

Nations condemn Russia's killing of civilians

Associated Press

BUCHA, Ukraine — Moscow faced global revulsion and accusations of war crimes Monday after the Russian pullout from the outskirts of Ukraine's capital, Kyiv, revealed streets strewn with corpses of what appeared to be civilians, some of whom had seemingly been killed at close range.

The grisly images of battered bodies out in the open or in hastily dug graves led to calls for tougher sanctions against the Kremlin, namely a cutoff of fuel imports from Russia. Germany reacted by expelling 40 Russian diplomats, and Lithuania threw out its Russian ambassador.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy left Kyiv for his first reported trip since the war began nearly six weeks ago to see for himself what he called the "genocide" and "war crimes" in the town of Bucha, the site of some of the horrors.

"Dead people have been found in barrels, basements, strangled, tortured," said Zelenskyy, who

again called on Russia to move quickly to negotiate an end to the war.

European leaders and the United Nations human rights chief condemned the bloodshed, some of them also branding it genocide, and President Joe Biden said Russian President Vladimir Putin should face a war crimes trial.

"This guy is brutal, and what's happening in Bucha is outrageous," said Biden, who also promised to increase sanctions against Moscow.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov dismissed the scenes outside Kyiv as a "stage-managed anti-Russian provocation." Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said the images contained "signs of video forgery and various fakes."

Russia similarly rejected previous allegations of atrocities as fabrications on Ukraine's part.

Ukrainian officials said the bodies of 410 civilians were found in towns around Kyiv that were recaptured from Russian forces

in recent days.

In Bucha, northwest of the capital, Associated Press journalists saw 21 bodies, including a group of nine in civilian clothes who appeared to have been shot at close range. At least two had their hands tied behind their backs. A bag of groceries was spilled by one of the dead.

The full extent of the bloodshed in the Kyiv area has yet to emerge. By all accounts, the horrors in the shattered southern port city of Mariupol are likely to be far worse.

"This is a war of murders, a lot of blood. A lot of civilians are dying," said Natalia Svitlova, a refugee from Dnipro in eastern Ukraine who fled to Poland. "I don't understand why this is possible in the 21st century and why no one can stop it."

European allies, though united in outrage over the aftermath outside Kyiv, appeared split on how to respond. Poland, which is on Ukraine's border and has taken in large numbers of refugees, angri-

ly singled out France and Germany for not taking tougher action and urged Europe to quickly wean itself off Russian energy. But Germany said it would stick with a more gradual approach of phasing out coal and oil imports over the next several months.

Western and Ukrainian leaders have accused Russia of war crimes before, and the International Criminal Court's prosecutor has already opened an investigation. But the latest reports ratcheted up the condemnation. European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said "the Russian authorities are responsible for these atrocities, committed while they had effective control of the area."

French President Emmanuel Macron said there is "clear evidence of war crimes" in Bucha that demand new punitive measures. "I'm in favor of a new round of sanctions and in particular on coal and gasoline. We need to act," he said on France-Inter radio.

US marks Patriot air-defense first at Balikatan exercises

BY SETH ROBSON

Stars and Stripes

Marine Corps hovercraft delivered an Army surface-to-air missile defense system to a Philippine beach for the first time during recent amphibious drills involving U.S. and Philippine troops.

The March 29 drill marked "the first-ever amphibious insertion of a Patriot missile system in the Philippines," 3rd Marine Division spokesman Maj. Kurt Stahl told Stars and Stripes in an email Monday.

The operation was part of Balikatan 22, an exercise involving 5,100 U.S. and 3,800 Philippine

troops that began March 28 and wraps up Friday.

Four launchers and 130 soldiers from the Army's Bravo Battery, 1st Battalion, 1st Air Defense Artillery Regiment deployed from Okinawa for the drills, Stahl said.

The air-defense equipment and troops landed at Aparri on hovercraft deployed by the USS Ashland amphibious assault ship.

"Following the landing, the Patriot missile system moved inland as part of a multiday rehearsal of a territorial coastal defense in northern Luzon," he said.

The Patriot battery supported Marines and Philippine troops

practicing coastal defense, Stahl said in a phone interview earlier Monday.

Marines, equipped with portable Stinger air-defense missiles, focused on low-altitude air defense while the Patriot troops practiced defending against high-altitude threats, he said.

"The Patriots have a capability we don't have in the Marine Corps," Stahl said.

Patriot Advanced Capability-2 missiles, for example, can travel up to 60 miles and reach as high as 20 miles, according to the Missile Defense Agency.

On Guam in September and November, a theoretical Patriot

battery was incorporated into air-defense tests involving a Terminal High Altitude Area Defense battery and an Iron Dome air-defense system brought from Texas by the 2nd Battalion, 43rd Air Defense Artillery Regiment.

A Patriot battery deployed to Japan's southern island of Amami during last summer's annual Orient Shield exercise. Also last summer, 65 soldiers from the 38th Air Defense Artillery Brigade deployed to Australia with a pair of Patriot launchers, a radar, power plant, control station and brigade and battalion command posts during the biennial Talisman Sabre drills.

Japan moves radar unit amid Chinese activity

By **MATTHEW M. BURKE**
AND **MARI HIGA**
Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — The Japan Air Self-Defense Force has repositioned a mobile radar unit on its southern island chain to strengthen defenses due to increased Chinese activity in the region.

