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Somber Christmas

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who never came home > 11*



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LATIN AMERICA

A Christmas tree in Mexico carries the faces of loved ones who never came home

MEXICO CITY (AP)

It's been 10 years since Verónica Rosas set up a Christmas tree. The sorrow brought on by the disappearance of her son in 2015 has been too overwhelming.

Before the 16-year-old vanished in a Mexico City suburb, mother and son yearned for the winter season. They loved buying natural Christmas trees. To brighten them up, they hung Diego's favorite decorations: figurines of Mickey and Minnie Mouse.

"It's been too hard and I have not been able to set up a tree," said Rosas, who recently met with other grieving relatives to make Christmas ornaments in remembrance of missing loved ones.

The gathering was hosted by the Catholic Diocese of Ecatepec, near the capital, where residents endure robbery, femicide and other crimes.

Rosas and a dozen more families showed up carrying pictures of their relatives.



Marisol Rizo, left, who said her mother Maria Dolores Rizo Juarez went missing on Dec. 22, 2012 in Alcoman, state of Mexico, and her daughter Leslie Mendez, decorate Christmas ornaments with her photograph to hang on the Tree of Hope during an event organized by the diocese of Ecatepec at the Church of the Sacred Heart of San Cristobal in Ecatepec, State of Mexico, on Monday, November 17, 2025.

For a few hours, they pasted the images onto old CDs and circles of cardboard, and sprinkled them with glitter.

A priest celebrated Mass and blessed their work. Afterward, the ornaments were hung from a "tree of hope" inside the cathedral, where they will remain until Feb. 2.

"We want to draw attention to the crisis that we're living," said Rosas, who founded an organization providing support for Mexicans sharing her pain. "It's a symbolic gesture that keeps what's happening in plain sight."

Official figures indicate that more than 133,000 people have disappeared in Mexico since 1952. Human trafficking, kidnapping, acts of retaliation and forced recruitment by cartel members are among the causes.

"This has been a Way of the Cross," said Marisol Rizo, referencing the biblical account of Jesus carrying the cross before his crucifixion. She has searched for her mother since 2012. "Thirteen years have passed and we can't make authorities do their jobs."

She said her children were little when her mother vanished, and juggling motherhood while searching for her took a toll.

"My mom always told me to take care of them," she said. "But as I searched for her, I forgot about my children."

Rizo believes her father was responsible for her mother's disappearance in a country where at least 10 women or girls are killed because of their gender every day. He has denied any involvement.

Like numerous other relatives of the disappeared, Rizo navigates the winter season with sorrow rather than joy. She still remembers how, years ago, she spent days round Christmas posting flyers on the streets.

It's a common practice among people with disappeared relatives in Mexico. Each poster contains contact information, as well as the photo, name, distinguishing features and the date a person went missing.

"On Dec. 24, I used to cry a lot," Rizo said. "I could see happy people pouring out of shopping centers while I was posting flyers, dragging my sorrow."

Rizo's daughter, now 17, joined her in crafting round ornaments at the Ecatepec cathedral. Yet the memories sparked by seeing photos of her vanished mother felt almost unbearable.

"These spheres represent a deep sadness to me," Rizo said. "This is not the place where I would have wished to see a picture of my mom."

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STATE

Protecting Washingtonians from scams and charity fraud this giving season



OLYMPIA, Washington

It's the time of year for thankfulness and charity. But as we arrive to Giving Tuesday, it's important for donors to ensure their generosity benefits legitimate charities and to protect themselves from scams.

This week marks the 10th annual International Charity Fraud Awareness Week, during which the Washington State Attorney General's Office (AGO) and the Office of the Secretary of State are sharing information to help Washingtonians avoid deceptive or fraudulent charity solicitations. It's part of a campaign on the AGO website and on social media that we're calling "Pause. Check the Cause."

Pausing before donating allows people to avoid giving impulsively and falling victim to solicitations that could be scams. Checking the cause is a reminder to do research to make sure the organization is tax-exempt and registered as a charity with the Secretary of State.

