

The Washington Post

News coverage and other essential information

W 10 10 10 10

Shows 7p/6p • Tomorrow: p.m. shows 7p/6p 86

Democracy Dies in Darkness

TUESDAY, JUNE 20, 2023 • 83

A jump for freedom on Juneteenth



MIKE MCGILLY/THE WASHINGTON POST

Pasua Turner jumps double Dutch at a Juneteenth event at Black Lives Matter Plaza on Monday. Across the country, Americans celebrated the federal holiday, which commemorates June 19, 1865, when a Union general read orders in Galveston, Tex., declaring that all enslaved people in the state were free. Story, B1

FBI resisted probe into Trump's role in Jan. 6 attack

OFFICIALS TOOK A YEAR TO INVESTIGATE

Garland, deputies feared appearing partisan

BY CAROL D. LEONNIG AND AARON C. DAYN

Hours after he was sworn in as attorney general, Merrick Garland and his deputies gathered in a wood-paneled conference room in the Justice Department for a private briefing on the investigation he had promised to make his highest priority: bringing to justice those responsible for the attack on the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021.

In the two months since the siege, federal agents had conducted 700 searches, charged 270 rioters and identified 865 likely suspects, said Michael R. Sherwin, then-acting U.S. attorney for the District of Columbia, telling through a slide presentation, Garland and some of his deputies nodded approvingly at the slide.

and the new attorney general called the progress "remarkable," according to people in the room.

Sherwin's office, with the help of the FBI, was responsible for prosecuting all crimes stemming from the Jan. 6 attack. He had made headlines the day after by refusing to rule out the possibility that President Donald Trump himself could be culpable. "We are looking at all actors, not only the people who went into the building," Sherwin said in response to a reporter's question about Trump. "If the evidence fits the elements of a crime, they're going to be charged."

But according to a copy of the briefing document, absent from Sherwin's 11-page presentation to Garland on March 13, 2021, was any reference to Trump or his

SEE PAGE 6 OR A16

'Candid' U.S.-China talks may herald cooperation

BY JOHN HUDSON AND MARGARET TORIN

BEIJING — Secretary of State Antony Blinken hailed his discussions with Chinese President Xi Jinping and other top Chinese officials as "very candid, very in-depth" and "constructive" on Monday and raised the prospect of cooperating on key global challenges, including ending the war in Ukraine, curbing North Korea's nuclear program and stemming climate change.

However, Blinken acknowledged that key differences remain on core issues, and U.S. diplomats did not forge an agreement with

Beijing to reopen military-to-military channels — a key objective of his trip.

"China has not agreed to move forward with that. It's an issue we have to keep working on," he told reporters at a news conference in Beijing after the meetings.

For weeks leading up to the visit, U.S. officials emphasized the importance of such communication links to prevent accidents from turning into a military confrontation — particularly recent close calls between planes and ships in the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait.

Still, the 35-minute-long meet-

SEE CHINA ON A7

With aid at stake, Ukraine clamps down on graft

BY DAVID L. STERN

KYIV, UKRAINE — The photos showed hundreds of dollars lying in piles on furniture and jutting out of a safe — the results of what officials from Ukraine's main anti-corruption body said last month was a \$2.7 million bribery scheme involving the chief justice of the country's Supreme Court, Vyacheslav Knyazyev.

Last month, anti-corruption investigators said they caught Knyazyev "red-handed" receiving a payment of about \$450,000 — a "second tranche of illegal ben-

Persistent corruption could threaten funding from wartime allies

efits" in a corruption scheme potentially involving other members of Ukraine's Supreme Court and judiciary. The cash in the photos was found at his home and office, officials said. Knyazyev was arrested and dismissed from his position, and a criminal investigation is ongoing.

"This is huge," said Tetiana Shevchuk, a lawyer with the Anti-Corruption Action Center, an anti-graft watchdog in Kyiv. "This is not an ordinary judge in a local court taking a bribe — it's the highest judge in the system."

As Ukraine mounts its counter-offensive against invading Russian forces, law enforcement officials in Kyiv are waging a war on corruption with similarly high stakes for the country's future. Ukraine is surviving not only on donated weapons but also on foreign economic aid, and Western supporters want to be sure their

money is not lost to the graft and malfeasance that has long stunted Ukraine's democratic aspirations.

