beyond protecting the greater sage grouse, as the health of sage grouse populations is a direct indication of their habitat’s health. The sagebrush sea is a critical bioregion that used to cover the vast majority of the American West, but millions of acres of sagebrush have become inaccessible to the greater sage grouse and hundreds of other native wildlife species. Large areas of sagebrush have been destroyed or fragmented for the sake of continued oil drilling, mining and other human development. The habitat has also been harmed by wildfires and invasive grasses such as cheatgrass, which can overgrow sagebrush. The decline of these habitats has dire consequences for cattle farmers and ranchers across the region as well, since they need healthy land for their livestock.

The best way to help sage grouse and their habitats is to put more restrictive policies on what can be done in those areas, and to replace previously destroyed or fragmented habitats whenever possible. A federal plan designed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to accomplish these goals has been in the works since 2015, but it was delayed due to the Trump administration’s heavy emphasis on energy development. Although the plan has finally been completed and approved by the Biden administration, many conservationists and scientists still feel that it needs work before being implemented.

A group of scientists recently stated in a public letter that the plan would likely “have severe consequences for sage grouse” in its current form. Specifically, they are concerned that the BLM’s proposal would still allow for mining and some forms of energy development within sage grouse habitat, and would not plan to restore any destroyed land. As a result, many feel that the current plan will not do enough to save the greater sage grouse or their habitat, and may serve to harm some landowners as well.

Western citizens and land stewards have a lot to gain if the greater sage grouse is protected. However, the government is still aiming for a proposal that can serve as a compromise between these citizens and the corporate and federal groups who want to prioritize energy development in these areas. The resulting friction between these two groups is practically unavoidable. If you would like to speak out on this issue, the BLM’s current proposal is available online and open to public comment until June 13th, 2024.



The effects of climate change & habitat destruction have caused greater sage grouse populations to decline by 80 percent since 1965.

Credit: Andrew Perilloux, Unsplash.

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Weekly Vikings Roundup

By Jordan Wright

For years, fans have been calling for the Vikings to draft a quarterback in the first round. Kirk Cousins was a very good quarterback during his time in Minnesota, but the Vikings decided to let him walk this offseason due to his age and price tag. With Cousins gone, and the draft having six quarterbacks who could potentially be drafted in the first round, all signs are pointing to those fans to finally get their wish.

Since quarterback is undoubtedly the most important position in football, let's take a look at the QBs in the 2024 NFL draft. There are two tiers of quarterbacks available in the first round, with Caleb Williams, Drake Maye, and Jayden Daniels making up the top tier, and JJ McCarthy, Bo Nix, and Michael Penix Jr. in the second tier.

Caleb Williams – Unquestionably the top quarterback in the draft, Williams is a lock to go number one to Chicago. The Bears have never had a 4,000-yard passer in their century-long history, but they've never had a QB as talented as Williams (scouts have compared him to Patrick Mahomes and Aaron Rodgers).

Drake Maye – After Williams, there is debate as to who is the second-best quarterback in the draft, Drake Maye or Jayden Daniels. Ultimately, it will come down to what type of offense Washington wants to run (they hold the second overall pick). Maye is a big, mobile quarterback with a cannon for an arm, similar to Justin Herbert or Josh Allen. Out of all six quarterbacks with first-round grades, Maye had the least amount of talent around him in college. He is also the youngest of the top-tier QBs. Whichever team drafts him will be betting on potential, but Maye has shown enough flashes to be worthy of a top-3 pick.

Jayden Daniels – The reigning Heisman winner, Daniels is another player whose potential is through the roof. He can make every throw on the field, and has been given top honors by Pro Football Focus in throws past the sticks, deep passing, first-and-second-down throws, and throws outside the numbers. However, his greatest strength is his mobility. He ran for 1,134 yards and 10 touchdowns last season, to go along with his 3,812 passing yards and 40 touchdowns (and only four interceptions). Daniels' pro comparison is Lamar Jackson but will need to go to a team that can build a game plan around him.

J.J. McCarthy – The top three quarterbacks will likely go in the top three picks of the draft, but the players in the second tier could be drafted anywhere from fourth overall to the second round. McCarthy did not have gaudy stats, as he was rarely asked to carry a Michigan team that just won the Championship. I think McCarthy belongs at the bottom of this tier, but he has been driving up draft boards over the past few weeks, and it's looking like there is a good chance he's the fourth quarterback off the board. His arm is good enough. His mobility is good enough. His pro comparison is all over the board, from Alex Smith to Daniel Jones.

Bo Nix – The record holder for NCAA completion percentage, Nix played incredibly well in Oregon's system that relied on pre-snap reads and pinpoint accuracy. He completed 77 percent of his throws for 4,508 yards, 45 touchdowns, and only three interceptions, plus another six touchdowns on the ground. Nix wasn't asked to throw deep very often, but he's more than capable of it when needed. According to PFF, Nix got top grades in throws under pressure, throws against the blitz, throws past the sticks (he tied Jayden Daniels with a 94.8 grade), intermediate passing grade, first-and-second-down throws (again tied with Daniels with a 91.3 grade), third-and-fourth-down throws, and throws outside the pocket. Phew. That is one heck of a list. If the Vikings can't move up and get one of the top three QBs, Nix is my choice in the second tier.

Michael Penix Jr. – The question with Penix isn't his ability, it's his availability. He began his college career at Indiana but only played in 21 games over his four seasons with the Hoosiers because of four season-ending injuries. He transferred to Washington in 2022, and he finally started showing his potential. Penix is more of a modern-day pocket passer, and while he has adequate mobility, his real strength is standing in the pocket and making plays. If he can stay healthy, he has all the tools to succeed in the NFL.

"Pain - It's No Joke"

There is an old joke where a man walks into his doctor's office and says, "Doc, it hurts every time I do this. What should I do? To which the doctor replies, "Simple, don't do that!" While the advice seems trite and maybe even insulting, like most jokes, there is some truth in it. Pain is one of the ways your body tries to protect you from even worse injury. Pain tries to keep you from walking on a sprained ankle or lifting things with a broken arm. In those cases, the advice from the doctor is accurate.

We cast broken bones to immobilize them, and use splints or slings to rest muscle strains or sprained tendons. In these cases, excessive movement can make injuries worse. That break could go from well aligned, where the bone can heal on its own, to displaced where the broken fragments are now too far apart to heal and reattach properly. This could mean the difference between just having a splint or cast, to needing surgery with plates, pins, or screws to realign and stabilize the broken pieces of bones.

People who have decreased sensation due to neuropathy also are at risk for having something minor become a major injury. In neuropathy, the nerves do not send a signal when a pebble is caught in your sandal. That small pebble could continue to rub throughout the day and lead to a large blister or even an ulcer. Neuropathy can also cause pain on its own as misfiring nerves cause pins and needles or a burning sensation, even when there is no external cause for the pain.

Another condition called Reflexive Sympathetic Dystrophy, or RSD, is where the nerves are stuck in a loop sending pain signals to the brain long after the initial injury occurred. This is a very difficult condition to treat. Fibromyalgia also is a condition where widespread pain occurs with no obvious external cause. For these people, the advice from the joke is not helpful. The typical pain medications used for broken bones or sprained ankles are also less effective. For patients with RSD or fibromyalgia, light activity with guidance from a physical therapist can sometimes help with their pain. However, too much activity can flare their condition and leading them to need hours or days to recover back to their baseline.

Unfortunately, sometimes pain cannot be completely removed or fully treated. The goal then changes from trying to remove the pain, to trying to remove the suffering associated with the pain. Ways of dealing with chronic pain need to be explored, such as chronic pain support groups or counseling. Pain specialists can also be a good resource for these people, as they have more pain interventions than a primary care physician. So the next time you have pain, don't be afraid to talk about it with your doctor, because living with pain is no joke.

Jill Kruse, D.O. is part of The Prairie Doc® team of physicians and currently practices as a hospitalist in Brookings, South Dakota. Follow The Prairie Doc® at www.prairiedoc.org and on Facebook and Instagram featuring On Call with the Prairie Doc®, a medical Q&A show providing health information based on science, built on trust, on SDPB and streaming live on Facebook most Thursdays at 7 p.m. central.



Jill Kruse, DO



EPA data: South Dakota industrial chemical releases rise amid national decline

Temporary spike at Smithfield pork plant partially to blame

BY: JOHN HULT - APRIL 7, 2024 7:00 AM

Most mountain and plains states have seen reductions in pollutants released to the air, water and soil since 2013 at a rate of decline more than double the national average.

In South Dakota, though, toxic releases increased by 16%.

That's according to recently published 2022 data from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Toxics Release Inventory.

The trend is largely attributable to a temporary spike in nitrate emissions from the Smithfield Foods plant in Sioux Falls, which discharges treated wastewater into the Big Sioux River. Smithfield is owned by China-based WH Group, with U.S. operations headquartered in Smithfield, Virginia.

The Sioux Falls plant's pollutant loads increased between 2020 and 2023 as it worked to complete an update to its on-site treatment plant, a project finished in mid-2023. The good news, according to East Dakota Water Development District Manager Jay Gilbertson, is that the next inventory release should show improvements reflective of that change at the pork processing facility.

"When the data comes in that will include the latter part of 2023, then there should be a big crash in that number," Gilbertson said.

A stricter limit on nitrate releases after the Smithfield wastewater upgrade was a condition of the plant's recently renewed surface water discharge permit. The permit was issued through the EPA's National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System, administered inside South Dakota's borders by the state's Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

Prior to the issuance of the plant's new permit, there were no limits on its nitrate releases.

"It is anticipated those upgrades will improve nitrate treatment and should result in diminished discharges of nitrate moving forward," said Dana Munyon, a public affairs specialist at the department.

An overabundance of nitrates in rivers, lakes and streams can harm aquatic life, boosting algal growth and potentially leading to fish kills. High levels of nitrate in drinking water can effect blood oxygen levels, and can lead to methemoglobinemia (also known as blue baby syndrome).

EPA data: Snapshot of industrial pollutants

Of all the South Dakota companies required to submit pollutant data through the Toxics Release Inventory, Smithfield is the largest producer and emitter of toxic materials.

Other major sources include the Wharf Mine near Lead and Aurora-based Novita, a facility that uses byproducts from the nearby Valero ethanol plant to make animal feed and vegetable oil.

But the inventory isn't an all-inclusive database of discharged pollutants.

It tracks production-related chemical waste from certain industry operations in each state and U.S. territory. Companies are required to report their releases if they're part of a covered industry, release chemicals on the inventory's list of those with potential to harm human health, and employ 10 or more people.

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That leaves several pollution sources unaccounted for, including municipal wastewater treatment plants like the one found in Sioux Falls. That plant also releases wastewater and nitrates into the Big Sioux River under the terms of its permit with the state, and at a higher overall volume than Smithfield.

"Smithfield kind of ends up taking the black eye on this one because they're the reporter of the biggest load on a list of entities that is not all-inclusive," said Gilbertson of East Dakota.

The inventory also does not set benchmarks for the amount of chemicals that can be safely released. Those levels and the enforcement of release limits are tied to separate programs under the EPA umbrella, including the surface water discharge permitting program.

The inventory, which launched in 1986, simply serves as a public data source. It lumps more than 800 chemicals together into a list and requires annual public disclosure of the amounts released for covered industries. Waste can be reported as treated, recycled, recaptured as energy, or disposed of in the air, water or soil.

"By making information about industrial management of toxic chemicals available to the public, TRI creates a strong incentive for companies to improve environmental performance," the EPA's Honor Morgan wrote in an email to South Dakota Searchlight.

South Dakota is not a high-level emitter of pollutants on a nationwide level, ranking 53rd of 56 states and territories in total chemicals released. There are 108 facilities required to report to the inventory in South Dakota, compared to 21,752 nationwide.

Unlike South Dakota's EPA reporting region, however, its trendline is moving up, not down.

The national decline for pollutant releases into the environment stood at 21%, according to the 2022 dataset. For EPA Region 8, which includes North and South Dakota, Wyoming, Colorado, Montana and Utah, the reduction was 47%.

South Dakota, with its 16% increase in releases, is an outlier in that group.

Gilbertson wasn't surprised to hear it, though. The state has a long history of taking a "wait and see" approach to pollution management.

"We like to wait until things go really bad and then do something about it," Gilbertson said. "Because if you start trying to be preemptive, a lot of people who think their ox is going to get gored start to scream and yell."

There is at least one bright spot in the inventory's trendlines for South Dakota, though. In 2013, facilities reported recycling 1.19 million pounds of material. In 2022, that figure had grown to 2.8 million pounds, for an increase of 135%.

The total amount of chemicals released fell in Region 8 as a whole from 2013-2022, but its level of recycled chemicals fell by 75%. That figure is eclipsed, however, by a 545% increase in the amount of chemicals reused for fuel rather than released.

In South Dakota, the amount of waste captured and reused was slightly less in 2022 than 2013.

Smithfield upgrade

Smithfield's position as South Dakota's top polluter in the limited dataset may not change in the coming years, but overall releases should be far lower.

Pound for pound, Sioux Falls-based Smithfield released quadruple the waste of the next-nearest emitter in South Dakota, the Wharf Resources gold mine. The pork processing facility released 4.9 million pounds of chemicals total in 2022, nearly all nitrates. All but approximately 160,000 pounds of it was discharged into the Big Sioux River.

The plant's \$45 million "denitrification" upgrade started to impact release levels with its completion last summer. The new process reduces nitrates in wastewater, Smithfield spokesman Ray Atkinson told South Dakota Searchlight via email, which "has far less impact to aquatic life."

"The new denitrification process has reduced Smithfield's overall nitrogen load to the Big Sioux River by more than two-thirds," Atkinson said.

Nitrates are a combination of nitrogen and oxygen.

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For nitrates specifically, the release of which are now regulated in Smithfield's state-issued EPA discharge permit, Atkinson said the new treatment process has allowed the company to hold nitrate releases at half its permitted limit.

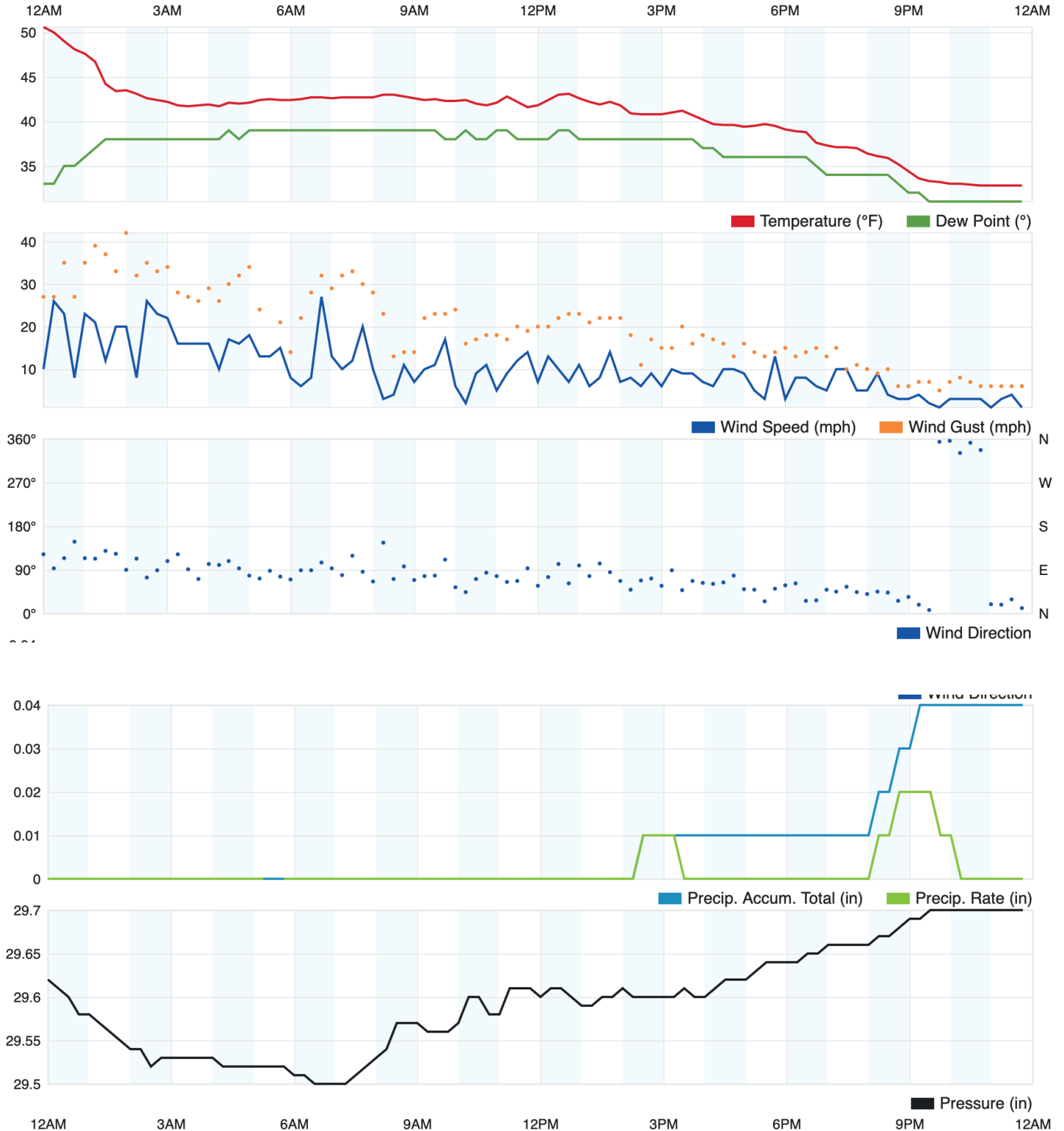
The plant has also reduced total suspended solids in wastewater by 84% compared to April 2023, and ammonia discharges by 60%, Atkinson said.

John is the senior reporter for South Dakota Searchlight. He has more than 15 years experience covering criminal justice, the environment and public affairs in South Dakota, including more than a decade at the Sioux Falls Argus Leader.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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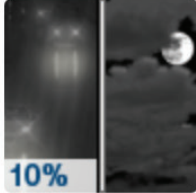
Monday



Rain/Snow and Patchy Fog then Rain Likely and Patchy Fog

High: 45 °F

Monday Night



Slight Chance Rain then Mostly Cloudy

Low: 32 °F

Tuesday



Mostly Sunny

High: 62 °F

Tuesday Night



Mostly Cloudy

Low: 40 °F

Wednesday



Sunny then Chance Rain and Breezy

High: 64 °F

Next Several Days...

