

INTERNATIONAL

Quake-triggered avalanche buries Italian hotel, rescuers fear 'many dead'

Italian rescuers dug frantically Thursday through a wall of snow and splintered trees that buried a resort hotel after an avalanche was shaken loose by a string of earthquakes, trapping at least 30 people including children. Some bodies were found, and officials feared many more were dead. Deep snow in the central Abruzzo region — which was also battered by major quakes last summer — slowed efforts to reach the Hotel Rigopiano, located off a hairpin-path alpine road at about 4,000 feet. Some rescuers used skis, and others were dropped by helicopter after daybreak Thursday — a day after the quakes that triggered the snowslide. Sniffer dogs aided crews seeking possible survivors or, as some predicted, bodies. The state-run news agency ANSA, citing rescue officials, said at least three bodies were pulled from the snow amid the slow search. "There are so many dead," Antonio Crocetta of the local alpine rescue workers told ANSA. "The avalanche was huge." Plaintive text messages were earlier sent to emergency numbers by those buried inside, according to ANSA. At least two children were believed missing. "Help, we're dying of cold," one couple wrote rescuers. But some rescuers described only silence Thursday as they began struggled to move the tightly packed snow — littered with rocks and tree limbs — that covered half the four-star spa and resort and toppled walls.

China's First Freight Train To The U.K. Rolls Into London

It took about two weeks, nearly 7,500 miles, nine countries and two continents. But before this freight train could roll to a well-deserved stop, it had to break through one final barrier, a banner proclaiming its historic achievement: "First freight train from China to UK — Yiwu to London." The train, which set out from the eastern Chinese city earlier this month, inaugurated a direct freight train service between the two countries with its arrival in east London's Barking terminal Wednesday. But to do so, it first had to cross Kazakhstan, Russia, Belarus, Poland, Germany, Belgium and France. The final leg of its intercontinental trip was under the sea, in the Channel Tunnel between France and the U.K. It should be noted, the news comes with a little caveat. The train that left Yimu isn't identical to the one that rolled into London, as The Guardian notes: "Differing rail gauges in countries along the route mean a single locomotive and set of wagons cannot travel the whole route." Still, the freight train — with its rather mundane cargo of clothing and household goods — marks a milestone for an altogether more ambitious plan: the revival of the centuries-old Silk Road trade routes between China and the West. Chinese President Xi Jinping announced the multibillion-dollar investment in infrastructure known as "One Belt, One Road" in 2013. With the new service, London is now the 15th European city to be linked with China by rail — and China is planning another 20 European routes. The U.K. route was announced by the state-run China Railway Corporation, and it is operated by the Yiwu Timex Industrial Investment Company. It is seen as a possible compromise for companies looking to send goods from the one country to the other, trimming the expenses of air travel and cutting the time of shipping by sea.



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Gambia Prepares For Showdown As Foreign Troops Threaten Intervention

In a few hours, longtime Gambian leader Yahya Jammeh's presidential term will expire. But he is clinging to power as troops from regional powers reportedly amass at the border. International and regional powers are demanding that Jammeh step down and make way for his rival, businessman Adama Barrow, who won last month's presidential election. The African Union has stated that it will stop recognizing Jammeh as president after his term expires at midnight local time. (Gambia is five hours ahead of the U.S. East Coast.) And ECOWAS, the West African regional bloc, appears to be preparing to enforce the election result by force. The [Nigerian air force said in a statement](#) that it has moved "a contingent of 200 men and air assets" to Senegal's capital, Dakar, "from where it is expected to operate into Gambia." Senegalese forces also are poised to cross the border, army spokesman Col. Abdou Ndiaye tells Reuters. "We are ready and are awaiting the deadline at midnight. If no political solution is found, we will step in," Ndiaye said, according to the wire service. ECOWAS had earlier threatened military action if Jammeh refused to leave and is seeking "the U.N. Security Council's endorsement of its 'all necessary measures' to help remove Jammeh from power," The Associated Press reported. Gambia, "a country of 1.9 million people, is estimated to have just 900 troops," according to the wire service. Jammeh, who has been president since he led a coup 22 years ago, initially accepted the result of the Dec. 1 election — but dramatically changed his mind a week later, saying that the results were void because of voting "irregularities." And earlier this week, he issued a 90-day state of emergency. Parliament also extended his term for another three months earlier today, according to news reports, though that hasn't appeared to ease the tension heading into tomorrow's deadline.