"Giving back to the community is vital and strengthens the fabric of our state," Washington Attorney General Nick Brown said. "But Washingtonians should be able to give to the causes they care about without having to worry their money will be stolen. These tips will help protect people from fraud."

Common scams

- Spoofing or impostor scams: An organization uses a name that mimics a well-established charity or uses multiple names to get multiple donations from the same person.

Tips: Ask the purported charity for its employer identification number (EIN) and search the databases of the Office of the Secretary of State and the IRS to verify

that it's legitimate. Search the internet for the exact name of the well-known charity and give directly on its website. Search the name of the purported charity and the word "scam," "fraud," or "legit."

- Phishing scams: A scammer sends an email or text message that appears to be from a legitimate charity with links to a website that looks like the charity's website. Scammer steals money and data from the donor.

Tips: Don't click on links in emails or text messages. Navigate to the charity's website directly. Be wary of unfamiliar organizations or unsolicited donation requests. Call the charity to learn more.

- Pop-up scams: A fake organization forms in response to a particular issue and asks for donations, often after a natural disaster or tragedy, and uses crowdfunding or social media platforms to raise money.

Tips: Give to registered charities and ones that have been around for at least three years. Be wary about donating to crowdfunding or social media solicitations.

- Payment-method scams: Certain types of payment methods carry risks and should be used with caution or avoided completely.

Tips: If using tap-to-pay, be sure to look at the amount on the other person's device before tapping. Sometimes a scammer will increase the donation amount without the donor's knowledge. Avoid using payment methods that are not secure, such as gift cards, digital currency, or wire transfers. Do not share personal information over the phone.

Visit the AGO website at <https://www.atg.wa.gov/charities> to learn about other scams and find out how to protect against them.



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POLITICS

Trump says he wants to ‘permanently pause’ migration to the US from poorer countries

WEST PALM BEACH, Florida (AP)

President Donald Trump says he wants to “permanently pause migration” from poorer nations and is promising to seek to expel millions of immigrants from the United States by revoking their legal status. He is blaming immigrants for problems from crime to housing shortages as part of “social dysfunction” in America and demanding “REVERSE MIGRATION.”

His most severe social media post against immigration since returning to the Oval Office in January came after the shooting Wednesday of two National Guard members who were patrolling the streets of the nation’s capital under his orders. One died and the other is in critical condition.

A 29-year-old Afghan national who worked with the CIA during the Afghanistan War is facing charges. The suspect came to the U.S. as part of a program to resettle those who had helped Ameri-

can troops after U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Trump’s threat to stop immigration would be a serious blow to a nation that has long defined itself as welcoming immigrants.

Since the shooting not far from the White House, administration officials have pledged to reexamine millions of legal immigrants, building on a 10-month campaign to reduce the immigrant population. In a lengthy social media post late Thursday, the Republican president asserted that millions of people born outside the U.S. and now living in the country bore a large share of the blame for America’s societal ills.

“Only REVERSE MIGRATION can fully cure this situation,” Trump posted on his Truth Social platform. “Other than that, HAPPY THANKSGIVING TO ALL, except those that hate, steal, murder, and destroy everything that America stands for — You won’t be here for long!”

The president said on Truth Social that



President Donald Trump speaks to reporters after speaking to troops via video from his Mar-a-Lago estate on Thanksgiving, on Thursday, November 27, 2025, in Palm Beach, Florida.

“most” foreign-born U.S. residents “are on welfare, from failed nations, or from prisons, mental institutions, gangs, or drug cartels” as he blamed them for crime across the country that is predominantly committed by U.S. citizens.

There are roughly 50 million foreign-born residents in the U.S., and multiple studies have found that immigrants are generally less likely to commit crimes

than are people who were born in the country.

The perception that immigration breeds crime “continues to falter under the weight of the evidence,” according to a review of academic literature last year in the Annual Review of Criminology.

“With few exceptions, studies conducted at both the aggregate and individual levels demonstrate that high concentrations of immigrants are not associated with increased levels of crime and delinquency across neighborhoods and cities in the United States,” it said.