Today



Highs: 40-50
Lows: 31-35

Cloudy all day
Rain continues

Tuesday



Highs: 59-64
Lows: 39-41

Wednesday



Highs: 57-65
Lows: 32-40

Light rain possible

Thursday



Highs: 54-59
Lows: 30-34

National Weather Service Aberdeen, SD

April 8, 2024 3:53 AM

Happy Eclipse Day! Unfortunately, today we will be completely covered by clouds as rain continues through the day. Accumulations are expected to be light. Tuesday will be warmer with highs in the upper 50s to low 60s. Rain chances (25 to 50%) return Wednesday afternoon.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 51 °F at 12:00 AM

Low Temp: 33 °F at 10:38 PM

Wind: 42 mph at 1:54 AM

Precip: : 0.07

Day length: 13 hours, 15 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 85 in 1945

Record Low: 6 in 1997

Average High: 54

Average Low: 29

Average Precip in April.: 0.36

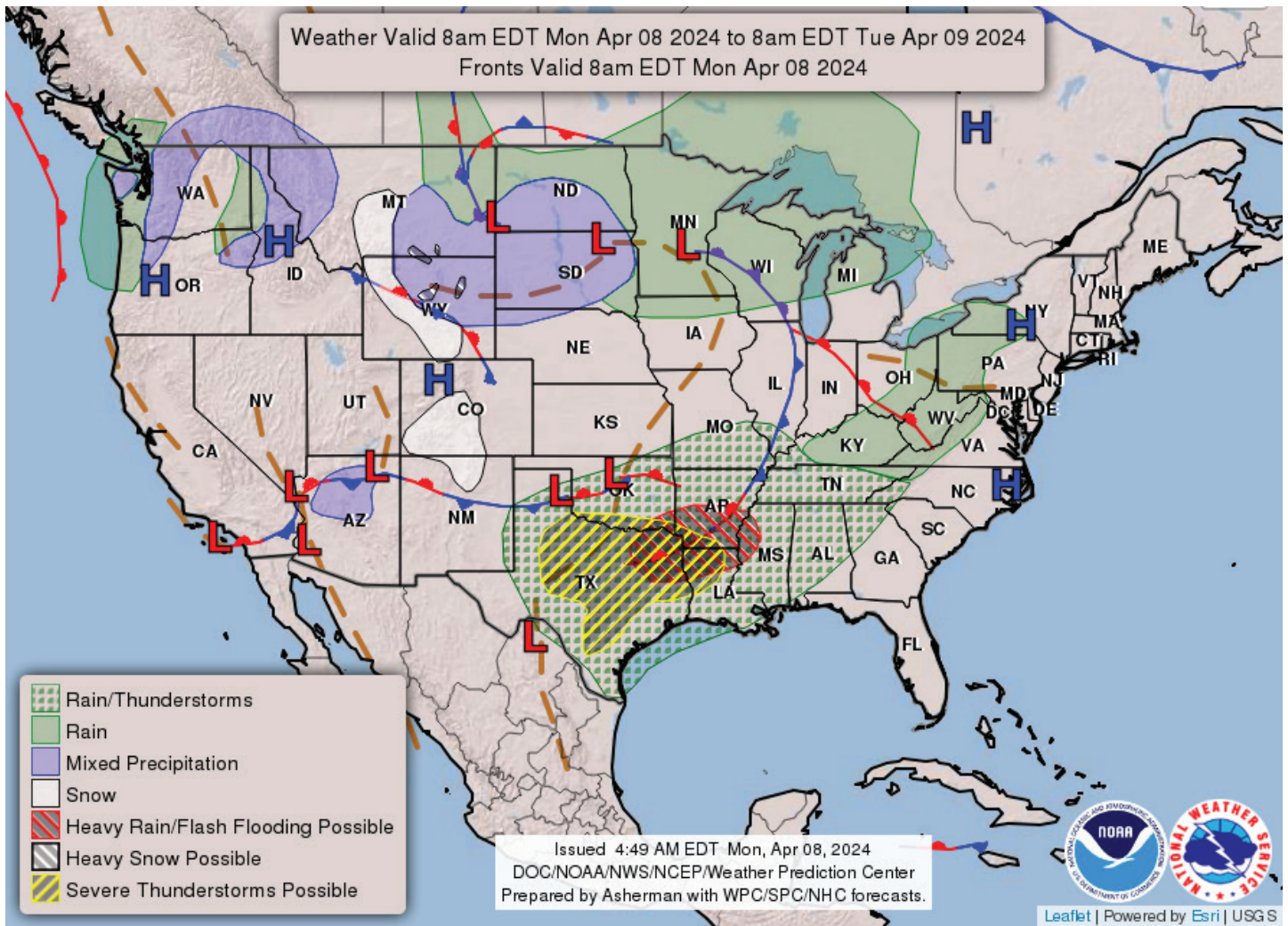
Precip to date in April: 0.07

Average Precip to date: 2.42

Precip Year to Date: 0.92

Sunset Tonight: 8:11:34 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:54:39 am



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Today in Weather History

April 8, 1995: Ten inches to two feet of snow fell in central South Dakota in a five-day period, beginning April 8th. Many roads became impassable. Several businesses, government offices, and schools closed on the 11th. Twenty-four inches fell at Ree Heights and Gettysburg, 20.0 inches at Faulkton, 18.0 inches at Kennebec, 16.0 inches at Pierre, and 10.0 inches at Doland.

1919 - A tornado swarm in northern Texas resulted in the deaths of 64 persons. (David Ludlum)

1926 - The lightning-set oil depot fire near San Luis Obispo CA boiled over and engulfed 900 acres. Many tornado vortices resulted from the intense heat of the fire. One such tornado traveled 1000 yards, picked up a house and carried it 150 feet, killing the two occupants inside. (The Weather Channel)

1938: Snow began to fall over central Oklahoma during the previous evening and continued to this day. In Oklahoma City, several snowfall records for the month soon fell to the storm, including the record for most total snowfall during April. The Oklahoma City snowfall totals of 0.8 inches on the 7th and 3.3 inches on the 8th remain daily records. In fact, the 3.3 inches of snow on the 8th is the most ever to fall on any single April day. The 4.1 inch total for the month is still the largest April monthly snowfall total.

1973: The state of Iowa and southwest Wisconsin saw severe blizzard conditions from April 8 through the 10th. Sustained wind of 40 to 50 mph, with gusts to 65 mph was reported with falling snow. Highways were closed, travel was suspended, and properties were damaged. Livestock and turkey losses approximated 20 million dollars. Record snowfall was reported in several localities. Belle Plaine had 20.3 inches; Dubuque had 19.2 inches, and Grundy Center saw 19 inches. Snow drifted as high as 16 feet. In southwest Wisconsin, this storm was quoted as being the "worst since 1921."

1989: Two-dozen cities in the southwestern U.S. reported new record high temperatures for the date. Phoenix AZ equaled their record for April of 104 degrees established just the previous day.

1987 - A cold front crossing the Northern Plateau and the Northern Rocky Mountain Region produced high winds in northeastern Wyoming. Winds gusting to 69 mph at Sheridan WY downed power lines and caused some property damage. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Strong northerly winds ushered cold air into the north central U.S. The strong winds, gusting to 60 mph at Rapid City SD and Williston ND, reduced visibilities in blowing dust over the Dakotas. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Two dozen cities in the southwestern U.S. reported new record high temperatures for the date. Phoenix AZ equaled their record for April of 104 degrees established just the previous day. (The National Weather Summary)

1990 - Twenty-two cities reported record low temperatures for the date as readings dipped into the 20s and 30s across much of the eastern U.S. Freezing temperatures severely damaged peach and apple orchards in West Virginia, where prolonged mild weather since January had caused an early blooming of spring vegetation. State and Federal agencies estimated a 50 percent loss in production for peaches and "Delicious Red Apples". (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1998: A major F5 tornado struck western Jefferson County in Alabama leveling the communities of Oak Grove, Rock Creek, Edgewater, McDonald's Chapel, Sylvan Springs and Pratt City. The tornado lifted just two miles from downtown Birmingham. The twister had a track of 20 miles with the damage path averaging between 1/2 and 3/4 of a mile in width. 34 people were killed, 221 injured and 1,000 homes destroyed.

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

FOREVER GOING FORWARD

Having been called to be a missionary, David Livingstone was required to appear before an organization for their endorsement and support. While being questioned about his call, he was asked, "Where are you willing to go?"

"Anywhere," he answered, "as long as it's forward!"

In concluding his second letter, Peter wrote, "But grow in the special favor and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." By his life and in his writings, Peter emphasized the importance of growth in the life and service of Christians. No matter how well we may believe we know God or how mature we may think that we are in our spiritual development, there is always space to "move forward."

We live in a world that is hostile to the things of God. There is little doubt that many would be pleased if they could make God completely invisible.

Because of the spirit of agnosticism, we must be aware of the battles that are going on around us and within us.

The world will always challenge our faith. The only way to make certain that we are moving forward is to spend time each day with God.

Prayer: May we realize, Lord, the importance of drawing closer to You each day so that we are always prepared to stand for truth and righteousness. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Rather, you must grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. 2 Peter 3:18



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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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.05.24

20 30 54 63 65 14

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$97,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 26
Mins 18 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.06.24

2 23 32 35 42 7

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$2,700,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 41 Mins 19
Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.07.24

2 6 11 39 45 11

TOP PRIZE:
\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 56 Mins 19
Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.06.24

3 4 28 32 33

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$50,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 56
Mins 18 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.06.24

16 19 56 59 66 14

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 25 Mins 18
Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.06.24

22 27 44 52 69 9

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$20,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 25 Mins 19
Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

Mozambique ferry accident leaves more than 90 people dead including children, local media say

By FARAI MUTSAKA Associated Press

HARARE, Zimbabwe (AP) — A makeshift ferry sank off Mozambique's northern coast killing 94 people, including children, local media reported Monday.

Silvério Nauaito, the administrator of the Island of Mozambique, told state-run Radio Mozambique that the ferry sank Sunday afternoon and that the initial death toll of 91 rose to 94 after they recovered three more bodies early Monday.

He said that there were 130 people on the ferry and "94 have lost their lives and about 11 people have been hospitalized."

"There are ... around three other people rescued, but it is not easy to say with precision how many remain missing," Nauaito told the radio station. He added that officials were heading Monday to the accident site to get more precise information.

The boat — operating between Lunga in the Nampula province and the Island of Mozambique — was overcrowded and many of those who drowned were children, according to TV Diário Nampula, a local online outlet. It capsized en route.

Some people had been traveling to attend a fair while others were trying to "flee from Lunga to the Island of Mozambique for fear of being contaminated by cholera, which has affected that region in recent days," the online outlet reported.

Other news reports quoted Jaime Neto, the secretary of state in Nampula province, as saying misinformation about an alleged cholera outbreak caused panic and had people board the boat, which ordinarily serves as a fishing vessel, to flee the area.

Authorities in Mozambique and neighboring southern African countries have been trying to contain a deadly cholera outbreak that spread in recent months.

Many areas of Mozambique are only accessible by boats, which are often overcrowded. The country has a poor road network and some areas are unreachable by land or air.

Ukraine denies a Russian claim that it launched drone strikes on a major nuclear power plant

By ILLIA NOVIKOV Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — A senior Ukrainian official has denied Russian accusations that his country's army fired exploding drones at Europe's largest nuclear power plant, which the Kremlin's forces have been occupying and running in southern Ukraine since shortly after the war began more than two years ago.

Andrii Yusov, the spokesperson for Ukraine's military intelligence agency suggested there had been no attack, saying Russian forces routinely fabricate strikes on the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant. However, the strikes on this occasion were confirmed by U.N.'s atomic watchdog agency, though it didn't attribute responsibility for the attack to either side.

The plant has repeatedly been caught in the crossfire since Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and seized the facility shortly after. The International Atomic Energy Agency, a U.N. body, has frequently expressed alarm about the facility amid fears of a potential nuclear catastrophe.

The plant's six reactors have been shut down for months, but it still needs power and qualified staff to operate crucial cooling systems and other safety features.

The U.N.'s atomic watchdog agency on Sunday confirmed drone strikes on one of the plant's six reactors, causing one casualty.

The IAEA team did not observe structural damage to the "systems, structures and components" important

to the nuclear safety of the plant, it said. They reported superficial scorching to the top of a reactor dome.

The damage "has not compromised nuclear safety, but this is a serious incident (with the) potential to undermine (the) integrity of the reactor's containment system," the IAEA said on X, formerly Twitter.

IAEA chief Rafael Mariano Grossi said the main reactor containment structures took at least three direct hits. "This cannot happen," he said on X.

Zaporizhzhia is one of four regions that Russia illegally annexed in September 2022.

The Institute for the Study of War, a think tank based in Washington, said Russian authorities are seeking "to use Russia's physical control over the (plant) to force international organizations, including the IAEA, to meet with Russian occupation officials to legitimize Russia's occupation of the (plant) and by extension Russia's occupation of sovereign Ukrainian land."

Palestinians returning to Khan Younis after Israeli withdrawal find an unrecognizable city

By WAFAA SHURAFI and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Streams of Palestinians filed into the southern Gaza city of Khan Younis on Monday to salvage what they could from the vast destruction left in the wake of Israel's offensive, a day after the Israeli military announced it was withdrawing troops from the area.

Many came back to the Gaza Strip's second-largest city to find their former hometown unrecognizable. With scores of buildings destroyed or damaged, piles of rubble now sit where apartments and businesses once did. Streets have been bulldozed. Schools and hospitals were damaged by the fighting.

Israel sent troops to Khan Younis in December, part of its blistering ground offensive that came in response to a Hamas-led attack on Oct. 7 into southern Israel. Israeli authorities say 1,200 people, mostly civilians, were killed and roughly 250 people taken hostage.

The war, now in its seventh month, has killed more than 33,000 Palestinians, mostly women and children, according to local health authorities, displaced most of the territory's 2.3 million people and left vast swaths of the beleaguered Gaza Strip uninhabitable.

"Many areas, especially the city center, have become unfit for life," said Mahmoud Abdel-Ghani, who fled Khan Younis in December when Israel began its ground invasion of the city. "I found that my house and my neighbors' houses turned to rubble."

Israel's withdrawal of troops from Khan Younis signaled the end of a key phase in its war against Hamas and brought Israeli troop levels in the tiny coastal enclave to one of the lowest since the war began.

Israel said the city was a major Hamas stronghold and says its operation over the past few months killed thousands of militants and inflicted heavy damage to a vast network of tunnels used by Hamas to move weapons and fighters. It also claimed to have found evidence that hostages were held in the city.

With no military presence in the city, Hamas could seek to regroup there as it has in other areas where the military has scaled back forces.

The latest Israeli withdrawal also cleared the way for some Palestinians to make their way back to the area to comb through the mountains of debris to try to hold on to any possessions that remained.

Najwa Ayyash, who also was displaced from Khan Younis, said she was unable to reach her family's third floor apartment because the stairs were gone. Her brother climbed his way up through the destruction and pulled down some possessions, including lighter clothes for her children.

Bassel Abu Nasser, a Khan Younis resident who fled after an airstrike hit his home in January, said much of the city turned into rubble.

"There is no sense of life there," the 37-year-old father of two children said. "They left nothing there."

On Sunday, shortly after the military announced it had withdrawn, lines of Palestinians could be seen leaving Khan Younis with scant possessions.

By foot and on bicycle, they carried plastic bags and laundry hampers with whatever they could gather back to where they were displaced to. One carried a rolled-up mattress. Another a standing fan. One man used his bike to move plywood.

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The military exodus from Khan Younis comes ahead of an expected Israeli offensive in Rafah, Gaza's southernmost city where hundreds of thousands have fled fighting elsewhere to seek shelter and which Israel says is Hamas' last major stronghold.

The city shelters some 1.4 million people — more than half of Gaza's population. The prospect of an offensive has raised global alarm, including from Israel's top ally, the U.S., which has demanded to see a credible plan to protect civilians.

Allowing people to return to nearby Khan Younis could relieve some pressure on Rafah, but many have no homes to return to. The city also is likely filled with dangerous unexploded bombs left by the fighting.

Israel's military quietly drew down troops in devastated northern Gaza earlier in the war. But it has continued to carry out airstrikes and raids in areas where it says Hamas regrouped, including Gaza's largest hospital, Shifa, leaving what the head of the World Health Organization called "an empty shell." Israel blames Hamas for the damage, saying it fights from within civilian areas.

Khan Younis' main Nasser Hospital has also been that target of Israeli raids, with troops storming it earlier this year because the military said the remains of hostages were inside.

The precise state of the hospital after the troops' withdrawal was unclear. Video from the hospital showed the emergency building appearing to be intact, but debris was strewn around its interior where thousands of displaced people once sought shelter before being forced to evacuate by the military.

Israel says its war aims to destroy Hamas' military and governing capabilities and return the roughly 130 remaining hostages, a quarter of whom Israel says are dead. Negotiations brokered by Qatar, Egypt and the U.S. meant to bring about a cease-fire in exchange for the release of hostages are underway.

Biden will talk about student debt relief in Wisconsin after primary voting delivered warning signs

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE and COLLIN BINKLEY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden is traveling to Wisconsin to announce details of a new plan to ease student loan debt for millions, a trip that comes a week after primary voting in the Midwest battleground highlighted weaknesses for the Democratic president and Donald Trump, his Republican challenger.

Biden was making the announcement Monday in Madison, the state's liberal capital and home of the University of Wisconsin's flagship campus.

The new federal rule paving the way for student debt relief is not expected to be issued by the time the president speaks, but Biden will highlight a plan the Department of Education started working on after the U.S. Supreme Court last year foiled his first attempt to forgive hundreds of billions of dollars in student loan debt.

Immediately after the court said Biden needed Congress to approve his original plan, the president said the decision was a "mistake" and "wrong" and announced that Education Secretary Miguel Cardona would undertake a new process using his authority under the Higher Education Act to waive or compromise student loan debt in specific cases.

A fresh announcement on student loan relief, an important issue for younger voters, could help energize parts of Biden's political coalition that have become disillusioned by his job performance. These are people whose support the president will need to defeat Trump in November.

In Wisconsin's primary elections on April 2, nearly 119,000 Republicans voted for a GOP candidate other than Trump, the party's presumptive nominee. And more than 48,000 Democratic voters chose "uninstructed" instead of Biden, more than double Biden's narrow margin of victory in Wisconsin in 2020.

Nearly 15% of Democrats in Dane County, home to the University of Wisconsin and Madison, voted "uninstructed." That is nearly double the statewide total of 8%.

Democratic U.S. Rep. Mark Pocan, who represents Madison in Congress, said he was struck that concerns about Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza were top of mind among voters at five town halls over the past two weeks in more rural parts of his district.

"I was surprised to see the intensity on the issue of Gaza coming not from a student voice out of Madi-

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son, but older voters in more rural parts of the district," Pocan said.

Pocan said the number of "uninstructed" votes shows the concern in Wisconsin and that Biden needs to address it. He said he planned to talk directly with Biden about it on Monday.

"I just want to make sure he knows that if we're going to have a problem, that could be the problem in Wisconsin," Pocan said.

Biden's new plan would expand federal student loan relief to new yet-targeted categories of borrowers through the Higher Education Act, which administration officials believe puts it on a stronger legal footing than the sweeping proposal that was killed by a 6-3 court majority last year.

The plan is expected to be smaller and more targeted than his original plan, which would have canceled up to \$20,000 in loans for more than 40 million borrowers.

The proposal is expected to cancel some or all federal student loans for more than 30 million Americans, the White House said. The Education Department plans to issue a formal proposal in the coming months, with plans to start implementing parts of the plan as early as this fall.

"President Biden will use every tool available to cancel student loan debt for as many borrowers as possible, no matter how many times Republican elected officials try to stand in his way," White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said in a call with reporters.

Details released by the White House on Monday largely mirror a plan drafted by the Education Department over the past several months through a federal rulemaking process. It lays out five categories of borrowers who would be eligible to get at least some of their federal student loans canceled if the rule is approved.

The plan's widest-reaching benefit would cancel up to \$20,000 in interest for borrowers who have seen their balance grow beyond its original amount because of unpaid interest. Borrowers could get the entirety of their interest erased, with no limit, if they are enrolled in an income-driven repayment plan and have annual incomes of less than \$120,000 or couples making less than \$240,000.

That part of the plan would forgive at least some unpaid interest for an estimated 25 million borrowers, with 23 million getting all their interest erased, according to the White House.

An additional 2 million borrowers would get their loans canceled because they're eligible for other forgiveness programs but have not applied. The Education Department would identify borrowers who are eligible but haven't applied to programs such as Public Service Loan Forgiveness.

Borrowers who have been repaying their undergraduate student loans for 20 years or more would be eligible to get any remaining debt canceled, along with those repaying their graduate school loans for 25 years or more.

The plan would forgive debt for those who were in college programs deemed to have "low financial value." It's meant to help those who were in programs that ended up losing eligibility to receive federal student aid or programs found to have cheated students.

A final category would cancel debt for borrowers facing hardships that prevent them from repaying their student loans. The White House says millions of borrowers could get forgiveness if they're at high risk of defaulting on their student loans or are burdened with medical debt or child care, among other criteria.

"This administration will begin to cancel up to \$20,000 in interest for millions of borrowers, and full loan forgiveness for millions more this fall," Cardona said in a call with reporters. "That's on top of the \$146 billion in student loan debt relief for 4 million Americans that we've already approved, more than any other administration in our country's history."

A series of hearings to craft the rule wrapped up in February, and the draft is now under review. Before it can be finalized, the Education Department will need to issue a formal proposal and open it to a public comment period.

The latest attempt at cancellation joins other targeted initiatives, including those aimed at public service workers and low-income borrowers. Through those efforts, the Biden administration says it has canceled \$144 billion in student loans for almost 4 million Americans.

Biden was stopping in Chicago for a campaign event before returning to the White House late Monday.

Top UN court opens hearings in a case accusing Germany of facilitating Israel's Gaza conflict

By MIKE CORDER Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — Preliminary hearings opened Monday at the United Nations' top court in a case that seeks an end to German military and other aid to Israel, based on claims that Berlin is enabling acts of genocide and breaches of international humanitarian law in the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza.

