

English articles

It's useful to read articles in English, even if you don't understand every word - it will help you increase your vocabulary and keep up to date with things happening in English-speaking countries!

*This page will be updated on **Mondays**. The first article is aimed at a B1 and upwards level and the second article is aimed at a B2 and upwards level*

Articles of the week



The Vatican closes the Sistine Chapel to the public and prepares for a papal conclave



By VANESSA GERA Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — Exit tourists. Enter cardinals.

The Vatican has closed the Sistine Chapel, where cardinals will gather for the conclave to elect the next pope after the death of Pope Francis on April 21 at age 88.

Francis was buried Saturday after a funeral in St. Peter's Square that gathered world leaders and hundreds of thousands of others, and a nine-day period of mourning is continuing before the conclave can start.

But the church is at the same time turning its attention to the next steps.

Key is preparing the Sistine Chapel for the red-robed cardinals who will gather at the Vatican in the heart of Rome to choose the next pope in an ancient process fictionalized in the 2024 film "Conclave."

One key task: installing the chimney where ballots will be burned after votes.

Those visitors who managed to enter on Sunday considered themselves lucky, since there is no telling how long the conclave will last, and how long the gem of the Vatican Museums will remain off-limits.

"I think we felt very lucky to be able to be the last group of visitors to come in today," said Sumon Khan, a tourist from the United States. "You know, our trip would not have been complete without seeing this beautiful place."

According to a schedule determined by church law, the conclave can only begin after the nine-day mourning period. It is expected to start between May 5 and May 10.

When it does, the cardinals will enter solemnly to participate in a secretive process said to be guided by the holy spirit that will result in the selection of the next leader of the 1.4 billion-strong Catholic church. The choice will determine whether the next pontiff will continue Francis' reforms, with his focus on the poor and marginalized and the environment, or whether they will choose a pontiff closer in style to conservative predecessors like Benedict XVI focused on doctrine.

For inspiration, the cardinals will also have the great beauty of the frescoes painted by Michelangelo and other renowned Renaissance artists. The most recognizable is Michelangelo's Creation of Adam, showing God's outstretched hand imparting the divine spark of life to the first man.

The chapel is named after Pope Sixtus IV, an art patron who oversaw the construction of the main papal chapel in the 15th century. But it was a later pontiff, Pope Julius II, who commissioned the works by Michelangelo, who painted the ceiling depicting scenes from Genesis from 1508 and 1512 and later returned to paint the Last Judgement on one of the walls.

When the conclave opens, cardinals will chant the Litany of Saints, the solemn, mystical Gregorian chant imploring the intercession of the saints, as they file into the chapel and take an oath of secrecy. The chapel's thick double doors will close and the master of liturgy will utter the Latin words "Extra omnes," meaning "everyone out."

The secretive process is part of a tradition aimed at preserving the vote from external interference.

The world will then wait for a sign that a successor to Francis has been chosen. Black smoke coming from the chimney in the Sistine Chapel will indicate that they haven't achieved the two-thirds majority for a new pope.

But when a pope is finally chosen, white smoke will rise and bells will toll.

Associated Press video reporter Pietro De Cristofaro contributed from Rome.

Don't like a columnist's opinion? Los Angeles Times offers an AI-generated opposing viewpoint



By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

In a colorful commentary for the Los Angeles Times, Matt K. Lewis argued that callousness is a central feature of the second Trump administration, particularly its policies of deportation and bureaucratic cutbacks. “Once you normalize cruelty,” Lewis concluded in the piece, “the hammer eventually swings for everyone. Even the ones who thought they were swinging it.”

Lewis' word wasn't the last, however. As they have with opinion pieces the past several weeks, Times online readers had the option to click on a button labeled “Insights,” which judged the column politically as “center-left.” Then it offers an AI-generated synopsis — a CliffsNotes version of the column — and a similarly-produced opposing viewpoint.

One dissenting argument reads: “Restricting birthright citizenship and refugee admissions is framed as correcting alleged exploitation of immigration loopholes, with proponents arguing these steps protect American workers and resources.”

The feature symbolizes changes to opinion coverage ordered over the past six months by Times owner Dr. Patrick Soon-Shiong, who's said he wants the famously liberal opinion pages to reflect different points of view. Critics accuse him of trying to curry favor with President Donald Trump.

Publisher says he doesn't want an “echo chamber”

Soon-Shiong, a medical innovator who bought the Times in 2018, blocked his newspaper from endorsing Democrat Kamala Harris for president last fall and said he wanted to overhaul its editorial board, which is responsible for researching and writing Times editorials.

