

Partly sunny 46/38 • Tomorrow: Partly sunny 47/30 B20

Democracy Dies in Darkness

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 2026 • \$4

A beautiful game among the ruins



OMAR AL-QATTAA/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE/GETTY IMAGES

Palestinians gather to watch a five-a-side soccer match being played Monday amid the rubble of destroyed buildings in Gaza City. Despite a United States-brokered truce that entered its second phase last month, violence has continued in the Palestinian territory, with Israel and Hamas trading accusations over ceasefire violations and breaches in the deal.

Maxwell declines to answer lawmakers

Ex-Epstein companion asks for presidential clemency at deposition

BY JEREMY ROEBUCK AND ANNA LISS-ROY

Jeffrey Epstein's longtime companion Ghislaine Maxwell declined to answer lawmakers' questions and invoked her Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination during a deposition before the House Oversight Committee on Monday.

But her lawyer said she was "prepared to speak fully and honestly" if she was first granted clemency by President Donald Trump.

Maxwell, who was convicted on sex trafficking charges in 2021, was set to face the committee's questioning via videoconference from the federal prison camp in Texas where she's serving her 20-year sentence. Instead, lawmakers emerged from the closed-door session less than an hour after it began. They said Maxwell had declined to engage with their inquiries, citing her ongoing legal efforts to have her conviction overturned.

"This, obviously is very disappointing," the committee's chairman, Rep. James Comer (R-Kentucky), told reporters afterward. "We had many questions to ask about the crimes she and Epstein committed, as well as questions about potential co-conspirators."

Video of the deposition, released by the committee later Monday, showed Maxwell seated at a conference room table in a khaki prison jumpsuit. She repeatedly said she would like to answer lawmakers' questions but was invoking her "right to si-

SEE MAXWELL ON A2

Ruling is near on ballroom challenge

BY DAN DIAMOND, AARON SCHAFER AND JONATHAN EDWARDS

A federal judge is expected to soon rule on whether President Donald Trump's planned \$400 million White House ballroom project can proceed, zeroing in on whether the administration's plan to rely on private donations allows it to bypass congressional approval.

Trump has argued that the approach spares taxpayers the expense, but the dispute has instead highlighted a lack of transparency over how the project is being financed. U.S. District Judge Richard Leon, congressional Democrats and watchdog groups have questioned an ar-

Judge weighs legality of White House project's reliance on private donors

rangement that relies on donations from corporations with business before the federal government, funneled through a nonprofit intermediary that stands to collect millions of dollars in fees, to fund the most significant alteration to the White House in decades.

Leon has said he may rule this month on the National Trust for Historic Preservation's challenge to the project. As the decision approaches, watchdog groups

have scrutinized the administration's fundraising effort, arguing that it exploits gaps in federal disclosure rules that Congress should tighten.

Trump and White House officials have publicly identified about two dozen companies and about a dozen individual donors they say have already contributed hundreds of millions of dollars for the project, including major corporations such as Amazon, Google and Palantir that collectively have billions of dollars in contracts before the administration. (Amazon founder Jeff Bezos owns The Washington Post.)

Most of the donors have declined to specify to reporters and lawmakers how much they have

SEE BALLROOM ON A2

Where is it cold enough for the Winter Olympics?