Nicaragua argues that by giving Israel political, financial and military support and by defunding the United Nations aid agency for Palestinians, UNRWA, "Germany is facilitating the commission of genocide and, in any case has failed in its obligation to do everything possible to prevent the commission of genocide."

Opening Nicaragua's case at the International Court of Justice, the country's ambassador to the Netherlands, Carlos Jose Arguello Gomez, told the 16-judge panel that "Germany is failing to honor its own obligation to prevent genocide or to ensure respect of international humanitarian law."

While the case brought by Nicaragua centers on Germany, it indirectly takes aim at Israel's military campaign in Gaza following the deadly Oct. 7 attacks when Hamas-led militants stormed into southern Israel, killing some 1,200 people. More than 33,000 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza, according to the territory's Health Ministry. Its toll doesn't differentiate between civilians and combatants, but it has said women and children make up the majority of the dead.

Israel strongly denies that its assault amounts to genocidal acts, saying it is acting in self defense. Israeli legal adviser Tal Becker told judges at the court earlier this year that the country is fighting a "war it did not start and did not want."

Germany rejects the case brought by Nicaragua.

"Germany has breached neither the Genocide Convention nor international humanitarian law, and we will set this out in detail before the International Court of Justice," German Foreign Ministry spokesperson Sebastian Fischer told reporters in Berlin on Friday.

Nicaragua has asked the court to hand down preliminary orders known as provisional measures, including that Germany "immediately suspend its aid to Israel, in particular its military assistance including military equipment in so far as this aid may be used in the violation of the Genocide Convention" and international law.

The court will likely take weeks to deliver its preliminary decision, and Nicaragua's case will probably drag on for years.

Monday's hearing at the world court comes amid growing calls for allies to stop supplying arms to Israel as its six-month campaign continues to lay waste to Gaza.

The offensive has displaced the vast majority of Gaza's population. Food is scarce, the U.N. says famine is approaching and few Palestinians have been able to leave the besieged territory.

The case "will likely further galvanize opposition to any support for Israel," said Mary Ellen O'Connell, a professor of law and international peace studies at the University of Notre Dame.

On Friday, the U.N.'s top human rights body called on countries to stop selling or shipping weapons to Israel. The United States and Germany opposed the resolution.

Also, hundreds of British jurists, including three retired Supreme Court judges, have called on their government to suspend arms sales to Israel after three U.K. citizens were among seven aid workers from the charity World Central Kitchen killed in Israeli strikes. Israel said the attack on the aid workers was a mistake caused by "misidentification."

Germany has for decades been a staunch supporter of Israel. Days after the Oct. 7 attack by Hamas, Chancellor Olaf Scholz explained why: "Our own history, our responsibility arising from the Holocaust, makes it a perpetual task for us to stand up for the security of the state of Israel," he told lawmakers.

Berlin, however, has gradually shifted its tone as civilian casualties in Gaza have soared, becoming increasingly critical of the humanitarian situation in Gaza and speaking out against a ground offensive in Rafah.

Nicaragua's government, which has historical links with Palestinian organizations dating back to their support for the 1979 Sandinista revolution, was itself accused earlier this year by U.N.-backed human rights

experts of systematic human rights abuses “tantamount to crimes against humanity.” The government of President Daniel Ortega fiercely rejected the allegations.

In January, the ICJ imposed provisional measures ordering Israel to do all it can to prevent death, destruction and acts of genocide in Gaza. The orders came in a case filed by South Africa accusing Israel of breaching the Genocide Convention.

The court last week ordered Israel to take measures to improve the humanitarian situation in Gaza, including opening more land crossings to allow food, water, fuel and other supplies into the war-ravaged enclave.

The Latest | Israeli troops withdraw from Khan Younis ahead of expected Rafah offensive

By The Associated Press undefined

Israel’s military says it has withdrawn its forces from the southern Gaza city of Khan Younis, wrapping up a key phase in its ground offensive against the Hamas militant group and bringing its troop presence in the territory to one of the lowest levels since the six-month war began.

But defense officials said Sunday that troops were merely regrouping as the army prepares to move into Hamas’ last stronghold, Rafah.

Israel for weeks has vowed a ground offensive in nearby Rafah. But the city shelters some 1.4 million people — more than half of Gaza’s population. The prospect of an offensive has raised global alarm, including from Israel’s top ally, the U.S., which has demanded to see a credible plan to protect civilians.

Still, the withdrawal was a milestone as Israel and Hamas marked six months of fighting. Military officials, speaking on condition of anonymity under army policy, said a “significant force” remained in Gaza to continue targeted operations including in Khan Younis, hometown of the Hamas leader, Yehya Sinwar.

The Palestinian death toll from the war has passed 33,000, with another 75,600 people wounded, Gaza’s Health Ministry said. The ministry doesn’t differentiate between civilians and combatants in its tally, but says women and children make up two-thirds of the dead.

The war began Oct. 7 when Hamas-led militants stormed into southern Israel, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and taking around 250 people hostage.

Currently:

- Israel is pulling some troops from southern Gaza. Now the plan is to clear Hamas from Rafah
- These Palestinian mothers in Gaza gave birth Oct. 7. Their babies have known only war
- AP Photos chronicle 6 months of devastation in Gaza war with no sign of an end
- Israel finds the body of a hostage killed in Gaza, while talks will resume on a cease-fire
- For families of hostages, it’s a race against time as Israel’s war reaches six-month mark
- Find more AP coverage at <https://apnews.com/hub/israel-hamas-war>

Here’s the latest:

ISRAELI MILITARY SAYS IT KILLED HEZBOLLAH COMMANDER IN LEBANON

BEIRUT — Israel’s military says it has killed a commander of Hezbollah’s secretive Radwan Force in southern Lebanon.

Ali Ahmad Hassin is one of the most senior militants killed since Israel and Hezbollah began exchanging fire at the start of the war in Gaza. His killing comes as regional tensions soar following an attack last week on Iran’s consulate in Syria, threatening to spark a wider conflagration.

The Israeli military said two other Hezbollah militants were also killed in the strike early Monday.

Hezbollah announced the death of Ali Ahmad Hassin but did not give any details on the circumstances or his role with the group, in line with how they announce the deaths of their members.

The Israeli military said he was killed in an Israeli airstrike in the southern Lebanese village of Sultaniyeh. It said in a statement that Hassin was responsible for carrying out attacks on northern Israel.

Hezbollah militants and Israeli troops have clashed along the tense Lebanon-Israel border since Oct. 8. Hezbollah says it would stop firing rockets once a ceasefire is reached in the Gaza Strip that would end

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the Israel-Hamas war.

Israeli officials have been demanding that the Radwan Force withdraw from the border area in order for tens of thousands of displaced Israelis to return home.

AUSTRALIA APPOINTS EX-DEFENSE CHIEF TO LOOK INTO ISRAELI STRIKE THAT KILLED 7 AID WORKERS

MELBOURNE, Australia — Australia has appointed retired national defense chief Mark Binskin to look into how Israel Defense Forces came to kill seven World Central Kitchen aid workers, including Australian Zomi Frankcom, in Gaza last week.

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said Monday he expected Israel would fully cooperate with Binskin as Australia's special adviser on Israel's response to the missile strikes on three aid vehicles.

"We would expect that someone of Mr. Binskin's stature, frankly, will be given every cooperation from the Israel Defense Forces and the Israeli government," Albanese told Australian Broadcasting Corp.

"We don't find the explanations to be satisfactory to this point," Albanese added.

The seven aid workers' deaths had "shaken the world," Albanese said, adding it is "unacceptable" that almost 200 aid workers have died since the conflict began in October last year.

Binskin, who served as Australian Defense Force chief from 2014 to 2018, will advise the government on the "sufficiency and appropriateness of steps taken by the Israeli government" in response to the fatal attack, which the Israeli military has described as a tragic error, a government statement said.

PALESTINIAN PRISONER CONVICTED IN 1984 KILLING OF ISRAELI SOLDIER DIES OF CANCER, ISRAEL SAYS

TEL AVIV, Israel — Israeli authorities say a Palestinian prisoner convicted in the 1984 killing of a soldier has died in a hospital after he was battling cancer.

Walid Daqa, who was an Israeli citizen, was sentenced to life in prison following the killing of soldier Moshe Tamam. The Palestinian Prisoners Club, which represents former and current prisoners, said he was slated for release next year. He was one of the longest-serving Palestinian prisoners held by Israel. Israeli media said he died Sunday.

The plight of prisoners in Israeli jails is deeply sensitive to Palestinians, many of whom have relatives who have served time in Israeli prisons. Their conditions in prison are closely followed and deaths while in custody, even under natural circumstances, can heighten tensions, which are already high amid the war in Gaza.

The fate of the prisoners is under particularly close watch now because Israel is expected to release many as part of a deal that emerges between it and Hamas meant to bring about a cease-fire in the war and the release of hostages taken captive into Gaza.

The prisoners club said Israel had excluded Daqa from all previous prisoner exchange deals, as he had been characterized as a high-risk prisoner.

Hamas accused Israel of "deliberate medical negligence" in Daqa's death. In a statement Monday, Israel's National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir said Daqa died of natural causes.

ISRAEL PULLS SOME TROOPS OUT OF SOUTHERN GAZA

JERUSALEM — Israel's military announced Sunday it had withdrawn its forces from the southern Gaza city of Khan Younis, wrapping up a key phase in its ground offensive against the Hamas militant group and bringing its troop presence in the territory to one of the lowest levels since the six-month war began.

But defense officials said troops were merely regrouping as the army prepares to move into Hamas' last stronghold, Rafah. "The war in Gaza continues, and we are far from stopping," said the military chief, Lt. Gen. Herzl Halevi.

Local broadcaster Channel 13 TV reported that Israel was preparing to begin evacuating Rafah within one week and the process could take several months.

Still, the withdrawal was a milestone as Israel and Hamas marked six months of fighting. Military officials, speaking on condition of anonymity under army policy, said a "significant force" remained in Gaza to continue targeted operations including in Khan Younis, hometown of the Hamas leader, Yehya Sinwar.

AP video in Khan Younis showed some people returning to a landscape marked by shattered multistory buildings and climbing over debris. Cars were overturned and charred. Southern Gaza's main hospital, Nasser, was in shambles.

ISRAEL FINDS BODY OF HOSTAGE KILLED IN GAZA

CAIRO — Israel's military says it has recovered the body of a 47-year-old farmer who was held hostage in Gaza.

Israel's army said Saturday it found the body of Elad Katzir and believed he was killed in January by militants with Islamic Jihad, one of the groups that entered southern Israel in the Oct. 7 attack, killed more than 1,200 people and took about 250 hostages. Katzir was abducted from Nir Oz, a border community that suffered some of the heaviest losses.

The discovery renewed pressure on Israel's government for a deal to get the remaining hostages freed, and thousands gathered in Tel Aviv to call for a deal as well as early elections. Hostages' families have long feared time is running out. At least 36 hostages have been confirmed dead. About half of the original number have been released.

"He could have been saved if a deal had happened in time," Katzir's sister Carmit said in a statement. "Our leadership is cowardly and driven by political considerations, and that is why (a deal) did not happen."

Israelis are divided on the approach by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his government. A week ago, tens of thousands of Israelis thronged central Jerusalem in the largest anti-government protest since the war began.

Candidates spar in Mexico's first presidential debate ahead of June 2 election

By MEGAN JANETSKY Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — In Mexico's first presidential debate on Sunday ahead of June 2 elections, former Mexico City Mayor and frontrunner Claudia Sheinbaum appeared comfortable with her polling lead, remaining calm amid ex-Senator Xóchitl Gálvez's personal attacks.

Jorge Álvarez Máynez, a candidate from the Citizen Movement party who is polling in single digits, grinned widely and presented himself as an alternative to the other two candidates, who he said represented the "old politics."

In the debate, candidates responded to questions about health, education, corruption, transparency, vulnerable groups and violence against women.

Polls have shown Sheinbaum of the Morena party of outgoing leftist President Andrés Manuel López Obrador leading by more than 20 points over Gálvez, who represents a coalition of opposition parties. If Sheinbaum or Gálvez wins, they would become the first woman president in Mexico, a country with a reputation for gender-based violence and a "macho," male-dominated culture.

Sheinbaum emphasized her connection with the highly popular López Obrador and promised she would continue his policies.

"We're going to keep transforming Mexico," Sheinbaum said.

Meanwhile, Gálvez launched personal attacks against her competition, including at Sheinbaum.

"Claudia, even if you deny it, you are still cold and heartless. I would call you the ice lady," Gálvez said.

"Claudia, you're not AMLO. You don't have his charisma," she said, using the president's nickname. Sheinbaum did not respond to several of Gálvez's sharpest attacks.

Mentions of López Obrador were surprisingly few in the debate even though the populist leader, who is not eligible for reelection, looms large in the upcoming polls.

The candidates also discussed rising migration levels to the United States, agreeing that migrants should be protected and respected on their path through Mexico. That contrasted with the security-focused approach pushed by the U.S. government.

Notably, the candidates spoke little of Mexico's soaring levels of violence and the slayings of local candidates, but a subsequent debate is expected to focus on security topics.

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Sheinbaum briefly mentioned the recent raid of Mexico's Embassy by Ecuadorian police on Friday, cutting in at the beginning of the debate to thank embassy staff for their bravery.

Huge crowds await a total solar eclipse in North America. Clouds may spoil the view

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

MESQUITE, Texas (AP) — Millions of spectators along a narrow corridor stretching from Mexico to the U.S. to Canada eagerly awaited Monday's celestial sensation — a total eclipse of the sun — even as forecasters called for clouds.

The best weather was expected at the tail end of the eclipse in Vermont and Maine, as well as New Brunswick and Newfoundland.

It promised to be North America's biggest eclipse crowd ever, thanks to the densely populated path and the lure of more than four minutes of midday darkness in Texas and other choice spots. Almost everyone in North America was guaranteed at least a partial eclipse, weather permitting.

"Cloud cover is one of the trickier things to forecast," National Weather Service meteorologist Alexa Maines explained at Cleveland's Great Lakes Science Center on Sunday. "At the very least, it won't snow."

The cliff-hanging uncertainty added to the drama. Rain or shine, "it's just about sharing the experience with other people," said Chris Lomas from Gotham, England, who was staying at a sold-out trailer resort outside Dallas, the biggest city in totality's path.

For Monday's full eclipse, the moon was due to slip right in front of the sun, entirely blocking it. The resulting twilight, with only the sun's outer atmosphere or corona visible, would be long enough for birds and other animals to fall silent, and for planets, stars and maybe even a comet to pop out.

The out-of-sync darkness lasts up to 4 minutes, 28 seconds. That's almost twice as long as it was during the U.S. coast-to-coast eclipse seven years ago because the moon is closer to Earth. It will be another 21 years before the U.S. sees another total solar eclipse on this scale.

Extending five hours from the first bite out of the sun to the last, Monday's eclipse begins in the Pacific and makes landfall at Mazatlan, Mexico, before moving into Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas and 12 other U.S. states in the Midwest, Middle Atlantic and New England, and then Canada. Last stop: Newfoundland, with the eclipse ending in the North Atlantic.

It will take just 1 hour, 40 minutes for the moon's shadow to race more than 4,000 miles (6,500 kilometers) across the continent.

Eye protection is needed with proper eclipse glasses and filters to look at the sun, except when it ducks completely out of sight during an eclipse.

The path of totality — approximately 115 miles (185 kilometers) wide — encompasses several major cities this time, including Dallas, Indianapolis, Cleveland, Buffalo, New York and Montreal. An estimated 44 million people live within the track, with a couple hundred million more within 200 miles (320 kilometers). Add in all the eclipse chasers, amateur astronomers, scientists and just plain curious, and it's no wonder the hotels and flights are sold out and the roads jammed.

Experts from NASA and scores of universities are posted along the route, poised to launch research rockets and weather balloons, and conduct experiments. The International Space Station's seven astronauts also will be on the lookout, 270 miles (435 kilometers) up.

Idaho inmate and accomplice accused of helping him escape during hospital ambush are due in court

By MARK THIESSEN Associated Press

Two members of an Idaho white supremacist prison gang, including an inmate and the man accused of helping him escape in an armed ambush at a Boise hospital, are due in court for a preliminary hearing

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Monday, along with a woman accused of providing a vehicle they used during 36 hours on the run.

The inmate, Skylar Meade, and Nicholas Umphenour, who police say opened fire on corrections officers transporting Meade from the hospital last month, both have been charged in the escape, along with Tia Garcia, who is accused of falsely reporting her car stolen just after the attack.

Umphenour additionally faces three counts of aggravated battery on an officer and using a deadly weapon in the commission of a felony, charges stemming from the ambush.

Meade and Umphenour, who are each being held on \$2 million bail, also are suspected in the deaths of two men in Clearwater and Nez Perce counties, about a seven-hour drive north of where they were arrested in Twin Falls, Idaho.

The homicide victims have been identified as James L. Mauney, 83, of Juliaetta, Idaho, who was reported missing when he failed to return from walking his dogs, and Gerald Don Henderson, 72, who was found dead outside his remote cabin near Orofino, Idaho.

Henderson had taken in Umphenour for about a month when he was in his late teens, according to authorities. Police said Umphenour and Meade stole Mauney's minivan and used it to get to the Twin Falls area.

Idaho Department of Correction officials have said Meade and Umphenour are members of the Aryan Knights white supremacist prison gang, which federal prosecutors have described as a "scourge" in the state's penitentiary system.

Meade, 31, was serving 20 years at the Idaho Maximum Security Institution in Kuna, south of Boise, for shooting at a sheriff's sergeant during a chase. Umphenour was released from the same lockup in January after serving time for theft and gun convictions.

The two were at times housed together and had mutual friends in and out of prison, officials said. Meade recently had been held in solitary confinement because officials deemed him a security risk.

The attack on the corrections officers came just after 2 a.m. on March 20 in the ambulance bay of Saint Alphonsus Regional Medical Center. Meade was brought to the hospital earlier in the night because he injured himself, officials said, but he refused treatment upon arrival.

Two corrections officers were wounded in the attack and a third was shot by responding police officers who mistook him for the gunman. All are expected to recover.

One other person has been charged in connection with the escape: Tonia Huber, who was driving the truck Meade was in when he was arrested, according to investigators. Huber has been charged with harboring a fugitive, eluding police and drug possession.

Latino voters are coveted by both major parties. They also are a target for election misinformation

By CHRISTINE FERNANDO and ANITA SNOW Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — As ranchera music filled the Phoenix recording studio at Radio Campesina, a station personality spoke in Spanish into the microphone.

"Friends of Campesina, in these elections, truth and unity are more important than ever," said morning show host Tony Arias. "Don't let yourself be trapped by disinformation."

The audio was recorded as a promo for Radio Campesina's new campaign aiming to empower Latino voters ahead of the 2024 elections. That effort includes discussing election-related misinformation narratives and fact-checking conspiracy theories on air.

"We are at the front lines of fighting misinformation in our communities," said María Barquín, program director of Chavez Radio Group, the nonprofit that runs Radio Campesina, a network of Spanish-language stations in Arizona, California and Nevada. "There's a lot at stake in 2024 for our communities. And so we need to amp up these efforts now more than ever."

Latinos have grown at the second-fastest rate, behind Asian Americans, of any major racial and ethnic group in the U.S. since the last presidential election, according to a Pew Research Center analysis, and are projected to account for 14.7%, or 36.2 million, of all eligible voters in November, a new high. They are a growing share of the electorate in several presidential and congressional battleground states, including

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Arizona, California and Nevada, and are being heavily courted by Republicans and Democrats.

Democratic President Joe Biden has credited Latino voters as a key reason he defeated Republican Donald Trump in 2020 and is urging them to help him do it again in November. Given the high stakes of a presidential election year, experts expect a surge of misinformation, especially through audio and video, targeting Spanish-speaking voters.

"Latinos have immense voting power and can make a decisive difference in elections, yet they are an under-messaged, under-prioritized audience," said Arturo Vargas, CEO of NALEO Educational Fund, a national nonprofit encouraging Latino civic participation. "Our vote has an impact. These bad actors know this, and one way to influence the Latino vote is to misinform."

In addition to radio, much of the news and information Latinos consume is audio-based through podcasts or on social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp and YouTube. Content moderation efforts in Spanish are limited on these platforms, which are seeing a rising number of right-wing influencers peddling election falsehoods and QAnon conspiracy theories.