Approximately 20 members of the 53rd Guard Team accompanied a TPS-102 radar unit to Yonaguni Island on Friday, according to a Self-Defense Force spokesman. The island, about 70 miles off Taiwan's eastern coast, is Japan's westernmost territory. The troops relocated from Miyako Island, about 140 miles to the east, the spokesman said Monday. The move will "strengthen the defense of our country at a

time when neighboring countries are increasing their activities around our country," the spokesman said, referring to China, whose coast guard frequently enters waters claimed by Japan around the Senkaku Islands, about 125 miles north of Yonaguni.

"Not only their activities are increasing, but also their activity area is expanding," the spokesman said. Government spokespeople in Japan typically speak to the media on condition of anonymity as a condition of their employment.

The spokesman declined to provide details on the TPS-102 radar system, other than to say it can detect "anything that flies." The cylindrical unit is mounted on the back of a truck.

Japan has launched its aircraft 571 times to intercept approaching Chinese drones, fighters, bombers and surveillance planes through three quarters of fiscal year 2021, which ended Thursday, according to Air Self-Defense Force data. That's 113 more than all of the previous fiscal year. Data for the final quarter has not yet been made available.

In March 2019, Japan deployed troops to three new bases in the country's south aimed at solidifying defenses around the Ryukyu Islands — also called the Nansei Islands — which run south from Japan's four main islands toward Taiwan.

Approximately 400 troops were stationed at a new garrison on Miyako. Plans call for 800 troops at the base, eventually.

Another 560 troops were placed on two bases on Kagoshima prefecture's Amami Oshima, north of Okinawa but south of Japan's main islands. A new command is also planned for Ishigaki Island, which lies between Yonaguni and Miyako.

A Japan Ground Self-Defense Force base with about 160 coastal surveillance troops was placed on Yonaguni in 2016, a Self-Defense Force spokesman said Monday.

The Ground Self-Defense Force plans to deploy an electronic warfare unit to Yonaguni as early as fiscal 2023, its spokesman said.

Japan bolstering its defenses on the southern island chain is in response to activity by China, the Air Self-Defense Force spokesman said.

Poll: Most S. Koreans want nation allied closest to US

By **DAVID CHOI**
Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — Nearly 87% of South Koreans think their country ought to develop closer ties to the United States than to any other nation, according to a poll released Monday.

The survey found 86.8% of respondents believe Seoul should develop closer economic, foreign and security policy ties with Washington. The Federation of Korean Industries commissioned the poll, which was conducted March 24-28.

Just 5% of respondents said North Korea ought to be the top partner with South Korea, and 3.2% said China. The European Union was cited by 2.1%, and 1.4% said Japan.

The poll surveyed 1,000 people and had a margin of error of 3 percentage points. The federation, an association of large

businesses, seeks to "promote sound economic policies," according to its website.

The results come one month before South Korean President Moon Jae-in finishes his five-year term. Yoon Seok-young, a former chief prosecutor elected president last month, is scheduled to be inaugurated May 10.

Moon's critics accused him of prioritizing relations with North Korea over ties to the U.S. In contrast, Yoon, a member of the conservative People Power Party, has called for closer ties with the U.S., including the resumption of large-scale drills, while taking a hardline stance against North Korea's provocations.

FKI's survey comes five months after a poll by the Seoul-based Korea Institute for Defense Analysis found that 67% of respondents viewed the U.S.-South Korean alliance favorably.

Ruling in rejected split verdict conviction on to appeals court

By **JOHN VANDIVER**
Stars and Stripes

An Army appellate court will soon take up the January decision by a Germany-based military judge that a unanimous guilty verdict will be required to convict an officer of sexual assault in his court-martial trial.

A hearing is set for April 14 at Fort Belvoir in Virginia, the U.S. Army Court of Criminal Appeals, which is the service's highest court, said in a March 22 filing.

The court agreed to hear the case in response to an appeal by prosecutors, who argue that Col. Charles Pritchard's decision in the case of Lt. Col. Andrew Dial was based on faulty legal reasoning.

Pritchard ruled that allowing a split guilty verdict would violate Dial's Fifth Amendment rights by denying him equal protection.

Dial, a member of the Belgium-based Allied Forces North Battalion, was slated to stand trial in Ja-

nuary in Kaiserslautern, Germany, on three counts of sexual assault. However, the proceedings against Dial were delayed after prosecutors filed a challenge. Pritchard found that there is "no rational basis" for allowing military defendants to be convicted under a lower threshold than the one that applies in civilian courts.

In 2020, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that split guilty verdicts are impermissible in state criminal trials. Unanimity of a jury conviction has long been required at the federal level.

Pritchard asserted that Congress has consistently narrowed the gap between the military and civilian legal systems, bringing the former more into line with the latter. But prosecutors said Pritchard was incorrect in his argument that service members and civilians are "similarly situated" and are therefore entitled to the same constitutional protections in terms of jury verdicts.

Biden cites economic gain but voters see more to do

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Seven months before he faces a critical test from voters in the mid-term elections, President Joe Biden is turning his focus to kitchen-table issues as he struggles to get credit for a recovering economy.