A study by economists initially released in 2023 found immigrants are 60% less likely to be incarcerated than people born in the U.S. Immigrants have been imprisoned at lower rates for 150 years, the study found, adding to past research undermining Trump’s claims.

NATIONAL

Why doing good also makes us feel good, during the holidays and beyond

WASHINGTON (AP)

The holiday season is a time for giving thanks, giving gifts — and for many, a time for giving back.

Food banks, services that deliver meals to seniors and other U.S. charities typically see a surge in volunteering between Thanksgiving and the end of the year. But there are good reasons to volunteer at any time of the year.

Alfred Del Grosso volunteers weekly to work the lunch shift at Shepherd’s Table, a food bank in Silver Spring, Maryland. “I feel more connected to the broader community,” he said.

Most Thursdays, the retired chemist from Kensington, Maryland, also lends an unpaid hand to help clear fallen trees and brush from local trails with the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club. “It’s mostly volunteers who help maintain the trails,” he said.

Researchers who study human evolution and social psychology say that giving back is deeply rooted in human nature. Volun-



A volunteer waves to a student as she waits in line at Miles Intermediate Elementary School in Atlanta after receiving new shoes from Mercedes-Benz USA, as a part of their Season to Shine holiday program, on December 7, 2022.

teers say they feel closer ties to the communities they serve.

“When we feel grateful for all we have, that motivates us to do good things for other people who have helped us, and also to do good things for new people,” said Sarah Schnitker, a psychologist at Baylor University.

“There’s a nice upwards reciprocal spiral

between gratitude and generosity,” often enhanced at holiday times, she said.

For many in the U.S., the season most associated with giving, receiving and volunteering runs from Thanksgiving through Hanukkah and Christmas to New Year’s.

But around the world, a giving season or festival is present in many cultures, said

Amrisha Vaish, a developmental psychologist at the University of Virginia.

“Nearly all cultures have events or public festivals that allow people to express gratitude,” she said. “In Hinduism, Divali is a time of lights and festiveness and good eating, but also a time in which people give gifts to really express what people have meant to them.”

For Muslims, Ramadan, which ends with the festival of Eid al-Fitr, is a time for reflection, gratitude and acts of charity. Many Buddhist traditions also emphasize gratitude.

The common purpose of such seasons, which also include non-religious acts of service, is to reinforce our natural cooperative tendencies, Vaish said.

“In human evolutionary history over hundreds of thousands of years, we’ve had to become cooperative in order to work together and survive as a species,” she said.

“We don’t have sharp claws, high speed, many other natural abilities. But what we do have is that we’re super cooperators; we can do more in groups than alone.”

LATIN AMERICA

Venezuelan leader Maduro may seem desperate. But his loyalty vs punishment strategy is hard to crack

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP)

English phrases once bothered Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro so much that he urged his State of the Union address audience to phase out words like skatepark and fashion.

But as the White House now ponders whether the U.S. military should strike Venezuela, Maduro is embracing English, singing John Lennon's Imagine, advocating for peace and dancing to a remix of his latest English catchphrase, "No War, Yes Peace."

While his turnaround is seen as a sign of desperation by supporters of Venezuela's political opposition, whose leaders have repeatedly told their backers in Washington that the threat of military action would crack Maduro's inner circle, months of pressure have yet to produce defections or a government transition.

Behind this knack for staying in power is a system that punishes disloyal associ-

ates harshly and allows loyal ministers, justices, military leaders and other officials to enrich themselves.

"The Bolivarian Revolution possesses a remarkable ability: the capacity for cohesion in the face of external pressure," Ronal Rodríguez, a researcher at the Venezuela Observatory in Colombia's Universidad del Rosario, said referring to the political movement, also known as Chavismo, that Maduro inherited from the late President Hugo Chávez. "When pressure comes from abroad, they manage to unite, defend and protect themselves."