The types of misinformation overlap with falsehoods readily found in other conservative media and many corners of the internet — conspiracy theories about mail voting, dead people casting ballots, rigged voting machines and threats at polling sites.

Other narratives are more closely tailored to Latino communities, including false information about immigration, inflation and abortion rights, often exploiting the traumas and fears of specific communities. For example, Spanish speakers who have immigrated from countries with recent histories of authoritarianism, socialism, high inflation and election fraud may be more vulnerable to misinformation about those topics.

Misinformation on the airwaves also is particularly difficult to track and combat compared with more traditional, text-based misinformation, said Daiquiri Ryan Mercado, strategic legal adviser and policy counsel for the National Hispanic Media Coalition, which runs the Spanish Language Disinformation Coalition. While misinformation researchers can more easily code programs to categorize and track text-based misinformation, audio often requires manual listening. Radio stations that air only in certain areas at certain times also can be difficult to track.

"When we have such limited representation, Spanish speakers feel like they can connect to these people, and they become trusted messengers," Mercado said. "But some people may take advantage of that trust."

Mercado and others said that's why trusted messengers, such as Radio Campesina, are so important. The station was founded by Mexican American labor and civil rights leader César Chavez and has built a loyal listening base over decades. At any given moment, as many as 750,000 people are listening to the Chavez Radio Network on the air and online, Barquín said.

"They will come and listen to us because of the music, but our main focus is to empower and educate through information," she said. "The music is just a tactic to bring them in."

Radio Campesina's on-air talent and musical guests often discuss misinformation on air, answering listeners' questions about voting, teaching them about spotting misinformation and doing tutorials on election processes such as how to submit mail-in ballots. The station also has hosted rodeos and music events to register new voters and talk about misinformation.

They allow listeners to call or text questions on WhatsApp, a social media platform especially popular with immigrant communities but where much of the misinformation they see festers. In March, the station partnered with Mi Familia Vota, a Latino advocacy group, for an on-air show and voter phone bank event to answer voter questions.

"We know that there are many people who are unmotivated because sometimes we come from countries where, when it comes to elections, we don't trust the vote," said Carolina Rodriguez-Greer, Arizona director of Mi Familia Vota, before she shared information on the show about how voters can track their ballots.

The organization began working with Spanish media outlets to dispel misinformation after seeing candidates such as former Arizona gubernatorial candidate Kari Lake spread election lies in 2022, Rodriguez-Greer said. Lake is now running for the U.S. Senate with Trump's endorsement.

"One way to combat this misinformation is to fill the airways with good information," said Angelica Razo,

national deputy director of campaigns and programs for Mi Familia Vota.

In Tempe, Brian Garcia tunes into Radio Campesina on drives to work. When he was growing up, the station played as his dad cooked dinner and his family gathered around the table. It was a staple for his family, he said, and he's excited about its efforts to tackle election misinformation.

"There aren't many organizations or folks that go onto Spanish language media to combat misinformation and disinformation," he said. "And I think serving as a resource and a trusted source within the Latino community that has already built those relationships, that trust will go a long way."

A variety of other community and media groups also are prioritizing the seemingly never-ending fight against misinformation.

Maritza Félix often fact-checked misinformation for her mother, whom she calls the "Queen of WhatsApp." This led to Félix doing the same for family and friends in a WhatsApp group that grew into the Spanish news nonprofit Conecta Arizona.

It now runs a radio show and newsletter that debunks false claims about election processes, health, immigration and border politics. Conecta Arizona also combats misinformation about the upcoming Mexican presidential election that Félix said has been seeping over the border.

Jeronimo Cortina, associate professor of political science at the University of Houston, tracks broad misinformation narratives aimed at Spanish-speaking communities across the country but also localized content targeting the state's rapidly growing Latino electorate. That includes misinformation about candidates' clean energy policies taking away jobs in Texas' oil and gas industries and about migrants flooding over the border.

"You won't see the same content targeting Latinos in Texas compared to Latinos in Iowa," he said.

This has led to a wider universe of groups tackling misinformation aimed at Latinos. NALEO Educational Fund's Defiende La Verdad campaign monitors misinformation and trains community leaders to spot it. In Florida, the We Are Más podcast combats Spanish-language misinformation nationally and locally, said its founder Evelyn Pérez-Verdía. Jolt Action, a Texas Latino advocacy group, registers new voters and helps them make sense of misinformation.

The Spanish-language fact-checking group Factchequeado is building partnerships with dozens of media outlets across the country to provide training and free Spanish fact-checking content.

"Disinformation is at the same time a global phenomenon and a hyperlocal phenomenon," said Factchequeado co-founder Laura Zommer. "So we have to address it with local and national groups uniting together."

Trump says he'll announce his position on abortion Monday, a key moment in the presidential race

By JILL COLVIN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Former President Donald Trump says he will finally announce Monday when he believes abortions should be banned, after months of refusing to stake a position on an issue that could decide the outcome of November's presidential election.

The presumptive Republican nominee wrote on his social media site Sunday night that he plans to issue a statement on "abortion and abortion rights." He told reporters last week he would make a statement soon after being asked about Florida's six-week abortion ban going into effect.

Trump for more than a year now has declined to say when in a pregnancy he would try to draw the line, even as Republican-led states have ushered in a wave of new restrictions following the overturning of Roe v. Wade in 2022. His announcement will be closely watched both by Democrats who believe the fight over abortion rights helps them at the polls and Republicans who failed to push Trump to endorse a national abortion ban during the GOP primary.

"Great love and compassion must be shown when even thinking about the subject of LIFE," Trump wrote on his social media site, "but at the same time we must use common sense in realizing that we have an obligation to the salvation of our Nation, which is currently in serious DECLINE, TO WIN ELECTIONS,

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without which we will have nothing other than failure, death, and destruction.”

Trump had long argued that the Supreme Court’s decision overturning Roe gave those who oppose abortion rights “tremendous power to negotiate.” He said he wanted to use that leverage to strike a deal that he hoped would “make both sides happy” and bring the country “together” — even though the issue is one of the most contentious in American politics, with opponents viewing abortion as murder and proponents seeing it as a fundamental women’s right.

Trump suggested last month in a radio interview that he was leaning toward supporting a national abortion ban at around 15 weeks of pregnancy — early in the second trimester.

“The number of weeks now, people are agreeing on 15. And I’m thinking in terms of that,” he said on WABC radio. “And it’ll come out to something that’s very reasonable. But people are really, even hard-liners are agreeing, seems to be, 15 weeks seems to be a number that people are agreeing at.”

At the same time, Trump seemed reluctant to embrace a federal ban.

“Everybody agrees — you’ve heard this for years — all the legal scholars on both sides agree: It’s a state issue. It shouldn’t be a federal issue, it’s a state issue,” he said.

Trump has tried to thread the needle on abortion throughout the campaign. He routinely takes credit for appointing the Supreme Court justices who overturned Roe v. Wade, which he has called a “moral and unconstitutional atrocity,” and has called himself the “most pro-life president in American history.”

But he has also repeatedly criticized fellow Republicans for being too hard-line on the issue, blaming candidates who did not allow for exceptions in cases of rape, incest and when the life of the pregnant person is at risk for the party’s losses that November.

“A lot of politicians who are pro-life do not know how to discuss this topic and they lose their election. We had a lot of election losses because of this, because they didn’t know to discuss it. They had no idea,” he said at the Concerned Women of America 2023 Leadership Summit.

Democrats and President Joe Biden’s campaign, meanwhile, have been spotlighting the issue as they work to draw a contrast with Trump.

Polling has consistently shown that most Americans believe abortion should be legal through the initial stages of pregnancy. About half of U.S. adults said abortions should be permitted at the 15-week mark, according to an Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research poll conducted last June.

Data compiled by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention show that the vast majority of abortions from 2012 to 2021 were performed within the first 13 weeks of pregnancy.

The Supreme Court’s 1973 Roe v. Wade decision established the constitutional right to abortion until the time of viability, at around 23 or 24 weeks into pregnancy.

Abortions later in pregnancy are rare and are often performed due to serious fetal abnormalities, when the life of the mother is at risk, or when women have faced significant delays accessing the procedure, according to the health policy research firm KFF.

Jelly Roll dominates the 2024 CMT Music Awards with host Kelsea Ballerini and a Toby Keith tribute

By MARIA SHERMAN AP Music Writer

Jelly Roll won big at the 2024 CMT Music Awards Sunday night, taking home three awards at the annual event celebrating the best in country music videos.

His accolades began with the CMT performance of the year award for his gospel-assisted rendition of “Need a Favor” at the 2023 CMT Music Awards nearly a year ago to the day. It also was his first-ever awards show performance.

“In that last year you changed my life in every way I never thought my life could be changed,” the tattooed rapper-turned-country breakout star said in an emotional acceptance speech live from the Moody Center in Austin, Texas. The show was broadcast live on CBS and Paramount+.

The music video for “Need A Favor” earned him male video of the year and the biggest award of the

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night, video of the year.

"I'm having one of the best nights of my life," he said, before focusing his speech on people who are looking for "second chances," specifically those in juvenile detention facilities. "I once heard a man say that 'you don't change until the pain to remain the same is greater than the pain it takes to change,' and that's what it takes. I love you, Texas."

In some ways, it was déjà vu from the 2023 awards show, where Jelly Roll also took home three awards, winning over audiences for his larger-than-life personality and outsider songs.

Kelsea Ballerini hosted the awards for fourth time in a row, opening with a comedic sketch about reading the minds of country music's biggest names that ended with Keith Urban hugging the beaver mascot of beloved Texas gas station chain Buc-ee's.

Her many outfit changes were only the first of a few surprises, which also included Melissa Etheridge appearing on a duet of "Come to My Window" with Ballerini.

Early on, Carly Pearce and Chris Stapleton won collaborative video of the year for their song, "We Don't Fight Anymore." She thanked Stapleton, who wasn't in attendance, and "Fans, fans, fans, fans, fans!"

Ashley Cooke won breakthrough female video of the year for "Your Place," her first-ever award. "I just won a CMT award, oh my god, good night!" she cheered as she headed off stage. Warren Zeiders took home the male equivalent for "Pretty Little Poison," thanking God and his best friend: his dad.

Live performances were fast and furious. Three-time CMT award winner and Texas native Cody Johnson opened the 2024 show with his ode to the lone star state, "That's Texas." Jason Aldean performed "Let Your Boys Be Country" in front of the University of Texas at Austin, a less controversial choice than his radio hit "Try That in a Small Town." Its music video was removed from CMT last year.

Megan Moroney brought her breakup anthem, "No Caller ID," to the CMT stage and Parker McCollum teamed with Brittney Spencer for "Burn It Down." NEEDTOBREATHE and Jordan Davis teased "CMT Crossroads" by tackling each other's "Brother" and "Next Thing You Know," respectively.

Lainey Wilson reminded the audience that "Country's Cool Again," leading into an outdoor performance of "Where It Ends" by Bailey Zimmerman. Veteran Keith Urban brought the first single of his forthcoming album, "Straight Line."

Wilson spent a lot time on stage, taking home female video of the year for "Watermelon Moonshine." "Thank you for supporting women in country," she told the audience.

Jennifer Nettles and Kristian Bush of Sugarland reunited on the CMT stage for the first time since 2011 in a collaborative performance with Little Big Town. The six voices teamed up for a cover of Phil Collins' "Take Me Home."

Trisha Yearwood was awarded the inaugural June Carter Cash Humanitarian Award, which honors musicians or industry veterans who demonstrate "an exceptional dedication to community and their fellow artists, embodying June's spirit as a fierce advocate and initiator in paying it forward," a statement said.

The country star was honored for her charitable contributions, including longstanding work with Habitat for Humanity and the annual Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter Work Week Project.

"I don't think anyone who's ever gotten a humanitarian award has thought they deserve it," she began, agreeing with the sentiment before turning her attention to the woman the award is named after.

"June Carter Cash was a force, and she was married to a force. I know a little bit about that," she said, in reference to her husband Garth Brooks, before applauding Carter Cash's ability to keep shining a light on her own successes. "She was strong in a very human way," Yearwood said.

Later in the night, she debuted a new song from her forthcoming album, the acoustic ballad, "Put It in a Song."

The emotional center of the award show no doubt came later, in an all-star tribute to the late Toby Keith, with Brooks & Dunn tackling Keith's 1993 breakout hit, "Should've Been A Cowboy," Sammy Hagar doing "I Love This Bar" and Lainey Wilson covering "How Do You Like Me Now." They all were backed by Keith's longtime band.

Keith, a hit country crafter of pro-American anthems who riled up critics and was loved by millions of

fans, died in February at 62 after being diagnosed with stomach cancer.

In the crowd, artists including Ashley McBryde and Jelly Roll raised their red solo cups in a cheerful tribute to the singer, who immortalized the humble plastic cups in his 2011 hit, "Red Solo Cup."

After the musical tributes on stage, Keith's longtime friend and baseball star Roger Clemens, his eyes watering, thanked Keith's wife and children in the audience for sharing their husband and father with the world.

Clemens led a toast to those on stage, in the crowd, and at home: "Repeat after me. 'Whiskey for my men, and beer for my horses,'" a reference to a comedic song by Keith featuring Willie Nelson.

It was a fitting homage: a little funny, with a whole lot of country heart.

US treads carefully in responding to Hong Kong's new national security law

By DIDI TANG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. has denounced Hong Kong's new national security law as a tool to potentially silence dissent both at home and abroad, but so far the action from Washington has been notably muted, disappointing those fighting for the Chinese territory's democracy and freedoms.

Since the law's swift passage on March 19, the U.S. has announced visa restrictions on an unspecified number of unnamed Hong Kong officials but taken no further action. That's a far cry from 2020, when Beijing imposed national security restrictions to end months of unrest on Hong Kong streets. The U.S. responded by hitting the city's highest-ranking officials with sanctions and depriving the territory of its preferential trading status.

While the new law, known as Article 23, now expands the Hong Kong government's powers to go after those it accuses of spying and to target dissidents anywhere in the world, Washington has been treading carefully.

The State Department declined to preview or comment on any potential actions but said it is considering all options.

Analysts suggest the Biden administration may not want to rock relations with China in an election year, especially when the impact of the law might take a while to manifest itself and any punitive U.S. measures would be unlikely to bring about meaningful change.

"U.S. policymakers appear resigned to the fact that China's takeover of Hong Kong is, for all intents and purposes, complete and irreversible," said Craig Singleton, senior China fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, a research institute based in Washington. "Moreover, it's not entirely clear that any specific actions from Washington would prompt Beijing to meaningfully reassess its approach towards Hong Kong, with Chinese policymakers having more or less signaled that Hong Kong's fate is not up for debate."

Rorry Daniels, managing director of Asia Society Policy Institute in New York, said the U.S. could be "trying to calibrate the response to the effects of the legislation and its use, rather than just to its enactment."

The language of the new law is vague, and its implementation will depend on how it is interpreted, which in itself is worrisome and could erode Hong Kong's status as a safe place for international contract settlement, Daniels said.

The new security law has come at a time when the White House wants to protect the fragile U.S.-China relationship, which has only stabilized in recent months, said Willy Lam, a senior fellow at the Jamestown Foundation, another Washington-based think tank.

"I think they don't want the relationship to deteriorate ahead of the election," Lam said.

Hong Kong and the latest legislation was brought up during the phone call between President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping on April 2. Xi told Biden the law reflected a "constitutional responsibility to safeguard national security," which he said would protect the well-being of Hong Kong's people and the interests of global investors, according to China's foreign ministry.

"The U.S. needs to respect China's sovereignty and the rule of law in Hong Kong, and should not disrupt,

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still less interfere, in the process," said ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin.

In Congress, a bill to strip Hong Kong's trade offices in the U.S. of their diplomatic privileges has not moved forward and neither has one that would require the president to consider sanctioning the city's judges, prosecutors and police commissioner if they were found to have undermined civil freedoms there.

"The latest response by the Biden administration has honestly concerned me about the administration's commitment to stand up against Beijing's aggression," said Frances Hui, policy and advocacy coordinator for the Washington-based Committee for Freedom in Hong Kong Foundation. "A more robust response from the U.S. is needed to facilitate future behavioral changes among (Chinese) and Hong Kong officials. A visa ban is something but not enough."

The committee and 23 other Hong Kong advocacy groups issued a joint statement on Thursday calling the Biden administration's response "inadequate and concerning." They urged the government to sanction Hong Kong officials responsible for the intensifying crackdown and offer haven in the U.S. to dissidents. They also urged Congress to pass the stalled legislation.

Singleton said action by the private sector might be more meaningful.

"American companies are quietly scaling back in Hong Kong amid growing safety concerns, with many fearing potential arrests for routine business activities," he said. "The private sector's shifting sentiments toward Hong Kong, rather than any single U.S. government action, will likely have the biggest impact on Beijing's ability to leverage Hong Kong's unique status to reverse China's downward economic spiral."

Lam said the U.S. government might be holding off until the conclusion of the trial against Jimmy Lai, a prominent publisher, in a high-profile national security case.

Should a Hong Kong court jail Lai for 20 years or more, which would equal life imprisonment given he is 76, "the U.S. government cannot afford to be seen not doing anything," Lam said.

Israel is pulling some troops from southern Gaza. Now the plan is to clear Hamas from Rafah

By JACK JEFFERY and TIA GOLDENBERG Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israel's military announced Sunday it had withdrawn its forces from the southern Gaza city of Khan Younis, wrapping up a key phase in its ground offensive against the Hamas militant group and bringing its troop presence in the territory to one of the lowest levels since the six-month war began.

But defense officials said troops were merely regrouping as the army prepares to move into Hamas' last stronghold, Rafah. "The war in Gaza continues, and we are far from stopping," said the military chief, Lt. Gen. Herzi Halevi.

Local broadcaster Channel 13 TV reported that Israel was preparing to begin evacuating Rafah within one week and the process could take several months.

Still, the withdrawal was a milestone as Israel and Hamas marked six months of fighting. Military officials, speaking on condition of anonymity under army policy, said a "significant force" remained in Gaza to continue targeted operations including in Khan Younis, hometown of the Hamas leader, Yehya Sinwar.

AP video in Khan Younis showed some people returning to a landscape marked by shattered multistory buildings and climbing over debris. Cars were overturned and charred. Southern Gaza's main hospital, Nasser, was in shambles.

"It's all just rubble," a dejected Ahmad Abu al-Rish said. "Animals can't live here, so how is a human supposed to?"

Israel for weeks has vowed a ground offensive in nearby Rafah. But the city shelters some 1.4 million people — more than half of Gaza's population. The prospect of an offensive has raised global alarm, including from Israel's top ally, the U.S., which has demanded to see a credible plan to protect civilians. Allowing people to return to nearby Khan Younis could relieve some pressure on Rafah.

White House national security spokesman John Kirby repeated on Sunday the U.S. opposition to a Rafah offensive and told ABC the U.S. believes that the partial Israeli withdrawal "is really just about rest and refit for these troops that have been on the ground for four months and not necessarily, that we can tell,

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indicative of some coming new operation for these troops.”

Israel’s military quietly drew down troops in devastated northern Gaza earlier in the war. But it has continued to carry out airstrikes and raids in areas where it says Hamas has resurfaced, including Gaza’s largest hospital, Shifa, leaving what the head of the World Health Organization called “an empty shell.”

The six-month mark has been met with growing frustration in Israel, where anti-government protests have swelled and anger is mounting over what some see as government inaction to help free about 130 remaining hostages, about a quarter of whom Israel says are dead. Hamas-led militants took about 250 captives when they crossed from Gaza into Israel on Oct. 7 and killed 1,200 people, mostly civilians.

Several thousand protesters called for a “hostage deal now” at a rally outside the Knesset in Jerusalem, organized by hostages’ families. In southern Israel, weeping relatives gathered at the site of a music festival where more than 300 people were killed on Oct. 7.

“It’s an impossible reality for us, it’s an impossible reality for the Gazans and the people of this country. We just want to live,” said one protester, Talia Ezrahi.

“I would agree to anything to return the hostages and stop the mass killings in Gaza,” said another protester, Michal Fruchtman.

Negotiations in pursuit of a cease-fire in exchange for the hostages’ release were expected to resume in Cairo on Sunday. An Israeli delegation led by the head of the Mossad intelligence agency was going to Cairo, according to an Israeli official who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the matter with the media.

