

Experts: Troops at risk in Gaza pier plan

The Washington Post

The Biden administration's plan to install a floating pier off the Gaza coast as part of a broad international initiative to feed starving Palestinians will endanger the U.S. service members who must build, operate and defend the structure from attack, military experts say, a risk with enormous political consequences for the president should calamity strike.

The effort, U.S. officials say, could deliver up to 2 million meals per day into the war-ravaged territory, where a famine is feared amid Israel's sustained bombardment and what critics say are its extreme restrictions on the flow of food, medicine and other humanitarian aid.

While the Pentagon maintains that no U.S. troops will deploy into Gaza, it has disclosed little about how long the operation could last and how it intends to ensure the safety of those involved, alarming some in Congress and other critics of the president's plan.

Military officials declined to answer questions from *The Washington Post* about where the

pier will be located and what security measures will be taken, citing a desire not to telegraph its plans.

The Americans' fixed proximity to the fighting and the intense anger at the United States for its support of Israel will render the pier an enticing target for Hamas or another of the region's militant groups — many of whom receive arms and military guidance from adversary Iran, skeptics of the operation warn. Rocket fire, attack drones and divers or speedboats hauling explosives all will pose a threat, they said.

Paul Kennedy, a retired Marine Corps general who led major humanitarian operations after natural disasters in Nepal and the Philippines, called it a "worthy goal" for the United States to reduce civilian suffering in Gaza. But he questioned whether the U.S. military is the proper entity to be involved.

"If a bomb went off in that location," he said, "the American public will ask, 'What the hell were they doing there in the first place?'"

This account is based on inter-

views with eight current and former U.S. national security officials familiar with the Gaza operation's ongoing planning or otherwise knowledgeable about the complex coordination required to safely conduct humanitarian missions of such a scale.

Those who defended the plan said the risk is real, but manageable, and that the United States is showing leadership by looking for new ways to feed Palestinians trapped by the fighting.

Several, however, cited the deadly terrorist bombings in Beirut in 1983 and during the U.S. evacuation of Afghanistan in 2021 as examples of the immense difficulty protecting U.S. service members during extended stays in vulnerable conditions.

The former left 241 U.S. service members dead. The latter killed 13 U.S. troops alongside an estimated 170 Afghans and remains a low point for the Biden administration and the focus of an ongoing oversight investigation in the Republican-controlled House.

The Army-led pier operation will involve about 1,000 U.S. troops and four Army ships that

deployed from southeastern Virginia on March 12. After an estimated 30-day transit, the vessels are expected to pull in offshore, where the soldiers will build the floating steel structure and an 1,800-foot, two-lane causeway stretching from the edge of the Mediterranean Sea to a beachhead.

Gen. Michael "Erik" Kurilla, U.S. Central Command's top commander, also sought to reassure lawmakers in congressional hearings earlier in March. But "strong reservations" remain, said Mississippi Sen. Roger Wicker, the Senate Armed Services Committee's ranking Republican, and other GOP senators in a letter to President Joe Biden last week.

"We are gravely concerned," they wrote to the White House, "that the Defense Department has given too little consideration to the likelihood that Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), and other U.S.-designated terrorist organizations operating in Gaza would attempt to attack the U.S. personnel that will be deployed to this mission."

DOD says it destroyed Houthi drones over Red Sea, in Yemen

Associated Press

CAIRO — The U.S. military said Sunday its forces destroyed one unmanned aerial vehicle in a Houthi rebel-held area of war-ravaged Yemen and another over a crucial shipping route in the Red Sea. It was the latest development in months of tension between the Iran-backed rebels and the U.S.

The drones, which were destroyed Saturday morning, posed a threat to U.S. and coalition forces and merchant vessels in the region, said U.S. Central Command.

It said that one drone was de-

stroyed over the Red Sea, while the second was destroyed on the ground as it was prepared to launch.

"These actions are necessary to protect our forces, ensure freedom of navigation, and make international waters safer and more secure for U.S., coalition, and merchant vessels," CENTCOM said.

There was no comment from the Houthi rebels, which control much of Yemen's north and west.

The rebels launched a campaign of drone and missile attacks on shipping in the Red Sea in No-

vember. They have also fired missiles toward Israel, although those have largely fallen short or been intercepted.

The rebels have described their campaign as an effort to pressure Israel to end its war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip. The ships targeted by the Houthis, however, largely have had little or no connection to Israel, the U.S. or other nations involved in the war.

The Houthis have kept up their campaign of attacks despite more than two months of U.S.-led airstrikes.

Last month, CENTCOM said its forces also destroyed four unmanned aerial vehicles in Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen.

It also said Houthis fired four anti-ship ballistic missiles toward the Red Sea, but no injuries or damages were reported by U.S., coalition or commercial ships.

The escalation in the Red Sea and the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza impacted the U.N.-led efforts to relaunch political talks to end Yemen's yearslong conflict, according to the U.N. envoy for Yemen.

No US veterans went to Iwo Jima reunion

By SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

U.S. Marines and Japanese soldiers marched side-by-side over the weekend on Iwo Jima, where their predecessors fought one of the bloodiest battles of World War II.