Ukraine's dream of joining the European Union will hinge in part on the anti-corruption fight, and the political future of President Volodymyr Zelenskyy — who won office four years ago promising to eliminate corruption — could also hang in the balance. Amid a war that has required heavy physical and emotional sacrifices, polls

SEE UKRAINE ON A9

Fighting Putin's Independent Russian militia aid Ukraine. A1

For many Black moms, a sadly familiar tragedy

Olympian's death carries echoes of their own pregnancy crises

BY ANJALIA JOHNSON AND FRITZ NIKAFFEL

They see themselves in her story. Not necessarily the part about being an elite athlete. But the part about being a Black woman who suffered catastrophic complications of pregnancy and childbirth, here being fatal.

Some poured out their pain on social media, recounting the trauma they endured. Others commiserated in group chats for Black mothers or gaped in solitude, saying quiet prayers of thanks that they survived what hundreds annually do not. And many of the obstetricians, midwives, doulas and reproductive-health equity researchers who said her name — Teri Bowie — with reverence also expressed an-

asperation that the nation's worsening maternal health crisis had claimed another victim.

"She is why we do this work," said Jola Coover-Perry, an obstetrician-gynecologist and founder of the National Birth Equity Collaborative, a nonprofit group dedicated to eliminating racial inequities in birth outcomes. "For her to be so seen as an athlete, and so unseen when it comes to being pregnant, speaks to the invisibility of Black motherhood."

Coover-Perry was attending a federal advisory meeting on infant and maternal mortality when she checked Twitter and was stunned by the news that the 32-year-old Olympian's death had been attributed to one of the most common causes of maternal mortality: high blood pressure.

In Bowie's case, the medical examiner in Florida's Orange County identified two potential contributing factors to her death: eclampsia, the most severe condition on the spectrum of pregnancy-related hypertensive disor-

SEE BOWIE ON A4

The Nile is the world's longest river? The Amazon would like a word.

If the Amazon and the Nile rivers both ended in Washington



Source: National Geographic. Illustration by the Washington Post

BY TERENCE MCCOY, LAUREN TIERNEY AND MARINA DEAN
IN RIO DE JANEIRO

Guinness World Records, Britannica and the U.S. government agree: The longest river in the world is the mighty Nile — the "father of African rivers," Britannica says.

But in Brazil, home to the powerful Amazon River, which cleaves South America more than 6,000 miles across it, the Nile's standing is slightly lower.

"Second biggest river in the world," reads Portuguese-speaking Wikipedia.

"The Amazon is the most extensive in the world," declares the educational website Brazil School.

At a time when so much of the world has been measured, so many arguments settled — tallest mountain (Everest), largest ocean (Pacific), most venomous snake (western taipan) — the question of which river is the world's longest remains, somehow, tantalizingly beyond our reach. What appears at first to be

a basic geographic query, a matter of cold science and hard numbers, has instead morphed into a cartographical dispute that has divided the scientific and exploration communities along the both lines of national identity, units of measurement and even personal pique.

"The Nile — or the Amazon?" "The Nile is definitely longer than the Amazon," said Sir Christopher Ondaatje, an English-Canadian adventurer who has journeyed to what he says is the river's far-flung source. "And there is no doubt about that."

"The Amazon is longer than the Nile," counters Guido Gelli, the former geodesics director of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics. "I have no doubt in my mind."

According to the U.S. Geological Survey and Britannica, the difference between their lengths

SEE RIVERS ON A14

IN THE NEWS



AP/WIDEWORLD

Rides in California The president toured a nature preserve and unveiled \$600 million for projects to fight climate change. A3

THE NATION A search is underway for a submarine that vanished with five people aboard during an expedition to explore the wreckage of the Titanic. A6
In a new study, scientists make the assertion that Earth formed within 3 million years — notably faster than previous estimates of 100 million years. A18

THE WORLD Alexei Navalny, the

Russian opposition leader, was put on trial on treason charges that could see his existing prison sentence extended by decades. A20
A searing heat wave across India's northeast has caused nearly 100 deaths since Thursday, officials said. A11
An Ecuadorian woman who was declared dead and then found alive inside her coffin has been deemed deceased for a second time. A11

THE ECONOMY

The latest AI advances are ushering Photoshop into a new era, letting users alter an image in sophisticated ways without mastering complex software. A14
A 600-pound marlin almost won a game-fishing crew \$3.5 million — then it was disqualified. A17