Pressure rose for action now.

“This doesn’t seem a war against terror. This doesn’t seem anymore a war about defending Israel. This really, at this point, seems it’s a war against humanity itself,” chef José Andrés told ABC, days after an Israeli airstrike killed seven of his World Central Kitchen colleagues in Gaza. Aid deliveries on a crucial new sea route to the territory were suspended.

“Humanity has been all but abandoned” in Gaza, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies said in a statement.

The U.N. and partners now warn of “imminent famine” for more than 1 million people in Gaza as humanitarian workers urge Israel to loosen restrictions on the delivery of aid overland, the only way to meet soaring needs as some Palestinians forage for weeds to eat. Thousands of aid trucks have been waiting to enter Gaza.

“It’s a slow-motion massacre of people to subject them to the kind of deprivation of food and water that they have been subjected to for the last six months,” Doctors Without Borders USA executive director Avril Benoit told CBS.

Mothers who have given birth in Gaza since the war began are especially vulnerable.

The Health Ministry in Gaza said the bodies of 38 people killed in Israel’s bombardment had been brought to the territory’s remaining functional hospitals in the past 24 hours. It said 33,175 have been killed since the war began. It doesn’t differentiate between civilians and combatants but says two-thirds of the dead are children and women.

Israel’s military continued to suffer losses, including in Khan Younis, where the military said four soldiers were killed. Over 600 Israeli soldiers have been killed since Oct. 7, according to Israel’s government.

Concerns about a wider regional conflict continued as a top Iranian military adviser warned Israel that none of its embassies were safe following last week’s strike in Damascus — blamed on Israel — that killed two elite Iranian generals and flattened an Iranian consular building. Israel has not directly acknowledged its involvement.

“None of the embassies of the (Israeli) regime are safe anymore,” Gen. Rahim Safavi, a military adviser to Iran’s supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, was quoted as saying by the semi-official Tasnim agency.

Brazil Supreme Court justice orders investigation of Elon Musk over fake news and obstruction

By DAVID BILLER Associated Press

RIO DE JANEIRO (AP) — A crusading Brazilian Supreme Court justice included Elon Musk as a target in an ongoing investigation over the dissemination of fake news and opened a separate investigation late Sunday into the executive for alleged obstruction.

In his decision, Justice Alexandre de Moraes noted that Musk on Saturday began waging a public “disinformation campaign” regarding the top court’s actions, and that Musk continued the following day — most notably with comments that his social media company X would cease to comply with the court’s orders to block certain accounts.

“The flagrant conduct of obstruction of Brazilian justice, incitement of crime, the public threat of disobedience of court orders and future lack of cooperation from the platform are facts that disrespect the sovereignty of Brazil,” de Moraes wrote.

Musk will be investigated for alleged intentional criminal instrumentalization of X as part of an investigation into a network of people known as digital militias who allegedly spread defamatory fake news and threats against Supreme Court justices, according to the text of the decision. The new investigation will look into whether Musk engaged in obstruction, criminal organization and incitement.

Musk has not commented on X about the latest development as of late Sunday.

Brazil’s political right has long characterized de Moraes as overstepping his bounds to clamp down on free speech and engage in political persecution. In the digital militias investigation, lawmakers from former President Jair Bolsonaro’s circle have been imprisoned and his supporters’ homes raided. Bolsonaro himself became a target of the investigation in 2021.

De Moraes’ defenders have said his decisions, although extraordinary, are legally sound and necessary to purge social media of fake news as well as extinguish threats to Brazilian democracy — notoriously underscored by the Jan. 8, 2023, uprising in Brazil’s capital that resembled the Jan. 6, 2021 insurrection in the U.S. Capitol.

On Saturday, Musk — a self-declared free speech absolutist — wrote on X that the platform would lift all restrictions on blocked accounts and predicted that the move was likely to dry up revenue in Brazil and force the company to shutter its local office.

“But principles matter more than profit,” he wrote.

He later instructed users in Brazil to download a VPN to retain access if X was shut down and wrote that X would publish all of de Moraes’ demands, claiming they violate Brazilian law.

“These are the most draconian demands of any country on Earth!” he later wrote.

Musk had not published de Moraes’ demands as of late Sunday and prominent blocked accounts remained so, indicating X had yet to act based on Musk’s previous pledges.

Moraes’ decision warned against doing so, saying each blocked account that X eventually reactivates will entail a fine of 100,000 reais (\$20,000) per day, and that those responsible will be held legally to account for disobeying a court order.

Brazil’s attorney general wrote Saturday night that it was urgent for Brazil to regulate social media platforms. “We cannot live in a society in which billionaires domiciled abroad have control of social networks and put themselves in a position to violate the rule of law, failing to comply with court orders and threatening our authorities. Social peace is non-negotiable,” Jorge Messias wrote on X.

Brazil’s constitution was drafted after the 1964-1985 military dictatorship and contains a long list of aspirational goals and prohibitions against specific crimes such as racism and, more recently, homophobia. But freedom of speech is not absolute.

Hank Aaron rose above racist hate mail and threats in pursuit of Ruth's home run record 50 years ago

By CHARLES ODUM AP Sports Writer

ATLANTA (AP) — Hank Aaron refused to be intimidated by racist hate mail or threats during his pursuit of Babe Ruth's home run record.

Aaron's teammates, including Dusty Baker, worried on his behalf even as the future Hall of Famer circled the bases following his record-breaking 715th homer on April 8, 1974. Baker, who was on deck, and Tom House, who caught the homer in the Atlanta bullpen behind the left-field wall, will return Monday for the 50-year anniversary of the homer.

After sprinting from the bullpen to deliver the ball to Aaron at home plate, House found Aaron's mother giving the slugger a big hug.

"You could see both of them with tears in their eyes," House told The Associated Press. "... It was a mother and son. Obviously, that was cool. It was also mom protecting her boy from at that time everybody thought somebody would actually try to shoot him at home plate.

"So there were all kind of things. I gave him the ball. I said, 'Here it is, Hank.' He said 'Thanks, kid.'"

Baker referred to Aaron as a father figure or big brother who looked out for him as he began his playing career with the Braves. Baker and other teammates, including Ralph Garr, tried to look out for Aaron during the home run chase.

"We always felt the need to protect him, always felt that need," Baker said last week. "I think we were more afraid for him than he was actually afraid because he never showed any fear of the threats or whatever. It seems like it drove him to a higher concentration level than ever before was possible."

Baker retired as Houston's manager following the 2023 season.

Bob Hope, then the Braves media relations director, said Aaron would not be deterred by the threats issued late in the 1973 season as he approached Ruth's record of 714 career homers.

"One time the FBI wanted to come meet with him on a Sunday and asked him not to play because they felt they had legitimate death threats on him," Hope said.

"We went down to the clubhouse and sat down with him and Hank just said: 'What kind of statement would that be? I am a baseball player. You guys do what you need to do to keep things secure, but I'm playing baseball.' And I thought that was very reflective of his personality all the way through."

Hope said most fan mail Aaron received was positive. "The hate mail was not pleasant, but there wasn't nearly as much as you're led to believe," Hope said. "It was just a very, very small percentage of the fans were causing that problem."

Hope and Baker remained close to Aaron after Aaron's career and until his death in 2021 at 86.

"One of the honors of your life that you don't want is when Hank died, at his funeral, Dusty and I were the only two nonfamily pallbearers," Hope said. "When I realized that at the funeral, it was almost overwhelming."

Wonya Lucas, Aaron's niece and the daughter of Bill Lucas, who with the Braves in 1976 became Major League Baseball's first African American general manager, said she can remember "Uncle Hank" remaining strong during the chase. She said that stayed constant even when threats led to police cars showing up at Aaron's home and Aaron's oldest daughter, Gaile, having to return home from college.

"I certainly understood the gravity of the situation and how the mood shifted is probably a good way to put it," Wonya Lucas said Friday. "But I do also remember his quiet strength, and despite all those conditions I described I felt safe in the home because I felt he gave us a sense of comfort."

To mark the 50-year anniversary of Aaron's 715th homer, the Atlanta History Center will open a new exhibit to the public, through the Henry Louis Aaron Fund, celebrating Aaron on Tuesday that will remain open through the 2025 All-Star Game in Atlanta. MLB Commissioner Rob Manfred is expected to attend a preview of the exhibit on Monday.

Aaron's bat and the ball he hit for the record homer, owned by the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York and normally not open to public viewing, will be on display at Truist Park's monument garden

on Monday.

The Hank Aaron Invitational is designed to encourage high school players from diverse backgrounds to play at higher levels. Alumni of the Hank Aaron Invitational include Cincinnati pitcher Hunter Greene, who participated in 2015, and Braves outfielder Michael Harris II, who played in 2018.

Major League Baseball also supports other initiatives, including the Andre Dawson Classic, designed to promote diversity in the sport.

"For me, just having somebody that looked like me that could be that successful and do the things he's done, the road he paved for players like me, that's pretty huge," Harris said Friday.

Despite those efforts, the number of Black players on major league rosters has declined. A study done by The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport at Central Florida revealed African American players represented just 6.2% of players on MLB opening day rosters in 2023, down from 7.2% in 2022. Both figures from the institute's latest reports were the lowest since the study began in 1991.

A recent spike in the number of African American first-round draft picks provides hope that MLB's efforts, including the Hank Aaron Invitational, may make a difference.

Salvage crews have begun removing containers from the ship that collapsed Baltimore's Key bridge

BALTIMORE (AP) — Salvage crews on Sunday began removing containers from the deck of the cargo ship that crashed into and collapsed the Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore, an important step toward the full reopening of one of the nation's main shipping lanes.

The removal of the containers from the deck of the Dali would continue this week as weather permits, according to a statement from the Key Bridge Response Unified Command. Crews were progressing toward removing sections of the bridge that lie across the ship's bow to eventually allow it to move, the statement said.

In total, 32 vessels have passed through temporary channels on either side of the wreckage, officials said.

"The Unified Command is concurrently progressing on its main lines of effort to remove enough debris to open the channel to larger commercial traffic," U.S. Coast Guard Capt. David O'Connell said in the statement.

The Dali has been trapped under mangled steel in the Patapsco River since it slammed into the bridge on March 26, killing six workers.

President Joe Biden took a helicopter tour Friday of the warped metal remains and the mass of construction and salvage equipment trying to clear the wreckage. The president also met for more than an hour with the families of those who died.

Eight workers — immigrants from Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador — were filling potholes on the bridge when it was hit and collapsed in the middle of the night. Two men were rescued and the bodies of three others were recovered in subsequent days. The search for the other victims continued.

Officials have established a temporary, alternate channel for vessels involved in clearing debris. The Army Corps of Engineers hopes to open a limited-access channel for barge container ships and some vessels moving cars and farm equipment by the end of April, and to restore normal capacity to Baltimore's port by May 31, the White House said.

More than 50 salvage divers and 12 cranes are on site to help cut out sections of the bridge and remove them from the key waterway.

South Carolina finishes perfect season with NCAA championship, beating Clark and Iowa 87-75

By DOUG FEINBERG AP Basketball Writer

CLEVELAND (AP) — Kamilla Cardoso delivered once again for Dawn Staley and South Carolina.

A perfect finish. A dynasty. A team too big for Caitlin Clark and Iowa this time around.

Cardoso had 15 points and a career-high 17 rebounds, and South Carolina completed its perfect season with an 87-75 victory over Clark and the Hawkeyes in the NCAA championship game on Sunday.

With Staley directing a relentless attack from the sideline, the Gamecocks (38-0) became the 10th Division I team to go through a season without a loss. And they accomplished the feat after they lost all five starters from last season's team that lost to Clark's squad in the national semifinals.

"When young people lock in and have a belief, and have a trust, and their parents have that same trust, this is what can happen," Staley said. "They made history. They etched their names in the history books."

Clark did all she could to lead the Hawkeyes to their first championship. She scored 30 points, including a championship-record 18 in the first quarter. She rewrote the record book at Iowa (34-5), finishing as the career leading scorer in NCAA Division I history with 3,951 points.

She hopes her legacy isn't defined by falling short in two NCAA championship games, but more by the millions of new fans she helped bring into the game and the countless young girls and boys that she inspired.

"I think the biggest thing is it's really hard to win these things, I think I know that better than most people by now, to be so close twice really hurts," Clark said.

As the final buzzer sounded, a stoic Clark walked off the court, through the confetti, and into the tunnel heading to the locker room.

"I personally want to thank Caitlin Clark for lifting up our sport. She carried a heavy load for our sport," Staley said. "She's going to lift that league (WNBA) up as well. Caitlin Clark if you're out there you're one of the GOATs of our game. We appreciate you."

South Carolina has won three titles in the last eight years, including two of the past three, to lay claim to being the latest dynasty in women's basketball. Staley became the fifth coach to win at least three national championships, joining Geno Auriemma, Pat Summitt, Kim Mulkey and Tara VanDerveer.

The Gamecocks, who have won 109 of their last 112 games, became the first team since UConn in 2016 to go undefeated. South Carolina had a couple scares throughout the season, but always found a way to win.

With most of the team returning next year, Staley's team is in a good position to keep this run going.

"This team, we're going to be good. Coach Staley, we have the best coach, what, in the country, in the nation, in the whole wide world?" Raven Johnson said. "It's no telling what she's going to add to the pieces that's already here. I just say be on the lookout."

Tessa Johnson led South Carolina with 19 points. Cardoso, the Final Four's Most Outstanding Player, also blocked three shots.

"Kamilla Cardoso was not going to let us lose a game in the NCAA Tournament," Staley said. "She played through an injury, she played like one of the top picks in the WNBA draft, and her teammates did something that no teammates have done for somebody who went to the WNBA in our program. They send her off as a national champion. So this is history for us."

Led by the 6-foot-7 Cardoso and Ashlyn Watkins, South Carolina enjoyed a 51-29 rebounding advantage. It also finished with 30 second-chance points.

The Gamecocks also showed off their impressive depth. Tessa Johnson helped the team to a 37-0 difference in points by reserves.

South Carolina trailed 46-44 late in the second quarter before going on an 11-0 run spanning halftime to open a 55-46 advantage early in the third quarter. Clark finally ended the run with a layup.

The Hawkeyes closed to 59-55 and had a chance to get even closer, but Hannah Stuelke missed a wide-open layup on a brilliant pass from Clark.

South Carolina responded with the next eight points, including two 3-pointers. The Gamecocks, who were 4 for 20 from behind the 3-point line during last season's Final Four loss to Iowa, went 8 for 19 from

deep against the Hawkeyes in the victory.

Iowa was down 80-75 after a three-point play by Sydney Affolter with 4:12 left. But the Hawkeyes were shut out the rest of the way.

Clark checked out with 20 seconds left when Iowa coach Lisa Bluder subbed in fellow senior Molly Davis, who hadn't played since she got hurt in the regular-season finale against Ohio State.

"I'm proud of my team, though. Finishing national runner-up two years in a row is an amazing feat," Bluder said. "Nobody thought we were going to be here at the beginning of the year, so that makes it pretty special."

Unlike the semifinals, when Clark struggled against UConn's defense, she got going early against South Carolina scoring 18 points in the opening quarter to set a championship game record, surpassing the 16 that Jasmine Carson of LSU had last year against the Hawkeyes.

The Gamecocks trailed 46-44 in the final minute when Te-Hina Paopao hit a 3-pointer and Raven Johnson stole the ball from Clark near midcourt and went in for a layup. South Carolina led 49-46 at the half.

Conservative opposition leads Prime Minister Tusk's party in Poland's local races, exit poll says

By VANESSA GERA Associated Press

WARSAW, Poland (AP) — An exit poll released after Poland's local and regional elections Sunday showed Prime Minister Donald Tusk's pro-EU party trailing the conservative opposition party that governed Poland for eight years until December. But the socially liberal mayor of Warsaw, a Tusk ally, easily won another term in the capital.

Sunday's elections were the first electoral test for Tusk's coalition government nearly four months since it took power. Poles voted for mayors, local councilors and representatives to the nation's 16 regional assemblies.

The exit polls have a small margin of error and final results are not expected until Monday. But they indicated that Law and Justice, the conservative party that governed Poland from 2015-2023, remains a political force to be reckoned with in the nation of 38 million people.

According to the Ipsos exit poll, Law and Justice won 33.7% of votes and Tusk's Civic Coalition won 31.9% in elections to the regional assemblies.

Law and Justice leader Jaroslaw Kaczynski declared victory, and said the result was a message to those who had counted the party out.

"As Mark Twain once said, the news of my death is somewhat premature," Kaczynski said, loosely quoting the American author.

Runoff votes will take place April 21 in cases where mayoral candidates did not win at least 50% of the vote.

Warsaw Mayor Rafal Trzaskowski will avoid a runoff after winning nearly 60% of the vote, according to the exit poll. Another Tusk ally, the mayor of Gdansk, also won outright.

Tusk called Trzaskowski the "hero" of the evening but acknowledged that conservative regions that favor his opponents appeared more mobilized. He said he believed some of his usual supporters might not have voted due to the good weather, with Sunday being an exceptionally warm and sunny day.

Several other parties trailed the two main groups, including the Third Way coalition with a projected 13.5%, the Left with 6.8% and the radical right-wing Confederation party with 7.5%.

The Third Way and the Left belong to Tusk's coalition at the national level. Together they won the fall national election. The result spelled the end of eight years of rule by Law and Justice, which was accused by the European Union of violating democratic standards with changes to the judicial system and public media.

Tusk won on promises to reverse many of those changes and is trying to implement that program, but it isn't easy. For example, a promise to liberalize the strict abortion law is being hampered by conservatives in Tusk's own coalition.

Weather is the hot topic as eclipse spectators stake out their spots in US, Mexico and Canada

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

MESQUITE, Texas (AP) — Eclipse spectators staked out their spots across three countries Sunday, fervently hoping for clear skies despite forecasts calling for clouds along most of the sun-vanishing route.

North America won't see another coast-to-coast total solar eclipse for 21 years, prompting the weekend's worry and mad rush.

Monday's extravaganza stretches from Mexico's Pacific beaches to Canada's rugged Atlantic shores, with 15 U.S. states in between.

"I have arrived in the path of totality!" Ian Kluff announced Sunday afternoon after pulling into Mesquite from Portland, Oregon, a 2,000-mile (3,200-kilometer) drive.

A total eclipse happens when the moon lines up perfectly between Earth and the sun, blotting out the sunlight. That means a little over four minutes of daytime darkness east of Dallas in Mesquite, where locals like Jorge Martinez have the day off. The land surveyor plans to "witness history" from home with his wife and their 3-year-old daughter, Nati.

"Hopefully, she'll remember. She's excited, too," he said following breakfast at Dos Panchas Mexican Restaurant.

Inside the jammed restaurant, manager Adrian Martinez figured on staying open Monday.

"Wish it was going to be sunny like today," he said. "But cloudiness? Hopefully, it still looks pretty good."

Near Ennis, Texas, to the south, the Range Vintage Trailer Resort was also packed, selling out of spots more than a year ago.

"I booked it instantly, then I told my wife, 'We're going to Texas,'" Gotham, England's Chris Lomas said from the trailer resort Sunday. Even if clouds obscure the covered-up sun, "it will still go dark. It's just about sharing the experience with other people," he added.

In Cleveland, the eclipse persuaded women's Final Four fans Matt and Sheila Powell to stick around an extra day after Sunday's game. But they were debating whether to begin their drive home to Missouri Valley, Iowa, early Monday in search of clearer skies along the eclipse's path. "We're trying to be flexible," Powell said.

Even the eclipse professionals were up in the air.

Eclipse mapmaker Michael Zeiler had a perfect record ahead of Monday, seeing 11 out of 11 total solar eclipses after successfully relocating three of those times at the last minute for better weather.

"We are the complete opposite of tornado chasers, always seeking clear skies," Zeiler said in an email over the weekend. This time, though, he was staying put in Fredericksburg, Texas, with his family, 10 of them altogether, and holding onto "a considerable ray of hope."

Farther north, in Buffalo, New York, Jeff Sherman flew in from Somerville, Massachusetts, to catch his second total solar eclipse. After seeing the U.S. coast-to-coast eclipse in 2017, "now I have to see any one that's nearby, he said.

Kluff also enjoyed clear skies for the 2017 eclipse, in Oregon, and rolled into Mesquite wearing the T-shirt from that big event. As for Monday's cloudy forecast across Texas, "at least I'll be around people who are like-minded."

