

Polish, Baltic presidents visit Ukraine

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — The presidents of four countries on Russia's doorstep visited Ukraine on Wednesday in a show of support for the embattled country, after Russian President Vladimir Putin vowed to continue his bloody offensive until its "full completion."

The presidents of Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia — all NATO countries that worry they may face Russian attack in the future if Ukraine falls — traveled by train to Kyiv to meet Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

In one of the most crucial battles of the war, Russia said more than 1,000 Ukrainian troops had surrendered in the besieged port of Mariupol, where Ukrainian forces have been holding out in pockets of the city. The information could not be verified.

Russia invaded on Feb. 24 with the goal, according to Western officials, of taking Kyiv, toppling the government and installing a Moscow-friendly one. In the seven weeks since, the ground advance stalled, Russia has lost potentially thousands of fighters — and the war has forced millions of Ukrainians to flee, rattled the world economy, threatened

global food supplies and shattered Europe's post-Cold War balance.

U.S. President Joe Biden on Tuesday called Russia's actions in Ukraine "a genocide" for the first time, saying "Putin is just trying to wipe out the idea of even being a Ukrainian."

Zelenskyy commended Biden's use of the word, saying "calling things by their names is essential to stand up to evil."

"We are grateful for US assistance provided so far and we urgently need more heavy weapons to prevent further Russian atrocities," he added in his tweet.

The European leaders visiting Ukraine planned to deliver "a strong message of political support and military assistance," Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda said.

Nausėda, Estonian President Alar Karis, Poland's Andrzej Duda and Egils Levits of Latvia also planned to discuss investigations into alleged Russian war crimes, including the massacre of civilians.

Nausėda said the leaders had visited Borydanka, one of the towns near Kyiv where evidence of atrocities has been found.

"This is where the dark side of humankind

has shown its face," he wrote on Twitter. "Brutal war crimes committed by the Russian army will not stay unpunished."

An expert report commissioned by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe found "clear patterns of (international humanitarian law) violations by the Russian forces in their conduct of hostilities."

The report was written by experts selected by Ukraine and published Wednesday by the Vienna-based organization that promotes security and human rights.

The report said that there were also violations by Ukraine, but concluded those committed by Russia "are by far larger in scale and nature."

Ukraine has previously acknowledged that there could be "isolated incidents" of violations and has said it would investigate.

Putin, however, has denied his troops committed atrocities, and on Tuesday insisted Russia "had no other choice" but to invade, saying the offensive aimed to protect people in parts of eastern Ukraine and to "ensure Russia's own security." He vowed it would "continue until its full completion and the fulfillment of the tasks that have been set."

Naval coalition is adding task force in Red Sea lanes

By J.P. LAWRENCE

Stars and Stripes

MANAMA, Bahrain — A naval task force commissioning on Sunday will patrol some of the world's most active shipping lanes in and around the Red Sea, where militant attacks and weapons seizures have increased in recent years.

Combined Task Force 153 will focus on the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden and the connecting Bab al-Mandeb waterway, U.S. military officials told reporters Wednesday.

"These are strategically important waters that warrant our attention," said Vice Adm. Brad Cooper, commander of a 34-nation naval alliance known as Combined Maritime Forces.

Yemen's Houthi militia recently attempted to attack oil tankers in the region with explosives-laden boats, the Saudi Arabian-based Arab News reported. Meanwhile, an

Iran-backed militant group seized a United Arab Emirates-flagged cargo vessel in January, The Associated Press reported.

Iran and Israel also have accused each other of attacking each other's ships in the region's waterways over the last year.

The task force will begin its first mission Sunday in the Red Sea aboard the USS Mount Whitney, the flagship of the Italy-headquartered U.S. 6th Fleet, which is currently operating with the 5th Fleet.

"Any destabilizing activity, including threats to commercial traffic and coastal infrastructure, really can have profound global impacts," said Cooper, who also helms U.S. Naval Forces Central Command and 5th Fleet.

About 10% of the world's shipping passes through the Suez Canal connecting the Mediterranean and Red seas, a New York Times report said last year.

About 15 people will staff the task force, which will coordinate among two to eight coalition ships on any given day, Cooper said.

The ranks of CTF 153 are expected to be filled mostly by U.S. personnel at first, with staff from other partnered countries to join in the coming days, 5th Fleet spokesman Cmdr. Tim Hawkins said.

An unnamed regional partner is expected to assume the leadership role later this year, Hawkins added.

The new task force joins three existing ones in the Combined Maritime Forces. It will take over responsibilities previously held by Task Force 150, which will refocus on the Gulf of Oman and the North Arabian Sea, Cooper said.

The other two task forces focus on countering piracy and patrolling the seas around the Persian Gulf.

Finland, Sweden closer to deciding on NATO

Associated Press

HELSINKI — European Union nations Finland and Sweden reached important stages Wednesday on their way to possible NATO membership as the Finnish government issued a security report to lawmakers and Sweden's ruling party initiated a review of security policy options.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24 triggered a surge in support for joining NATO in the two traditionally militarily non-aligned Nordic countries, with polls showing a majority of respondents willing to join the alliance in Finland and supporters of NATO in Sweden clearly outnumbering those against the idea.