The troops, along with family members of those who fought on Iwo Jima and officials from both nations, visited the remote island Saturday for the 79th Reunion of Honor commemorating the pivotal 36-day battle.

Around 170 people took part in the ceremony, but no U.S. World War II veterans came this year to the island now known as Iwo To in Japan, a spokesman for III Marine Expeditionary Force, 2nd Lt. Owen Hitchcock, said in an

email Monday.

There are three or four U.S. veterans of the battle who are still alive, but there was no civilian contract airliner that could bring them to the island for the ceremony, Hitchcock said in a follow-up email. There are no surviving Japanese veterans of the battle, he said.

Last year, several of the few remaining U.S. veterans of the battle were present for the hourlong ceremony. They were joined by as many as 100 members of Japanese families who lost loved ones on the island.

The Battle of Iwo Jima began with an amphibious assault by Marines on Feb. 19, 1945, following months of aerial and naval bombardment. The Japanese had dug a defensive labyrinth

of tunnels into the island's volcanic rock. Of the 70,000 Marines who fought there, more than 6,800 were killed and 19,000 were wounded. About 18,000 died on the Japanese side, with only 216 captured. The island was finally declared secure on March 26, 1945.

The flag-raising atop Mount Suribachi, photographed by The Associated Press' Joe Rosenthal, helped rally U.S. support for the war effort and became an iconic symbol of American sacrifice and courage.

Those who attended this year's reunion gathered near a monument on the island's southern point, overlooking the beach where some of the battle's heaviest fighting happened.

A video of the ceremony posted on the Defense Visual Information Distribution Service showed U.S. Marines and Japanese soldiers marching shoulder-to-shoulder with American and Japanese flags before members of the Japanese Diet placed wreaths at the monument.

The reunion honors troops from both nations who fought with valor on Iwo Jima, III MEF commander Lt. Gen. Roger Turner said at the gathering.

The troops who gave their lives there "altered the course of history," he said.

The U.S.-Japan alliance is based on mutual respect, common goals and commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific, Turner added.

Triton arrival in Sicily marking first for Europe

By ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — One of the U.S. military's newest intelligence drones has arrived in Europe as part of the only Navy unmanned patrol squadron's second detachment.

An MQ-4C Triton drone arrived at Naval Air Station Sigonella on Saturday, the Navy announced in a statement the same day.

Last month, VUP-19 celebrated the deployment of a detachment and opening of a Triton hangar at the base in Sicily. The squadron also has a detachment in Guam.

Bringing the Triton to the U.S. 6th Fleet area of responsibility expands "the roles of unmanned aircraft systems operations in our region and beyond," Capt. Aaron Shoemaker, commanding officer of NAS Sigonella, said in the statement.

NAS Sigonella's location in the Mediterranean enables deployment of P-8 Poseidon patrol and reconnaissance aircraft throughout the theater, supporting U.S. European Command and U.S. Africa Command.

The drone, which is designed to work with the P-8 Poseidon, can aid intelligence gathering, support search and rescue operations and serve as a communications relay.

It wasn't clear how many Tritons would eventually be based at Sigonella. A drone's five-member crew per ground station comprises a pilot, tactical coordinator, two mission payload operators and a foreign signals intelligence coordinator, according to the Navy.

VUP-19 is homeported at Naval Air Station Jacksonville and Naval Air Station Mayport in Florida.

Lawmakers concerned over lack of civilian care in Japan

By ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — Two U.S. senators and a representative remain concerned about gaps in health care access for Defense Department civilians in Japan, they said in a recent letter to the Defense Health Agency.

Strategies to improve DOD civilian health care, staffing issues at military medical facilities and wait times are among questions raised by Sens. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., and Tim Kaine, D-Va., and Rep. Michael Burgess, R-Texas, in their March 20 letter to DHA.

"We write in regard to my ongoing concerns that Department of Defense civilians and contractors in Japan continue to face problems with access to medical care, and that this problem is impacting morale and retention," the letter states.

The letter to Army Lt. Gen. Telita Crosland, DHA's director, and Lester Martinez-Lopez, assistant secretary of defense for health affairs, references a Nov. 29 report from the Office of the Inspector General that noted "significant challenges associated with civilians using off-base medical care."

The lack of care is "having serious and negative impacts on the lives of service members and DoD civilians, causing many to leave their assignments in Japan," the letter continued.

The letter cites a March 2023 survey by the Japan Civilian Medical Advocacy Group, a grassroots organization lobbying for health care options for DOD civilians. It found that 42% of respondents were "actively in the process of finding a new job" and 60% were considering changing jobs due to health care concerns.

Alternate channel open at site of bridge collapse

Associated Press

BALTIMORE — The U.S. Coast Guard has opened a temporary, alternate channel for vessels involved in the clearing of debris at the site of the collapsed Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore, part of a phased approach to opening the main channel leading to the vital port, officials said.

Crews are undertaking the complicated work of removing steel and concrete at the site of the bridge's deadly collapse into the Patapsco River after a container ship lost power and crashed into a supporting column. On Sunday, dive teams surveyed parts of the bridge and checked the ship, and workers in lifts used torches to cut above-water parts of the twisted steel superstructure.

Officials said the temporary channel is open only to vessels that are helping with the cleanup effort. Authorities believe four workers plunged to their deaths in the collapse. Recovery of their bodies is a key part of the ongoing salvage operation.