Since Biden took office last year, job growth has been vigorous and steady — as he told the country Friday after the March jobs report showed the addition of 431,000 jobs and the unemployment rate falling to a low 3.6%. But those same remarks were also tempered by his recognition that food and gas prices are too high and inflation is at its worst level in a generation.

For Biden, convincing Americans of the progress made in the economic recovery only serves as a salient reminder of how much further the country has to go.

“Our economy has gone from being on the mend, to being on the move,” Biden said, even as he acknowledged Americans are not ready for a victory lap. “I know that this job is not finished: We need to do more to get prices under control.”

At times, Biden’s bifurcated messaging — like the state of the economy itself — can seem like a jumble of contradictions. It leaves voters to piece together their own opinions —

potentially to the president’s political peril.

Record wage gains of 5.6% over the past year, for example, run up against consumer prices that have risen at 7.9% annually. Biden’s announcement this past week of plans to release a million barrels of oil daily from the U.S. strategic reserve over the next six months was a recognition of the harm that inflation can have not just on the economy, but his own policy ambitions.

The economic discontent is reflected in Biden’s standing in public opinion polls.

Roughly 7 in 10 people in the United States describe the economy as being in poor shape, while nearly two-thirds disapprove of Biden’s economic leadership, according to a March poll by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

Administration officials and Biden allies happily point to the job creation data as a sign of accomplishment, but they are also perturbed by the lingering economic malaise that threatens him with a historically inhospitable environment for a president’s party in a midterm year.

The administration is also looking to highlight broader access to health insurance under the Affordable Care Act and Medicare with an event Tuesday featuring Biden’s old boss, former President Barack Obama.

Lawmakers tout more projects in \$1.5T budget bill

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Home-district projects for members of Congress are back, sprinkled across the government-wide \$1.5 trillion bill President Joe Biden signed recently. The official tally shows amounts modest by past standards yet spread widely around the country — and that understates what lawmakers are claiming credit for.

The bipartisan legislation, financing federal agencies this year, contains 4,975 such projects worth \$9.7 billion, according to an Associated Press examination of items attributed to specific lawmakers in legislative documents. The listed projects, long called earmarks, ranged from \$4,000 for evidence detection equipment for Huntington, W.Va., to \$350 million to help restore Florida’s vast but imperiled Everglades.

The projects’ reemergence after an 11-year hiatus, with transparency requirements and other curbs, marks a revival of expenditures that let lawmakers tout achievements to voters and help party leaders build support for legislation.

They’re vilified by some, especially conservatives, as emblems of influence peddling and waste. But they’ve been openly embraced by lawmakers from both parties, who cite Congress’ constitutional power of the purse and say they know their local needs.

“I’m very proud of them,” said Sen. Richard Shelby, top Republican on the Senate Appropriations Committee, of the eye-popping \$648 million he amassed for his state, the AP analysis showed. That included \$126 million for two campuses of the University of Alabama, his alma mater, and hundreds of millions to improve the city of Mobile’s seaport and airport.

The price tag of Shelby’s projects was the highest in Congress, according to Taxpayers for Common Sense, a nonpartisan group that favors fiscal restraint and produced largely similar figures in its own preliminary study.

Many lawmakers are asserting that the money they won for constituents exceeded what the measure explicitly attributes to them. That’s because Congress narrowly defines what’s listed as home-district projects.

Bolstering broad, national programs that lawmakers know benefit their states isn’t included, so lawmakers can tout such amounts as achievements without having them formally listed as earmarks.

Calif. police search for shooters who killed at least 6, injured 12

Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — The usual crowds filled the streets as bars and nightclubs were closing in California’s capital city of Sacramento when the sound of rapid-fire gunshots sent people running in terror. In a matter of seconds, the latest U.S. mass shooting had left six people dead and 12 wounded.

Sacramento police said they were searching for at least two people who opened fire at about 2 a.m. Sunday on the outskirts of the city’s downtown entertainment district, anchored by the Golden One Arena that hosts concerts and the NBA’s Sacramento Kings. The team’s home game against the Golden State Warriors went on as scheduled Sunday night and began with a moment of silence for the victims.

Police Chief Kathy Lester revealed few details from the investigation and pleaded with the public to share videos and other evidence that could lead to the killers.

“The scale of violence that just happened in our city is unprecedented during my 27 years here,” Lester told reporters during a news conference at police headquarters. “We are shocked and heartbroken by this tragedy. But we are also resolved as an agency to find those responsible and to secure justice for the victims and the families.”

Small memorials with candles, balloons and flowers were placed Monday morning near the crime scene. One balloon had a message on it saying in part: “You will forever be in our hearts and thoughts. Nothing will ever be the same.”

UN: World hurtling to climate danger zone

Associated Press

BERLIN — Temperatures on Earth will shoot past a key danger point unless greenhouse gas emissions fall faster than countries have committed, the world's top body of climate scientists said Monday, warning of the consequences of inaction but also noting hopeful signs of progress.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said the report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change revealed "a litany of broken climate promises" by governments and corporations, accusing them of stoking global warming by clinging to harmful fossil fuels.

"It is a file of shame, cataloguing the empty pledges that put us firmly on track toward an unlivable world," he said.