Finland, a country of 5.5 million, shares the EU's longest border with Russia, an 833-mile frontier. Sweden has no border with Russia.

Russia, for its part, has warned

Sweden and Finland against joining NATO, with officials saying it would not contribute to stability in Europe. Officials said Russia would respond to such a move with retaliatory measures that would cause "military and political consequences" for Helsinki and Stockholm. One of Russian President Vladimir Putin's reasons for invading Ukraine was that the country refused to promise that it would not join NATO.

Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin, speaking Wednesday in Stockholm in a joint news conference with her Swedish counterpart Magdalena Andersson, said Finland is ready to make a decision on NATO "within weeks" rather than months following an extensive debate in the 200-seat Eduskunta legislature.

Marin stressed that Finland and Sweden, two neighboring Nordic countries that have close

economic, political and military ties, will make independent decisions regarding their security policy arrangements, including whether to join NATO.

"But we do that with a clear understanding that our choices will affect not only ourselves but our neighbors as well," Marin said, adding that she would prefer seeing both Finland and Sweden becoming NATO members.

Andersson said Sweden and Finland would maintain "a very close dialogue and have a very straightforward and honest discussions" in the coming weeks over their countries respective choices on NATO.

The only real option to NATO membership could be an enhanced bilateral military cooperation added with the U.S. and Nordic NATO member Norway, Finnish experts have said.

Marin and Andersson lead the

ruling Social Democratic Parties in their respective countries. The parties are expected to announce their NATO views in early and late May, respectively.

Parliaments in both countries are ready to decide the matter — something that could happen in Finland in late May and a bit later in Sweden. Complicating things in Sweden is the general election in September, which is likely to be dominated by the NATO issue.

In Finland, President Sauli Niinistö said he was convinced that his country's decision on NATO will be ready well ahead of NATO's June 29-30 summit in Madrid.

Andersson said Wednesday that the Swedish government is working on a security environment analysis together with all parties in the Riksdag legislature. She said the report is due May 31 but could be finished earlier.

Solomons pressured by US, Australia to nix China pact

Associated Press

CANBERRA, Australia — Australia and the U.S. are stepping up diplomatic outreach to the Solomon Islands after China signed a security deal with the South Pacific island nation that could lead to Beijing establishing a military presence there.

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison said Wednesday that his minister for International Development and the Pacific, Zed Seselja, had flown to the Solomon Islands the day before for talks with Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare on the April 1 security pact the country agreed to with China. Seselja said he had asked Sogavare to abandon the deal.

"We have asked Solomon Islands respectfully to consider not signing the agreement and to consult the Pacific family in the spirit

of regional openness and transparency, consistent with our region's security frameworks," Seselja said in a statement.

The trip came the same day that U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman spoke with Solomon Islands Foreign Minister Jeremiah Manele about Washington's plan to reopen an embassy in the capital, Honiara.

The announcement of reopening the embassy, which has been closed since 1993, came in February before the security pact came to light, but amid already growing concerns about Chinese influence in the country. State Department spokesman Ned Price said the call touched on "our joint efforts to broaden and deepen engagement between our countries," in addition to the embassy plans, but gave no further details.

Infant's injuries lead to arrest of Navy sailor, wife on Guam

By MATTHEW M. BURKE
Stars and Stripes

A Navy petty officer and his wife face charges on Guam of family violence and child abuse after a pediatrician discovered arm, rib and skull fractures on the couple's 3-month-old child, according to a magistrate's complaint.

Austin Christopher Johnson, 22, and his wife, Nica Mae Johnson, 20, were arrested over the weekend and charged Monday in Guam Superior Court, the complaint states. The charges are third-degree felonies.

The Johnsons were released on a \$10,000 personal recognizance bond, the release document said. Child Protective Services took custody of their daughter, according to the complaint.

Nica Johnson told police she noticed a bump on the child's arm

and the child was crying Saturday after her husband had given the infant a bath. Together they took their daughter to the emergency room at Naval Hospital Guam, where a pediatrician examined her, according to the complaint.

X-rays showed fractures of the child's upper arm, ribs and skull, the complaint said.

The Johnsons said they did not know how the child was injured, according to the complaint.

Superior Court Judge Jonathan Quan ordered the couple to have no contact with their daughter, the Guam Daily Post reported. Johnson, a petty officer third class, is temporarily assigned to the USS Emory S. Land, a submarine repair ship at Naval Base Guam, Joint Region Marianas spokeswoman Lt. Cmdr. Kelli Roesch wrote in an email Tuesday to Stars and Stripes.

Police arrest suspect in NYC subway attack

Associated Press

NEW YORK — A man who posted numerous social media videos decrying the United States as a racist place awash in violence and recounting his struggle with mental illness was arrested Wednesday afternoon, a day after an attack on a subway train in Brooklyn left 10 people wounded by gunfire.

Frank R. James, 62, was taken into custody in Manhattan's East Village neighborhood, law enforcement officials who weren't authorized to discuss the investigation and spoke on condition of anonymity told The Associated Press. Further details weren't immediately available.

Police had initially said Tuesday that James was being sought for questioning because he had rented a van possibly connected to the attack, but weren't sure whether he was responsible for the shooting. Mayor Eric Adams said in a se-

ries of media interviews Wednesday morning that investigators had upgraded James to a suspect, but did not offer details beyond citing "new information that became available to the team."