THE REGION Two teen cousins were killed and a child was critically injured in separate D.C. shootings on Father's Day. In Maryland's takeover

INSIDE

of the state's troubled college savings agency is off to a rocky start, parents say. In Arlington County voters will be the first in Virginia to use a ranked-choice system in a publicly run election, a switch that has left some perplexed. B1
STYLE A scientist says anti-vaccine activists "stalked" him at his home after Joe Rogan challenged him to debate anti-vaccine proponent Robert F. Kennedy Jr. C1

INSIDE



HEALTH & SCIENCE On clinical trials and tribulations The roller coaster of life after a cancer diagnosis, plus other stories about the disease. E1

STYLE Can he deliver? Teamsters head Sean O'Brien has big plans. C1

WASHINGTON NEWS... A1
CONCRETE... A6
OPINION PAGE... A12
ENTERTAINMENT... A16
TELEVISION... C1
WORLD NEWS... A8

ISSN 01 101
The Washington Post/June 20, 2023
017062921100

AMERICAS

The Nile is the world's longest river? The Amazon would like a word.

By [Terrence McCoy](#), [Lauren Tierney](#) and [Marina Dias](#)
June 12, 2023 at 5:00 a.m. EDT



An international team of researchers and explorers is preparing to journey the length of the Amazon to determine which river is the world's longest. (Video: The Washington Post)

Listen 10 min Comment 229 Gift Article Share

RIO DE JANEIRO — Guinness World Records, Britannica and the U.S. government agree: The longest river in the world is the mighty Nile — the “father of African rivers,” [Britannica says](#).

But in Brazil, home to the powerful Amazon River, which cleaves South America more than slithers across it, the Nile's standing is slightly lower.

“Second biggest river in the world,” scoffs [Portuguese-speaking Wikipedia](#).

“The Amazon is the most extensive in the world,” declares the [educational website Brazil School](#).

A Tale of Two Rivers

The Nile flows north from sub-Saharan Africa to Egypt and the Mediterranean Sea. The Amazon flows east from the Andes mountains of Peru to Brazil and the Atlantic Ocean.



At a time when so much of the world has been measured, so many arguments settled — tallest mountain (Everest), largest ocean (Pacific), most venomous snake (western taipan) — the question of which river is the world's longest remains, somehow, tantalizingly beyond our reach. What appears at first to be a basic geographic query, a matter of cold science and hard numbers, has instead morphed into a cartographical dispute that has divided the scientific and exploration communities along the fault lines of national identity, units of measurement and even personal pique.

The Nile — or the Amazon?

“The Nile is definitely longer than the Amazon,” said Sir Christopher Ondaatje, an English-Canadian adventurer who's journeyed to what he says is the river's far-flung source. “And there is no doubt about that.”

“The Amazon is longer than the Nile,” counters Guido Gelli, the former geosciences director of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics. “I have no doubt in my mind.”

According to the U.S. Geological Survey and Britannica, the difference between their lengths is just 132 miles — less than the drive from Washington to Philadelphia. They have the Nile's 4,132 miles barely edging out the Amazon's 4,000.

**If the Amazon and the Nile rivers
both ended in Washington, D.C.**



To try to settle the dispute — a task that some assert will never be possible — a team of international researchers and explorers are now planning to voyage the length of the Amazon. Backed by organizations including the Explorers Club, which has supported some of history's most daring expeditions, and other groups, the team is to set out next spring in the most distant reaches of the Peruvian Andes, the mountains where the Amazon is said to begin. For the next seven months, members will map and measure the river's entire course until it reaches the Atlantic Ocean.

Then, if all goes smoothly, a journey down the Nile — which might, after all, also be mismeasured — could be next.

“Mount Everest has been climbed thousands of times,” said Brazilian explorer Yuri Sanada, who is leading the mission. “More than 1,500 people have rowed or paddled across an ocean. But to kayak down the entire Amazon? That has been done fewer than 10 times, and all of them were for adventure’s sake. To document the entire river, its geography and biodiversity — this has never been done.”



According to the U.S. Geological Survey and Britannica, the Nile is 132 miles longer than the Amazon. (Video: The Washington Post)

The journey will not be without its dangers. Drug traffickers use the Amazon as a smuggling route. Sections are pervaded by river pirates. In 2018, six men were charged in the murder of British canoeist Emma Kelty, who was sexually assaulted and killed halfway through a solo journey down the river’s length.