Underpinning the loyalty-or-punishment principle are corruption networks blessed by Chávez and Maduro that give the loyal permission to get richer. The policy has vexed previous efforts to unseat



Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro takes part in a government-organized civic-military rally in Caracas, Venezuela, on Tuesday, November 25, 2025.

Maduro and has helped him and his close associates to skirt economic sanctions, obtain U.S. presidential pardons and claim an electoral victory they resoundingly lost.

Rodríguez explained that prison and torture can be part of the punishment, which is usually harsher for accused wrongdoers with military affiliation. The

strategy has been crucial for an authoritarian Maduro to keep control of the military, which he lets traffic drugs, oil, wildlife and myriad goods in exchange for coup-proof barracks.

"This has been a very effective tool because Chavismo has always been able to eliminate those actors who at some point try to rise up, and it has been able to expose corrupt practices from all sorts of actors," Rodríguez said.

Venezuela's political opposition, led by Nobel Peace Prize winner María Corina Machado, had banked on the military's support to dislodge Maduro after credible evidence showed that he lost the 2024 presidential election. But Defense Minister Vladimir Padrino López and other military leaders stood by Maduro, just like they did in 2019 during a barracks revolt by a cadre of soldiers who swore loyalty to Juan Guaidó, the opposition leader recognized at the time by the first Trump administration as Venezuela's rightful leader.

NATIONAL

Shoppers spend billions on Black Friday to snag holiday deals

NEW YORK (AP)

Despite wider economic uncertainty hovering above this year's holiday season, shoppers turned out in big numbers for Black Friday — spending billions of dollars both in stores and online.

Adobe Analytics, which tracks e-commerce, said U.S. consumers spent a record \$11.8 billion online Friday, marking a 9.1% jump from last year. Traffic particularly piled up between the hours of 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. local time nationwide, when \$12.5 million passed through online shopping carts every minute.

Consumers also spent a record \$6.4 billion online on Thanksgiving Day, per Adobe. Top categories that saw an uptick in sales across both days included video game consoles, electronics and home appliances. Shopping services powered by artificial intelligence and social media advertising have also particularly influenced what consumers choose to buy, the firm said.

Meanwhile, software company Salesforce — which tracks digital spending from a range of retailers, including grocers — estimated that Black Friday online sales totaled \$18 billion in the U.S. and \$79 billion globally. And e-commerce platform Shopify said its merchants raked in a record \$6.2 billion in sales worldwide on Black Friday.

Black Friday is far from the sales event that created midnight mall crowds or door-buster mayhem just decades ago. More and more consumers have instead turned to online deals to make post-Thanksgiving purchases from the comfort of their own homes — or opt to stretch out spending across longer promotions now offered by retailers.

In-store traffic has dwindled over the years. Initial data from RetailNext, which measures real-time foot traffic in physical stores, found that U.S. Black Friday traffic fell 3.6% compared to 2024. Still, the firm noted that was "notably better" than a sharper 6.2% decline it saw in the days leading up to Thanksgiving.

LATIN AMERICA

Mexico plans to build Latin America's most powerful supercomputer

MEXICO CITY (AP)

Mexico unveiled plans Wednesday to build what it claims will be Latin America's most powerful supercomputer — a project the government says will help the country capitalize on the rapidly evolving uses of artificial intelligence and exponentially expand the country's computing capacity.

Dubbed "Coatlicue" for the Mexica goddess considered the earth mother, the supercomputer would be seven times more powerful than the region's current leader in Brazil, José Merino, head of the Telecommunications and Digital Transformation Agency.

President Claudia Sheinbaum said during her morning news briefing that the location for the project had not been decided yet, but construction will begin next year.



Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum speaks at her first state-of-the-nation address at the National Palace in Mexico City, on September 1, 2025.

"We're very excited," said Sheinbaum, an academic and climate scientist. "It is going to allow us to fully get in on the use of artificial intelligence and processing of data that today we don't have the capacity to do."

Merino said that Mexico's most powerful supercomputer operates at 2.3 petaflops — a unit to measure computing speed, meaning it can perform one quadrillion operations per second. Coatlicue would have a capacity of 314 petaflops.