The gunman sent off smoke grenades in a crowded subway car and then fired at least 33 shots with a 9 mm handgun, police said. Five gunshot victims were in critical condition, but all 10 wounded in the shooting were expected to survive. At least a dozen others who escaped gunshot wounds were treated for smoke inhalation and other injuries.

The shooter escaped in the chaos, but left behind numerous clues, including the gun, ammunition magazines, a hatchet, smoke grenades, gasoline and the key to a U-Haul van.

That key led investigators to James, a New York City-area native who had more recent ad-

dresses in Philadelphia and Wisconsin.

Federal investigators determined the gun used in the shooting was purchased by James at a pawn shop — a licensed firearms dealer — in the Columbus, Ohio, area in 2011, a law enforcement official said.

The van was found, unoccupied, near a station where investigators determined the gunman had entered the subway system. No explosives or firearms were found in the van, a law enforcement official said. Police did find other items, including pillows, suggesting he may have been sleeping or planned to sleep in the van, the official said.

Investigators believe James drove up from Philadelphia on Monday and have reviewed surveillance video showing a man matching his physical description coming out of the van Tuesday morning, the official said.

Other video shows James entering a subway station in Brooklyn with a large bag, the official said.

In addition to analyzing financial and telephone records connected to James, investigators were reviewing hours of rambling, profanity-filled videos James posted on YouTube and other social media platforms — replete with violent language and bigoted comments, some against other Black people — as they tried to discern a motive.

In one video, posted a day before the attack, James criticizes crime against Black people and says drastic action is needed.

"You got kids going in here now taking machine guns and mowing down innocent people," James says. "It's not going to get better until we make it better," he said, adding that he thought things would only change if certain people were "stomped, kicked and tortured" out of their "comfort zone."

Cops: LA gangs behind 'follow-home' holdups

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Los Angeles street gangs are behind brazen robberies in which people are followed home from fancy locations, stripped of a fortune in jewelry or other goods and sometimes shot, police said Tuesday.

At least 17 gangs, most of them based in South Los Angeles, had independently staged robberies, sometimes using spotters to target people wearing high-end watches or driving expensive cars, Capt. Jonathan Tippet, who spearheads an LAPD "follow-home robbery" task force, told the city Police Commission.

As many as five carloads of people have followed home some targets, swarming them to steal watches, handbags or cars before they have much of a

chance to resist, Tippet said.

In one case, a man was arrested this month on suspicion of robbing a victim of two watches worth an estimated \$600,000.

"We have seen countless individuals traumatized by having a gun pointed at them," Tippet said. "Many others are dealing with the trauma and injuries from being tackled, kicked, beaten, punched and are pistol-whipped to the head."

Tippet said there were 165 such holdups last year and 56 so far this year, including five in the past two days. Thirteen victims were shot, including two people who died. Fifty robberies took place in the LAPD's Hollywood Division and nearly as many in the Wilshire Division, along with many in an area that includes the downtown Jewelers District.

SD House impeaches attorney general due to fatal car crash

Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. — The South Dakota House on Tuesday impeached state Attorney General Jason Ravensborg over a 2020 car crash in which he killed a pedestrian but initially said he might have struck a deer or another large animal.

Ravnsborg, a Republican, is the first official to be impeached in South Dakota history. He will at least temporarily be removed from office pending the historic Senate trial, where it takes a two-thirds majority to convict on impeachment charges. The Senate must wait at least 20 days to hold its trial, but has not yet set a date.

Ravnsborg pleaded no contest last year to a pair of traffic misdemeanors in the crash, including making an illegal lane change. He has cast Joseph Boever's death as a tragic acci-

dent.

In narrowly voting to impeach the state's top prosecutor, the Republican-controlled House charged Ravensborg with committing crimes that caused someone's death, making "numerous misrepresentations" to law enforcement officers after the crash and using his office to navigate the criminal investigation. A Senate conviction would mean that Ravensborg would be barred from holding any state office in the future.

"When we're dealing with the life of one of your citizens, I think that weighed heavily on everyone," said Republican Rep. Will Mortenson, who introduced the articles of impeachment.

Ravnsborg said in a statement he is looking forward to the Senate trial, "where I believe I will be vindicated."

US saw highest death total ever in 2021

Associated Press

NEW YORK — 2021 was the deadliest year in U.S. history, and new data and research are offering more insights into how it got that bad.

The main reason for the increase in deaths? COVID-19, said Robert Anderson, who oversees the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's work on death statistics.

The agency this month quietly updated its provisional death tally. It showed there were 3.465 million deaths last year, or about 80,000 more than 2020's record-setting total.

Early last year, some experts were optimistic that 2021 would not be as bad as the first year of the pandemic — partly because effective COVID-19 vaccines had finally become available.

"We were wrong, unfortunately," said Noreen Goldman, a Princeton University researcher.

COVID-19 deaths rose in 2021 — to more than 415,000, up from 351,000 the year before — as new coronavirus variants emerged and an unexpectedly large number of Americans refused to get vaccinated or were hesitant to wear masks, experts said.

