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Democracy Dies in Darkness

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VATICAN MEDIA/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Pope Leo XIV, who has emerged as a leading critic of the war in Iran, hosts Secretary of State Marco Rubio on Thursday at the Vatican.

Rubio in Rome seeks to mend fences with Pope Leo

BY ANTHONY FAIOLA,
STEFANO PITRELLI
AND ADAM TAYLOR

ROME — Secretary of State Marco Rubio met Thursday with Pope Leo XIV with relations between the Vatican and the White House at a low point over President Donald Trump's repeated, direct criticism of the U.S.-born pontiff, who has emerged as a leading global critic of the war in Iran and of the administration's invocation of God in pursuing military action that has resulted in the deaths of thousands.

Rubio was at the Vatican for roughly two hours on Thursday,

Visit comes amid a low point in relations over Trump's repeated barbs

meeting with both the pope and Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Vatican's secretary of state. The small U.S. delegation included Sergio Gor, the U.S. ambassador to India, who is a personal friend of Rubio's and a prominent Catholic in the Trump administration.

The meetings involved "an exchange of views" on the regional and international climate, ac-

ording to a readout by the Vatican, with a focus on countries marked by war, political tensions and humanitarian crises.

The Vatican stressed one final point: "the need to work tirelessly for peace."

A State Department official, speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss the private meeting, portrayed the meeting positively, describing it as constructive and friendly. U.S. officials also highlighted the pomp and circumstance with which Rubio was greeted at the Vatican and noted that the meetings ran well over their allotted time.

State Department spokesper-

son Tommy Pigott said that Rubio and Leo discussed issues in the Middle East and the Western Hemisphere and that their meeting underscored the "strong relationship" between the Vatican and Washington.

The meeting with Parolin, meanwhile, saw a review of "ongoing humanitarian efforts in the Western Hemisphere and efforts to achieve a durable peace in the Middle East," as well as efforts at "advancing religious freedom," Pigott said.

Thursday's meetings were held after Trump's criticism of Leo, including a new broadcast on

SEE VATICAN ON A12

Iran can endure blockade for months, CIA says

ALSO HAS AMPLE MISSILE, DRONE ARSENAL

Analysis undercuts rosier picture painted by Trump

BY WARREN P. STROBEL,
JOHN HUDSON
AND ELLEN NAKASHIMA

A confidential CIA analysis delivered to administration policymakers this week concludes that Iran can survive the U.S. naval blockade for at least three to four months before facing more severe economic hardship, four people familiar with the document said, a finding that appears to raise new questions about President Donald Trump's optimism on ending the war.

The analysis by the U.S. intelligence community, whose secret assessments on Iran have often

been more sober than the administration's public statements, also found that Tehran retains significant ballistic missile capabilities despite weeks of intense U.S. and Israeli bombardment, three of the people familiar with it said.

Iran retains about 75 percent of its prewar inventories of mobile launchers and about 70 percent of its prewar stockpiles of missiles, a U.S. official said. The official said there is evidence that the regime has been able to recover and reopen almost all of its underground storage facilities, repair some damaged missiles and even assemble some new

SEE BLOCKADE ON A10

Tehran's oil still flowing in covert transfers at sea

BY IMOGEN PIPER

Since the U.S. blockade in the Gulf of Oman began last month, at least 13 tankers have offloaded Iranian oil in covert ship-to-ship transfers thousands of miles away, near a cluster of small islands in Indonesia known as the Riau Archipelago, according to a Washington Post analysis of satellite imagery and ship-tracking data.

The transfers are part of a backdoor arrangement that for years has helped Tehran continue to sell oil despite crushing international sanctions, experts said. While the blockade appears

to have stopped new shipments of Iranian oil from escaping the Persian Gulf, the ongoing transfers allow Tehran to leave that financial spigot open, if only temporarily, as shipments that are already at sea make their way to China or other markets.

Satellite imagery since April 16 showed six laden tankers that were sailing under the Iranian flag pull up alongside six empty tankers. Seven additional laden tankers — vessels that appeared to be sailing under false flags or to have undisclosed management, according to shipping information repository Equasis —

SEE IRAN ON A10

College students shun screens in bid to connect

Negative impacts of technology include difficulty socializing and an erosion of the overall experience

BY SUSAN SVRLUGA

NEW YORK — At the gate, guests slipped their phones into little cloth bags, putting them away for the evening. As the sunlight faded on a cobblestone street, more than 200 students from New York University gathered at a table nearly as long as the city block. It was cold — so cold that they ate wrapped in plush blankets and clutching handwarmers — but they leaned in to talk with strangers, laughing and trading stories.