Officials earlier said the channel would have a controlling depth of 11 feet, a horizontal clearance of 264 feet and a vertical clearance of 96 feet. A video released Sunday showed the

Coast Guard dropping buoys in the water.

"This marks an important first step along the road to reopening the port of Baltimore," Capt. David O'Connell, the federal on-scene coordinator of the response, said in a statement Monday. "By opening this alternate route, we will support the flow of marine traffic into Baltimore."

On Monday, the Small Business Administration is opening a center in Dundalk, Md., to help small businesses get loans to help them with losses caused by the disruption of the bridge collapse.

And President Joe Biden will visit the site of the bridge collapse on Friday, White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre announced Monday. He will meet with state and local officials and get an "on-the-ground look" at federal response efforts, Jean-Pierre said.

The bridge fell as the crew of the cargo ship Dali lost power and control on March 26. They called in a mayday, which allowed just enough time for police to stop vehicles from getting on the bridge, but not enough time to get a crew of eight workers off the structure.

Crews escorting cars around damage on part of Calif.'s Highway 1

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — Authorities urged motorists to avoid California's Highway 1 along the central coast after a section of the scenic route collapsed during an Easter weekend storm, forcing closures and stranding motorists near Big Sur, authorities said.

The collapse occurred amid heavy rain Saturday afternoon near Rocky Creek Bridge about 17 miles south of Monterey, sending chunks of asphalt tumbling into the ocean from the southbound side of the two-lane road.

The highway was closed in both directions in the mountainous area of California's central coast as engineers assessed the damage, said the state Department of Transportation, or Caltrans.

"We are working on a plan to get motorists evacuated from the area," the California Highway Patrol said Saturday.

Around noon on Sunday, crews had determined that travel in the northbound lane was safe, and authorities began periodically escorting motorists around the damaged section. About 300 cars were waiting to travel northbound when officials led the first convoy through the area, the San Francisco Chronicle reported.

Some stranded motorists had slept in their cars overnight while others were sheltered at

the nearby Big Sur Lodge, the newspaper said.

Caltrans spokesperson Kevin Drabinski said periodic convoys would continue over the coming days as crews shore up the highway, which had other closures because of rocks and debris in lanes. He urged people to avoid the area.

The famous route has seen frequent closures because of collapses, mud flows and rockslides during severe weather.

The slow-moving storm dumped heavy rain at lower elevations and more than a foot of snow at Sierra Nevada ski resorts around Lake Tahoe.

Ryan Kittell, a National Weather Service meteorologist, said the system is typical for March but was not an atmospheric river like many of the other storms that have pounded the state in recent winters.

The storm exited the San Francisco Bay Area on Friday and "just marched right down the California coast," bringing most of the rainfall to the Los Angeles area, Kittell said.

The storm then parked itself over Southern California, where it was expected to stay until Sunday night or into Monday.

Showers and possible thunderstorms, with the potential for lightning and damaging winds, were still possible for parts of Santa Barbara, Ventura and LA counties.

Murdaugh gets 40 years for stealing from clients

Associated Press

CHARLESTON, S.C. — For maybe the last time, Alex Murdaugh, in a prison jumpsuit instead of the suit he used to wear, shuffled into a courtroom Monday in South Carolina and was sentenced to 40 years in federal

prison. Murdaugh was punished — this time in federal court — for stealing from clients and his law firm. The 55-year-old disbarred attorney is already serving a life sentence without parole in a state prison for killing his wife and son. A report by

federal agents recommended a prison sentence between 17½ and just under 22 years.

The 40-year sentence will be insurance on top of insurance. Along with the life sentence, Murdaugh pleaded guilty and was ordered to spend 27 years

in prison in state court on financial crime charges.

The federal sentence will run at the same time as his state prison term and he likely will have to serve all 40 years if his murder convictions are overturned on appeal.

Germany relaxes laws on marijuana

Associated Press

FRANKFURT, Germany — Marijuana campaigners in Germany lit celebratory joints on Monday as the country liberalized rules on cannabis to allow possession of small amounts.

The German Cannabis Association, which campaigned for the new law, staged a “smoke-in” at Berlin’s landmark Brandenburg Gate when the law took effect at midnight. Other public consumption events were scheduled throughout the country, including one in front

of the Cologne cathedral and others in Hamburg, Regensburg and Dortmund.

The new law legalizes possession by adults of up to 25 grams (nearly 1 ounce) of marijuana for recreational purposes and allows individuals to grow up to three plants on their own. That part of the legislation took effect Monday.

German residents age 18 and older will be allowed to join nonprofit “cannabis clubs” with a maximum 500 members each starting July 1. Individu-

als will be allowed to buy up to 25 grams per day, or a maximum 50 grams per month — a figure limited to 30 grams for people under age 21. Membership in multiple clubs won’t be allowed.

The clubs’ costs will be covered by membership fees, which are to be staggered according to how much marijuana members use.

The legislation also calls for an amnesty under which sentences for cannabis-related offenses that will no longer be il-

legal to be reviewed and possibly reversed.