The coronavirus is not solely to blame. Preliminary CDC data also shows the crude death rate for cancer rose slightly, and rates continued to increase for diabetes, chronic liver disease and stroke.

Drug overdose deaths also continued to rise. The CDC does not yet have a tally for 2021 overdose deaths, because it can take weeks of lab work and investigation to identify them. But provisional data through October suggests the nation is on track to see at least 105,000 overdose deaths in 2021 — up from 93,000 the year before.

New research released Tuesday showed a particularly large jump in overdose deaths

among 14- to 18-year-olds.

Adolescent overdose death counts were fairly constant for most of the last decade, at around 500 a year, according to the paper published by the Journal of the American Medical Association. They almost doubled in 2020, to 954, and the researchers estimated that the total hit nearly 1,150 last year.

Joseph Friedman, a UCLA researcher who was the paper's lead author, called the spike "unprecedented."

Those teen overdose deaths were only around 1% of the U.S. total. But adolescents experienced a greater relative increase than the overall population, even though surveys suggest drug use among teens is down.

Experts attributed the spike to fentanyl, a highly lethal drug that has been cut into heroin for several years. More recently, it's also been pressed into counterfeit pills resembling prescription drugs that teens sometimes abuse.

Biden waiving ethanol rule in bid to lower gas prices

Associated Press

MENLO, Iowa — With inflation at a 40-year high, President Joe Biden journeyed to corn-rich Iowa on Tuesday to announce a modest step aimed at trimming gasoline prices by about a dime a gallon at a limited number of stations by waiving rules that restrict ethanol blending.

His action reflects the ways Biden is deploying almost every weapon in his bureaucratic arsenal to ease price pressures, yet the impact appears to be small and uncertain. Inflation has only accelerated in recent months, instead of fading as Biden once promised it would after the recovery from the coronavirus recession following last year's \$1.9 trillion relief package.

A government report Tuesday that con-

sumer prices jumped 8.5% in March from a year ago — the worst reading since December 1981 — only deepened the political challenge for Biden and fellow Democrats ahead of this year's midterm elections. More than half the increase came from higher gas prices, which spiked in part because of Russia's war in Ukraine, but costs also jumped for housing, food and other items.

Biden called the inflation report "Putin's price hike."

"Your family budget, your ability to fill up your tank, none of it should hinge on whether a dictator declares war and commits genocide a half a world away," the U.S. president said, referring to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

But in his remarks at the POET biofuels facility in Menlo, west of Des Moines, Biden acknowledged that the waiver on ethanol mixes was a small step.

"I'm doing everything within my power by executive orders to bring down the price," he said. "It's not going to solve all our problems, but it's going to help some people."

Most gasoline sold in the United States is blended with 10% ethanol, a biofuel that is currently cheaper than gas. Biden was announcing that the Environmental Protection Agency will issue an emergency waiver to allow widespread sale of a 15% ethanol blend that is usually prohibited between June 1 and Sept. 15 because of concerns that it adds to smog in high temperatures.

Disaster response efforts are bolstered in Philippines

Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines — As search and rescue efforts increased with the arrival of equipment, the death toll has risen to at least 56, with 28 others missing, after a summer tropical depression that unleashed days of pounding rain caused landslides and floods in the central and southern Philippines, officials said Wednesday.

Nearly 200 villagers were injured mostly in the landslides in the hard-hit city of Bay-

bay in central Leyte province over the weekend and early Monday, officials said. Army, police and other rescuers were struggling with mud and unstable heaps of earth and debris to find the missing villagers.

More rescuers and heavy equipment, including backhoes, arrived in the landslide-hit villages in Baybay. Its mayor, Jose Carlos Cari, said the weather cleared Wednesday, allowing the search and rescue work to go full force.

"We're looking for so many more missing people," Cari said, and added that authorities would do a recount to determine how many villagers were really missing and believed buried in the landslides.

Forty-seven of the dead were recovered from the landslides that hit six Baybay villages, military and local officials said. Nine other people drowned elsewhere in floodwaters in four central and southern provinces, they said.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

University suing 2 YouTubers over pranks

CA LOS ANGELES — The University of Southern California is suing two YouTube performers who the school said created panic after barging into classrooms to film prank videos for their channels.

Court documents obtained by the Los Angeles Times claim YouTubers Ernest Kanevsky and Yuguo Bai, who are not USC students, caused “terror and disruption” during three “classroom takeover incidents” in the university’s Mark Taper Hall of Humanities.

In the most recent incident, on March 29, Kanevsky and Bai interrupted a lecture on the Holocaust while pretending to be “a member of the Russian Mafia” and Hugo Boss, a known manufacturer of Nazi uniforms during World War II, according to court documents.

Students ran from the classroom to flee “what reasonably appeared to them as a credible threat of imminent classroom violence,” the court filing says.

Hungry javelina gets stuck in car, goes for ride

AZ CORNVILLE — A hungry javelina in Arizona ended up going for a drive when it became trapped inside an empty car and bumped it into neutral.

Deputies in Yavapai County responded to a call in Cornville about a javelina stuck in a Subaru station wagon. Javelinas are pig-like animals that are native to desert environments.

The car’s hatchback had apparently been left open overnight, and the javelina jumped

in to get to a bag of Cheetos. The hatch then closed, trapping the animal inside.