"This is amazing," junior Grant Callahan said after conversations

about philosophy, artificial intelligence and Shanghai.

That's because in his experience, something once quintessential to college life has been completely changed by technology. Instead of the socializing that American college culture is known for, many students walk around campus looking down at their phones, scroll through elevator rides and sit in classrooms glued to their laptops.

Many college leaders are concerned about the amount of time students spend on screens and social media, worried that it is

SEE COLLEGE ON A5



SHURAN HUANG/FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

People on their phones at New York University, which has launched an effort called NYU IRL, or "in real life," to foster socialization.



SETH HERALD/REUTERS

Tennessee redistricting

State troopers ask demonstrators opposed to redistricting efforts to leave the Tennessee House gallery Thursday. Republicans adopted a map that could snatch a Democratic-held seat. **Story, A6**

A muted 'Sammies' as staffers stay spooked

BY MERYL KORNFIELD

The 25th annual Oscars-like ceremony for federal workers — the Samuel J. Heyman Service to America Medals — honored the civil service under five previous administrations, with former presidents George W. Bush and Joe Biden making video appearances.

But the current occupant of the White House specifically went unnamed Wednesday night.

More than a year after President Donald Trump and Elon Musk's U.S. DOGE Service dramatically slashed the civil service, the gala honoring the federal workforce — nicknamed the "Sammies" — has become a significantly smaller affair. The dif-

ference was noticeable as a crowd slimmer than in years past filled an auditorium at the National Museum of the American Indian to celebrate this year's winners.

Fewer civil servants were nominated and received awards after many federal workers expressed a fear of retaliation if they drew too much attention, said Max Stier,

SEE AWARDS ON A6

Democrats are becoming more bullish on Senate flip

Big hurdles remain, but Trump's unpopularity, Iran war provide opening

BY THEODORIC MEYER

Democrats are increasingly optimistic about retaking the Senate in the midterm elections — an aspiration that appeared all but out of reach at the start of President Donald Trump's second term.

The political terrain heading into November remains forbidding for Democrats, who need to win races in at least five states that Trump carried in 2024 to recapture the Senate. But Trump's crumbling approval ratings and the Iran war's weight on the economy have given the party fresh hope less than six months from Election Day, even as big hurdles remain.

In an interview, Senate Minority Leader Charles E. Schumer (D-New York) said he is confident that Democrats can pull it off, citing Trump's weakness in polls and the strength of the candidates Schumer has recruited to run in red-leaning states.

"A year ago, no one thought we had a chance to take back the

SEE MIDTERMS ON A2

IN THE NEWS

FEMA overhaul A Trump-appointed committee recommended major changes to streamline what it called an inefficient and "bloated" emergency response agency. **A4**

2020 election probe A federal judge denied a request to order the FBI to return voting material seized in Fulton County, Georgia. **A7**

THE NATION
A former MAGA influencer has emerged as a top critic of the right-wing online machine. **A4**
The suspect in a Colorado firebombing attack pleads guilty to murder, gets life. **A8**

THE WORLD
Global health officials are scrambling to contain a deadly outbreak of hantavirus linked to the ship *Hondius*, tracing some 30 departed passengers from at least a dozen countries. **A13**

THE ECONOMY
Some schools are cutting back on the technology they spent billions on as states adopt policies to curb students' screen time. **A14**
U.S. stocks fell from their records after oil prices yo-yoed and Wall Street waited for developments in Iran. **A14**

STYLE
The president insists on gratitude in D.C., Philip Kennicott writes, so he put up banners thanking himself. **B1**

SPORTS
The Nationals beat the Twins, 7-5, to improve to 18-20 and win their first series at home this season. **B7**

THE REGION
Officials at the Justice Department launched a civil rights investigation into the Fairfax County prosecutor. **B13**

WEEKEND
An Irish pub in Arlington has been dubbed "America's Best Soccer Bar." Regular patrons there aren't surprised.

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