



At St. Peter’s Basilica on Wednesday, in front of the Sistine Chapel chimney, a large screen showed the cardinals before the conclave.

Keeping Vigil
For the Signal
Of a New Pope

By MOTOKO RICH and PATRICIA MAZZEI

VATICAN CITY — After the men who will select the next pope were locked inside the Sistine Chapel without cellphones on Wednesday, the only thing left to do was wait for them to send a signal to the outside world. By smoke.

The highly secret voting began inside what is possibly one of the world’s most secure vaults in the early evening, with the 133 cardinals tasked with deciding who will succeed Pope Francis writing candidates’ names on voting cards by hand, trying to disguise their handwriting.



Black smoke in the evening meant voting would resume.

Outside in St. Peter’s Square, thousands of the faithful, the curious and the vacationing gathered to await the news of whether the cardinals had managed to elect a papal successor. Word came at 9 p.m., in the form of black smoke billowing from a chimney installed last week on the roof of the chapel.

If the smoke had been white, it would have meant that the cardinals had chosen the first new pope in a dozen years in just one round of voting, a feat not seen for centuries.

But the black smoke, created when the cardinals’ ballots are incinerated in a cast-iron stove, means they’ll have to try again.

“We are cold, we’re hungry, we’re thirsty but yet we can’t move,” said the Rev. Peter Mangum, 61, a priest at the Church of Jesus the Good Shepherd in Monroe, La. He and three other priests had been in the square for about seven hours, and it was Father Mangum’s fourth

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Offramp Seen
In India Clash
With Pakistan

By MUJIB MASHAL and SALMAN MASOOD

NEW DELHI — For two weeks, as India promised a forceful response to a terrorist massacre that it linked to Pakistan, the only real question seemed to be just how hard it would strike.

The answer came in the wee hours of Wednesday, as India sent jets soaring through the air to hit several sites in Pakistan, and as the Pakistani military mobilized its own fleet to try to shoot the Indian planes out of the skies.

By day’s end, long after the missiles had stopped flying and the killing had come to a close, both sides took stock and found that they had enough to claim victory — or to further escalate the conflict.

India struck deeper into Pakistan than it had at any point through decades of enmity between the two nuclear-armed rivals. The damage by all accounts was extensive, with more than 20 people killed in dozens of strikes across six to nine locations, including in towns long known to harbor terrorist leaders wanted for carnage inflicted on India.

But there was also growing evidence that Pakistan, too, had delivered serious blows. Two or three Indian planes went down on the Indian side of the border, according to Indian officials and Western diplomats, as well as local news media reports and eyewitness descriptions. It was exactly what India had hoped to avoid after having suffered a similar embarrassment the last time it exchanged military strikes with Pakistan, in 2019.

The question now is whether Pakistan will decide that it must answer India’s strikes on the Pakistani heartland with an attack of its own on Indian soil.

For now, Pakistan says it is keeping all options open. But diplomats and analysts expressed some hope that the day’s events might offer the two sides an offramp that allows them to avert a spiral into all-out war.

Those looking for signs that the two countries might be serious about de-escalation pointed in part to India’s statements about its strikes. In its public

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Some Elite Law Firms Decline
To Take Up Immigration Cases

By MATTHEW GOLDSTEIN and JESSICA SILVER-GREENBERG

Hours after Donald J. Trump was sworn in for a second term, he issued an executive order laying the groundwork for mass deportations of immigrants and denying them legal assistance.

Public interest groups focused on immigrant rights teamed up to fight the order and called in Gibson Dunn, a major law firm with the resources to help take on the White House. In January, Gibson Dunn, working with the groups, sued the Trump administration seeking to restore legal help for immigrants facing deportation.

Two months later, Gibson Dunn changed its tune.

Even though lawyers from the elite law firm had already been working with the public interest groups on drafting another lawsuit, Gibson Dunn said it could not put its name on this latest case, according to five people with direct knowledge of the matter who would speak only on the condition of anonymity because they feared alienating Gibson Dunn.

Lawyers from Gibson Dunn explained that it was afraid of incurring Mr. Trump’s wrath if the firm



Tears of Joy Greet Ukraine’s P.O.W.s
Hundreds of family members crowded a parking lot in the Chernihiv region to welcome loved ones being repatriated from Russian prisons. Amid happy reunions, there was anguish, too. Page A11.

Tennessee Jury
Clears Officers
In Nichols Case
Beating Death of Man
Stopped in Memphis

By BEN STANLEY and EMILY COCHRANE

MEMPHIS — Three former police officers were acquitted on Wednesday of all state charges against them, including second-degree murder, in the death of Tyre Nichols, a Black man whose brutal beating in 2023 stunned the nation.

It was the second trial for the three men, Demetrius Haley, Tadarrius Bean and Justin Smith. They were accused of fatally beating Mr. Nichols, a FedEx employee who had been driving home from work when he was stopped by officers more than two years ago.

The three were convicted of witness tampering in a separate federal trial last fall, but acquitted of a more serious charge of violating Mr. Nichols’s civil rights by causing his death. Federal jurors also found Mr. Haley guilty of violating Mr. Nichols’s civil rights by causing bodily injury.