Authorities said the javelina ripped off a portion of the dashboard and the inside of a door in an attempt to escape. The animal then managed to knock the car into neutral, causing it to roll down the driveway and across the street.

A deputy opened the hatch, and the javelina ran back into the wilderness.

Man killed when arm gets stuck in subway car door

MA BOSTON — A man was killed when his arm became stuck in the door of a Boston subway car as it pulled away from a station, authorities said.

The man got his arm trapped in the door and was pulled along by the moving train, said Jim Borghesani, a spokesperson for the Suffolk district attorney’s office.

He was pronounced dead at the scene, he said. His name was not released. The district attorney’s office, MBTA police, and the National Transportation Safety Board are investigating.

Fearless Girl statue will stay put for now

NY NEW YORK — The 4-foot bronze Fearless Girl statue that was deposited in front of New York City’s Charging Bull in 2017 will remain in its current spot opposite the New York Stock Exchange at least until early next year while city officials wrestle with a permanent disposition for the popular symbol of female empowerment, a city board decided.

Members of the Public De-

sign Commission granted an 11-month permit extension and said they would spend the next six months exploring a way for New York City to take ownership of the statue, which is currently the subject of litigation between artist Kristen Visbal and State Street Global Advisors, the Boston-based asset-management firm that commissioned it.

The statue was supposed to be a temporary installation when State Street commissioned it in 2017 to urge higher representation of women on corporate boards, but permits to keep it on display were extended several times once it became a major tourist attraction.

Judge: Officials unlawfully approved copper mine

MT BILLINGS — State environmental officials unlawfully approved a large copper mine in central Montana despite worries that mining waste would pollute a river that’s popular among boaters, a state judge ruled.

Officials with the Montana Department of Environmental Quality failed to conduct an adequate review of the proposed Black Butte mine north of White Sulphur Springs, Judge Katherine Bidegaray in Meagher County said in the ruling.

Work began last year on the mine along a tributary of the Smith River, a waterway so popular among boaters that the state holds an annual lottery to decide who can float down it.

Bidegaray’s ruling leaves a permit in place for now. She asked the two sides in the case to submit legal briefs within 45 days to address what should happen next.

Beach boardwalk getting \$3.7M colorful makeover

SC MYRTLE BEACH — A beachside boardwalk is getting a colorful makeover in a South Carolina vacation spot.

Myrtle Beach recently began a \$3.7 million facelift for the boardwalk that’s popular with tourists and local residents, WBTW-TV reported.

Workers are replacing the original Southern yellow pine decking, which the city said is nearly 12 years old. The new “wood-look decking” comes in nine colors, and the city said the “linear pattern is adding a visual appeal to the boardwalk surface.”

The boardwalk will remain open during the project, but portions will be closed while work is being done, the city said.

FBI offers reward in vandalizing of petroglyphs

NM SANTA FE — The FBI is offering a reward for information leading to an arrest in the vandalizing of the Cieneguilla Petroglyphs in Santa Fe.

The agency announced a \$5,000 reward Monday for any details that could help locate a suspect or suspects.

Authorities say the spray-painted graffiti was discovered on the petroglyphs in January. The Bureau of Land Management oversees the property where the petroglyphs are.

The petroglyphs, which date between the 13th and 17th centuries, are considered a precious Native American cultural resource.

— From wire reports



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Irving, Durant lift Nets past Cavaliers

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Bring on Boston.

That's the next stop on a recent rise for the Brooklyn Nets, who were in 10th place not long ago but don't look like an underdog right now.

Kyrie Irving had 34 points and 12 assists, Kevin Durant added 25 points and 11 assists, and the Nets took the No. 7 seed in the Eastern Conference by beating the Cleveland Cavaliers 115-108 on Tuesday night in the play-in opener.

Brooklyn raced to a 20-point lead after one quarter and turned Cleveland away time and again to earn a matchup with No. 2 seed Boston in a series that begins Sunday.

"I know that team very well and they know us very well and it'll be a back and forth," said Irving, a former Celtics guard, "and once you throw that ball in the air, you're going to really see

some spectacular basketball."

Irving made his first 12 shots before a three-pointer rimmed out in the fourth quarter. He finished 12-for-15.

A preseason NBA Finals favorite who sputtered through a turbulent season and were in 10th place entering the last week of the regular season, the Nets have run off five straight wins. With Durant and Irving, they are far more dangerous than the usual No. 7 seed.

And both are willing to give the ball to teammates who are capitalizing when they get it. Bruce Brown had 18 points, nine rebounds and eight assists, while Andre Drummond scored 16 points.

Brown, who is from Boston, talked about how they can keep doing that against a Celtics team missing defensive anchor Robert Williams. Durant was aggravated when he heard that.

"It ain't going to be that easy,

I'm going to tell you that," Durant said.

Unless Brooklyn plays like it did in the first quarter.

The Nets made nearly 71% of their shots in the period — Irving and Durant combined to make all eight of theirs — and closed the period with a 15-3 spurt that made it 40-20. It was a bigger lead than Brooklyn had in any first quarter during the regular season.

"You can't give a team like Brooklyn that has championship aspirations and players who have won championships a 22-point lead," Cavs coach J.B. Bickerstaff said. "Again, give our guys credit for getting back in it. But that's damn near impossible to overcome."