Governments agreed in the 2015 Paris accord to keep global

warming well below 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit this century, ideally no more than 2.7F. Yet temperatures have already increased by over 2F since pre-industrial times, resulting in measurable increases in disasters such as flash floods, prolonged droughts, more intense hurricanes and longer-burning wildfires, putting human lives in danger and costing governments hundreds of billions of dollars to confront.

"Projected global emissions from (national pledges) place limiting global warming to 1.5C (2.7 F) beyond reach and make it harder after 2030 to limit warming to 2C (3.6F)," the panel said.

In other words, the report's co-chair, James Skea of Imperial College London, told *The Associated Press*: "If we continue acting as we are now, we're not

even going to limit warming to 2 degrees (3.6 F), never mind 1.5 degrees (2.7F)."

Ongoing investments in fossil fuel infrastructure and clearing large swaths of forest for agriculture undermine the massive curbs in emissions needed to meet the Paris goal, the report found.

"To keep the 1.5-degree (2.7F) limit agreed in Paris within reach, we need to cut global emissions by 45% this decade," said Guterres. "But current climate pledges would mean a 14% increase in emissions."

In a summary negotiated with governments over the past two weeks, the panel concluded that returning warming to 1.5C (2.7F) by 2100 would require removing vast amounts of carbon dioxide — the main greenhouse gas — from the atmo-

sphere. Many experts have said this is unfeasible with current technologies, and even if it could be done, it would be far costlier than preventing the emissions in the first place.

The report's authors said they had "high confidence" that unless countries step up their efforts to cut greenhouse gas emissions, the planet will on average be 4.3 to 6.3 F warmer by the end of the century — a level experts have said is sure to cause severe impacts for much of the world's population.

"We are on a pathway to global warming of more than double the 1.5-degree (2.7F) limit agreed in Paris," said Guterres. "Some government and business leaders are saying one thing — but doing another."

"Simply put, they are lying," he added. "And the results will be catastrophic."

Massacre testing Europe's 'red lines' on Russia energy

The Washington Post

Europe is united in its outrage over evidence of alleged Russian atrocities in Ukraine. But the European Union is not sure what it is willing to do about it, especially when it comes to energy.

As photographs of bodies in the streets of the town of Bucha circulated online over the weekend, horrified Ukrainian and European officials called for the EU to finally stop buying Russian oil and gas.

Every barrel of oil and ton of gas is "soaked in the blood" of those killed, the speaker of Ukraine's parliament said. Lithuania's foreign minister warned other EU countries not to become "accomplices."

With scenes of the devastation splashed across newspapers, French President Emmanuel Macron said Monday that indications of "war crimes" in

Ukraine warranted new sanctions and that he will work with Germany and other EU partners to move forward on the issue of Russian oil and coal.

German Defense Minister Christine Lambrecht said Sunday that Bucha had put energy sanctions on the table, but other German leaders later suggested an energy embargo is unlikely — prompting Poland's prime minister to call out Berlin for being an EU holdout.

The whole debate raises uncomfortable questions about where the EU draws its "red lines" on Russian energy — if those lines exist at all.

"If there is a red line, it probably hasn't been crossed for Germany," said Marcel Dirsus, a German political scientist and nonresident fellow at the Institute for Security Policy at Kiel University.

Hungary PM liked at home, isolated abroad after win

Associated Press

BUDAPEST, Hungary — As Hungary's nationalist Prime Minister Viktor Orban prepares to continue his autocratic governance of Hungary for another four years, he faces a shattered opposition at home but an increasingly isolated position abroad, where his flouting of democratic standards and approach to the war in Ukraine has riled the European Union and other nations.

On Sunday, as officials from his right-wing Fidesz party gathered at an election night event on the Danube river in Budapest, Orban told supporters that their landslide victory was a message to Europe that his model of "illiberal democracy" was a prophecy for the continent's future.

"The whole world has seen tonight in Budapest that Christian democratic politics, conservative civic politics and patriotic politics

have won," Orban said. "We are telling Europe that this is not the past, this is the future, our common European future."

But while Orban's party won 53% of the vote in Hungary, convincing Europe to get on board won't be so easy. Orban already faces heavy pressure in the EU to change tack on his approach to corruption, minority rights and media freedom, and as war rages in neighboring Ukraine, his ties to Russian President Vladimir Putin have alienated even some of his closest allies.

During Hungary's campaign, a Western-looking coalition of opposition parties challenging Orban called for Hungary to support its embattled neighbor and act in lockstep with its EU and NATO partners. Yet Orban, considered to be Putin's closest ally in the EU, insisted that Hungary remain neutral and maintain its close economic ties with Moscow.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Climber fined, banned for false rescue claim

AK ANCHORAGE — A Utah physician was fined and banned from climbing Mount Denali for five years after he made false claims to get himself and his friends rescued off the mountain, the Anchorage Daily News reported.

U.S. Magistrate Judge Scott A. Oravec ordered Dr. Jason Lance, 48, to pay a \$5,000 fine and donate \$5,000 to the Denali Rescue Volunteers during a sentencing hearing in Fairbanks, according to a spokeswoman for the Alaska U.S. Attorney's Office.

After one critically injured climber in his group was rescued by park rangers, Lance then asked to be evacuated off the mountain, prosecutors said. Rangers told him the helicopter was no longer flying that night and told him the only way down was to rope up and descend.