Gulf Between Richest And Poorest Is Wider Than Previously Thought, Oxfam Says

For several years, Oxfam International has released an annual report on global wealth inequity. The numbers were startling: In [the 2016 report](#), Oxfam said the world's richest 62 people owned as much wealth as the poorest 3.6 billion. The numbers were also wrong, Oxfam announced Monday. Better data show that last year's report should have said that just *nine* billionaires possessed as much wealth as the poorest half of the planet in 2016. And this year, [Oxfam says](#), you only need eight megarich men to balance the scales with the accumulated wealth of 3.6 billion people. The charitable organization's executive director describes the disparity as "obscene." "Inequality is trapping hundreds of millions in poverty," Winnie Byanyima said in a statement. "It is fracturing our societies and undermining democracy." Oxfam's headline-grabbing statistics, released shortly before the World Economic Forum began in Davos, Switzerland, are based on two sources: the [Credit Suisse Global Wealth Databook](#), which looks at wealth distribution within countries, and [Forbes' annual list of billionaires](#), which evaluates the assets of wealthy individuals. The most recent Credit Suisse Databook used "new and better data," especially on the distribution of wealth in India and China, to conclude that the world's poorest people possessed even less money than previously calculated.

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NATIONAL

The Future Of Medicaid May Be Found In Indiana, Where The Poor Pay

To get a glimpse of where Medicaid may be headed, it may be wise to look to Indiana. That's where Seema Verma, President Trump's pick to run the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, comes from. And that's where she put her stamp on the state's health care program for the poor. Verma is a private consultant who was hired by Indiana Governor and Vice President Mike Pence to design a Republican-friendly expansion of Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act. The state paid her almost \$5 million over four years through 2017, according to the contracts. She sees the federal Medicaid program as a bureaucratic nightmare that hamstrings states and encourages poor people to remain dependent. "The Medicaid program has not kept pace with the modern health-care market," she testified at a Congressional hearing in 2013. "Its rigid complex rules designed to protect enrollees have also created an intractable program that does not foster efficiency quality or personal responsibility." The plan she came up with for Indiana requires poor Medicaid recipients to make monthly payments for their insurance, or lose benefits.

"Seema was very committed to extending coverage to low-income families in Indiana," says Cindy Mann, who was the CMS official who negotiated the deal with Verma on that state's Medicaid expansion. She says throughout the negotiations, Verma was "very committed to a particular ideology. That ideology is very much focused on personal responsibility."

Verma did not respond to multiple requests to be interviewed for this story.

Obama's Post-White House Plans Include My Brother's Keeper Effort

After the death of Trayvon Martin, President Obama said America needs to do more to show young black and brown men that their country cares about them. That was the motivation for the president's My Brother's Keeper initiative, one he has vowed to continue long after he leaves the White House. President Obama says when he leaves the White House, he and Michelle will take a vacation. They'll catch up on sleep. And then he plans to devote time and energy to an initiative aimed at helping young black and brown men.

For most of his time in office, President Obama shied away from policies designed to help any particular racial group, saying he wanted to focus instead on promoting opportunity for everyone. But in launching his My Brother's Keeper initiative three years ago, Obama took a different tack, acknowledging all too often the deck is stacked against young African-American and Latino men. And he says addressing that is a national challenge. Over the last three years, Obama has enlisted businesspeople, clergy, athletes and celebrities to mentor and show support for young black and brown men. Shortly before Christmas, he met with some of those volunteers, as well as some of the young people who've been helped by their efforts.