Darius Garland scored 34 points for Cleveland, which has another chance to earn the No. 8 seed. It will host the winner of the Atlanta-Charlotte game on Friday, with the winner moving

on to face No. 1 seed Miami.

The Nets and Cavs both went 44-38 but Brooklyn clinched the tiebreaker by beating Cleveland at Barclays Center last Friday to finish 3-1 against them. The Cavs were confident they could come back to Brooklyn and win, though it was clear quickly just how difficult that would be.

Irving was 9-for-9 in the first half, with a jumper at the buzzer that made it 57-43.

"I always say about Kyrie in a March Madness, one-game type of situation, he's a tough guy to bet against," former Cleveland teammate Kevin Love said. "Again, seen this movie before but still — I think that there's just times where he comes out and plays out of his mind and that's why he's a future Hall of Famer. So you just kind of have to tip your hat to him. He hit some really tough, contested shots today."

Play-in: Edwards, Russell lead Wolves over Clippers

Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — Anthony Edwards and D'Angelo Russell came through with a steady stream of clutch makes. Patrick Beverley supplied the intensity in an emotional triumph over his former team.

The Minnesota Timberwolves proved they belong in the playoffs, and that rare air for this franchise is just where they're headed.

Edwards and Russell combined for 59 points to help the Timberwolves overcome a rough night for Karl-Anthony Towns and beat the Los Angeles Clippers 109-104 in a play-in game on Tuesday night.

"The game had to go in a different direction," coach Chris Finch said. "That's why you have a team, because a lot of other people step up."

Edwards scored 30 points

with five three-pointers and Russell had 29 points and six assists to send Minnesota to the No. 7 seed in the Western Conference and a first-round matchup with Memphis.

"Just utilizing what we have," Russell said. "We've got a lot of pieces that complement each other."

Paul George finished with 34 points after shooting 2-for-10 in the first half for the Clippers, who have a second chance to make the playoffs with a home game on Friday for the No. 8 seed against either New Orleans or San Antonio.

Reggie Jackson (17 points) and Norman Powell (16 points) did their part in stretches, but Los Angeles failed to create enough separation when the Timberwolves were sputtering through most of the first half.

Towns had only 11 points on 3-

for-11 shooting and fouled out midway through the fourth quarter, but his sidekicks were more than up to the challenge.

"I took what the game gave me. That's what they gave me. They were scared to guard me, and I took advantage of that," Edwards said.

Jackson's three-pointer gave the Clippers their largest lead of the game at 93-83 with 8:54 remaining, but about 4 minutes later Russell knocked down the go-ahead three-pointer for a 97-95 advantage Minnesota never relinquished. He saluted the crowd for the punctuation.

Edwards followed with a tomahawk dunk after blowing by Powell at the top of the key.

Towns fouled out with 7:34 to go, less than 2 minutes after he had just checked back in.

"They played a lot better without KAT on the floor," Los

Angeles coach Tyrone Lue said. "They got into us defensively. They switched on a lot more stuff. I just didn't think we made the right plays."

Sticking with it

The Wolves trailed 45-38 when Towns exited with his fourth foul with 3:48 left before halftime, but there was a delay less than a minute later after a woman from the crowd sneaked onto the court during a dead ball on the other end. Staging an animal rights protest, she glued her hand to the hardwood along the baseline and sprawled out before security was able to pry her away.

The Timberwolves took advantage of the extended pause. Russell hit two mid-range floaters and a three-pointer over the balance of the half to help stake them to a 53-51 lead at the break.

Nakken makes history as first base coach

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — Alyssa Nakken made major league history as the first female coach on the field in a regular season game, and the San Francisco Giants pounded the San Diego Padres 13-2 on Tuesday night.

The 31-year-old Nakken took over at first base in the third inning after Giants first base coach Antoan Richardson got ejected. When she was announced as Richardson's replacement, Nakken was greeted with a warm ovation from the crowd at Oracle Park. She also received a congratulatory handshake from Padres first baseman Eric Hosmer.

"I think we're all inspirations doing everything that we do on a day-to-day basis and I think, yes, this carries a little bit more weight because of the visibility,

obviously there's a historical nature to it," Nakken said. "But again, this is my job."

San Francisco manager Gabe Kapler said Nakken had "prepared for this moment" while working with Richardson and others.

"So it's not a foreign spot on the field for her. She does so many other things well that aren't seen," he said. "So it's nice to see her kind of be right there in the spotlight and do it on the field."

Nakken is an assistant coach who works heavily with baserunning and outfield defense. She watches games from an indoor batting cage near the steps to the dugout.

Richardson said his ejection stemmed from an incident that began when San Diego third base coach Mike Shildt, the for-

mer St. Louis Cardinals manager, approached the Giants dugout.

Richardson said he asked Shildt what he needed. The San Francisco coach said Shildt used an expletive and told Kapler to "control" Richardson.

"At that point in time I went up to the top step and said, 'Excuse me,' because I couldn't believe what I heard" and got ejected, Richardson said.

Brandon Belt hit a two-run homer highlighting a six-run first inning off Yu Darvish, and it was 10-1 in the second. That was plenty for Alex Cobb (1-0), who struck out 10 to win his San Francisco debut.