But, Sanada said, the risks are worth the expected results. Not only to showcase the extraordinary wildlife of a river that anchors a region being pushed to the brink of collapse by illegal deforestation, but also to try to solve one of the world’s last geographical mysteries.

“Which river,” he asked, “is the longest in the world?”

The Amazon, Undone



Takeaways from The Post’s investigation of deforestation in the Amazon



As the Amazon rainforest goes dry, a desperate wait for water



We traveled to the Amazon to investigate deforestation

A controversial science

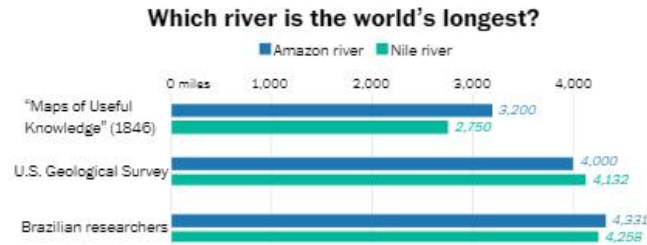
It’s not an easy question to answer. Rivers, more than most geographic features, are ever changing and prone to multiple interpretations. Floods wash away bends. Shorelines swivel. Man-made canals divert their paths.

Then there’s the question of where a river begins. Is it at the headwaters of the largest channel of water — the “source stream?” Or is it the “most distant source,” the faraway birthplace of the most distant tributary?

Equally controversial is deciding where the river ends. Many geographers think it's where the mainstream hits the mouth. But others say it's where the longest distributary comes to its end.

"It's the wild west," said Matthew Hanson, a remote sensing scientist at the University of Maryland. "Who's going to say, 'No, you can't measure a river that way?' ... It's crazy. It's fun. It's weird."

Any deviation in measurement, any change in the river's course, natural or otherwise, can yield different lengths — and reshuffle the ranking. In 1846, according to the atlas "Maps of Useful Knowledge," the Amazon was the world's longest river, at 3,200 miles; the Nile came in at 2,750.



More recently, Brazilian researchers have argued, the Amazon is more than 1,000 miles longer — and 87 miles longer than the Nile. Or maybe, according to the U.S. Geological Survey, it's 132 miles shorter than the Nile.

"It's a complicated science, and that has created leeway for people to make bold claims and to assert different points of view," said Angela Thompsell, a historian at the State University of New York at Brockport who has studied the Nile's history. "We would like to have a nice pinpoint answer, somewhere we can point to on the map, that this is where the river begins."

But for the two most famous rivers in the world, that has not yet been possible.

[*An Indigenous TikTok star takes Amazonian culture viral*]

Searching for the Amazon's source



Boats await passengers to ferry across the Apurimac River in Pichari, Peru. (Rodrigo

A decade ago, the neuroscientist James Contos wanted a change. Burned out in his profession, he hoped to pursue his passion: Kayaking. Knowing Peru had some of the world's best rivers to run, he was looking at maps of the Andes mountains when something odd stuck out to him.

For centuries, people believed the Amazon's source was the Marañón River in northern Peru. Then explorers argued that following another remote tributary, Apurímac River, led to an even more distant source. A 1971 expedition led by the American explorer Loren McIntyre traced the river to a faraway brook in the Andes and crowned it the Amazon's headwaters.

But looking at the maps, Contos focused on a third affluent, the Mantaro River, that appeared to twist farther than the Apurímac. So he set out with a GPS, hiking boots and kayak to find out if the maps were true. He ventured into the inhospitable environment — arid, cold, thin mountain air — that couldn't have been more different from the low, flat, hot Amazon basin.

After days of hiking, Contos found a new most distant source: A modest spring near the base of a mountain.