Dacey weather was also predicted almost all the way to Lake Erie, despite Sunday's gorgeous weather. The only places promised clear skies along Monday's narrow 115-mile-wide (185-kilometer-wide) corridor of totality were New England and Canada.

Like everywhere else, the weather was the hot topic at the Buffalo Naval and Military Park on Sunday. By mid-morning, volunteer Tom Villa already had greeted tourists from several states, as well as Canada and Brazil.

"They hope it's like this tomorrow, of course, but you know, the weather is the weather," he said.

UConn, Purdue set to collide in NCAA title game after dominating in a romp-filled March Madness

By AARON BEARD AP Basketball Writer

GLENDALE, Ariz. (AP) — The NCAA Tournament has reached its finish line, down to one game pairing the two best teams that routinely win in romps and boasting a marquee post matchup that features a two-time national player of the year.

Maybe that will make this version of March Madness something to remember after all.

Reigning champion UConn meets Purdue on Monday night in a matchup of top seeds that have combined to win their first five tournament games by an average margin of 22.3 points. They have been at the center of a tournament lacking in drama, with its second-highest average margin of victory since the field expanded to 64 teams in 1985, only one last-second winning shot and few of the highlight-reel thrills that had become a staple of the event.

Don't expect the Huskies or Boilermakers to feel the least bit bothered by their dominance, either.

"People that love basketball and people that really know the game, you watch good basketball," Purdue guard Fletcher Loyer said Sunday. "Obviously the upsets are fun and real cool and they get attention. But real basketball, you like to see the two best teams go at it. And I think that's what we have here."

The tournament's allure remains strong, from casual-at-best basketball fans scribbling out their own bracket projections to TV ratings that keep coming in strong. Yet there's a short list of unexpected moments this year: namely, Jack Gohlke making 10 3-pointers to help Oakland stun blueblood Kentucky in the first round and North Carolina State's wild ride as an 11-seed to the program's first Final Four since the "Cardiac Pack" title run of 1983 under the late Jim Valvano.

As for those last-second shots that live on in tournament lore, the closest this year was KJ Simpson rattling in a baseline jumper with 1.7 seconds left to lift Colorado past Florida 102-100 in Round 1.

Everything else has largely been about UConn's run to greatness, and Purdue's march to redemption from last year's stunning loss to 16th-seeded Fairleigh Dickinson.

"Once you get to this time of year, everything is just you are who your identity is," UConn coach Dan Hurley said. "The way you play, it's very automatic. It just comes down to hoping that it's your night."

UConn (36-3) has looked like a runaway train from before the first game in its push to become the first men's team to repeat as national champions since Florida in 2006 and 2007, and become only the third program to become a repeat winner since UCLA's run of seven straight under John Wooden from 1967-73.

"The way they've won, you know, there's been some teams that have hung in there with them, then they've separated from them," Purdue coach Matt Painter said. "There's some other teams that have gotten flat-out blitzed."

Last year, UConn became the fifth title winner since the 1985 expansion to win all six games by double-digit margins, the closest coming by 13 points. This year, the No. 1 overall seed has been even more dominant; the Huskies' closest game was Saturday night's 86-72 win against Alabama, and they've won five games by a combined 125 points — an average of 25 per night.

By comparison, North Carolina in 2009 holds the record for highest points differential of that elite group at 121 points through six games, so another double-figure win by the Huskies to complete a 6-for-6 run would shatter that record.

UConn forward Alex Karaban figures that's still compelling stuff, too.

"To witness greatness from both teams and to witness greatness from what we did last year, too, I think it's special," Karaban said. "And it doesn't have to be close, doesn't have to be any of that for it to be March Madness. It can be March Madness ... and making history."

As for the Boilermakers (34-4), they have won five games by an average of 19.6 points, including the 63-50 win against N.C. State in the national semifinals. The only close call was battling from 11 down before halftime to beat Tennessee 72-66 — behind 40 points from 7-foot-4 star Zach Edey — to clinch the program's first Final Four trip since 1980.

Now they're in their first title game since their only other appearance, a 1969 loss to Wooden's Bruins,

and Edey will have to tangle with 7-2 defensive force Donovan Clingan.

"It's cool with me winning by enough points where it's not that your palms are sweaty, being nervous like that," Purdue guard Lance Jones said with a broad smile. "So I think having that margin of victory is good."

But that has also been at the forefront of what has been a blowout-filled tournament.

The average margin of victory in this tournament has been 14.4 points, according to Sportradar. Only the 1993 tournament (14.9 points) has had a higher margin since 1985, and the average margin had been 11.8 points for the previous 29 tournaments.

Now Purdue has the final chance to stop UConn's March, and maybe have two teams tussling in a compelling finale.

"You give respect to a team like UConn that can go and handle their business and go and beat a team by 15 to 20 every night," Loyer said. "That's tough to do and respect to them for it. So it's making sure we're ready to go and giving the people a show because it's the two best teams in college basketball. I don't know what more you could ask for."

Caitlin Clark set out to turn Iowa into a winner. She redefined women's college hoops along the way

By WILL GRAVES AP National Writer

CLEVELAND (AP) — Caitlin Clark doesn't want to think about it. Or doesn't want to talk about it. That will come later. Probably much later.

Yes, the Iowa star sees the packed stands. Hears the pop in the crowd whenever she drops in another 3-pointer from the logo. Senses the throng of media around her. Doesn't need to be reminded that her name has been trending pretty much everywhere over four months that have transformed her life and, in some ways, her sport.

The reality is the leading all-time scorer in NCAA Division I history envisioned some of this. A year ago after a painful loss to LSU in the national title game, Clark's lone focus was finding a way back.

One paradigm-shifting season later, that moment arrived Sunday.

And while it ended just the same way last year's final against LSU did — with Clark and the Hawkeyes walking off the floor amid confetti that fell for others as South Carolina celebrated its second title in three years — she tried to keep it in perspective.

Yes, she wanted to win. Badly. And she played like it, particularly during a first quarter in which she poured in 18 points, a record for most points in a quarter in an NCAA final. Yet the deep and relentless Gamecocks wore Clark and the Hawkeyes down. She finished with 30 in all before checking out with 20 seconds to go, receiving a long, loud ovation and a hug from coach Lisa Bluder.

There were no tears. Not publicly anyway. Instead, there was an appreciation for a remarkable journey few deemed possible when she arrived on campus four years ago.

"The emotions will probably hit me over the next couple days," Clark said. "I don't have much time to sit around and sulk and be upset. I don't think that's what I'm about either. Yeah, I'm sad we lost this game, but I'm also so proud of myself, I'm so proud of my teammates, I'm so proud of this program. There's a lot to be proud of."

Clark's impact

The evidence of how far Clark and women's college basketball have come has been everywhere over the last month, nowhere more so than at a Final Four laden with star power both on the court and in the stands.

The arena was nearly full when Clark's now iconic No. 22 made its way onto the floor for Iowa's open practice on Saturday. Jogging out to meet her teammates in a black jersey, shorts and socks, she casually sank a 3-pointer from the wing the first time she touched the ball, a splash through the net that was met with an audible volume spike.

It was that way over the course of 50 mostly informal minutes. The cameras in the arena never wandered too far. The crowd never really went silent. It never really does when Clark is involved.

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It's been that way for a while now. She has navigated it all with an uncommon polish, welcoming the spotlight if only because it gives her the power to point it in whatever direction she chooses.

Clark doesn't view herself as a one of one but a part of a burgeoning ecosystem within women's sports. Sure, a record 14.2 million tuned in to watch Iowa's win over UConn on Friday night. She doesn't view it as a one-off.

"I think you see it across the board, whether it's softball, whether it's gymnastics, volleyball," Clark said. "People want to watch. It's just when they're given the opportunity, the research and the facts show that people love it."

And they love Clark in particular, a full-circle moment for Clark she never saw coming. As a kid she remembers being part of the "Jimmer-Mania" that surrounded former BYU sharpshooter Jimmer Fredette.

Now she's the one with kids in the stands wearing T-shirts in her likeness. She's the one who has created a fiefdom of sorts, selling out basketball games wherever she laces up her black-and-yellow Nikes. It's all a bit strange, if only because this was never her intention.

Growing up she dreamed of helping Iowa chase down the women's basketball powers that be. Now she and the Hawkeyes have elbowed their way among the sport's elite. That was always the goal, not all that has surprisingly come with it: the commercials, the name-drops from hoops royalty like LeBron James and Steph Curry and the way she's helped make women's basketball accessible to an audience that long considered it an afterthought if it considered it at all.

It can be dizzying. She has tried, however, to keep it in perspective, stressing whenever she can that this thing — whatever it is — is hardly just about her. It's about those who came before and those who will come after.

It's a group that is rapidly expanding.

As Clark and the Hawkeyes went through a walk-through that doubled as a celebration for how far they've come, a young girl held a sign that said "I used to play soccer, now I hoop." She's hardly alone.

"I genuinely believe every time that Caitlin breaks a record or comes off a game, there are thousands of boys and girls out shooting and wanting to be 22," Iowa coach Lisa Bluder said. "Thousands."

What's next

The original is ready to cede the stage — at least at this level — to others. It's a moment Clark knows is coming, even though she's made it a point to not get ahead of herself. Getting too caught up in the last-ness of everything would take too much energy from the task at hand.

"I know what's next is soon," she said Sunday. "But at the same time, I'm not blind to the fact that I need to enjoy this, I need to soak this in."

The WNBA draft, where Clark is expected to be taken first overall by the Indiana Fever, awaits on April 15, little more than a week away. Then maybe some time with Team USA before the Paris Olympics.

It's been a whirlwind. It will be a whirlwind. There will be time to reflect down the road. Sunday marked the end of one part of her life. Next week begins the start of another. She's hopeful the people that made their way into the tent stick around for what's to come.

"I don't really get offended when people say I never watched women's basketball before," she said. "I think, one, you're a little late to the party, yes. But, two, that's cool. We're changing the game. We're attracting more people to it."

People that watched to root for her. People that watched to root against her. People that watched out of curiosity. People that watched out of wonder.

Clark doesn't really care how or why they came along for the ride. It simply matters that they did, and that means more than any net-cutting ceremony ever could.

"The way people are not only showing up, but cheering about the game and invested in the game, they understand the game," she said. "They know what's going on. They're passionate about it. To me, that's the coolest thing."

That's the Caitlin Clark thing.

Staley, South Carolina achieve perfection, becoming 10th unbeaten team in NCAA Division I history

By DOUG FEINBERG AP Basketball Writer

CLEVELAND (AP) — South Carolina has joined an elite group, becoming the 10th NCAA Division I women's basketball team to go through a season undefeated.

UConn was the last program to accomplish the feat, in 2016, and this year's Gamecocks team might be the most surprising member of the club. Coach Dawn Staley lost all five starters from last season's team that went into the Final Four unbeaten before losing to Caitlin Clark and Iowa. This time around, the Gamecocks used their size and depth to beat the Hawkeyes 87-75 on Sunday for the title.

South Carolina had a couple scares throughout the season. The Gamecocks were down at the half to Duke, LSU and Tennessee during the regular season. The biggest threat occurred in the SEC Tournament semifinals when they needed a last-second 3-pointer from Kamilla Cardoso to beat Tennessee and keep the perfect run alive.

The nine historic teams that South Carolina joined:

1985-86 Texas

The Longhorns were the first to go unbeaten, finishing at 34-0. They averaged 83.9 points a game and that was before the 3-point line. Texas cruised through the tournament, winning its first two games by 41 and 26 points. The Longhorns had a scare in the regional final before running through the Final Four with a 35-point win over Western Kentucky and a 16-point victory over Southern California to win the championship.

1994-95 UConn

This was the first of 11 championships for the Huskies. Geno Auriemma's squad was led by AP Player of the Year Rebecca Lobo. She averaged 17.1 points while shooting 50% from the field. UConn won its tournament games by an average of 25.3 points with the closest contest coming against Virginia, which ended up losing by four.

The Huskies beat Pat Summitt and Tennessee in the championship game.

1997-98 Tennessee

After losing to UConn in 1995, Tennessee won three consecutive titles. The last of them was a 39-0 season when Summitt's squad was led by the "Three Meeks" — Semeka Randall, Chamique Holdsclaw and Tamika Catchings. Holdsclaw won the first of her two straight AP Player of the Year awards. The Lady Vols capped their historic run with a 93-75 victory over Louisiana Tech in the title game.

2001-02 UConn

This was the beginning of a run of three straight national championships for the Huskies. This team had a star-studded lineup that included five future pros in Sue Bird, Diana Taurasi, Swin Cash, Tamika Williams and Asjha Jones. The quintet each averaged more than 10 points per game. They ran through the NCAA Tournament, when the only game that was within 18 points was the title victory over Oklahoma.

2008-10 UConn

UConn had two straight undefeated seasons that were part of a 90-game winning streak that broke the UCLA men's record for consecutive victories. The Huskies were led by the superstar trio of Maya Moore, Renee Montgomery and Tina Charles, who combined to average over 50 points a game in 2009. The team's closest game in the 2009 tournament was an eight-point, second-round win over Florida. The Huskies steamrolled Louisville by 22 points in the title game. The 2010 perfect run almost ended in the title game when the Huskies trailed Stanford 20-12 at halftime before rallying for a 53-47 victory.

2011-12 Baylor

Brittney Griner led Baylor to its first unbeaten season and the school became the first to win 40 games. Griner had 160 blocks over the course of the season and the Bears had nine Top 25 wins in the regular season. Griner and Odyssey Sims were the stars of the team that helped the Bears win the school's second national championship. Griner had four double-doubles in the tournament capped by an 80-61 victory over Notre Dame in the title game.

2013-14 UConn

The Huskies had another generation of stars that helped the team win four consecutive titles. This was the second of the quartet and UConn had a balanced offense led by Breanna Stewart, Kaleena Mosqueda-Lewis and Stefanie Dolson.

This was the program's first season in the American Athletic Conference after the breakup of the Big East. The new conference posed little challenge for the Huskies. UConn ran through the NCAAs before facing an undefeated Notre Dame team in the title game. The former Big East rivals had never met in a title game before, and UConn came away with the 79-58 win.

2015-16 UConn

This was the end of an era for UConn as Stewart capped her historic career by leading the Huskies to a fourth consecutive title and 11th overall. She earned Most Outstanding Player honors of the Final Four for an unprecedented fourth straight year. She averaged 19.4 points and 8.4 rebounds while shooting nearly 58% from the field. UConn had only one game during the season decided by less than 10 points and went on to beat Syracuse by 31 points in the title game.

International leaders condemn Ecuador after police break into the Mexican Embassy in Quito

By REGINA GARCIA CANO and GABRIELA MOLINA Associated Press

QUITO, Ecuador (AP) — The global condemnation of Ecuador's government for its decision to break into the Mexican Embassy snowballed Sunday with more presidents and other leaders expressing disapproval, shock and dismay.

The criticism came as Mexico's ambassador and other personnel arrived in Mexico City on Sunday afternoon after departing Ecuador's capital, Quito, on a commercial flight. President Andrés Manuel López Obrador severed diplomatic ties with Ecuador immediately after Friday's raid, which international law experts, presidents and diplomats have deemed a violation of long-established international accords.

Alicia Bárcena, Mexico's secretary of foreign relations, thanked the returning diplomats "for defending our embassy in Quito even at the risk of their own physical well-being."

"Not even the dictator Pinochet had dared to enter the Mexican embassy in Chile," she said Sunday, referring to the late Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet. "They entered violently and without authorization, physically assaulting (diplomats). We energetically condemn it."

Police broke through the external doors of the embassy to arrest Jorge Glas, a former vice president who had been residing there since December. He had sought asylum after being indicted on corruption charges.

Bárcena said Mexico plans to challenge the raid on Monday at the World Court in The Hague. She added that 18 countries in Latin America, 20 in Europe and the Organization of American States have backed Mexico.

The Spanish foreign ministry in a statement Sunday said, "The entry by force into the Embassy of Mexico in Quito constitutes a violation of the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations. We call for respect for international law and harmony between Mexico and Ecuador, brotherly countries to Spain and members of the Ibero-American community."

A day earlier, the OAS in a statement reminded its members, which include Ecuador and Mexico, of their obligation not to "invoke norms of domestic law to justify non-compliance with their international obligations."

U.S. State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said "the United States condemns any violation of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, and takes very seriously the obligation of host countries under international law to respect the inviolability of diplomatic missions." He called on the two countries to resolve their differences.

Diplomatic premises are considered foreign soil and "inviolable" under the Vienna treaties and host country law enforcement agencies are not allowed to enter without the permission of the ambassador. People seeking asylum have lived anywhere from days to years at embassies around the world, including

at Ecuador's in London, which housed WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange for seven years as British police could not enter to arrest him.

Glas on Saturday was taken from the attorney general's office in Quito to the port city of Guayaquil, where he is being housed at a maximum-security prison.

Glas' attorney, Sonia Vera, told The Associated Press that officers broke into his room in the Mexican embassy and he resisted when they attempted to put his hands behind his back. She said the officers then "knocked him to the floor, kicked him in the head, in the spine, in the legs, the hands," and when he "couldn't walk, they dragged him out."

Vera on Sunday said the defense team had not been allowed to speak with Glas since his arrest.

Authorities are investigating Glas over alleged irregularities during his management of reconstruction efforts following a powerful earthquake in 2016 that killed hundreds of people. He was previously convicted on two separate bribery and corruption cases.

President Daniel Noboa had not spoken publicly about the raid as of Sunday. On Saturday, Ecuador's Foreign Minister Gabriela Sommerfeld told reporters that the decision to enter the embassy was made by Noboa after considering Glas' "imminent flight risk" and exhausting all possibilities for diplomatic dialogue with Mexico.

Mexico granted Glas asylum hours before the raid. Sommerfeld said "it is not legal to grant asylum to people convicted of common crimes and by competent courts."

Noboa became Ecuador's president last year as the nation battled unprecedented crime tied to drug trafficking. He declared the country in an "internal armed conflict" in January and designated 20 drug-trafficking gangs as terrorist groups that the military had authorization to "neutralize" within the bounds of international humanitarian law.

Noboa's tenure ends in 2025 as he was only elected to finish the term of former President Guillermo Lasso.

María Dolores Miño, director of Ecuador's independent Law and Justice Observatory and a law professor at the International University of Ecuador, said the raid was not only "extremely embarrassing" for Ecuador but also opens up the possibility of serious repercussions.

"The scope of a political sanction and its impact should not be underestimated," Miño said. She added that although the process that Mexico will initiate before the World Court will take time "there will come a time when we have that sentence, which will include economic reparations that will have to be paid with Ecuadorians' money."

Victims of Montana asbestos pollution that killed hundreds take Warren Buffett's railroad to court

By MATTHEW BROWN and AMY BETH HANSON Associated Press

LIBBY, Mont. (AP) — Paul Resch remembers playing baseball as a kid on a field constructed from asbestos-tainted vermiculite, mere yards from railroad tracks where trains kicked up clouds of dust as they hauled the contaminated material from a mountaintop mine through the northwestern Montana town of Libby. He liked to sneak into vermiculite-filled storage bins at an adjacent rail yard, to trap pigeons that he would feed, during long days spent by the tracks along the Kootenai River.

Today, Resch, 61, is battling an asbestos-related disease that has severely scarred his left lung. He's easily winded, quickly tires and knows there is no cure for an illness that could suffocate him over time.

"At some point, probably everybody got exposed to it," he said, speaking of asbestos-tainted vermiculite. "There was piles of it along the railroad tracks. ... You would get clouds of dust blowing around downtown."

Almost 25 years after federal authorities responding to news reports of deaths and illnesses descended on Libby, a town of about 3,000 people near the U.S.-Canada border, some asbestos victims and their family members are seeking to hold publicly accountable one of the major corporate players in the tragedy: BNSF Railway.

Hundreds of people died and more than 3,000 have been sickened from asbestos exposure in the Libby area, according to researchers and health officials. Texas-based BNSF faces accusations of negligence

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and wrongful death for failing to control clouds of contaminated dust that used to swirl from the rail yard and settle across Libby's neighborhoods.

The vermiculite was shipped by rail from Libby for use as insulation in homes and businesses across the U.S.