Joc Pederson homered for the first time since joining the Giants with an eighth-inning drive.

Wilmer Flores, held out Mon-

day for personal reasons, returned to start at third base for the Giants and his RBI single in the second chased Darvish (0-1). Flores also homered in the eighth.

Afterward, Kapler defended Steven Duggar's steal in the second with his team up 10-1 and Mauricio Dubon's bunt in the sixth as the Giants led 11-2.

"I can't think of a reason why it doesn't make sense to continue to try to compete all the way through the game," Kapler said.

Pederson and Flores both connected after Padres outfielder Wil Myers moved to the mound to pitch.

Cobb, who signed a \$20 million, two-year contract ahead of the lockout, gave up two runs on four hits and walked two over five innings.

Pujols hits home run as Cardinals edge Royals

Associated Press

ST. LOUIS — Albert Pujols homered for the first time since returning to St. Louis and Andrew Knizner hit a three-run shot, helping the Cardinals beat the Kansas City Royals 6-5 on Tuesday night.

Nolan Arenado also went deep for St. Louis, which has won 20 of 27 interleague games against the in-state Royals since 2017.

Salvador Perez homered twice and Michael A. Taylor also connected for Kansas City, which has allowed 33 runs in losing its last three games. Daniel Lynch (0-1) allowed six runs in five innings.

The 42-year-old Pujols, who also singled twice in a 3-for-4 performance, signed with St. Louis on March 28 for his final season. The star slugger played for the Cardinals from 2001-11, helping them win two World Series.

Jordan Hicks (1-0) picked up the win with two innings of hitless relief.

Yankees 4, Blue Jays 0: Aaron Hicks hit a two-run homer and made jumping catch in his first left-field start in four years, leading host New York to the victory.

The Yankees scored first for the first time in five games this season when Hicks drove a 2-0 slider from Yusei Kikuchi (0-1) into the right-center field seats in the sec-

ond inning.

Rays 9, Athletics 8 (10): Manuel Margot hit a game-ending single during host Tampa Bay's two-run 10th inning.

Wander Franco started the Rays' 10th with an RBI double off Lou Trivino (0-1). Josh Lowe was walked intentionally with two out, and Margot then lined his clutch hit down the left-field line.

Braves 16, Nationals 4: Marcell Ozuna homered twice in a win for host Atlanta, and Ozzie Albies drove in three runs.

Coming off an 11-2 loss, the Braves began the game with a .201 team batting average before banging out 19 hits and going 9-for-19 with runners in scoring position.

Rockies 4, Rangers 1: Kris Bryant got his first two RBIs in a Colorado uniform and helped his new team stretch its winning streak to four games with a win at Texas.

Guardians 10, Reds 5: José Ramírez hit a grand slam and drove in six runs, rookie Steven Kwan reached base three more times and Cleveland spoiled Cincinnati's home opener.

Cubs 2, Pirates 1: Seiya Suzuki homered twice, Drew Smyly pitched five scoreless innings and Chicago spoiled Pittsburgh's home opener.

Mets 2, Phillies 0: Tylor Megill deli-

vered his second straight scoreless start for the Mets, and Brandon Nimmo homered for visiting New York.

White Sox 3, Mariners 2: Luis Robert hit his first homer of the season, a tiebreaking drive in the sixth inning that led host Chicago to its third consecutive victory.

Brewers 5, Orioles 4: Andrew McCutchen hit a tiebreaking single in the seventh inning, Devin Williams pitched out of his own jam in the eighth, and visiting Milwaukee held on for the win.

Red Sox 5, Tigers 3: Rafael Devers had three hits and two RBIs, helping Boston rally for the win at Detroit.

Angels 4, Marlins 3: Pinch-runner Tyler Wade slid home when Miami shortstop Miguel Rojas bobbled Max Stassi's grounder in the ninth inning, and host Los Angeles swept a two-game interleague series with Miami.

Astros 2, Diamondbacks 1: Michael Brantley delivered a go-ahead single in the ninth inning, and Jose Siri hit a homer and a key double that helped Houston win at Arizona.

Dodgers 7, Twins 2: Trea Turner and visiting Los Angeles broke open a tie game with a six-run eighth inning, then waited out the rain to take their series opener against Minnesota.

Division showdown: Canes top Rangers

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Seth Jarvis and Jordan Staal scored third-period goals and Frederik Andersen made 28 saves as the Carolina Hurricanes beat the New York Rangers 4-2 on Tuesday night in a showdown for first place in the Metropolitan Division.

Sebastian Aho had a goal and two assists and Andrei Svechnikov also scored for the Hurricanes, who moved four points ahead of the second-place Rangers with eight games remaining in the regular season.

K'Andre Miller scored and Chris Kreider added a late goal for his 50th of the season. Igor Shesterkin finished with 21 saves.

New York had its three-game winning streak snapped and is 7-2-1 in its last 10. The Rangers clinched a playoff berth for the first time since 2017 with a win over Ottawa last Saturday and are 24-8-4 at home.

With a chance to tie Carolina for first place, New York was hosting the Hurricanes in their first visit to Madison Square Garden since Dec. 27, 2019.