The doctor then claimed people in his group were in shock and suffering from early hypothermia, the charges say. Rangers launched a helicopter to provide what they thought was urgent medical help, only to turn back after guides said the group of three was descending.

Police look into hazing allegations at university

VT NORTHFIELD — Police are investigating allegations of hazing involving the women's rugby team at Norwich University, authorities said.

Multiple law enforcement agencies went to a residence hall at the private military school in Northfield to collect

evidence, The Barre-Montpelier Times Argus reported.

Officer Karie Tucker said that she went to the school on March 20 for a report of someone being held at knifepoint. Tucker said she spoke to the woman two days later and that person reported that she had been "branded" using pliers and a lighter by other members of the team. The victim said she was too intoxicated to say no. After getting permission, Tucker looked at the victim's cellphone and saw what she described as a video of another woman with a washcloth, or something similar, held over her face while a third woman poured liquid onto the cloth, something Tucker described as "waterboarding," according to court records.

Raw British Columbia oysters pose health risk

CA SACRAMENTO — At least 34 people statewide have contracted Norovirus in the past few weeks in California after eating raw oysters harvested in British Columbia, state health officials said.

The state Department of Health issued a warning not to eat raw oysters imported from the Canadian province, where officials have closed multiple growing regions for sanitary contamination. In California, people who ate oysters at nine restaurants throughout the state between March 11 and March 19 reported getting ill. Illnesses associated with oysters from British Columbia have also been reported in other states, the department said.

Despite issuing multiple recalls of oysters from British Columbia, the health department

said it has continued receiving reports of people getting ill. It advised restaurants and retailers to check their inventory to ensure that potentially contaminated raw oysters are not available for purchase.

Hunting dog bitten by wolf close to UP trail

MI MARQUETTE — A hunting dog was bitten by a wolf in Michigan's Upper Peninsula.

The dog and another beagle were being trained by their owner near a trailhead in Marquette when the attack occurred, according to Michigan's Department of Natural Resources.

The dog was baying at a rabbit about 200 yards off a trail when the wolf bit it on a hind leg.

WWII museum honors George H.W. Bush

LA NEW ORLEANS — The National WWII Museum in New Orleans dedicated a gallery of planes to former aviator President George H.W. Bush, who was forced to bail out of his bomber during the war when it was hit by Japanese anti-aircraft fire.

The Times-Picayune/The New Orleans Advocate reported that Bush was remembered during the dedication ceremony at the museum where the gallery displaying aircraft flown during the war was christened the George H.W. Bush Aviation Gallery. Overhead was the same type of plane flown by Bush during the war — a blue light bomber called an Avenger.

The future president was trying to eliminate a Japanese ra-

dio tower in 1944 when his aircraft was hit and he bailed out; a submarine rescued him, but the other two men in the plane died.

Man with 9 DUI arrests picks up number 10

DE MILLSBORO — A Delaware man has been arrested and charged with drunken driving for the 10th time, state police said.

Authorities said Charles Smith, 54, of Millsboro, was arrested for a 10th-offense DUI following a car crash.

Investigators said troopers were notified that a white pickup had struck a fence and that the driver was trying to run away. Authorities said officers found Smith walking just south of the accident scene, and that he smelled of alcohol. A computer inquiry revealed that Smith's driver's license was revoked and that he had been arrested for nine prior DUI offenses.

Lack of lifeguards limits swimming pool season

NE OMAHA — Two-thirds of Omaha's outdoor swimming pools will be shuttered for half of the summer because of a lifeguard shortage.

The Omaha World-Herald reported that the city announced that there aren't enough lifeguards to safely monitor swimmers every day at all 15 locations. That means 10 of the pools will only open for half of the nine-week season. City officials cited the COVID-19 pandemic as the primary cause of the shortage. Training courses were canceled and the city lost an entire cycle of lifeguards in 2020.

— From wire reports

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Staley, South Carolina defeat UConn

Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — Dawn Staley hoisted the championship trophy high, strutted around the court and stopped for a brief victory dance. She handed over the hardware to South Carolina's student band, then headed back to midcourt for more merriment.

The Gamecocks hit all the right notes this season, and they finished with a masterpiece.

Staley's team buttoned up on defense and dominated on the glass, beating UConn 64-49 on Sunday night to end the Huskies' undefeated streak in title games. Destanni Henderson scored a career-high 26 points, Aliyah Boston added 11 points and 16 rebounds, and South Carolina handed Geno Auriemma's Huskies their first loss in 12 NCAA title games.

"We played every possession like it was our last possession," said Staley, the first Black men's or women's coach with two Division I titles. "They were determined to be champions today."

A year ago, the Gamecocks lost in the Final Four when Boston missed a layup before the

buzzer.

"Honestly, I've been thinking about this since last season. Everyone had a picture of me crying," said Boston, who was the Most Outstanding Player of the Final Four. "Today, we're national champions and I'm in tears."

With Staley calling the shots in a Louis Vuitton letterman jacket, South Carolina took UConn to school on the boards and capped a wire-to-wire run as the No. 1 team in the country in The Associated Press poll. The Gamecocks also won the championship in 2017 with A'ja Wilson leading the way.