The law was pushed through by the current coalition of Chancellor Olaf Scholz’ Social Democrats, the Greens and the pro-business Free Democrats, against opposition from some of Germany’s federal states and the center-right Christian Democrats. Christian Democratic leader Friedrich Merz has vowed that his party will reverse the legislation if it wins national elections expected in the fall of 2025.

Gunmen in Ecuador kill 9, injure 10 others in attack

Associated Press

QUITO, Ecuador — Gunmen attacked a group of people in Ecuador’s coastal city of Guayaquil killing nine and injuring 10 others, police said Sunday, the latest in a string of violent incidents in the South American country.

The attack took place around 7 p.m. local time Saturday in the southern neighborhood of Guasmo. According to police, the armed group entered a pedestri-

an street in a gray Chevrolet Spark, where a group of people were practicing sports. The gunmen got out of the vehicle and proceeded to shoot people.

“So far, the result is nine people dead and 10 injured,” police Col. Ramiro Arequipa told journalists around midday on Sunday.

No group immediately claimed responsibility for the attack.

It was the second mass killing

in as many days. On Friday, five people who had been kidnapped were killed execution-style in the coastal province of Manabi by an armed gang. Police said there were signs the victims were tourists mistakenly caught up in a local drug-trafficking dispute.

In that incident, an armed group had kidnapped a total of 11 people. Police said the other six, including five minors, were rescued and handed over to their families. Two suspects were ar-

rested on Saturday morning, according to police.

The killings in Manabi “remind us that the battle continues,” said Ecuador’s President Daniel Noboa on the social media network X, on Saturday.

“Narcoterrorism and its allies are looking for spaces to scare us, but they will not succeed,” Noboa said. His post contained a video of a man handcuffed and bent over, being led away forcefully by an armed police officer.

Ex-official believes Russia behind Havana Syndrome

Miami Herald

The former head of the Pentagon’s investigation into the mysterious health incidents known as Havana Syndrome told the CBS investigation show “60 Minutes” he believes Russia was behind them and was attacking U.S. officials abroad and at home.

In partnership with The Insider, a Russian exile media outlet, and German magazine Der Spiegel, 60 Minutes reported Sunday night on new evidence connecting a possible domestic incident of Havana Syndrome to Russia and identified a Russian military intelligence

unit, identified as 29155, as the possible culprit of some of the suspected attacks, the latest turn in a case that has confounded U.S. spy agencies.

Havana Syndrome got its name from the city where U.S. and Canadian diplomats and intelligence officials first reported in 2016 experiencing strange noises and sensations of pressure, and later developed debilitating symptoms like vertigo, migraines and hearing and cognitive problems. The incidents were later reported around the world, which led to suspicions that a foreign adversary, possibly Russia, was attacking U.S.

diplomats and spies with some type of directed energy weapon.

Though U.S. intelligence officials initially suspected Russia’s military intelligence, known by the initials GRU, U.S. intelligence agencies said in March that they hadn’t found hard evidence pointing to those responsible and that it was unlikely that a foreign adversary has been attacking American officers around the world.

But the incidents have not stopped.

According to 60 Minutes, a previously unreported “anomalous health incident” — the government term for the Havana

Syndrome — at the NATO summit in Lithuania last year attended by President Joe Biden left a senior Pentagon official seeking medical care.

Greg Edgreen, who ran the investigation into Havana Syndrome for the Defense Intelligence Agency from 2021-23, said that as a result of the incidents, U.S. officers abroad have been “neutralized.”

When asked by the show’s host, journalist Scott Pelley, if he thought the United States is being attacked, he answered, “My personal opinion, yes.” “By whom?” Pelley asked.

“By Russia,” Edgreen said.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Punxsutawney Phil, wife are parents of 2 babies

PA PUNXSUTAWNEY — Now we know what Punxsutawney Phil, the groundhog who predicts whether an early spring will arrive each Feb. 2, does on the other 364 days.

The Pennsylvania group that handles Phil, and his groundhog wife, Phyliss, said the couple have become parents.

The Punxsutawney Groundhog Club said in a Facebook post that Phyliss recently gave birth to two healthy babies. It did not specify their sex or give names for either one.

"We're pleased to announce that Punxsutawney Phil has had his first children; we believe there are two baby groundhogs and that Phil and Phyllis have started a family," said Thomas Dunkel, president of a tuxedo-clad group called The Inner Circle that carries on the groundhog tradition each year.

Dunkel said a club member discovered the babies Saturday when he came to feed their parents fruit and vegetables.

Phil emerges from his burrow each year the morning of Feb. 2. If he sees his shadow, tradition holds, there will be six more weeks of winter. This year, he did not see his shadow, heralding an early spring.

13-year-old girl detained after shooting injures boy

MN ST. PAUL — Police in Minnesota have detained a 13-year-old girl after a shooting that left a boy hospitalized with a gunshot wound to the head.

Officers responded to the

shooting and found the badly wounded boy, according to St. Paul police. He is believed to be 11 years old.

Paramedics rushed him to a hospital with injuries that police described as life threatening.

Investigators learned that the 13-year-old girl was a possible suspect and began to search for her, police said in a news release. They found her less than 2 miles from where the shooting happened and took her into custody.

Police are still investigating, and no other details were immediately released about what led up to the shooting.