The first trial among what attorneys say are hundreds of lawsuits against BNSF for its alleged role polluting the Libby community is scheduled to begin Monday.

The railroad — owned by Warren Buffett's Berkshire Hathaway Inc. — has denied responsibility in court filings and declined further comment.

Resch works at an auto dealership in Libby and his wife is listed as a plaintiff in a pending lawsuit against BNSF in Montana's asbestos claims court. He's uncertain whether his sickness came from the rail yard. The Libby high school track included contaminated vermiculite, as did insulation in the walls and attics of homes he entered during his two decades as a volunteer firefighter.

The plaintiffs for the upcoming trial against BNSF, the estates of Joyce Walder and Thomas Wells, lived near the Libby rail yard and moved away decades ago. Both died in 2020 of mesothelioma, a rare lung cancer caused by asbestos that is disproportionately common in Libby.

The mine a few miles outside town once produced up to 80% of global vermiculite supplies. It closed in 1990. Nine years later, the Environmental Protection Agency arrived in Libby and a subsequent cleanup has cost an estimated \$600 million, with most covered by taxpayer money. It's ongoing, but authorities say asbestos volumes in downtown Libby's air are 100,000 times lower than when the mine was operating.

Awareness about the dangers of asbestos grew significantly over the intervening years, and last month the EPA banned the last remaining industrial uses of asbestos in the U.S.

The ban did not include the type of asbestos fiber found in Libby or address so-called "legacy" asbestos that's already in homes, schools and businesses. A long-awaited government analysis of the remaining risks is due by Dec. 1.

Asbestos doesn't burn and resists corrosion, making it long lasting in the environment. People who inhale the needle-shaped fibers can develop health problems as many as 40 years after exposure. Health officials expect to grapple with newly diagnosed cases of asbestos disease for decades.

The EPA declared the nation's first ever public health emergency under the Superfund cleanup program in Libby in 2009. The pollution led to civil claims from thousands of people who worked for the mine or the railroad, or who lived in the Libby area.

During a yearslong cleanup of the Libby rail yard that began in 2003, crews excavated nearly the entire yard, removing about 18,000 tons of contaminated soil. In 2020, BNSF signed a consent decree with federal authorities resolving its cleanup work in Libby and nearby Troy, plus a 42-mile stretch (68 kilometers) of railroad right-of-way.

Last year, BNSF won a federal lawsuit against an asbestos treatment clinic in Libby that a jury found submitted 337 false asbestos claims, making patients eligible for Medicare and other benefits. The judge overseeing the case ordered the Center for Asbestos Related Disease to pay almost \$6 million in penalties and damages, forcing the facility into bankruptcy. It continues to operate with reduced staff.

Some asbestos victims viewed the case as a ploy to discredit the clinic and undermine lawsuits against the railroad. BNSF said the verdict would deter "future misconduct" by the clinic.

In the months leading up to this week's trial, attorneys for BNSF repeatedly tried to deflect blame for people getting sick, including by pointing to the actions of W.R. Grace and Co., which owned the mine from 1963 until it closed. They also questioned whether other asbestos sources could have caused the two plaintiffs' illnesses and suggested Walder and Wells would have been trespassing on railroad property.

U.S. District Court Judge Brian Morris blocked BNSF from blaming the conduct of others as a means of escaping liability. And he said the law doesn't support the notion that trespassing reduces a property owner's duty not to cause harm.

Morris has yet to issue a definitive ruling on another key issue: the railroad's claim that its obligation to ship goods for paying customers exempts it from liability.

The plaintiffs argue the rail yard in downtown Libby — where Resch once played in piles of vermiculite

— was used for storage and not just transportation, meaning the railroad is not exempt.

Montana's Supreme Court has ruled in a separate case that BNSF and its predecessors were more involved in the mine than simply shipping its product.

Mine owner W.R. Grace filed for bankruptcy in 2001 and paid \$1.8 billion into an asbestos trust fund to settle future cases. It paid about \$270 million to government agencies for environmental damages and cleanup work. The state of Montana was also faulted in Libby, for failing to warn residents about asbestos exposure. It paid settlements totaling \$68 million to about 2,000 plaintiffs.

BNSF has settled some previous lawsuits for undisclosed amounts, attorneys for plaintiffs said. A second trial against the railroad over the death of a Libby resident is scheduled for May in federal court in Missoula.

"I sure hope that they give those folks justice," Resch said about the upcoming trials. "I mean everybody took part in it as far as corporate America goes." _____

This story has been corrected to reflect the proper spelling of Warren Buffett's last name. It is Buffett, not Buffet.

In call with Blinken, father of killed aid worker urges tougher US stance on Israel in Gaza

By STEPHANY MATAT Associated Press

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. (AP) — When America's top diplomat called with condolences over the killing of John Flickinger's son in the Israeli airstrikes on a World Central Kitchen aid convoy in Gaza, Flickinger knew what he wanted to say.

The grieving father told Secretary of State Antony Blinken the killings by Israel in the Hamas-run territory must end, and that the United States needs to use its power and leverage over its closest Mideast ally to make that happen.

Flickinger's 33-year-old son, Jacob Flickinger, a dual U.S. and Canadian citizen, was among the seven humanitarian workers killed in the April 1 drone strikes.

"If the United States threatened to suspend aid to Israel, maybe my son would be alive today," John Flickinger told The Associated Press in describing his 30-minute conversation Saturday with Blinken.

Flickinger said Blinken did not pledge any new policy actions but said the Biden administration had sent a strong message to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that the relationship between the United States and Israel may change if the Israeli Defense Forces do not show more care for the fate of civilians in Gaza.

"I'm hopeful that this is the last straw, that the United States will suspend aid and will take meaningful action to leverage change in the way Israel is conducting this war," John Flickinger said.

Flickinger said Blinken also spoke with his son's partner, Sandy Leclerc, who is left to care for their 1-year-old son, Jasper.

In addition to Jacob Flickinger, three British nationals, an Australian, a Polish national and a Palestinian were killed in the strikes.

John Flickinger described his son as "larger than life," a "loving son, a devoted dad and new father and a very loving companion to his life partner."

Jacob Flickinger was remembered as a lover of the outdoors who ran survival training retreats and was involved in mountaineering, rock climbing and other adventure activities. He spent about 11 years serving in the Canadian Armed Forces, including eight months in Afghanistan.

The elder Flickinger said his son knew going to Gaza was risky, but he discussed it with family members and volunteered in hopes of helping Palestinians in Gaza that aide groups say face imminent famine.

"He died doing what he loved, which was serving and helping others," said Flickinger, whose own non-profit, Breakthrough Miami, exposes underrepresented students to academic opportunities and prepares them for college.

World Central Kitchen representatives have said they informed the Israeli military of their movements and the presence of their convoy.

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Israeli officials have called the drone strikes a mistake, and on Friday the military said it dismissed two officers and reprimanded three others for their roles. The officers mishandled critical information and violated rules of engagement, the military said.

But John Flickinger said that in his view the strike "was a deliberate attempt to intimidate aid workers and to stop the flow of humanitarian aid."

World Central Kitchen has since ceased food deliveries in Gaza, Flickinger noted, and he said it looks like Israel is "using food as a weapon."

The Canadian government has been communicating with the family and is offering financial support to move Leclerc and Jasper from Costa Rica, where the family lives, back to Quebec province to be closer to family, Flickinger said.

Flickinger said his son's remains are in Cairo pending the issuance of a death certificate by Palestinian authorities. Once that happens, the family has made arrangements for them to be transported to Quebec.

'Godzilla x Kong' maintains box-office dominion in second weekend

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — "Godzilla x Kong: The New Empire" easily swatted away a pair of challengers to hold on to the top spot at the box office for the second week in a row, according to studio estimates Sunday.

After its above-expectations \$80 million launch last weekend, the MonsterVerse mashup brought in \$31.7 million over its second weekend, a 60% drop from its debut. The Warner Bros. and Legendary Pictures release, directed by Adam Wingard, has thus far outperformed any of the studio's recent monster films except for 2014's "Godzilla."

But with \$361.1 million worldwide in two weeks, "Godzilla x Kong" could ultimately leapfrog the \$529 million global haul of 2014's "Godzilla." The latest installment, in which Godzilla and Kong team up, cost about \$135 million to produce.

"Godzilla x Kong" extended its box-office reign as another primate-themed movie arrived in theaters. Dev Patel's "Monkey Man," an India-set revenge thriller released by Universal Pictures, opened in 3,029 North American theaters with an estimated \$10.1 million.

That marked a strong debut for Patel's modestly budgeted directorial debut in which he stars in a bloody, politically charged action extravaganza. "Monkey Man," which cost about \$10 million to make, was dropped by its original studio, Netflix, after which Jordan Peele and his Monkeypaw Productions swooped in.

The weekend's other new wide release, "The First Omen," from Disney's 20th Century Studios, struggled to make a big impact with moviegoers. It came in fourth with an estimated \$8.4 million in ticket sales in 3,375 theaters, while collecting an additional \$9.1 million overseas. The R-rated horror film, which cost about \$30 million to make, is a prequel to the 1976 Richard Donner-directed original starring Gregory Peck and Lee Remick.

This version, directed by Arkasha Stevenson and starring Nell Tiger Free, Tawfeek Barhom and Bill Nighy, follows 2006's "The Omen," which opened to \$16 million and ultimately grossed \$119 million.

The tepid opening for "The First Omen" allowed Sony's "Ghostbusters: Frozen Empire" to take third place with \$9 million in its third weekend of release. The sci-fi comedy sequel has collected \$88.8 million domestically and \$138 million worldwide.

Warner Bros.' "Dune: Part Two" continues to perform strongly. It added \$7.2 million in its sixth week, dipping just 37%, to bring its domestic total to \$264 million.

One of the week's biggest performers was in China, where Hayao Miyazaki's Oscar-winning "The Boy and the Heron" landed in theaters. The acclaimed Japanese anime is setting records for a non-Chinese animated film. After opening Wednesday, its five-day total surpassed \$70 million, a new high mark for Miyazaki and Studio Ghibli.

Estimated ticket sales are for Friday through Sunday at U.S. and Canadian theaters, according to Comscore. Final domestic figures will be released Monday.

1. "Godzilla x Kong: The New Empire," \$31.7 million.

2. "Monkey Man," \$10.1 million.
3. "Ghostbusters: Frozen Empire," \$9 million.
4. "The First Omen," \$8.4 million.
5. "Kung Fu Panda 4," \$7.9 million.
6. "Dune: Part Two," \$7.2 million.
7. "Someone Like You," \$3 million.
8. "Wicked Little Letters," \$1.6 million.
9. "Arthur the King," \$1.5 million.
10. "Immaculate," \$1.4 million.

Many cancer drugs remain unproven 5 years after accelerated approval, a study finds

By CARLA K. JOHNSON AP Medical Writer

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration's accelerated approval program is meant to give patients early access to promising drugs. But how often do these drugs actually improve or extend patients' lives?

In a new study, researchers found that most cancer drugs granted accelerated approval do not demonstrate such benefits within five years.

"Five years after the initial accelerated approval, you should have a definitive answer," said Dr. Ezekiel Emanuel, a cancer specialist and bioethicist at the University of Pennsylvania who was not involved in the research. "Thousands of people are getting those drugs. That seems a mistake if we don't know whether they work or not."

The program was created in 1992 to speed access to HIV drugs. Today, 85% of accelerated approvals go to cancer drugs.

It allows the FDA to grant early approval to drugs that show promising initial results for treating debilitating or fatal diseases. In exchange, drug companies are expected to do rigorous testing and produce better evidence before gaining full approval.

Patients get access to drugs earlier, but the tradeoff means some of the medications don't pan out. It's up to the FDA or the drugmaker to withdraw disappointing drugs, and sometimes the FDA has decided that less definitive evidence is good enough for a full approval.

The new study found that between 2013 and 2017, there were 46 cancer drugs granted accelerated approval. Of those, 63% were converted to regular approval even though only 43% demonstrated a clinical benefit in confirmatory trials.

The research was published in the Journal of the American Medical Association and discussed at the American Association for Cancer Research annual meeting in San Diego on Sunday.

It's unclear how much cancer patients understand about drugs with accelerated approval, said study co-author Dr. Edward Cliff of Harvard Medical School.

"We raise the question: Is that uncertainty being conveyed to patients?" Cliff said.

Drugs that got accelerated approval may be the only option for patients with rare or advanced cancers, said Dr. Jennifer Litton of MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston, who was not involved in the study.

It's important for doctors to carefully explain the evidence, Litton said.

"It might be shrinking of tumor. It might be how long the tumor stays stable," Litton said. "You can provide the data you have, but you shouldn't overpromise."

Congress recently updated the program, giving the FDA more authority and streamlining the process for withdrawing drugs when companies don't meet their commitments.

The changes allow the agency "to withdraw approval for a drug approved under accelerated approval, when appropriate, more quickly," FDA spokesperson Cherie Duvall-Jones wrote in an email. The FDA can now require that a confirmatory trial be underway when it grants preliminary approval, which speeds up the process of verifying whether a drug works, she said.

Top UN court will hold hearings in a case accusing Germany of facilitating Israel's Gaza conflict

By MIKE CORDER Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — Preliminary hearings open Monday at the United Nations' top court in a case that seeks an end to German military and other aid to Israel, based on claims that Berlin is "facilitating" acts of genocide and breaches of international law in the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza.

Israel strongly denies its military campaign amounts to breaches of the Genocide Convention.

While the case brought by Nicaragua centers on Germany, it indirectly takes aim at Israel's military campaign in Gaza following the deadly Oct. 7 attacks when Hamas-led militants stormed into southern Israel, killing some 1,200 people. More than 33,000 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza, according to the territory's Health Ministry. Its toll doesn't differentiate between civilians and combatants, but it has said women and children make up the majority of the dead.

"We are calm and we will set out our legal position in court," German Foreign Ministry spokesperson Sebastian Fischer said ahead of the hearings.

"We reject Nicaragua's accusations," Fischer told reporters in Berlin on Friday. "Germany has breached neither the genocide convention nor international humanitarian law, and we will set this out in detail before the International Court of Justice."

Nicaragua has asked the court to hand down preliminary orders known as provisional measures, including that Germany "immediately suspend its aid to Israel, in particular its military assistance including military equipment in so far as this aid may be used in the violation of the Genocide Convention" and international law.

The court will likely take weeks to deliver its preliminary decision and Nicaragua's case will probably drag on for years.

Monday's hearing at the world court comes amid growing calls for allies to stop supplying arms to Israel as its six-month campaign continues to lay waste to Gaza.

The offensive has displaced the vast majority of Gaza's population. Food is scarce, the U.N. says famine is approaching and few Palestinians have been able to leave the besieged territory.

"The case next week in The Hague will likely further galvanize opposition to any support for Israel," said Mary Ellen O'Connell, a professor of law and international peace studies at the University of Notre Dame.

On Friday, the U.N.'s top human rights body called on countries to stop selling or shipping weapons to Israel. The United States and Germany opposed the resolution.

Also, hundreds of British jurists, including three retired Supreme Court judges, have called on their government to suspend arms sales to Israel after three U.K. citizens were among seven aid workers from the charity World Central Kitchen killed in Israeli strikes. Israel said the attack on the aid workers was a mistake caused by "misidentification."

Germany has for decades been a staunch supporter of Israel. Days after the Oct. 7 attack by Hamas, Chancellor Olaf Scholz explained why: "Our own history, our responsibility arising from the Holocaust, makes it a perpetual task for us to stand up for the security of the state of Israel," he told lawmakers.

Berlin, however, has gradually shifted its tone as civilian casualties in Gaza have soared, becoming increasingly critical of the humanitarian situation in Gaza and spoken out against a ground offensive in Rafah.

Nicaragua's government, which has historical links with Palestinian organizations dating back to their support for the 1979 Sandinista revolution, was itself accused earlier this year by U.N.-backed human rights experts of systematic human rights abuses "tantamount to crimes against humanity." The government of President Daniel Ortega fiercely rejected the allegations.

In January, the ICJ imposed provisional measures ordering Israel to do all it can to prevent death, destruction and acts of genocide in Gaza. The orders came in a case filed by South Africa accusing Israel of breaching the Genocide Convention.

The court last week ordered Israel to take measures to improve the humanitarian situation in Gaza, including opening more land crossings to allow food, water, fuel and other supplies into the war-ravaged

enclave.

On Friday, Israel said it's taking steps to increase the flow of humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip, including reopening a key border crossing into northern Gaza.

Nicaragua argues that by giving Israel political, financial and military support and by defunding the United Nations aid agency for Palestinians, UNRWA, "Germany is facilitating the commission of genocide and, in any case has failed in its obligation to do everything possible to prevent the commission of genocide."

Israel strongly denies that its assault amounts to genocidal acts, saying it is acting in self defense. Israeli legal adviser Tal Becker told judges at the court in January that the country is fighting a "war it did not start and did not want."

Yellen says US-China relationship on 'more stable footing' but more can be done to improve ties

By FATIMA HUSSEIN and KEN MORITSUGU Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen sent a message of mutual cooperation at a meeting Sunday with Chinese Premier Li Qiang, highlighting the improvement in relations since her visit to China last year while recognizing that major differences remain.

After focusing on trade and economic issues for the first two days of her visit, Yellen turned to the broader U.S.-China relationship in the meeting with Li, one of China's top leaders.

"While we have more to do, I believe that, over the past year, we have put our bilateral relationship on more stable footing," she said in the ornate Fujian room of the Great Hall of the People on the west side of Tiananmen Square.

Yellen, who is regarded favorably in China, is the first Cabinet member to visit since Presidents Joe Biden and Xi Jinping met in California in November in a carefully orchestrated meeting to set the troubled relationship between their countries on a better course.

Li, in remarks before the media before their meeting, said the high media interest in Yellen's visit "shows the high expectation they have ... and also the expectation and hope to grow" the U.S.-China relationship.

China's emergence as an economic and military power has created a rivalry with the long dominant United States.

The U.S. has restricted China's access to advanced semiconductors and other technology, saying it could be used for military purposes. China, still a middle-income country, accuses the U.S. of trying to constrain its economic development.

At their meeting, Li told Yellen that China hopes the U.S. won't politicize economic and trade issues or overstretch the definition of national security, the official Xinhua News Agency said.

Yellen came to China with trade practices that put American companies and workers at an unfair competitive disadvantage at the top of her agenda.

Chinese government subsidies and other policy support have encouraged solar panel and EV makers in China to invest in factories, building far more production capacity than the domestic market can absorb.

While that has driven down prices for consumers, Western governments fear that that capacity will flood their markets with low-priced exports, threatening American and European jobs.

But Li argued that the development of the green energy industry in China would make an important contribution to combating climate change, the Xinhua report said.

The U.S. and China on Saturday agreed to hold "intensive exchanges" on more balanced economic growth, according to a U.S. statement issued after Yellen and Chinese Vice Premier He Lifeng held extended meetings over two days in the southern city of Guangzhou.

They also agreed to start exchanges on combating money laundering. It was not immediately clear when and where the talks would take place.

"As the world's two largest economies, we have a duty to our own countries and to the world to responsibly manage our complex relationship and to cooperate and show leadership on addressing pressing

global challenges," Yellen said.

Relations were at a low point when she visited in July in the early stages of efforts to improve ties.

China had cut off talks on a range of issues in anger over a visit by then U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to Taiwan in 2022. Tensions were further inflamed by a Chinese balloon that traversed America in early 2023 before being shot down by a U.S. fighter jet.

In that context, Yellen's visit is an attempt to build on a fragile stability that has been established.

The end of her trip will overlap with a visit by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov on Monday and Tuesday that was announced by China's Foreign Ministry on Sunday.

China's sharp rise in trade with the Kremlin has increased since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. While China does not provide weapons to Russia, the U.S. has expressed concern about China's sale of items to Russia that can have military as well as civilian uses.

During a press conference Saturday, Yellen addressed the U.S. relationship with China on the subject of Russia.

"We think there's more to do, but I do see it as an area where we've agreed to cooperate and we've already seen some meaningful progress," she said. "They understand how serious an issue this is to us."

Yellen also met Sunday with Beijing Mayor Yin Yong and told him that "local governments play a critical (economic) role, from boosting consumption to addressing overinvestment," adding that Beijing is particularly important in China.

"I believe that to understand China's economy and its economic future, engagement with local government is essential," Yellen said.

Later Sunday, Yellen met with students and faculty at Peking University.