This time it was Boston — the AP Player of the Year — and her fellow South Carolina post players who dominated on the game's biggest stage. The Gamecocks outrebounded the Huskies 49-24, including a 21-6 advantage on offensive boards.

"We knew tonight that if we didn't hold our own on the boards, that it was going to be a really bad night for us," Auriemma said. "And that's exactly what happened."

They also clamped down on star Paige Bueckers and UConn

on defense, just like they did all season long.

"They deserved it 100%," Auriemma said. "They were the best team all year."

It was South Carolina's night from the start. The Gamecocks (35-2) jumped to an 11-2 lead, grabbing nearly every rebound on both ends of the floor. They led 22-8 after one quarter much to the delight of their fans, who made the trip to Minneapolis to be part of the sellout crowd.

The Huskies (30-6) trailed by 16 in the second quarter before Bueckers, a Minnesota native, got going. After having just one shot in the first quarter, she scored nine points in the second to get UConn within 35-27 at the half. She finished with 14.

An 8-2 run to start the third quarter put South Carolina up 43-29 before the Huskies finally started connecting from behind the arc. UConn missed its first eight three-point attempts until Caroline Ducharme made one from the wing and Evina Westbrook followed with another to get the Huskies within 43-37.

That's as close as they could get because of Henderson.

The senior guard had a three-

point play to close the third quarter and then had the team's first four points in the fourth to restore the double-digit lead. UConn couldn't recover.

"My teammates believed in me once again. We've been working so hard since Day 1, and it finally paid off, all my hard work, all my focus," Henderson said. "Me trusting the process. Me trusting God. She just put me in a position just to be great, and today, we're national champions."

This was the Huskies' first trip to the championship game since 2016, when they won the last of four straight titles. Since then, UConn has suffered heartbreaking defeats in the national semifinals, losing twice in overtime, before holding off Stanford on Friday night. The Huskies were trying to win their 12th title in the same city they won their first one in 1995.

Auriemma said Saturday that when his team had won each of its 11 titles, UConn entered the game as the better team. They certainly weren't on Sunday.

"We just didn't have enough," he said. "They were just too good for us."

Staley, Auriemma may meet for title again next year

Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — Dawn Staley and Geno Auriemma hugged at midcourt after South Carolina ended UConn's undefeated run in NCAA championship games.

It was the first time the coaches had met on women basketball's biggest stage and may not be the last with so many talented players returning for both teams next season, including the last two AP Players of the Year in Aliyah Boston of South Carolina and Paige Bueckers of UConn.

"It's hard to say each year what could happen," Auriemma said. "This year was a perfect

example of you plan for some things and then all of a sudden your plans get blown up. I like our chances. Provided we don't have to navigate a season like we did this year, knock on wood. If we stay healthy, I expect to be back next year."

The first matchup went to the Gamecocks in dominant fashion, a 64-49 victory Sunday that gave Staley her second national championship in two title games appearances. It left Auriemma with his first loss in 12 tries.

"Look at the tradition of UConn and what they've been able to do," Staley said. "They're the standard. If it takes winning

11 national championships to be a dynasty, I'm probably going to fall short of that, because I'm not going to be in the game long enough for us to win 11."

She's set her own standard though. The victory made Staley the first Black coach in either men's or women's Division I basketball to win two national championships, getting her first one in 2017.

"I felt a great deal of pressure to win because I'm a Black coach," she said. "Because if we don't win, then you bring in so many other, just scrutiny. Like you can't coach, you had enough to get it done but yet you failed.

You feel all of that, and you feel it probably 10 times more than anyone else because we're at this platform."

Staley said she feels she can provide inspiration for other Black coaches.

"If I can be that ray of hope, if I can be that vessel of theirs to them being successful, you know I'm a willing giver of this game, because this game has given me so much."

On Sunday night, it gave Staley another championship.

"We played every possession like it was our last possession," Staley said. "They were determined to be champions today."

76ers down Cavs, grab a playoff spot

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — Joel Embiid had 44 points and 17 rebounds, James Harden recorded his second triple-double with Philadelphia and the 76ers locked up a playoff spot with a 112-108 win over the Cleveland Cavaliers on Sunday night.

Embiid was questionable coming into the game with a sore ankle. But not only did the 7-footer play, he dominated down the stretch, scoring 12 points in a key sequence of the fourth quarter.

He also made 17 of 20 free throws, added five blocks and three assists in 38 minutes of another MVP resume-builder. Embiid also made three three-pointers.

“He was dominant,” coach Doc Rivers said. “He had 44, I bet he’ll tell you he missed probably five or six point-blank shots that he never misses. That’s a great example [of] sometimes your offense doesn’t go the way you want it to go and you’ve just got to hang in there, and he did that. The whole team did.”

Harden had an off-shooting night (4-for-13), but finished with 21 points, 10 rebounds and 10 assists.

Thunder 117, Suns 96: Backup center Olivier Sarr scored a career-high 24 points and Aleksej Pokuveski recorded his first career triple-double to lead host Oklahoma City over NBA-leading Phoenix.

Sarr came off the bench to shoot 9-for-12 from the field, including 5-for-6 from three-point range. The other 7-footer, Pokuveski, had 17 points, 12 assists and 10 rebounds while playing point guard for the bulk of the game.