Last coal-burning plant in New England set to close

MA BOSTON — The last coal-fired power plant in New England, which had been the focus of a lawsuit and protests, is set to close in a victory for environmentalists.

Granite Shore Power said it reached an agreement with the Environmental Protection Agency to close the Merrimack Station in New Hampshire by June 2028. As part of the deal, the company said the site will be turned into the state's first renewable energy park that hosts solar power and battery storage systems. The company also said it would shutter Schiller Station in Portsmouth in December 2025. That facility, which is permitted to use oil, coal and biomass, has not operated for several years.

"From our earliest days as owners and operators, we have been crystal clear; while our power occasionally is still on during New England's warmest days and coldest nights, we were firmly committed to tran-

sitioning our facilities away from coal and into a newer, cleaner energy future," Jim Andrews, CEO of Granite Shore Power, said.

Author also charged for alleged earlier murder try

UT SALT LAKE CITY — A Utah woman who authorities said fatally poisoned her husband in 2022, then published a children's book about grief, now faces another attempted murder charge for allegedly drugging him weeks earlier on Valentine's Day.

Kouri Richins, 33, is accused of killing her husband with a lethal dose of fentanyl at their home in a small mountain town near Park City in March 2022. New charging documents filed by Summit County prosecutors allege that was not her first attempt on his life.

They detail the perilous months preceding Eric Richins' death, painting a picture of a paranoid man walking on eggshells around his wife as she made secret financial arrangements and bought illicit drugs that were later found in his system.

5 hurt when man shoots following parking fight

MI DETROIT — Five people were wounded after what Detroit police said was a dispute over a parking space outside a blues club.

The argument started about 2:45 a.m. and had become physical when one man involved pulled a gun from a vehicle and fired shots into a crowd, Assistant Police Chief Charles Fitzgerald told reporters.

"When he came back he brought a gun, as most cowards do," Fitzgerald added. "Five people get shot over a parking spot is just silly to me."

The gunman then drove away. No arrests have been made.

Fitzgerald said it appears only one of the shooting victims was involved in the fight. The others were bystanders. All five, ranging in age from 33 to 49, were hospitalized in stable condition, he added.

Endangered fish hinders water conservation plan

CA IMPERIAL — Southern California's Imperial Irrigation District, which supplies water to farmers who grow most of the nation's winter vegetables, planned to start a conservation program this month to scale back what it draws from the critical Colorado River.

But a tiny, tough fish got in the way.

Now, those plans won't start until at least June so water and wildlife officials can devise a way to ensure the endangered desert pupfish and other species are protected, said Jamie Asbury, the irrigation district's general manager.

The proposal to pay farmers to temporarily stop watering feed crops such as alfalfa this summer has environmentalists concerned that irrigation drains could dry up, threatening the fish that measures the length of an ATM card.

"Drains are created for farmers to be able to convey irrigation runoff, and the pupfish decided it was a good place to live," Asbury said.

— From wire reports

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Wolfpack make first Final Four since 1983

Associated Press

DALLAS — Bruising big man DJ Burns Jr. plays with plenty of joy, skipping on and off the floor and interacting with North Carolina State fans that he often works into a frenzy with slick moves and a soft-touch shot.

"I was raised in a happy environment," Burns said. "I try to take that with me everywhere I go."

Now he can take that to the desert for the Wolfpack's first Final Four in four decades.

The 6-foot-9, 275-pound Burns scored a season-high 29 points on 13-for-19 shooting, DJ Horne had 20 and 11th-seeded N.C. State beat Atlantic Coast Conference rival Duke 76-64 in the South Region final Sunday.

N.C. State is back on basketball's biggest stage for the first time since the late Jim Valvano was sprinting around the court looking for someone to hug after winning the 1983 national title with an upset of Houston and Phi Slama Jama.

"These guys are so special," seventh-year coach Kevin Keatts said. "Nine elimination games or you go home."

These Wolfpack (26-14) head to Glendale, Ariz., with the most losses ever for a Final Four team, but on a winning streak that began after losing their last four regular-season games, and seven of nine. They had to win five games against past national champions in five days in the ACC Tournament,

including a win over Duke in the quarterfinal round, just to get into the 68-team NCAA Tournament field.

Now they will play 7-foot-4 All-American Zach Edey and Purdue in the first national semifinal game, before defending champion UConn takes on Alabama.

"I'll say like I've been saying the whole tournament. When I stop having fun with basketball, I'll stop playing," said Burns, who was voted the South Region's most outstanding player. "There's just been a total switch in our commitment. Nobody's being late to things. Nobody's being a problem on the court. Everybody's come together."

Fourth-seeded Duke (27-9), which ousted top seed Houston in the Sweet 16 two nights earlier, missed out on its second Final Four in three seasons after leading by six at half-time and maintaining that margin with 16½ minutes left.

But soon after Keatts was called for a technical foul with 8 minutes left, his team was well on its way to becoming the seventh double-digit seed to make the Final Four since the tournament expanded to 64 teams in 1985.

Jared McCain made both free throws for the technical that Keatts got after officials ruled a missed shot by Duke's Kyle Filipowski that went over the backboard and off the shot clock went off one of his players. Replays showed that while maybe there should

have been a foul since Burns made contact with the 7-foot Filipowski's arm, the Wolfpack forward wasn't even close to the ball.