Rising temperatures will cut the number of available host sites

BY JANICE KAI CHEN, N. KIRKPATRICK AND JÚLIA LEDUR

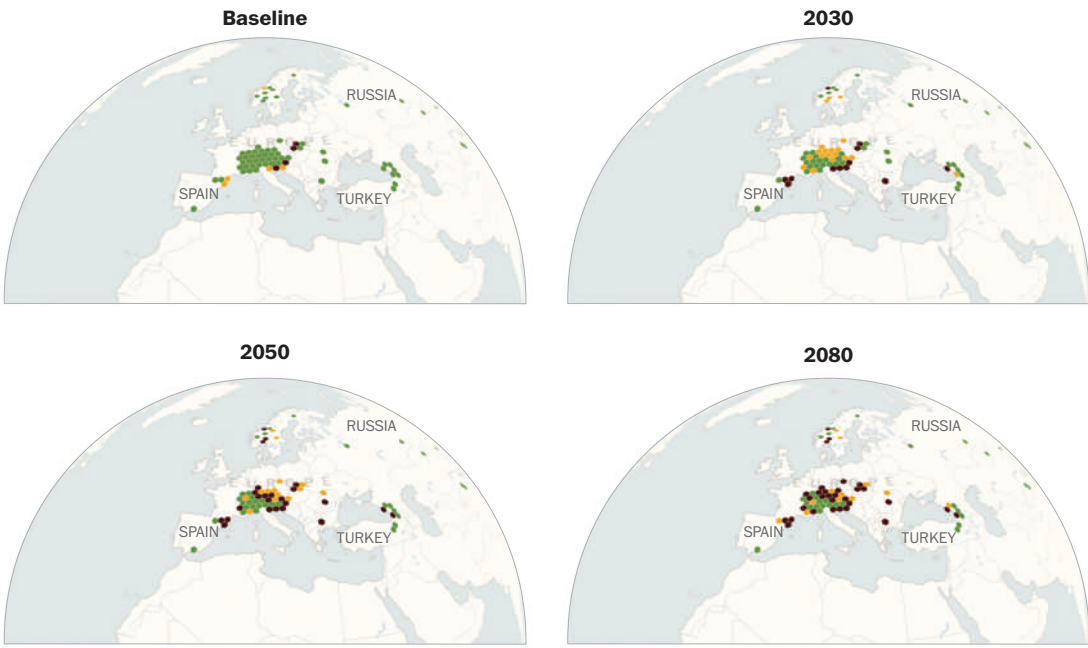
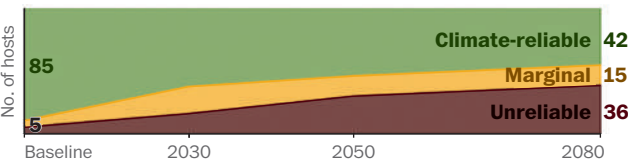
When the Milan-Cortina Winter Games were just weeks away, patches of bare ground peeking through Bormio's downhill ski course had top ski officials worried. With the weather too warm to make snow during the day, the machines had to run at night to create enough snow for the upcoming competitions.

Five thousand miles away from the Italian Alps, the Rocky Mountains were experiencing the warmest winter on record. Snowfall in the early season at Park City, Utah, which will host events for the 2034 Winter Olympic Games, has been dismal.

The warm December weather in both host locations

SEE OLYMPICS ON A20

Climate reliability of Olympic host locations



Hong Kong dissident Lai sentenced to 20 years

BY SHIBANI MAHTANI

Hong Kong newspaper founder Jimmy Lai, a leading figure in the city's pro-democracy movement and an ardent critic of the Chinese Communist Party, was sentenced Monday to 20 years in prison after being found guilty in December of sedition and collusion with foreign forces.

The heavy sentence means that Lai, 78, who is a British citizen, could spend the rest of his life imprisoned as a martyr-like figure, exemplifying the price nonviolent dissidents are paying for their activism in the once-free-wheeling city. Lai's family and some supporters still hold out hope that Washington or London might secure his release through diplomatic negotiations.

The sentence was not a surprise as Beijing has sought to wipe out the city's few remaining press freedoms and judicial inde-

SEE SENTENCE ON A15

IN THE NEWS

Quantum future A Maryland lab is developing a powerful computer that could cure cancer but also steal passwords. B13

Views of America At the Olympics, U.S. athletes are sharing their opinions when asked about the issues back home — as they should, Barry Svrluga writes. B1

THE NATION Justice officials seek to toss Stephen Bannon's conviction for defying a House subpoena. A3
Democrats hope a left-wing YouTube channel can counter conservative online media. A7

THE WORLD Prince William and Princess Catherine of Wales said they were "deeply concerned" about revelations in the Epstein files involving two high-profile British figures. A14

THE ECONOMY Opening statements began in the first of several trials over claims that tech platforms aim to addict children. A16

SPORTS The Seattle Seahawks' Super Bowl victory was achieved partly through design and mostly through brute force. B1

STYLE Bad Bunny's Super Bowl halftime show turned out to be a joyous party, not a political provocation. B7
Super Bowl ads this year leaned into wackiness, nostalgia and bathroom humor. These were the best, worst and weirdest. B7

THE REGION As Virginia lawmakers join the Spanberger administration, a wave of special elections must fill the empty seats. B13
D.C. health officials are warning of possible exposure to measles after three people with the illness visited the region in recent weeks. B13

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