Mavericks 118, Bucks 112: Luka Doncic scored 32 points and matched a season high

with 15 assists to help Dallas win at Milwaukee.

Giannis Antetokounmpo led the Bucks with 28 points and 10 rebounds. Milwaukee was essentially at full strength Sunday after resting all of its usual starters in a 153-119 loss to the Los Angeles Clippers on Friday night.

Celtics 144, Wizards 102: Jaylen Brown scored 32 points, Jayson Tatum had 22 and Boston cruised past Washington in the Celtics’ regular season home finale.

Jockeying for one of the top seeds in the Eastern Conference, Boston posted its 13th win in 16 games with three games left in the regular season.

Nuggets 129, Lakers 118: Nikola Jokic had 38 points, 18 rebounds and six assists, and Denver moved into fifth place in the Western Conference with a victory at Los Angeles.

Will Barton scored 25 points and Aaron Gordon added 24 points and eight rebounds for the Nuggets, who capitalized on LeBron James’ absence with a fourth-quarter surge to grab their fourth win in five games. Denver moved a half-game ahead of Utah for the fifth spot in the playoff picture, getting further insurance against being forced into the play-in tournament.

Pistons 121, Pacers 117: Saddiq Bey scored 31 points and Fred Jackson had 19 to lead sharpshooting Detroit to a win at Indiana.

Bey hit 11 of 18 shots, including shooting 7 of 9 on three-pointers, in 23 minutes. The Pistons, who have won three games in a row, sank 21 of 41 3-pointers and set a team record for threes in a half with 13 in the opening two

quarters.

Knicks 118, Magic 88: RJ Barrett scored 27 points, Obi Toppin matched his career high with 20 and New York rolled at Orlando.

Toppin and Alec Burks scored 12 points each in a 37-point third quarter for the Knicks, who made 12 of their first 13 shots in the period. Burks finished with 19 points and seven rebounds, and Immanuel Quickley had his first triple-double (20 points, 10 rebounds, 10 assists) in 34 minutes off the bench.

Timberwolves 139, Rockets 132: Anthony Edwards scored 33 points, Karl-Anthony Towns added 28 and Minnesota built a huge lead and held to win at Houston.

Spurs 113, Trail Blazers 92: Keldon Johnson scored 28 points and host San Antonio defeated short-handed Portland.

Warriors 109, Kings 90: Andrew Wiggins scored 25 points, Jordan Poole added 22 and visiting Golden State held off Sacramento.

Nemanja Bjelica had season highs of 19 points and 12 rebounds to go with his six assists in the Warriors’ second straight win — something they hadn’t done since early March.

Clippers 119, Pelicans 100: Marcus Morris Sr. scored 22 points, Ivica Zubac got his 22nd double-double of the season with 16 points and 14 rebounds, and host Los Angeles prevented New Orleans from clinching a spot in the play-in tournament.

Heat 114, Raptors 109: Kyle Lowry had 16 points and 10 assists against his former team, Max Strus scored all of his 23 points in the second half and Miami won at Toronto.

Tiger arrives at Augusta, unsure if he will play

Associated Press

AUGUSTA, Ga. — A comeback unlike any other for Tiger Woods might start at the Masters.

Just over 13 months since Woods damaged his right leg so badly he said doctors considered amputation, Woods arrived at Augusta National on Sunday afternoon and warmed up on a range where there were more photographers than players.

Woods hit balls for about 20

minutes and then got in a cart and headed to the course, which is closed Sunday afternoon to everyone except players and caddies.

Already a star attraction, the hype over the five-time Masters champion is higher than ever after a violent single-car crash that looked as though it might end his career.

Still to come is the decision on playing.

In a tweet Sunday morning announcing he was coming to

Augusta to resume preparations for the Masters, he said it will be a “game-time decision” whether he competes.

The Masters does not have a firm deadline to commit like regular tour events. It is an invitation tournament, and players typically notify the club only if they do not plan to play.

Tee times are published Tuesday.

“Knowing Tiger the way I know him, if he wasn’t totally

like ... pretty much feel he has a chance to win, he wouldn’t tee it up,” Mark O’Meara said. “The thing about Tiger Woods is usually when everybody thinks he can’t do something, that’s when he does it.”

If Woods decides to play — he played 18 holes at Augusta National five days ago — it would be his first competition against the world’s best players since Nov. 15, 2020, when the Masters was moved to autumn because of the pandemic.

Panthers defeat Sabres to clinch a playoff spot

Associated Press

BUFFALO, N.Y. — Jonathan Huberdeau set Florida's single-season points record, and the Panthers clinched a playoff berth with a 5-3 win over the Buffalo Sabres on Sunday.

Huberdeau scored his 24th goal to extend his point streak to eight games and raise his season total to 97, one more than teammate Aleksander Barkov's record set in 2019.

"He's a tremendous player, and he deserves it the way he's been playing," said Barkov, who had two assists and is second on the team with 72 points. "It couldn't happen to a better guy. We still have a lot of games left, so it's going to be a lot of fun to see where he's going to end up."

Anthony Duclair scored twice as Florida (48-15-6) established a franchise record for victories. Winning for the seventh time in eight games, the Panthers closed a two-game trip by improving to 20-9-6 on the road.