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Research Finds Evidence Of Coastal Buffer Weakening U.S. Hurricanes

Fewer hurricanes have made landfall on the coast in the past decade. Research suggests a bipolar relationship between conditions in the Atlantic and along the coastline may have a protective effect. It's been more than 10 years since the U.S. was hit by a major hurricane. Scientists mark that up to chance. New research suggests a reason for our good fortune. Atlantic hurricanes are born in tropical, warm waters southeast of the continent. Over the past decade, there have been plenty of big ones out there - Category 3 or bigger. But they haven't hit the U.S., or else they've petered out by the time they do, like Hurricane Matthew, which started out last October as a major hurricane. Atmospheric scientist James Kossin with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration says it didn't last. "As it turned up and started to move over to the east coast of Florida, it began to weaken," he said. Down to a Category 1 hurricane by the time it hit the U.S. So what happened? Matthew was born in the tropical Atlantic. Two things allowed it to grow - very warm water and a lack of wind shear. Wind shear is when you get two adjacent layers of wind moving at different speeds. They break up hurricanes. As Matthew approached the U.S. coast, it encountered cool water and high wind shear, just the opposite of the conditions that created it. That weakened the storm. Kossin says this is not an isolated case. He's looked at records back to 1947. It's happened before. His analysis shows that there's a sort of bipolar relationship between the tropical Atlantic and U.S. coastal waters. "In a nutshell, when things are good for hurricanes in the tropics, they're bad for hurricanes near the coast. And when they're bad for hurricanes in the tropics, they're good for hurricanes near the coast," he said. Writing in the journal *Nature*, Kossin warns that when the conditions flip, when the Atlantic cools and gets windier, it still breeds hurricanes. And that's when conditions along the coastline tend to intensify hurricanes as they get closer. Kossin says this phenomenon has protected the U.S. in the past, but there's no guarantee it will last. "This has been a very lucky thing for us. And we've had it in place now for a while, and we don't know how this phenomenon is going to be affected by climate change," Kossin said. Climate change could strengthen the coastal buffer, he says, or eliminate it.

Mysterious radio signal traced to dwarf galaxy light-years away

A mysterious signal that has confounded scientists for years has been traced to a spot in the sky more than 3 billion light-years away. Almost a decade after the first fast radio burst (FRB) was discovered, an international team of researchers has pinpointed the origin of one such signal as a dwarf galaxy in the pentagon-shaped constellation Auriga. Scientists originally thought the signal -- sporadic bursts of radio waves -- was coming from within the Milky Way itself, or from our closest galactic neighbors, but a new report in the journal *Nature* confirms it emanates from a tiny galaxy 1% the mass of our own. "These radio flashes must have enormous amounts of energy to be visible from over 3 billion light-years away," Cornell University researcher Shami Chatterjee said. "We think it may be a magnetar -- a newborn neutron star with a huge magnetic field, inside a supernova remnant or a pulsar wind nebula -- somehow producing these prodigious pulses," Chatterjee said.

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STATE

Study Shows Possible Way To Head Off Algal Blooms

There may be a way to prevent harmful blooms of algae in some lakes or reservoirs, according to a new study. Researchers from the University of Wisconsin-Madison Center for Limnology and scientists from three other universities gradually spread phosphorus and nitrogen in a small lake in Michigan. The team compared the lake with two others and found they could collect data predicting when a rapid growth of algae and loss of oxygen were coming. Previously, algal blooms could only be forecasted a few days in advance, said Center for Limnology Director Steve Carpenter, who co-authored the study. "We found that we could get predictions two weeks to about six weeks in advance of the bloom, which is a significant improvement," Carpenter said. Researchers also found when they halted the nutrients – phosphorus and nitrogen – the algae growth quickly declined. "That if we acted on the predictors – so the predictors give us a signal that a bloom is coming – and we stop the nutrient input, we were able to prevent the bloom," Carpenter said. Harmful algal blooms can occur when nutrients such as phosphorus and nitrogen trickle into the water from places like farms or lawns and increase the amount of algae in the water. The study may not lead to stopping algal blooms in large lakes that receive excessive nutrients from a large number of sources, including manure runoff from farms. But Carpenter said the findings could help managers of drinking water reservoirs take short-term measures to reduce phosphorus input, or know when a big amount of nutrients is about to trigger a bloom and switch to a different water supply.