2 women who say abortion restrictions put them in medical peril feel compelled to campaign for Biden

By COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A Texas woman who went into premature labor, developed sepsis and nearly died and a Louisiana woman who said restrictive abortion laws prevented her from getting medical help for a miscarriage are now campaigning for President Joe Biden as the Democrat highlights how women's health is being affected by the overturning of federal abortion protections.

Amanda Zurawski and Kaitlyn Joshua will travel to North Carolina and Wisconsin over the next two weeks to meet with doctors, local officials and voters. The Biden campaign sees their stories as potent firsthand accounts of the growing medical peril for many women as abortion restrictions pushed by Republicans complicate health care.

"The abortion topic is a very heavy topic, and I understand that, said Joshua, 31, of Baton Rouge, Louisiana. "But I also understand and believe that the Biden and Harris administration is the only administration that could do anything remotely close to addressing the abortion bans ... and then also doing a deeper dive into research and understanding women's health in general."

Biden and Democrats see reproductive health as a major driver for the 2024 election as the president and his proxies blame Republican Donald Trump, whose judicial nominations paved the way for the Supreme Court's conservative majority decision in 2022 that overturned abortion rights codified by Roe v. Wade.

Republicans, including Trump, are struggling to figure out how to talk about the issue, if at all. Trump has both taken credit for the overturning of Roe and suggested abortion should be legal until 15 weeks, and has promised to make a statement outlining his policies this week.

Since the high court's ruling, voters have approved a number of statewide ballot initiatives to preserve or expand the right to abortion. Support for abortion access drove women to the polls during the 2022 midterm elections, delivering Democrats unexpected success.

About two-thirds of Americans say abortion should generally be legal, according to polling by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. Only about one-quarter say abortion should always be legal and only about 1 in 10 say it should always be illegal.

Joshua and her husband were excited to be having a second baby. But she started to experience bleeding and serious pain at about 11 weeks. She suspected she was miscarrying.

At an emergency room in Baton Rouge, doctors examined her but wouldn't confirm she was miscarrying or discuss medical options, she said. She was sent home to wait. The bleeding worsened, and she went to a second hospital where again, doctors sent her home and told her to contact her doctor in a few days. A midwife eventually confirmed that Joshua had miscarried.

"Something that sounds as simple as dealing with a miscarriage can't even be met with a true diagnosis anymore," Joshua said. "It's kind of wild, right? And it's really frightening."

Joshua and Zurawski will be in Raleigh, Durham and Charlotte, North Carolina, on Wednesday, a state Biden hopes to flip. The state has enacted a law banning most abortions after 12 weeks, overriding a veto from the Democratic governor.

The week after that, they will visit Milwaukee, Eau Claire and Madison, Wisconsin, a state Biden won in 2020. Republicans in the state Assembly tried to set up a statewide referendum on the April ballot banning abortion after 14 weeks of pregnancy — more restrictive than current law — but the legislative session ended without a state Senate vote.

Both women said they felt compelled to get into politics after their own experiences.

"People don't get how bad it is, and they don't get how bleak it is," Zurawski said. "And so the more we continue to share our stories. ... I think it's really important to spread awareness and paint this picture."

Zurawski, 37, of Austin sued Texas last year after she and other women could not get medical care because of the state's abortion laws. She had been in her second trimester, after 18 months of fertility treatments, when she went into early labor and was told the baby would not survive. Doctors said they could not intervene to provide an abortion because Zurawski wasn't in enough medical danger.

Zurawski had to wait. Three days later, her condition rapidly worsened and she developed sepsis, a dangerous medical condition in which the body responds improperly to an infection. She stabilized long enough to deliver a stillborn girl, whom she named Willow. Zurawski then spent days in intensive care.

She recently returned from a family trip to Disney World and said, "I thought I'd be coming home from that trip with a 1-year-old and be putting her down for a nap."

"But instead I'm doing this interview to help campaign for Biden," Zurawski said. "It's just the complete opposite world than I ever would have seen myself in."

Kagame blames the world's inaction as Rwanda commemorates the 1994 genocide with lingering scars

By RODNEY MUHUMUZA and IGNATIUS SSUUNA Associated Press

KIGALI, Rwanda (AP) — Rwandan President Paul Kagame blamed the inaction of the international community for allowing the 1994 genocide to happen as Rwandans on Sunday commemorated 30 years since an estimated 800,000 people were killed by government-backed extremists.

Rwanda has shown strong recovery and economic growth in the years since, but scars remain and there are questions about whether genuine reconciliation has been achieved under the long rule of Kagame, whose rebel movement stopped the genocide and seized power. He has been praised by many for bringing relative stability but vilified by others for his intolerance of dissent.

Kagame led somber commemoration events in the capital, Kigali. Foreign visitors included a delegation led by Bill Clinton, the U.S. president during the genocide, and Israeli President Isaac Herzog.

The killings were ignited when a plane carrying then-President Juvénal Habyarimana, a Hutu, was shot down over Kigali. The Tutsis were blamed for downing the plane and killing the president. and became targets in massacres led by Hutu extremists that lasted over 100 days. Some moderate Hutus who tried to protect members of the Tutsi minority were also killed.

Rwandan authorities have long blamed the international community for ignoring warnings about the killings, and some Western leaders have expressed regret.

Clinton, after leaving office, cited the Rwandan genocide as a failure of his administration. French Presi-

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dent Emmanuel Macron, in a prerecorded video ahead of Sunday's ceremonies, said that France and its allies could have stopped the genocide but lacked the will to do so. Macron's declaration came three years after he acknowledged the "overwhelming responsibility" of France — Rwanda's closest European ally in 1994 — for failing to stop Rwanda's slide into the slaughter.

"It was the international community which failed all of us, whether from contempt or cowardice," Kagame said in a speech after lighting a flame of remembrance and laying a wreath at a memorial site holding the remains of 250,000 genocide victims in Kigali.

He also shared the story of a cousin whose family he tried to save with the help of U.N. peacekeepers. She did not survive.

"We will never forget the horrors of those 100 days, the pain and loss suffered by the people of Rwanda, or the shared humanity that connects us all, which hate can never overcome," U.S. President Joe Biden said in a statement.

Rwanda's ethnic composition remains largely unchanged since 1994, with a Hutu majority. The Tutsis account for 14% and the Twa just 1% of Rwanda's 14 million people. Kagame's Tutsi-dominated government has outlawed any form of organization along ethnic lines, as part of efforts to build a uniform Rwandan identity.

National ID cards no longer identify citizens by ethnic group, and authorities imposed a tough penal code to prosecute those suspected of denying the genocide or the "ideology" behind it. Some observers say the law has been used to silence critics who question the government's policies.

Rights groups have accused Kagame's soldiers of carrying out some killings during and after the genocide in apparent revenge, but Rwandan authorities see the allegations as an attempt to rewrite history. Kagame has previously said that his forces showed restraint in the face of genocide.

Kagame said Sunday that Rwandans are disgusted by critics who have "questioned and revised" the history of the genocide. "Rwandans will always challenge it," he said, adding that preventing another genocide requires political measures such as those now in place.

"Our journey has been long and tough," he said. "Rwanda was completely humbled by the magnitude of our loss, and the lessons we learned are engraved in blood. But the tremendous progress of our country is plain to see and it is the result of the choice we made together to resurrect our nation."

He added, "The foundation of everything is unity. That was the first choice — to believe in the idea of a united Rwanda and live accordingly."

A night vigil will be held later on Sunday as part of a week of remembrance activities.

Naphtal Ahishakiye, the head of Ibuka, a prominent group of survivors, told The Associated Press that keeping the memory of the genocide alive helps fight the mentality that allowed neighbors to turn on each other, killing even children. Mass graves are still being discovered across Rwanda 30 years later, a reminder of the scale of the killings.

"It's a time to learn what happened, why it happened, what are the consequences of genocide to us as genocide survivors, to our country, and to the international community," said Ahishakiye.

He said his country has come a long way since the 1990s, when only survivors and government officials participated in commemoration events. "But today even those who are family members of perpetrators come to participate."

Kagame, who grew up a refugee in neighboring Uganda, has been Rwanda's de facto ruler, first as vice president from 1994 to 2000, then as acting president. He was voted into office in 2003 and has since been reelected multiple times. A candidate for elections set for July, he won the last election with nearly 99% of the vote.

Rights activists and others say the authoritarian Kagame has created a climate of fear that discourages open and free discussion of national issues. Critics have accused the government of forcing opponents to flee, jailing or making them disappear while some are killed under mysterious circumstances. Kagame's most serious political rivals are his Tutsi ex-comrades now living in exile.

Though mostly peaceful, Rwanda also has had troubled relations with its neighbors.

Recently, tensions have flared with Congo, with the two countries' leaders accusing one another of sup-

porting armed groups. Relations have been tense with Burundi as well over allegations that Kigali is backing a rebel group attacking Burundi. And relations with Uganda are yet to fully normalize after a period of tensions stemming from Rwandan allegations that Uganda was backing rebels opposed to Kagame.

Latter-day Saints leader addresses congregants without a word on racial or LGBTQ+ issues

By HANNAH SCHOENBAUM Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — The oldest-ever president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints urged congregants on Sunday to spend more time worshipping in temples. He backed up the invitation by announcing plans to build 15 new places of worship around the globe.

Russell M. Nelson announced the planned construction in a pre-recorded closing speech at the twice-annual Salt Lake City conference. It's traditionally watched by millions worldwide.

"Nothing will help you more to hold fast to the iron rod than worshipping in the temple as regularly as your circumstances permit," Nelson said.

The 99-year-old retired heart surgeon attended both days of the conference in a wheelchair, but did not speak live. He was absent from the fall 2023 conference due to a back injury.

As he nears his 100th birthday, the president has created a mixed legacy that some churchgoers say has made the faith's global membership feel more included but has left LGBTQ+ and other minority members feeling unsupported. Sunday's address mentioned none of it.

Nelson had a conservative track record in his previous position on the church's leadership panel, which led many to predict he wouldn't make any significant changes as president. Religious scholars now say his six years in office have been anything but stagnant.

"He's shaken up the church in a lot of ways — changed everything from what happens every Sunday at regular worship services to the long-term trajectory of where the church is pointed," said Matthew Bowman, a religion professor at Claremont Graduate Universities.

Nelson, who notes he has been alive for more than half of the faith's 194-year history, is known for leading the church through the COVID-19 pandemic and urging people to stop referring to Latter-day Saints as "Mormons," a sharp shift after previous church leaders spent millions over decades to promote the moniker.

He severed the faith's century-long ties with the Boy Scouts of America, creating the church's own youth program that also could serve the more than half of its 17 million members who live outside the U.S. and Canada. He appointed non-American leaders to the top governing body and pushed to publish regional hymnbooks celebrating local music and culture worldwide.

The president shortened Sunday services and spearheaded a massive building campaign totaling more than 150 temples, even before Sunday's announcement of 15 more locations to come. The drive accelerates a long-running effort to dot the world with the faith's lavish houses of worship.

He also forged a formal partnership with the NAACP. Until 1978, the church banned Black men from the lay priesthood, a policy rooted in the belief that black skin was a curse. The church disavowed the reasons behind the ban in a 2013 essay, but never issued a formal apology. It remains one of the most sensitive topics for the Utah-based religion.

Considered a prophet by church members, Nelson has largely avoided taking a position on hot-button issues.

"He's not a culture warrior," said Patrick Mason, a religion and history professor at Utah State University. "But in terms of church presidents over the past century, I would put him in the the top two or three who, by the time of their death, will have left their mark on the church."

Mason described Nelson's administration as "gentler" and more welcoming than those of previous presidents, even as he strictly interprets religious doctrine.

Under Nelson, the church insists LGBTQ+ members are welcome, but maintains that same-sex marriage is a sin. It also limits participation by transgender members who pursue gender-affirming medical procedures or change their names, pronouns or how they dress.

Nelson's early actions as president gave some LGBTQ+ members hope that he might change those policies.

He made waves in 2019 when he rescinded controversial rules banning baptisms for the children of gay parents and branding same-sex couples as heretics who could face excommunication. His administration later supported a 2022 law protecting same-sex marriage at the federal level because it included what Nelson's top adviser, Dallin H. Oaks, called "necessary protections for religious freedom."

Oaks, 91, is Nelson's likely successor. He has reminded followers at several past conferences that the church believes children should be raised by a married man and woman.

That message is echoed in what's known as the "musket fire speech," now required reading at Brigham Young University. In it, a high-ranking church leader urges faculty and students to take up their intellectual "muskets" to defend the faith's stance on marriage and family values.

Fred Bowers, president of the LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints support group Affirmation, pointed to the speech as one of many recent examples of how the faith has made LGBTQ+ members feel isolated.

Despite ongoing tensions between church leadership and LGBTQ+ members, Nelson repeatedly has instructed congregants to be kind to those whose experiences they might not understand.

"One of the easiest ways to identify a true follower of Jesus Christ," he said in his conference speech last spring, "is by how compassionately that person treats other people."

Ecuadorian police broke into Mexico's embassy, sparking outrage. Why is this such a big deal?

By MEGAN JANETSKY Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Diplomatic relations between Mexico and Ecuador dramatically imploded after Ecuadorian police burst into Mexico's embassy in Quito and arrested Jorge Glas, Ecuador's former vice president.

Glas, arrested late Friday, had been convicted on charges of bribery and corruption and remains under investigation for other potential crimes. Following the arrest, leaders from across the Americas voiced outrage at the incident and Mexico's president announced he was breaking diplomatic ties with Ecuador.

But in a region that's no stranger to political explosions, what has provoked such fierce outrage?

International law experts and leaders across the region have said that the move violated long-established international laws that few rulers have dared to breach. It's almost an unprecedented act. To date, there are only a tiny handful of cases of raids on embassies on the books.

By forcing their way into the Mexican embassy to make the arrest, Ecuadorian police effectively intruded onto Mexican sovereign territory, said Natalia Saltalamacchia, a professor on international relations at the Autonomous Technological Institute of Mexico. Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador called the break-in "a flagrant violation of international law and the sovereignty of Mexico."

The law Saltalamacchia, López Obrador and other leaders are citing is an accord dating back to 1963 known as the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations. It sets out clear rules on "diplomatic immunity," which effectively blocks authorities from entering embassies by force, among other things.

By injuring diplomatic personnel within the embassy, Saltalamacchia said, Ecuador's government violated another section of the accords.

"When a state like Ecuador makes decision like that, you're really endangering all the embassies of all the states in the world" by ignoring precedent, Saltalamacchia said. "You enter into a state of anarchy, a sort of jungle law."

Such rules have been established to maintain healthy diplomatic relations around the world, and allow diplomats to carry out their work without fear of retribution. The U.S. State Department notes that diplomatic immunity exists to "ensure the efficient and effective performance of their official missions on behalf of their governments."

The Friday night raid is a move even the region's most-criticized governments have hesitated to take, and something Ecuador's own government once declared illegal.

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Most notably – and rather ironically – the British government threatened to raid Ecuador’s embassy in 2012 to go after WikiLeaks leader Julian Assange, who was seeking asylum in Ecuador.

“We are deeply shocked by the British government’s threats against the sovereignty of the Ecuadorian embassy and their suggestion that they may forcibly enter the embassy,” said Ecuador’s government at the time. “This is a clear breach of international law and the protocols set out in the Vienna Convention.”

British authorities never made good on their threat, and only a few examples of actual violations have been documented in recent decades.

Saltalamacchia cited the takeover of the American embassy in Iran in 1979, when diplomats were held hostage for 444 days. In Cuba, in 1956 before the Vienna Convention was agreed, nine people were killed in Haiti’s embassy as a result of a raid by Cuban police under the Batista dictatorship.

In 1981, Cuba carried out another raid on Ecuador’s embassy to capture a number of officials seeking political refuge status.

The Organization of American States on Saturday also compared Friday’s break-in to a 2022 incident when Nicaraguan authorities “illegitimately occupied” their own offices in Managua. The OAS also called for a meeting to discuss the Ecuador incident.

While embassies have also been attacked and raided in countries including Lebanon, Argentina, Libya, Indonesia and Thailand, those raids were carried out largely by insurgent groups.

Saltalamacchia said by arresting Glas, Ecuador’s government may have also violated a regional agreement known as the 1954 Convention on Diplomatic Asylum, which allows individuals to seek asylum in embassies.

However, some have defended Ecuador.

Former Ecuadorian ambassador Jorge Icaza told The Associated Press that while he agreed that entering the embassy was illegal, he added it was improper to protect “a criminal who was sanctioned by the Ecuadorian justice (system) in two very evident cases, which is also negative from the point of view of international standards”.

Ecuador’s presidency on Friday night also alleged that Mexico’s government had “abused immunities and privileges granted to the diplomatic mission” and granted “diplomatic asylum contrary to the conventional legal framework.”

Today in History: April 8

Hank Aaron hits 715th homer, breaking Babe Ruth’s career record

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Monday, April 8, the 99th day of 2024. There are 267 days left in the year.

Today’s Highlight in History:

On April 8, 1974, Hank Aaron of the Atlanta Braves hit his 715th career home run in a game against the Los Angeles Dodgers, breaking Babe Ruth’s record.

On this date:

In 1513, explorer Juan Ponce de Leon and his expedition began exploring the Florida coastline.

In 1864, the United States Senate passed, 38-6, the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution abolishing slavery. (The House of Representatives passed it in January 1865; the amendment was ratified and adopted in December 1865.)

In 1911, an explosion at the Banner Coal Mine in Littleton, Alabama, claimed the lives of 128 men, most of them convicts loaned out from prisons.

In 1913, the 17th Amendment to the Constitution, providing for popular election of U.S. senators was ratified.

In 1943, President Franklin D. Roosevelt ordered a freeze on wages and prices to combat inflation.

In 1952, President Harry S. Truman seized the American steel industry to avert a nationwide strike.

In 1973, artist Pablo Picasso died in Mougins (MOO’-zhun), France, at age 91.

In 1990, Ryan White, the teenage AIDS patient whose battle for acceptance had gained national atten-

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tion, died in Indianapolis at age 18.

In 1992, tennis great Arthur Ashe announced at a New York news conference that he had AIDS.

In 1993, singer Marian Anderson died in Portland, Oregon, at age 96.

In 2010, President Barack Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev signed the New START treaty in Prague.

In 2012, Bubba Watson saved par from the pine straw and won the Masters on the second hole of a playoff over Louis Oosthuizen.

In 2013, former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, 87, died in London, while actress and former Disney "Mouseketeer" Annette Funicello, 70, died in Bakersfield, California.

In 2018, Patrick Reed won the Masters golf tournament for his first victory in a major.

In 2020, a 76-day lockdown was lifted in the Chinese city of Wuhan, where the global pandemic began.

In 2022, the movie academy banned Will Smith from attending the Oscars or any other academy event for 10 years following his slap of Chris Rock at the Academy Awards.

In 2023, Ben Ferencz, the last living prosecutor from the Nuremberg trials, who tried Nazis for genocidal war crimes and was among the first outside witnesses to document the atrocities of Nazi labor and concentration camps, died at age 103.

Today's Birthdays: Author and Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter Seymour Hersh is 87. "Mouseketeer" Darlene Gillespie is 83. Singer Peggy Lennon (The Lennon Sisters) is 83. Songwriter-producer Leon Huff is 82. Actor Stuart Pankin is 78. Rock musician Steve Howe (Yes) is 77. Former House Republican leader Tom DeLay is 77. Movie director John Madden is 75. Rock musician Mel Schacher (Grand Funk Railroad) is 73. Sen. Ron Johnson, R-Wis., is 69. Actor John Schneider is 64. "Survivor" winner Richard Hatch is 63. Rock musician Izzy Stradlin is 62. Singer Julian Lennon is 61. Actor Dean Norris is 61. Rock singer-musician Donita Sparks (L7) is 61. Actor Robin Wright is 58. Actor Patricia Arquette is 56. Actor JR Bourne is 54. Rock singer Craig Honeycutt (Everything) is 54. Rock musician Darren Jessee (Ben Folds Five) is 53. Actor Emma Caulfield is 51. Actor Katee Sackhoff is 44. Actor Taylor Kitsch is 43. Rock singer-musician Ezra Koenig (Vampire Weekend) is 40. Actor Taran Noah Smith is 40. Actor Kirsten Storms is 40. Actor Sadie Calvano is 27.