Purdue 72, Tennessee 66: At Detroit, big man Zach Edey went for a career-high 40 points along with 16 rebounds and one big block to muscle the Boilermakers into the program's first Final Four since 1980 with a victory over the Volunteers.

The 7-foot-4 center willed his way to a win in a back-and-forth thriller between the country's top two players, edging out Tennessee's All-American, Dalton Knecht, who finished with 37 points.

Fittingly for this showdown, Edey swatted away Knecht's layup as the Northern Colorado transfer drove to the basket while trailing by five with 33 seconds left, putting an end to the Vols' desperate comeback hopes.

Top-seeded Purdue (33-4) set aside last year's grand disappointment—a first-round loss as a No. 1 seed—to book the trip to Glendale, Ariz. On Saturday, the Boilermakers will play North Carolina State in the national semifinals.

This was a scrapfest of a game played in front of an ear-splitting crowd packed with Purdue fans who made their way up from Indiana.

They were looking for history, and they got it—along with the game ball that Fletcher Loyer chucked about 20 rows into the stands when the buzzer went off.

Unbeaten South Carolina advances to women's Final Four

Associated Press

ALBANY, N.Y. — Dawn Staley has South Carolina back in a familiar place—the Final Four—and she got there this time with an entirely new starting lineup.

Tessa Johnson scored 15 points and Kamilla Cardoso added 12 to help the undefeated Gamecocks to a 70-58 win over Oregon State on Sunday in the Albany 1 Regional Final of the women's NCAA Tournament.

"Proud because we beat the odds," Staley said. "Odds said we shouldn't make it back to the Final Four. Proud of our team for them believing in themselves. We created a certain level of chemistry and culture and they stuck with it."

It's the second consecutive year South Carolina has made it to the national semifinals undefeated. The Gamecocks are hoping for a different conclusion this time, as they lost to Caitlin Clark and Iowa in the Final Four last year.

South Carolina, which has made the Final Four in four straight years, will play N.C. State on Friday night in Cleveland. The Wolfpack beat Texas later Sunday in Portland, Ore.

"Each time we get an opportunity to cut down nets is kind of special," Staley said.

Two more wins by the Gamecocks would make them the 10th school to finish a season undefeated and the first since UConn did it in 2016.

Top-seeded South Carolina (36-0) led by four at the half and built a 14-point lead before No. 3 seed Oregon State (27-8) got within 62-58 with 3:55 left in the game.

No. 11 N.C. State 76, No. 4 Texas 66: At Portland, Ore., Aziaha James made a career-high seven 3-pointers and scored 27 points, and the third-seeded Wolfpack earned their first trip to the Final Four since 1998, beating top-seeded Texas in a game played with 3-point lines at different dis-

tances on opposite ends of the court.

River Baldwin added 16 points for N.C. State (31-6), which will face unbeaten South Carolina in the national semifinals in Cleveland on Saturday. The Gamecocks beat Oregon State in Albany, N.Y., earlier Sunday.

Madison Booker, one of the top freshmen in the country along with Southern California's JuJu Watkins, finished with 17 points to lead the Longhorns (33-5), who were vying for their first Final Four since 2003.

Before the Portland 4 Region final, Texas coach Vic Schaefer and N.C. State's Wes Moore conferred with officials about a visible difference between the 3-point lines.

The NCAA acknowledged a discrepancy but said both coaches agreed to play on. Four previous games in Portland were played without anyone saying anything publicly about the issue. The court was corrected before Monday's Elite Eight game between USC and UConn, the NCAA said.

Soto leads Yankees to sweep of Astros

Associated Press

HOUSTON — Juan Soto had three hits capped by an RBI single with two outs in the ninth inning that lifted the New York Yankees to a 4-3 win Sunday, completing an opening four-game sweep of the Houston Astros.

With the score 3-3, Gleyber Torres singled off closer Josh Hader (0-1) with two outs in the ninth inning and stole second base. Soto then singled on a line drive to left field.

“It just put a bow on the series of what we saw in his at-bats,” manager Aaron Boone said.

Soto hit .529 (9-for-17) with four RBIs in his first games with the Yankees after his trade from San Diego, helping New York to its first 4-0 start since 2003 and just its fourth since 1950.

“That’s the kind of start I wanted,” Soto said with a laugh. “I grinded really hard this off-season and in spring training to be successful in the beginning of the season.”

The Astros had a shot to tie it in the bottom of the inning against Clay Holmes. Jeremy Peña and pinch-hitter Victor Caratini singled and Jose Altuve hit a hard grounder that third baseman Jon Berti snagged with a dive and scrambled to third for a forceout.

Yordan Alvarez hit a drive 2 inches foul of the left-field line and followed with a fly ball that

advanced pinch-runner Mauricio Dubón to third. Alex Verdugo made a sliding catch in left field on a ball hit by Kyle Tucker to end it and give Holmes his third save.

Phillies 5, Braves 4: Trea Turner capitalized on a third out overturned on replay with a tying single and Alec Bohm drove in two runs in the seventh inning to rally host Philadelphia over Atlanta.