Central Wisconsin Health Center Could House Mentally Ill Defendants

A central Wisconsin mental health center could house criminal defendants to help ease the strain on two existing state facilities. Under the plan, the Norwood Health Center in Marshfield would treat mentally ill defendants until they're competent to participate in criminal proceedings. Norwood Administrator Jordon Bruce said the state would lease a 20-bed unit for \$500,000 per year and hire professionals to staff it. "They're looking at adding about 36 full-time equivalent employees, psychiatrists, psychologists, nurses, social workers," he said. The plan, proposed to Norwood by the state, still needs approval by the Wisconsin Department of Health Services and Wood County, which owns the facility. Bruce admitted some county officials are worried. "We certainly want to ensure the safety and security of not only our current residents and staff but also the Marshfield and surrounding communities as a whole," Bruce said. He said Norwood would not house the most dangerous felony defendants. The state is considering Norwood because of the high demand for the Mendota Mental Health Institute in Madison, which houses men, and the Winnebago Mental Health Institute in Oshkosh, which houses women, Bruce said. Housing defendants in Marshfield would also cut down on the need to travel to Madison or Oshkosh. "When we look at the state as a whole, to only have two of these facilities, not only family members but law enforcement personnel that have to transport these individuals, this would be much closer for those central Wisconsin and northern Wisconsin counties," Bruce said.



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UW-Eau Claire Researcher Finds Increase In Race-Based Bullying In Schools

A cyberbullying researcher at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire said he's seeing an increase in the number of high school students being bullied because their race or skin color than in past years. Justin Patchin, a criminal justice professor at UW-Eau Claire, said for the last three years he and a colleague have talked to thousands of middle and high school students about bullying in school and online. This summer and fall nearly 6,000 students were surveyed nationwide and a new trend has emerged. "If we look at the 2013 data, about 12 percent of students told us that they had been bullied at school because of their race or their color. In 2016, it was 25 percent who said that they were bullied because of that," said Patchin, co-founder of the Cyberbullying Research Center. But Patchin said without more research it's impossible to say what's driving the increase. "We don't know why that is, but it just seems that behavior, specifically, is occurring with more frequency now than in years past." Patchin said he's gotten questions about whether some of the rhetoric surrounding the 2016 presidential race has anything to do with the increase in race-based bullying in schools, but he said without further study he and other researchers can't make that connection.

Study: Wisconsin Could See More Than 30,000 New Cases Of Cancer This Year

study by the American Cancer Society shows cancer death rates across the country dropped 25 percent over the past two decades. The study also estimates Wisconsin will see nearly 33,000 new cases of cancer this year. The society's spokesman for Wisconsin, Lou Harvin, said Wisconsinites must focus on preventative measures to continue the decrease in new cases. "The state's smoking rates are getting better but it's still an issue and we're trying to improve that," Harvin said. "In Wisconsin, we're just trying to get the word out as much as we can to tell people that cancer is alive and well, even though the numbers are getting better." The study predicts a little more than 3,000 Wisconsin deaths will be due to lung cancer in 2017. Smoking rates tend to be higher among people of color and because of that they should start getting tested at an earlier age than their white peers, Harvin said. Data from the study also estimated 21,000 of those new patients will survive. Harvin said survival estimates are a rather new figure. "Fifty years ago, there was no such thing as the phrase 'cancer survivor,'" Harvin said. "That was an oxymoron. Today, we are able to say that people are living with cancer. That people are dealing with it, that they're combating it. They are fighting it, they're living longer with cancer."

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SPORTS

WSN Cup Standings: Arrowhead, Catholic Memorial, Darlington lead after fall sports

The WSN Cup is an award that honors schools that provide and achieve success in many of the WIAA sponsored sports. The award totals points earned in both boys and girls sports. All WIAA sponsored sports are included as part of the scoring for the award.

