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Mostly sunny 60/44 • Tomorrow: Partly sunny 58/42 B6 Democracy Dies in Darkness TUESDAY, OCTOBER 15, 2024 • \$3

Rumors, rancor disrupt storm aid

Alleged threats against Helene responders lead to charges for N.C. man

BY BRIANNA SACKS AND DAN LAMOTHE

LAKE LURE, N.C. — Threats against federal emergency response personnel have hampered relief work in parts of western North Carolina hard hit by Hurricane Helene, prompting disaster workers to relocate because of safety concerns and feeding a cycle of fear and anxiety.

On Monday, the Rutherford County Sheriff's Office said in a statement that it had arrested William Jacob Parsons, 44, of Bostic, N.C., on charges of making threats against Federal Emergency Management Agency employees, FEMA and U.S. Forest Service personnel, who had been working on recovery, relocated, and at least some work in the county was paused. While officials had warned about the threat of truckloads of militia potentially targeting relief workers, the sheriff's office did not find evidence for those claims.

The incident is one of the latest examples of growing concerns about safety and security in western North Carolina. **SEE FEMA ON A9**

The Fix: Connecting the threats to misinformation Trump amplified. **A2**

FEMA flood maps: The agency underestimated the risk in N.C. **A9**

ELECTION 2024

Campaign takes stand against fact checks

In live settings, Trump aims to let his falsehoods go unchallenged

BY ASHLEY PARKER AND JOSH DAWSEY

Donald Trump and his campaign have waged an aggressive campaign against fact-checking in recent months, pushing TV networks, journalism organizations and others to abandon the practice if they hope to interact with Trump.

Trump nearly backed out of an August interview with a group of Black journalists after learning they planned to fact-check his claims. The following month, he and his allies repeatedly complained about the fact-checking that occurred during his debate with Vice President Kamala Harris, berating journalists and news executives in the middle of the televised debate.

And this month, Trump declined to sit down for an interview with CBS's "60 Minutes" because he objected to the show's practice of fact-checking, according to the show.

Campaign advisers also expressly asked CBS News to forgo fact-checking in its vice-presidential debate. **SEE TRUMP ON A8**

GOP lawsuits: Challenges to votes cast overseas draw veterans' ire. **A7**

A search begins for signs of life



CHANDAN KHANNA/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

A SpaceX Falcon Heavy rocket carrying NASA's Europa Clipper launches Monday from Cape Canaveral, Fla. The spacecraft is the largest robotic probe the agency has ever built and will spend the next 5½ years traveling 1.8 billion miles to the ice-encrusted moon of Jupiter. Scientists hope to determine whether Europa can sustain life. **Story, A3**

Canada accuses India of wider targeting of Sikhs

BY GREG MILLER AND GERRY SHIH

The killing of a Sikh separatist in Canada last year was part of a broader campaign of violence against Indian dissidents directed by a senior official in the Indian government and an operative in the country's spy agency, according to Canadian officials who cited intercepted Indian commu-

Each nation orders out six of the other's envoys in escalating dispute

nications and other newly acquired information.

Canadian authorities have also identified at least six Indian dip-

lomats serving in Canada who were directly involved in gathering detailed intelligence on Sikh separatists who were then killed, attacked or threatened by India's criminal proxies, Canadian officials said.

Canada ordered all six of those diplomats to leave the country in notices that were sent early Monday, the officials said. Among them were India's top diplomat in

the country, Sanjay Kumar Verma, and its top consular official in Toronto, the officials said.

India issued a conflicting statement saying it had withdrawn the diplomats over concerns for their safety. India later announced that it had expelled six Canadian diplomats, including Canada's top diplomat in New Delhi.

The previously undisclosed details were first reported by **SEE CANADA ON A16**

Two pandas begin journey to new home in D.C.

BY MICHAEL E. RUANE AND LYRIC LI

Two giant pandas, in a plane stocked with bamboo shoots and carrots, have departed China for an hours-long flight to Washington and a new home at the National Zoo.

Just under a year after the last giant pandas left the national's capital, fans of the black-and-white bears are eagerly awaiting

Their bamboo packed, Bao Li and Qing Bao have departed China

Qing Bao, a 3-year-old female, and Bao Li, a 3-year-old male. Their arrival will mark the continuation of a beloved animal conservation program in Wash-

ington that goes back half a century.

The zoo has been mum about the pandas' travel plans for security reasons, but it posted on X on Monday afternoon that "something giant is coming."

The bears are being transported on a FedEx Boeing 777 cargo jet nicknamed the "Panda Express" from Chengdu, China. FedEx also did not disclose details of the trip but said on X on Monday that the

Panda Express was "on the move."