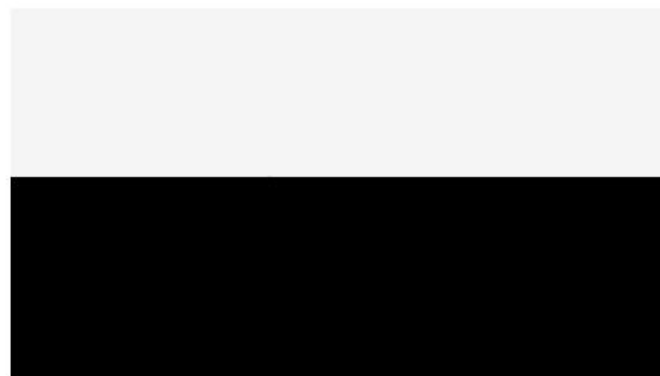
He published his research in 2014 in the scholarly journal *Area*. "I thought I'd made a big discovery, and it would be big news," he said.

But other researchers immediately tried to discredit it.

"A moot point" was how one geographer described the finding to National Geographic.

A dam had been built along the Mantaro that diverts enough water during the dry season that the riverbed empties. Some scientists argued that this should disqualify it from consideration as a source. Others countered that it shouldn't matter — the river's seasonality was caused by human intervention.

The argument started to sound a lot like another river squabble: The one surrounding the source of the Nile.



Three African countries — Uganda, Burundi and Rwanda — claim the source of the Nile. (Video: The Washington Post)

There, controversy goes back centuries. In the mid-1850s, at the height of the global exploration craze, when fame and fortune rested on bold announcements, an explorer named Jack Speke came out with one of the biggest. He argued in 1858 that he'd found the river's source: Lake Victoria. That proclamation has been debated ever since,

and today, three separate countries — Uganda, Burundi and Rwanda — claim the source of the Nile as their own.

But the controversy quiets as the Nile winds its way north, flowing into Egypt and onward to the Mediterranean Sea.

With the Amazon, it hasn't been so simple.

'Print the legend'



The Amazon river in Ilha de Marajo, Brazil. (Pedro Vilela/Getty Images)

The waters of the Amazon travel thousands of miles before coming to Marajó Island, half the size of Portugal, wedged between the river and the Atlantic. Most of the Amazon's water gushes northward, the shortest route to the sea. But some of it tracks south, beginning a long, circuitous path toward the Atlantic.

Most people consider the north stream to be the Amazon's final say. Not Paulo Roberto Martini, 76. To prove his point, the longhaired scientist traced a map on a recent Monday morning at the Brazilian Institute of National Spatial Research in São Paulo state.

"Here's the Breves canal," he said, indicating a narrow blue squiggle.

His finger followed it as it banked South, then merged into waters that flushed eastward toward the Atlantic. This path — which goes around the Marajó rather than past it — was what his team selected to measure when it set out in 2008 to compare the lengths of the Amazon and the Nile. To make things fair, they measured the Nile by the same standard, selecting its longest path to the mouth.

In the final count, the Amazon came out on top, narrowly: 4,344 miles to 4,257. Headlines declared the Amazon the longest river the world. But victory was fleeting.

Other scientists criticized the decision to use the Breves canal. Some alleged the Brazilian researchers were looking for any way to make their river appear longer. “Gaming the measurement in order to be #1,” one remote sensing scientist remarked.

Martini said his team was surprised by the reaction. “We felt very attacked,” he said. So they moved onto other areas of research, the study was never peer-reviewed, and the issue was largely forgotten.

But even now, Martini thinks about the day he questioned the Nile’s place as the world’s longest river. It reminds him of the ending to the John Ford Western “The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance,” when James Stewart admits that the success of his life has been built on a lie. His plea to set the record straight is ignored. “When the legend becomes fact,” an editor tells him, “print the legend.”

Martini wishes that next year’s expedition would finally settle the debate. But he’s not hopeful.

“The issue of the longest river in the world still isn’t resolved,” he said. “And it won’t ever be.”

Map data sourced from Natural Earth and HydroSHEDS. Chart data sourced from “Maps of Useful Knowledge” (1846), USGS, the National Geographic Society, and Post reporting. The maps in the story represent what are considered the longest measurements of each river, and do not represent all disputed starting points for each river.

🗨️ 229 Comments

🎁 Gift Article



By [Terrence McCoy](#)

Terrence McCoy is The Washington Post’s Rio de Janeiro Bureau Chief. He has twice won the George Polk Award and was named a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in 2023. [Twitter](#)



By [Lauren Tierney](#)

Lauren Tierney is a Senior Graphics Reporter at The Washington Post. Before joining the Post in 2017, she was a Graphics Editor at National Geographic Magazine. [Twitter](#)