It comes as no surprise to see Arrowhead on top of the **Large Schools Division** (enrollment over 1000 students), as the Warhawks have won the WSN Cup each of its first nine years of existence. Arrowhead's 460 points is not only the highest Large School total, it is the highest of any school regardless of size. While the football team did not see the success we've become accustomed to, there were plenty of highlights, including a state championship by the girls golf team and runner-up finishes in both boys and girls cross country. In addition, the girls swimming and diving squad took third at state, the boys volleyball team made it to the state tournament, and the boy soccer team was in a sectional final. Arrowhead was the only school to score points in every fall sport. Middleton is not far behind with 415 points, while Sun Prairie, Homestead, and Neenah round out the top five. Catholic Memorial is on top of the **Medium Schools Division** (enrollment 500-1000), as the Crusaders are chasing their first ever WSN Cup trophy after many years coming up just short. The Crusaders have a lead of 125 points on the next closest school, thanks to a trio of fall sports state championships in football, girls volleyball, and boys volleyball. The boys soccer team also advanced to a sectional final. Rounding out the top five are Notre Dame, Whitefish Bay, three-time defending champion Madison Edgewood, and McFarland. With a pair of state titles and runner-up finish in the fall sports season, Darlington is out to an early lead in the **Small Schools Division** (enrollment below 500). The Redbirds' boys and girls cross country teams captured state championships under legendary head coach Arnie Mieke, who was named the 2015 National Coach of the Year by the NFHS Coaches Association. It was a sixth consecutive state title by the boys squad. The football team finished as the Division 6 runner-up for a fourth straight year. Defending champion Aquinas is not far behind, with Regis, Lourdes Academy, Cedar Grove-Belgium, and The Prairie School rounding out the top six.

Somerset looking to plug leaks in its defense

In five of the 11 games this season, the Somerset boys hockey team has surrendered five or more goals. Four of those five games resulted in the team's losses as the Spartans end the 2016 portion of their schedule with a 7-4 record. The Spartans lost two of their three games last week, giving up 15 goals over the three games. The week started with a 6-0 loss at Onalaska last Tuesday. On Wednesday, the Spartans faced West Salem in a tournament at Menomonie. It didn't go well for the Spartans, who came away on the losing end of an 8-2 decision. Things did begin to turn around on Thursday when the Spartans score a 4-1 win over Ashwaubenon in the second round of the Menomonie tournament. Somerset coach Dan Gilkerson said the porous defensive play can no longer be overlooked.

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WEATHER

- **Today:** Scattered flurries before 3pm. Partly sunny, with a high near 18. West wind around 10 mph, with gusts as high as 15 mph.
- **Tonight:** Increasing clouds, with a low around 12. West wind around 5 mph becoming south after midnight.
- **Wednesday:** Cloudy, with a high near 29. Breezy, with a south wind 5 to 15 mph becoming southwest in the afternoon. Winds could gust as high as 20 mph.
- **Wednesday Night:** Mostly cloudy, with a low around 23. Breezy, with a west wind around 15 mph, with gusts as high as 25 mph.
- **Thursday:** A 20 percent chance of snow after 7am. Cloudy, with a high near 28. Blustery, with a northwest wind 15 to 20 mph, with gusts as high as 30 mph.
- **Thursday Night:** A 20 percent chance of snow before 7pm. Mostly cloudy, with a low around 12. Blustery.

COMMERCIALS

Announcer: You know texting while driving is dangerous. That's not new information. Yet most people admit to doing it anyway. Drivers are 23 times more likely to be involved in a car accident while texting. Know the facts and wait to text. The danger is real and it applies to you! Auto-Owners Insurance, The "No Problem" People. Information provided by Virginia Tech Transportation Institute.

Example Local Tag: Visit [Your Agency Name] in [Your City] today at [Website Address]

Announcer: Where are you? Are you in bed?
Or are you leaving the first human footprint on Mars?
Are you jogging?
Or are you about to pull off the heist of the century?
Are you in your car?
Or are you praying those red eyes in the darkness can't see you?
A voice in your ear can take you anywhere.

VO: Audible. Get your first audiobook for free and feel every word. \$7.99 a month after 30-day trial. Starts automatically. Terms apply.