MacKenzie Weegar had a goal and an assist for Florida. Anton Lundell also scored, and Spencer Knight made 26 saves.

Jeff Skinner had a goal and an assist for the Sabres, who are on the cusp of missing the playoffs for an NHL-record 11th consecutive season. Tage Thompson and Kyle Okposo also scored, and Dustin Tokarski stopped 35 shots. Buffalo lost an eight-game point streak (5-0-3), its longest in three seasons.

Senators 5, Red Wings 2: Josh Norris scored three goals for his first career hat trick and host Ottawa completed a sweep of its home-and-home series with Detroit.

Artem Zub and Nikita Zaitsev also scored for the Senators, and Anton Forsberg made 30 saves.

Islanders 4, Devils 3: Jean-Gabriel Pageau had three goals and an assist, and visiting New York held off New Jersey to extend its winning streak to a season-high four straight games.

Former Devil Cory Schneider made 27 saves in his first NHL start since March 6, 2020. The 36-year-old goaltender was recalled from Bridgeport of the American Hockey League last month with Ilya Sorokin sidelined and Semyon Varlamov needing a break.

Flyers 4, Rangers 3 (SO): Kevin Hayes scored the only goal of the shootout and Martin Jones made 43 saves to lift Philadelphia

to a win at New York.

Hayes lifted the puck past Igor Shesterkin as the Flyers got just their ninth road win in 34 games this season.

Wild 5, Capitals 1: Joel Eriksson Ek scored his career-best 20th and 21st goals of the season and added an assist, and Minnesota cruised to a win at Washington.

Marcus Foligno built on one career high with his 20th goal and set another with his 16th assist for the Wild, who have won nine of their last 10 while earning a point in the other. Tyson Jost and Nicolas Deslauriers also scored as second-place Minnesota extended its lead to five points over third-place St. Louis in the Central Division. Jordan Greenway had three assists and Cam Talbot made 25 saves.

Coyotes 3, Blackhawks 2 (OT): Shayne Gostisbehere scored on a deflection with 14.7 seconds left in overtime, Michael Carcone and Travis Boyd also scored, and Arizona won at Chicago.

The win was only the struggling Coyotes' second in the last nine games (2-6-1). The slumping Blackhawks lost their fifth straight (0-3-2) after a two-game winning streak.

Oilers 6, Ducks 1: Connor McDavid had a goal and two assists to extend his point streak to 13 games, Leon Draisaitl scored his 50th goal of the season, and visiting Edmonton won its fourth straight game.

Tyson Barrie and Brett Kulak each had a goal and two assists, and Ryan Nugent-Hopkins had a goal and an assist as the Oilers pulled within one point of Los Angeles for second place in the Pacific Division with a game in hand. Jesse Puljujarvi also scored, and Mike Smith made 31 saves.

Kraken 4, Stars 1: Jared McCann scored a short-handed goal in the first period and Ryan Donato converted on a breakaway early in the third period in Seattle's win over visiting Dallas.

McCann's early goal was his 25th of the season and Donato's 14th of the season came five minutes into the third period to give the Kraken a cushion.

Golden Knights 3, Canucks 2 (OT): Shea Theodore scored 2:05 into overtime, leading visiting Vegas to its fifth straight win.

Jonathan Marchessault had a goal and assist, and Alex Pietrangolo also scored in regulation for the Golden Knights.

Hamlin wins at Richmond to end slump

Associated Press

RICHMOND, Va. — Denny Hamlin hoped a visit to the track he watched races at as a youngster would help kick-start a season that started in an uncharacteristic fashion — poorly.

Thanks to some crafty tire strategy that his team timed right, he got it done.

Hamlin ran down William Byron with five laps to go Sunday and ended the slowest start to a season in his career with a victory in the Toyota Owners 400 at Richmond Raceway.

"You just have a tough season and if things aren't going well and it seems like the breaks aren't going your way and then the law of averages say things are going to kind of work out and we get our performance better and today's the day where it all matched up," said Hamlin, who started the day 22nd in points.

In a race that featured four sets of green-flag pit stops and a whole lot of tire strategy, Hamlin closed a huge gap between Byron and teammate Martin Truex Jr., passing Truex on the outside and Byron shortly thereafter. He then held off a challenge from Kevin Harvick, a three-time winner at Richmond.

"Yeah, just great strategy there. Just drove as hard as I could," Hamlin said after climbing from his car. "There was no doubt in my mind, maybe just a little, but they got this car right there towards the end. Wow, unbelievable."

Hamlin's 47th career victory was his first at his hometown track since 2016, the first for Toyota in the Next Gen car and gave NASCAR seven different winners in seven Cup Series races.

Harvick was second, followed by Byron, Truex and Kyle Larson.

"Had a shot there at the end," Harvick said. "I wanted to be close enough with the white to just take a swipe at him. Yeah, the lapped cars there kind of got in the way and I lost a little bit of ground."

Hamlin got himself into contention during the second stage when he and Joe Gibbs Racing teammate Christopher Bell opted to stay on the track while most of the rest of the field pitted for tires. The move initially gave the risk-takers a sizable lead, but one that began evaporating quickly.

Hamlin made it pay off in the final stage, going from 15th to seventh over just a few laps after a restart using the extra set of tires he had over the field.