Two other former officers involved in the beating — Desmond Mills Jr. and Emmitt Martin III — took guilty pleas in the earlier federal case; Mr. Mills also pleaded guilty in state court. It remains unclear how the state case against Mr. Martin, who has been described as the most violent officer in the beating, will be handled.

The jury in the state case, seated from the Chattanooga area in eastern Tennessee to ensure a fair trial, deliberated more than eight hours after a seven-day trial in Memphis. In addition to second-degree murder, the three defendants had been charged with aggravated kidnapping, official misconduct and official oppression.

Sentencing in the federal trial is expected later this year. Mr. Nichols’s family has also sued Memphis and its Police Department.

The three former officers were emotional after the verdict was read on Wednesday, with Mr. Haley appearing to cry. Mr. Nichols’s mother, RowVaughn Wells, who gave wrenching testimony about the injuries that her son had sustained, did not show any emotion. She and her husband left the courtroom without any comment.

“Today’s verdicts are a devastating miscarriage of justice,” Ben Crump and Antonio Romanucci, two civil rights lawyers who have represented Mr. Nichols’s family, said in a statement. They added that they were “outraged, and we

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China Hints
At Hardball
In U.S. Talks
Set to Discuss Tariffs,
But Issuing Warning

By ALEXANDRA STEVENSON

HONG KONG — By agreeing to meet with the Trump administration to discuss trade, China is seeking to cast itself as the responsible one in a bruising superpower competition that has roiled the global financial system and set off fears of a recession.

For weeks, China had publicly said that it would not engage in trade talks with the United States under duress, refusing to “kneel down” and compromise with a “bully.” It insisted that Washington should first drop its eye-watering tariffs on China as a condition for negotiations.

On Wednesday, Beijing indicated it would come to the table after all, saying that its top trade official, He Lifeng, would meet with Treasury Secretary Scott



He Lifeng, a top trade official, plans to meet Scott Bessent.

Bessent in Switzerland this week. Even so, it maintained a tough stance, warning Washington against using the talks as “a smoke screen to continue coercion and extortion.”

The Chinese government said it had come to this decision “based on a full consideration of global expectations, China’s interests and the calls of American industry and consumers,” suggesting that it was doing so largely for the greater good.

“China is trying to frame itself as the responsible party, but it’s still a pretty hard-line tone: You better behave yourself in these talks,” said Yun Sun, a China analyst at the Stimson Center.

But the move is still a softening of China’s stance, at a time when economic data has shown that the trade brinkmanship was taking a toll on both countries’ economies.

The Trump administration’s decision to raise tariffs on Chinese goods imported to the United States by 145 percent, and China’s response in hiking its own tariffs on American goods to 125 percent, has effectively frozen all trade between the two countries in recent weeks.

Chinese factories were hit with

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Tourism to U.S. Slips

Despite ominous signs, data shows that travel to the United States is largely holding up. Page A13.

Change in travel from last year

International arrivals at U.S. airports	Summer flight bookings from Europe
-1.5%	-2%
Summer flight bookings from Asia	Summer flight bookings from Canada
+4%	-21%

Sources: U.S. Customs and Border Protection; Airlines Reporting Corporation

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Timberwolves’ Game 1 Dud
Anthony Edwards, Minnesota’s dynamic leader, struggled in the series opener against Golden State. PAGE B10

Paying for Sports Palaces
Projects in Detroit and Washington revive debates over what cities gain, and lose, when they fund stadiums. PAGE B7



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Pushing Gazans to the South
Airstrikes rain on Gaza as Israel tries to uproot civilians, heightening hopelessness among Palestinians. PAGE A6

Lost Spacecraft Coming Home
The Soviet Kosmos-482, headed to Venus in 1972, is expected to crash-land on Earth by this weekend. PAGE A11

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Fringe Conspiracies at Center
Since President Trump’s return to office, authority figures are embracing once-extreme ideas, including the false belief that the Earth is flat. PAGE B1

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Energy Star Program to End
The E.P.A. plans to eliminate the popular energy efficiency certification for dishwashers, refrigerators, dryers and other home appliances. PAGE A17

Hegseth’s Use of Passwords
Cyberattacks revealed some of the data the defense secretary used to register on websites in the past, raising new questions about security. PAGE A16

Capital City’s Budget in Limbo
Conservative Republicans in the House have balked at efforts to revive a bill to restore more than \$1 billion in funding for the District of Columbia. PAGE A17

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Stars Shining Brightest
An endless procession of great looks were on display at the Met Gala. We singled out 15 of the best. PAGE D6

Best Kentucky Derby Hats
Styles ranging from traditional to over the top abounded at America’s most fashionable sporting event. PAGE D1



ARTS C1-6
New Territory in Dance
A work by Axis Dance Company uses telescoping crutches and hexapod legs to reshape ideas about moving. PAGE C1

‘Fix-It’ Fiction Offers Justice
When a favorite TV show’s characters, or romances, are killed off, some writers provide a different plotline. PAGE C1

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Ross Douthat PAGE A23