Panthers 3, Ducks 2 (OT): Jonathan Huberdeau scored at 3:41 of overtime to lift host Florida over Anaheim for its eighth straight victory.

Anthony Duclair scored twice for the Eastern Conference leaders, and Sergei Bobrovsky made 22 saves.

Derek Grant and Troy Terry scored for the Ducks. John Gibson stopped 52 shots in an incredible effort that went for naught.

Wild 5, Oilers 1: Kevin Fiala and Ryan Hartman each scored twice, and host Minnesota beat Edmonton in a matchup of two of the NHL's hottest teams.

Frederick Gaudreau also scored for the Wild, who improved to 11-1-2 in their last 14 games. Cam Talbot made 27 saves.

Capitals 9, Flyers 2: Alex Ovechkin scored for a fourth consecutive game to reach 46 on the season and T.J. Oshie ended a nine-game goal drought to help host Washington extend its winning streak to four games with a victory over Philadelphia.

The Capitals scored three goals on their first six shots. Lars Eller scored twice, Martin Fehervary and Connor Sheary added goals, and defenseman Matt Irwin scored for the first time since Dec. 6, 2018. Goals by Garnet Hathaway and Johan Larsson closed out the scoring for Washington, which had its highest scoring output of the season and at home in 14 years. Ilya Samsonov made 19 saves to improve to 7-1-0 against the Flyers.

Blues 4, Bruins 2: Vladimir Tarasenko scored twice, including the go-ahead goal in the second period, and St. Louis rallied to win at Boston.

Torey Krug and David Perron each finished with a goal and an assist as the Blues (43-20-10) posted their sixth straight victory. Ville Husso had 39 saves to win his fifth straight start. Robert Thomas added his 48th assist of the season, extending his career-best point streak to 10 games.

Sabres 5, Maple Leafs 2: Rasmus Dahlin and Rasmus Asplund each had a goal and an assist, helping Buffalo win at Toronto.

Tage Thompson, Kyle Okposo and Jeff Skinner also scored for the Sabres (27-37-11). Alex Tuch and Victor Olofsson added two assists apiece. Craig Anderson made 23 saves as they won the season series 3-1-0 and became the only team to defeat the Leafs three times this season.

Senators 4, Red Wings 1: Tim Stützle had two goals and an assist, and Ottawa stopped a three-game skid with a win at Detroit.

Austin Watson added a goal and an assist, and Drake Batherson snapped a tie in the second period. Anton Forsberg made 24 saves.

Islanders 5, Penguins 4 (SO): Zach Parise and Josh Bailey each scored twice, and Kyle Palmier had the lone goal in the shootout as host New York beat Pittsburgh.

Ilya Sorokin stopped Jake Guentzel, Sidney Crosby and Kris Letang in the shootout and finished with a career-high 43 saves for the Islanders.

Kings 5, Blackhawks 2: Blake Lizotte scored twice, Phillip Danault had a goal and an assist and Los Angeles snapped a three-game skid with a victory at Chicago.

Trevor Moore and Jordan Spence also scored for the Kings. Jonathan Quick finished with 18 saves.

Predators 1, Sharks 0 (OT): Ryan Johansen scored from a sharp angle at 3:18 of overtime to lead host Nashville over slumping San Jose.

Stars 1, Lightning 0: Roope Hintz scored with 4:50 remaining and host Dallas forced Tampa Bay to wait at least another day to clinch a playoff spot.

Flames 5, Kraken 3: Matthew Tkachuk scored three goals for a career-best 37 this season, and host Calgary rallied to beat Seattle and extend its winning streak to five games.

Devils 6, Coyotes 2: Fabian Zetterlund and Kevin Bahl got their first career goals and New Jersey scored twice in the final minute of the second period in a win at Arizona.

Canucks 5, Golden Knights 4 (OT): Quinn Hughes scored 51 seconds into overtime and host Vancouver kept its slim playoff hopes alive with a win over Vegas.

Source: Raiders QB Carr gets three-year extension

Associated Press

The Las Vegas Raiders have given quarterback Derek Carr a three-year contract extension, a person with knowledge of the deal tells The Associated Press.

The extension is worth \$121.5 million, the person said, speaking Wednesday on condition of anonymity because the deal has not been announced.

Despite all sorts of turmoil with the Raiders last season, including the resignation of coach

Jon Gruden, Carr helped them to the playoffs as a wild card in the tough AFC West. He threw for a career-high 4,804 yards and 23 touchdowns as Las Vegas went 10-7 before losing at Cincinnati in the postseason.

An eight-year veteran, Carr, 31, was entering the final year of his deal, worth nearly \$19.8 million in base salary.

When healthy, he has been a starter for nearly all of that time with the Raiders and has made

three Pro Bowls.

Curry's status for Warriors unclear

SAN FRANCISCO — Stephen Curry's status for Golden State's playoff opener Saturday against Denver remains unclear as he rehabs a sprained ligament in his left foot.

The reigning scoring champion has been doing individual work on the court in recent days and could be integrated into full

practices and scrimmages sometime this week. The Warriors said Tuesday that "his eventual return to game action — and the possibility of playing this weekend — is undetermined and will be based on his continued progress."

Curry was injured March 16 at home against Boston and Golden State went 6-6 without him, finding some rhythm to win the final five regular-season games.