“If you just have the one side, it's just going to be an echo chamber,” Soon-Shiong told Fox News last fall. He said broadening the outlook is “going to be risky and it's going to be difficult. I'm going to take a lot of heat, which I already am, but I come from the position that it's really important that all voices be heard.”

Three of the six people who researched and wrote Times editorials, including editorials editor Mariel Garza, resigned in protest after the Harris non-endorsement. The other three have since left with the last holdout, Carla Hall, exiting after writing a last column that ran March 30 about homeless people

she met while covering the issue. Soon-Shiong's decision caused a similar unrest with subscribers as happened when Washington Post owner Jeff Bezos decided the newspaper would not back a presidential candidate.

The Times used to run unsigned editorials — reflecting a newspaper's institutional opinion — six days a week. The paper lists only two editorial board members, Soon-Shiong and executive editor Terry Tang. They're usually too busy to write editorials. Soon-Shiong has said he will appoint new board members, but it's unclear when.

He also said he was seeking more conservative or moderate columnists to appear in the paper. Lewis, a self-described Reagan Republican who just began as a columnist, believes he's part of that effort. Soon-Shiong has also brought up CNN commentator Scott Jennings, a Republican consultant who has already contributed columns for a few years.

Los Angeles Times spokeswoman Hillary Manning was asked recently about editorial policy, but reportedly lost her job in a round of layoffs before she could answer. There has been no reply to other attempts at seeking comment from Times management, including how readers are responding to “Insights.”

There were some initial questions about whether a “bias meter” as described by Soon-Shiong would apply to news articles as well as opinion pieces. But the publisher told Times reporter James Rainey in December it would only be included on commentary, as it has remained since “Insights” was introduced to readers on March 3.

A gimmick that insults the intelligence of readers?

In practice, the idea feels like a gimmick, Garza, the former editorials editor, said in an interview with The Associated Press.

“I think it could be offensive both to readers ... and the writers themselves who object to being categorized in simple and not necessarily helpful terms,” she said. “The idea of having a bias meter just in and of itself is kind of an insult to intelligence and I've always thought that the readers of the opinion page were really smart.”

The online feature created problems instantly when it was applied to columnist Gustavo Arellano's piece about the little-noticed 100th anniversary of a Ku Klux Klan rally that drew more than 20,000 people to a park in Anaheim, California.

One of the AI-generated “Insights” said that “local historical accounts occasionally frame the 1920s Klan as a product of 'white Protestant culture' responding to societal changes rather than an explicitly hate-driven movement.” Another said that “critics argue that focusing on past Klan influence distracts from Anaheim's identity as a diverse city.”

Some at the Times believe an ensuing backlash — Times defends Klan! — was inaccurate and overblown. Still, the perspectives were removed.

Often, “Insights” have the flat, bloodless tone of early AI. After contributor David Helvarg's column about potential cuts to the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration, the opposing viewpoint noted that Trump supporters “say it aligns with broader efforts to shrink government and eliminate programs deemed nonessential.”

A better way to improve opinion offerings is to hire more journalists and put them to work, said Paul Thornton, former letters editor for the Times' opinion section.

Media columnist Margaret Sullivan argued in The Guardian that Soon-Shiong talks about promoting viewpoint diversity but really wants to push the newspaper toward Trump. “His bias meter should — quickly — go the way of hot type, the manual typewriter and the dodo,” Sullivan wrote.

Soon-Shiong, in his interview with Rainey, dismissed claims that he was scared of Trump or trying to appease him. People need to respect different opinions, he said. “It's really important for us (to) heal the nation,” he said. “We've got to stop being so polarized.”

A writer amused by the label attached to him

One writer who doesn't mind “Insights” is Lewis — with one caveat.

“I like it,” he said. “I didn't know what to expect but I was pretty pleasantly surprised. It does provide additional context for the reader. It provides counterpoints, but I think they're very fair counterpoints.”

Lewis, who once worked for Tucker Carlson's “Daily Caller,” was amused to see “Insights” judge his most recent column as “center-left.” He figured it was because he was critical of Trump. Instead, Lewis said it points to the relative meaninglessness of such labels.

“I guess I'm a center-left columnist,” he said. “At least for a week.”

David Bauder writes about the intersection of media and entertainment for the AP. Follow him at <http://x.com/dbauder> and <https://bsky.app/profile/dbauder.bsky.social>

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