Leading 3-2 behind a strong outing from Chris Sale in his Braves debut, reliever Aaron Bummer (0-1) seemingly got Johan Rojas to ground into an inning-ending double play. But a second look showed Rojas was safe and overturned the call by first base umpire Clint Vondrak, and the third straight sellout crowd roared in approval.

Padres 13, Giants 4: Luis Campusano and Ha-Seong Kim hit three-run homers, and host San Diego routed San Francisco for an opening four-game split.

Patrick Bailey had a run-scoring passed ball and Manny Machado an RBI double in a five-run first inning. Campusano followed with a drive into the first-row seats near the right-field foul pole off Daulton Jeffries (0-1), who made his first big league start since 2022.

Dodgers 5 Cardinals 4: Max Muncy hit a two-run homer to right field with one out in the eighth inning, and host Los Angeles rallied from a four-run

deficit to beat St. Louis.

Teoscar Hernández had two hits and drove in two runs as the Dodgers took three of four in the series.

Athletics 4, Guardians 3: Pinch-hitter Abraham Toro forced in the game-ending run when he drew a four-pitch, bases-loaded walk from Eli Morgan, and host Oakland beat Cleveland for its first win this season.

The A’s, who have announced plans to move to Las Vegas in 2028, drew just 4,118 at the Coliseum on a sunny afternoon. Attendance for the opening four-game series totaled 26,902.

Angels 4, Orioles 1: Reid Detmers gave the Angels some much-needed effectiveness on the mound, allowing one run in five innings to help visiting Los Angeles avoid a season-opening sweep with a win over Baltimore.

Brewers 4, Mets 1: Jackson Chourio hit an RBI double for his first career extra-base hit and helped Collin Rea (1-0) escape a bases-loaded jam as visiting Milwaukee beat winless New York to remain undefeated.

Blue Jays 9, Rays 2: Justin Turner homered and drove in four runs as visiting Toronto gained a split of a four-game series by beating Tampa Bay.

Royals 11, Twins 0: Bobby Witt Jr. finished a double shy of the cycle, Kyle Isbel and Maikel

Garcia hit back-to-back home runs, and host Kansas City routed Minnesota to avoid a second straight season-opening sweep.

Reds 6, Nationals 5: Will Benson and Christian Encarnacion-Strand hit back-to-back home runs with two outs in the ninth inning, lifting host Cincinnati to a series-clinching win over Washington.

Pirates 9, Marlins 7 (10): Oneil Cruz raced home on Jason Delay’s bunt in the 10th inning, and visiting Pittsburgh beat Miami for a four-game sweep of their season-opening series.

Tigers 3, White Sox 2: Jack Flaherty pitched six effective innings in his debut and Andy Ibáñez snapped a tie with a pinch-hit single in the ninth, sending visiting Detroit to a victory over Chicago.

Cubs 9, Rangers 5: Ian Happ tied his career high with four hits and drew a tiebreaking bases-loaded walk from José Leclerc in a four-run ninth inning, helping visiting Chicago beat Texas to salvage the finale of their opening three-game series.

Diamondbacks 5, Rockies 1: Christian Walker hit a two-run homer, Brandon Pfaadt pitched five solid innings and host Arizona beat Colorado.

Red Sox 5, Mariners 1: Emmanuel Valdez hit a three-run homer, Garrett Whitlock pitched five effective innings and visiting Boston beat Seattle.

Joshua scores twice as Canucks hold off Ducks

Associated Press

VANCOUVER, British Columbia — Dakota Joshua scored twice and the Vancouver Canucks held on for a 3-2 victory over the Anaheim Ducks on Sunday, a day after clinching a playoff berth.

Brock Boeser added a first-period power-play goal for the Canucks and J.T. Miller contributed a pair of assists.

The Ducks got third-period tallies from Olen Zellweger and Mason McTavish.

Vancouver goaltender Arturs Silovs made

20 saves in his first NHL action since March 6, 2023.

Lukas Dostal stopped 27 of 30 for the Ducks, who were coming off a 6-1 loss to the Oilers in Edmonton and lost their fifth straight game.

“I thought overall we put some pressure on them. I thought the whole game was pretty competitive from us,” said Zellweger, who had his parents in the stands. “Not where we wanted at the end, but I’m sure we’ll continue to build on our effort and competitiveness here.”

The Canucks remain atop the Pacific Division standings, six points up on the Oilers. Vancouver was idle Saturday when it clinched its first playoff spot since 2020.

Earning a spot in the postseason is only part of the team’s plan, Miller said.

“We need to focus on the next game more importantly right now and not look ahead, because if we play like we did tonight we’re going to lose most games,” he said. “So we need to make sure that we’re focused on the present, not worried about (playoffs.)”

Mavs end Rockets' 11-game win streak

Associated Press

HOUSTON — Luka Dončić had 47 points, 12 rebounds and seven assists, Kyrie Irving added 24 points and seven assists, and the Dallas Mavericks won their seventh straight and snapped the Houston Rockets' 11-game winning streak with a 125-107 victory on Sunday night.

Dončić scored 32 points in the first half on 12-for-18 shooting, going 6-for-10 on 3-pointers, as the Mavs led 66-45. Dončić had 22 in the first quarter alone and finished 18-for-30 from the field, including 9-for-16 on 3s. He tied his career high for 3-pointers.