A FedEx cargo jet from Chengdu via Anchorage is scheduled to arrive at Dulles International Airport at 9:55 a.m. Tuesday, according to FlightAware, a website that tracks air traffic.

The government-run China Wildlife Conservation Association said that the bears were given a final health check before departing, and that veterinarians **SEE PANDAS ON A10**

U.S. told of plans for Iran strike

OFFICIALS: ISRAEL EYES MILITARY SITES

Netanyahu signals he'll avoid oil, nuclear targets

BY SHIRA RUBIN AND ELLEN NAKASHIMA

TEL AVIV — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has told the Biden administration he is willing to strike military rather than oil or nuclear facilities in Iran, according to two officials familiar with the matter, suggesting a more limited counterstrike aimed at preventing a full-scale war.

In the two weeks since Iran's latest missile barrage on Israel, its second direct attack in six months, the Middle East has braced for Israel's promised response, fearing the two countries' decades-long shadow war could explode into a head-on military confrontation. It comes at a politically fraught time for Washington, less than a month before the election; President Joe Biden has said publicly he would not support an Israeli strike on nuclear-related sites.

When Biden and Netanyahu spoke Wednesday — their first call in more than seven weeks after months of rising tensions between the two men — the prime minister said he was planning to target military infrastructure in Iran, according to a U.S. official and an official familiar with the matter. Like others in this story, they spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive deliberations.

The White House had no immediate comment. The Israeli prime minister's office said in a statement that "we listen to the opinions of the United States, but we will make our final decisions based on our national interest."

The retaliatory action would be calibrated to avoid the perception of "political interference in the U.S. elections," the official familiar with the matter said, signaling Netanyahu's understanding that the scope of the Israeli strike has the potential to **SEE ISRAEL ON A13**

Gaza hospital: At least four killed in blaze ignited by Israeli strike. **A13**

How a Dutch soccer star became a cocaine trafficker

As his star was rising, police officers warned him about the dangers of fame. It wasn't enough.

BY KEVIN SIEFF IN AMSTERDAM

Quincy Promes was on his phone, again.

The soccer star was constantly fielding messages: about his role on the most famous team in the Netherlands, his place on the Dutch national squad, the endorsement deals that netted him a small fortune.

But this time, Promes was texting from a burner phone about his secret life off the field. It was early 2020. One of the country's most famous athletes was finalizing the import of a shipment of cocaine arriving at a Belgian port.

"My boys are on their way to Antwerp," wrote Promes, a forward at the time for Ajax Amster-

dam. His phone records were obtained by Dutch law enforcement and were used to convict him of drug trafficking in an Amsterdam court this year.

Promes paid intermediaries — his "soldiers," he called them — to secure 2,850 pounds of cocaine that had just arrived from Latin America in a shipping container packed with bags of salt.

The other traffickers seemed perplexed by Promes's role.

"Is he definitely that footballer?" one asked in a separate text.

The growing intersection of sports and organized crime has alarmed some of the world's biggest law enforcement agencies. The FBI and Interpol now **SEE SOCCER ON A12**

IN THE NEWS

IV fluid shortage Hurricane Helene struck the plant that produces 60 percent of the nation's supply, prompting hospitals to postpone some procedures. **A18**

A visit to the Bird House At the National Zoo, scientists show the public how identifying markers can aid avian monitoring efforts. **B1**

THE NATION Iceland is forging deeper U.S. ties to repel Russia's presence in the North Atlantic. **A2**
Children who got covid are more likely to develop Type 2 diabetes, a study found. **A3**

THE WORLD China began military drills near Taiwan after a forceful speech by the island's new leader. **A11**
A former agent for East Germany's Stasi was convicted of a murder in a 1974 killing. **A15**

THE ECONOMY The Nobel Prize for economics was awarded to three researchers who studied prosperity gaps between countries. **A17**
The billionaire family that owns Purdue Pharma is signaling they intend to fight lawsuits by challenging use of public nuisance laws. **A18**

THE REGION A jury awarded more than \$3 million to a former D.C. government employee who was fired after raising concerns as a whistleblower. **B1**
A 5-year-old Maryland boy with autism who went missing was found dead in a nearby pond by state police divers. **B1**

STYLE Six more lawsuits alleging sexual assault by hip-hop mogul Sean "Diddy" Combs were filed in federal court. **C1**

HEALTH & SCIENCE Solitude can help nurture creativity, calm and clarity if you know how to make the most of your time alone. **E1**

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