"When you talk about best player in the world, understanding the time and where we are in the schedule and this road trip, he came out and showed why he's one of the best in the world," Dallas coach Jason Kidd said. "He set the tone offensively. ... He put the ball in the basket, was able to read and play the defense we saw tonight. It's up to him to do his job, and

he did it at a high level tonight."

Dončić had a highlight reel shot, making an underhand lob from inside the 3-point line as time was expiring on the shot clock early in the third quarter.

Dante Exum scored 13 points and P.J. Washington had 12 points and six rebounds for the Mavericks. Dallas shot 52% and made a season-high 24 3-pointers in 47 attempts (51%).

"We were aggressive," Dončić said. "They switched, so I think me and (Kyrie) went to work. Everybody else was open, so we were able to knock those shots down."

Dallas tied idle New Orleans for fifth in the Western Conference with eight games remaining for each team.

Jabari Smith Jr. scored 28 points and Aaron Holiday added 16, but Jalen Green was held to just 12 on 5-for-15 shooting as Houston's push for a play-in spot stalled. The Rockets fell two games behind 10th place Golden State for the final play-in spot in the West.

Thunder 113, Knicks 112: Shai Gilgeous-Alexander made the go-ahead jumper from the corner with 2.6 seconds left, sending visiting Oklahoma City to the playoffs for the first time since 2020 with a victory over New York.

Nuggets 130, Cavaliers 101: Nikola Jokić had 26 points, 18 rebounds and 16 assists for his 22nd triple-double of the season, and Denver beat Cleveland to snap a two-game home losing streak.

Lakers 116, Nets 104: LeBron James had one of the best shooting nights of his illustrious career, going 9-for-10 behind the arc to tie his career high for 3-pointers, and matched a season high with 40 points to lead visiting Los Angeles to a victory over Brooklyn.

Warriors 117, Spurs 113: Stephen Curry had 33 points and visiting Golden State held on to beat undermanned San Antonio for its fourth straight victory.

76ers 135, Raptors 120:

Kelly Oubre Jr. scored a season-high 32 points, Kyle Lowry had 11 points and 10 assists against his former team and visiting Philadelphia snapped a three-game losing streak, beating Toronto.

Clippers 130, Hornets 118: Paul George knocked down eight 3-pointers and finished with a season-high 41 points, and visiting Los Angeles defeated Charlotte for its fifth straight road win.

Heat 119, Wizards 107: Terry Rozier III scored 27 points, Bam Adebayo had 22 and visiting Miami grinded out a victory over Washington.

Bulls 109, Timberwolves 101: DeMar DeRozan had 27 points and eight assists and Alex Caruso added 21 points on a season-high seven 3-pointers as hot-shooting Chicago beat host Minnesota.

Kings 127, Jazz 106: Harrison Barnes scored 24 points and keyed a big third-quarter run for host Sacramento that carried it to a victory over Utah.

Hamlin wins at Richmond in OT after late caution

Associated Press

RICHMOND, Va. — Denny Hamlin won the race off pit road with Joe Gibbs Racing teammate Martin Truex Jr. after a caution with two laps to go and won in overtime at Richmond Raceway on Sunday night.

Truex dominated the second half of the NASCAR Cup Series race — he led 288 laps — and seemed poised to hold off challenges by Joey Logano and Hamlin for the final two laps when Kyle Larson got nudged from behind on the front straightaway and skidded into the infield, causing the caution.

"I needed that kind of situation at the end to happen to win it," Hamlin said.

Larson had been fading from contention before the spin.

"I was a little bit loose and then I got a shot there," Larson said of the bump from Bubba Wallace that almost certainly cost Truex his fourth victory at Richmond.

On the restart, Hamlin got a good jump from the inside lane, withstood a challenge from the outside from Truex and held off Truex and two other challengers for the surprise victory.

"This is a team win for sure," Hamlin said after climbing from his car. "The trophy needs to go to each one of these pit crew members. They just did an amazing job. They've been killing it all year."

Hamlin's victory was his second this season, the fifth of his career at what he considers his home track, and the 53rd of his

career, but it left Truex unhappy with several drivers involved.

"We got beat out of the pits and he jumped the restart," Truex said of Hamlin. "Had a car capable of winning. So just have to come back next week trying to get him again."

NASCAR said they reviewed the restart and it was within the rules.

After the race, a frustrated Truex door-slammed Larson as they coasted into the first turn, then bumped Hamlin from behind three times.

"I think he just gets more mad at Denny, but I was the closest one to take his anger out on," Larson said. "It's all good. I hope he doesn't have any hard feelings for me, because I defi-

nately don't toward him."

The victory pulled the four Gibbs Toyota teams even with the four Chevrolet teams from Hendrick Motorsports with three victories each through seven races.

Larson, who won this race last year, barely beat Truex off pit road during green flag stops with 65 laps to go, but Truex quickly caught him and pulled away as he had many times earlier.

Logano, who started the race 22nd in points with just one top 10 finish, worked his way into the lead pack in the second half, tried to run down Hamlin in the two-lap dash to the finish and was second, followed by Larson and Truex. It matched Ford's best finish this season.